

Gender-Sensitivity and the Possibility of Feminist Foreign Policy in Global Digital Diplomacy

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Abstract

While feminist foreign policy (FFP) refers to a set of state-defined norms and a policy label adopted by governments, not all gender-sensitive states choose to embrace this label officially. This raises an essential question for global politics: is adopting the feminist label truly necessary – or even feasible – for promoting gender equality? This study aims to address this question by offering a broader picture of how global politics approach gender equality and FFP. Contrary to many studies that focus only on countries that have officially adopted FFP, this study conducts a comparative analysis of countries' gender sensitivity and approaches to FFP on a global scale. To this end, ten countries from the G20 were selected; their gender-sensitive discourse, domestic gender regimes, and positions on FFP were comparatively analyzed based on the Facebook accounts of their foreign ministries—serving as tools of digital public diplomacy—during the final quarter of 2024. Methodologically, the study adopts a feminist poststructuralist framework that combines feminist postcolonial and ethical perspectives. The findings show that each state's approach to FFP and its use of gender-sensitive digital discourse are closely linked to - and shaped by - its unique geographical, sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts. Finally, the study observes a broader backlash against the feminist label itself, which is also reflected in feminist foreign policy.

Keywords: feminist international relations, public diplomacy, domestic gender regime, G-20 countries, feminist label backlash

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Introduction

In global diplomacy, the past decade has witnessed growing debates and practices surrounding feminist ethics, gender-sensitive, and gender-responsive foreign policies, alongside the rise of feminist foreign policy (FFP). FFP refers to a set of norms through which gender mainstreaming and feminist principles are integrated into foreign policy, particularly in areas states prioritize across diplomacy such as development assistance, defense and security cooperation, and trade (Thompson and Clement 2019: 78–80; Aggestam and True 2020: 144; Foster and Markham 2024: 2). FFP fundamentally implies an intersectional perspective challenging patriarchal power structures and looking after the rights of groups marginalized

not only by gender identity but also race, class and other structural hierarchies (Conway 2020). Nevertheless, many non-FFP-adopting states implement gender-sensitive foreign policy practices that are inclusive, ethical, and responsive to gender inequalities (Aggestam and True 2020: 157; Rajagopalan 2021; UN Women 2023; Singh 2025). In this context, gender-sensitivity serves as an indicator of states' positions on FFP and the reflection of feminist principles in foreign policy practice.

There is still debate over whether gender-sensitivity in foreign policy is sufficient or whether adopting FFP is necessary. Some authors argue that FFP functions as nation branding that reinforces states' global image as ethical actors (Aggestam, Rosamond and Hedling 2024: 54, 95). However, according to Sugg (2021), FFP is not only a branding exercise but a necessity; a constructivist process that fosters a comprehensive gender-responsive orientation across all areas of foreign policy. From this perspective, focusing only on gender equality is not enough. A genuinely feminist stance acknowledges that gender inequalities come from deep-rooted power structures such as patriarchy, colonialism, and exploitative capitalism (AFFPC 2022: 1). Contrarily, a non-Western perspective argues that the FFP/feminist label is not essential when a state pursues gender-sensitive foreign policy practices shaped by its own geographical, cultural, and historical dynamics (Singh 2025). On the other hand, while many states commit to gender equality, they still show reluctance and resistance to FFP and the word "feminist" (Sugg 2021: 15; Dolce de Faria and Rios Balbino 2023: 4; Van Wyk 2023: 68).

Is the FFP label indispensable for institutionalizing feminist ethics in global diplomacy, or can gender-sensitive approaches achieve comparable outcomes? This study examines how global diplomacy approaches gender equality in foreign policy, focusing on the intersection of digital diplomacy and FFP. To this end, ten countries representing the G20, which is considered to shape the world's economic and political trajectory, were selected using the most different systems design in comparative analysis, and all Facebook posts from their foreign ministries in the last quarter of 2024 were analyzed. Their gender-sensitive discourse, approaches to FFP, and domestic gender regimes were assessed comparatively from the feminist poststructuralist, post-colonial, and ethical perspectives. This study aims to contribute to the literature by moving beyond existing works that primarily focus on FFP-adopting states and by exploring how FFP is perceived by both adopting and non-adopting states at a broader level, as well as the reasons underlying these perspectives. It also brings together two emerging trends in international relations: feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy.

This study examines the role of the adoption of FFP in relation to gender-sensitive practices in global diplomacy. By comparing states with different approaches to FFP, it analyzes the consistency between their gender-sensitive digital diplomatic discourses and domestic gender regimes. The study therefore questions whether FFP functions as a transformative political framework or as a diplomatic label and branding tool in some cases. The study also examines whether a singular or a universal FFP model is possible, since the gender-sensitive digital diplomacy is shaped by diverse historical, cultural and geopolitical contexts.

Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Feminist approaches to International Relations (IR) emerged in the late 1980s as a critique of the gendered hierarchies in global politics and traditional IR. These approaches highlight marginalization of women and queer individuals, the regeneration of violence, and seek to transform the structures of international politics (Zalewski 2010: 31-39; Enloe 2014; Prügl and Tickner 2018: 75-76). Feminist IR's development was shaped by global regulations such as the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 (Foster and Markham 2024: 14-15), and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000 (Puechguirbal 2010: 161-166). These instruments contributed to the institutionalization of feminist approaches and the advancement of FFP.

FFP has gained momentum over the past decade. Despite national variations, some common principles stand out among different FFP definitions. These include mainstreaming gender equality, centering on the human rights of women, LGBTQIA+, and marginalized groups in foreign policy, allocating substantial resources, ensuring public impact assessment, challenging power structures in aid, trade, defense, and diplomacy, and incorporating gender advisors and sex-disaggregated data (Thompson and Clement 2019: 78-80; Aggestam and True 2020: 144). Sweden was the first country to formally adopt FFP in 2014, followed by Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Mexico, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Norway, and Spain; with countries such as Chile, Ireland, Liberia, Libya, and Scotland adopting similar frameworks (Foster and Markham 2024: 4-5).

Regarded as the pioneer of FFP, Sweden's approach is based on the principles of rights, representation, and resources to guarantee the human rights of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals (Government Offices of Sweden 2018: 11-19, 53). It has influenced many countries to adopt different versions of FFP. However, the inconsistencies between Sweden's FFP discourse and its actual practices, especially its militarization and substantial arms exports to Saudi Arabia, drew much criticism and finally weakened FFP's credibility (Nordberg 2015). Following the diplomatic tensions over the bilateral arms agreement, Sweden's new conservative government abandoned the FFP label, stating its counterproductive potential (Foster and Markham 2024: 4; Cakrabuana 2025). Although Sweden's FFP attracted significant global attention, it also faced resistance in various contexts.

A state's approach to gender equality and FFP can be analyzed through its use of digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is a multilayered field where digital technologies, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and foreign policy intersect. According to Kurbalija (n.d.), the digital transformation of diplomacy extends beyond social media to areas like cybersecurity, data security, secure communication systems, generative artificial intelligence, e-commerce, data analytics, web-based conferencing, virtual consulates, big data, metaverse

technologies, and augmented reality. In contemporary diplomacy, cyberspace influences foreign policy decision-making while cyber politics guide leaders during conflicts (Li and Lorci 2025: 186). The virtual embassies of the Maldives and Sweden launched in 2007, the United States (US) virtual embassy targeting the Iranian public in 2011 (Frey 2024: 116, 119–121), and Estonia’s e-governance and e-service models (Hardy 2024: 2) are amongst many digital diplomacy practices.

Among the areas of digital diplomacy, this study focuses on digital public diplomacy, where gender-sensitive discourse and FFP are most visible. Unlike traditional diplomacy, digital public diplomacy represents diplomatic actors’ use of digital tools and social media platforms to promote foreign policy goals and national image through dialogical public engagement (Hanson 2010: 3; Pamment 2013: 3; Natarajan 2014: 94; McNutt 2014: 50; Manor and Segev 2015: 94; Manor 2019: 14; Manor 2023: 267; Soetiman, Krishnamurti and Sharief 2024). Digital public diplomacy with its hashtags, visuals and narratives, within the context of FFP, functions as a policy medium where states build their ideological national image and feminist discourse (Government Offices of Sweden 2018: 52–53; Aggestam, Rosamond and Hedling 2024: 21, 24–26).

The study adopts a multi-component feminist theoretical framework, based on poststructuralist feminist theory and complemented by feminist ethical and postcolonial perspectives. From a poststructuralist feminist perspective, discourse and structure mutually shape one another, and concepts such as power, gender, diplomacy, and identity are understood as formed through both discursive and structural processes. Political actors, including the media, play an essential role in these discursive relationships, through which discourse can produce new political realities (Butler 1993: 9-13, 210-211; Hansen 2006: 6-8, 33; Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 102). From this perspective, FFP is understood both as a political framework and as a discursive field, while digital public diplomacy serves as a key arena for expressing this discourse. Accordingly, this study examines how feminist values associated with FFP, such as gender sensitivity, are applied through digital diplomatic practices.

While many states do not openly adopt FFP, they implement gender-sensitive practices aligned with its principles. A gender-sensitive approach to foreign policy acknowledges gendered inequalities and seeks to address them through inclusive and ethical practices. It includes strategies such as gender-responsive policies, gender mainstreaming, and gender parity initiatives that integrate gender perspectives into diplomatic and institutional processes (Aggestam and True 2020: 157; Rajagopalan 2021; UN Women 2023; Singh 2025).

This study frames gender sensitivity as an embedded and inclusive component of FFP and as a comparative index among countries. It examines states’ online representations regarding what is included or excluded and whether they constitute a discursive feminism. The analyses draw a distinction between direct gender-sensitive posts, which openly address gender equality, feminist, and LGBTQIA+ issues, and indirect gender-sensitive posts, where

these issues are addressed implicitly within broader diplomatic frameworks. Additionally, the study questions whether the states promote or remain silent on the rights of women, gender-diverse people, and marginalized groups through hashtags, images, and narratives. These performative practices establish states' positions on FFP.

Many states do not formally declare FFP but implement gender-sensitive practices that integrate gender awareness into external relations. As Singh (2025) exemplifies, some Asian states incorporated feminist ethics into their foreign relations, taking their history of anti-colonial resistance into account, without labeling this FFP. Label backlash and different political priorities can be among the reasons why these states avoid an FFP declaration. After all, FFP functions as a form of nation branding and enables states to focus on priorities (Aggestam, Rosamond and Hedling 2024: 24–25). States' gender-sensitive practices differ depending on their historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. For this reason, the study adopts a postcolonial feminist perspective that emphasizes the intersection of power, gender, and postcolonial legacies, foregrounds women's different lived realities (Narayan 1998: 89, 98), and challenges Western-centric contexts. Feminist ethics, as the other component of the study's theoretical framework, questions patriarchal hierarchies and the power inequalities they reproduce (Robinson 2019: 4, 14–15).

Research Design and Data Collection

Building on poststructuralist feminist theory, the study combines discourse analysis with the most different systems design in the comparative method to assess G20 countries' gender-sensitivities in foreign policy and their approaches to FFP. The comparative method systematically analyzes a small number of cases by identifying cross-national similarities and differences (Collier 1991: 9-10; Ragin 1994). The most different systems design selects cases from diverse contexts to reveal common factors that explain the observed political outcome (Przeworski and Teune 1970: 35). Discourse analysis is the examination of how meaning and power are constructed through discourse (Fairclough 2010: 4-8). Based on this research design, the study selects ten G20 member states with active, accessible foreign ministry Facebook accounts, taking into account diverse geographic, historical, and sociological backgrounds.

Facebook was selected as the research field because it is the most suitable platform for discourse analysis among other social media platforms. While X (previously known as Twitter), Instagram, Flickr, TikTok, YouTube and Vimeo produce event-driven micro-texts, visual or video-dominant content (Yağmurlu 2019: 1274), Facebook, by combining long texts such as policy statements, official announcements, cultural materials and interactive content with institutional multimedia, has a hybrid structure which transforms digital diplomacy into a discursive field (Kampf, Manor and Segev 2015: 343; Spry 2018: 74–76; Kazbek and Almash 2019: 154-156). Moreover, its elite-to-public orientation and its status as the world's

largest platform with the highest market share make it suitable for observing public diplomacy (Kampf, Manor and Segev 2015: 343; Spry 2018: 76; Fernandez-Grela, Maltabarov and Apsattarova 2025: 172).

Another methodological limitation of the study is the three-month cross-sectional design covering the final quarter of 2024 (1 October–31 December). As Lynn et al. (2015: 1, 5) emphasize, social media produces high-volume data that can reveal meaningful patterns even over short time intervals. Given the ministries' high posting frequencies, a three-month dataset is sufficient to capture their recurring gender-sensitive discourse patterns. Moreover, this period includes the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (UN Women n.d.), from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day). It provides an appropriate time frame for observing states' positions on this global campaign.

The selected countries and their foreign ministries' official Facebook accounts are: Australia (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade n.d.), Brazil (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil n.d.), Canada (Global Affairs Canada n.d.), France (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs n.d.), India (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India n.d.), Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan n.d.), Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia n.d.), South Africa (Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa n.d.), Türkiye (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.), and the United Kingdom (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office n.d.). The Facebook posts of Brazil and Saudi Arabia were translated into English using Google Translate. Two separate tables were created, and independent variables that were derived from the theoretical approaches were identified.

In Table 1 (Quantitative), the independent variables include: (1) number of Facebook followers; (2) number of posts shared between October and December 2024; (3) number of gender-sensitive posts (direct and indirect); (4) percentage of gender-sensitive posts among total posts; and (5) total engagement with gender-sensitive posts (likes, comments, and shares). Given that gender is an interdisciplinary issue, all posts were carefully examined. Posts were identified as gender-sensitive posts (GSPs) if they directly or indirectly addressed feminist policy, gender equality, the empowerment, rights and protection of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, support for marginalized gender groups in conflict settings, their economic and political participation, the condemnation of gender-based violence, or the inclusion and representation of diverse gender identities in diplomatic discourse. Posts that explicitly and solely focused on gender-sensitive concerns were categorized as "direct GSPs". Posts where gender-sensitivity appeared only briefly or in the linked content of the post were classified as "indirect GSPs". States are ranked in Tables 1 and 2 by GSP ratio, from highest to lowest. The number of engagements with the posts was considered an indicator of their public reach and effectiveness.

Table 1. Quantitative Indicators of Gender Sensitivity in Digital Diplomacy

Country	Followers	All Posts	Gender-Sensitive Posts (GSPs) Direct Posts (DP)+ Indirect Posts (IP)	GSPs % of All Posts	Total Engagements on GSPs (Likes + Comments + Shares)
Canada	279 K	363	135 (7D + 128ID)	% 43.10	2526
United Kingdom	527 K	100	18 (9D + 9ID)	% 18.0	1501
France	56 K	121	20 (11D + 9ID)	% 16.5	4723
Brazil	195 K	61	9 (5D + 4ID)	% 14.7	429
South Africa	73 K	491	40 (20D + 20ID)	% 8.10	309
Australia	85 K	51	4 (1D + 3ID)	% 7.80	307
Japan	178 K	417	22 (0D + 22ID)	% 5.27	534
India	2.1 M	1132	23 (6D + 17ID)	% 2.00	1046
Saudi Arabia	731 K	302	6 (2D + 4ID)	% 1.90	475
Türkiye	83 K	293	1 (1D + 0ID)	% 0.30	30

In Table 2 (Qualitative), the independent variables are posts that address (1) gender equality and the women's human rights; (2) the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence in everyday life and armed conflict; (3) gender-equal economic empowerment and gender-targeted resource allocation; (4) gender-balanced political participation and visibility in diplomacy, peacebuilding roles, conflict resolution, and leadership including activists, and civil society figures; (5) gender-equal representation of voices, perspectives and expertise in social and professional spheres (6) sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to healthcare, reproductive freedom, abortion rights, and bodily autonomy; (7) gender-sensitive visuals, hashtags, and support to feminist campaigns; (8) the rights and protection of LGBTQIA+ individuals and diverse gender identities; (9) human rights and structurally marginalized groups who are excluded and disadvantaged by power relations.

Table 2. Qualitative Indicators of Gender Sensitivity in Digital Diplomacy

	Canada	United Kingdom	France	Brazil	South Africa	Australia	Japan	India	Saudi Arabia	Türkiye
Gender Equality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Prevention of Gender-Based Violence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Economic Empowerment and Resource Allocation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Political Participation and Peacebuilding Roles	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Representation in Social and Professional Spheres	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Use of Gender-Sensitive Visuals, Hashtags, and Campaigns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
LGBTQIA+ Rights	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Human Rights and Marginalized Groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

States' approaches to gender sensitivity were examined discursively through their digital public diplomacy outputs, presented in quantitative and qualitative tables. In addition, a literature review was conducted to identify the structural factors beyond FFP, namely regime type, cultural context, and domestic gender regimes, and their influence on each state's FFP stance. The in/consistencies between states' digital discourses and the structural dimensions were also assessed. As Aggestam and True (2021: 391–393) state, diplomacy is a social practice, and gendered norms embedded in the social structure reproduce inequalities and are projected onto foreign policy, leading some states to diffuse or resist pro-gender principles.

Analyses and Findings: Gender-Sensitivity Patterns of Digital Diplomacy and Structural Dimensions

In comparative analysis, states' gender-sensitivity is established through a comprehensive evaluation of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Alongside direct/indirect GSP rates and total engagements, the qualitative table examines whether posts foreground gender equality, human rights, minority rights, UN Women's "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence", LGBTQIA+ rights, and gender-balanced political or social representation.

Furthermore, states' digital discourses are compared with their structural realities, including their domestic gender regime and political and cultural contexts.

States that formally adopted FFP, such as Canada and France, rank among the highest levels in both GSP rates and total engagements, and address all qualitative variables listed in Table 2. In Canada, although Table 1 shows only seven direct GSPs, gender sensitivity is strongly evident in nearly half of all posts in its digital diplomacy. Activist hashtags such as #GenderedDisinformation, #NoExcuse, #GBV, and #DontBeDeceived reinforce Canada's feminist orientation while it consistently highlights human rights day, LGBTQI+ rights¹, Indigenous rights, child protection, disability rights, freedom of religion, and journalists' safety. Frequent visibility of Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly aligns with Canada's FFP discourse.

FFP-adopted liberal democratic Canada has strong gender-sensitivity and a feminist discourse in digital diplomacy. It supports global gender equality through Feminist International Assistance Policy (Zhukova, Sundström, and Elgström 2021: 4). Its culture encompasses both Indigenous relational worldviews and contesting Western binaries (Wilson 2005: 346). However, as Guppy and Luongo (2015: 241) state, the progress in gender equality has recently stalled in Canada. Neoliberal policies have weakened infrastructures of equality, exacerbated income inequalities, increased unpaid care burdens, and led to social exclusion (Brodie 2008: 153–154, 161; Guppy and Luongo 2015: 243–256). Consequently, Canada's assertive FFP approach remains constrained by limited policy capacity and ongoing inequalities (Novović 2024: 231).

France also takes a strong feminist stance, with over half of its gender sensitive posts being direct posts. Hashtags such as #feministforeignpolicy, #25November, #equalityforall, #stopviolence, #Orangetheworld, and reels about cybersexism highlight the importance given to combating violence against women and advancing feminist diplomacy. LGBTQ+ communities, minority rights, and marginalized artists and journalists are presented through their own stories. Gender equality in the social and professional spheres is central, yet diplomatic figures such as Anne-Marie Descôtes, former French Ambassador to Germany, receive limited visibility.

Although France has a strong FFP discourse in digital diplomacy, the domestic structure makes its implementation difficult. What Blidon (2019: 1039) calls "*féminisme à la française*" (feminism in French style) reflects a cultural perspective that seems reluctant to recognize gender equality fully. The domestic gender regime with a rising individualism and politicized narratives around minority women deepen the gap between discourse and reality (Hardy-Massard, Rezrazi and Gangloff 2025: 98). Moreover, France's republican tradition, grounded in universalism, *laïcité*, and a market-oriented liberal framing of FFP, leads to a selective translation of international feminist norms and constrain the transformative potential of its feminist diplomacy (Morgan 2017: 894, 896; Zhukova, Sundström and Elgström 2021: 18, 20).

1 Throughout the article, 'LGBTQIA+' is used as an umbrella term for terminological consistency; nevertheless, the original variations used by states in their social media posts are retained.

A notable finding from Tables 1 and 2 is that several countries without a formally declared FFP—such as the UK, Brazil, South Africa, and Australia—also display strong gender-sensitive discourse. They have high GSP rates in Table 1 and address mainly all variables in Table 2. Specifically, the UK exhibits a considerable feminist stance in digital diplomacy while foregrounding visibility of campaigns (#16Days, #NoExcuse), survivor-centered video narratives, LGBTQ+ rights, minority groups such as the Yazidi community, and racial inequality. References to political actors such as Anneliese Dodds, Minister of State for Development and Women and Equalities; Catherine West, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Indo-Pacific; and Rachel Reeves, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and to a Netflix series based on the life of former High Commissioner Jane Marriott, reinforce this stance (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office 2024).

The UK has restructured its welfare state by moving beyond the male-breadwinner model and advancing gender equality over the last few decades (Lewis 2002: 344; Evans, Meuller and Hiraide 2025: 418). But the neoliberal domestic gender regime and the adult-worker model still reproduce disparities, particularly by neglecting unpaid care (Roth and Saunders 2020: 306; Lewis 2002: 344), while apparent gains mask more profound structural inequalities, economic precarity, and pervasive violence (Evans, Meuller and Hiraide 2025: 423, 430). As Khan (2017) argues, the UK remains hesitant to adopt a formal FFP that will challenge its entrenched institutional power structures.

Brazil also stands out with its high GSP rate and strong feminist discourse in digital diplomacy. Hashtags like #GenderEquality and #LGBTQIA, as well as the emphasis on human rights, racial equality, the empowerment of Black communities, the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities, and efforts to address hunger, poverty, and broader social injustice, demonstrate Brazil's commitment to feminist ethical values. The Ministry's open use of #LGBTQIA positions Brazil as a norm-entrepreneur for inclusive human rights. Bonna Nogueira (2017: 545) also emphasizes Brazil's diplomatic leadership in promoting LGBTQIA+ rights. Nevertheless, the gender-balanced political representation remains limited, with only one reference to Health Minister Nísia Trindade.

Despite the progressive gender equality discourse of Brazil, the structural conditions of women make FFP difficult to envision (Dolce de Faria and Rios Balbino 2023: 15). Brazil's presidential federal democracy is nourished by strong patriarchal and racial hierarchies embedded in its post-colonial history (Dolce de Faria and Rios Balbino 2023: 9-11). Despite modern equality discourse, gender roles regarding women's caring responsibilities and domestic life persist (Santos and Garibaldi de Hilal 2018: 493). The domestic gender regime of intersecting race and class prevents women's influence in governance and diplomacy through its glass-ceiling structure (Cerqueira da Silva and de Castro Casa Nova 2024: 1267). Akgemci (2024: 136-138) states that gender inequalities are intertwined with class, race, ethnicity, nation, and colonial power relations in Latin America, including Brazil. For this reason, Latin American feminism is intersectional.

South Africa is another strongly gender-sensitive state, with high direct GSP rates and addressing all variables. Its digital diplomacy displays a powerful feminist stance, with active participation in the UN Women 16 Days of Activism campaign and hashtags such as #StopGBV, #EndGBV, #WomenPeaceAndSecurity. It foregrounds systemic inequalities, social justice, human and child rights, the anti-apartheid legacy, and the Ubuntu philosophy, which reflects a broader feminist ethical understanding. Gender-balanced political representation is made visible with references to Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, Minister in the Presidency of South Africa, and Thandi Moraka, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, alongside ambassadors such as Tokozile Xasa, Lindiwe Msengana-Ndlela, and Nonceba Losi.

Despite its strong gender-sensitive discourse, democratic and post-apartheid South Africa has been struggling with race, class, and patriarchy-based inequalities (Cold-Ravnkilde 2019: 212–213; Haastrup 2020: 14). According to Van Wyk (2023: 68, 74), the government increasingly adopts FFP elements but avoids using the label because feminism is often politically seen as a liberal Western import. Yet South Africa's understanding of feminism is rooted in the liberation struggle and the collective political agency of Black women, and evolved into an intersectional form of gender politics that prioritizes community and the relational care of Ubuntu ethics and it embraces post-colonial feminist values grounded in nonsexism and antiracism (Haastrup 2020: 7; Van Wyk 2023: 64–66), all of which reflect its diplomatic culture.

Australia's GSP ratio is relatively low, but the Humanitarian Policy Report and gender-sensitive aid programs shared in the posts suggest that qualitative indicators take precedence over quantitative indicators. The posts present a feminist discourse responsive to LGBTQIA+, human rights violations, displaced populations, persons with disabilities, children, and Indigenous peoples, gender-based violence on 25 November, and full gender equality. The gender-balanced representation also seems aligned with its feminist discourse through the visibility of Penny Wong, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Even though Australia displays strong gender-sensitive practices, it seems hesitant to adopt FFP openly. This, according to Newsome (2021: 477–480), appears to be related to neoliberal male-breadwinner gender regime, which is still influential in shaping citizenship and care responsibilities. The state presents itself as a liberal democracy committed to gender equality; however, masculinized political cultures of diplomacy and security put feminist framings at risk and bring about what Lee-Koo (2020: 236–238) calls a “pro-gender foreign policy by stealth”. While gender equality is prioritized in foreign policy, Australia avoids using the term “feminist” (AFFPC 2025) and the FFP label to balance international normative commitments with conservative domestic political realities.

Tables 1 and 2 lastly demonstrate that India, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye neither have high GSP rates nor have adopted FFP. Specifically, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye, despite limited qualitative variables, seem not to prioritize gender sensitivity. Even though Japan has 22 GSPs, it is the only state in this sample that has zero direct GSP. The absence of gender-sensitive hashtags and visual materials further reinforces its distance from FFP. By

rarely mentioning regional human rights concerning Chinese and Cambodian communities, Japan doesn't present an activist or feminist stance. Only two gender-balanced political figures appear: parliamentary vice ministers Eri Arfiya and Ikuina Akiko. Alongside the findings, it is notable that Japan places more emphasis on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation than any other state. Except for one reference from Australia, disarmament is limitedly mentioned in the posts of Canada, the UK, and Türkiye.

Liberal-democratic Japan's reluctance to adopt an FFP seems related to patriarchal norms and a male-breadwinner model that positions women within family-centered roles (Shire and Nemoto 2020: 442). Former Prime Minister Abe's "women shine" diplomacy instrumentalized gender equality in favor of the economy and international legitimacy. While not questioning structural inequalities, it reinforced militarized masculinity in security narratives (Motoyama 2022: 1–3). Despite being the first woman Prime Minister, feminists critically argue that Sanae Takaichi's gender-imbalanced cabinet and alignment with the Liberal Democratic Party's patriarchal model undermine her potential as a forerunner for women's rights (Komiya 2025).

Even though India's GSP rate is low, it addresses nearly all the qualitative variables. Only one gender-related hashtag—#WomenInLeadership—is used. A hesitant stance toward LGBTQIA+ is evident, while posts on human rights and minorities make limited references to social justice, older members, and a human-centric approach, without an activist tone. Several political figures appear in the posts, including President Droupadi Murmu, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and ambassadors such as Madhumita Hazarika Bhagat, Devyani Khobragade, Smita Pant, Abhilasha Joshi, and Swati Vijay Kulkarni.

While India claims a secular federal democratic and gender-sensitive governance, its domestic gender regime which is based on patriarchy, religion and caste hierarchies constrains the transformative potential of diplomacy (Haq et al. 2020: 586; Rathnam 2024: 230; Vishwanath, Mukund and Bhasin 2024: 5). Its foreign policy has gender-sensitive elements but remains hesitant to adopt FFP explicitly (Singh 2025). Authors argue that FFP practice is applied in India but is different from the Swedish model. It is grounded in anti-colonialism, anti-hierarchical power relations, solidarity, and intersectionality, and rooted in India's historical and socio-cultural setting (Patel 2023; Vishwanath, Mukund and Bhasin 2024: 5; Singh 2025).

Saudi Arabia has one of the lowest GSP rates. Neither human rights, hashtags, nor gender-equal politicians are mentioned. References to women are limited to portraying them as victims in need of protection in conflict zones, which is considered to reproduce male-centered discourse (Puechguirbal 2010: 162). This clear distance from gender-sensitive discourse seems a reflection of religious and patriarchal norms as well as the geopolitical environment where security is dominant over foreign relations. Saudi Arabia's authoritarian monarchy, shaped by Wahhabi Islamic order and conservative tribal culture, restricts women's rights under the rhetoric of moral protection. Consequently, women's visibility in foreign policy remains symbolic, serving to support regime legitimacy (Al-Fassi 2016: 188; Aldossari and Calvard 2022: 877).

Türkiye ranks lowest among all countries in both the GSP ratio and total engagements. Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, unlike Japan, don't share detailed information on Facebook or prioritize transparency in digital diplomacy, a characteristic of FFP (Mesa 2024). Türkiye supports the 16 Days of Activism using the #NoExcuse hashtag, as well as Human Rights Day on 10 December. It takes a stance by addressing discrimination, hate crimes, racism, xenophobia, and hatred against Islam, the frequent visibility of Deputy Foreign Minister A. Berris Ekinci's participation in political and peacekeeping meetings in the posts is a positive indicator of gender-balanced representation.

Although constitutionally a secular state, Türkiye developed an increasingly authoritarian political culture that redefines gender relations through a neoliberal and Islamic-conservative framework. Within this context, women are confined to domestic roles of motherhood, family honor, and caregiving, while the rephrased "gender justice" term replaces feminist equality, legitimizes this regime culturally, and affects foreign policy (Özdemir 2023: 26–28; Tabak, Erdoğan and Doğan 2022: 150–154; Sokullu and Ekşioğlu 2023: 52). Moreover, Türkiye's partly realist foreign policy orientation reproduces militaristic, male-dominated and hyper-masculine norms that conflict with FFP principles (Tunçarslan 2018: 82; Ataç 2021: 103).

Conclusion

This study compares the G20 states' approaches to FFP. It examines how they construct gender-sensitive discourse in digital diplomacy, as well as the inconsistencies between their digital discourse and domestic gender regimes independent of FFP adoption. The limited number of studies that address these intersections together constitutes the fundamental contribution of this study to the feminist International Relations literature. Incorporating feminist poststructuralist, ethical, and postcolonial perspectives, this article offers an original theoretical framework, concluding that FFP is not independent of domestic gender regimes, political or cultural contexts, and is a discursive, geopolitical, and ethical outcome shaped by these intersecting dynamics.

According to the findings, gender sensitivity in digital diplomacy is discursively constructed through different instruments, depending on each state. These include direct or indirect GSPs, references to human rights or marginal groups from a feminist ethical perspective, openly addressing LGBTQIA+ rights, foregrounding relational cultural approaches such as Ubuntu philosophy, visibility of gender-balanced representations in political and social spheres, women's experiences from women's voices, activist hashtags and images, participation in international campaigns, intersectional feminist approach, references to disarmament or, in contrast, hidden, hesitant, passive or completely silent discourse.

States' digital discourses and their approaches to FFP reveal inconsistencies with their domestic indicators. FFP-adopting states such as Canada and France, and non-FFP-adopting states such as the UK and Australia have strong feminist discourses in their digital diplomacy; however, their domestic realities do not reflect such a strong feminism. On the other hand, non-

FFP-adopting states such as Brazil, South Africa, and India develop distinct gender-sensitive discourses shaped by different geographical, sociopolitical, and postcolonial contexts. Such divergence and the perception of an imposed Western liberal feminism model may explain their backlash against the FFP label. Non-FFP-adopting states such as Japan, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia exhibit passive and hesitant gender-sensitive discourse, which is consistent with their domestic realities.

The findings raise the question of whether FFP aims to promote meaningful change and global peace, or whether it has increasingly become a discursive branding tool used by Western states to secure advantageous positioning. As scholars argue, FFP often functions as nation branding that reinforces states' global image, reducing gender equality to a commodified foreign policy value. However, FFP risks remaining symbolic without strong social foundations (Aggestam, Rosamond and Hedling 2024: 54, 95; Karlsson 2024: 9-10). The negative perception of the feminist label, as well as the domestic structural inconsistencies, help explain the backlash against the FFP label in states such as the UK, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, and India, despite their relatively strong digital gender-sensitive practices. This suggests that states may engage in feminist or gender-sensitive practices without formally adopting FFP. Additionally, while prioritizing FFP is ultimately a political choice (Aggestam, Rosamond and Hedling 2024: 24), its interaction with other imperatives such as security demands or economic priorities should be considered.

Explaining non-FFP adoption only by label backlash would be overly optimistic when considering the global rise in gender backlash. As organized counter movements against gender-equality gains, gender backlash became an international crisis threatening democratic pluralism, fundamental human rights, as well as the rights, safety, and lives of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals (UN Women and UNRISD 2025: 11, 24-25). In sum, while digital diplomacy offers a sphere in which states express their FFP stances in geographic and socio-political contexts, these discourses often contradict domestic structural inequalities and reduce FFP to an alignment with global modernity. This study suggests that FFP is not only a discursive or performative label but an intersecting hybrid outcome of states' domestic structural conditions and their external feminist discourse. In this sense, states can produce feminist knowledge, norms, and discourse without adopting the FFP label, and digital diplomacy functions as an epistemic field for this production.

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