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MASTER THESIS

Backlash against the F-Word

Feminist Foreign Policy in German Political Discourse

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Abstract

With the adoption of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), the so-called traffic light coalition government has promised a paradigm shift of Germany's approach to foreign and security policy following the elections in 2021. Due to its fundamentally transformative nature aimed at overcoming unjust and patriarchal power structures, this reform process has since faced considerable resistance. The current rise of right-wing extremism and the crisis of the international rules-based order have further posed a particular challenge to the advocacy for gender equality. With the design and implementation of the German FFP agenda still under continuous development and thus in an especially vulnerable phase of establishment, the possibility of constructive and substantive debates on FFP in German political discourse has been decisively jeopardised by the devaluation, false allegations, and trivialisation tactics of the far-right. This has not only impacted the debates on FFP, but also increasingly restricted its further development and future potential. Crucially, these dynamics carry the risk of everincreasing polarisation, and if they become entrenched in the form of backlash politics, there is a threat of denigration and potential abolition of FFP in Germany, as well as a danger to liberal norms in general as gender equality functions as a benchmark of democracy. So far, the motivation in feminist literature to strictly determine backlash has yet been limited. Applying a strict definition of backlash politics as the combination of retrograde aims, exceptional questioning of dominant scripts, and the entrance into public debates, the present paper bridges insightful feminist ideas and findings with the validity and usefulness of a clear determination of backlash politics. Conducting a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), this contribution hence examines the controversy around FFP in the context of 84 statements delivered in the German Bundestag between the introduction of the concept up until the political summer break in 2023, determining the decisive potential for actual societal transformation triggered by recognised backlash dynamics. The results indeed indicate a significant level of polarisation amounting to backlash politics, with considerable implications for the German political dynamics, including the apparent emergence of a new cleavage, and possibly a retrograde shift as well as institutional change.

Keywords

Feminist Foreign Policy | Backlash Politics | German Political Discourse | Qualitative Content Analysis

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List of Abbreviations

AfD Alternative für Deutschland

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women

CDU Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands

CSU Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern

DIP Documentation and Information System for Parliamentary Materials

EU European Union

FFP Feminist Foreign Policy

FPA Foreign Policy Analysis

Grüne Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen

IR International Relations

MP(s) Member(s) of Parliament

SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

QCA Qualitative Content Analysis

UN United Nations

UNSC United Nations Security Council

UNSCR United Nations Security Council Resolution

WPS Agenda Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Introduction

With an explicit commitment to Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), the so-called German traffic light coalition government consisting of *SPD*, *Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen* and *FDP* has promised a paradigm shift of Germany's approach to foreign and security policy following the elections in 2021 (Mika 2021). Focusing on rights, resources, and representation, this concept provides for the empowerment of women and girls in the international context and the promotion of social diversity. The declaration of a feminist turn of foreign affairs in the coalition agreement was complemented by the publication of elaborated principles for FFP by the German Federal Foreign Office around one and a half years later (ZDF 2023). Interestingly, in her speech that she gave upon the presentation of the German FFP guidelines, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock opened with the following statement:

I must admit that I was surprised time and again during this process by what a "trigger word" it is, this little word "feminist". And yet what we are aiming for with these guidelines is something that in the twenty-first century should really go without saying – for all people to enjoy the same rights, freedoms and opportunities, regardless of their gender, regardless of what religion they belong to, regardless of who their parents are, how they look or who they love. And women, as we all know, make up half of society in every country. Feminist Foreign Policy is therefore not an ideological rallying cry, but here in Germany is a product of our Basic Law. And it is certainly not a trivial afterthought. It is a cold hard security issue. (Federal Foreign Office 2023)

With this comment, Annalena Baerbock pointed to the controversial debate that has been sparked in German politics and society with the reorientation of the German foreign policy approach as well as she implicitly and explicitly addressed the critique FFP provoked. Indeed, as indicated by Annalena Baerbock, "by adopting the "f-word" it elevates politics from a broadly consensual orientation of gender mainstreaming toward more controversial politics, and specifically toward those that explicitly seek to renegotiate and challenge power hierarchies and gendered institutions that hitherto defined global institutions and foreign and security policies" (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond 2016, 323). As this development can be perceived as a threat to privileges and identities associated with rather traditional and patriarchal convictions and power structures, resistance against this progressive concept has been considerably strong. Despite notable advancements in gender equality in the contexts of diverse global governance institutions as well as nation states' approaches to foreign policy and international affairs, a trend in the opposite direction of more and more hostile global politics,

which actively challenge and oppose the spread of pro-gender norms, has also emerged (Mouffe 2005, as cited in Aggestam & True 2020, 145). While the world has been experiencing an increase in illiberal democratic structures and growing success of right-wing populist actors, re-masculinisation has been considerably rising across global and national politics. Consequently, gender can arguably be regarded as "one of the major fault lines in contemporary global politics" (Aggestam & True 2020, 145).

As a result of this current state and development of the global political stage – facing difficulties transforming and overcoming patriarchal traditions with "the rise of hypermasculine leaders" (Aggestam & True 2020, 158-159) as well as the continuous erosion of liberalism and the rule-based international structures – in Germany and beyond, there have been considerable challenges for pursuing a soft power approach to foreign policy like FFP. This context has not only pushed the limits and vulnerability of FFP as the danger for a pushback against gender equality has been increasing but also resistance to transformative approaches to international relations has been growing and traditional foreign policy perspectives have been revisited. "Hence, contestation through antagonistic discourses and nonimplementation as a way of resisting pro-gender norms may characterize global politics in the future" (Aggestam & True 2020, 158-159), and might as well be witnessed in Germany. The following question therefore arises: How has the controversy around FFP played out in the case of Germany and to what extent has it amounted to backlash politics?

The present paper investigates this research question with a focus on debates in the German Bundestag, where backlash dynamics might have manifested themselves in a particularly relevant and impactful way. To be more precise, while the concrete definition and design of the German FFP agenda have been under continuous development since its conception and thus in a particularly vulnerable phase of establishment and implementation, the possibility of constructive and substantive debates on FFP in the German Parliament and wider political sphere has — ever since the introduction of the concept — been decisively jeopardised by the devaluation, false allegations, and trivialisation tactics of the far-right (Lauch 2024). Indeed, these dynamics have not only shifted the focus of debates on FFP in the German Bundestag but have also increasingly restricted the content-centred discussion of the topic and thus also its further development and future potential. In turn, this development has carried the risk of everincreasing polarisation, and if has become entrenched in the form of backlash politics, there is not only a threat of denigration and potential abolition of the German FFP, but also a danger to liberal norms in general as gender equality functions as a benchmark of democracy (Alter & Zürn 2020). More so, the future of Germany's FFP strategy has never seemed as uncertain as it

does now with the dissolution of the German traffic light coalition government and elections scheduled for early 2025, in which conservative and far-right parties are expected to gain significant support.

Whereas fluctuations in gender policies go in line with political changes, trends in the direction of more progressive gender equality standards have usually been faced with "barriers and reversals" (George 2022). Indeed, from civil and political to economic and social rights, the development of women's rights and movements globally has been a continuous up and down process (Clavaud et al. 2023) with omnipresent contestation around it. However, it has been contestation amounting to backlash dynamics against women's rights and gender equality which could be increasingly observed over the past years, endangering numerous women's rights milestones, especially with regards to gender-sensitive educational campaigns, sexual and reproductive rights, or gender-based violence (Radačić & Facio n.d.). Thereby, the origins of backlash groups could be traced back to three main stakeholders, who have been conservative religious associations, civil society organisations, and state actors. While these groups have shown outward opposition to 'gender ideology', their actions have gone beyond mere resistance, and have constituted efforts to preserve and reinforce hierarchical structures in society and politics in response to their (assumed) erosion (Wittenius & Lange 2021, as cited in Landes et al. 2021).

Within the UN system, antifeminist mobilisation has also been on the rise with the purpose of fighting 'gender ideology', and turning back to what is portrayed as the 'natural family' (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020). By now, antifeminist backlash groups have managed to establish a robust transnational network, mirroring the strategies employed by women's rights organisations. These backlash actors have set aside internal differences to unite under a shared framework, which they have developed and strengthened at global conferences. Analysing and adopting the UN language has further allowed them to learn how to frame their proposals in ways that resonate institutionally (UFI 2019). Moreover, these antifeminist backlash groups have actively lobbied decision-makers who have shown sympathy or have seemed undecided, as well as they have worked to exclude their opponents from key decision-making forums (Cupać and Ebetürk, 2020).

The effective implementation of these strategies has helped antifeminist groups to position themselves as a decisive stakeholder within the UN system, shifting the institution from a space dominated by progressive agenda-setters to a platform of intense political conflict between two opposing transnational networks (Zürn et al. 2012, as cited in Cupać and Ebetürk, 2020). This

internal divide within the UN, which can be referred to as a 'gender rights vs natural family' cleavage, may not necessarily overhaul the UN system but has been more and more influencing the nature of its political dynamics. From a feminist point of view, this development reveals latent patriarchy now gaining visibility and power. Some scholars even argue that – while progressive 20th-century movements commonly represent resistant positions to patriarchal structures – counter-movements would reflect reactions from patriarchist actors (Gilligan and Richards 2018). Nonetheless, the long-term effects of these tensions are uncertain at this point in time: On the one hand, they could imply a 'democratisation' process of the UN by challenging its liberal and progressive orientation. On the other hand, they could pave the way for a social order where 'natural family' values prevail over women's rights (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020).

The international and national contestation around feminism and gender equality policies as well as the possibly decisive implications of gender backlash further illustrate the relevance of determining how the issue of FFP has been discussed in the German context and to which extent the discourse has shown backlash dynamics. In other words, "backlash politics is a particular and extraordinary variant worthy of special study not only because of its contemporary relevance, but also because it can instigate substantial change in societies and political systems" (Alter & Zürn 2020, 564). To be more precise, the implications of backlash are defined by unpredictability, contagiousness, transformation, and endurance. In a nutshell, "backlash politics often leads to a change of discourse, procedures, and institutions in a given political system" (Madsen 2017, and more generally the contributions in Sandholtz and Whytock 2017, as cited in Alter & Zürn 2020, 570). This, in turn, includes the fading of political momentum, the emergence of new divisions, or a regressive shift (Alter & Zürn 2020). While the second – the emergence of a new cleavage – could be observed in the UN context around the topic of gender equality, in the FFP pioneer state of Sweden, for example, the third implication – a regressive shift – has hold true as the new government that came into power in 2022 has actually revoked the country's FFP (George 2022).

Nonetheless, so far, the motivation in feminist literature to strictly determine backlash has been limited, resulting in the use of the label of backlash in various instances, as for most feminist researchers, feminism is not only an analytical lens but also a political positioning (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020). The described implications of backlash politics yet underline the importance of differentiating backlash from regular political controversies. Applying a strict definition of backlash politics as the combination of retrograde aims, exceptional questioning of dominant scripts, and the entrance into public debates (Alter & Zürn 2020), the present paper aims to

constitute a contribution to the existing body of literature by bridging insightful feminist ideas and findings with the validity and usefulness of the clear determination of backlash politics. Thereby, the scale at hand not only allows for a more nuanced analysis of the presence and level of backlash dynamics around the issue of FFP addressed in debates in the German Bundestag, but also makes it possible to determine the decisive potential for actual societal transformation triggered by recognised backlash dynamics.

The research question posed in this paper is supposed to be answered conducting a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of a total of 84 statements given in the German Bundestag in between the introduction of the concept up until the political summer break of 2023, covering the timespan of January 2022 to June 2023. The chosen approach not only enables structured insights into the discussions on FFP in the German Parliament, but also allows to determine which criteria of backlash politics might have been met to what extent as well as how the discourse has mirrored the dynamics of competing ideologies around FFP. The results show that there is indeed a significant level of polarisation around the issue of FFP in the German Bundestag, with all criteria of backlash politics having been fulfilled, which poses considerable implications for the German political dynamics, including an apparent emergence of a new cleavage and possibly a retrograde shift as well as institutional change.

In the following, an overview over the case of FFP is first of all provided, including its definition, developments, and debates around the concept, along with a discussion of critique and the current state of research on debates around FFP, which helps to understand even better why this policy might trigger backlash groups to campaign against it and contextualises the analysed debates. Thereafter, the theoretical framework around the contestation of (international) norms and backlash politics in general, as well as concerning feminist policies in particular, is considered in more detail, highlighting the relevance of demarcating usual political contestation and backlash dynamics. Moreover, as a next step, the research design for investigating the above-named research question is explained, including a discussion on the chosen methodology and material. On that basis, the findings of this paper are presented and evaluated, and limitations are addressed. Finally, a conclusion is drawn and a future outlook is anticipated.

Feminist Foreign Policy – Definitions, Developments, Debates

To begin with, it is important to get a clearer picture of the case of FFP in order to understand why this policy might trigger backlash groups to campaign against it in the first place. In the following, the definitions and principles, as well as the developments around FFP are hence outlined, along with an overview of critique and the current state of research on debates around FFP. This contextualisation then informs the analysis of the controversy around FFP in the German Bundestag and the determination of the presence and dynamics of backlash politics regarding the issue of FFP.

Defining Feminist Foreign Policy

In 2014, for the first time worldwide a country's foreign policy was explicitly declared as feminist when the Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström introduced her approach to Swedish foreign affairs – a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) (Thompson et al. 2021). This has arguably marked the beginning of a culmination of a long history of efforts by feminist peace activists, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist groups (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023). Over the course of several decades before the initialisation of FFP, corresponding ideas and evidence have been collected that have contributed to the growing awareness of the importance of advancing gender equality policies (Karsch 2021, Zilla 2022) as well as the step-by-step implementation of gender equality milestones (Klein 2022, Lunz 2022, Zilla 2022). This progress could then pave the way for the development and realisation of FFP approaches, providing a normative point of orientation for FFP approaches and constituting guidelines for its implementation (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023).

Decisive steps on the long way towards FFP include, for instance, the three World Conferences on Women held during the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that became effective in 1981; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as a product of the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995); the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000, as well as gender equality being enshrined as the third Millennium Development Goal (MDGs 2000–2015) and the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs 2016–2030) (Zilla 2022).

The further development of these existing tools is the unique selling point of Feminist Foreign Policy: by extending feminist perspectives to other mutually influential areas such as trade policy, migration policy, climate policy or criticism of racism, Feminist Foreign Policy requires an overarching and coherent feminist political practice. (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023)

However, up until today, there is no internationally recognised definition of FFP yet (Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023, Cheung et al. 2021). Nonetheless, certain elements could be identified as general characteristics of FFP strategies (Zilla 2024). Typically, FFP establishes a political framework that not only guides national governments' foreign policy strategies and activities but also the organisation and workings of internal departments (Zilla 2024). Based on a human-rights-centred normative peace policy approach, FFP agendas tend to aim at transforming international power structures dominated by military, patriarchal, racial, and neo-colonial violence to achieve gender equality and the elimination of any kind of discrimination, providing benefits for society as a whole (Galtung 1969). Thereby, the concepts of intersectional human security and justice play a key role, as interrelated mechanisms of suppression and discrimination of traditionally and currently marginalised groups based on origin, gender, sexual orientation, or race are supposed to be identified and overcome (Crenshaw 1989).

Departing from a traditional understanding of security in terms of protecting borders, FFP approaches are more comprehensively concerned with individual and overall societal dimensions of security. The engagement for gender equality and generally inclusive societal structures is further justified by intrinsic normativity – related to the values of human rights and non-discrimination – as well as extrinsic pragmatism – related to empirics proving the favours of equality and inclusion in all political and societal dimensions (Zilla 2024). Importantly, the benefits of female inclusion in all decision-making and implementation levels of foreign policy go far beyond equal representation: Improving the engagement of women promises decisive advantages in terms of the effectiveness, extensiveness, and sustainability of peace, stabilisation processes, overall prosperity, and cultural innovation (Lazarou & Braden 2019). In a nutshell, FFP is based on the conviction that an advancement of the conditions of and potentials for females incorporates advantages for the entire society and world order. Thereby, FFP demands more than gender mainstreaming and numerical equality approaches, as the underlying purpose is a disruption and transformation of patriarchal power structures and the abolishment of any kind of discrimination and exclusion in political decision-making processes (WILPF 2022, as cited in Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023, Zilla 2022).

When the first ever FFP strategy was introduced in the pioneer state of Sweden back in 2014, it was centred around three key dimensions: rights, representation, and resources, which were later complemented by reality as a fourth element (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023). This means ensuring equal rights and representation of women and girls, providing the necessary resources to achieve this aim, and placing the actual real-life conditions of females as the point of departure for FFP efforts. Despite being criticised for constituting a framework that is reformistic rather than transformative, these focus areas have been established as a sort of standard for conceptualising and implementing FFP strategies (WILPF 2022, as cited in Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023).

In Germany, following a rather vague introduction in the coalition agreement back in 2021, the Federal Foreign Office presented elaborated principles for FFP in March 2023 as a detailed reference for the further definition and development of FFP objectives and policy instruments (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023, ZDF 2023). Beyond elaborating on the principles of the '3 Rs' – rights, resources, and representation – the German FFP guidelines focus on six foreign policy topics that are targeted to undergo a feminist turn: "peace and security, humanitarian aid and crisis management, human rights, climate and energy, foreign trade, as well as foreign cultural and educational policy" (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023). In comparison with other countries' FFP strategies, the German concretisation constitutes the most encompassing one up to date (CFFP 2023). Likewise, recognising the importance of arms control and disarmament, intersectionality, and reflection on post-colonial sensibilities, the German Federal Foreign Office is taking more extensive steps than numerous other states following FFP agendas (CFFP 2023).

Developing Feminist Foreign Policy

Looking beyond Germany, over the past years, FFP has indeed started to spread among the world as part of a process of international norm diffusion (Zilla 2024). As of today, around ten states have officially committed themselves to FFP agendas (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023, Zilla 2024). Apart from Germany, other examples include Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain, and Libya (Lauch 2024). Moreover, more than 50 governments from across the globe were represented at the Third Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico City in July 2024 (Michalko et al. 2024). Thus, "it is clear that there is growing political buyin and momentum behind the concept, so, for the near future, feminist foreign policies are here to stay" (Michalko et al. 2024).

This evolution of FFP can be seen as a reflection of the rise of feminism internationally (Thomson 2022). Compared to several years ago, feminist activism has never been so widely accepted by society as today. The interest and motivation of governments, especially those considered 'middle powers' (Thomson 2022, 181), has thus been triggered and reinforced to associate themselves with feminist ideas in order to elevate their position on the international stage. It is worth exploring the purpose of an official declaration of FFP for these states, particularly within global power hierarchies. While some states implement feminist principles without explicitly labelling their policies as feminist, discursive impact and international power dynamics are significant factors in this context (Cheung et al. 2021).

As there is no accepted definition across different states, its deployment is more important for what it *acts* to signal than for what it *is* in terms of policy content. As such, it acts not as a specific set of practices, but rather as a broader signal that the state is committed to international liberal norms and institutions. (Thomson 2022, 174)

From a national political perspective, on the other hand, "(t)he uptake of FFP can be seen in relation to parties and political figures coming to power after long periods of opposition rule, or as representatives of new political entities that are seeking to distinguish themselves" (Thomson 2022, 182). Within countries, also the role of local actors and political decision-makers and their impact on the advancement of FFP ideas should not be underestimated, as illustrated by the central figure Marget Wallström introducing FFP to Swedish foreign affairs, for instance (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond 2019).

These reasonings could also apply to the case of Germany, where the concept of FFP was introduced as the foreign policy approach after the traffic light coalition government was formed by the Social Democrats, Liberals, and Greens. For the latter, who have been the driving force behind this paradigm shift, it had been a long time since they were part of the national government. As they show one of the highest degrees of salience of the issue of gender equality in their political positions and actions among the German parties (Wallaschek et al. 2024), FFP could have also worked as a means of distinction to others. In addition, the Green and first ever female Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has functioned as a key actor driving the change towards FFP in Germany. In view of the discursive power of feminist declarations described above, the introduction of FFP could therefore be regarded as a strategic positioning in the context of increasing polarisation around gender equality.

Moreover, it could have been intended as a direct response to the growing hostility towards gender equality policies from right-wing and conservative forces in Germany. This, in turn,

could reinforce the polarisation on FFP, and would be a significant factor impacting potential backlash dynamics and connected implications. Since the supporters of FFP on the one hand, and backlash groups on the other hand, pursue a transformative agenda in opposite directions, a field of tension automatically arises between progressive and retrospective visions for the future. This political conflict can thus form an ideal basis for the emergence of backlash dynamics, in which the various actors might also mutually fuel each other. As already mentioned, the reactions to backlash politics and their typical companions indeed play a decisive role in the further development and consequences of backlash dynamics with regards to the intensification and new formation of lines of division, among other consequences, which will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

Debating Feminist Foreign Policy

Looking specifically at the debates around FFP in Germany, FFP was discussed one of the first times in the German Bundestag on February 22, 2019. At that time, the Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen parliamentary group submitted a motion entitled "Consistently implement Feminist Foreign Policy – overcome violence and discrimination, realise gender justice and human rights worldwide" (19/7920), which, however, after subsequent discussion in the Foreign Affairs Committee, did not find a majority in a second reading in the German Bundestag on 28 October 2020 (Deutscher Bundestag n.d.) During the same period of government, the Left Party also failed with its proposal "Renounce violence in international conflicts – comprehensively anchor UN Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security" (19/23515). Simultaneously, another motion of the Left under the heading "For a peaceful Feminist Foreign Policy" (19/17548) as well as a motion of the AfD with a quite opposing demand for a foreign policy of Germany "independent of gender" (19/23710) were passed on to the Foreign Affairs Committee for discussion (Deutscher Bundestag n.d.). Yet, the specific concept of FFP was never explicitly considered in German foreign policy approaches and actions before 2021, even though the previous government with Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas declared women's rights and equality to be part of their agenda (Lauch 2024).

However, ever since FFP has started to guide German foreign affairs following the government change in 2021, "three problems form the heart of the critical discussion around FFP: firstly the gap between rhetoric and practice, secondly the tension between FFP and other policy areas, and thirdly the discrepancies between the heterogeneous demands of different feminist perspectives" (Zilla 2022). One of the most disputed aspects of FFP indeed concerns the

discrepancy between claim and reality. The feminist title of this concept sets high expectations about realising the purpose of fundamentally transforming foreign affairs by comprehensively and effectively abolishing patriarchal injustices. However, numerous FFP strategies, "despite their (superficially) ambitious rhetoric, do no more than implement gender mainstreaming and gender equality" (Zilla 2023, 2). These governments have thus faced complaints by feminist groups, who accuse the states of abusing and instrumentalising feminism. In such instances, the opportunity to draw upon the legacy of feminist challenges, present feminist viewpoints on foreign affairs, and bring decisive initiatives like the WPS agenda, its action plans, and the CEDAW out of their specific political and technical domains, and consolidate them into a cohesive framework, whereby increasing their accessibility to the broader public, has largely been overlooked or underutilized (Zilla 2023, 2).

Another major challenge for FFP consequently lies in ensuring a continuous implementation of feminist strategies and principles beyond legislation periods. Strengthening existing multilateral frameworks, agreements, and mechanisms and increasing their collective implementation is therefore, alongside the empowerment of civil society, a decisive factor for the likelihood of survival and the long-term action potential of FFP. This is to ensure that FFP survives changes of government – like the one anticipated in Germany after the elections scheduled for February 2025 – and that the increasing attacks on the concept especially from antifeminist groups can be corrected and countered from various other sides in politics and society. A feminist approach to politics must also be implemented across all departments and policy areas, as the operation and interaction of unjust power dynamics affect local, national, and international levels, as well as interconnected policy domains (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023). Otherwise, "a feminist foreign and development policy will merely bring about more gender mainstreaming and equality. However, this would not be a transformative approach, but only a weakly compensatory one that does little to shake existing patriarchal power structures" (Zilla 2023, 8).

The question and danger, however, is that due to the way FFP has been negotiated in German political discourse, a constructive further development and broad establishment both at the political level and in relation to civil society has not been or will not be possible, particularly with the current political climate characterised by attacks on liberal norms and transformative policy approaches as well as the ever-increasing polarisation of gender equality issues. In light of the comparatively recent introduction to German foreign affairs, it seems too early for FFP to have yet built up the required resilience, and under the current circumstances it may not even have the chance to do so. This tendency can at least be seen in what is already known about the

discourse on FFP in the German Parliament. Indeed, despite a multitude of policies and issues considered in relation to FFP with different degrees of focus and relevance placed on them by the different German parties, an overall insufficient addressing of certain crucial aspects of FFP and a lacking overall consideration of marginalised groups has been observable in discussions held in the German Bundestag (Lauch 2024).

To be more precise, while all criteria of an 'ideal' FFP version have been addressed in the German Bundestag debates, there still has been significant variation in how often individual issues connected to FFP have been discussed (Lauch 2024). Due to an insufficient consideration of, for instance, intersectionality as well as actually transformative aims and instruments – as defined previously and deemed crucial for overcoming inequalities and injustices comprehensively and effectively – a truly 'feminist' interpretation of FFP has appeared lacking in the overall German parliamentary discourse (Ridge et al. 2019, Thomson und Clement 2019, Netzwerk 1325 2022, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy 2021b as cited in Lauch 2024). It is rather representation understood in the numerical sense that has been dominating the perspectives put forward by the German parties.

However, it is important to note that the generally diffuse conception of FFP in the German Parliament has been strongly connected to and conditioned by major differences in the parties' readings of FFP (Lauch 2024). While the perspectives put forward by the Greens have followed the basic ideas and principles of FFP by far most precisely and consistently, the ones of the Left and the *SPD* have done so as well, however, with notable limitations. On the other hand, it has rather been the contributions of the Conservatives, Liberals and *AfD* that have not corresponded with 'ideal' FFP criteria (Lauch 2024). Thereby, the *AfD* has marked a special case as the involvement of the party in the Bundestag debates has been found to be very rarely of a constructive and content-focused nature but rather aiming at questioning and degrading FFP (Lauch 2024).

Indeed, despite a disproportionally high involvement of *AfD* MPs in the debates on FFP, there has been a significant lack of seriousness and substantive comments from their side. On the contrary, sarcasm and misinformation on FFP have dominated the statements given by representators of the far-right party. Consequently, instead of *what* is being said, the focus of the *AfD* has rather been on the way *how* their positions are communicated (Lauch 2024). Assessing contributions by the *AfD* could then reveal how the party has worked towards changing the understanding of FFP, provoking negative associations with the concept, and hindering its implementation (Lauch 2024). In doing so, as already indicated, the *AfD*'s

behaviour and positioning towards FFP has constituted the exact opposite to the Greens, which is the other party most frequently involved in the discussion on the issue in the German Parliament (Lauch 2024). While the contributions of the Greens have most closely mirrored 'ideal' FFP principles, the interest of the *AfD* has seemed to solely focus on undermining, trivialising, and ridiculing FFP (Lauch 2024). Yet, does this level of polarisation and controversy and the related dynamics fulfil the criteria of backlash politics, and if so, what would be the implications? In order to answer this question, the conception and consequences of backlash dynamics need to be clarified before turning to the further analysis of the discourse in the German parliamentary debates on FFP.

Backlash Politics – Conception and Consequences

What is known about the contestation around (feminist) international norms, including FFP? How can usual degrees of political contestation be distinguished from backlash politics, why is this differentiation necessary, and what are the implication in case backlash dynamics are at play? The following section provides an overview over the state of the art on these issues, and complements the theoretical framework for investigating the controversy around FFP in the German Bundestag as well as for determining to which extent the presence of backlash politics can be confirmed.

International Norms and Their Contestation

In the International Relations (IR) literature, a norm is commonly understood as "a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, 891), with sanctions imposed in case of non-compliance. Closely connected to this idea of international norms constituting clearly defined entities meant for ratification and implementation within nation states (Krook & True 2012) has been the concept of a norm life cycle, which reflects the process of initiating, diffusing, and internalising a norm (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998). In the first phase, different advocates for different norms are thought to compete for wider support until reaching a certain threshold of acceptance, which would then secure the establishment of a norm and provide for its stability (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998).

For a long time, the consideration of disputes has been limited to the rejection to well-established (mostly liberal) norms emanating from individual states showing a high degree of resistance or having been socialised into the respective norm schemes at international or regional level. However, a success of such socialisation processes has then been assumed to validate the norm by habitualisation and internalisation, so it would no longer be publicly questioned or debated (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, Risse & Sikkink 1999, Schwellnus 2009). Consequently, processes of giving meaning to (international) norms, interpreting, and contesting them have predominantly been regarded as only playing a role when norms are emerging (Van Kersbergen & Verbeek 2007).

Translating international norms into domestic policy frameworks without transforming the respective norm has yet increasingly been considered impossible (Van Eerdewijk & Roggeband 2014). Adopting international norms generally, and specifically in the policy area of gender equality "may initiate rather than resolve struggles over its exact content" (Krook & True 2012,

110). Indeed, understanding the policy process as a field of competition for distinctly determined issues, causes thereof, and problem-solving approaches to these issues and causes, meaning is ascribed to norms at any moment via framing them in a certain way (Benford & Snow 2000). "Defined as standards of appropriateness, norms are inherently contested, and their meaning is negotiated in and between the frames employed by the variety of actors engaged in these processes" (Benford & Snow 2000, 614). Power structures and mechanisms hence play a significant role both for when norms are emerging and diffused (Keck & Sikkink 1998, as cited in Roggeband 2019).

As norms research developed further, the discipline thus widened its focus towards also investigating disputes over norms and their possible deterioration domestically or internationally. Yet, there has been a persistent bias of a progressive understanding of norms with the assumption that norm contestation would always imply negative consequences (Deitelhoff 2020). However, contestation simply does not bring negative implications in all cases (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann 2019, 2020, Wiener 2014). Rather than equating contestation with normative regression, norm change requires debate, as commonly "it is not only the discursive struggles about the meaning but also righteousness of norms that give rise to normative change" (Deitelhoff 2020, 717). Indeed, the act of discussing a norm, even when it has already entered the phase of establishment, can also contribute to legitimising it as it can increase and reinforce a common understanding of its meaning (Wiener 2007, 2010, Clark et al. 2017). The challenge is thus to differentiate contestation triggering normative change on the one hand, and contestation leading to normative regression on the other hand (Deitelhoff 2020). Interestingly, in the German context and beyond, FFP is explicitly presented as a norm intended for such continuous further development, and pro-actively inviting constructive critique for its future determination and implementation in order to consistently advance its legitimacy. So, for instance, comparing the viewpoints on FFP reflected in the coalition agreement of the German government in 2021 with those in the FFP guidelines published in 2023, a progress can be observed in the understanding of FFP. While gender is portrayed as a binary concept in the first, resulting in addressing mainly women and girls, the latter accounts for broader inclusivity and further includes other groups suffering from marginalisation (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023). The principle of reflexivity underlying FFP and the consideration of the framework as a work in progress mean that there would also be potential for a continuous further development of the German FFP strategy in the future. Yet, if this can be achieved in reality remains to be seen – especially also in face of the resistance coming from antifeminist stakeholders, which might arguably lead to backlash rather than constructive norm contestation (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023).

Contestation around the F-Word

Looking at the case of feminist policies in any form, they have consistently invited considerable contestation throughout history. Arguably, this does not seem surprising as feminism in general, and FFP in particular, involves a critical assessment of traditional gender roles in society and is aimed at overcoming power imbalances in patriarchal regimes following a transformational agenda. At the same time, justifications of unequal treatments of men and women and opposition to the rights of women and girls are connected to such existing norms and convictions, which are embedded within social systems connecting and organising ideas and practices, often perpetuating themselves (Eerdewijk & Roggeband 2014, as cited in Roggeband 2019). Resistant reactions from stakeholders who support or profit from those norms and ideas that are supposed to be adapted or replaced are thus expectable.

For international women's rights, as there is no universal definition of these norms and they can be characterised by vagueness and contradiction, it is further possible to put forward distinct interpretations (Roggeband 2019). For instance, despite its common perception as an "organic whole" (Zwingel 2017, as cited in Roggeband 2019, 7), the human rights legislative corps shows crucial tensions internally, which has decisive implications for understanding and defining gender equality norms as well. Similarly, norms with a trade liberalisation approach can be difficult to reconcile with the gender mainstreaming agenda (Pollack & Hafner-Burton 2010, as cited in Roggeband 2019; Van der Vleuten et al. 2014). On the one hand, such an ambiguous nature of international norms enables spreading them among various locations and political stages as distinct stakeholders can interpret them distinctly (Krook & True 2012). On the other hand, it makes norms subject to ongoing changes and (re-)definitions, which highlights the necessity to investigate their unsteady character and the dynamics around them within distinct contexts and among distinct stakeholder (Zwingel 2016).

As part of the above-named framing dynamics, norms can be stretched and bended, for instance. The first implication refers to an expansion of the norm's previous meaning towards a more encompassing yet blurred new definition, whereas the latter means changing the meaning of the norm in a way that serves a different purpose than the initial one (Lombardo et al. 2009). Importantly, these framing procedures are influential throughout both conceptualising and diffusing norms, with debates around and adaptations of norms taking place continuously. For

the case of FFP debates in the German Bundestag, the far-right *AfD* was found to have employed both tactics over the past years, seemingly to challenge, dismiss, and mock FFP (Lauch 2024). The party has utilised stretching to broaden and obscure the definition of FFP, enabling it to be linked to and held accountable for various issues, likely with the intention of undermining its value. Through bending, the *AfD* has altered the meaning of the concept of FFP, shifting its original purpose in favour of a distorted one, ultimately leading to its diminishment as well (Lauch 2024).

Already before the implementation of the FFP strategy, the growing success of the AfD in

Germany has been decisively pushing the limits of socially accepted degrees of anti-feminist attitudes so that misogynistic expressions have become increasingly popular again and have been openly shared on social media and other stages, for instance (Dörner 2018). Such activism has encompassed the spread of anti-gender narratives and the use of direct citizen actions, for example, petitions, demonstrations, and prayers, alongside governmental tools to shape or alter educational agendas, laws, and public opinion (WGDAWG). Indeed, gender and gender equality have been significantly contested issues in German political discourse for a considerable while, with a variety of critical voices coming from political representatives of the most popular parties, journalists, scientists, anti-feminist groups advocating for men's rights, radical opponents of abortions, as well as fundamentalist groups of Christian belief (Frey et al. 2014, as cited in Lang 2017). More generally, "backsliding from and within internationally recognised norms [...] is currently a problem across large parts of Europe" (Landes et al. 2021). In Germany and beyond, over the course of the past years, right-wing extremist and right-wing populist groups like the AfD have thus managed to impact gender and family policy issues as well as the debate around them in a way of filling the discourse with fear and ideas of a complete societal 'genderisation'. In doing so, these actors have exerted a significant influence beyond their original peers and have constructed a situation over which they try to migrate into debates in politics and society away from the isolated stance at the right-wing end of the political spectrum (Lang 2017). As a result, the chances of a gender backlash against transformative foreign policy strategies increase, particularly if the rule-based liberal order continues to deteriorate as well, potentially leading to a reversion to more traditional foreign policy approaches (Aggestam & True 2020), and endangering the hardly achieved progress in protecting women's and minorities' rights over the past decades. However, it has not been assessed yet whether the situation in Germany might already go beyond usual political contestation and point to backlash dynamics around the discussions on FFP in the German Parliament. But which characteristics make the concept of backlash unique and why is the possible presence of backlash politics worthy of special inquiry?

Contestation versus Backlash Politics

If contestation can be broadly defined as all instances of a questioning and / or rejection of norms and institutions in discourse, political backlash can be understood as a subtype of contestation that is extraordinary in its claims and focused on reverting to a prior social condition. (Alter & Zürn 2020, 3)

More specifically, backlash politics can be regarded as a combination of retrograde objectives, extraordinary goals and tactics, and the entrance to mainstream public discourse, bearing the potential to substantially alter society and politics (Alter & Zürn 2020). Indeed, unpredictability and transformation are expectable when the criteria of backlash politics are fulfilled and, even more so, when they are reinforced by typical companions including the provocation of nostalgia and emotions, breaking with taboos, and the alteration of institutions (Alter & Zürn 2020).

Importantly, backlash politics should not be considered as an isolated phenomenon but need to be investigated as part of the overall political dynamics and in relation to the reactions it provokes from other stakeholders (Alter & Zürn 2020). As the final consequences of backlash politics also depend on the counter-reactions, the interaction among all actors must be the focus of the analysis and not only the results achieved by backlash groups. Thereby, as indicated above, both sides of the debates might employ the following instruments that typically accompany backlash dynamics: "(1) emotive elements, which for backlashers are often suffused with the haze of nostalgia; (2) taboo breaking and new political strategies; (3) challenges to procedures and institutions associated with the dominant script" (Alter & Zürn 2020, 568). When applied, these factors further contribute to destabilising the political space.

Nonetheless, the empirical distinction between backlash and contestation remains a challenge when looking at backlash groups' aims and strategies. Both actors engaged in contestation with the purpose of changing international norms as well as backlash movements might employ any available instruments to support their cause, "from emotional storytelling to naming and shaming to arms-twisting" (Keck & Sikkink 1998, Price 1998). However, a distinction can then be made on the basis of severity. In contrast to 'normal' contestation, backlash politics show an extraordinary degree of rejecting respective norms as the underlying principles and structures are called into question and not only the norms themselves (Alter & Zürn 2020).

What makes backlash groups remarkable in this sense it that they are rejecting widely accepted notions of political legitimacy – concepts embedded within prevailing social and political frameworks such as in political theories, constitutions, party platforms, and policy rationales (Alter & Zürn 2020).

Of course, various backlash agendas target different elements of prevailing frameworks. For example, contemporary European authoritarian populist movements focus on reversing immigration and globalisation, as well as reducing or abolishing the transfer of political power to European institutions. At a deeper level, they oppose principles such as equal access to shared resources like welfare benefits and reject cultural pluralism as a reflection of individual freedom and societal tolerance (Alter & Zürn 2020). Related to this criterion, backlash is distinguishable by its entrance into public discourse, which makes the connected claims seem 'normal'. By achieving recognition for the movement's social goals and embedding the retrograde vision into broader public discourse, backlash movements initiate a political dynamic that is intentionally transformative (Alter & Zürn 2020). While this could also mean success for norm entrepreneurs and their agenda of norm change, it is the overall dynamic of all named criteria that differentiates backlash politics from 'normal' contestation (Deitelhoff 2020).

(Anti-)Feminism and Backlash Politics

Interestingly, "for feminist scholars, backlash is a socially pervasive phenomenon" (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020, 704). However, even though the term backlash is comparatively prominently applied by feminists, there are only a few conceptualisations developed by experts from the feminist field of study (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020). The use of the expression relates back to a book from 1991 entitled *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, composed by Susan Faludi, an American journalist, and awarded with the Pulitzer prize (Clavaud et al. 2023). The story outlined in the book revolves around the tactics employed by conservative American groups fighting against women's rights in the 1980s and 1990s, especially triggered by abortion being authorised federally in 1973 (Clavaud et al. 2023). It is a portrait of the diverse questioning of women's rights by American actors on the political right, who, in cooperation with decisive religious stakeholders, initiated a broad cultural counter-reaction against the feminist agenda in that period. The opposition catalysed itself in the media and other cultural outlets such as movies and literature, resulting in the development and implementation of policies limiting women's access to the labour market and abortion (Clavaud et al. 2023). It

was therefore a direct counter-movement to the initiatives liberating women economically in the 1970s and 1980s.

While there is no determination of backlash by Faludi herself, her assessments are impacted by understanding backlash as a response by stakeholders who feel that their significance, impact, and domination is deteriorating (Faludi 1991). Faludi further highlighted the omnipresent nature of antifeminist backlash as a reaction to any notable achievement of women's rights groups. The dynamics triggering and manifesting backlash as well as making it a recurring instance throughout history have also been addressed in other feminists' works. Some definitions go beyond the opposition to feminism as the central feature of antifeminist backlash and point to an agenda of a reaffirmation, maintenance, and intensification of a subordinate status of females which shows historic recurrence, contingency, and cultural contextualisation (Walby 1993). With regards to the role of backlash in public discourse, further observations revealed that antifeminist backlash groups are not only concerned with legal discrimination but also impacting the language of liberty and equality in more subtle forms (Ferber 2007). So, what could these insights on (anti-)feminism and backlash imply for the specific case of FFP?

Feminist Foreign Policy and Backlash Politics

By questioning traditionally established processes guiding political thinking and actions, FFP encourages to review and adjust agenda setting processes towards increasing policy coherence (Zilla 2022). Its transformative nature demands critically examining power dynamics that are perceived as 'natural' – and also one's own role within these systems. The disruptive intention behind FFP therefore fosters the incorporation of alternative viewpoints. Through inviting new ideas, FFP strategies elevate normative standards for designing, justifying, and implementing decisions in political contexts (Zilla 2022). It is this potential for rethinking which constitutes a core strength of FFP, but also triggers considerable attacks by the opponents of FFP.

The inherent questioning of patriarchist and discriminatory political power and privileges as well as the transformational orientation of FFP towards gender and overall societal equality can arguably constitute provocations towards those stakeholders who have tended to support and profit from exactly those convictions and mechanisms that are supposed to be abolished and overcome. As indicated above, backlash movements are likely to form under such an impression of deteriorating significance, impact, and domination (Faludi 1991). At the very least, they might be inclined to defend their traditionally established positions. More extremely, FFP might also trigger an interest in reaffirming, maintaining, or even intensifying a

subordinate status of females and other historically marginalised groups (Walby 1993). Motivated by retrograde objectives, campaigns towards revoking FFP strategies and reorientating foreign policy actions according to traditional foreign policy convictions and principles could be expected. Their success would then crucially depend on managing to position these demands in the overall public discourse.

Nonetheless, the motivation in feminist literature to strictly determine and assess backlash has been limited up until today. The delineation of the concept of backlash politics from other minor and major forms of contesting and challenging women's rights just does not seem to constitute an issue of high relevance for many feminist experts, so they continue applying the label of backlash in various instances (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020). However, this also means that feminist scholars would very rarely disagree to define antifeminist attitudes and actions as backlash when the above-explained criteria of retrograde aims, exceptional questioning of dominant scripts, and the entrance into public debates (Alter & Zürn 2020) – and possibly any or all of the frequent accelerants – would be met. Yet, even if these features would not be given, they would probably count any antifeminist purposes and aims as backlash, since for most feminist researchers, feminism is not only an analytical lens but also a political positioning (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020).

Here, the present paper aims to constitute a contribution to the existing body of literature by bridging insightful feminist ideas and findings with the validity and usefulness of the clear determination of backlash politics understood as the combination of the three necessary conditions and additional possible companions listed above. This combined approach promises to provide significant advantages for effectively assessing the extent to which antifeminist backlash plays a role in the political dynamics and context under consideration (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020). Thereby, the scale at hand not only allows for a more nuanced analysis of the presence and level of backlash dynamics around the issue of FFP addressed in debates in the German Bundestag, but also makes it possible to determine the decisive potential for actual societal transformation triggered by recognised backlash dynamics.

Methodology and Material

A Qualitative Approach towards Investigating Backlash Politics

As stated previously, this paper focuses on the controversy around FFP in German political discourse and more specifically investigates the presence and dynamics of backlash politics around FFP in Bundestag debates. For this purpose, a qualitative research method arguably seems to be the most appropriate choice, allowing for the analysis of the behaviour, experiences, and motives of individuals as well as their social interactions, and providing significantly more concrete and in-depth insights compared to quantitative approaches (Flick, Kardorff et al. 2019). Indeed, qualitative approaches facilitate understanding social realities and raising awareness for their underlying processes, patterns, and overall structure. This, in turn, fits perfectly with the aim of this academic work as "to study backlash politics is to query how visions of the past come to structure contemporary and future-oriented politics, and how adding certain extraordinary tactics and strategies interject dynamics that can generate transformative change" (Alter & Zürn 2020, 577).

As in the present case the focus lies on parliamentary debates, this analysis further largely draws on hermeneutics, which is specifically concerned with the interpretation of texts and communication (Marotzki 2019). Importantly, five key rules guide such qualitative investigation of data in the social sciences (Kuckartz 2018): To begin with, the researcher's own previous knowledge as well as biases regarding the issue under consideration need to be critically reflected. Moreover, the material in question needs to be understood in its entirety, meaning filling in possible gaps in the texts with the help of contextual knowledge. This further relates to the third rule, which points to the possible foreign nature of the analysed text due to language or cultural barriers, which is, first of all, supposed to become part of the conscience of the researcher, and the effects thereof are then supposed to be minimised by getting more familiar with the text and its context. The fourth rule highlights to focus on aspects of the text that seem particularly relevant for the topic under investigation when going through the material for the first time. Yet, the final rule demands to differentiate identifying topics and categories within the text from new, possibly even unexpected, findings (Kuckartz 2018). These five key aspects are particularly relevant for the initial dealing with material – here the extracts of the German Bundestag debates – as well as during the coding process.

In line with these principles, for structuring the present research process as well as for guiding the interpretation of the controversy around FFP in German political discourse, a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) further seems to be the most promising method. QCA constitutes an interpretative form of assessment, where coding is based on interpretation, classification, and evaluation; text selection and coding is therefore linked to human understanding and interpretation (Kuckartz 2018, 27). What differentiates QCA from other forms of qualitative research is its basis on and centrality of categories. It is hence a highly systematic approach, with clear rules guiding each of its individual phases. Moreover, the classification and categorisation include the data in its entirety, and not only parts thereof (Kuckartz 2018). Inspired by the ideas and principles of hermeneutics, as described above, the data under consideration is drawn together through an interactive process, which will be explained in detail below, and then critically reflected upon. While the different analytical steps can be completed at the same time, QCA allows for the incorporation of feedback loops at any moment during the research and interpretative exercise, so it is possible to perfectly tailor the approach to the specific case under consideration.

In addition, compared to other methods, the orientation of QCA is rather descriptive, and the coding particularly serves structure and systematisation rather than the transformation of empirics into numerical data (Kuckartz 2018). Indeed, the central characteristic of QCA is its two-dimensional structuring of the investigated material into cases and categories (Kuckartz 2018). This idea constitutes the 'content structuring matrix' (Kuckartz 2018, 49), enabling deriving both case- and category-oriented insights. Categories can thus increase the effectiveness of the exploration; beyond serving as tools for the analysis, they also build the substance of the research and the basis for the construction of the theory that is aimed at (Kuckartz 2019). Thereby, the development of categories can be 'data-driven', 'conceptdriven', or based on a combination of these two options (Kuckartz 2019, 185). The derivation of categories for the purpose of this paper is explained in the section on operationalisation further below. Last but not least, the summary of the data, and its continuous comparison and contrasting form part of the analytical phases. This way, the different behaviour and positions of the German parties on FFP and their interactions in the debates, including the question whether and to which extent the discourse shows characteristics of backlash politics, can be answered. Importantly, the reliability and transparency of the method provide for its high recognition for analyses in the social sciences field.

Data Sampling and Case Selection

Before going into more detail about the different steps of QCA performed to investigate the controversy around FFP in German Bundestag debates, the following logic guided the data sampling and case selection procedure: To begin with, as the research interest lies at detecting the occurrence of backlash indicators on the highest political level in Germany, studying debates in the Bundestag appears to be the most appropriate approach, constituting the main arena for the discursive argumentation between different political stakeholders, whereby enabling direct insights into their social and political interactions as representatives of the German society as a whole. Considering how power through language becomes even more powerful when activated and used by actors in powerful positions, parliamentary discourse is therefore particularly relevant for conceptualising, debating, implementing, and attacking FFP, and assessing the presence and possible implications of backlash dynamics.

More specifically, the protocols of the plenary debates in the Bundestag build the data basis, reflecting a broad variety of viewpoints on the topic of FFP from all major political parties in Germany. In these debates, politicians can present their viewpoints on FFP and provoke respective reactions by colleagues from both government and opposition sides as well as considerable attention by the media and overall public, given the novelty of the FFP approach and the overall societal controversy around it. With their speeches, the Members of Parliament (MPs) can inform about, comment on, give account of, and receive critique regarding their political arguments and decisions. Furthermore, public policies and overall governmental plans and actions can be directly and indirectly impacted through the speeches by altering the German Parliaments' position, including the ones of coalition partners and opposition parties — depending on how sensitive, complex, and politically relevant the addressed issues are in the context of FFP.

Having established all discussions in the German Parliament as the total core for the present research question, the data of interest for this paper was further chosen by 'purposive sampling' (Misoch 2019), meaning that it was purposefully selected from this total core based on characteristics defined prior to the analysis and interpretation (Merkens 2019). First of all, the relevant time period for this study could be identified as covering all discussions in the German Parliament addressing FFP since the introduction of the concept in 2021 up until the political summer break in 2023. The starting point marks the formation of the new German traffic light coalition government after the 2021 elections consisting of *SPD*, *Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen* and *FDP* – the first German government ever to include a commitment to FFP in its coalition

agreement, arguably marking a paradigm shift in the German foreign policy approach. In March 2023, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock then presented elaborate principles for FFP (ZDF 2023). As these detailed guidelines on Germany's FFP agenda were only published almost one and a half years after the introduction of FFP, it is important to note that the vast majority of debates under consideration in this paper therefore relate to a comparatively vague determination of FFP, which might have impacted the content and dynamics of the discussions as well.

With the political summer break of 2023 marking the end of the period considered for the analysis – given the time constraints and formal requirements of the official regulations on composing this paper – the debates on the issue of FFP included in this study hence cover around one and a half years after the introduction of the concept. As indicated previously, this initial time span following the introduction of the German FFP agenda constitutes an especially vulnerable and decisive period, as the strategy is in the midst of development, implementation, and contestation. The discussions might therefore be particularly controversial, and in face of possible backlash dynamics, the developments of this controversy can determine the further progression and possible survival or abolishment of FFP following government changes such as the one anticipated for Germany after the elections scheduled in February 2025.

For the specified time period, in the context of a total of 103 speeches made by MPs in German Bundestag debates, the keyword "Feministische Außenpolitik" could be identified in the plenary protocols for the election period 20 when searching in the official Documentation and Information System for Parliamentary Materials (DIP) provided by the German Bundestag (Deutscher Bundestag 2023). However, as these 103 references to FFP include any mentioning of this keyword, the initial collection of these instances was further purposefully filtered in order to only capture those statements that actually substantially engage with the concept of FFP. This way, statements that just include the keyword FFP in a half sentence, for example, even though the topic of debate is completely unrelated to the strategy per se, could be excluded. Likewise, if the reference is not exclusively focusing on FFP but feminist development policy as well – indicated by formulations such as "Feministische Außen- und Entwicklungspolitik" – it is also excluded to ensure the sole focus on FFP of this paper.

Consequently, out of the initial 103 speeches identified, a total of 84 instances serve the purpose of this investigation, covering a timespan from January 12, 2022 to June 21, 2023 (Appendix 1). These 84 statements were delivered by a total of 53 different MPs, representing all political parties forming part of the German Parliament, including the *CDU/CSU*, *FDP*, *SPD*, *Bündnis*

90/Die Grünen, Die Linke, and the AfD. Thereby, around half of the statements were delivered by male, and the other half by female MPs, which is remarkable in light of the German Bundestag consisting of only 31.4 percent of women overall during the analysed election period. Following this determination of the statements meeting the criteria established above, the data was prepared for further investigation.

For this purpose, the respective documents were retrieved from the DIP website and the passages around the mentioning of the keyword "Feministische Außenpolitik" were identified. As indicated above, the DIP website provides access to reports of the plenary sessions of the German Bundestag, including the stenographic documentation of MP's speeches. Before these reports are published, the speakers are entitled to check it and in case corrections are requested, the meaning of the speech or parts thereof must not be altered. Choosing this data therefore has significant advantages as it is easily accessible and resource-efficient in terms of time and money. In other words, it is free, permanent, and – stemming from an official source – highly reliable. These circumstances ensure that the analysis is not only transparent and flexible, but also easy to replicate and accessible for validity and reliability checks.

To further narrow down the subtracted texts to only include the relevant extracts explicitly addressing FFP, those were then separated from the rest of the contributions to the parliamentary discourse, paying detailed attention to the broader context of the given statements to ensure the most efficient and thorough demarcation possible. In order to get a broader picture of the discussions, this meant carefully considering the entire speech the extract was taken from, as well as the previous and following one, or even the entire debate if necessary. Furthermore, not to lose any contextual information that might be helpful for the further understanding of the extracts in the coding and interpretive process, the following background aspects on the speaker and setting were noted for each statement: the speaker's name and party, the date when the statements was given, the related session, agenda item, topic, the context around the excerpt, as well as the type of contribution, which could either be a speech, intervention, or question (Appendix 2). This preparatory work resulted in 84 individual documents containing both the relevant extracts of the debates dealing with FFP as well as the corresponding contextual information. In order to implement the different phases of QCA, the documents were then added to the MAXQDA software for coding and in-depth analysis and evaluation.

Operationalisation

QCA is typically completed in several steps, which can possibly be interlinked and performed in parallel (Kuckartz 2018). To begin with, after data preparation, initial categories are derived from the theory underlying the research question, which then serve as the basis for a principal scanning of the material and a first categorisation (Kuckartz 2018). For the purpose of this paper, the theory on backlash politics as outlined in a previous section guided the development of these initial categories. Hence, to first of all determine the basic level of polarisation on the issue of FFP, the code 'position' captures either a positive, negative, or conditional perspective on FFP put forward in the investigated statements (Appendix 2). The latter sub-category assesses whether the position on FFP depends on a certain definition or implementation of the concept. For example, Germany's FPP approach could be regarded as positive only if it relies on the principle of intersectionality. On the other hand, an MP might share the opinion that the German FPP strategy would be supported in theory, but only if the promised ideas would be turned into concrete actions with a measurable impact in practice as well.

These examples already hint to another indispensable element to include in the present study, which is the justification given for the respective positive, negative, or conditional position on FFP. The design of sub-codes for the code 'justification' was intentionally left open in this first step of category formation in order to be able to use the findings of the initial text work for the further data-driven development of these categories. Whereby 'concept-driven' categories reflect the theory on backlash politics and help determining the presence of backlash indicators, the combination with such 'data-driven' categories allows to tailor the approach to the particular case of FFP in German parliamentary debates and provides further in-depth understandings of the context and dynamics of the discourse in the Bundestag. Despite its systematic nature, a decisive advantage of the method of QCA is indeed leaving enough room for flexible adaptations to the specific interest of study (Kuckartz 2019).

Going back to the 'concept-driven' categories, as defined previously, the presence of backlash politics can be confirmed if the combination of the following criteria is met: retrograde objectives, extraordinary goals and tactics, and the entrance into mainstream public discourse (Alter & Zürn 2020). The first two indicators are thus also included in the coding scheme, whereas the third cannot be captured by an individual code but must rather be investigated looking at the bigger picture of the nature and dynamics of the political discourse on FFP in Germany provided via the overall analysis of the other codes. Furthermore, as the typical companions of provocation of nostalgia and emotions, breaking with taboos, and the alteration

of institutions tend to go in line with backlash politics (Alter & Zürn 2020), they are further incorporated in the coding scheme (Appendix 2).

Importantly, backlash politics should not be considered as an isolated phenomenon but need to be investigated as part of the overall political dynamics and in relation to the reactions it provokes from other stakeholders (Alter & Zürn 2020). As the final consequences of backlash politics also depend on the counter-reactions, the interaction among all actors must be the focus of the analysis and not only the results achieved by backlash groups. Therefore, another category is concerned with the reactions to the statements on FFP in the German Bundestag, such as the involvement of further speakers, the contribution of questions, comments, and applause. Relatedly, stylistic elements such as jokes, irony, and rhetorical questions can impact and reinforce the controversial nature of debates on FFP in the Bundestag, so these aspects are further included in the analysis (Appendix 2).

Having established the first general categories for coding based on the theory on backlash politics, the extracts of the parliamentary debates could then be studies in more detail, carefully following the five key rules guiding qualitative investigations of data in the social sciences as outlined above. All plenary protocols were hence read thoroughly as a next step, balancing the consideration of the research interest as well as a critical reflection of own previous knowledge and subjective assumptions on the issue on the one hand, and openness for possibly distinct interpretations on the other hand (Kuckartz 2018). Important sections in the texts and initial insights were noted and, if necessary, the broader context around the subtracted statements was again double-checked with the entire original plenary protocol at hand in order to ensure the correct understanding and interpretation of the material.

After this initial work with the texts, the main categories for coding could be developed further and be more clearly specified and documented in the form of a code book, including rules for the application of the codes as well as concrete examples from the statements (Kuckartz 2018). At this point, the sub-codes for the determination of the code 'justification', which had previously been deliberately left open, could now also be complemented inductively using the empirical data. In doing so, international norms, such as human rights or the principle of representation, and security issues, including conflicts, crises, and war could be determined as justifications put forward for a positive, negative, or conditional position of FFP (Appendix 2). Moreover, values like justice, solidarity, and sustainability, or questions of resource allocation as well as scientific findings were given as reasons for a certain assessment of FFP. Last but

not least, the concept of FFP itself or its implementation served as a justification for the opinions expressed in the parliamentary discussions.

Before coding the entire corpus of the material with the help of the code book, a randomly selected small sample of statements was coded first for quality control of the established categories, which could thereby be further specified and / or adopted where necessary. Thereafter, the material in its entirety could be chronologically coded, and the relevant text passages were matched with the respective categories, while one text passage could classify for several different categories at the same time (Kuckartz 2018). To ensure the efficiency and coherence of the coding, all text passages falling under the same code were then considered together and checked for consonance and deviations, respectively, applying the principle of 'as simple as possible, as differentiated as necessary' (Kuckartz 2018, 108) for determining the need for additional sub-categories. Finally, another round of coding oriented around the extended code book was completed, up to the point where no other sub-categories had to be added anymore and all relevant excerpts were captured by the codes. This progress then allowed for the finalisation of the code book, including the respective definitions and examples of the categories and sub-codes. Based on this process, the controversy around FFP in the German Bundestag and the presence and dynamics of backlash politics could then be assessed.

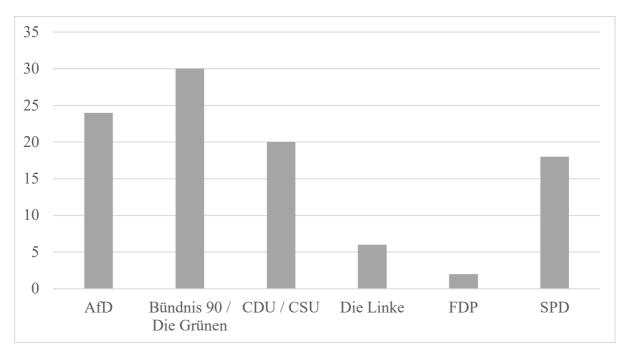
Results, Discussion, and Limitations

In the following, the results of the QCA are presented and discussed, starting with a general overview over how the controversy around FFP has played out in the German Bundestag. This includes an assessment of who has taken part in the debates, which positions on FFP have been put forward in the statements, and how these positions where justified. Moreover, the presence and dynamics of backlash politics are evaluated, and the implications as well as the limitations of the findings are addressed.

Participation in German Parliamentary Debates on Feminist Foreign Policy

To begin with, looking at the overall participation in the debates on FFP in the German Parliament, a clear difference in the behaviour of the MPs of the main German political parties could be observed (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Total of Statements on Feminist Foreign Policy by Party Affiliation in Percentage.



Source: Own work. N=84 statements.

While the MPs from Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen have clearly been the most active in the discussions on FFP, they have been relatively closely followed by the AfD (Figure 1). This

comparatively high engagement rate of both parties on the topic goes in line with the general salience of gender issues in their political approaches and actions on the progressive and traditional end of the political spectrum, respectively. For the Greens, their dominance does not come as a surprise given the strong advocacy of the party for gender equality policies and the centrality of the Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock as the prominent figure behind the introduction and implementation of the German FFP strategy. Indeed, in the analysed debates, her outstanding role in the campaigning for FFP has also been recognised and highlighted by several MPs across different parties.

Interestingly, Annalena Baerbock has been the only person on ministerial level engaged in the discussions on FFP as well as the most active among all MPs delivering statements on this topic in the observed period, which could be expectable given that the FFP agenda has been her own initiative and falls exactly under her policy domain. However, the close link between the FFP concept and a single person in the office of Foreign Minister could also have a negative impact on the sustainability of FFP, as in the event of a change of government, the continuation of the FFP agenda would depend heavily on the respective successor and their political attitude and commitment to the concept. This circumstance appears all the more problematic when considering that of the total of 736 MPs of the German Bundestag in the period analysed, only 53 issued statements in the FFP discussions, meaning that the overall engagement with and commitment to FFP has been remarkably low. It is therefore questionable whether the FFP strategy could endure beyond a single legislative period unless a broader base – and not only a prominent leader in a politically influential position such as the Foreign Minister – would drive FFP forward. In doing so, increasing attacks on the concept, particularly from the anti-feminist side, could also be better corrected and fended off by various other actors in politics and society.

A feminist policy approach should moreover be implemented across departments and policy fields, as the impact and interplay of unjust power dynamics affects local, national, and international levels as well as interconnected policy areas (Fröhlich & Hauschild 2023). For this, the lack of contributions to the debates from other MPs on ministerial level apart from Annalena Baerbock indicates that FFP has not yet managed to establish itself as a coherent framework in Germany. Like this, it is likely to "merely bring about more gender mainstreaming and equality. However, this would not be a transformative approach, but only a weakly compensatory one that does little to shake existing patriarchal power structures" (Zilla 2023, 8). Nonetheless, strong public activism for FFP from the side of the Foreign Minister can help to raise awareness for this progressive approach towards foreign affairs both domestically as well as internationally, while the commitment to FFP reflects defending international liberal

norms and organisations (Thomson 2022). On the one hand, considering the current global power hierarchies dominated by "the rise of hypermasculine leaders" (Aggestam & True 2020, 158-159) as well as the continuous erosion of liberalism and the rule-based international structures, the discursive impact of such a behaviour can play a significant role for the development of international power dynamics and combatting patriarchal traditions (Cheung et al. 2021). On the other hand, such a strategic positioning can be intended as a means of distinction in terms of national political competition (Thomson 2022), including constituting a direct response to the growing hostility towards gender equality policies from far-right and conservative forces in Germany.

On the other side of the political spectrum, for the analysed period, the first rank in terms of speaking frequency on FFP of Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has indeed been shared with the Deputy Chairman of the parliamentary group of the AfD, Stefan Keuter. For the case of the AfD in general, having in mind their far-right political orientation, the high involvement in the debates closely following the Greens already points to an actual perception of FFP as a provocation towards their values and viewpoints, which could have triggered vehemently rebelling against it, as will be further explored below. Besides, statements by MPs affiliated with the CDU / CSU as well as SPD have been comparatively frequent as well (Figure 1). In contrast, it is noteworthy that both the FDP and Die Linke have rarely contributed to the discussions on FFP at all, which could mean that the issue has been neither of great interest nor particular relevance to them.

Polarisation around Feminist Foreign Policy in the German Bundestag

However, without doubt, the paradigm shift of the German traffic light coalition government implementing FFP has sparked a heated political debate in German political discourse, departing from the rather consensual gender mainstreaming direction and initiating a much more controversial negotiation level, while "gender equality and women's norms are among the most contested phenomena globally" (Aggestam & True 2020, 159). Indeed, a very high level of polarisation around FFP can be confirmed for the German parliamentary debates when looking at the different positions put forward by the MPs of the main political parties in the context of the analysed Bundestag discussions (Figure 2). As indicated previously, the Greens have consistently campaigned in favour of gender equality policies, which has also been the case for FFP, with remarkable 100 percent of positive attitudes shared in their statements

(Figure 2). Likewise, for the coalition partner *SPD* with similar supporting views on gender equality, the viewpoints shared on FFP have been exclusively positive as well.

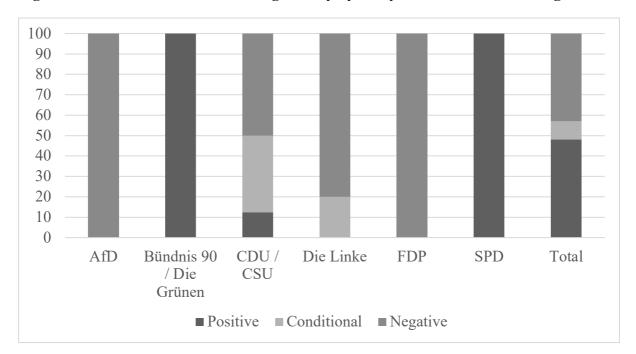


Figure 2: Positions on Feminist Foreign Policy by Party Affiliation in Percentage.

Source: Own work. N=84 statements (several positions could be reflected in one extract).

Yet, the complete opposite has been the case for the *AfD*, whose MPs have rejected FFP in all their statements on the issue without a single exception. This clear-cut division among these parties reveals the emergence and intensification of a new cleavage forming in German politics – comparable to the developments around gender equality at the UN level as described in a previous section (Cupać and Ebetürk, 2020). From a feminist stance, the Greens, and also the *SPD*, can arguably be seen as progressive 20th century movements fighting patriarchal structures such as via the engagement for FFP, while the opposition from the *AfD* reveals latent patriarchy now gaining visibility and power (Gilligan and Richards 2018). Such significant polarisation not only generally endangers the hardly achieved progress in protecting women's and minorities' rights over the past decades, but also specifically increases the vulnerability of FFP to a decisive degree, posing a challenge to its future survival throughout government changes such as the one anticipated following the German elections scheduled for February 2025, where conservative and far-right stakeholders are expected to gain significant votes. The effects of such polarisation are indeed likely to continuously change the nature of the political dynamics in the German Bundestag, more and more shifting the institution to a space of intense

political conflict between two opposing stakeholders (Zürn et al. 2012, as cited in Cupać and Ebetürk, 2020). Nonetheless, the long-term effects of these tensions are uncertain at this point in time, and will also significantly depend on the outcome of the upcoming elections.

Interestingly, even though *Die Linke* is typically known for a rather supportive stance on gender equality policies, in the context under consideration, the opposite can be observed with mainly negative, and a few conditional statements given on FFP (Figure 2). However, it must be noted that the overall engagement of MPs from the Left has been comparatively low, so it is questionable to which extent these findings might actually reflect the party's view on FFP. The completely negative perception of the FFP strategy by MPs from the FDP is further noteworthy, despite the party's membership in the traffic light coalition government that has initiated the implementation of the concept. Here, the same reasoning as for *Die Linke* might hold true, as the number of statements given by the Liberals is so small that the representative character of these findings is rather doubtful. Last but not least, the general reluctance of the CDU/CSU to endorse gender equality policies has been also reflected in the stance on FFP, with 50 percent negative statements on this concept, and 37.5 percent conditional viewpoints, which leaves a low share of positive associations with Germany's FFP strategy (Figure 2). Crucially, these positions on FFP of the major political parties need to be evaluated in connection to the justifications given for a positive, negative, or conditional assessment of FFP, which provide more in-depth insights into the competing ideologies around FFP in the German parliamentary discourse.

Competing Ideologies around Feminist Foreign Policy in the German Parliament

Table 1: Justifications for Positions on Feminist Foreign Policy by Party Affiliation in Percentage.

Justification	AfD	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	CDU / CSU	Die Linke	FDP	SPD	Total
Concept / Definition	28.7	22.6	25.9	22.6	20	26.1	25.5
Implementation	17	7.3	31.5	31.8	40	8.7	15.2
Interests	19.1	10.2	5.6	4.5	20	13	12.1
International Norms and Institutions	4.3	13.1	5.6	4.5	N/A	14.5	9.4
Resources	9.6	3.6	5.6	9.1	N/A	5.8	6
Science	N/A	0.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.3
Security	13.8	25.5	20.4	18.2	N/A	13	18.9
Self-Reflexivity	N/A	2.2	1.9	N/A	N/A	1.4	1.3
Values	4.5	14.6	3.7	4.5	20	17.4	11.3

Source: Own Work. N=84 statements (several justifications could be reflected in one extract).

Indeed, looking at the competing ideologies around FFP in the German Parliament, within the overall analysed statements, a clear majority of around one quarter of all justifications put forward for a certain positioning on FFP have concerned the concept and / or definition of the strategy itself (Table 1). Here, it has to be kept in mind that FFP agendas, including the German one, tend to aim at transforming international power structures dominated by military, patriarchal, racial, and neo-colonial violence to achieve gender equality and the elimination of any kind of discrimination (Galtung 1969). By questioning traditionally established processes guiding political thinking and actions, FFP encourages to review and adjust agenda setting processes towards increasing policy coherence (Zilla 2022). It is exactly this potential for rethinking which is commonly regarded as a core benefit of the FFP concept, but

simultaneously triggers considerable attacks by opponents, which can be seen in the following examples for justifications for either a positive or negative view on FFP focusing on the concept and its definition:

The needs of girls and women must be considered everywhere. They are entitled to the so-called three Rs: equal rights, equal resources, and equal representation [...] If the perspectives of women and girls are not considered, crisis prevention and crisis management will always remain inadequate, and the causes of conflicts will at best be dealt with symptomatically. But we want to get to the root cause. (Extract 19, Heinrich 2022)

For several decades, left-green actors have tried to demoralise Germany [...] Ukraine has been experiencing first-hand just how stupid and dangerous these Western illusions were. The Russian invasion of Ukraine could easily have been prevented if the West had pursued a different policy, a policy of credible deterrence instead of so-called Feminist Foreign Policy. (Extract 73, Braun 2023)

As stated in the quotes as well, in light of the geopolitical situation over the past years in terms of crises and wars, security has further been one the most frequently mentioned reasons for positive or negative positions on FFP by MPs across almost all political parties (Table 1). A comprehensive understanding of human security, such as the one presented by the Social Democrat Gabriela Heinrich, has been widely reflected in the statements of both MPs from SPD and Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen. In contrast, like Jürgen Braun from the AfD, far-right politicians have demanded a return to a traditional perspective on security based on deterrence and a classic focus on the protection of borders. Conservatives, on the other hand, have tended to name certain conditional justifications for their positions on FFP. Referring to the special fund for the federal armed forces, for instance, Friedrich Merz argued: "You can pursue a Feminist Foreign Policy for all I care, [...] but not with this budget for the Bundeswehr" (Extract 5, Merz 2022).

Relatedly, for both *CDU/CSU* and *Die Linke*, the implementation of the FFP concept has been another prominent reason for a conditional or negative position expressed in the context of the statements of their MPs (Table 1). Even though quite a few representators from both parties have in principle supported the ideas behind the FFP approach, many have criticised a lack of effective and coherent implementation in reality. Yet, these contributions from the opposition can be seen as an important scrutinising element holding the traffic light coalition government accountable for its promises, ensuring that theory and declarations are put into practice as well.

The fluid understanding and constant development of the FFP strategy – particularly up until the publication of the elaborated principles by the Foreign Office in spring 2023 – has thereby had a considerable impact on the majority of the analysed discussions. Apart from the benefits of the continuous revision and adaption of FFP for the advancement of its legitimacy, this situation has also caused confusion from time to time, illustrated by the following comment:

There is still an insistence on a Feminist Foreign Folicy that is about identifying and breaking power structures. [...] This is a battle cry to those in power. This is getting completely out of hand. What we don't have is a concept that shows how we should deal with these regions and autocracies that we need and with whom we need to talk. We are calling on the German government to present an appropriate concept. (Extract 81, Radwan 2023)

However, FFP is not a fixed or fully developed approach that can be put into practice through a standardised process, which poses considerable challenges for discussing and implementing FFP. Similar to democracy, both its conception and implementation are a work in progress (Zilla 2024). Its formulation is shaped by specific contexts, often requiring a balance between diverse, and sometimes conflicting, goals and methods, not necessarily exclusively feminist ones. Nonetheless, this does not imply randomness or selective application. Adopting an FFP entails several key responsibilities, including broadening analytical lenses, critically examining the power dynamics around the categories and criteria employed, and reassessing priorities (Zilla 2024). Beyond constructive critique of this characteristic of FFP as mentioned above, this has also triggered significant provocation by the *AfD*, for example in the following way:

When I meet with members of your department, I sometimes simply ask: What is a Feminist Foreign Policy? This makes the staff members' foreheads sweat, and they start with individual definitions along the lines of Pippi Longstocking's motto: I make the world, widde widde as I like it. I had a look on the internet. The definition on Wikipedia reads: "Feminist Foreign Policy is a concept or principle in international foreign policy in which feminist perspectives are taken as the standard." – So, I ask you: how discriminatory is that? Where are the men and the third gender you celebrate? (Extract 13, Keuter 2022)

This ironic or rather sarcastic reference to a perceived conflict of interest connected to FFP is another reason that has often been emphasised by the *AfD* to justify a negative attitude towards the concept. FFP includes the conviction that foreign policy should not only serve the interests of individual nation states but should place humans and the general world population at the

centre of attention instead, aiming for a peaceful and sustainable coexistence of all societies. This view seems to have triggered the concerns of the German far-right party, as its representators have again and again underlined that the interest of Germany should be the first and foremost point of orientation for designing and implementing foreign policy strategies and actions. Relatedly, over the course of the past years, right-wing extremist and right-wing populist groups like the *AfD* have already managed to impact gender and family policy issues as well as the debate around them in a way of filling the discourse with fear and ideas of a complete societal 'genderisation'. While these groups show outward opposition to 'gender ideology', their actions go beyond mere resistance, and constitute efforts to preserve and reinforce hierarchical structures in society and politics in response to their (assumed) erosion (Wittenius & Lange 2021, as cited in Landes et al. 2021). As indicated above, backlash dynamics are likely to arise under such an impression of deteriorating significance, impact, and domination (Faludi 1991) like the one shared by MPs from the *AfD*. So, to which extent does the controversy around FFP in German parliamentary discourse amount to backlash politics?

Backlash against Feminist Foreign Policy in the German Bundestag

For the purpose of this paper, backlash politics is understood as the combination of the following three key features: firstly, the aim to re-establish previous social circumstances; secondly, particular objectives and strategies "that challenge dominant scripts" (Alter & Zürn 2020, 563); and thirdly, the entrance into general societal debates (Alter & Zürn 2020). If these conditions of backlash politics are met, often so in combination with reinforcing companions such as "nostalgia, emotional appeals, taboo breaking and institutional reshaping" (Alter & Zürn 2020, 563), the implications are defined by unpredictability, contagiousness, transformation, and endurance. The presence and dynamics around backlash politics might therefore lead to the fading of political momentum, the emergence of new divisions, or a regressive shift (Alter & Zürn 2020).

Unsurprisingly, in the context of the analysed debates on FFP in the German Bundestag, the aim to re-establish previous social circumstances has been particularly prominent among MPs from the *AfD*. On several occasions, they have explained their wish to return to a focus on and implementation of traditional foreign policy tools and convictions, which they regard as most promising for the German population generally, and German women specifically, mixing in traditional gender role expectations as well as xenophobic anti-migration narratives, such as in the following instance:

Because woke ideology goes hand in hand with an excess of cultural sensitivity – a cultural sensitivity that is directed against your own women and that forbids you from clearly naming the elephant in the room, even when women are raped or murdered, as was recently the case with five-year-old Anissa here in Berlin or 14-year-old Ece in Illerkirchberg. If you were really concerned about the welfare of women, you would be focussing on completely different things, not on trans-propaganda, not on 67 genders and not on the whole gender nonsense and certainly not, Ms Baerbock, on a Feminist Foreign Policy that makes us look ridiculous all over the world. (Extract 68, Harder-Kühnel 2023)

Here, clearly, also reinforcing companions of backlash politics have been employed, appealing to the emotions of the audience with references to severe crimes committed against children, and raising exaggerated critique against gender sensitivity as part of FFP, which works to make the strategy seem random and ridiculous. Applying similar techniques, as indicated above, the AfD has been prominently presenting itself as the only defender of the 'real' interests of the German population and particularly women, as in the case below:

Families are stuck in a hamster wheel of stagnating real wages and exploding costs. The mother at the Aldi checkout doesn't need the day-care place to fulfil herself, but because she has to work to earn money. She doesn't need a quota, an equal opportunities officer or a Feminist Foreign Policy, she needs affordable housing, electricity, and food. Then there is freedom of choice, and only the AfD stands for freedom of choice in this country. (Extract 67, von Storch 2023)

Since the supporters of FFP on the one hand, and its opponents on the other hand, have been pursuing a transformative agenda in opposite directions, a field of tension between progressive and retrograde visions has therefore automatically arisen – whether it is concerning the general approach to politics or towards a specific policy domain. For the evaluation of backlash politics, it is therefore also crucial to assess the reaction of other political stakeholders to the behaviour of the AfD, in this instance. Indeed, on the other side of the political spectrum, actors like the Foreign Minister have utilised emotional appeals to underline their arguments in favour of FFP as well, which can further reinforce polarisation, as parties and politicians might be inclined to incite each other further and further and thus normalise and intensify such behaviour.

Because I was with the mothers from Srebrenica a week ago and they described to me how the traces of this war are in them and said: "Ms Baerbock, no action was taken back then, in the early 1990s", when their daughters, when their friends were raped, when

rape was not recognised as a weapon of war, when they were not prosecuted by the International Criminal Court. (Extract 6, Baerbock 2022)

Yet, it is only on the side of the *AfD* that extraordinary goals and tactics and the challenge of dominant scripts have been found in the analysed statements on FFP in the German Parliament. Interwoven with the rejection of FFP and gender equality policies in general, opposition to the international liberal order, European institutions, and a questioning of the principle of equality for all human beings, depending on nationality or gender identification, for example, could be detected in the statements put forward by the far-right.

Now it is difficult to define what a woman is in Germany; anyone can adopt a different gender at any time. So, the question is: based on this approach to Feminist Foreign Policy – it's better to have the toilets in the town centre than on the outskirts – how do you check that real women are actually benefiting from this and not just anyone else? (Extract 84, Brandner 2023)

This quote, but also the previous examples, further confirm the use of the framing tactics of stretching and bending by the *AfD*, which could already be identified in the context of other studies, seemingly to challenge, dismiss, and mock FFP (Lauch 2024). Also in the statements under investigation in this paper, the party has utilised stretching to broaden and obscure the definition of FFP, enabling it to be linked to and held accountable for various issues, likely with the intention of undermining its value. Likewise, through bending, the *AfD* has altered the meaning of the concept of FFP, shifting its original purpose in favour of a distorted one, ultimately leading to its diminishment (Lauch 2024), such as in the following example as well: "Yes, ladies and gentlemen, does Feminist Foreign Policy perhaps mean bringing Islamist misogyny to Germany so that there is less of it in Afghanistan? Is that then feminist domestic policy?" (Extract 66, Curio 2023, 2).

Interestingly, the provocative and exaggerate behaviour of the far-right has a priori been assumed by the other political parties when delivering their support for the FFP strategy. In their statements, they have then already addressed and countered the expected opposition towards FFP. This adjusted discussion technique of advocates for FFP, combined with the very high engagement of the AfD against FFP in the German Bundestag, give reason to interpret the presence and dynamics of backlash politics as also having entered overall public discourse in the German Parliament, whereby the third component of backlash politics seems to be fulfilled as well. In other words, the AfD has thus moved from a former position on the outer edge of the political spectrum to a central and recognised player in the German parliamentary discourse.

The confirmation of the three criteria for backlash politics as well as the application of several types of typical companions therefore result in a politically destabilised situation, in which discourse dynamics have shifted, which can, in turn, also influence the future workings of the institutions more generally.

Last but not least, however, the following limitations impacting these findings need to be considered: Most significantly, a clear peak in the number of statements given by MPs could be identified in both September and October 2022 (with a total of 12 statements delivered in each month). The timing of these debates could be connected to the women's rights movement in Iran and the protests following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. Indeed, the situation in Iran clearly dominated the debates in the German Bundestag when looking at the specific topic addressed in relation to FFP. Commonly, politicians have even referred to the situation in Iran as a 'test case' for reactions by the German government applying the newly established feminist approach to foreign policy. Due to the widespread recognition of the protests in Iran both in the media and mong the population in general, and the particular connection of the demands put forward for gender equality with feminist solidarity and support, it could be assumed that the MPs had an extraordinary strong interest in getting involved in the debates and sharing their opinions. This, in turn, might have impacted engagement levels and also the argumentation style, as the politicians probably wanted to convey their positions in a particularly visible way. While crises such as these seem to have increased general awareness for and possibly also support for FFP, this strong focus on one topic simultaneously shows that FFP has not yet been considered and discussed as an encompassing scheme for all dimensions of German foreign policy. Nonetheless, after the rise in debates on FFP following the instances in Iran, even though the number of discussions on FFP gradually went down a few months afterwards, it still generally stayed on a higher level than before.

Another peak of discussions on FFP could be determined for March 2022 and March 2023, respectively. As March 8 marks International Women's Day, this further points to a still dominant close association of primarily women's issues with FFP. Indeed, International Women's Day has provoked comparatively many debates on the issue of FFP among the analysed sample of Bundestag debates. Moreover, since the considered period in this paper is limited more or less to the publication time of the elaborated principled on FFP by the Federal Foreign Office due to formal constraints on this work, the majority of the analysed statements relate to a rather blurry definition of the strategy as outlined in the coalition agreement, which has certainly had an impact on the discussions, dynamics, and findings as indicated above as well. Finally, given the completion of the QCA by a single coder, and the centrality of human

interpretation for this method, there is a certain subjective element to the design and application of the coding scheme. While this has been addressed by orientating the coding scheme and further evaluation of the data as much as possible around already existing theory and academic investigations, and strictly following the key principles established by hermeneutics to increase the validity and reliability of this work, a bias remains inevitable.

Conclusion

Over the past decades, decisive improvements in strengthening women's position and furthering pro-gender norms in the context of diverse global governance institutions as well as nation states' approaches to foreign policy could be achieved. Nonetheless, there is still a long way ahead towards making complete gender equality a reality, while simultaneously a drift in the opposite direction with increasingly strong contestation and resistance against propagating pro-gender standards as well as a significant risk of gender backlash has been observable. The current rise of right-wing extremism and the crisis of the international rules-based order have further posed a particular challenge to the advocacy for gender equality.

Thereby, the current time marks a critical point for gender equality in German international relations, as the so-called traffic light coalition government has promised a paradigm shift of Germany's approach to foreign and security policy following the elections in 2021 – a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). Due to its fundamentally transformative nature aimed at overcoming unjust and patriarchal power structures, this reform process has since faced considerable resistance. With the design and implementation of the German FFP agenda still under continuous development and thus in an especially vulnerable phase of establishment, the possibility of constructive and substantive debates on FFP in German political discourse have further been decisively jeopardised by the devaluation, false allegations, and trivialisation tactics of the far-right. This has not only impacted the debates on FFP, but also increasingly restricted its further development and future potential.

In turn, this development carries the risk of ever-increasing polarisation, and if it becomes entrenched in the form of backlash politics, there is not only a threat of denigration and potential abolition of the German FFP, but also a danger to liberal norms in general as gender equality functions as a benchmark of democracy (Alter & Zürn 2020). "Hence, contestation through antagonistic discourses and nonimplementation as a way of resisting pro-gender norms may characterize global politics in the future" (Aggestam & True 2020, 158-159), and might as well be witnessed in Germany. More so, the future of Germany's FFP strategy has never seemed as uncertain as it does now with the dissolution of the German traffic light coalition government and elections scheduled for early 2025, in which conservative and far-right parties are expected to gain significant support. This paper hence focused on the following research question: How has the controversy around FFP played out in the case of Germany and to what extent has it amounted to backlash politics?

Despite backlash politics being a "particular and extraordinary variant worthy of special study not only because of its contemporary relevance, but also because it can instigate substantial change in societies and political systems" (Alter & Zürn 2020, 564), there yet had not been much motivation in feminist literature to strictly determine backlash in the context under consideration. Applying a strict definition of backlash politics as the combination of retrograde aims, exceptional questioning of dominant scripts, and the entrance into public debates, the present analysis could hence develop a valuable contribution by bridging insightful feminist ideas and findings with the validity and usefulness of a clear determination of backlash politics, determining the decisive potential for actual societal transformation triggered by recognised backlash dynamics in German political discourse. The chosen approach of a Qualitative Content Analysis of a total of 84 statements given in the German Bundestag in between the introduction of the concept up until the political summer break of 2023, covering the timespan of January 2022 to June 2023, not only enabled structured insights into the discussions on FFP in the German Parliament, but also allowed to determine which criteria of backlash politics have been met to what extent as well as how the discourse mirrored the dynamics of competing ideologies around FFP.

The results indeed indicate that while the *AfD* has shown outward opposition to 'gender ideology', the actions of the party's MPs go beyond mere resistance, and constitute efforts to preserve and reinforce hierarchical structures in society and politics in response to their (assumed) erosion (Wittenius & Lange 2021, as cited in Landes et al. 2021). In the interplay with the strong engagement for gender equality in general and particularly for FFP coming from progressive stakeholders like the *SPD* and especially the Greens, a significant level of polarisation amounting to backlash politics has therefore been observable in the German Parliament, catalysing itself in the apparent emergence and intensification of a new political cleavage that might mirror the developments around the issue of gender equality already detected at the UN level (Cupać & Ebetürk 2020).

The push for and application of extraordinary goals and tactics as well as the challenge of dominant scripts by backlash actors has thereby already considerably impacted the discursive dynamics in the German Bundestag, reinforced by typical companions of backlash politics. The *AfD* has consequently managed to change its position from the stance at the end of the political spectrum towards a central stakeholder in discussions on FFP in the German Bundestag. The supporters of FFP, on the other hand, tend to already anticipate rebellion against the FFP strategy when delivering their statements in the Bundestag debates, which signifies the entrance of backlash dynamics in overall political discourse, with considerable implications for the

German political dynamics overall, including a possible retrograde shift as well as institutional change should the objectives of backlash actors be partly or fully implemented.

Due to the challenges in strengthening the resilience of the FFP concept – for example considering the overall very limited participation and commitment of the MPs in debates on the topic as well as the close linking of the strategy with Annalena Baerbock in the position of Foreign Minister – the overall outlook for the future viability and chances of survival of the German FFP agenda beyond changes of government is therefore disillusioning. A general orientation towards and support of international norms and institutions as well as civil society could contribute to compensating FFP counter-movements in the German political discourse and combatting the far-reaching effects of the identified backlash dynamics.

The question and danger, however, is that due to the way FFP has been negotiated in German political discourse, a constructive further development and broad establishment both at the political level and in relation to civil society has not been or will not be possible, particularly with the current political climate characterised by attacks on liberal norms and transformative policy approaches as well as the ever-increasing polarisation of gender equality issues. It indeed seems too early for FFP to have yet built up the required resilience, and under the current circumstances it may not even have the chance to do so. This evolution is arguably even more likely in light of the upcoming elections in Germany in February 2025, with an expected rise of conservative and far-right forces, which could ultimately intensify the polarisation and backlash dynamics even more.

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Appendix 1: Overview over the Selected Material

Extract Number	Date	Name	First Name	Party	Type of Contribution
1	12/01/2022	Baerbock	Annalena	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
2	17/02/2022	Harder- Kühnel	Mariana Iris	AfD	Speech
3	17/02/2022	Schauws	Ulle	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
4	23/03/2022	Dobrindt	Alexander	CDU / CSU	Speech
5	23/03/2022	Merz	Friedrich	CDU / CSU	Speech
6	23/03/2022	Baerbock	Annalena	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
7	23/03/2022	Kreuter	Stefan	AfD	Speech
8	23/03/2022	Frohnmaier	Markus	AfD	Speech
9	23/03/2022	Banaszak	Felix	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
10	25/03/2022	Kleinwächter	Norbert	AfD	Speech
11	27/04/2022	Baerbock	Annalena	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
12	13/05/2022	Spellerberg	Merle	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
13	01/06/2022	Keuter	Stefan	AfD	Speech
14	22/06/2022	Dr. Kippels	Georg	CDU / CSU	Question
15	22/06/2022	Annen	Niels	SPD	Response to Question
16	22/06/2022	Friedhoff	Dietmar	AfD	Question
17	08/07/2022	Brugger	Agnieszka	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
18	08/07/2022	Spellerberg	Merle	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech

19	07/09/2022	Heinrich	Gabriela	SPD	Speech
20	07/09/2022	Ziemiak	Paul	CDU / CSU	Speech
21	22/09/2022	Engelhardt	Heike	SPD	Speech
22	28/09/2022	Dr. Lührmann	Anna	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Response to Question
23	29/09/2022	Baerbock	Annalena	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
24	29/09/2022	Heinrich	Gabriela	SPD	Speech
25	29/09/2022	Nouripour	Omid	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
26	29/09/2022	Bär	Dorothee	CDU / CSU	Speech
27	29/09/2022	Dr. Schmid	Nils	SPD	Speech
28	29/09/2022	Kaddor	Lamya	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
29	29/09/2022	Schwabe	Frank	SPD	Speech
30	29/09/2022	Wissler	Janine	Die Linke	Speech
31	12/10/2022	Dr. Leikert	Katja	CDU / CSU	Speech
32	12/10/2022	Heinrich	Gabriela	SPD	Speech
33	12/10/2022	Keuter	Stefan	AfD	Speech
34	12/10/2022	Kaddor	Lamya	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
35	12/10/2022	Akbulut	Gökay	Die Linke	Speech
36	12/10/2022	Semet	Rainer	FDP	Speech
37	12/10/2022	Radwan	Alexander	CDU / CSU	Speech
38	12/10/2022	Türk- Nachbaur	Derya	SPD	Speech
39	12/10/2022	Spellerberg	Merle	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
40	20/10/2022	Schäfer	Jamila	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech

41	20/10/2022	Erndl	Thomas	CDU / CSU	Speech
42	21/10/2022	Dr. Wadephul	Johann David	CDU / CSU	Speech
43	09/11/2022	Alt	Renata	FDP	Speech
44	09/11/2022	Erndl	Thomas	CDU / CSU	Speech
45	09/11/2022	Dr. Schmid	Nils	SPD	Speech
46	09/11/2022	Dr. Lührmann	Anna	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Response to Question
47	11/11/2022	Dr. Scheer	Nina	SPD	Speech
48	23/11/2022	Frohnmaier	Markus	AfD	Speech
49	23/11/2022	Düring	Deborah	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
50	14/12/2022	Chrupalla	Tino	AfD	Speech
51	15/12/2022	Kaddor	Lamya	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
52	15/12/2022	Trittin	Jürgen	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
53	15/12/2022	Bär	Dorothee	CDU / CSU	Speech
54	15/12/2022	Amtsberg	Luise	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
55	15/12/2022	Schwabe	Frank	SPD	Speech
56	19/01/2023	Röttgen	Norbert	CDU / CSU	Speech
57	19/01/2023	Türk- Nachbaur	Derya	SPD	Speech
58	20/01/2023	Schwabe	Frank	SPD	Speech
59	20/01/2023	Nastic	Zaklin	Die Linke	Speech
60	26/01/2023	Dr. Kaufmann	Malte	AfD	Speech
61	03/03/2023	Dr. Leikert	Katja	CDU / CSU	Speech
62	03/03/2023	Wundrak	Joachim	AfD	Speech

63	03/03/2023	Nastic	Zaklin	Die Linke	Speech
64	03/03/2023	Lucks	Max	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
65	03/03/2023	Radwan	Alexander	CDU / CSU	Speech
66	16/03/2023	Dr. Curio	Gottfried	AfD	Speech
67	16/03/2023	von Storch	Beatirx	AfD	Speech
68	17/03/2023	Harder- Kühnel	Mariana Iris	AfD	Speech
69	17/03/2023	Schwaus	Ulle	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
70	17/03/2023	Höchst	Nicole	AfD	Speech
71	17/03/2023	Breymaier	Leni	SPD	Speech
72	17/03/2023	Heinrich	Gabriela	SPD	Speech
73	29/03/2023	Braun	Jürgen	AfD	Speech
74	19/04/2023	Brandner	Stephan	AfD	Speech
75	19/04/2023	Hahn	Florian	CDU / CSU	Speech
76	27/04/2023	Brugger	Agnieszka	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
77	27/04/2023	Keuter	Stefan	AfD	Speech
78	27/04/2023	Vogler	Kathrin	Die Linke	Speech
79	27/04/2023	Amtsberg	Luise	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech
80	27/04/2023	Erndl	Thomas	CDU / CSU	Speech
81	27/04/2023	Radwan	Alexander	CDU / CSU	Speech
82	28/04/2023	Otten	Gerold	AfD	Speech
83	21/06/2023	Brandner	Stephan	AfD	Question
84	21/06/2023	Emmerich	Marcel	Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	Speech

Source: Own work based on Deutscher Bundestag 2023.

Appendix 2: Overview over the Categories for Coding

Main Category	Sub-Category	Explanation / General Examples	Exemplary Extracts from Statements	Number of Applications
Speaker	Name			53
	First Name			53
	Party Affiliation	AfD, Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen, CDU / CSU, Die Linke, SPD		53
Setting	Date			84
	Session			84
	Agenda Item			84
	Topic (Keyword)	Foreign policy, International Women's Day, Iran, other countries, resources / financial issues, security policy, special fund for the federal armed forces,		84
	Context around Excerpt	Explanation of foreign policy approach and priorities, understanding of security within NATO, welcoming the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, combining FFP and feminist development		84

		policy, world championship in Qatar, violations of human rights, conflict in Ethiopia, international police missions, sanctions against Iran,		
Type of Contribution	Speech	Usual type of contribution in the form of a speech in the German Bundestag		78
	Intervention	Contribution to another speaker's statement		1
	Question	Question to another politician		2
	Response to Question	Response to a question posed by another politician		3
Position on FFP	Positive	Support of FFP	"This is not a fuss! It's not a fuss, it's in keeping with the times." (Extract 6, Baerbock 2022)	38
	Negative	Opposition to FFP	"This is not the values-based and Feminist Foreign Policy you like to talk about. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a disgrace, and a moral declaration of bankruptcy for the traffic light [coalition government]."	34

			(Extract 30, Wissler 2022)	
	Conditional	Support of or opposition to FFP under certain conditions	"For me, the situation of women in Iran is the litmus test for Feminist Foreign Policy. Words alone are not enough, but action must also follow." (Extract 53, Bär 2022)	7
Justification	International Norms and Institutions	Human rights, representation, CEDAW, WPS Agenda,	"Women's rights are human rights." (Extract 38, Türk- Nachbaur 2022)	36
	Security	Peace, conflicts, crises, war, human security,	"The German response to this crisis can only be: the establishment of energy sovereignty — for which we need nuclear and coal-fired power — a Bundeswehr capable of defence with defence technology made in Germany, the consistent alignment of foreign policy with Germany's national interests and a strong Germany as a mediator." (Extract 8, Frohnmaier 2022).	72
	Values	Justice, solidarity, sustainability,	"The Islamic values represented by the mullahs in Iran are clearly not our Western values."	43

		(Extract 33, Keuter 2022).	
Resources	Finances, budget,	"You can pursue a feminist foreign policy for all I care, [] but not with this budget for the Bundeswehr." (Extract 5, Merz 2022)	23
Science	Statistics, studies, indicators	"We are experiencing worldwide that the deterioration of the rights of girls and women is an indicator of the strengthening of authoritarian forces." (Extract 1, Baerbock 2022)	1
Interests	Interests of women and girls or other traditionally marginalised groups, interests of the German population, conflict of interests between the German population and societies abroad,	"We in the AfD are once again calling for a foreign policy that is guided by the interests of the German people, which places and pursues their interests at the centre." (Extract 13, 2022)	46
Self-Reflexivity	Awareness for one's own position within power hierarchies, critical self-evaluation and interest in self-	"Here too, we need to be honest and reflect on where our behaviour contributes to other people's insecurity."	5

	improvement of the FFP agenda, 	(Extract 12, Spellerberg 2022)	
Concept / Definition	Fundamental principles of FFP, declaration of the approach to foreign affairs as feminist, 'gender ideology', transformative agenda, diversity,	"All of this is part of a comprehensive, values-led foreign policy that acts quickly and pragmatically in acute crises and does not spend a lot of time arguing and, on the other hand, has a strategic approach that looks beyond its own horizons and into the coming decades." (Extract 6, Baerbock 2022)	79
Implementation	Discrepancy between concept of FFP & implementation in reality, claims and promises versus actions,	"In its coalition agreement, the left-yellow government has enshrined a value-based and Feminist Foreign Policy. Now it is delivering weapons into the hands of white, heterosexual men in Ukraine. The German government also announced a gender action plan for the whole world in its coalition agreement, and now it is sending Robert Habeck to kneel in Qatar." (Extract 8, Frohnmaier 2022)	58

Backlash Indicators	Retrograde Objective	Abolishment of FFP, traditional gender roles, traditional understanding of security (focused on protecting borders),	"So my appeal to you: remember the beginnings of International Women's Day, the good and right fight of real women's campaigners and the successes of this fight: freedom, equal rights, protection from violence." (Extract 2, Harder-Kühnel 2022).	12
	Extraordinary Goals and Tactics	Challenge of dominant scripts and institutions, rejection of commonly recognised norms and principles,	"What is that supposed to be, Ms Baerbock? Do you want to drop tampons over Tehran?" (Extract 2, Harder-Kühnel 2022).	27
	Nostalgia	Positive evaluation of the past, wish to return to a previous condition or situation,	"For decades – it has to be said – we have communicated sensibly, maintained diplomatic standards and cultivated economic exchange. These have been the guiding principles of German foreign policy in recent decades." (Extract 50, Chrupalla 2022).	6
	Emotional Appeals	Stories of individuals suffering from war, violence,	"To emphasise the Bundeswehr here and then say in the same sentence:	16

		and poverty, provocation of empathy and compassion,	"Okay, Bundeswehr and no more of this feminist foreign policy", that breaks my heart." (Extract 6, Baerbock 2022)	
	Taboo Breaking	Scandalous statements, provocations of outrage and shock, breaking with and shifting boundaries within discourses,	"But don't be surprised if your matriarchy suddenly wakes up in a patriarchy of a completely new quality. However, this will not be so colourful and woke, but probably burka black." (Extract 2, Harder-Kühnel 2022)	19
Stylistic Elements	Jokes	Use of humour, teasing, making fun of someone or something,	"[] and it starts with individual definitions according to the motto of Pippi Longstocking: I make the world, widde widde as I like it." (Extract 13, Keuter 2022)	1
	Irony	Lack of seriousness,	"Congratulations to this self-proclaimed progressive government for its values-based foreign policy!" (Extract 63, Nastic 2023).	16
	Rhetorical Question	Highlighting something obvious or taken for granted, attempting to	"But how does German foreign policy react, how does the German Foreign Minister,	4

		support a certain message or argument,	who has made feminist foreign policy her programme and her claim?" (Extract 56, Röttgen 2023)	
Reactions	Further speakers	Number of further MPs involved in the debate		N/A
	Questions	Number and type of questions posed as a reaction to given statements		5
	Positive Comments	Positive engagement with given statements		15
	Negative Comments	Negative engagement with given statements		79
	Applause	Support for given statements		122

Source: Hargrave & Langengen 2021, 591-592; Russell 2018; with own adaptations and extensions based on Bates et al. 2014, Shaw 2002, Lukoschat & Köcher 2021, Alter & Zürn 2020 & Deutscher Bundestag 2023.