Political leadership and gendered multilevel games in foreign policy

KARIN AGGESTAM AND JACQUI TRUE *

In these times of increasing polarization, gender is one of the major fault-lines in contemporary global politics.¹ This article analyses how political leaders harness gender dynamics to further their power, status and authority to act in foreign policy. In recent decades, two major trends in global politics are apparent. On the one hand, there has been a noticeable promotion of pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy. Gender equality is now a salient issue in international relations, alongside human rights, multilateralism and liberal democracy. Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has become an integral part of the normative international policy framework on peacebuilding; and gender equality is one of the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).² Moreover, national and international security is increasingly linked to women’s security. Several studies have shown how the level of violence against women correlates with a state’s levels of stability and peacefulness.³ This line of argument was stressed, for example, by former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who advocated women’s empowerment not only as the ‘right thing to do’ but also as a ‘smart’ policy and a vital component of US national security.⁴ Gender mainstreaming has been widely adopted by international institutions, organizations and states. Women’s participation and representation in peace operations and negotiations have gained increasing visibility and importance in global affairs, with a number of international policy institutes and organizations tracking and mapping women’s descriptive representation (women’s numerical presence in representative positions). The WPS agenda has even become one of the core foreign policy pillars of some states, such as Australia, Canada, Mexico, Norway, South Africa

* This article is part of the special section in the March 2021 issue of International Affairs on ‘New directions in foreign policy analysis’, guest-edited by Amnon Aran, Klaus Brummer and Karen E. Smith.

¹ Ronald Ingelhart and Pippa Norris, Rising tide: gender equality and cultural change around the world (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

² Jacqui True and Antje Wiener, ‘Everyone wants (a) peace: the dynamics of rhetoric and practice on “Women, Peace and Security”’, International Affairs 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 553–74.

³ See e.g. Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli and Chad F. Emmett, Sex and world peace (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁴ Valerie Hudson and Patricia Leidl, The Hillary doctrine (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
and Sweden.⁵ For these states, the promotion of pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy is seen as a chance to exercise global and regional leadership and to undertake ‘nation-branding’, as well as ‘smart’ diplomacy and economics.⁶ As the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau expressed it, ‘gender equality is an opportunity, not a threat’.⁷

On the other hand, we have also witnessed an opposite trend in contemporary global politics, with growing resistance to pro-gender equality norms and increasing difficulties in sustaining previously agreed multilateral commitments to women’s human rights. This trend reflects a noticeable ‘remasculinization’ of international politics. A growing number of male populist political leaders are now forming governments in large and powerful as well as in smaller states. Most of these political leaders mobilize an antagonistic politics based on gendered dynamics, combining misogyny, anti-elitism and racism to challenge what they generally perceive as an ‘unjust world order’.⁸ Discontent with neo-liberalism, combined with the economic inequalities and uncertainties generated by globalization and the concomitant financial, conflictual, migration and health crises, has fuelled support for both far-right and Islamic extremist movements that recruit members by promoting practices harmful to women. Hence gendered dynamics are strikingly present in the resurgence of populism and radical forms of nationalism, and of violent extremism, which threaten the liberal world order from within. Populist political leaders in a diverse set of countries, including Brazil, Hungary, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Turkey and the United States, share an ambition to reverse the feminist gains of recent decades, together with regimes in other states such as Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The subordination of women fits these leaders’ strongly held world-view that the ‘natural’ political order is based on male domination and gender segregation.⁹

The adoption of an ‘alpha male foreign policy’ by a number of countries is one reason why a dozen female world leaders recently warned that a ‘war on women’ is eroding women’s rights globally.¹⁰ As yet, though, there are few studies that directly address gender in foreign policy analysis (FPA).¹¹ This lacuna in the

---

⁵ See Foreign Policy Analysis 16: 2, 2020, pp. 143–249, special issue on ‘Gender and foreign policy analysis’, guest-edited by Karin Aggestam and Jacqui True.

⁶ Karin Aggestam and Jacqui True, ‘Gendering foreign policy: a comparative framework for analysis’, Foreign Policy Analysis 16: 2, 2020, pp. 143–62; Penny Griffin, ‘The everyday practices of global finance: gender and regulatory politics of “diversity”’, International Affairs 95: 6, Nov. 2019, pp. 1215–34.

⁷ Quoted in Adman Chapnick, ‘The origins of Canada’s feminist foreign policy’, International Journal 74: 2, 2019, p. 197.

⁸ David Cadier, How populism spills over into foreign policy (Brussels: Carnegie Europe, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), www.carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/78102. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 23 Nov. 2020.)

⁹ Peter Beinhart, ‘The new authoritarians are waging war on women’, The Atlantic, Jan.–Feb. 2019, p. 14.

¹⁰ Susan Glasser, ‘Trump’s alpha male foreign policy’, Global Politico, 27 Feb. 2017; Daniel W. Drezner, ‘Immature leadership: Donald Trump and the American presidency’, International Affairs 96: 2, March 2020, pp. 383–400; Elizabeth Pearson, ‘Extremism and toxic masculinity: the man question re-posed’, International Affairs 95: 6, Nov. 2019, pp. 1251–70; Kate Lyons, ‘Rise of the “strongman”: dozens of female world leaders warn women’s rights being eroded’, Guardian, 28 Feb. 2019.

¹¹ For exceptions, see Karin Aggestam and Anna Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish feminist foreign policy in the making’, Ethics and International Affairs 30: 3, 2016, pp. 323–34; Sylvia Bashevkin, Women as foreign policy leaders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Hudson and Leidl, The Hillary doctrine; Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, ‘Norm entrepreneurship in international politics’, Foreign Policy Analysis 13: 3, 2017, pp. 701–21.
research is surprising, considering the increasing international diffusion both of pro-gender equality norms and of a populism that draws on misogyny. 12

The overarching aim of this article is to generate new theory on political leadership and gender dynamics in foreign policy. It explores the ways in which political leaders, as situated actors, navigate and harness pro- and anti-gender norms in global politics to further their power, status and authority to act in foreign policy. Our definition of ‘political leaders’ includes members of the ‘foreign policy executive’ of a country, placing emphasis on formal positions linked to authority, resources and legitimacy. We elucidate gendered dynamics by proposing a novel concept of ‘gendered multilevel games’ that emanate from the intersections between the domestic, international and transnational levels, and reach within and across states.

One of the advantages of FPA is that it recognizes the interplay between the domestic and the international. Gourevitch coined these international influences on domestic politics as the ‘second image reversed’, arguing that a focus on the different forms of state obscures the transnational connection between structures and interests, and the role of politics in foreign policy-making. 13 Linking domestic politics to international relations, Putnam advanced the concept of ‘two-level games’ to capture how political leaders are both constrained and enabled by the interaction between these contexts in international negotiations. 14 Different approaches to political leadership all seek to navigate the demands not only of domestic and international politics, but also of transnational politics and of global civil society, which increasingly influence foreign policy-making. Yet gendered dynamics and practices affecting foreign policy leadership have not been systematically addressed. We argue that political leadership is central to foreign policy, while also recognizing that structural and hierarchical principles of patriarchy are historically ingrained in practices of leadership, diplomacy, state identities, institutions and global order. 15 Hence, the new concept of ‘gendered multilevel games’ provides us with theoretical and empirical knowledge of the distinct ways in which individual political leaders, as situated actors, gain power and authority by manoeuvring among gendered leadership, gendered institutions and gendered structures in foreign policy. The concept also directly confronts the problem of agency and structure in foreign policy.

The article proceeds as follows. The first part, based on a review of the existing literature, sets out why gender matters in the exercise of foreign policy leadership. It identifies areas where more scholarship is needed to explain the gendered dynamics among foreign policy leaders. It also puts forward the concept of ‘gendered multilevel games’, which is contingent on the dynamics generated

12 Karen Smith, ‘Missing in analysis: women in foreign policy-making’, Foreign Policy Analysis 16: 1, 2019, pp. 130–41.
13 Peter Gourevitch, ‘The second image reversed: the international sources of domestic politics’, International Organization 32: 4, 1978, pp. 881–912.
14 Robert D. Putnam, ‘Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games’, International Organization 42: 3, 1988, pp. 427–60.
15 Cynthia Enloe, The big push (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Jacqui True, ‘Anarchy and patriarchy in world politics’, in Hidemi Suganami and Madeline Carr, eds, The anarchical society at 40 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 234–53.
within and across gendered institutions and domestic, international and transnational structures. The second part uses four empirical vignettes of gendered multilevel games to illustrate the analytical utility of the concept and the variation of gendered performances at play in different foreign policy domains. The final part considers the implications of gendered multilevel games for understanding how political leaders harness pro- and anti-gender norms in foreign policy.

**Political leadership and gendered multilevel games**

Political leaders play a central role in navigating and shaping foreign policy change and continuity. Leaders leverage their own personal resources, such as their experience, ability to communicate well and rapport with followers. They deploy ideas and ideology and build coalitions and networks in order to promote policy change, manoeuvring within and across existing domestic and international structures. Among the range of factors influencing foreign policy leaders is the role of gender, with respect to both how leadership is pursued (process) and what policy change is sought (substance). Yet to date the study of foreign policy leadership has been for the most part gender-blind. As Karen Smith argues, ‘the sex of the decision-maker and the gendered nature of the decision-making processes have generally been left out of the picture’.

**Why gender matters in foreign policy leadership**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the ‘great man theory’, which views leadership as derived from something a person is born with, not something acquired, with the implication—given the historical record—that most natural born leaders are men rather than women. These studies also tend to disregard the importance of contexts and followers. By contrast, we view foreign policy leadership largely as a relational and contextual practice, following broader studies of leadership, and as a process ‘that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation’.

The large number of studies on foreign policy leadership reflects the theoretical diversity in the field. Some studies emphasize the roles played by individual actors and the impact of belief-systems, personalities and other psychological characteristics, while others stress the milieus within which they operate and the structural contexts that enable and constrain leadership. Yet very few of these

---

16 Valerie Hudson, ‘Foreign policy analysis: actor-specific theory and the ground of international relations’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1: 1, 2005, pp. 1–30.
17 Smith, ‘Missing in analysis’.
18 Hudson and Benjamin S. Day, *Foreign policy analysis: classic and contemporary theory*, 3rd edn (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), p. 39.
19 R. A. W. Rhodes and Paul ’t Hart, *The Oxford handbook of political leadership* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
20 Bernard Bass and Ralph Stogdill, quoted in Thomas Preston, ‘Leadership and foreign policy analysis’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
21 For an overview, see Lisbeth Aggestam and Markus Johansson, ‘The leadership paradox in EU foreign policy’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55: 6, 2017, pp. 1203–20.
studies highlight gender as a relevant variable. In the field of FPA, Hermann’s seminal work is frequently cited because of her situational definition of leadership, which includes factors such as personality, groups, relationships, contexts and outcomes. George’s concept of ‘operational code’ in foreign policy is also useful, since it reflects the impact of political leaders’ philosophical and instrumental beliefs on their diagnostic capacity. Even so, gender is not incorporated as a factor influencing the others. At the same time, leadership scholars suggest that ‘the body matters’ as much as personality, and that gender schemas are powerful filters that influence not only behaviour, but also how leadership is understood, perceived and interpreted. Narrowing the scope of study, Burns has suggested a simple typology based on a distinction between transactional (self-interested, power-orientated) and transformational (in pursuit of higher goals and moral principles) leadership. Here, gender may affect the inclination to one leadership type or the other. But while the question of whether women are more likely to enact a transformational leadership style and men a transactional style is debated in the business leadership literature, this typology has not been pursued systematically in the study of foreign policy. Some foreign policy literature has explored the role and influence of women in foreign policy leadership, although this does not necessarily involve analysis of gender as a set of attributes and norms affecting both male and female leaders. Genovese found in a 1993 study that women leaders tended to act in more masculine and aggressive ways in foreign policy to overcome the perception of feminine weakness, while male leaders (consciously or subconsciously) wield masculine gender identities with both positive and negative outcomes for foreign policy. Subsequently, several scholars have begun to explore the somewhat novel and increasing phenomenon of women in foreign policy leadership positions. Bashevkin’s recent analysis of four female US secretaries of state since 1980 has broken the gendered assumption that women leaders resemble the female electorate in their foreign policy preferences and that they are doves on defence compared with male leaders. Importantly, she notes that not all women foreign policy leaders have supported pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy.

In this article, we highlight the ways in which both sex (the political agency, leadership and statecraft of men and women) and gender (feminine and masculine...
line characteristics) are used in foreign policy. The distinction between the two concepts enables us to capture how both women and men perform and act according to gender norms, and how gendered structures and symbolism pertaining to institutions and states influence and shape foreign policy processes and decision-making.\textsuperscript{30} Foreign policy leadership is a form of relational power \textit{vis-a-vis} followers—citizens, other states and leaders, and global publics—and, as feminist International Relations scholars argue, power is inherently gendered. ‘Doing gender, doing power and doing leadership are frequently linked because the traits associated with traditional leadership are masculine.’\textsuperscript{31} Both men and women can display leadership, but leadership traits themselves—such as individualism, dominance, authority and the ability to use force—are socially ascribed to men and generally understood as masculine. As a result, the experience of leadership will frequently be different for women and for men, and women’s leadership may struggle to be recognized as such. At the same time, popular business literature has suggested that a ‘female advantage’ in leadership might be emerging with the growing recognition of the need for greater emotional intelligence and ‘authentic’ leadership.\textsuperscript{32} This theory could be seen as a corollary to the increasing importance of ‘soft power’ in foreign policy and moreover, to the promotion of gender equality as a form of ‘smart power’.

Hence, beyond the sex of the decision-maker, leadership styles can be compared both in terms of their projection of masculine and feminine power and in terms of their foreign policy approach. Those male and female leaders who depart from traditional masculine norms of leadership and power must be able to project their different voices in alternative ways—which are increasingly available with the rise of transnational politics conducted via social media and of diverse global audiences. The scholarship on gender and leadership outside the FPA field argues that a balance of men and women in leadership positions should allow the differences between masculine and feminine approaches to come to the fore.\textsuperscript{33} On the basis of gender differences in voting behaviour and the findings of public opinion polling on foreign policy,\textsuperscript{34} we might expect that women’s political interests in non-military, diplomatic solutions to insecurity and conflict will be balanced against traditional military approaches, which at present disproportionately reflect men’s political interests.

One striking characteristic in the recent rise of populist leaders in global politics is the way most of them exercise government power on the basis of a direct leader-

\textsuperscript{30} Carol Cohn, ‘Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals’, \textit{Signs} 12: 4, 1987, pp. 687–718; Sylvia Bashevkin, ‘Numerical and policy representation on the international stage’, \textit{International Political Science Review} 35: 4, 2014, pp. 409–29.

\textsuperscript{31} Fletcher, ‘The paradox of postheroic leadership’, p. 651.

\textsuperscript{32} Sally Helgeson, \textit{The female advantage: women’s way of leadership} (New York: Penguin Random House, 1990); Alice H. Eagly, ‘Female leadership advantage and disadvantage: resolving the contradictions’, \textit{Psychology of Women Quarterly} 31: 1, 2007, pp. 1–12.

\textsuperscript{33} Deborah Rhodes, \textit{The difference that gender makes to leadership} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Serena Simoni, ‘Queens of narco-trafficking: breaking gender hierarchy in Colombia’, \textit{International Affairs} 94: 6, Nov. 2018, pp. 1257–68.

\textsuperscript{34} Joshua Goldstein, \textit{War and gender} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Holsti and Rosenau, ‘The foreign policy beliefs’.

\textit{International Affairs} 97: 2, 2021
Political leadership and gendered multilevel games in foreign policy

Followers are mobilized using a rhetoric that frames transnational elites, liberals (including feminists and gender experts), multilateralism and international institution-building as a threat to the people and the nation. Many of these populist political leaders are distinguished by a style that favours bilateralism, centralism and a personal ‘un-diplomatic’ style of leadership that gives them greater room for manoeuvre in both domestic and global politics.

In this article, we limit our analysis to foreign policy leaders of states. Unlike non-state actors, who may set an agenda by advocating a specific norm or policy, foreign policy decision-makers can take advantage of their positions and their relative (gendered) power to redefine the ‘national interest’. Below, we advance the new concept of ‘gendered multilevel games’ as an analytical approach to examining the power, authority and practice of foreign policy leaders. Through this concept, we seek to explain how foreign policy leadership varies and how political leaders ‘do gender’ to achieve specific foreign policy goals.

Theorizing gendered multilevel games

One of the major debates in the field of FPA relates to agency and structure. In this article, we view human agents and structures as fundamentally interrelated and mutually constituted. However, there are few if any contributions to this debate in FPA that explicitly problematize gendered structures, hierarchies and political actors. Building on the analysis of why gender matters in foreign policy, we propose a novel concept of ‘gendered multilevel games’ for use in the critical assessment of foreign policy leadership. Inspired by Harding’s seminal work on structuration and standpoint theory, the concept unpacks the gendered and mutual constitution of agent and structure. As such, it is distinct from the ‘iterative games’ concept of neo-liberal institutionalists.

The metaphor of games suggests there is an element of play and performance in the diplomatic interaction. Feminist theorists have long understood the performative aspect of gender, the ‘stylised repetition of acts’ in any social interaction that reflect specific narratives, for example, highlighting that the archetypal diplomat or political leader has a male body. Yet gender is not just an attribute of individuals, but a system of signification and meaning; thus it affects actors’ self-understanding and perceived interests. Gendered norms establish biological

---

35 Johannes Plageman and Sandra Destradi, ‘Populism and foreign policy: the case of India’, Foreign Policy Analysis 15: 1, 2019, p. 285.
36 Plageman and Destradi, ‘Populism and foreign policy’, pp. 285–98.
37 Davies and True, ‘Norm entrepreneurship in international politics’.
38 Walter Carlsnaes, ‘The agency–structure problem in foreign policy analysis’, International Studies Quarterly 36: 3, 1992, pp. 345–70.
39 Sandra Harding, The feminist standpoint theory reader: intellectual and political controversies (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).
40 Judith Butler, Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 179.
41 Iver Neumann, ‘The body of the diplomat’, European Journal of International Relations 14: 4, 2008, pp. 671–95.
42 Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, ‘Power in international politics’, International Organization 59: 1, 2005, pp. 39–72; Manni Crone, ‘It’s a man’s world: carnal spectatorship and the dissonant masculinities in Islamic State videos’, International Affairs 96: 3, May 2020, pp. 573–91.
Karin Aggestam and Jacqui True

differences ‘not only as a natural fact but as the ontological basis for political and social differences’. They do not just legitimate differences and inequalities; they produce them. In times of crisis and upheaval, which are frequent in foreign policy, gendered norms which create the illusion of fixed and stable structures reassert boundaries—defining identity, the home, public and private, and the nation-state.

Recognizing gender as performative and a productive form of power, we view foreign policy through the lens of gendered games—involving gendered behaviour, symbolism and interaction. Because diplomacy is social and dynamic, political leaders can be attentive to shifts in the intersubjective consensus among other leaders and states as well as to their domestic constituencies, and in response may reshape both foreign policy processes and outcomes. How political leaders, as situated actors, perceive and navigate these gendered dynamics, whether consciously or unconsciously, is central to the analysis of gendered multilevel games. Moreover, our approach challenges the domestic/international divide in foreign policy by recognizing that the state itself consists of multiple actors and bureaucratic processes. Also, foreign policy leadership is increasingly about harnessing the power of global networks and publics to address common and often intractable challenges, as much as it is about managing interstate relations.

Figure 1: Gendered multilevel games in foreign policy

To analyse the dynamics at play in these gendered games, three interrelated and mutually constituted levels have to be addressed: (1) gendered leadership (in and among individual political agents); (2) gendered institutions (in and among states, involving branding and symbolism); and (3) gendered structures (global interactions

---

43 Helen Kinsella, ‘Securing the civilian: sex and gender in the laws of war’, in Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, eds, Power in global governance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 271.

44 Aida A. Hozic and Jacqui True, ‘Making feminist sense of the global financial crisis’, in Aida A. Hozic and Jacqui True, eds, Scandalous economics: gender and the politics of financial crises (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 11.

45 Jessica T. Matthews, ‘Power shift’, Foreign Affairs 76: 1, 1997, pp. 51–66.
of state and non-state actors based on pro- and anti-gender norms and principles). By paying attention to these levels, we can identify the favouring or restraining conditions of agency and practice that help to explain foreign policy change. In particular, the concept of gendered multilevel games highlights how specific favouring domestic, international or transnational structures create ‘windows of opportunity’ for the diffusion of or resistance to pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy. We argue that the gendered dynamics at play in these games generate a more precise understanding of how power and authority are exercised in foreign policy. Political leaders are constantly mediating a complex international social world of gender symbolism and normative structures which affect how states, non-state actors and individuals present themselves and are perceived. In this world, gender generates power and authority from ‘systems of signification and meaning’ that are socially produced and affect political actors’ self-understandings and perceived interests. Consequently, the application of the concept of gendered multilevel games sensitizes our empirical analysis of situated political actors to the material lived experience of human beings where gender intersects with, and often reinforces, other social categories of inequality and identity, such as race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, nationality status and so forth. For instance, contemporary global incentive structures may provide an overarching rationale, such as economic growth or sustainable peace, to enable political leaders to use gender games to advance pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy. At the same time, it takes time to change deeply entrenched patriarchal structures in states and in global politics. If the present rule-based liberal order, which promotes international norms such as human rights and gender equality, is further eroded, the opportunities for navigating gendered multilevel games to promote outcomes conducive to gender equality in foreign policy are likely to be reduced. As such, existing patriarchal structures both constrain feminist and gender equality actions and enable resistance to them. For example, hyper-masculine performance of foreign policy, which is reflected in strong-arm tactics and displays of hard power, can be a game of political contestation embedded in antagonistic (racist, sexist, contested sovereignty) discourses that effectively mobilize anti-gender norms while also resisting pro-gender equality norms.

In sum, adept political leaders can manoeuvre these gendered dynamics vis-à-vis other leaders, institutions and structures to reconfigure diplomatic games, and to reshape and legitimize foreign policy outcomes. But these gendered dynamics are also contextual and conditional, and vary from one specific foreign policy domain to another. Thus the power and authority of political leaders as situated actors to restructure foreign policy are contingent on their capacity to act and their understanding of the gendered dynamics of the situation.

46 George Karavas, ‘How images frame China’s role in African development’, *International Affairs* 96: 3, May 2020, pp. 667–90.
47 Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, ‘Power in global governance’, in Barnett and Duvall, eds, *Power in global governance*, pp. 1–32.
48 Jacqui True and Antje Wiener, ‘Everyone wants (a) peace: the dynamics of rhetoric and practice on “Women, Peace and Security”’, *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 553–74.
Variation in gendered multilevel games

In this section, we highlight the analytical utility of gendered multilevel games and show how their distinct dynamics are played out in foreign policy leadership and practice. We also unpack the variation in how political leaders in both small and large states harness gendered leadership, institutions and structures to further specific foreign policy interests and outcomes. Four vignettes of gendered multilevel games are analysed: (1) hyper-masculine leadership and revisionist foreign policy; (2) normative leadership and gendered nation-branding; (3) compassionate leadership and gendered transnational symbolism; and (4) contested leadership on pro- and anti-gender norms in foreign policy.

Hyper-masculine leadership and revisionist foreign policy

Many populist leaders tend to favour a personal, direct, hyper-masculine leadership style, which offers them greater room for manoeuvre in both domestic and global politics. They also seek to bring back national ‘greatness’ through the pursuit of a revisionist foreign policy. In this vignette, we illustrate how such a gendered multilevel game is played by US President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Most analysts agree that the Trump administration lacked a clear sense of direction about substantive foreign policy goals and doctrines. However, political leadership is seen as vital in Trump’s campaign to restore and reclaim US ‘greatness’ in world politics. This campaign is marked by an extreme sensitivity to symbolism, where status, respect and recognition are seen as critical pillars upholding American foreign policy process and practice. Trump’s political mantra of ‘making America great again’, which has been consistently used in the administration’s political rhetoric, draws heavily on gendered leadership, symbolism and anti-gender norms in global politics. Thus, following his election in 2016, Trump marked the shift in US foreign policy by espousing a practice of strong-arm tactics and seeking out opportunities for visceral male bonding with foreign political leaders. One striking example of such a hyper-masculine gendered game was the North Korea–US summit in 2018. At this meeting, Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un reinforced each other’s performance of gendered leadership by engaging in ‘masculinity contests’ over the size of the buttons they would press to release nuclear warheads, among myriad other examples.

President Trump’s leadership style enacted a gendered multilevel game through a power-oriented, macho-style, ‘winner-takes-all’ approach to foreign policy. On numerous occasions Trump used gender-loaded symbolism—for example, during the election campaign of 2016, when he repeatedly discredited the former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton by describing her as an ‘evil woman’. Likewise, he often referred to the former US president Barack Obama as a ‘weak’ accom-
modative globalist who, according to Trump, put American interests second to those of other states, resulting in a ‘national humiliation’ in which the rest of the world was ‘laughing’ at the United States.\footnote{Wolff, ‘Donald Trump’s status-driven foreign policy’, p. 106.} Trump’s claim was that this approach weakened America, endangering its rightful claim to the top position in global politics, and consequently needed to be replaced by a more power-orientated diplomacy that draws authority from traditional gender norms in global politics.\footnote{Wolff, ‘Donald Trump’s status-driven foreign policy’, pp. 99–100; Ann Tickner, Gender in International Relations (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).} This triggered a dramatic shift towards bilateralism and militarism that reflects a disbelief in multilateral diplomacy.

These changes have reshaped the institutions of US foreign policy in several ways. The antipathy towards diplomacy and pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy was illustrated by the swift removal of the word ‘gender’ from all State Department documents and representations at the UN. Moreover, several senior diplomatic positions were not filled when vacated, while diplomats as a whole were often portrayed as ‘enemies’ of the White House. As one senior US diplomat put it: ‘I’ve never seen an attack on diplomacy as damaging to both the State Department as an institution and our international influence as the one now underway.’\footnote{William Burns, ‘The demolition of US diplomacy’, Foreign Affairs, 14 Oct. 2019, p. 1.}

The other example is provided by President Erdoğan in the way he negotiates domestic, international and transnational political authority and power. Ali Bilgiç argues that Turkey under Erdoğan has shifted from a reactive to an active foreign policy.\footnote{Ali Bilgiç, Turkey, power and the West: gendered international relations and foreign policy (London: Tauris, 2016).} Erdoğan’s political leadership seeks to throw off the gendered insecurity of Turkey in relation to western hegemonic powers. Like Trump, Erdoğan relies on his connection to social and religious conservatives for his domestic hold on political power. Erdoğan’s control over the Turkish economy and society also extends to his networks with powerful businessmen who are able to profiteer while the government cracks down on labour unions and workers’ rights. The same authoritarianism also benefits male heads of household, whose dominance is assured by laws and policies restricting women’s sexual and reproductive rights, their freedom of dress and their mobility.

President Erdoğan uses the gendered symbolism of women’s bodies to assert his power both domestically and internationally. By singling out women who do not conform to conservative, religious norms he signals both the reach of his state power and his rejection of the liberal international order, along with its core principles of human rights and women’s rights. In several speeches, Erdoğan has claimed that abortion is stalling Turkey’s economic growth, and has branded the procedure ‘murder’.\footnote{Arash Ahmadi, ‘Turkey Prime Minister Erdoğan sparks row over abortion’, BBC News, 1 June 2020.} He has argued that women should be confined to the domestic sphere and dedicated to traditional roles, such as cooking and household chores.

In September 2019, the Turkish security services demanded lists of the names of all women who had had abortions in Istanbul between January 2017 and May 2019 as part of ‘terror investigations’.\footnote{Steven Sweeney, ‘Turkey slammed after launching terror investigations into those who have had abortions’, BBC News, 1 June 2020.} Turkish police stated that the informa-
tion was necessary as part of ongoing investigations into membership of armed terrorist organizations and ‘insult[s] to the president and state elders’. 58 In Turkey, existing laws require married women to gain the consent of their husbands to terminate a pregnancy. By targeting women’s bodily autonomy as a threat to national security in this crackdown, Erdoğan simultaneously played to domestic and foreign policy constituencies through his hyper-masculine political leadership. Such practices deliberately contested gender structures such as international legal norms of human rights.

Similarly, in the context of the Syrian conflict, President Erdoğan struck a ‘patriarchal bargain’ with President Trump regarding the US withdrawal from Syria, allowing Turkey to reassert its power over the ‘feminized’ Kurds and their claim to territory. 59 In that context, men apparently loyal to a Turkish-backed militia group, in a town taken from Kurdish fighters who had held it during the conflict with Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, released a video on social media depicting their abuse of the body of a dead young female Kurdish fighter, Amara Renas, while yelling ‘Allahu Akhbar’. 60 According to the Kurdish authorities, these were the very same methods used by Islamic State. 61 This event, played out in the global media, revealed the antipathy of the Turkish regime to the Kurds through the violation of a female fighter’s body. The dead woman, who had taken on the traditionally male role of fighting against violent and misogynistic Islamic extremists, symbolized a challenge to the Turkish regime’s gender norms as well as to Turkey’s territorial boundaries. President Erdoğan’s administration deliberately targets women’s rights and restrains women’s bodily autonomy as an act of power and authority that employs gendered symbolism to shore up domestic and transnational conservative religious political constituencies, and to entrench Turkey’s regional hegemony in relation to international foreign policy alliances.

**Normative leadership and gendered nation-branding**

As noted above, a number of countries have recognized the current ‘window of opportunity’ in global politics to promote gender equality and mainstreaming. Canada and Sweden provide two such examples, both enacting a gendered multi-level game through normative foreign policy leadership and explicit nation-branding through their foreign policies. As part of the rebranding of Canada as the champion of gender equality, 62 Justin Trudeau, the prime minister, has declared himself a feminist and actively sought to promote gender-inclusive governance by appointing equal numbers of men and women to cabinet positions in 2015. Canada’s rebranding can also be seen as part of the wider effort to project the country’s...
Political leadership and gendered multilevel games in foreign policy

soft power as US power diminishes in the global arena. For instance, Trudeau renamed the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development ‘Global Affairs Canada’, signalling greater engagement with non-state actors and an increased commitment to multilateralism. Moreover, he appointed a global ambassador to promote gender equality across foreign policy. This position provides an institutional mechanism for the further development of normative feminist principles in shaping foreign policy. As part of the rebranding of Canada, the Trudeau government announced in 2017 that it was embracing a feminist international assistance policy to ensure that Canada’s aid benefits women’s rights organizations globally. As a result, Canada is now among the top four donors providing aid focused on gender equality. Moreover, demonstrating its global leadership, Canada has committed itself to sending more women soldiers to international peacekeeping operations, and in 2017, at the UN Peacekeeping defence ministerial meeting in Vancouver, launched the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.

Another example of a gendered multilevel game involving gendered leadership, institutions and interactions was Trudeau’s decision to make gender equality a signature theme of Canada’s presidency of the G7 in 2018. This initiative strategically played up and benefited from the symbolism of Trudeau as a ‘feminist’ leader, from international gendered normative structures such as UN SCR 1325, and from Canada’s policy-making institutions and reputation as a gender-equal state. Mainstreaming gender was seen as a transformative G7 agenda, bringing states together to manage security threats while respecting human rights and the rule of law, and ensuring gender-sensitive policy-making processes. Gender equality was an overarching theme of the G7 summit, at which all Canadian ministers present were briefed to speak on the issue. A new Advisory Group on Gender Equality was established, which could be seen as a form of ‘transnational business feminism’, with Melinda Gates among its high-level members. Mainstreaming gender in security was a particular focus: to this end, Canada convened a meeting of the G7 Advisory Group on Gender Equality with ministers responsible for security and counterterrorism. Officials argued that not including a gender lens had national security implications, and that gender equality was crucial in the realm of hard security. Here we can see how Trudeau’s leadership navigated a multilevel gendered game, rebranding Canadian foreign policy by grasping the window of opportunity provided by the international WPS and G7 agendas to support pro-gender equality norms while managing increasing state security threats and conflicts.

63 Laura Parisi, ‘Canada’s new feminist international assistance policy: business as usual?’, Foreign Policy Analysis 16: 2, 2020, pp. 163–80.
64 Stephanie Fillion, ‘As Sweden and Canada push their feminist foreign policy, others resist the label’, Passblue, 12 Feb. 2018.
65 Canadian International Development Platform, Canada on the global stage: where to next? (Ottawa, 2018), p. 12.
66 Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein, ‘What the G-7 got right—and wrong—about gender equality’, Foreign Policy, 28 Aug. 2019.
67 Adrienne Roberts, ‘Scandalous feminism? Why we need to look beyond Justin Trudeau’, Progress in Political Economy, March 2016.
68 Cheshmak Faroud, Global Affairs Canada presentation at Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, Countering Violent Extremism working group meeting, The Hague, 8 March 2019.
In 2014, Sweden took advantage of the window of opportunity in global politics in a similar way by becoming the first country in the world to brand the government and its foreign policy as ‘feminist’. This entailed the ambitious claim that it would become the world’s ‘strongest voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights for all women and girls’.\(^{69}\) Branding Sweden’s foreign policy institutions with such gendered symbolism has attracted global attention and enhanced Sweden’s national reputation. Furthermore, Sweden has acted as a normative entrepreneur and international agenda-setter in promoting the WPS agenda. The Swedish government has derived power and authority to act in foreign policy from the rise of pro-gender equality norms in global politics. Margot Wallström in particular, during her time as the country’s foreign minister, harnessed these gendered dynamics of leadership and symbolism to advance Sweden’s feminist foreign policy. She repeatedly stressed that women’s inclusion in peacebuilding and economics is smart and efficient diplomacy.\(^{70}\) Moreover, this policy was highly visible during the time Sweden served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2017–18, and became an integral part of all Sweden’s interactions with other states. Wallström’s ability to play a different gendered game from other countries in international politics benefited from widespread and longstanding domestic support for gender equality and state feminism, and robust societal institutions promoting these principles. Feminist foreign policy engaged in multilevel gendered politics by building on Sweden’s longstanding foreign policy orientation and self-image as a ‘humanitarian superpower’. It is based on gender cosmopolitanism that refers to the ‘co-constitutive relationship between Sweden’s promotion of women’s rights, security, bodily integrity and justice at home and abroad and a commitment to the protection of all women’s entitlement to civil liberties’.\(^{71}\)

**Compassionate leadership and transnational gendered symbolism**

New Zealand, a small nation of less than 5 million people in the South Pacific, provides an insightful illustration of how a political leader, the prime minister Jacinda Ardern, has negotiated the power and authority of gendered leadership in responding to crises of international significance. Ardern’s compassionate and empathetic approach, which she projects globally, has gained widespread international recognition. Being one of the youngest women to lead a country, and only the second national leader to have a baby while in office, it was inevitable that she would receive international attention for transforming gender norms. Her speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2018 advocating global action on climate change and criticizing the US position was notable for its expression

---

\(^{69}\) Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Action plan for feminist foreign policy 2015–18* (Stockholm, 2015) https://www.government.se/495660/contentassets/66afদেও/a72b4a05d43393c843a/handlingsplan-feministisk-utrikespolitik-2018-enge.pdf.

\(^{70}\) Author interview with Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström, 26 Nov. 2018, Stockholm.

\(^{71}\) Annika Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Protection beyond borders: gender cosmopolitanism and co-constitutive obligation’, *Global Society* 27: 3, 2013, pp. 328.
of solidarity with, especially, small islands facing extinction. It was made even more memorable by her challenge to the gender stereotypes at the heart of the international structure in bringing into the Assembly chamber her three-month-old daughter, who was cared for by her male partner during her address.

In March 2019, a ‘lone wolf’ terrorist attacker killed 51 people with an automatic weapon during Friday prayers at two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch. Instead of aggressively condemning the terrorist, blaming the country he originated from or stoking fear and anxiety about further threats, Ardern acted calmly. She immediately reached out to the victims’ families and community, visiting them in person. She donned the hijab to show empathy with the Muslim community within and beyond the New Zealand nation, and women across the country emulated her gesture of solidarity by wearing headscarves. She refused to use the name of the terrorist, thereby denying him airtime in the global media through which to propagate far-right violent extremism, and organized a nationwide televised commemoration and two-minute silence. Her image was projected onto the world’s tallest building, Dubai’s Burj Khalifa, with the word ‘Peace’ emblazoned above it in English and Arabic, showing appreciation from the centre of the Arab region. This representation of cross-cultural solidarity and western responsibility changed the conventional meaning of the veil in the West from a motif of feminine subordination to an image of global humanity.  

Compassion, listening and empathy are often seen as feminine qualities incompatible with decisive or strong foreign policy leadership in a crisis. Ardern proved, however, that so-called ‘feminized’ leadership can be powerful in both the national and international realms. While extending compassion to the attacker’s victims and sensitivity to their families’ cultural and religious needs, she rallied her government to tighten existing legislation and institute a new law banning automatic weapons. Women leaders often come to power in a crisis or in circumstances where men have failed. This has been called the ‘glass cliff’ phenomenon. In the aftermath of the Christchurch terror attack, however, Ardern turned a crisis into an opportunity—an opportunity for a new multilevel gendered game enacted through empathetic, gendered leadership that resonated in foreign policy precisely by contesting the masculine ways of governing.

Managing a multiparty coalition government, Ardern forged a consensus among government and opposition members of parliament on the gun prohibition. In the same year, her government also passed the first ‘well-being budget’ in the world. The new budget requires all new state spending to meet five criteria, among them the reduction of child poverty, family violence and mental illness, with the goal of advancing the overall well-being of the population in measurable

---

72 Katherine E. Brown, ‘Religious violence, gender and post-secular counterterrorism’, International Affairs 96: 2, March 2020, pp. 279–304.
73 Tina Brown, ‘What happens when women stop leading like men: Jacinda Ardern, Nancy Pelosi and the power of female grace’, New York Times, 30 March 2019.
74 Jamila Rizvi, ‘Jacinda Ardern just proved typically “feminine” behaviour is powerful’, Sydney Morning Herald, 19 March 2019.
75 See further Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam, ‘The glass cliff: evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions’, British Journal of Management 16: 2, 2005, pp. 81–90.
ways, rather than just the economic wealth of the nation as measured by GDP. These acts show how the gendered symbolism associated with seemingly feminine values of care and morality, when elevated within state institutions and through policy diffusion to other states, have the potential to change gendered structures.

Within ten days of passing the gun prohibition, Ardern, along with Emmanuel Macron, president of France, instigated a dialogue with technology companies to prevent the distribution of violent extremist content online. The ‘Christchurch call summit’ extended responsibility for countering transnational terrorism to include powerful non-state corporate actors such as Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter. The outcome established a new crisis-response framework to be used to stop content of the kind that motivated the Christchurch mosque attacker from going viral online. Demonstrating adept manoeuvring through gendered multilevel games, in part through her compassionate leadership and gendered cross-cultural symbolism, Ardern created new foreign policy alliances and emergent global norms. These acts have contributed to bringing about incremental change in the usual gender structures of international relations, in particular, resignifying traditionally feminine qualities as powerful foreign policy tools.

As discussed above, the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau provides another example of a political leader who strives to represent a ‘compassionate and constructive voice in the world’. As such, Trudeau illustrates how male political leaders can advance pro-gender equality norms through adept manoeuvring in gendered games in domestic, international and transnational politics. However, Trudeau’s political leadership and skills in navigating the gendered multilevel game were challenged at the G7 summit in Quebec in June 2018 by his interaction with US President Donald Trump. Trump left the summit early, having signed the joint G7 statement, but later abruptly retracted US support in a tweet upon hearing that Canada planned to impose tariffs on the US in response to US steel and aluminium tariffs on Canada. Trudeau said: ‘I have made it very clear to the president that it is not something we relish doing, but it is something that we absolutely will do. As Canadians, we are polite, we’re reasonable, but we will not be pushed around.’ Trump retaliated on Twitter: ‘Based on Justin’s false statements at his news conference, and the fact that Canada is charging massive tariffs … I have instructed our US Reps not to endorse the Communique.’ Playing an aggressively gendered game, Trump further blasted Trudeau as ‘meek and mild’ and tweeted that he was ‘dishonest and weak’, attributions which have implicit feminine connotations.

76 Eleanor Ainge Roy, ‘New Zealand’s wellbeing budget promises billions to care for the most vulnerable’, Guardian, 30 May 2019.
77 Kris Willsher, ‘Leaders and tech firms pledge to tackle extremist violence online’, Guardian, 16 May 2019.
78 Justin Trudeau, ‘Gender equality is an opportunity, not a threat’, Globe and Mail, 8 March 2016.
79 Elin Bjarnegard and Erik Melander, ‘Pacific men: how the feminist gap explains hostility’, Pacific Review 30: 4, 2017, pp. 478–93.
80 Zeeshan Aleem, ‘The G7 looked like it was going okay, then Trump got mad on Twitter’, Vox, 20 June 2018.
Contested leadership and pro- and anti-gender norms in foreign policy

In this last vignette, we highlight the contested nature of foreign policy leadership that mediates gendered normative structures globally, transnationally and domestically. The first illustration of this contestation focuses on anti-gender norms and concerns the ‘global gag rule’, also known as the ‘Mexico City policy’, which blocks US federal funding for NGOs to providing and supporting abortion rights and services. While all Democratic presidents have lifted this rule, and all Republican presidents have reinstated it, President Trump not only gave it top priority in his first days in office, but chose to expand it. This reflects Trump’s strong attachment to gendered symbolism in foreign policy and his heavy reliance on the support of ultra-conservative domestic groups and transnational anti-abortion movements. Moreover, it signals Trump’s willingness to use gendered multilevel games to lead and build new global alliances with like-minded regimes in states such as Brazil, Egypt, the Philippines, Russia and Saudi Arabia, as well as with NGOs who accept US funding. The purpose of these alliances is normative: to block and roll back the advancement in recent years of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, which they perceive as anti-family and pro-abortion. For instance, in the run-up to the WHO conference in 2018, the United States sent letters to 72 countries to secure the elimination of any references to sexual and reproductive rights. Washington also insisted at the most recent G7 meeting that any references to sexual and reproductive health be watered down.

The expanded version prohibits not only American aid to finance international NGOs working on women’s sexual reproductive rights but also ‘gags’ other organizations from funding groups that provide abortion services even though these organizations are not recipients of US aid. Hence, the global gag rule signalled the overarching intent of the Trump administration to cut back on international development assistance and international human rights work. Since the United States is the largest donor in global health, the impact of the global gag rule is enormous. Because NGOs fear the loss of US financial support, many of them have become silent on women’s human rights and bodily integrity. Consequently, the US foreign policy shift has opened up a widening rift in the international NGO community on women’s rights, illustrating how gender multilevel games resonate at the global level as well as within and between states. At the same time, the rift between the United States and its western allies is deepening, with a multilateral group launching alternative funding through a global campaign ‘She Decides’ to empower women’s and girls’ rights to take decisions about their own bodies.

81 Burns, ‘The demolition of US diplomacy’.
82 Colum Lynch, ‘Trump administration steps up war on reproductive rights’, Foreign Policy, 18 Sept. 2019.
83 Ariana Eunjung Chan and Carol Morello, ‘Trump expansion of abortion “gag rule” will restrict $8.8 billion in US aid’, Washington Post, 15 May 2017.
84 The WHO and many international experts emphasize that the global gag rule endangers millions of women and girls. See editorial ‘The devastating impact of Trump’s global gag rule’, Lancet Global Health, vol. 393, 15 June 2019.
85 Lynch, ‘Trump administration steps up war’.
86 Lynch, ‘Trump administration steps up war’.
Another illustration of contested foreign policy leadership, this time focused on pro-gender equality norms, is provided by the diplomatic crisis that erupted in 2015 between Sweden and Saudi Arabia. By branding its foreign policy as feminist, Sweden, in contrast to other ‘women-friendly’ states such as Australia and Norway, has expressed a readiness to engage in more politically contested foreign policy domains, including those that challenge gendered power hierarchies, institutions and practices. As Margot Wallström stated in 2015: ‘It’s time to become a little braver in foreign policy.’ In so doing, Swedish feminist foreign policy has sought to make gendered conflicts of interest visible. For instance, the promotion of women’s sexual and reproductive health rights is framed as a ‘headwind’ agenda. Such a statement indicates an awareness of the challenges facing political leaders seeking to manage distinct and often antagonistic gendered games in global politics.

The rift of 2015 in Swedish–Saudi diplomatic relations provides a striking illustration of the different ways in which the dynamics of gendered leadership, symbolism and structures play out in different political arenas. Sweden is a world-leading arms producer, and until 2013 Saudi Arabia was one of its five most important trading partners. However, shortly after the launch of a feminist foreign policy, Sweden’s foreign minister Margot Wallström enacted a new style of foreign policy leadership by publicly criticizing the Saudi regime for its poor track record on human rights and the status of women, and its absolute authoritarian rule. In addition, Wallström criticized the public flogging of the blogger Raif Badawi as a ‘medieval’ practice. Saudi Arabia reacted swiftly and sternly by recalling its ambassador from Sweden and getting Wallström’s invitation to speak at the Arab League withdrawn. As part of this escalating diplomatic gendered multilevel game between Saudi Arabia, called ‘the most masculine state’, and Sweden, a proto-feminist state, the Saudi regime rallied support within the region and internationally, including from corporate non-state actors. Saudi Arabia not only criticized Sweden’s statement as interference in its internal affairs, but declared that the statement by Foreign Minister Wallström amounted to criticism of shari’a law, and of Islam as a religion. Consequently, Sweden was widely condemned in the Arab region and beyond, while other EU member states kept a surprisingly low profile, distancing themselves from the Swedish position. Yet despite the ongoing crisis, Foreign Minister Wallström and the Swedish government managed this diplomatic multilevel game by enacting a gendered institutional prerogative of not renewing the bilateral arms deal with Saudi Arabia. This triggered another set of gendered multilevel games, with leading domestic critics in Swedish business and diplomacy, such as former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, arguing that the cancellation of the arms deal damaged Sweden’s interna-

87 Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, ‘Swedish feminist foreign policy’.
88 Jenny Nordberg, ‘Who’s afraid of a feminist foreign policy?’, New Yorker, 15 April 2015.
89 Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Handbook Sweden’s feminist foreign policy (Stockholm, 2010).
90 See Madawi al-Rasheed, A most masculine state: gender, politics and religion in Saudi Arabia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
91 Nordberg, ‘Who’s afraid of a feminist foreign policy?’.
92 Nordberg, ‘Who’s afraid of a feminist foreign policy?’.
Political leadership and gendered multilevel games in foreign policy

At the same time, mediating behind the scenes, the Swedish prime minister and the Swedish king discreetly sent confidential letters to the Saudi kingdom, offering official regrets for any misunderstandings. At the same, drawing on gendered domestic and transnational support, Wallström stood by her leadership position and her feminist approach to foreign policy by repeating that she had nothing to apologize for.

Conclusion

This article has proposed a new theoretical concept, ‘gendered multilevel games’, with which to analyse the intricate gendered dynamics that affect political leadership in foreign policy. A growing number of countries have adopted pro-gender, even avowedly ‘feminist’, norms in their foreign policies, while at the same time resistance to and contestation of this development is increasing with the rise of populist leaders who have come to power around the world on illiberal platforms including opposition to gender equality. In this article, we have argued that the time is ripe for academia to explore how political leaders harness gendered dynamics in foreign policy. Because at present both theoretical and empirical knowledge is sparse, we have suggested this new concept of gendered multilevel games to enhance analytical precision and encourage an agency-structure approach to the study of gender and foreign policy. The new concept captures the open-ended, layered dimensions of foreign policy in a complex and highly globalized world. Analysing the interplay of gendered leadership, institutions and structures in foreign policy-making reveals the opportunities for, and performances of, new ways of doing gender, doing leadership and doing foreign policy.

By way of conclusion, we suggest three directions to be taken in research on gender, political leadership and FPA. First, FPA needs more theoretical tools to capture the gendered political dynamics we have identified in this article. We have suggested one such theoretical tool in the form of the concept of gendered multilevel games. There is also a need to revise existing concepts of leadership, personality, operational code, belief-system and group thinking to render them more gender-sensitive. Greater analytical depth and understanding of foreign policy-making will result from factoring into FPA the three elements of our concept of gendered multilevel games: gendered leadership, gendered institutions and gendered structures. Second, our four illustrations show the variation in gendered multilevel games; now more empirical and systematic studies are required, taking gendered dynamics seriously as a starting point, to enable cross-national and regional comparison of foreign policy. Third, the research results emanating from these kinds of studies have the potential to make a significant contribution to wider debates in International Relations on the contestation of the liberal world

93 Alistair Scrutton and Johan Ahlander, ‘After Saudi feud, Sweden debates a “feminist” global role’, Reuters, 16 March 2015.
94 Nordberg, ‘Who’s afraid of a feminist foreign policy?’.
95 Hudson, ‘Foreign policy analysis’.
order, because, as we noted at the beginning of this article, gender is now—and increasingly—a major fault-line in contemporary global politics. We anticipate that the advocacy of pro- and anti-gender norms will become a terrain of increasingly overt political conflict among states and global actors, going well beyond the undercurrents of normative contestation, or the particular contexts of war, extreme conflict and terrorism-affected situations, in which it is apparent today.