DIŞ POLİTİKADA
KADINLAR
WOMEN IN FOREIGN POLICY

Women, World Politics and Turkey

WFP Perspectives on 2025

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Preface

*Zeynep Alemdar**

Reading through last year's preface, I stumbled upon my words for the 10th anniversary of Women in Foreign Policy. I wrote, "We know we are in a period of change, and our capacity for surprises just expands." Surely, 2025 did not disappoint in surprising us. While everything is happening at an incredible speed in the international arena, and especially around Turkey, it seems like women's resilience increase.

One of the things we do to increase our resilience is to make sense of the events that are happening in the region. The first section of 2025 Almanac includes four articles that approach the events that shaped 2025 and partly 2026 through a gendered lens from Epstein files to the gender backlash, to economies of war and international crises. In the assessments written by our members on how different themes, from the Epstein Case to Global Authoritarianism, from the Security Crisis to the War Economy, have affected our lives and transformed our worlds, you will also see how last year touched women, as Women in Foreign Policy always strives to do.

In the second section of the Almanac, following a general assessment showing how women's rights have regressed worldwide, you will find country studies and leader biographies written by academics about women leaders and policies in Italy, Ireland, and Japan. The latest situation in Afghanistan and the status of women in the peace process in Turkey are also covered in this section.

The next three articles in the Almanac address three key themes that are always on our agenda but are often pushed to the sidelines: climate, migration, and the digital sphere. We must continue to examine and persistently monitor the impact of these three themes on women's rights and the women's peace and security agenda.

The closing article of the Almanac focuses on our special interest as Women in Foreign Policy: Feminist Foreign Policy. While the popularity of FFP has faded because of the gender backlash, it is still the approach represents and defines a bold departure from the system we currently inhabit. Feminist Foreign Policy, focusing on peace, gender equality, and environmental

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integrity, adopts a different approach to the structure of the state and the international system while aiming to give all stakeholders a voice. It may well be our last hope and a key framework to reshape the system we are currently in...

The Almanac brings together contributors from various backgrounds and expertise. We also try to overcome generational and ranking gaps. This volume would not have been possible without the dedicated effort of Gökçe Gezer, who graciously came up with a new format that we hope you would like as much as we do. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Gökçe Gezer, all our writers, and Ekin Ürgen, who made it possible for this Almanac to reach you.

Unpacking the Epstein Case and the Crisis of the Liberal International Order

Hürcan Aslı Aksoy*

The case of Jeffrey Epstein – a billionaire who sexually abused and exploited underaged girls over many years – unfolded at a moment when the post–Cold War liberal order was already under strain. Emerging evidence suggests that his offenses were not merely acts of sexual misconduct but exercises of power and control. This dimension is crucial. The scandal brought organized, transnational criminal networks to light and revealed how power, when embedded in elite structures, can operate with impunity. The network surrounding him operated internationally, often exploiting legal loopholes and jurisdictional fragmentation to evade regulatory scrutiny.

For three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the liberal international order rested on several core assumptions: the rule of law would constrain the excessive exercise of power; institutions would correct abuses; multi-national organizations such as the United Nations (UN) would provide normative frameworks, and liberal democracies would maintain normative authority by upholding rights – including women's, children's, and LGBTQI+ rights. The Epstein scandal did not create the crisis of this order, but it exposed its deep erosion and its limited capacity to hold powerful elites accountable.

Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci famously described periods of transition as interregnum moments when "the old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born". In such periods, authority fragments, norms weaken, and contradictions become visible. Certainly, the Epstein case can be read through this lens: as a window into the instability of global system in transition.

The post-Cold War order heavily relied on institutional trust. Courts, media, universities, and political institutions were expected to function as mechanisms of accountability. Elite

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misconduct, once exposed, was presumed to trigger correction through legal and reputational consequences. Yet Epstein's trajectory revealed cracks in that expectation. Prior investigations against him failed to produce proportionate consequences for his crime. Legal processes appeared uneven and abused girls from precarious backgrounds were often mistrusted or discredited, while elite environments surrounding the perpetrator appeared unusually insulated from scrutiny. Whether due to prosecutorial discretion, institutional caution, or social deference to wealth and status, the response fell short of the order's own normative claims. This was a system where people, children, women, nature, and animals are turned into commodities; where they are seen as something that can be bought and sold, used, and consumed. In this system, money and power show that everything, including justice, can be bought.

The gendered dimension of the case makes this institutional weakness particularly visible. The post–Cold War order rhetorically elevated gender equality to the level of universal norm. International conventions, development programs, and UN frameworks increasingly incorporated women's rights language. Yet, when abuses occurred within elite contexts, even in the Western hemisphere, enforcement appeared delayed, inconsistent, or politically sensitive. This disjuncture signals more than hypocrisy; it reveals structural asymmetry.

At its core, the Epstein case exposes a deeper structural problem: the globalization of elite power without a corresponding globalization of accountability. Financial flows, philanthropic networks, and social capital operate transnationally, while legal enforcement remains largely national, fragmented, and politically mediated. In a period marked by declining multilateralism, politicized institutions, and polarized societies, this asymmetry becomes even more pronounced.

This asymmetry represents the "dying" dimension of the old order: institutions formally endure, yet their capacity to command trust erodes. A power struggle unfolds between the defenders of the "old" liberal framework and the proponents of alternative, often illiberal models. In this context, the revelations surrounding the Epstein files provide a fertile ground for authoritarian and paternalistic cultural narratives that portray traditionalism as safer and more stable. Even in the absence of a coherent alternative order, such actors can instrumentalize to discredit liberal norms and values. Movements grounded in critique of liberal norms and institutions gain additional discursive leverage.

Authoritarian, or illiberal, governance models do not prioritize gender justice or elite accountability, on the contrary, many promote hierarchical, patriarchal structures as stabilizing principles. The Epstein revelations illustrate how entrenched patriarchal power can erode the credibility of the liberal order from within, undermining the very institutional foundations it claims to defend.

In this interregnum, structural contradictions sharpen. Liberal democracies continue to promote women's rights globally, yet struggle to address power asymmetries within their own elite structures. Movements such as #MeToo represent attempts to reassert accountability from below, to expose the informal codes of silence that protect powerful perpetrators. Yet institutional responses often remain reactive rather than systemic.

The Epstein case also illustrates how economic inequality intersects with gendered vulnerability. The liberal order generated extraordinary concentrations of wealth and influence. Elite philanthropy, private advisory networks, and informal influence channels blurred the boundaries between public and private authority. When economic and political power consolidate at the top, social protections erode below, and asymmetries deepen.

Gender becomes one axis of this asymmetry. Girls and young women from economically precarious backgrounds were exposed to risks that elite actors were structurally positioned to avoid. The international dimension of recruitment of young, mostly underaged girls— extending beyond poorer U.S. states to Eastern Europe, Morocco, Mexico, and elsewhere – reflects contemporary hierarchies within the global system. In this sense, the case can also be interpreted as revealing elements of modern imperial asymmetry, where exploitation follows lines of economic and geopolitical inequality. The scandal thus signals not only moral but institutional failure.

From a woman's perspective, this transitional instability is particularly consequential. Gender equality depends on institutional reliability and credible enforcement. When systems fail to protect the vulnerable while shielding the powerful, social trust erodes – and with it, the legitimacy of liberal gender governance itself. The Epstein case thus reveals the fault lines of the contemporary global order: gendered power, elite insulation, and institutional fragility converge at a moment when the old system is visibly strained and the new one remains undefined. In a world marked by fragmentation and competition, whether states can effectively

constrain concentrated power will influence how legitimate they are at home and how authoritative they appear abroad.

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Anti-Gender Politics as a Foundational Element of Global Authoritarianism

Sevgi Uçan Çubukçu[*]

Over the past two decades, the literature on international relations and political science has extensively examined the global rise of authoritarian regimes and the accompanying democratic backsliding. These studies have primarily focused on processes such as institutional weakness, the concentration of power in the executive, how elections are conducted and the erosion of the rule of law. While these analyses make significant contributions to our understanding of regime transformations, they have largely overlooked a crucial dimension of the rhetoric and strategies of today's authoritarian regimes: the targeting of gender equality.

Gender equality has become an integral component of the global normative order through international texts such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention These frameworks position gender equality not merely as a social policy area belonging to domestic politics, but as one of the fundamental components of the liberal international order and human rights regimes. (Çubukçu, 2022). However, the rise of populist authoritarianism has progressed in tandem with an increasingly organized and systematic challenge to these norms. Yet, anti-gender politics should not be seen as a reactive backlash against feminist advances or a cultural conflict limited to domestic politics. On the contrary, 'anti-gender' functions as an organized norm-disrupting strategy with transnational characteristics, a constitutive element of contemporary authoritarianism.

Authoritarian regimes challenge the liberal international order and consolidate their domestic legitimacy by targeting gender equality, a globally referenced but politically fragile norm. Deniz Kandiyoti's conceptualization of "masculinist restoration" (Kandiyoti, 2025) transcends the limitations of 'backlash'; within this framework, it explains anti-gender politics through the processes of neoliberal crisis, authoritarian legitimation, and the struggle for norms. Thus, it

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explains how interventions against gender equality operate; how they weaken international human rights regimes; It helps us understand how authoritarian states facilitate cooperation between transnational conservative networks and how they produce moral boundaries; the conflict created by the crisis of neoliberalism in the gendered division of labor; and the impact of this conflict on young men and fathers who are victims of neoliberal capitalism.

Comprehensive studies are also being conducted on how to move away from the rhetoric of "gender backlash" by imagining a "new gender contract" for a fairer, more equal Europe. (Petö, Thissen & Clavaud, 2025)

Since the late twentieth century, gender relations have become one of the fundamental determinants of the global normative order through binding agreements, monitoring and policy frameworks. International institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union have promoted gender equality as a universal principle of democratic regimes and human rights. (Kandiyoti, 2025; Çubukçu, 2022). This has made it possible for this principle has been incorporated into domestic legal systems, public policies, and institutional practices in different political contexts (Çubukçu, 2012). Within international relations theory, these developments have mostly been analyzed through constructivist approaches that emphasize the emergence, diffusion, and internalization of norms. In this framework, gender equality has been largely considered as an established global norm, especially in liberal democratic regimes. However, the global rise of authoritarian and neoliberal regimes has increasingly challenged this assumption of entrenchment (Bilgin and Sezgin 2022). This challenge is not limited to the explicit rejection of gender equality; rather, it operates through norm-disrupting and substitutional processes. Authoritarian actors reinterpret international gender norms, questioning their legitimacy (Ertürk, 2025); or they withdraw from these norms, framing them as incompatible with national sovereignty, cultural, religious, or moral order.

A significant portion of the existing literature conceptualizes resistance to gender equality as a reactive "backlash" against feminist gains (Kovats & Peto, 2017). While this approach may be analytically functional in certain contexts, it falls short in explaining the scale, organization, and continuity of contemporary anti-gender politics. The concept of backlash ,with its assumptions of transience, spontaneity, and limited scope, has limitations in our undrstanding of its norm-diruptive nature. Reading anti-gender politics as a process of reconstruction in which established international norms are systematically weakened, challenged, and replaced with alternative normative frameworks provides a clearer picture. This process operates not in the

form of a complete abandonment of international commitments, but rather in the form of emptying norms through reinterpretation and symbolic withdrawals. Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of "masculinist restoration" (Kandiyoti 2025) emphasizes that authoritarian responses to the neoliberal crisis involve the re-establishment of the gender hierarchy. Within this framework, 'disrupting the existing norm' occurs both domestically and internationally. It is understood as a functioning gendered authoritarian masculine strategy. Anti-gender politics has become a central component of authoritarian regimes' legitimacy-generating strategies.

When gender equality is framed as a threat to the family structure, moral values, and national sovereignty, authoritarian regimes seek order through common and ancient discourses such as religion, culture, and family (Çokoğullar, 2022). These discourses enable regimes to mobilize social support to establish legitimacy and delegitimise opposition actors. In this way, authoritarian governments can challenge the liberal normative order without facing international backlash from more costly violations in security or economic areas.Within this context, feminist movements, LGBTQ+ advocacy, gender studies programs, and reproductive rights are presented as external impositions or ideological threats. These actors are transformed into symbolic enemies in the establishment of narratives of sovereignty, security, and cultural and religious values. As a result, a process of masculinist restoration operates through the regulation of bodies, identities, and social roles.

Empirical findings demonstrate that today's anti-gender politics are not limited to national contexts. On the contrary, this politics has become embedded in transnational conservative networks in where discourses and strategies circulate across borders (Özkazanç, 2019). These networks encompass well-funded religious organizations, advocacy groups, think tanks, and political actors (Miller-Idriss, Cynthia, 2025). Authoritarian regimes are increasingly operating through transnational and looser networks, rather than through classical international structures and multilateral forms of cooperation. Through these networks, anti-gender norms circulate globally; liberal international institutions are weakened while authoritarian forms of governance are strengthened. Narratives such as family values and moral order constitute a shared ideological repertoire that has a socioeconomic context beyond cultural and religious differences. (Ertürk, 2025). This transnational dimension necessitates addressing anti-gender politics as an international phenomenon. Anti-gender politics not only reflects internal cultural conflicts but also erodes the universal nature of gender equality (mainstreaming) by transforming the international normative framework. (Ertürk, 2025)

These developments are clearly observable in different political contexts. In Hungary and Poland, populist right-wing governments have carried out systematic attacks on gender equality in parallel with anti-European Union rhetoric. (Bilgin and Sezgin 2022) Constitutional amendments and legal regulations centering on the "traditional family" have both institutionalized gender hierarchy and presented international norms as a threat to national sovereignty. (Çokoğullar, 2022) In the United States, the Trump administration supported misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric with concrete policy interventions such as budget cuts targeting gender studies programs. In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro attempted to dismantle mechanisms aimed at preventing gender-based violence. In South Korea, attempts to close the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family have exhibited similar rhetorical patterns. (Miller-Idriss, Cynthia,2025) Turkey provides a particularly illustrative example of how anti-gender political strategies operate. The decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, the marginalization of feminist organizations, debates on alimony and reproductive rights, and the removal of gender equality frameworks from higher education policies demonstrate the selective rejection of international norms through discourses of sovereignty and moral order.

The systematic erosion of gender equality norms has serious consequences for the international order. As gender equality ceases to be a universal principle and becomes a controversial norm, the authority of international human rights regimes weakens. This process contributes to the fragmentation of the liberal international order and increasingly normalizes authoritarian forms of governance. Furthermore, anti-gender politics reveals that authoritarian regimes construct their legitimacy not only through repression but also through cultural and moral regulatory mechanisms. Social consent generated through anti-gender politics eliminates democratic pluralism. In this context, gender emerges as a central arena where international norms are contested and reconfigured.

In sum, beyond a reactive phenomenon of politics, anti-gender functions as one of the main determinants of global authoritarianism. Gender equality is not only a target of authoritarian rise; it is also one of the fundamental arenas of struggle in which the contemporary international order is being restructured. Understanding this dynamic is critical to understanding both the functioning of authoritarian forms of government and the future of global norms.

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A Threshold Where Uncertainty Becomes Institutionalized: 2025 and the War Economy

Özge Mumcu Aybars[*]

The year 2025 represents a critical juncture in which uncertainty is no longer confined to episodic crises but has become a structural feature of global politics. The erosion of predictability in interstate relations has proceeded in parallel with the weakening of normative frameworks and the functional decline of institutional mechanisms. In this context, a security-centred approach, described as a "war economy," has ceased to be a temporary policy preference and is now solidifying into a permanent orientation.

The war economy, in this sense, refers not only to an increase in military expenditures but to the emergence of a new political-economic order in which public budgets, technological capacity, and economic resources are redistributed around security priorities. As the influence of multilateral institutions declines, collective security reflexes weaken; technological capacity increasingly emerges not merely as a tool of competition, but also as an instrument of economic and political control (Mearsheimer, 2018; Tooze, 2021; SIPRI, 2024).

The United States' cuts to foreign aid, the crystallization of shifts in U.S. foreign policy orientation in November 2025, and the strengthening of inward-looking tendencies accompanied by an increased outward projection of these dynamics; the weakening of institutional coordination with Europe; and the transition from a normative foreign policy to a security-focused line have seriously destabilized the established balance of the international system (Ikenberry, 2018; OECD, 2023). This trajectory demonstrates that the reallocation of resources from development and social policy to security and defence priorities is a fundamental indicator of the institutionalization of the war economy.

Within this new fragile context, Turkey is pursuing a multidimensional balancing policy: on the one hand, attempting to manage developments in Syria, while on the other, maintaining relations with the West without directly confronting Russia. This strategy, shaped by the tension

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between geopolitical pressures and economic necessities, affects not only foreign policy but also domestic politics; it has paved the way for Turkey to distance itself from the S-400 process and orient itself toward re-entry into the F-35 program (NATO, 2024; White House, 2025).

This brief analysis aims to succinctly outline the position of the international system and Turkey in the uncertainty-driven year of 2025, as well as the transformation of that position, within the framework of the structural effects of the war economy.

The year 2025 also marks a period in world politics in which charismatic leadership—often described as right-wing populist—has gained strength, while institutional political structures have been pushed into the background. Security-based policies, internal enemy narratives, and control over the media have become core instruments of right-wing populism in many countries (Mudde, 2019; Freedom House, 2024). This political climate creates fertile ground for legitimizing security-centred policies and the war economy through the production of social consent.

By contrast, in Europe, the emergence of a discourse among centre-right parties seeking to re-centre democratic values to limit the rise of far-right movements and parties stands out as a counterbalancing tendency (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Multilateral international institutions established after the Second World War are facing an increasingly deep legitimacy and functionality crisis in 2025. The shift away from development institutions like USAID reflects a more profound transformation in priorities. Rather than just budget cuts, we are witnessing a reallocation of resources that shifts the focus toward security and defence. This shift opens up new discussions about achieving a balance between development and global safety. (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2024). The declining trust in key institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union presents an opportunity for growth and renewal. Although their influence may sometimes seem symbolic, we can turn this challenge into an opportunity to improve their effectiveness in tackling the complex global issues we face. By coming together, we can revitalize our roles in promoting peace and managing crises with renewed commitment. (UNDP, 2024).

The fragmentation of institutional political alliances has become explicitly visible in the U.S. National Security Strategy of 2025. This strategy signals a foreign policy orientation based on limited engagement, selective intervention, and security-centred priorities within the context of the United States, the European Union, and NATO (White House, 2025). While redefining

the U.S. role in global leadership, this approach also indicates a shift toward a framework that prioritizes regional balance over multilateralism. The weakening of institutional coordination with Europe has brought with it a pronounced process of disintegration in terms of shared threat perception and alliance-based cohesion as well (Nye, 2020; RAND Corporation, 2024). Meanwhile, the unresolved conflict between the Colani administration and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria carries the risk of increasing security threats along Turkey's southern border.

War Zones in 2025: Gaza and Ukraine

The war in Gaza, ongoing since 7 October 2023, has once again exposed the ineffectiveness of the international community toward the end of 2025. The failure to activate effective deterrence mechanisms despite violations of international humanitarian law has produced a severe legitimacy crisis on a global scale (UN OCHA, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024). The politicization of humanitarian aid and restrictions on access deepen the civilian costs of the war economy, with these costs disproportionately borne by women and children.

Peace initiatives between Ukraine and Russia remain deadlocked over high-value issues such as rare-earth elements, energy supply chains, and control over critical infrastructure. In 2025, the war persists beyond the front lines—extending from diplomatic arenas to the economy, technology, resource allocation, and the energy policies of multiple countries—within the broader framework of the war economy (IEA, 2024; European Commission, 2024). Ukraine's attacks on Moscow in the final days of 2025 and Russia's response indicate that this front is likely to deepen further.

Geopolitically located at the centre of major fault lines, Turkey continues to fulfil its institutional obligations within NATO while maintaining relations with Russia and China in line with the constraints imposed by energy dependency and economic realities. Ankara's decision not to fully participate in Western sanctions against Russia since the start of the Ukraine–Russia War, while simultaneously providing support to the Ukrainian army through Bayraktar UAVs, points to a war-economy practice in which the defence industry is deeply intertwined with foreign policy and economic strategy (SIPRI, 2024; BBC Monitoring, 2024).

In addition, the failure to achieve a lasting agreement between HTS leader Colani and the SDF following the change of administration in Syria in 2025 has increased security risks along

Turkey's southern border. The ongoing uncertainty in Syria has increased Turkey's strategic burden, with refugee pressure and border security, pushing Ankara toward restructuring its defence policies and developing new intelligence and intervention mechanisms to address cross-border threats (International Crisis Group, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). As defence priorities strengthen, contraction in social policy has led to the social impacts of crises being felt most acutely by women (UNDP, 2024).

In the final days of December 2025, reports of a drone originating in Ukraine crossing the Black Sea and crashing in Çankırı, alongside sightings of UAVs alleged to be of Russian origin in various parts of Anatolia, placed Turkey's air defence systems on high alert (Reuters, 2025). During the same period, the death of Libyan Chief of General Staff General Mohammed Ali Al-Haddad in a plane that took off from Ankara and crashed near Haymana demonstrated that the risks inherent in foreign policy have reached not only diplomatic but also physical dimensions (Associated Press, 2025). Concurrently, an observed increase in ISIS organizational activities within Turkey and the security operations carried out in response deepened concerns over rising internal security risks.

As the year drew to a close, geopolitical fault lines marked by intensified uncertainty became more visible; Ukraine's UAV attacks on Moscow and allegations of an assassination attempt against Russian President Vladimir Putin raised the prospect of a broader-scale conflict that could draw in the EU and NATO (Reuters, 2025). At the same time, escalating street movements in Iran and signals of support for these developments from Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu revealed a high likelihood that global instability would enter a new phase as the world moved into 2026 (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Collectively, these developments indicate that 2025 can be defined not just as a year marked by regional crises but as a historical turning point. In this context, uncertainty has taken on a structural nature, while the war economy has influenced economic priorities, security policies, and social inequalities. This new order, driven not by shared values but by security reflexes, is moving the international system into a fragile state that is increasingly unpredictable.

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Crisis Everywhere, Security Somewhere

*Karel Valansi**

The year 2025 unfolded under the persistent language of "crisis." It was defined by a landscape of wars that increasingly appear without clear political ends. As conflicts persisted without resolution, borders hardened, political polarization deepened, societies across regions experienced a permanent state of emergency. In this environment, "crisis" was no longer a temporary disruption but a regular feature in the global discourse.

Last year, we saw a world saturated with the language of "security." Media reflected and reinforced this condition, flooding public discourse with references to threat, danger, and survival. However, beneath the apparent universality of this "state of insecurity" lay a fundamental question: security for whom?

Not all forms of insecurity were narrated equally, nor were all subjects of insecurity granted the same political weight or even the same visibility. While the media coverage overwhelmingly privileged state-centric and securitized frames, gendered and human experiences of insecurity remained marginal or were instrumentalized for political rewards. In other words, for women and marginalized communities, insecurity has not become a "breaking news" event but a structural condition of the crises.

Accepting the presence of this narrative imbalance is critical to understand how political priorities are set, whose suffering becomes politically acceptable and actionable, and whose remains peripheral. This article argues that dominant narratives have contained gendered insecurity within a narrow, militarized framework. The crisis fatigue, on the other hand, has functioned to normalize the exclusion of women from the very security architectures built in their name, without their real presence and without acknowledging women as political actors with security knowledge of their own.

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Most of us do not experience global conflicts directly. Instead, we live in what Walter Lippmann described as a 'pseudo-environment'- a mental map of the world constructed through news reports, social media, and political speeches. In 2025, these maps were extremely shaped with "spectacular" violence such as missile strikes, bombs, drone footage, live-streamed terror attacks, and political assassinations. This past year was also narrated as a series of existential threats to the state, a framing that privileges immediacy over structural casualty. This mediated reality has also provided a crucial lens through which ordinary individuals started to interpret the world's complexity.

The media has long played a major role in shaping perceptions, including political perceptions of security. In 2025, the media's role became even more important, as crises were no longer treated as exceptional disruptions to the global system but rather as a normalized condition. The language of security dominated the headlines and political messaging in 2025. "Borders under threat," "national survival," "regional or strategic stability" became daily headlines, reinforcing a state-centric understanding of what it means to be secure in the first place while marginalizing non-military dimensions of security and well-being.

As media narratives have prioritized state-centric, militarized security, in this environment, insecurity has been reframed primarily through an emphasis on geopolitical competition, military and intelligence capabilities, border control – a return to 'hard power' all over again. Securitization increasingly became a default narrative logic. Political actors framed their decisions as necessary responses to an existential threat, while the media amplified these frames without much critical investigation. The emphasis on urgency and presence of threat narrows the space for alternative understandings of security, sidelining social, economic, and gendered vulnerabilities that are less visible but no less destabilizing. It also produced a political understanding in which the emergency was invoked to justify exceptional measures and to obscure the visibility of everyday insecurities, which were largely marginalized.

Additionally, when the public is bombarded from every corner with "breaking news," the capacity for empathy and understanding of the issue more deeply is stretched thin, creating the 'crisis fatigue' phenomenon, a tool of political management that dulls moral sensitivity rather than encouraging informed engagement. As Neil Postman (1985) warned, we are not suppressed by a lack of information but by its abundance, creating a state of political paralysis.

As conflicts and crises persisted, media attention cycles shortened, and many long-term humanitarian issues, such as gendered violence, economic precarity, and displacement, struggled to maintain visibility. These issues were addressed as humanitarian concerns rather than as security priorities, thereby removing them from the political agenda without urgency or accountability. Accordingly, policies responding to security crises rarely addressed the conditions that produced the issues categorized as such.

It is crucial to say that gendered vulnerabilities were not absent from media narratives. Still, they were contained within a narrow, patriarchal frame, and as a result, gendered insecurity became structurally marginalized and politically expendable. Women were most frequently depicted in crisis coverage as victims, mourners, or caregivers. Women's experiences were often used to evoke moral urgency while keeping them distant from authority or decision-making, disconnecting them from their capacity for agency and from their potential roles in community resilience and conflict mitigation.

When women are represented primarily through vulnerability, their insecurity becomes part of a background condition rather than a political agenda requiring political solutions. Crisis fatigue further normalized these traditional representations, rendering these already marginalized issues less narratively urgent over time. The result was a media environment in which some forms of suffering or insecurities were rendered visible and grievable, to the expense of others. Such hierarchies shape not only public opinion but, more importantly, policy responses.

Narratives, as tools of power, often functioned as filters that shaped the story of 2025. The narratives through which insecurity is communicated are not politically neutral. The media exercises narrative power in determining what counts as security and whose insecurity needs public attention. In 2025, state survival was the dominant securitized frame. In this context, women frequently appeared as grieving mothers or displaced caregivers, portrayed as a consequence of the conflict. They were rarely given voice, agency, or a defining role in political solutions, a pattern that reflects long-standing hierarchies of authority within both media and security policymaking. With this narrative containment, women are mainly framed as victims to be protected in this essentially male-led fortress of security understanding. Thus, gendered insecurity remains a private tragedy rather than a public priority in the security agenda and policy decision-making.

2025 has mirrored the fragility of the world in which we live. It showed that true safety remains elusive, especially for those whose lives are structured by care, precarity, and endurance rather than power projection. In Antonio Gramsci's words, "the old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters." 2025 reflects precisely this interval, where instability generates both narrative excess and moral exhaustion. Yet these moments are not only periods of danger, crises, and anxiety but also moments of political choice. Recentering women's (and other marginalized groups') experiences should not be an act of moral charity. Security must be reimagined so that women are not merely affected subjects and victims without agency, but rather indispensable political actors in the search for stability and security.

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A Year in Retreat: Challenges Women's Rights in 2025

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It would be an understatement to categorize 2025 as the year of systematic deterioration of women's rights.

In general, when we look at progress on human rights and equality, a teleological trend is evident. After long and arduous struggles, societies abolish certain horrific practices such as slavery, indentured servitude, or death penalty. Subsequently, they do not regress back and decide to reinstate these. That is, once a normative progress takes place, it tends to stick around.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for women's rights. Despite massive amounts of women's mobilization, international agreements and national legislations, norm changes in women's rights seem hard to achieve, but easy to lose! It is as if women's rights advocates can never let their guard down, and their achievements could never be permanent. Reproductive rights, gender quotas, access to political office, or protections from violence can suddenly be eliminated. At any point, societies may turn their backs against women and start relitigating their existing rights. Unlike other rights, women's rights are always up for renegotiation. Previously won battles could always be re-opened, as seen in the case of reproductive rights in the US, or alimony rights in Turkey. Decades long progress can rapidly be erased by populist, anti-women political winds.

When we look at the highlights of 2025 in terms of women's rights, the elephant in the room is the second presidency of Donald J. Trump. While Trump had achieved serious blows to women's rights in his first term, his second term holds even graver challenges. The inner circle of Trump 2.0. tends to be more loyal, blunt, macho, and much less qualified. Despite significant pressures from the Republican GOP leadership to select a woman as his Vice President, Trump opted for mostly celebrity male figures for his top cabinet positions. Unfortunately, the

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legislative branch failed to put any breaks on these substandard nominations. Consequently, the US ended up with a vaccine-sceptic lawyer with a history of drug abuse as the head of its national healthcare system, an aggressive and alcoholic talk show host with a history of wife abuse as the head of its national defense, and of course, Elon Musk, the richest men in the world who was trying to round up his multiple wives and 11 kids into a massive compound in Texas, in charge of federal government restructuring.

We would have easily ignored the political drama in the United States as it struggles through a bizarre period, had the US not been, in Susan Strange's words, *a structural power*. Way back in the 1980s, Susan Strange had brilliantly warned us against the increasing power of markets and finance capital under the watchful eyes of the U.S. Moreover, she had pointed at two grave mistakes of the European nations: first, bending the knee to the U.S. and submitting to its protective shield under NATO, and second, not engaging in any systematic global wealth distribution that could have addressed the inhumane wealth gap between the west and the rest.

As we watched the U.S. President delegate the largest federal government restructuring in the U.S. history to the richest men in the world, and run his real estate, hotel, investment property, golf resort businesses from Florida while simultaneously managing the state affairs, we need to credit Susan Strange for having the farsightedness to say the following: "*state power is increasingly shared with markets, enterprises and non-state authorities*." (Strange, 1998: 21) What we see is nothing short of an aggressive takeover of the 250-year-old American state apparatus by private corporate interests.

The U.S. is not only setting a bad example by dismantling its state autonomy and state capacity in the hands of private financial interests. It is also spearheading the normalization of devaluation of women's rights, skills and expertise in political, social, and economic domains. Below index by the Economist illustrates the state of women's conditions in the OECD countries. Referred as the Glass Ceiling Index, it measures nearly 30 countries based on ten criteria, including women's political participation, labor market participation, wage gap, education gap, etc. The results are striking. In the last decade, the OECD average declined, and Turkey's position dropped to the bottom of the pack. Scandinavian countries enjoyed their position at the top while Portugal and New Zealand made significant progress. Aside from these handful of small and very progressive nations, most other countries experienced various degrees of demotion in women's status.

2025 also witnessed desperate calls for pro-natalist policies, particularly in societies that have a poor track record of women's rights. Countries at the bottom of the Glass Ceiling Index all had politicians enthusiastically inviting women to have more children. Some like South Korea have been "importing" Vietnamese women for cross-border marriages, particularly in rural areas, which amounted to commodification of women without making any significant improvement on national fertility. (Lee 2011). What these politicians conveniently ignore is the incredibly high correlation between low rates of fertility and low rates of women's empowerment. Societies that try to turn the clock back on women's rights and mistreat 50% of their population, sooner or later face a catastrophic demographic cliff. Neither the imported brides, nor the child subsidies can reverse this trend. Meanwhile, the best inoculation against population decline seems to be respecting women's rights as human rights and granting them their fair share under the sun.

Index rank out of 29 countries

Left (start)	Right (end)
1. Iceland	1. Sweden
2. Sweden	2. Iceland
3. Norway	3. Finland
4. Finland	4. Norway
5. Poland	5. France
6. France	5. New Zealand
7. Denmark	5. Portugal
8. Belgium	8. Spain
9. Hungary	9. Denmark
10. Canada	10. Australia
11. New Zealand	11. Belgium
12. Portugal	12. Austria
OECD average	13. Poland
13. Spain	14. Britain
14. Australia	14. Canada
15. Slovakia	16. Italy
16. Israel	17. Slovakia
17. Italy	18. Ireland
18. Austria	OECD average
19. Germany	19. Greece
20. United States	19. United States
21. Greece	21. Netherlands
22. Britain	22. Germany
23. Ireland	23. Israel
24. Netherlands	24. Hungary
25. Czech Republic	25. Czech Republic
26. Switzerland	26. Switzerland
27. Turkey	27. Japan
28. Japan	28. South Korea
29. South Korea	29. Turkey

2016   18   20   22   24

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Gender Policies in Italy and Recent Developments

*Gökçen Yavaş**

Over the past year in Italy, legislative initiatives addressing violence against women and femicide have been placed among the top priorities on the political and social agenda. In this context, gender-related policies of Giorgia Meloni - Italy's first female prime minister and leader of the populist radical right party Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy, FdI) have become a focal point of public debate.

In office since October 2022, Meloni has marked a notable change in terms of representation within Italy's traditionally male- dominated political system. However, the shift fell short of producing a transformative impact on gender policies. In a speech delivered in 2019 Meloni's self-identification as a "woman" and a "mother" underscores female representation while signalling a political framework based on traditional gender roles (Giuffrida 2023). In this context, this study examines the gender policies of the Meloni government over the past year within their historical and political context.

In Italy, the strong link between familialism and traditional gender roles has long constituted a significant feature of conservative political perspectives. This structure has also shaped a fundamental dividing line between right-wing and left-wing political approaches to gender policies, while directly shaping the development of the feminist movement (Ruspini 2015: 65). The feminist movement that emerged during the 1970s - commonly regarded as the second wave - developed alongside organised labour struggles. This convergence contributed to legislative reforms in areas such as equal pay, divorce, and abortion (Dell'Abate-Çelebi 2009:19; Ruspini 2015: 65). However, during the 1990s, progress on gender equality was constrained by the dominance of right-wing populist politics, particularly under Silvio Berlusconi, leader of Forza Italia and former prime minister. In contrast, the centre-left governments led by the Democratic Party pursued a more inclusive approach to gender equality. During this period, in particular in 2016, civil society activism also gained momentum with the feminist movement Non Una di Meno (Not One Woman Less), emerging as a prominent actor (Chironi 2019: 1470; Feo ve Lavizzari 202: 12).

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Meloni's approach to gender is structured around a political framework that prioritises motherhood, nationalism, sovereignty and an anti-immigration discourse. From this perspective, the framing of women's rights through identity- and – security based discourses is defined as "femo-nationalism" in the critical literature. Within populist politics as illustrated by Meloni's case, the notion of "gender ideology" functions to reproduce gender roles within an exclusionary framework by portraying the "natural family" as under threat (Indelicato ve Lopes 2024). In this context, Meloni has frequently emphasised women's roles within the family, motherhood and declining birth rates, and she institutionalised this approach through the establishment of Ministry for Family, Birth Rate and Equal Opportunities in 2022. At the same time, restrictive policies on abortion have continued, and the rights of same-sex couples to adoption and surrogacy have been excluded from the political agenda (Donà 2023).

Over the past year, violence against women has emerged as one of the most significant issues during the Meloni period. Following the murder of university student Giulia Cecchettin in 2023 generated widespread public outrage and prompted legislative initiatives aimed at addressing gender-based violence (Degani 2025). For example, on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, parliament unanimously passed a law recognising femicide as a distinct crime and introducing life imprisonment. Despite broad political support, the law has been criticised for failing to adequately address cultural and structural roots of violence against women. Debates have mainly intensified regarding the need to prioritise preventive measures over punitive ones (Euractiv 2025).

The scale of violence against women became more visible with the preliminary findings published by ISTAT in 2025. According to the report, approximately one-third of women aged 16-75 in Italy have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their life-time. The most common perpetrators were recorded as current or former partners (ISTAT 2025).

In the 2025 Gender Equality Index, Italy ranks 12th within the EU with a score of 61.9. Although the overall score has increased over the last past decade, inequalities persist, particularly in the labour market. The full-time equivalent employment rate stands at 33 per cent for women compared to 53 per cent for men. Women hold 30 per cent of ministerial positions and account for 34 per cent of parliamentary representation (EIGE 2025). While no significant increase in representation has occurred during the Meloni period, issues related to women have become more visible in parliamentary activity compared to previous years (Cavalieri, De Giorgi ve Feo 2025). The Women's Employment Bonus introduced in 2024 alongside the new bonus and

premium schemes for mothers with at least two children implemented in 2025, aims to encourage women's participation in the workforce (NoiPA 2025). However, discourse on women's integration into the labour market aligns with a conservative view that primarily positions women as caregivers (Cavalieri, De Giorgi ve Feo 2025).

In conclusion, as of 2025, violence against women remains a central political issue on Italy's political agenda. By contrast, reforms related to women's employment have remained limited, and political and economic inequalities remain unresolved. Meloni's emphasis on women's familial roles produces a restrictive and exclusionary framework that marginalises migrant women, LGBTQ+ individuals and actors advocating a comprehensive approach to gender equality. Meloni's policies indicate how familialist gender regime embedded in Italy's right-wing political tradition continues under contemporary conditions.

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Catherine Connolly: A New President in Ireland

Ayşegül Gökalp Kutlu[*]

Catherine Connolly won the presidential election held in Ireland on 24 October 2025, becoming the 10th President of the Republic of Ireland. Securing more than 63% of first-preference votes[1], Connolly achieved a landslide victory and became the candidate to receive the highest majority since the establishment of the presidency (McQuinn et al., 2025).

Connolly is not the first woman to serve as President of Ireland. The office was previously held by Mary Robinson (1990–1997) and Mary McAleese (1997–2011). Nevertheless, Connolly's election must be assessed within Ireland's still-problematic landscape of political representation in terms of gender equality. Women's representation in the national parliament stands at 25%, well below the European Union average of 33.4%, even though this figure represents the highest level in Irish history. The influence of the Catholic Church and a conservative social structure significantly restricted women's participation in public and political life throughout much of the twentieth century. Although women gained the right to vote in 1922, birth control was not legalized until 1993, and divorce only became legal in 1995. While the legalization of same-sex marriage (2015) and the repeal of the abortion ban (2018) mark important turning points, women's representation in decision-making mechanisms remains limited.

Connolly's victory becomes even more significant when the political context of the election is taken into account. Her two rivals, Jim Gavin and Heather Humphreys, were candidates supported by the two major centre-right governing parties. Fianna Fáil, led by Prime Minister Micheál Martin, nominated Jim Gavin, while Fine Gael put forward former cabinet minister Heather Humphreys. In effect, Connolly was running against the government bloc. Although she ran as an independent candidate, Connolly received broad support from left-wing parties throughout the campaign. Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, and the Social Democrats, as well as People Before Profit, the Green Party, and several smaller left-wing parties, chose to support Connolly and did not field their own candidates. When Gavin withdrew from the race amid

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intense public pressure following allegations that he had failed to refund an overpayment to a former tenant, the election effectively turned into a contest between two women candidates. Connolly's victory can therefore be read as a strong political message reflecting voters' critical stance toward centre-right governing parties and entrenched political elites (Carroll, 2025).

At the same time, it should be remembered that the Irish presidency is largely a ceremonial office. The President does not possess executive power but performs representational, non-partisan, and limited oversight functions within the constitutional system. During their term, presidents are expected to remain above party politics and do not directly intervene in day-to-day political debates. Nevertheless, through their discourse, public attitudes, and symbolic choices, they can exert a normative influence in areas such as social equality, human rights, peace, and cultural pluralism. A prominent example of this role is former President Michael D. Higgins. With his Labour Party background, socialist views, and critiques of neoliberalism, Higgins consistently focused on human rights, social justice, and opposition to neoliberal policies throughout his political career. He was active both domestically and internationally on issues such as gender equality, minority rights, and the protection of civil liberties (Leahy, 2023). Known for his opposition to militarism and imperialism, Higgins also championed cultural development, climate justice, and a more inclusive vision of the republic, while promoting the Irish language, which he himself speaks fluently. In this respect, Higgins's discourse constitutes an important reference point for Connolly. Connolly's emphasis during the campaign on issues such as the climate crisis, homelessness, inclusivity, democratic accountability, and the promotion of the Irish language points to a value-based presidential choice on the part of voters (Dom & McMahon, 2025).

Higgins was widely regarded as a popular and unifying figure. Connolly similarly gives the impression that she will serve as an inclusive president. Born in Galway in western Ireland, Connolly grew up in a large working-class family of fourteen children and received training in psychology and law. She began her political career at the local level within the Labour Party and served as a member of Galway City Council as well as Mayor of Galway. In 2016, she was elected to Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament) as an independent TD, where she became known for her outspoken criticism of government policies and her advocacy for human rights. In 2020, Connolly also became the first woman to serve as Deputy Speaker of the Dáil (Leas-Cheann Comhairle) (Connolly for President, 2025).

While Connolly's foreign policy stance broadly aligns with Ireland's traditional policy of neutrality, it also reflects a distinctly critical and normative perspective. She has frequently criticized NATO's expansion and the growing militarization of the European Union. Although she has described Russia's invasion of Ukraine as illegal and unacceptable, she has also accused NATO of fueling militarism and has defended Ireland's neutrality doctrine as a strong international stance. In international politics, Connolly's sharp criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza and her calls for solidarity with the Palestinian people have been particularly notable. She has argued that Israel is committing genocide and has urged the Irish government to take a more decisive position on the issue (McQuinn et al., 2025).

In the area of migration and refugee policy, Connolly adopts a human-rights-centred approach. She has condemned attacks against asylum seekers, warned against anti-immigrant rhetoric, and described the protection of refugees as a fundamental moral responsibility. Connolly also supports the idea of the peaceful reunification of the island of Ireland (Irish unity). During her campaign, she visited Belfast and described Northern Ireland's current status as akin to the severing of a part of the body. She argued that residents of Northern Ireland should be allowed to vote in presidential elections in the Republic of Ireland and stated that she would like to see a united Ireland during her term (Graham, 2025). At the same time, she has repeatedly emphasized that reunification can only occur through democratic means and with the consent of people on both sides.

The election was also marked by a low voter turnout of approximately 46% and an unusually high number of spoiled ballots. While this cannot be interpreted solely as an explicit protest vote, it suggests that some voters perceived the presidential race as offering limited choices and lacking sufficient pluralism. The narrow field of three candidates and the limited powers of the presidency are among the factors believed to have contributed to reduced voter engagement (Carroll, 2025). When considered alongside Connolly's decisive victory, low turnout and spoiled ballots point to a complex picture reflecting both voters' distance from established centre parties and a broader sense of dissatisfaction with the political system. Closely observing the normative impact of Connolly's presidency, particularly with regard to gender equality, human rights, and social justice in both domestic and foreign policy, will therefore be of considerable interest.

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[1] The Republic of Ireland uses the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system in presidential, parliamentary, and local elections. Under this system, voters rank candidates according to their preferences (1, 2, 3, etc.) rather than voting for a single candidate. During the counting process, first-preference votes are counted first; if no candidate reaches the required majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and their votes are redistributed to remaining candidates based on voters' subsequent preferences (vote transfers). Connolly's receipt of more than 63% of first-preference votes indicates that she was supported directly as the first choice by a clear majority of voters, making vote transfers unnecessary.

Being a Woman in Afghanistan in 2025: Boundaries of International Law

*Tuğba Bayar**

When the Taliban regained control of Kabul in August 2021, the fate of Afghan women and girls took a devastating turn. Over the subsequent four years, women have been almost entirely erased from public life, deprived of their political, civil, social, economic, and cultural rights. Taliban's decrees have instituted one of the most comprehensive systems of gender-based exclusion in modern history, accompanied by severe psychological and physical suffering. Compounded by poverty, natural disasters, and the climate crisis, women's lives have become confined to survival itself. Afghanistan now represents not only a human rights emergency but also a profound test of the international community's commitment to universality and accountability.[1]

Systematic Erasure and Daily Resistance

The restrictions imposed since 2021 have been absolute in scope. Beyond the compulsory face veil and the obligation to appear in public only with a male guardian, women are barred from education beyond primary school, excluded from most forms of employment, and denied freedom of movement, expression, and association. They can work only in marginal or gender-segregated spaces such as women's hospitals, girls' schools, or female prison wards.[2] Those who attempt to defy these rules risk imprisonment, corporal punishment, or execution. Reports suggest that even basic autonomy, such as managing a bank account or using digital payment systems, is effectively inaccessible to most women.

The Taliban's censorship has extended into the intellectual sphere. At least 140 books written by women across multiple disciplines have been banned.[3] Health-care restrictions have reached levels of absurdity. Women are forbidden from completing secondary or higher education, and thus from qualifying as doctors, yet the regime mandates that women may only

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be treated by female medical personnel.[4] The policy represents the literal institutionalization of impossibility.

A tragic illustration occurred in September 2025, when a 6.2-magnitude earthquake struck Nangarhar Province. Witnesses reported that male rescuers refused to extract women from the rubble, leaving female volunteers to attempt rescues without proper equipment. Medical assistance was delayed because Taliban rules required female medics to treat female survivors. The disaster exposed in the starkest terms how gender apartheid transforms even humanitarian crises into scenes of systemic cruelty.[5]

International Legal Commitments and Violations

The principal human rights treaties of the United Nations system have long bound Afghanistan. It is since 1983 signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[6], and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[7] It ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, and in 2003 the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[8] The Taliban's policies constitute explicit breaches of these obligations, violating the non-derogable principles of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.

In 2003, Afghanistan also acceded to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), allowing the Court jurisdiction over crimes committed on its territory. In 2024, six States Parties that are Chile, Costa Rica, Spain, France, Luxembourg, and Mexico, invoked Articles 13 and 14 of the Statute to refer the Taliban's actions against women and girls to the ICC. This unprecedented referral positioned gender-based persecution as a matter of global criminal accountability rather than internal governance.

In July 2025, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani, charging them with crimes against humanity for their systematic repression of women and girls.[9] The Court found that both men had *ordered, directed, and encouraged* discriminatory policies amounting to gender persecution. The decision also recognized that the Taliban's campaign targeted not only women but also individuals whose gender identity or sexuality defied the regime's strict norms that men punished for "un-Islamic" attire or behavior among them. The ruling represents a landmark in

international criminal jurisprudence. It is the first instance in which gender apartheid is being adjudicated as a prosecutable category of crimes against humanity.

Gender Apartheid as a Legal and Normative Concept

The Taliban's regime has prompted scholars and activists to revive the term gender apartheid, drawing parallels with South Africa's racial apartheid system. The analogy captures not only the scale of exclusion but also its structural and ideological nature. Under Taliban rule, gender hierarchy is not incidental but foundational to governance. Women's voices, bodies, and labor have been systematically erased from the public sphere, relegating them to private invisibility. The policy of banning women's public speech like prohibiting their voices from being broadcast or heard by men, epitomizes this logic of silencing.

This gendered authoritarianism has catastrophic social effects. Early marriage rates have surged; maternal mortality has risen sharply; and widespread malnutrition has deepened.[10] The combined impact of coercion, economic deprivation, and psychological trauma has shortened women's life expectancy and undermined any sense of personhood. Yet even under these conditions, acts of resistance continue to surface. Thousands of Afghan girls secretly attend online courses, learning languages, psychology, coding, and nursing through clandestine networks.[11] The Taliban, aware of this defiance, frequently disrupts internet access in an effort to sever these lifelines.

Economic repression has also given rise to underground economies of survival.[12] Many women now run secret beauty salons, offering services such as hairdressing and make-up, activities labeled *haram* under Taliban edicts. These micro-spaces of defiance, though perilous, symbolize the persistence of agency under tyranny.

Tribunal for Women in Afghanistan established by the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) concludes that the Taliban's treatment of women and girls amounts to crimes against humanity, specifically gender persecution and other inhumane acts under Article 7 of the Rome Statute, and describes their rule as an "institutionalised system of repression" that strips women of education, work, movement, health care and political voice. Legally, this does three important things: (i) it consolidates a detailed factual and legal record that can be used by formal mechanisms such as the ICC and UN investigative bodies; (ii) it explicitly calls for "gender apartheid" to be recognised as a crime under international law, pushing doctrinal

development beyond existing persecution language; and (iii) it reinforces the argument that states have a responsibility not to normalise or legitimise the Taliban regime while such crimes are ongoing, and instead to support accountability processes and protection for Afghan women, girls, and refugees.[13]

International Response and the Call for Solidarity

The international community's reaction has been slow and fragmented. While sanctions and diplomatic isolation have limited effects on a regime indifferent to external legitimacy, humanitarian interventions often risk reinforcing Taliban control by channeling aid through patriarchal intermediaries. Against this backdrop, UN Women has urged global actors to adopt a principled and gender-responsive approach.[14] It calls for sustained and flexible funding to empower Afghan women's organizations; for allocating at least 30 percent of all aid to gender-equality programs; and for avoiding any partnerships that could normalize Taliban policies. Crucially, it insists that women's rights must form the ethical foundation of all humanitarian and development strategies in Afghanistan.

Conclusion: Accountability, Visibility, and Hope

Being a woman in Afghanistan in 2025 means living under a system that criminalizes existence itself. The Taliban's policies have transformed gender into a ground of persecution comparable to race or ethnicity under classical apartheid regimes. Yet this reality has also pushed the international legal order toward new normative frontiers. The ICC's intervention affirms that gender-based oppression is not merely a matter of national culture or religion but a universal concern within the architecture of international law.

Still, justice will not be achieved through judicial mechanisms alone. Real change depends on sustained transnational solidarity on amplifying Afghan women's voices, supporting their networks, and ensuring that humanitarian engagement does not come at the price of complicity. The question that remains for the global community is not whether it recognizes gender apartheid, but whether it will act to end it.

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The Changing Face of Conservative Female Leadership:
Sanae Takaichi

Ahu SUMBAS[*]

In 2025, a significant change for women's political leadership unfolded in Japan, a country historically shaped by male-dominated social and political institutions. Sanae Takaichi, elected leader of the conservative-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), became Japan's first female prime minister on 21 October 2025. Yet, much of the international media attention about Takaichi focused on a biographical detail from her youth: her experience as a drummer in a heavy metal band. Portraying her as a 'conservative woman with unconventional hobbies', became another example of the gendered and often trivializing language of politics. Overshadowed by these narratives were far more critical debates: the tension between Takaichi's conservative political positions and women's rights, and the broader significance of her rise in Japanese political landscape[1].

Takaichi was born in 1961 in the historic city of Nara to a middle-class family with civil servant parents. Political power in Japan has traditionally been inherited through elite-powerful family lineages, passed from fathers to male heirs[2]. Takaichi, by contrast, was neither emerged from a powerful political family nor conformed to the gendered expectations of a political leadership. Furthermore, she won the party leadership race against Koizumi Shinjiro as one of hereditary politicians, son of former minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō. Even her political victory alone positions Takaichi as a significant female figure in the Japanese politics.

Takaichi, first elected to the Diet in 1996 within the LDP, Japan's dominant conservative-nationalist party since 1955. She has since served ten terms as a member of parliament and held several cabinet positions, including Economic Security Ministry. Her political mentors were former prime minister Abe Shinzō and, following Abe's assassination, Asō Tarō[3].

While Takaichi's lack of political dynasty suggests a political career shaped by her individual efforts, intra-party negotiation, and strategic alliance-building[4], her success cannot be

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understood without reference to broader structural and political factors in Japan. The most important of these factors is both the LDP's loss of public support and the party's internal ideological realignment[5]. For the first time in decades, the LDP lost its majority in the lower house during the 2024 general elections and then in the upper house in the 2025 midterm elections. These losses intensified ideological divisions within the party, particularly between centrists and right-wing conservative bloc.

Growing social and economic pressures on Japanese politics have undermined the popularity of centrist leaders, while political discourses emphasizing 'security, strict immigration control, national revival, and social order' gained political popularity reflecting trends observable not only in Japan but across global right-wing politics. Within this context, Takaichi has emerged as the public face of the LDP's conservative wing and as a female leader capable of articulating anxieties surrounding security, migration, economic uncertainty, and social cohesion. As Klein (2025) argues, 'Takaichi within Japan's broader political culture, one shaped by nostalgia, stability-seeking voters, and the enduring dominance of the LDP, arguing that her conservatism reflects continuity more than populist rupture'[6]. From this perspective, her positions on constitutional revision, postwar historical narratives, and national identity are not exceptional, but rather consistent expressions of the LDP's conservative mainstream[7].

In this political context, the resignation of Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's from LDP triggered a leadership instability within the party. The party's long-standing coalition partner of 26 years, Komeito, refused to support Takaichi as prime minister and withdrew from the coalition. The collapse of the LDP–Komeito coalition created a political opening in which the party sought to consolidate power through its right wing. Takaichi's ability to forge a new coalition with the conservative Japan Innovation Party (Ishin no Kai) placed her at the center of this reconfigured political alignment. In other words, Takaichi's political rise reflects the convergence of public demand for security and economic stability in Japan, the strategic support of the LDP's conservative faction, and the impact of new coalition politics[8].

A Victory or a Setback for Women's Leadership?

Japan ranks 142nd globally in women's parliamentary representation with women accounting for only 16 % of the House of Representatives and 25 % of the House of Councillors.[9] In the context of such persistently low female representation and a male dominated-traditional political culture in Japan, Takaichi's political victory carries a symbolic role beyond the mere

fact of becoming Japan's first female prime minister. Her leadership sends a broader message to Japanese society, that women, even without hereditary political identity, can achieve to the highest offices in politics. Moreover, public opinion surveys indicating widespread approval of the election of a female prime minister reflects a significant change in public attitudes in Japan[10].

Takaichi does not present her political stance as a defender of gender equality based social transformation; rather, she primarily positions herself as a proponent of right-wing conservative and nationalist ideas. Indeed, she has voiced admiration for UK ex-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in her quest to build as 'a strong and prosperous Japan', and has been widely labeled by the media as Japan's Iron Lady[11]. Takaichi's emphasis on preserving the gender status quo and defending traditional family structures situates her firmly within a conservative policy framework, thereby rendering the symbolic significance of this female leadership deeply contested.

It can be argued that Takaichi has deliberately distanced herself from feminist discourse. Yet her public discourse on gender equality remains closely aligned with conservative values emphasizing traditional family norms and work ethics. On the one hand, she voiced her goals such as achieving Nordic-level female representation in her cabinet, expanding financial support for maternity clinics and women's health centers, and introducing tax incentives to support caregivers' career prospects. On the other hand, Takaichi appointed only three women to her eighteen-member cabinet[12], and she has taken an oppositional stance toward allowing married couples to retain separate surnames, legalizing same-sex marriage, and permitting female succession within the imperial family. A particularly striking paradox here is that 'Takaichi continued to use her maiden name in public after her first marriage, and her husband took her surname after they married a second time'[13]. Among the feminist scholars conceptualizing substantive representation with a tradition approach as the advancement of women's collective feminist interests, Takaichi is widely regarded as a controversial figure. Feminist and progressive groups in Japanese politics have label her as 'an old man with a woman's face', 'an honorary man', and 'not representative of women'[14].

Nevertheless, the growing global presence of women leaders within right-wing conservative parties complicates these critiques. The question of which women represent which women's interests has long been central to debates within the literature on women's representation[15]. While pluralist democratic theory affirms the legitimacy of competing and conflicting interests

in a peaceful deliberative process, it would be a mistake to define women's interests as only progressive or feminist interests. As long as democratic politics continues to provide space for deliberation, contestation, and compromise among multiple and divergent articulations of women's interests, both conservative and feminist claims deserve a place at the table. In this sense, as Easton emphasizes, despite all ongoing controversies, 'Takaichi's achievement remains a woman's success and should be recognized as such'[16]. However, it would be naive to assume that the dominant conservative patriarchal discourse in political history will not marginalized and suppressed feminist demands. Consequently, the potential threat this poses to women's representation and gender equality must also be recognized.

In conclusion, Takaichi's rise as prime minister holds undeniable symbolic significance. It increases the visibility of women in politics, normalizes the image of female leadership, and challenges Japan's male-dominated, hereditary-centered political tradition. Yet it is equally clear that this change does not, in itself, promise a structural transformation toward gender equality in either Japanese or global politics. During her prime ministry, Takaichi is expected to consolidate a weakened and internally divided party, to govern a newly formed coalition, and to struggle economic and social challenges under a minority government. The following period will therefore demonstrate which social, economic, and political transformations Japan is able to accomplish under a woman's leadership, and which it is not.

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Women's Participation in the 2025 Türkiye-PKK Peace Process

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Armed conflicts are inherently gendered: even when women are not direct combatants, they bear disproportionate burdens of displacement, economic insecurity, care responsibilities, and social fragmentation.[1] Feminist peace research has consistently shown that excluding women from peace processes not only marginalizes their experiences but also undermines the sustainability of peace settlements.[2] These insights are institutionalized in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which recognizes women as agents of peace rather than passive victims.[3] Yet, despite this normative framework, women's participation in peace processes remains uneven and often informal. The renewed peace process that emerged in Turkey in 2025 offers an important case for examining how women engage with a largely top-down political process through parliamentary interventions and grassroots mobilization.

The modern Kurdish conflict in Türkiye can be traced back to longstanding grievances over issues of cultural recognition, political representation, and state repression of Kurdish identity and rights. Beginning in 1984, the armed insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) evolved into a protracted conflict involving counterinsurgency operations and political marginalization, particularly in the southeastern provinces of Türkiye. A combination of political exclusion and militarized governance produced cycles of violence and displacement, especially for women, that shaped Turkish political life for four decades.[4]

Turkey's first major attempt at negotiated peace, commonly referred to as the "Solution Process" (Çözüm Süreci), took place between 2013 and 2015. Initiated through secret talks between state officials and imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, the process aimed to end armed conflict through disarmament and democratization reforms. While the process raised significant public hope, it remained highly centralized and elite-driven.[5]

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Women's participation during this period was limited and largely informal. Although some Kurdish women politicians, such as Ayla Akat Ata were involved in meetings with Öcalan, women were not institutionally represented in negotiation mechanisms. Feminist scholars have criticized the process for reproducing masculine security logics and treating peace as a technical issue rather than a social transformation.[6]

The renewed peace process that began in 2025 emerged from an unexpected political realignment. In October 2024, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), publicly signalled openness to dialogue, followed by Abdullah Öcalan's February 2025 call for peace and democratic society. The PKK's declaration of a ceasefire and willingness to dissolve itself marked a significant departure from previous cycles of violence. In August 2025, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) established a National Solidarity, Brotherhood, and Democracy Commission to formalize discussions around the peace process.[7]

Although the composition of the parliamentary commission reflects Türkiye's broader gendered gap in political representation, several women MPs have nevertheless played visible and substantive roles in shaping the peace agenda. Among them, Gulistan Kilic Kocyigit (DEM Party MP) has been particularly prominent in parliamentary debates on the peace She has repeatedly emphasized that a sustainable peace cannot be achieved without advancing a framework of equal and inclusive citizenship. By situating peace within broader debates on justice, political rights, and legal accountability, her interventions challenge narrow, security-oriented understandings of negotiation and foreground the structural conditions necessary for durable peace.[8] Other women MPs Pervin Buldan Züleyha Gülüm have similarly articulated peace as inseparable from democratic inclusion and gender equality.

Crucially, several women groups were invited to address the commission including the Peace Mothers Association (Barış Anneleri Derneği) the Saturday Mothers (Cumartesi Anneleri), the I Need Peace Women's Initiative (Barışa İhtiyacım Var Kadın İnisiyatifi), and the Platform for Women's Equality. This marked a significant procedural shift from earlier peace processes, in which women's movements were largely confined to external advocacy.

In their interventions, these women's groups articulated a conception of peace that extended well beyond the formal cessation of armed hostilities. Peace was framed as a relational and social process, grounded in justice, recognition, and the repair of everyday life disrupted by decades of conflict. Representatives of the Peace Mothers, for instance, emphasized peace as the right to mourn publicly, to learn the fate of the disappeared, and to prevent future

generations from experiencing the same losses. In this framing, peace was inseparable from truth, accountability, and dignity, rather than merely a political agreement between armed actors.[9]

Similarly, the I Need Peace Women's Initiative defined peace as a condition in which women's lives are no longer shaped by militarization, fear, and precarity. Their testimonies highlighted how conflict permeates daily existence through displacement, economic insecurity, and the normalization of violence and argued that peace must therefore involve social and political transformation, including gender equality, democratic participation, and equal citizenship. Peace, in this sense, was presented not as an end point but as an ongoing process requiring structural change.[10]

Across these interventions, women consistently linked peace to human security rather than state security. Their statements foregrounded care, social cohesion, and the rebuilding of trust as central components of any durable peace settlement. By embedding peace within lived experience and social justice claims, these women challenged technocratic and elite-centric definitions of peace that prioritize negotiation outcomes over societal repair.

From a WPS perspective, the 2025 peace process in Türkiye illustrates a mixed picture of cautious progress and persistent structural constraints. The active engagement of women MPs in parliamentary debates and the formal invitation of women's civil society organizations to address the parliamentary peace commission mark an important departure from earlier peace initiatives, in which women's roles were largely invisible or confined to informal advocacy. These developments suggest a growing procedural recognition of women as legitimate political actors in peace-related deliberations. At the same time, women's inclusion remains limited in scope. Their underrepresentation in commission leadership and the procedural restrictions surrounding civil society interventions point to the continued dominance of elite, state-centric approaches to peace. From a WPS standpoint, this raises concerns that women's participation risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative, reinforcing existing power hierarchies rather than reshaping them. Whether this broader framing will translate into substantive policy influence, however, remains to be seen. As the peace process continues to evolve, the durability and depth of peace in Türkiye will depend on whether women's participation is consolidated into meaningful political power or remains a procedural gesture within an unfinished and highly contingent negotiation process.

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[9] For details, see https://bianet.org/haber/baris-anneleri-gerillalar-neye-dayanarak-turkiyeye-gelecek-310662

[10] https://www.barisaihtiyacimvar.com/komisyon/raporu

Takeaways from Belém: Women, Peace and Climate Security

*Sezen Kaya Sönmez**

Although climate change is a global threat that affects all living beings on Earth, in its consequences it exhibit as a dynamic that reproduces gender inequalities.[1] Climate security risks intersect with existing social, political, and economic inequalities, shaping people's levels of exposure to risk and their adaptive capacities.[2] Gender inequalities, such as limited access to financial resources and exclusion from decision-making processes, weaken women's capabilities to respond to climate change. Consequently, this process, which disproportionately affects women and girls in every sphere, from the destruction caused by climate change to inequalities in resource access, has moved the climate crisis beyond being a mere environmental issue, making it an integral part of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The recognition by the WPS agenda of the climate crisis as a fundamental factor shaping peace and security offers a crucial foundation for integrating this struggle into National Action Plans.[3] In this regard, the four pillars of WPS constitute a concrete starting point for climate action: *Participation* incorporates the leadership and knowledge of women and vulnerable groups into the process, while *Protection* creates legal shields for women environmental defenders who are on the front lines and face disproportionate risks. *Prevention* mechanisms enable the anticipation of climate-related security risks by addressing structural inequalities, whereas *Relief and Recovery* enhance social resilience by ensuring that post-disaster interventions are climate-smart and gender-responsive.[4] Although the integration of these two security issues represents an important theoretical starting point, we observe that it faces significant practical gaps.

In this context, data from the field regarding the extent to which countries have completed their homework (Nationally Determined Contributions - NDCs) issues a serious warning. The "Gender Equality and Climate Policy Scorecard," developed by UN Women and the Kaschak

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Institute and presented during the COP30 process, reveals a striking picture and problems in the prevention mechanism based on the analysis of 32 new-generation NDCs.[5] According to the report, while the vast majority of countries (23 countries) make commitments regarding women's economic security, Gender-Based Violence, the most pressing security dimension of the climate crisis, takes a back seat. Only 6 of the examined countries identified the increased risk of violence, and merely 5 (15%) were able to present a concrete prevention package regarding this issue. In other words, while states promise to provide 'green jobs' to women, they do not consider protecting them from violence, which escalates after disasters, as a climate policy. Similarly, despite the knowledge that the climate crisis exacerbates the care burden on women, fewer than half of the countries (15 countries) have planned measures to alleviate this burden.[6]

In addition, we observe the most significant examples of the inefficient functioning of prevention and relief and recovery mechanisms in conflict zones, where women who assume the responsibility of collecting water and firewood face the risk of sexual and gender-based violence along these routes. While resource scarcity causes girls to drop out of school; as seen in the Sri Lanka and Mozambique examples, early marriages turn into a tragic survival strategy for families under climate stress, further deepening inequalities.[7] However, despite this bleak picture, women are emerging as the architects of resilience in the midst of the crisis. For instance, in Chad, women, who constitute 60% of the agricultural workforce, ensure food security through innovative agricultural techniques despite land degradation; meanwhile, in Yemen's Taiz region, women have negotiated directly with tribal leaders and military actors to ensure civilians' access to water and have reduced local tensions. [8] These examples demonstrate that women are not merely victims in need of protection, but are the most effective actors in peace and climate adaptation. Furthermore, according to GIWPS data, peace processes where women are at the negotiating table tend to be more lasting; likewise, climate projects led by women yield more successful results in food security and resource management. [9] These examples demonstrate that women are the most effective actors in peace and climate adaptation, despite challenges to the WPS agenda and climate change integration mechanisms.

However, despite this potential on the ground, we face a severe deficit in participation in policy-making. For instance, as of June 2024, although the vast majority of National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) submitted to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) refer to gender, these references unfortunately often remain superficial or disconnected from

implementation. Consequently, adaptation and mitigation efforts fail to meet women's genuine needs. Furthermore, the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP)[10] processes hold vital importance regarding women's security and their roles in peacebuilding. In 2023, women comprised only 31% of Party delegations at COP28, a rate identical to that of 2013, indicating stagnation in gender representation at high-level climate negotiations.[11] In 2024 at COP29, women constituted 35% of Party delegations and 33% of parliamentarians and delegation leaders. [12] This picture, reflecting global trends, highlights the chronic underrepresentation of women in the number of negotiators and their limited influence on climate agreements.

By 2025, one of the most concrete outcomes of COP30 was the adoption of the new Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP). [13] As underscored by UN Women, this plan is not merely a statement of goodwill remaining on paper, but rather serves as a 'user manual' for climate action.[14] The roots of this plan lie in the "Lima Work Programme on Gender" (LWPG), adopted in Lima in 2014 (COP20), to advance gender-responsive climate policies and actions by ensuring gender balance and integrating gender into the work of implementing the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, to implement gender-responsive climate policies and actions. COP 22 decided to extend the LWPG for three years and review it at COP 25, while the first GAP under the UNFCCC was established at COP 23. At COP29, Parties agreed to extend the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) for another ten years and set a roadmap to create a new GAP expected to be adopted at COP30 in November 2025.[15] The 2026-2034 Belém GAP, adopted by the Parties at COP30, opens a new chapter for equality and inclusivity in climate policy and actions. Offering a nine-year framework, the GAP is notable for recognizing historically excluded groups, including Indigenous women and women with disabilities, and for introducing commitments for women and girls regarding care work, violence against women, security, protection mechanisms for women, health, and nature-based solutions.[16] Described by the UNFCCC as a 'launchpad' and covering the 2026-2034 period, this plan positions gender equality at the center of climate action, ranging from safer participation to stronger data, finance, and technology.[17]

Returning from Belém, we carry with us a promising Action Plan and strong policy recommendations. However, as highlighted by GIWPS, the WPS agenda must be positioned as a 'core pillar' of the climate security architecture. [18] Although the Plan envisages improving the gender-responsiveness of climate finance, the funding to support these efforts has still not been provided. Furthermore, despite the vital importance of the inclusion and equal participation of women and girls for ensuring their rights and effective climate action, women

are largely excluded from decision-making processes. Therefore, it is essential that the GAP adopts an approach that genuinely strengthens women's leadership rather than creating symbolic participation mechanisms. This must include specific mechanisms for consulting with women and girls at all levels, as well as increasing education, regardless of socioeconomic status or other factors. In essence, the fight against climate change is not merely a technical issue of reducing emissions. It is a matter of ensuring the security of a mother battling drought in Somalia, an indigenous leader protecting her forest in the Amazon, and a woman striving to ensure food security for her family during conflict.

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The New Geopolitics of Migration: Hard Borders, Invisible Women

Deniz Ş. Sert[*]

The year 2025 further deepened the already complex nature of international migration, exposed political fragilities, and pushed states' migration governance onto an increasingly instrumental and security-centered track. The world is moving at two different rhythms: on one side, millions of people on the move; on the other, states trying to stop that movement. On the one hand are those forced to relocate because of wars, climate disasters, and economic collapse; on the other are political regimes fortifying their borders and surrounding transit routes with invisible barbed wire. This year made it unmistakably clear that migration is not only a demographic or humanitarian phenomenon, but also a foreign policy issue through which power balances in the international system are being rebuilt.

Looking at this picture through a feminist foreign policy lens draws attention to two intersections that often remain in the background: first, the multi-layered effects of migration on women; and second, how women are systematically rendered invisible in the political and humanitarian crises produced by migration. While feminist foreign policy proposes redefining security in human-centered terms, it offers a similar lens for migration: making visible the link between states' maneuvers in foreign policy and the everyday vulnerabilities in women's lives. For this reason, the migration story of 2025 is about both the calculations of great powers and the struggles of ordinary people. These two levels are not separate. On the contrary, decisions made at the highest tables of international politics most affect women who risk their lives trying to cross borders.

Trump's Return in the U.S. and the Hardening of a Securitized Migration Doctrine

In 2025, the United States played a decisive role on the global migration stage. Following Donald J. Trump's re-election, migration policy ceased to be merely a topic of domestic debate and became almost the central concept of the national security architecture. Executive orders

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issued in the first months of the year reshaped the U.S. migration regime from top to bottom. Deportation processes were accelerated, asylum applications at the southern border were virtually halted, migration from certain countries was suspended, and visa regimes introduced unprecedentedly strict—and continuous—security vetting procedures.

In the Trump administration's rhetoric, the justifications behind these policies were consistently expressed in the same terms: "security," "invasion," "national threat." Migration was thus re-militarized in America's foreign policy vocabulary. Yet, from a feminist foreign policy perspective, this militarized language represents an approach that entirely obscures the gendered dimensions of migration—because women's reasons for seeking asylum (gender-based violence, forced marriage, discrimination based on sexual orientation) find no place within a securitized frame.

Throughout 2025, the precariousness faced by women coming from Latin America while trying to reach the U.S. appeared in news coverage and in reports by human rights organizations. Borders turned into a liminal space where women are exposed to both physical and psychological violence. From the human security perspective required by feminist foreign policy, the U.S. migration regime in 2025 offered a paradigm that prioritizes protecting the state over protecting people. This paradigm sets a dangerous precedent for how global migration governance may be shaped.

Europe's Hardening Borders and the Far-Right Political Shift

Across the Atlantic, 2025 also marked a clear political shift in Europe along the migration–security axis. The growing strength of far-right parties in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Italy pushed mainstream politics toward a harder line on migration. In Europe, migration is no longer a bridge between foreign and domestic policy; rather, it has become the defining issue where the two merge—shaping electoral strategies, identity politics, and international alliances.

Over the past three decades, the European Union's border management has undergone a marked transformation from physical security to digital and algorithmic surveillance infrastructures. In the 1990s, the period known as "Fortress Europe" relied on hardening external borders through walls, fences, and coastal patrols. From the 2010s onward, this approach evolved into a data-driven coordination model centered on integrating shared

databases such as Eurodac, VIS, and SIS II, and expanding Frontex's mandate. Today, the EU has moved toward a digital-algorithmic border regime that frames migration as a "manageable risk," using biometric identification, AI-supported risk scoring, automated pre-screening systems, and large-scale surveillance networks. This shift indicates that EU migration policy is increasingly moving away from humanitarian protection and toward a logic of technological security.

Another element that has been widely discussed in recent years and again stood out this year is the externalization of migration. The EU had signed new agreements with North African countries to stop migrant flows at the source. In December 2025, EU interior ministers agreed on a new migration reform–planned to enter into force in 2026–covering faster deportation procedures, "safe country" definitions, and return centers. All of this can be interpreted as an effort to build Europe's borders beyond its own territory. From a feminist perspective, such externalization policies increase women's risks along migration routes and push them toward more dangerous pathways. The cases of sexual violence and exploitation documented in Libya demonstrate how acute these risks are (BBC 2025). Europe's hardening migration policy is therefore not only a border management problem; it is also a normative issue about which bodies and which lives states deem worthy of protection. Feminist foreign policy exposes the power relations behind this choice and proposes centering the invisibilized experiences of migrant women.

Multiple Migration Crises in the Global South: Where Conflict, Climate, and the Economy Intersect

In 2025, deepening continued in the crises that generate migration. Renewed conflict in Sudan displaced tens of thousands of people within a matter of days (Aljazeera 2025). It is not difficult to infer that women fleeing conflict zones–under the threat of sexual violence–are forced onto unsafe transit routes. In such regions, where the concept of human security recedes in favor of state security, women's experiences reveal a layered vulnerability. In Myanmar, the pressures of military rule and the long-standing displacement of Rohingya Muslims were once again made visible in 2025. In Bangladesh, overcrowded and inadequate camps combined with new dangers produced by the climate crisis, further worsening the unsustainability of living spaces for women and children arriving from Rakhine.

In the Sahel, terrorist attacks, political instability, and accelerating desertification made 2025 acritical threshold in terms of mass mobility. According to UNHCR data, by the end of 2026 the Sahel region—including Mauritania and coastal states—is expected to host 5.6 million forcibly displaced and stateless people, rising from around 4 million in September 2025. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is projected to increase by 16%, with three-quarters located in Burkina Faso, and the number of refugees and asylum seekers is expected to rise by 17%.

When combined with economic crises, these movements are creating—and will continue to create—a security dynamic that affects many countries' foreign policies. Forced displacement waves in Gaza, meanwhile, reminded the world how fragile population movements in the Middle East's geopolitics can become a perpetual cycle. Throughout 2025, thousands of families were forced to relocate repeatedly. Once again, women and children bore the heaviest burden of these cyclical displacement patterns.

Turkey's Migration Politics in 2025: Permanence, Tension, and Diplomatic Instrumentalization

In 2025, a foreign population exceeding four million turned Turkey's migration politics into a complex web between foreign and domestic policy. A significant portion of the population arriving from Syria is now growing up within the education system as second and third generations. Migration's permanence has thus become an undeniable social and political reality. Yet public debate remains confined to the binary of "return" and "citizenship." In Turkey's foreign policy, migration continues to be used as a bargaining chip—especially in relations with Europe. Migration is no longer only a humanitarian crisis; it has become a foreign policy instrument placed at the center of diplomatic negotiations.

For migrant women, Turkey in 2025 offered both opportunities and serious challenges. Informal work, the inability to report gender-based violence, difficulties in accessing health services, and the concentration of care burdens on women remain areas that feminist foreign policy must keep in view. Migration is no longer only about people changing places; it is a foreign policy tool through which states redefine power projection, reinterpret international norms, and shape domestic politics. Feminist foreign policy can provide a framework to question this instrumentalization. The gap between state-interest-first policies and individuals' security needs is especially visible for women. Women's experiences along migration routes

should make feminist foreign policy an indispensable ethical perspective: What do states protect, whom do they protect, and at what cost?

Conclusion: The Urgency of a Feminist Migration Policy in a World of Hardening Borders

2025 was a year in which migration did not stop, but borders hardened. States became more closed in the face of the human tragedy driven by migration; technology, meanwhile, turned border management into a more invisible yet more effective instrument of pressure. In this process, women's experiences often remained in the shadow of states' security narratives. Feminist foreign policy, however, proposes shining light into that shadow and centering human security alongside state security.

The 2025 panorama of migration points to an urgent question for the future: As the world changes rapidly and borders harden, who will defend the human face of migration? The feminist foreign policy tradition gives a clear answer: a world is possible in which security is redefined not for states, but for people. In a period when the burden of migration weighs more heavily on women's shoulders, this perspective is not only an ethical call—it is also a necessary theoretical and practical framework for the sustainability of international politics.

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The Manosphere and not-so-bright Future of Misogyny

Zeynepnaz Coşkun & Bezen Balamir Coşkun*

The limited series "Adolescence", which premiered on March 13, 2025, has recorded around 142.6 million views worldwide, making it one of the top 10 most-watched English-language Netflix shows. Premiere of "Adolescence", which is about a teenage boy accused of murdering a female classmate, triggered heated debates about the "manosphere" and the profound crisis of modern boyhood.

As AI and emerging technologies advance, society's interest has shifted away from the once-familiar world of social media. Still, over 5.2 billion people use social media, and a large portion of those users are young, impressionable children and adolescents. Moreover, we are witnessing a time in which public spaces in cities are disappearing, so teenagers are spending more and more time online. Our teenage years are formative years that shape how we view the world and those around us. We gain these views through various role models like our parents or peers, and in the modern age, these role models may also be on our computers and phones.

That begs the question, who are these role models online? The internet used to be song covers and cat videos, waiting five minutes for your computer to open. It has now become a very dangerous space for impressionable young boys. The Oxford Dictionary defines the *Manosphere* as websites and blogs where men express opinions on issues concerning contemporary masculinity and male relationships with women, especially those associated with views hostile to feminism and women's rights. Some of the tamer faces of the Manosphere would be the likes of Jordan Peterson and Joe Rogan, both famous in their own ways, and more extreme examples are the likes of Andrew Tate, who is currently being charged with human trafficking offences. The language used in these spaces is easy to distinguish; many see themselves as Alpha males. The main philosophy is that men are unhappy because feminism has stripped them of a beautiful life where they would dress up in a "man"ly way, make money,

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have a wife, and the wife would be more than delighted to take over the role of caretaker. None of this may seem that extreme yet, but we are just at the tip of an iceberg.

Once you leave the realm of more mainstream platforms such as YouTube or Instagram and enter the world of Reddit, the sphere gets darker. On Reddit, you will quickly find *Incels* and *Edgelords*. *Incels* are a group of mostly heterosexual men who are involuntarily celibate, and they believe that this is caused by the rise of feminism and free society. They see themselves as victims of liberal societies that have given women too many rights. These people don't just spew hate towards women on online forums; they actively motivate each other to take action. In 2018, Alek Minassian drove his van into a sidewalk in Toronto, killing 10 people.[1] He later said he was radicalized online by the group called *incel rebellion*. *Edgelords*, on the other hand, are people who choose an extreme nihilistic approach and rebel against political correctness by taking extreme stances and sharing taboo opinions. These individuals' online personas are usually extremely racist and misogynistic. They almost always spread far-right fascist ideals. Misogyny is a connecting link between the far-right and the manosphere, whose ideologies feed each other. The interconnection of these supremacist ideologies, as well as their transmission into the mainstream, needs academic attention.

Why is it that so many young men fall down the far-right pipeline? Why has the Manosphere grown so much in recent years? Firstly, we believe the most important issue is loneliness. Most of these boys, who are in their adolescent ages, are clearly yearning for community and connection, and this is somehow where they land the quickest. Furthermore, not all but many of the individuals in these groups have mental health issues. This is no excuse; mental health problems do not make you racist, but untreated mental health issues do make you unstable. These forums serve as an outlet for young men, perhaps they are in families where they are not seen or loved, they do not have the power to lash out at their father, so they choose to lash out on online forums. Adolescent boys experiencing social disconnection, family dysfunction, a sense of abandonment, inequality and poverty are usually prone to violence. The older men of the manosphere use these vulnerabilities to manipulate and poison young minds. That is why it is so important now more than ever to teach children to question what others say, what they read. Even more so to monitor the internet use of children who have not even had a chance to develop critical thinking skills. Now the experts and parents are looking for ways to keep adolescent boys far away from these breeding grounds of violence, misogyny and racism. We are seeing the effects of these forums and spaces every day. Young men are increasingly leaning right in many countries around the world. We need good-hearted, healthy role models

for and young men so they can see that happiness does not come with control but with community.

In the political sphere, we observe an intrinsic relation between the Manosphere and far-right politics. The rumours about the White House's intervention in a federal investigation on behalf of accused sex trafficker Andrew Tate in November 2025[2] were the most extreme reflection of this relationship. After Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 presidential election, social media was filled with reactionary misogynistic hate and vitriol. The manosphere became the most significant catalyst for Trump's votes. Thousands of young men voted for Trump. On X, especially, scores of young male Trump supporters were celebratory, publicly affirming their hate towards women and women's rights. In return, Trump's presidency further exacerbates the spread of misogynistic messages of the Manosphere personalities.

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Feminist Foreign Policy at a Crossroads: Will it be still relevant? Can it increase its impact?

*Şehnaz Kıymaz Bahçeci**

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) represents a bold departure from traditional statecraft by interacting with other states and non-state actors in a manner that prioritises peace, gender equality, and environmental integrity.[1] This framework traces its official history back to 2014, when Sweden's Foreign Minister announced the world's first FFP to what she characterised as "giggles" from global leaders.[2] Since then, FFP has evolved from a bold experiment into a global framework, embraced and adapted by approximately 15 countries, from the Global North as well as the Global South.

In the past few years, with the changing tides in global politics, the framework faced significant criticism and skepticism for its perceived inability to respond to deep global crises. We witnessed some countries, such as Sweden and Germany, withdrawing from using the term "Feminist Foreign Policy" to define their approach due to changing political landscapes, or electoral concerns. On the other hand, critics of FFP and the civil society organizations that have supported and engaged with the FFP framework frequently pointed to a "rhetoric-to-reality gap" where symbolic gestures and progressive language are not matched by budgetary commitments or policy coherence. This skepticism has deepened as activists question the selective application of human rights principles, particularly in contexts of escalating conflict and "bully diplomacy" employed by some countries. FFP is often scrutinized for maintaining a Western image, although we also see an increasing number of Global South countries embracing FFP or one or more of its principles. Another strong criticism against FFP is that it does not dare to subvert dominant neoliberal structures.

The latest, 2025 update of the recurring research, <u>Defining Feminist Foreign Policy 2025</u>, by the <u>Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative</u>, reveals a complex but hopeful trajectory. While high-profile withdrawals occurred in Sweden, Argentina, and Germany during a rightward political swing, the research found that FFP has actually survived more elections than it has lost.

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In countries like France, and Mexico, the framework remained stable or even expanded through institutionalization—embedding feminist principles into laws, budgets, and bureaucracies to ensure the "architecture outlasts the architects".

The report utilises the "5Rs" framework—Rights, Resources, Representation, Research and Reporting, and Reach—to assess state progress.[3] It finds that while women's representation in diplomacy has improved, reaching a 31% share of ambassadorial roles in FFP countries, the "Resources" pillar is under acute threat. Official Development Assistance (ODA) dropped by 9% in 2024, with many FFP governments cutting aid while simultaneously increasing military spending to historic levels.[4]

The 2025 research also highlights a shift toward "institutional feminism," where the goal is to embed FFP within the formal machinery of government so that feminist priorities outlast individual political champions. This "second generation" of FFP focuses on five mechanisms: policy, architecture, budgetary earmarks, leadership roles, and staff capacity. The findings underscore that for FFP to remain credible, it must move beyond being a "political brand" and instead become a legally and bureaucratically entrenched structure capable of withstanding shifting political tides.[5] This is essential because organized anti-rights movements now present a direct threat to democracy, the rule of law and peace.

The study was launched in October 2025, right before the 4th Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy was convened in Paris, France. The Conference brought together over 500 representatives from more than 55 states. It aimed to strengthen international coalitions under the banner "Resist, Unite, Act".[6] Bringing together 55 countries, in this political climate, under a title that contains the word "feminist" was an important accomplishment.

An even more significant outcome was the adoption of a political declaration by 31 countries, pledging unity in the face of multidimensional crises and explicitly committing to defend bodily autonomy, diverse family forms, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, all very timely additions in this political climate.[7] While the conference was lauded for widening the diplomatic scope, observers noted opportunities for rigorous accountability or exchange with grassroots feminist voices were limited due to the formal diplomatic nature of the conference.[8] Furthermore, in a time marked by reductions in funding for gender equality, as noted in the FFPC's report by the reduction of the global ODA, the political declaration did not have strong commitments to resourcing that would need to accompany an FFP to reach its goals.

Immediately preceding the official ministerial event, civil society convened the <<OFF>> Conference, titled *Avec Nous / Pour Toutes* ("With Us / For All"). This decentralized forum successfully centered the perspectives of feminists from the Global Majority world and provided a space for deeper debate beyond diplomatic protocols.

In support of the <<OFF>> Conference, civil society organizations also prepared a "Civil Society Call for Transformative Feminist Foreign Policies," a unified message addressing the gap between state promises and reality. The Feminist Diplomacy Lab led the coordination of this civil society statement, endorsed by over 150 organisations in more than 50 countries within just five days.[9] The rapid and widespread mobilization for the statement signified that global civil society remains determined to utilize the FFP framework as a tool for systemic justice. The statement demands an FFP grounded in anti-racism and intersectionality that explicitly seeks to dismantle systems of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, funds and protects WHRDs and LGBTI rights defenders explicitly, stands against the anti-gender and anti-rights attacks throughout the World and institutionalizes meaningful accountability.[10] The statement was presented to Delphine O, French Ambassador and Secretary General of the Generation Equality Forum, who have personally joined the last session of the <<OFF>> Conference to receive the statement.[11]

Looking ahead, the 5th Ministerial Conference is scheduled to be held in Spain in 2026. Spain's Minister for Foreign Affairs, José Manuel Albares, has emphasised that defending feminism today is synonymous with defending democracy.[12] Considering Spain's international political stance and actions in 2025, such as hosting the UN Financing for Development Conference, its support for Palestinian's human rights in the international stage and its stance against redirecting budget away from public services to increase military spending, continuation of such systemic political discussions may be possible at the 2026 5th FFP Ministerial Conference.

For the future of FFP, several critical suggestions emerge:

- For FFP to withstand political cycles, feminist principles must be institutionalized within government structures, laws and budgets

- Coherence of domestic and international rhetoric and implementation on human rights continues to be a litmus test for FFPs

- Governments must shift from donor-recipient models to structures based on co-creation and shared decision-making with feminist movements.

- Protecting gender equality funding is a political choice; core, flexible, accessible funding is important for progressing gender equality.

As FFP enters its second decade, its future depends on closing the gap between rhetoric and resources. True progress requires the political courage to protect funding and share power with grassroots movements.

[1] Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative. 2025. *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy 2025*. Accessible at https://www.ffpcollaborative.org/dffp-2025 . Last accessed 29 December 2025

[2] International Centre for Research on Women. 2022. Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: A 2021 Update. Accessible at: https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FFP-2021Update_v4.pdf Last accessed 29 December 2025.

[3] The 5 R framework builds on the 3R framework promulgated by Sweden in 2014: rights, representation, resources

[4] Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative. 2025. *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy 2025*. Accessible at https://www.ffpcollaborative.org/dffp-2025 . Last accessed 29 December 2025

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs Website. 2025. *Fourth Ministerial Conference on feminist foreign policy*. Accessible at https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/feminist-diplomacy/fourth-ministerial-conference-on-feminist-foreign-policy/#sommaire_3 . Last accessed 29 December 2025

[7] French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs Website. 2025. *Adoption of the joint political declaration, 4th Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policies, 23 October 2025*. Accessible at https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/feminist-diplomacy/fourth-ministerial-conference-on-feminist-foreign-policy/article/adoption-of-the-joint-political-declaration-4th-ministerial-conference-on Last accessed 29 December 2025.

[8] ODI. 2025. *Can feminist foreign policy go the distance? Overdue reflections following the fourth ministerial conference*. Accessible at: https://odi.org/en/insights/can-feminist-foreign-policy-go-the-distance-overdue-reflections-fourth-ministerial-conference/ . Last accessed 29 December 2025.

[9] Feminist Diplomacy Lab website. 2025. *A Civil Society Call for Transformative Feminist Foreign Policies*. Accessible at https://www.feministdiplomacylab.org/news/a-civil-society-call-for-transformative-feminist-foreign-policies . Last accessed 29 December 2025

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] WECF Website. 2025. *"Avec Nous / Pour Toustes" Ecofeminist taking space along to the Feminist Foreign Policy Conference in Paris*. Accessible at https://www.wecf.org/avec-nous-pour-toustes-ecofeminist-taking-space-along-to-the-feminist-foreign-policy-conference-in-paris/. Last accessed 29 December 2025.

[12] Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation Website. 2025. *Albares announces in Paris that Spain will host the next Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in 2026*. Accessible at https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/Comunicacion/NotasPrensa/Paginas/2025_NOTAS_P/Albares-anuncia-en-Paris-que-Espana-acogera-en-2026-la-proxima-Conferencia-de-Politica-Exterior-Feminista.aspx . Last accessed 29 December 2025