The Rise and Fall of the First Feminist Foreign Policy
Understanding Sweden’s Unprecedented Policy Approach Between 2014 – 2022
and the Role of Norm Entrepreneurship

Hanna Walfridsson
Abstract

In 2014, Sweden created the first feminist foreign policy (FFP). Other states have since adopted FFPs as tools to further gender equality at a time of women’s rights regressions. Following a government shift in 2022, Sweden also became the first to dismantle the framework. The policy, its implementation and revokal guide the analysis, providing an understanding of the rise and fall of Swedish FFP. This thesis expands existing knowledge of the policy and sheds light on its underexplored impact and dismantlement. In conducting a critical policy analysis of the official FFP document, this work draws upon Bacchi’s WPR approach. This study shows that the policy constructed gender inequality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights as its overarching problem. In addition, the study performs a qualitative content analysis of key governmental documents, evaluations, and media sources, based upon a framework of norm entrepreneurship, soft power, and hard power. Pursuing the FFP, norm entrepreneurship and soft power aided implementation, while hard power and arms trade caused struggles. The policy revokal was framed by a harsher political and security context, where the FFP was seen as at odds with Swedish interests and values – thereby signalling a step back from normative ambitions.

Word count: 22 118

Key words: Feminist Foreign Policy, Norm Entrepreneurship, Gender, WPR, Sweden
Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY ............................................................... 1
   1.1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................... 1
   1.2. RESEARCH PROBLEM ..................................................................................... 2
   1.3. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ....................................................... 3
   1.4. OVERVIEW OF THESIS .................................................................................. 3

2. GETTING TO A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL TRAJECORY ................................................................. 5
   2.1. FROM WOMEN’S RIGHTS TO FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES .................... 5
   2.2. SWEDEN: FROM POST-WAR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY TO FEMINIST FORERUNNER .. 6

3. EXISTING RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ...................................... 8
   3.1. TRENDSPOTTING: EMERGING THEMES IN THE LITERATURE ...................... 8
       3.1.1. Defining Feminist Foreign Policy ................................................................. 8
       3.1.2. Pro-Gender Equality Norms on the Rise .................................................. 10
       3.1.3. Norm Entrepreneurship and Agenda-Setting at the Forefront .................. 11
       3.1.4. The Departure from Traditional Foreign Policy ........................................ 13
       3.1.5. Moving Forward: Establishing the Research Agenda ............................... 14
   3.2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ......................................... 16
       3.2.1. What’s the Problem Represented to be? ................................................. 16
       3.2.2. Conceptualising the Coding Frame ......................................................... 20

4. A METHOD FOR GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY ...... 22
   4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN .......................................................................................... 22
   4.2. MATERIAL AND DATA COLLECTION .............................................................. 23
       4.2.1. Collecting Textual Material ....................................................................... 23
   4.3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK ........................................................................... 26
       4.3.1. What’s the Problem Represented to be in Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy? 26
       4.3.2. Qualitative Content Analysis .................................................................... 27
   4.4. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION .................................................................. 29
       4.4.1. Evaluation and Positionality of Research ............................................... 29
       4.4.2. Ethical Considerations .............................................................................. 31
   4.5. SETTING THE PARAMETER: DELIMITATIONS OF STUDY .............................. 32

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING SWEDEN’S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY ................................................................. 33
   5.1. THE RISE OF THE FIRST FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: PROBLEMATISING SWEDEN’S POLICY FRAMEWORK ................................................................. 33
       5.1.1. What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy? 34
       5.1.2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’? 35
       5.1.3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about? ....................... 38
       5.1.4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? ...................... 40
   5.2. SUCCESSFUL OR CONTRADICTORY? SWEDEN’S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN PRACTICE ................................................................. 43
       5.2.1. Successful Implementation: Norm Entrepreneurship and Wielding of Soft Power 44
       5.2.2. Failure in Implementation: Hard Power and Weapons Export at Odds With Policy 46
   5.3. THE FALL OF SWEDEN’S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY ................................. 49
   5.4. SWEDEN: LETTING GO OF THE NORMATIVE LEAD? ...................................... 52

6. 2023, WHAT CAN BE LEARNT? DISCUSSING THE IMPLICATIONS ............................. 54
   6.1. WHAT HAS SWEDEN’S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY TAUGHT US? ................... 55
   6.2. ONCE A NORM ENTREPRENEUR, ALWAYS A NORM ENTREPRENEUR? ........... 58

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS ......................................................................................... 61
   7.1. REFLECTION AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ............................... 62
   7.2. CONTRIBUTIONS .............................................................................................. 63

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................ 65
List of Tables

Table 1. Questions from Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach ................................................................. 18
Table 2. List of primary empirical material .......................................................................................... 25
Table 3. List of supporting empirical material ..................................................................................... 26
Table 4. Questions from Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach, applied to Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy ........ 27
Table 5. Theory inspired coding frame, based on conceptualisations from literature review .............. 28

List of Figures

Figure 1. Summary of key findings from WPR analysis ........................................................................ 33
Figure 2. Summary of key findings from the coding of policy impact .................................................... 43
Figure 3. Summary of key findings from the deductive (blue) and inductive (purple) coding of the policy revokal ... 49
Figure 4. Summary of key findings related to norm entrepreneurship .................................................. 52
Figure 5. Understanding Swedish FFP between 2014-2022: Summary of key findings of thesis .......... 54
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFP</td>
<td>Feminist Foreign Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIAP</td>
<td>Feminist International Assistance Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPA</td>
<td>Foreign Policy Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWDA</td>
<td>International Women’s Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRHR</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN OHCHR</td>
<td>The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Women</td>
<td>United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>Women, Peace and Security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introducing Feminist Foreign Policy

1.1. Introduction

Throughout the last century, women have gained numerous new rights and freedoms. Yet, this progress is entangled with a rise in anti-gender sentiments in Europe and beyond, with mobilisation of movements opposing gender equality (Thomson, 2022:7; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a). Human rights experts now raise concerns about recent rollbacks of women’s rights. In Iran, the ‘morality police’ has mercilessly enforced hijab laws; the Taliban government of Afghanistan has stripped women and girls of their most elemental freedoms and rights; meanwhile Poland and the United States have made infringements on women’s reproductive rights (Sáez, 2023) – and these are only some of the extensive cutbacks during last year.

Women’s rights advocates like Sáez (2023) argue that these troublesome regressions serve as a reminder that the protection and advancement of women’s rights ought to be every government’s priority. Political tools to promote gender equality remain as important as they have ever been. Although gender equality is increasingly becoming a policy concern, gender has also come to be a major fault-line within the political landscape (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Aggestam & True, 2020:145). While Mintz and DeRouen (2010) argue that foreign policy decision making centres around security matters, the question remains: security for whom?

Swedish foreign policy took a distinct turn in October 2014. Although the nation has often been regarded as a pioneer of gender politics, its decision to create the world’s first explicitly feminist foreign policy (FFP) has been labelled as radical and unprecedented (Ingebritsen, 2006; Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2019a:37). When Sweden launched the policy approach, a vital part of its framing was human security (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016:326). Conventional, realist approaches to foreign policy have long regarded the state as the referent object to be secured by military might (Collins, 2019:2). Adopting a FFP involves a shift towards a normative framework, guided by ethical principles – where security means more than the mere absence of war (Zhukova, Rosén Sundström & Elgström, 2022; Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). Since 2014, momentum for FFP has been building, with several states following in Sweden’s footsteps (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021). Now, recent developments leave the future of FFP unclear.

Analysing Sweden’s FFP is especially relevant today, at a time of rollbacks of women’s rights – and after the country at the helm of the ground-breaking approach became the first to revoke it
In October 2022, only a day after newly elected Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson from the conservative Moderate party (Moderaterna) introduced his cabinet, a dismantlement of the FFP was presented. “Gender equality is a fundamental value in Sweden and also for this government, but we’re not going to conduct a feminist foreign policy. The label has not fulfilled its purpose and obscures the fact the Swedish foreign policy must be based on Swedish values and Swedish interests,” Tobias Billström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, said to the newspaper Aftonbladet (Granlund, 2022:00.49). This new trajectory for foreign policy has caused worry amongst civil society organisations (Concord, 2023; Concord, 2022).

While willingness to put gender at the centre of foreign policy is increasing, scholarship on FFP is still sparse. Many questions remain unanswered in this emerging field of research. As a tool for promoting pro-gender equality norms on national, transnational, and global levels, feminist foreign policies are of uttermost relevance for the field of Global Politics.

1.2. Research Problem

Feminist foreign policy remains a disputed topic and there is still no consensus on what exactly constitutes such an approach, since the policies differ depending on context and in terms of problems they aim to address (George, 2022; Thomson, 2020:424). According to Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond (2016), “no foreign policy is ethical and coherent unless it takes account of women’s distinct needs, as well as the suffering of other subordinated groups” (p.332). The very label itself signals a transformative ambition and willingness to challenge gender hierarchies.

As an increasingly number of states embrace efforts for gender equality, Sweden now seemingly takes a step back from its ambition. This makes the study of its policy of ever-growing importance. Sweden’s landmark policy paved the way for states to take responsibility for the distinct needs of women and girls. What is more, its creation set a precedent for the international community (Gill-Atkinson et al., 2021:6).

Most of this research revolves around the policy framework and the decision-making process through which it came to be adopted, while few focus on its impact. Even less has been said about how Sweden came to scrap the feminist label altogether. What successes and failures preceded its recent revokal, why did the government abolish it and what might this rebranding come to mean for Swedish foreign policy? In the aftermath of its recent dismantlement, how does one begin to understand the rise and fall of Swedish FFP?
1.3. Purpose and Research Questions

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the gap found in the nexus of gender and foreign policy, by examining the development, implementation, and dismantlement of Sweden’s unprecedented FFP. Through this process, this thesis aims to contribute to the developing scholarship on what FFP means in theory as well as in practice. The aim thus becomes twofold – to further expand existing knowledge of the policy framework, while also shedding light on the underexplored avenues that are its impact and dismantlement. To achieve this aim, this thesis seeks to answer the following overarching research question:

- How can the rise and fall of Swedish feminist foreign policy between 2014 – 2022 be understood?

To gain a better understanding of Swedish FFP and to paint a picture overviewing its full life cycle, the following four sub-questions will be used to guide the analysis.

- What's the problem represented to be in Sweden's former feminist foreign policy?
- How was the policy implemented in practice?
- How was the policy revokal framed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs?
- How can these policy developments be understood in the context of Sweden’s long-standing role as norm entrepreneur for gender equality values?

The first three sub-questions will allow exploration of all stages of the policy - launch, implementation and revokal - while the final one will provide nuance and context to the policy developments described in response to the first three.

1.4. Overview of Thesis

After this introduction, chapter two describes the political context and historical trajectory which facilitated the emergence of the unprecedented policy approach. Relevant details related to progress for women’s rights and influential international legislation is provided, along with a brief context of Sweden’s modern political history.

In chapter three, ‘Existing Research and Theoretical Framework’, emerging themes in the literature are presented. This is done by diving deeper into the debates surrounding the definition of FFPs, examining the rise of pro-gender equality norms in foreign policy, determining the interplay between FFP, norm entrepreneurship and agenda-setting, and outlining the approach as a departure from traditional security and foreign policy. The literature review ends by presenting the
research agenda and way forward. The study continues by presenting the theoretical framework, based on Bacchi’s (2009) ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be’ (WPR) approach and a conceptual framework anchored in norm entrepreneurship, soft power, and hard power.

The fourth chapter, concerning methodology, guides the reader through the case study as a research design, the selection of key governmental documents and media sources, along with the method for data collection. It also describes how both WPR, and qualitative content analysis are used as methods for analysing the textual material. Under methodological reflections, a discussion addressing ethical considerations, the positionality and the evaluative criteria of the study follows. The chapter ends by presenting delimitations.

Chapter five provides key findings and analysis, systematically lined up to answer the research questions and examine all stages of the policy lifespan. The opening section starts with how gender equality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights came to be constructed as the problem in Sweden’s FFP, followed by how norm entrepreneurship and soft power aided its successful implementation while hard power and arms trade led to failures. Next, it discusses how the Minister for Foreign Affairs motivated the policy revokal considering the harsher political and security context, with the FFP being at odds with Swedish interests and values. The final section summarises how these findings relate to Sweden’s norm entrepreneurship.

Returning to the overarching research question, chapter six draws together the comprehensive findings from the sub-questions in presenting its understanding of the FFP between 2014-2022. This discussion is structured according to the key lessons learnt from these developments, which facilitates an analysis of the implications this has for Sweden’s long-standing role as a norm entrepreneur for gender equality values.

This thesis ends with chapter seven, which concludes how one can understand the rise and fall of Sweden’s FFP and the lessons this teaches us. The chapter continues with reflections regarding overlapping policy frameworks and the dismantlement’s actual impact on Swedish foreign policy, which are two possible avenues for future research. Finally, the thesis restates its contribution to the societal movement for gender equality and the academic field of Global Politics, not least by offering initial insight into the recent revokal.
2. Getting to a Feminist Foreign Policy: The Political Context and Historical Trajectory

2.1. From Women’s Rights to Feminist Foreign Policies

To understand the emergence of FFP, it must be positioned in relation to previous progress for women’s rights and gender equality. While gender equality is a goal in its own right, research has stressed other vital benefits of elevating the status of women and girls (girls will henceforth be included in references to women and women’s rights), like improved likelihood of peace, strengthened democracy, higher resistance to extremism and radicalisation, augmented global health along with increases in gross domestic product (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020:15).

Almost 50 years ago, the United Nations initiated its Decade for Women (Thomson, 2022:6). The year 1979 also marked the signing of a landmark convention - the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Thomson underlines the massive impact it had - together with the Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995 - for strengthened commitments to human rights, health, and violence against women. These events also paved the way for the Millennium Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – two documents which make important references to women specifically.

Women’s rights remain a significant concern in international policy making, not least through the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (also known as WPS), which puts the harms suffered by women during conflicts front and centre (Thomson, 2022:6). The WPS has come to inform the normative framework for both security and foreign policy in several countries, not just FFP states (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016:324). According to Thomson (2022), “the advent and growth of FFP is the logical end to this more than 30-year trajectory” (p.6). Although gender equality is increasingly being put on the international agenda, there are still major gaps in legal protections for women around the world, with numerous discriminatory laws still in place. According to UN Women (2022b:11), it may take another 286 years before discriminatory barriers will be gone, if progress continues at the current rate.

In the beginning of October 2022, the list of countries with FFPs included “Sweden (2014), Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2022), Chile (2022), Colombia (2022) and Liberia (2022)” (UN Women, 2022a: para.2). Support for the approach is also growing in countries like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The
expanding Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group included a total of sixteen countries by January 2022, according to Ann Linde, who took over as Sweden’s Minister for Foreign Affairs after Margot Wallström in 2019 (UN Women, 2022a). Gender equality forerunner Sweden has since then become the first FFP state to revoke its feminist label altogether (Walfridsson, 2022).

2.2. Sweden: From Post-War Social Democracy to Feminist Forerunner

Overlooking Swedish modern political history, the social democratic legacy is striking. The Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna) first came into power in 1932, and their political reign lasted for almost four and a half decades, until 1976 (Möller, 2019). This historical period coincided with a rapid expansion of the Swedish welfare state, in the decades after World War II. Within the Scandinavian countries, Holst (2018) argues, “a significant increase in female labour participation has gone hand in hand with welfare state expansion” (p.102). Compared to many other countries, it has enabled a larger inclusion of women in both the labour market and public life. Nationally, the core principles of the welfare state - that the state assumes responsibility for all citizens to achieve a high living standard - have united politicians across party lines (Möller, 2019:216).

According to Möller (2019:17), two notions had an incremental influence over Swedish political identity throughout the previous century: the non-alignment policy and the People’s Home (Folkhemmet). ‘Folkhemmet’, an expression coined by Per Albin Hansson in 1928, reflected a vision of a society where everyone would feel safe and welcome. It envisioned Sweden as a home, with a strong state that would care for its citizens (Larsson & Marklund, 2018:307).

The military non-alignment has given Sweden a distinct role, especially during the Cold War (NATO, 2022; Dahl, 2006). Sweden took upon itself to become an international role model, an ambition which was at an all-time high between the mid 60s and late 80s. According to Dahl (2006:899), being detached from the two blocks granted Sweden more credibility when pursuing an activist foreign policy. This stance was perhaps most evident in Social Democratic leader Olof Palme’s vocal opposition to the Vietnam War in the early 70s. The activist foreign policy became known around the world, and Sweden began to self-identify as a moral superpower (Larsson & Marklund, 2018:339). Dahl (2006:898) argues that this built upon a strong sense of solidarity and led to support for disarmament and development aid, as well as economic, political, and legal instruments to achieve change in the international system. Nevertheless, not everyone agreed with Sweden’s claim to moral superiority.
Domestically, the 1970s brought along several critical reforms which strengthened the status of women, such as the right to abortion and the Gender Equality Act, which helped further women’s position in society (Regeringskansliet, 2019:7). Since the early 80’s, political power has primarily shifted between the Moderate Party and the Social Democrats. It was not until the 90s that gender equality truly rose on the political agenda (Möller, 2019:18).

When it comes to the last decade’s progress towards the institutionalisation of gender equality norms in Swedish politics, it is impossible to dismiss the importance of the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016:325). In 2015, Wallström entered office as the Social Democrats formed a government along with the Green Party (Miljöpartiet). As the first ever UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict, Wallström had extensive knowledge of gender issues and was a passionate advocate for gender justice. According to Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, who have conducted influential studies of the Swedish FFP, the policy is intimately linked to the influence of Wallström.

Sweden’s self-understanding is thus moulded in visions of a prosperous society, facilitated through a strong state shaped by equality and participation. Nylund, Håkansson and Bjarneå (2022:1) argue that commitments to gender equality, anti-colonialism as well as anti-racism have been crucial for the label as a humanitarian superpower – which has become integral not only to Sweden’s internal self-identity, but to its external nation-branding. The ambition to become a norm entrepreneur for gender equality is linked to the legacy of the welfare state and the nation’s self-identity as a ‘humanitarian superpower’ (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016:326).

Yet, Sweden has not been alone in its normative pursuit: countries like the Netherlands and perhaps most prominently Canada have been fierce competition in the race to become the moral superpower. For Sweden, human rights have played an important role in shaping foreign policy, not least by putting the rights of women at the forefront of the policy. Furthermore, an important factor enabling Sweden to take a leading role amongst a group of moral superpowers is the mentioned long-time non-alignment policy (Dahl, 2006). This line has been called into question, seeing as Sweden allowed transit of German soldiers and arsenal to Norway during World War II, and already had a close, although unofficial relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Hägglöf, 1960:164; Dahl, 2006:902). Officially, however, the policy came to an end when Sweden handed in its application to NATO in May 2022, spearheaded by the Social Democrats – a party which until recently opposed joining the alliance (Öjemar, 2022).
3. Existing Research and Theoretical Framework

3.1. Trendspotting: Emerging Themes in the Literature

Since the political phenomenon of feminist foreign policies is relatively new, the number of studies conducted on the topic is sparse. According to Aggestam and True (2020:159), a field of research examining how foreign policy and gender interconnect is developing. This literature review is positioned in this nexus, from which several prominent themes emerge. First, much research focuses on defining the concept of FFP. Second, many scholars examine the increasing centrality of gender equality norms in foreign policy more broadly. Third, FFP is often linked to a state’s desire to perform norm entrepreneurship or agenda-setting. Lastly, the policy is described as a departure from traditional notions of foreign policy and security. These themes are elaborated in the sections below.

3.1.1. Defining Feminist Foreign Policy

Interestingly, the topic of most earnest debate within the literature seems to be the meaning of the policy framework itself. Unpacking the concept, ‘Foreign policy’ can be defined as an independent actor’s, primarily sovereign state, official external relations or policy guiding its international relations (Thompson & Clement, 2019:6; Smith, 2020:131). In essence, it is a practice shaped by domestic and international factors, but which is aimed at that which lie beyond national borders (Bulley, 2014:174; Mintz & DeRouen, 2010).

With regards to the feminist aspect of the policy, there is a lack of consensus regarding what exactly it involves - a consensus also lacking in the broader feminist movement itself (George, 2022). Rather, the exact meaning is context-dependent. Feminism is an umbrella term for different strands of theories, united by an ambition to achieve equality and non-discrimination. Feminist theories acknowledge a global gender structure consisting of male domination and female subordination – the patriarchy. The normative strife to overturn this order and create gender equality unites them (Carbin & Jansson, 2018; Kinsella, 2017:190-193; Thompson, 2020). Although the FFP concept lacks cohesion, George (2022) argues that “the agenda can broadly be understood as policies that focus a country’s international engagements on gender issues through rhetoric, diplomacy, and development aid, among other vehicles” (para.3).

Some describe FFP as a normative account of foreign policy, which should facilitate respect for human rights along with an enabling environment for political participation and democracy (Mama Cash, 2022:2). Others define it as an approach to foreign policy which puts gender equality at its
core, considering it a factor predicting flourishing, peaceful societies (IWDA, 2023). While FFPs are not alone in believing that gender equality contributes to prosperity and stability, they are unique in two ways, according to Aggestam and Bergman-Rosmond (2016:323). First, their ethically informed framework implies a normative reorientation of not just what foreign policy can be, but what it should be. Second, using the f-word signals an ambition to challenge power hierarchies and gendered institutions, as the policy moves beyond standard gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of promoting gender equality by analysing and integrating the impact that policies, legislations, or any other planned action have on women and men, across all sectors: economic, societal, and political (Aggestam & True, 2020:144). Their experiences and concerns are key throughout this whole process (Smith, 2020:136). Gender mainstreaming is an integral part of examining policies and their implementation, to enable policymakers to redress disparities and inequality between genders.

When it launched, the Swedish FFP centred around three pillars: rights, representation, and resources (Bergman-Rosmond, 2018:234). The first pillar puts the rights of women at the centre of all levels of policy, taking a human rights-based approach. Second, it promotes the representation of women in all decision-making processes, regardless of area or level. This emphasises the need for dialogue with female representatives, not least from civil society. Lastly, the policy strives to reallocate resources to promote gender equality efforts and to further women’s access to human rights (Utrikesdepartementet, 2018:11). These principles are now also instrumental for other states’ policies, with the Swedish model serving as a template (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021).

Emphasising contextual adaptation, reality also became an important aspect of Sweden's FFP (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021:3). Reality, now the fourth pillar of the policy, requires one to look past what the policy means in theory, to what it means in practice (Zilla, 2022). How is the policy implemented and how can it be made more efficient in a specific context? For instance, Reyes and Velázquez (2021) interviewed and collected testimonies from migrant women in Mexico to examine to what extent the FFP accounted for the realities of women, especially those who suffered from other forms of discrimination.

Moreover, FFPs must account for a multitude of women - the category is far from homogenous. Any successful FFP ought to build upon an intersectional approach. The concept intersectionality,
coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights the interconnectedness between different power structures and systems of oppression. It builds upon the notion that power axes such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class intersect in a network, where they reciprocate one another. This network influences political, economic, cultural, and social exclusion (Crenshaw, 1989; Lykke, 2003).

Against this background, the International Center for Research on Women’s definition of the concept is deemed the most suitable, since it arguably encompasses the policy’s most important features. Accordingly, feminist foreign policy can be seen as “the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states and movements in a manner that prioritises gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocates significant resources to achieve that vision and seeks through its implementation to disrupt patriarchal and male dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defence and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups and movements” (Thompson & Clement, 2019:7, emphasis added).

3.1.2. Pro-Gender Equality Norms on the Rise

Another central theme is the rise of pro-gender equality norms (henceforth referred to as pro-gender norms) in foreign policy. In the past decades, gender has become increasingly salient in politics, with a growing awareness of gender equality in policy making (Thomson, 2022:6; Thomson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021). The term ‘gender’ refers to socially constructed beliefs about women and men – it is not biologically inherent or interchangeable with sex (Kinsella, 2017:196). Rather, gender is fluid, performative, and created through repetition. Gender norms form societal structures and determine who holds power over others (Butler, 1990). Gender has important implications for global politics and foreign policy, elaborated under ‘The Departure from Traditional Foreign Policy’.

Numerous states are now pursuing smart diplomacy and economics by advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, representation, and leadership (Aggestam & True, 2016:144). This political shift is seen in countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Norway. Several scholars within the field study the transfer or diffusion of pro-gender norms. Thomson (2022) examines how gender norms have gradually become accepted within the international community, while Zhukova, Rosén Sundström and Elgström (2022), analyse how strategic narratives shaped translation of norms into states’ domestic contexts and how these helped wield
soft power beyond national borders. In the latter study, a qualitative content analysis of textual material like policy documents, press releases, public speeches and news articles proved helpful to approach the topic.

The literature also positions FFPs within a broader context of human rights and gender equality, along with ethical approaches to foreign policy (Thompson & Clement, 2019; Zhukova, Rosén Sundström & Elgström, 2022:197). While FFPs are relatively new, the feminist movement is not. Progress has been made and several landmark conventions have been reached, although much remains to be done. The ‘radical’ FPPs were facilitated by conventions such as WPS, CEDAW and the SDGs, which paved the way for a more inclusive approach to politics (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016:324; Aggestam & True, 2020:144).

Additionally, researchers have analysed how women in foreign policy decision making (Smith, 2020) and individual leaders (Aggestam & True, 2021) impact the rise of pro-gender norms in foreign policy. To examine this impact, foreign policy analysis (FPA) is a method used by scholars in the field, such as ones just mentioned, as well as Achilleos-Sarll (2018). According to Smith (2020:131), FPA is an approach which underlines the impact of individuals on behaviour and change of global politics, and thus their influence on the policy making process. While most studies on the topic are based upon qualitative textual analysis, often - but not exclusively - on the policy itself, these aforementioned studies focus on the decision-making process leading up to the feminist policy shift, rather than the final policies.

An important distinction between FFPs and other ethical foreign policies is that the latter have rarely made commitments towards global gender justice and women’s empowerment: something which is fundamental to feminist approaches (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2019a:40). Nevertheless, FFPs should be seen as continuations of established commitments to gender equality and other international commitments (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Parisi, 2020). With the FFPs promoting the spread of pro-gender norms in the global political arena, these norms lie at the very heart of this research project.

3.1.3. Norm Entrepreneurship and Agenda-Setting at the Forefront

Within this scholarship, the ambition of FFP states to facilitate change through international agenda-setting, aiming to put gender equality front and centre of foreign policy becomes prominent. The adoption of such policies is often connected to normative entrepreneurship and
a desire to be perceived as a ‘good state’ (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Thomson, 2022). It can be used as nation branding, since it signifies respect for international norms of gender equality and an adherence to liberal values (Thomson, 2022:11). Sweden’s desire to be known as a ‘good state’ with progressive values far predates its FFP – the nation’s normative entrepreneurship and ‘moral superpower’ ambition dates to the middle of last century (Dahl, 2006).

With regards to normative entrepreneurship, seminal work by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) define norms as “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (p.891). Norms constitute a set of mutually shared expectations, which shape relationships between actors through social expectations (Seabrooke, 2006). The importance of norms should not be understated, since they serve as basis for moral judgements and wield political power through influence over individuals, organisations, and states (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Notably, this relates to norm entrepreneurship – a central concept for this thesis.

According to Davies and True (2017:701), a norm entrepreneur is either a normative non-state actor or state agent in pursuit of persuading states to change the way in which they behave. Norm entrepreneurs strive for political change by challenging how societal problems are currently understood. Yet, there is a distinction between the categories. Davies and True argue that “[u]nlke non-state actors who set the agenda by advocating for new norms, foreign policy leaders leverage their identity and position to advance the recognition and diffusion of already established norms by reframing the moral prerogative of the ‘national interest’” (p.701). Norm entrepreneurs are particularly important for the emergence of norms, as they advocate for leaders to adopt the norm. The concept is intimately linked to the spread of FFPs, both in relation to Margot Wallström in particular, but also the Swedish government more broadly.

There is also an important parallel between norm entrepreneurship and being a moral superpower. The missionary attribute is a defining factor, according to Dahl (2006), who argues that “a moral superpower is not just active or activist but indeed sees itself as being on a mission—to better the world, to spread the light” (p.898). Thus, Dahl characterises the concept as an actor having both firm moral ambitions and norms, along with a progressive foreign policy. For Sweden, the two concepts are closely linked.

The adoption of a FFP has been outlined as a tactics for advancement in the international arena, with countries like Sweden, Canada and Mexico expressing ambitions to take leading roles as norm
entrepreneurs in the battle for gender equality (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; Delgado Peralta, 2020:13). For example, Parisi (2020) conducted a critical feminist analysis of the public policies behind Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), using Bacchi’s WPR approach. Parisi (2020:165) found that the adoption of the FIAP could be attributed to a juncture of three vital factors: the country’s international reputation, advancement of FFPs elsewhere along with a formative relationship with the US – from which Canada hoped to distinguish itself. Additionally, when comparing Canada’s FIAP and Sweden’s FFP, Thomson’s (2020) theoretical framework was inspired by the same WPR approach. This enabled a critical examination of which problem representations these policies constructed, their underlying assumptions and, consequently, which solutions were deemed suitable. Seeing how this is a goal of this thesis, the WPR approach will be utilised for this work.

3.1.4. The Departure from Traditional Foreign Policy

The last key trend regards the institutionalisation of norms for gender equality through foreign policies as a departure from traditional foreign policy and notions of security (Reyes & Velázquez, 2021; Bergman-Rosamond, 2018). Visible in the scholarship is a tendency to submit conventional presuppositions to critical scrutiny. Researchers draw upon theories such as post-colonialism (Zhukova, 2021), feminist theory (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2019b) and gender theory (Aggestam & True, 2021; Towns & Niklasson, 2017) to shed light on problems arising from dominant understandings of politics. Scholars within foreign policy and security studies often consider the nation-state the security-seeking unit, which strives to maximise their power within an anarchic, international order - yet feminist researchers argue that such a discourse is gendered (Collins, 2019:2; Bergman Rosamond, 2018).

The gendering of politics is visible in a myriad of ways, but in this context the gendering of power is perhaps most central. Understanding gender as performative also means that gender is continuously negotiated and contested, which facilitates a recognition of gender beyond the feminine versus masculine dichotomy (Kaneva & Cassinger, 2022:310). Power bears the stamp of this dichotomy, where ‘hard power’ is coded masculine and ‘soft power’ feminine. While hard power entails economic or military coercion, most often through the use or threat of military force, soft power conversely entails “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008:94).
Nye’s (2008:94) influential conceptualisation of soft power attributes importance to the role of culture and ideas in foreign policy and international relations. Soft power resources like policies, values and culture can all be used to exert power over others. Importantly, this highlights that the matter of ‘whose story wins’ has become a major battle within contemporary politics (Nye, 2013:3). Additionally, Kaneva and Cassinger (2022:305) state that soft power is often sought through diplomacy or nation branding – and this is often how the FFPs are perceived.

Delehanty and Steele (2009:530) argue that masculinized conceptions of security revolving around armed conflict are often premiered over topics like global inequality and environmental issues, which are classified as feminine issues and are thus systematically devalued. Feminist scholars criticise the gendering of states as rational, masculine actors and emphasise the need to facilitate an understanding of states as a multitude of actors, calling for a focus on experiences of individuals (Bergman Rosamond, 2018:228; Aggestam & True, 2020:154; Tickner, 1992). Much of the literature therefore suggests a shift from state security to human security.

Human security is an inclusive approach seeing the individual as the central unit to be protected, connecting individuals to national and international levels of security. Subsequently, it accounts for more than military threats and incorporates personal, political, economic, environmental, health, food, and community security (Persaud, 2019:145). Human security is gendered, and people perceive insecurity in very different manners. Moreover, it entails that the “defense of human life is more important than the defense of States, and personal integrity is as important as territorial integrity” (Pividori & Degani, 2019:4). This builds upon the notion that societies grow more stable as people have their basic needs met (IWDA, 2023) – and as a fundamental aspect of FFPs, this understanding is intrinsically connected to how security is sought through the approach.

3.1.5. Moving Forward: Establishing the Research Agenda

Concluding the literature review, a first section of the research centres around how to define a FFP - even though previous studies have yet to come to a consensus. Literature on this theme was used as a base for further developing the meaning of FFPs. Second, others take on a broader perspective, analysing the rise of pro-gender norms in foreign policy in general. This perspective was paramount for contextualising the findings and analysis of this thesis, and therefore constituted an important basis for reviewing the implications of Sweden’s policy developments.
Third, FFPs are linked to a willingness to put gender equality on the international agenda and perform norm entrepreneurship. This played an integral role for shaping the content analysis and was subsequently a central for the analysis, which is primarily seen in the integration of the concept in the coding frame applied to the policy implementation and revokal. Lastly, this approach is often contrasted to conventional policy frameworks and is framed as a departure from traditional notions of foreign policy and security. This theme not only provided a basis for understanding the policy and how it came to be, it was also of great use when examining how Sweden later came to revoke the feminist label of its foreign policy. Furthermore, the literature discussion culminated in central methodological decisions, motivating both the choice to use Bacchi’s WPR approach and providing the key concepts norm entrepreneur, soft power, and hard power for the research enquiry, through the conceptual framework. Both aspects are further developed under ‘Theoretical Framework’.

Important gaps in existing research also emerge through the literature review. Overall, the general scarcity of scholarship on FFP seemingly enjoys a consensus amongst academics working in the nexus of gender and foreign policy. The literature returns to this overarching gap, especially Aggestam and True (2020). The burgeoning policy area remains under-researched, with grey and academic literature having much ground to cover (Thomson, 2020:425).

Additionally, most research focuses on adoption of FFPs, or the policy documents themselves, rather than their implementation and impact. Thomson (2020:435) encourages research to shift from theory to practice, exploring the outcome of the policies. Similarly, Aggestam and True (2020:146) highlight the need to analyse how feminist goals and pro-gender norms are practised through foreign policy. Were the commitments pursued in practice and, if so, with what effect? Given that FFPs have only developed in the last decade, with many adopting them just recently, few have studied their results (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021). At the same time, recent developments in Swedish foreign policy open new avenues for research. Why did the country revoke the feminist label of its foreign policy and what might it come to mean in practice?

On the basis thereof, this thesis explores these research gaps, to contribute to scholarship on FFP more broadly and shed light on the adoption, impact, and dismantlement of the first-ever case to both announce and denounce such a policy: Sweden.
3.2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon existing research in the field, the centrality of norm entrepreneurship and power becomes evident. These concepts, elaborated in the previous section, therefore serve as analytical tools for the analysis. While getting to the roots of a problem is of concern for many academics, it is especially so for feminist scholars, given their normative aim to disrupt gender hierarchies. In this process, how one diagnoses a political problem is key, and Dahlerup (2018:199) therefore suggests Bacchi’s WPR approach as a useful tool for feminist analysis. The literature (see Parisi, 2020; Thomson, 2020) also showed the usefulness of WPR when performing critical policy analysis and exposing implicit problem representations. To identify the problems addressed in Sweden’s former FFP, the WPR approach served as a core pillar of this theoretical framework.

3.2.1. What’s the Problem Represented to be?

The popular WPR approach was first presented in Bacchi’s Women, policy and politics: the construction of policy problems (1999) and can be explained as an analytical framework and post-structural tool for critical inquiry of public policies. WPR was initially developed to gain a better understanding of women’s inequality and how this issue was discussed in policy documents (Bacchi, 2009:vi). According to Bacchi, policies are created within a distinct setting, in terms of cultural, geographical, and historical contexts. To understand how governing takes place, these factors must be examined (Bacchi, 2009:ix).

The basis of this approach can be found in theories of the influential philosopher Michel Foucault, according to whom power is closely entwined with knowledge: two factors that guide norms, practices, and all societal life (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). Other scholars using Bacchi’s framework argue that such a Foucauldian approach “emphasises that power produces which subject positions one inhabits, and which policy discourses gain ascendancy or are silenced” (McIlwain, Baldwin, Manathunga, Baird & Pickering, 2022:262).

Usually, policy analyses operate from the presupposition that policies are a government’s way to deal with a specific kind of problem. Problems are assumed to exist independently of the way that they are described in policy documents or the wider political debate. In contrast, Bacchi’s (1999; 2005; 2009; 2012) view builds upon the notion that how one thinks about an issue affects what is considered the appropriate way of approaching it and consequently what should be done to solve it. Therefore, all problem descriptions involve judgements and interpretations. From this view, policies do more than simply respond to problems – they are the discourse through which
problems and solutions are constructed. Bacchi argues in line with McHoul and Grace (1993) that “discourses are socially produced forms of knowledge that sets limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a 'given social practice’” (Bacchi, 2009:35).

When implementing this approach, it is the problematization - not the problem - which lies at the centre of the study. Problematization can be conceptualised as the process of how something becomes represented as a problem. The process reduces complexity and includes necessary simplifications, but this naturally also means that parts of the story get left out (Bacchi, 2009:xii). The problems are framed in a certain manner. Yet, Bacchi (2012:22) clarifies, the WPR approach is distinct from framing theory, since it is concerned with how problematization shapes governing processes, rather than strategic framing or intentional manipulation of a problem. The analysis is about getting to the bottom of what assumptions, forms of knowledge and inherent conceptual logics that facilitate a certain representation in a public policy (Bacchi, 2012:22).

To put problem representations in public policies under scrutiny is important, since they define and legitimise the course of action to address the problem and shape the resources allocated to these measures (Ville et al., 2023:47). When integrated in official government programs or policies, they also hold political power (Bacchi, 2012:22). The representation of an issue like gender inequality can have a vital impact on how policies aim to solve that issue and how successful these attempts are. Schmidt and Radaelli (2004) also argue that our understanding of norms is shaped through discourse. The WPR approach will allow an analysis which ties back to the importance of pro-gender norms and Sweden’s norm entrepreneurship.

While the WPR approach is primarily used for policy analysis, its applicability extends beyond public policies (Bacchi, 2012:22). Within this study, the approach was primarily based on the Swedish government’s official FFP documents but extended to related declarations and news articles too. This decision was anchored in the approach’s ability to critically examine and expose implicit problem representations in a wide array of material. Just as Ville et al. (2023:43) used WPR analysis to scrutinise how policies regarding the forest sector problematise gender inequality, this study calls into question how the Swedish FFP problematise gender inequality: what is the problem represented to be and what does this tell us about the underlying assumptions of the policy? Accordingly, the critical interrogation of the policy was conducted through a framework of four questions from Bacchi’s (2009) framework.
Table 1. Questions from Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach

**Question 1.** What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy?

**Question 2.** What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?

**Question 3.** How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

**Question 4.** What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

**Question 5.** What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?

**Question 6.** How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

---

**Question 1.** What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in a specific policy?

Through this question, one can identify and clarify the implicit problem representation of the policy. Examining the suggested interventions or proposals for change can reveal the underlying problem they address. Importantly, there may be more than one problem representation, and these may even be contradictory. The first question therefore aims to highlight the dominant representation (Bacchi, 2009:2-4).

**Question 2.** What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?

The goal of the second question is to localise inherent cultural values and analyse the background knowledge taken for granted. The question concerns identifying the conceptual logics behind the problematization, and to examine how meaning is created through a policy. Bacchi (2009:4-10) emphasises the importance of binaries, categories and concepts in the meaning making process.

Much of public debate is based on binaries or dichotomies like the distinctions between public/private and male/female. Through their use, complex relationships are simplified. Implied is a hierarchical relationship between the two concepts, where one side is privileged at the cost of the other. With regards to categories, this includes a closer inspection of how people are categorised. Categories are not given but constructed, and the same holds true for binaries and concepts. This categorisation is central for how governing transpires and how people think about others, as well as themselves. Lastly, key concepts function as a relatively open-ended label which can be filled with different meanings by different people. Consequently, concepts are fiercely contested and require the analysis to shed light on which meanings are given to central concepts.
in a specific policy. It may, nevertheless, be difficult to notice the construction of a concept, as some are firmly anchored in culture and history (Bacchi, 2009:4-10).

**Question 3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?**
This question was designed to investigate which conditions facilitated the emergence of the representation and how it came to be the dominant one. It investigates the origins, mechanisms, and history of a problem. This stresses that a certain representation is not naturally given but is rather contingent and can therefore be object to change. Another goal of this question is to expose the powers engaged in upholding certain representations (Bacchi, 2009:10-12).

**Question 4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?**
The fourth question explores what is being left unsaid. What does the policy fail to problematize? Seeing how representations have inherent limitations, this question aims to highlight perspectives which have been silenced in a policy. This shifts attention to contradictions or tensions within the representation, calling attention to its inadequacies. Just like question 3, it is about the underlying conditions which make the representation possible (Bacchi, 2009:12-14).

Although this thesis only used four out of Bacchi’s six questions, it could be argued that the fifth WPR question (effect of problem representation) correlates with sub-question two (policy impact) and could provide relevant findings to back up this sub-question. The same could be said for the sixth WPR question (disrupting problem representation) and the revokal of the FFP. Nonetheless, other material evaluating the implementation and revokal of the FFP were deemed better suited to provide insight into sub-question 2 and 3. This material was studied using an alternative theoretical approach, integrating key concepts from the literature review. Due to the limited scope of this project, a combination of the two approaches cannot be covered here.

Once the WPR questions have been applied to a policy, Bacchi (2009:19) suggests a final step involving applying her questions to one’s own problem representations. This type of self-reflexivity is of importance as the researcher too is submerged in conceptual logic and has both an identity and pre-existing knowledge which shape that analysis.
3.2.2. Conceptualising the Coding Frame

Seeking to examine the impact and revokal, qualitative content analysis combining inductive and deductive coding was implemented. The combination of coding processes was inspired by Zhukova, Rosén Sundström and Elgström’s (2022) study of perceptions of Sweden’s FFP, which shows the benefits of pairing theoretically informed deductive codes with inductive codes that help highlight “patterns in the data that did not fit any pre-determined theoretical concepts” (p.446). This study integrated important components from the theory section, both in the coding frame and open-coding processes. Although the methodology chapter addresses the content analysis more explicitly, this section clarifies key concepts which the deductive coding frame draws upon. This coding frame encompasses three concepts defined in the literature review: soft power, hard power, and norm entrepreneur. These were chosen to shed light on and nuance the areas where the policy did or did not succeed, as well as the way in which the policy revokal was framed.

First, the code and concept of soft power highlights areas in which Sweden has successfully wielded soft power in relation to the policy. Parallels between successful policy implementation and the policy’s goal to achieve political aims using what Nye (2008:94) defines as soft power resources like policies, values and culture are central. Zhukova, Rosén Sundström and Elgström (2022) argue that the government has translated pro-gender norms into strategic narratives of the Swedish state, which by extension indicates a nation branding as gender equality forerunner and ‘women-friendly state’. This concept was used to nuance the success of the FFP, while hard power, on the other hand, was used to indicate areas where the policy has been less successful. Use of hard power highlights contradictions in the implementation, given that it is arguably at odds with the policy’s ethical considerations (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2019a:45). Examining to what extent the framing of the policy revokal was made in relation to soft or hard power provides important insight to the removal of the feminist label.

For the deductive framework, the most central concept is norm entrepreneur. In the Handbook for Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy (Utrikesdepartementet, 2018:54), leadership is highlighted as a key factor for norm change, with the government acting as a norm entrepreneur, taking on leadership for the spread of pro-gender norms. Therefore, using norm entrepreneur as a code and guiding instrument to analyse the implementation and revokal of the policy provided crucial findings for sub-question two, three and four.
Lastly, the codes ‘successful implementation’ and ‘failure in implementation’ served as the main categories of the textual material focusing on the effects of the FFP. These were examined in relation to the six external ambitions of the policy framework. Together, these five aspects constitute the deductive coding frame presented under the ‘Qualitative Content Analysis’.

Before concluding the chapter, the theory and conceptual framework should be subject to scrutiny. This theoretical starting point facilitated an analysis which could be seen as subjective. While some would use this as criticism of the theory and method, it should be clarified that this study started from the premise that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997). Rather, the reflexive nature of the WPR approach is one of its benefits (Tawell & McCluskey, 2022:147). Using the chosen theories involved translating the textual material into relevant findings, and according to Haraway (1988), “[t]ranslation is always interpretative, critical, and partial” (p.589).

---

1 See Table 5 on page 28.
2 Objectivity and subjectivity within research will be further discussed under ‘Methodological Reflections’.
4. A Method for Getting to the Bottom of Feminist Foreign Policy

4.1. Research Design

With an aim to offer insight into the rise and fall of Sweden’s FFP and to provide thick descriptions of the emerging political phenomena, this thesis is designed as a longitudinal, single case study. This facilitates an examination over an extended period, to follow the policy development (Yin, 2014:53). The Swedish case is historically important within the population, having been described as unprecedented and serving as a model for other states’ frameworks (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2019a:37). According to Yin (2018:4), case studies offer great insight into complex social or political phenomena – especially for contemporary cases which are out of the researcher’s control and when looking into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a phenomenon.

Scholarship on the topic presents arguments for both single case formats and comparative case studies. Although the latter could facilitate interesting comparisons, this thesis aims for depth, rather than width. The single case study was chosen, since it can facilitate an in-depth examination of a political phenomenon, in the setting of its actual occurrence. This is particularly useful when distinctions between case and context are not immediately obvious (Yin, 2018:15).

Although the usefulness of case studies is questioned by some scholars, Flyvbjerg argues that they play a vital role in knowledge production. According to him, “[s]ocial science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and, thus, has in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2006:223).

Additionally, this design opens for both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This study takes on the latter research strategy since it can help facilitate deeper, more nuanced understandings: both historically and contextually (Halperin & Heath, 2020:248). Case studies, however, are more of a methodological approach than a cohesive method. Rather, the research design can be implemented through a multitude of methods. This also relates to the primary strength of the case study, which Yin (2018:126) argues is its ability to handle a wide range of evidence or material.

The findings are divided in four sections, lined up with the sub-questions of the thesis. In the first section, a critical policy analysis inspired by Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach examines the problem

---

3 For instance, an interesting comparison could have been Sweden (the first FFP state in the global north) and Mexico (the first FFP state in the global south). Yet, this approach would also raise issues such as language barriers and time constraints. With regards to language, not all relevant material from the Mexican government was accessible in English.
representation in Sweden’s FFP and what this tells us about how the policy came to be launched. Next, qualitative content analysis examines policy impact in practice, after which the revokal of the policy follows. Section four summarises the integrated findings related to Sweden’s norm entrepreneurship. Together, these findings constitute the basis for a wider analysis and discussion.

4.2. Material and Data Collection

This study’s data selection was based on several types of textual material, including key official policy documents, news articles, statements, and documentations of impact. With regards to language, material in Swedish and in English was collected since both languages are used by the Swedish government and are languages that the author of this work masters. Furthermore, using a multitude of sources for data is also important given the research design. According to Yin (2018:113), any well-conducted case study requires a triangulation of sources for evidence.

4.2.1. Collecting Textual Material

First, the official policy document describing Sweden’s feminist foreign policy was collected. This document lays the foundation for the critical policy analysis and consequently the first section of the analysis, focusing on the policy and its launch. Once identified, the policy document was archived in the digital program NVivo. The selection criteria for this material was:

- Policy documents related to the feminist foreign policy, published by the Swedish government after the 2014 national election on September 14th until the 1st of April 2023
- Passed as official government programs

Complementary material in the form of foreign policy declarations and news articles is used to strengthen the findings from the policy document, by providing support for how the problematization in the policy came about. The selection criteria for this material was:

- Declarations of foreign policies: All declarations published by the Swedish government between the 2014 national election in September, leading up to launch of the government communication in September 2019
- News articles: Published in major Swedish newspapers, after the national election in 2014 until the end of the year, containing comments by Margot Wallström on the FFP

The news articles were identified and collected through Retriever Media Archive, using the search phrases ‘feministisk utrikespolitik’ (feminist foreign policy), ‘Margot Wallström’ and ‘utrikesminister’ (Minister for Foreign Affairs). To limit the scope of material, only articles published in one of the four
The biggest Swedish news outlets Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet, Expressen and Svenska Dagbladet were collected, between the dates 2014-09-14 to 2014-12-31 (Ocast, n.d.).

Next, material documenting and reviewing the impact of the policy was collected. Given that data collection from primary sources is not covered within the scope of this study, this section relies on trustworthy secondary sources. This enables an analysis of the implementation of the policy in a range of areas which would otherwise not have been accessible. The selection criteria for this material was:

- Official evaluative documents related to the impact of the FFP, published on the Swedish government’s website
- Published reviews of the policy’s impact, conducted by trustworthy non-governmental organisations with expertise in the field

With regards to material providing evidence for how the Minister for Foreign Affairs – and the Swedish government by extension – framed the decision to abandon the FFP, public statements and news articles were collected. The selection criteria for this material was:

- Official statements: Any official press release or statement addressing foreign policy, published by the Swedish government after the 2022 national election on September 11th until the 1st of April 2023
- News articles: Published in major Swedish newspapers, containing comments by Tobias Billström on the revokal of the FFP. Must be published after the latest government declaration on October 16th 2022 until the 1st of April 2023

The articles were collected from the same news outlets as above, using Retriever Media Archive and the same search phrases: ‘feministisk utrikespolitik’, ‘Tobias Billström’ and ‘utrikesminister’. The timeframe was limited to 2022-10-16 to 2023-04-01.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Foreign Office</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Evaluative document</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Sveriges feministiska utrikespolitik: Exempel på tre års genomförande”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Swedish feminist foreign policy: Examples from three years of implementation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Feminist foreign policy and efforts for gender equality and all women and girls' rights, representation and resources during the years 2014–2021]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Evaluative document</td>
<td>Concord website</td>
<td>“Hur feministisk är Sveriges utrikespolitik?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[How feminist is Sweden's foreign policy?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gabriella Irsten</td>
<td>2019-08-28</td>
<td>Evaluative document</td>
<td>Heinrich Böll Stiftung website</td>
<td>“How feminist is the Swedish feminist foreign policy?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Foreign Office</td>
<td>2023-02-15</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Statement of foreign policy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Göran Greider</td>
<td>2022-11-08</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
<td>“Billströms proppmatta uttalande bör bli historiskt”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Billström's staffed statement ought to become historical]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Erik Helmersson</td>
<td>2022-10-30</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
<td>“Stå bakom kvinnorna – överalt”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Stand behind women – everywhere]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Anders Lindberg</td>
<td>2022-10-23</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Aftonbladet</td>
<td>“Kristerssons offer: kvinnor och klimatet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Kristersson's stimulus: women and the environment]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Karin Thurfjell</td>
<td>2022-10-22</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladet</td>
<td>“Billström tar farväl av feministiskt utrikespolitik”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Billström bids farewell to feminist foreign policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Expressens Ledare</td>
<td>2022-10-20</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Expressen</td>
<td>“Exit feministiskt utrikespolitik”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Exit feminist foreign policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Thea Mossig-Norheim</td>
<td>2022-10-19</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Expressen</td>
<td>“Kristerssons skrällar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Kristersson's surprise]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lina Lund</td>
<td>2022-10-19</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
<td>“Billströms löfte: Ingen mer feministiskt utrikespolitik”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Billström’s promise: No more feminist foreign policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>John Granlund</td>
<td>2022-10-19</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Aftonbladet</td>
<td>“Billström slöpar den feministiska utrikespolitikern”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Billström scrips the feminist foreign policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladets Ledare</td>
<td>2022-10-19</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladet</td>
<td>“En regering som vill ta ansvar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[A government that wants to take responsibility]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Susanna Kierkegaard</td>
<td>2022-10-26</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Aftonbladet</td>
<td>“Nu ska Billström ur i världen och käfta”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Now Billström is going out in the world to mock off]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Erik Helmersson</td>
<td>2023-02-16</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
<td>“Borgfreden om Nato står fast”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[The true over Nato remains firm]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. List of supporting empirical material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Foreign office</td>
<td>2015-02-11</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Regeringens deklaration” [Statement of government policy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Foreign office</td>
<td>2016-02-24</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Statement of government policy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Foreign office</td>
<td>2017-02-15</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Statement of government policy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Foreign office</td>
<td>2018-02-14</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Statement of government policy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Foreign office</td>
<td>2019-02-13</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Government website</td>
<td>“Statement of government policy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Göran Eriksson</td>
<td>2014-11-16</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladet</td>
<td>“Vi är beredda att värna våra gränser” [We are prepared to hold our borders]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Margot Wallström,</td>
<td>2014-10-19</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladet</td>
<td>“Barnkonventionen bör bli lag” [The convention on the rights of the child ought to become law]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isabella Lövin,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Åsa Regnér</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Robert Egnell</td>
<td>2014-10-15</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
<td>“Feministisk utrikespolitik effektivaste vägen mot fred” [Feminist foreign policy is the most efficient way to peace]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jenny Stiernsted</td>
<td>2014-10-15</td>
<td>News article</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladet</td>
<td>“Här är landets nya ministrar” [Here are the new ministers of the country]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Analytical Framework

Once the material specified above was collected, it was analysed using either WPR inspired policy analysis or qualitative content analysis. These analytical methodologies are further explained in the two upcoming sub-sections.

4.3.1. What’s the Problem Represented to be in Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy?

With regards to Sweden’s FFP document, the analysis was structured according to Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach. Once the policy document had gone through an initial reading, it was put under close interrogation using four WPR questions as analytical tools, to subsequently identify the problem representations present.
Table 4. Questions from Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach, applied to Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy

**Question 1.** What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in Sweden’s feminist foreign policy?
**Question 2.** What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?
**Question 3.** How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
**Question 4.** What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?

The results from the WPR analysis are presented in the section ‘The Rise of the World’s First Feminist Foreign Policy’, where the findings are structured according to the four questions. Since each question builds upon the previous one, the structure intends to facilitate a better understanding of the analytical process.

4.3.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

For the last sections of the analysis, qualitative content analysis was used to analyse a wide array of material, as specified above. According to Boréus & Bergström (2017b:25-26), content analysis is a useful tool when searching for patterns in large bodies of text. It can be used to compare different corpora and changes over time, or to examine how an issue is portrayed or evaluated. Furthermore, content analysis can be conducted in a quantitative or qualitative manner, where the latter can facilitate a more complex analysis of the content.

An important distinction between the two approaches to content analysis is that the quantitative approach often works deductively, creating an initial theory driven coding scheme to guide what is examined in the material. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, often works inductively through an open coding process, where the coding frame emerges from within the textual material itself (Boréus & Bergström, 2017b:24). Nevertheless, it should be clarified that deductive coding is not exclusively qualitative but can be used within qualitative approaches too. This study combines deductive and inductive qualitative coding.

Initially, all textual material in section two and three was analysed using the deductive coding frame presented below. In the coding frame, relevant concepts from the literature review have been assigned indicators to guide the analysis. However, these concepts should be seen as sensitising concepts, rather than operationalised definitions. This means that the concepts and their indicators guide the analysis, but are not entirely fixed (Bryman, 2016:696). As such, they shed light on
important findings, yet leave room for a flexible analysis. The coding was conducted using the programme NVivo, in which all material was archived.

Table 5. Theory inspired coding frame, based on conceptualisations from literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Norm entrepreneur** | - Efforts to persuade states to change behaviour  
                      - Aims to challenge the way that societal problems are currently understood  
                      - Foreign policy leaders using position and identity to advance existing norms in the name of national interest  
                      - Actively advocating for political leaders to adopt norms |
| **Soft power**    | - Achieving political aims through attraction rather than coercion  
                      - Influence through policies, values and culture  
                      - Diplomacy  
                      - Nation branding  
                      - Feminine power |
| **Hard power**    | - Achieving political aims through military or economic coercion, either by use of or threat thereof  
                      - Masculinised power |
| **Successful implementation** | Efforts that have helped achieve one of the six external goals of the Swedish FFP, which aim to contribute to all girls’ and women’s:  
                                       1. Full enjoyment of human rights  
                                       2. Freedom from physical, psychological and sexual violence  
                                       3. Participation in prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in building peace after conflict  
                                       4. Political participation and influence in all areas of society  
                                       5. Economic rights and empowerment  
                                       6. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) |
| **Failure in implementation** | Failure to implement or contradictions of the six external goals of the Swedish FFP, presented above. |

After the deductive coding was performed, it was complemented by inductive coding, as motivated earlier. In this study, the inductive coding was operationalised in accordance with Lindgren’s (2014b) method for open coding through a three-level process involving coding, thematization and summarising.

---

4 The six external goals are specified by Utrikesdepartementet (2018:17) and builds upon the author’s own translation.

5 See discussion under ‘Conceptualising the Coding Frame’ on page 20.
As a first step, the textual material - the reviews of policy impact, declarations of foreign policy and news articles - was assigned codes, allowing for the grouping of sections that demonstrate similar phenomena. This provided an initial sorting of the material, where the coding was carried out in an inductive manner, with the codes growing out of the material itself (Lindgren, 2014a; Boréus & Bergström, 2017b:24). Moreover, the process was iterative, as the codes were continually compared to the analysed material.

The approach worked from the bottom and upwards, where these codes acted as pillars when building the subsequent framework for the content analysis (Lindgren, 2014a). This was then seen in the following thematization, where sorting codes into themes was done to emphasise connections between the codes and ensuing patterns in the text (Lindgren, 2014c). In the final step, conclusions were drawn from the patterns found through the coding process and a form of constant comparative analysis was used to verify the findings within the material (Lindgren, 2014b). The summary of these findings was then integrated with the findings from the deductive coding, thus creating the final results of the coding.

4.4. Methodological Reflection

The literature review and theoretical framework have guided the selections of research design, collection of material and methods for analysis. While there are a multitude of ways in which the research problem could have been approached6, the most suitable methodology was deemed to be content analysis, through combining critical policy analysis inspired by Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach with inductive and deductive qualitative coding. This decision was clearly anchored in the research problem and available material.

4.4.1. Evaluation and Positionality of Research

All research requires evaluation, but when it comes to establishing suitable assessment criteria for the quality of qualitative research there is much debate (Bryman, 2016:384). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), two central criteria for qualitative research ought to be trustworthiness and authenticity7. This study adheres to the first of the two: trustworthiness. This overarching criterion

---

6 For example, in the preliminary stages of this study, interviews with government officials were deemed as a relevant path for exploring how the removal of the feminist label had changed foreign policy work in practice - if it had done so. While this could have provided interesting input and first-hand knowledge of the most recent policy change, this complementary method for data collection was quickly eliminated due both to the difficulty in gaining access. This is often the case when interviews involve political elites (Halperin & Heath, 2020:322).

7 Bryman describes Lincoln and Guba’s criterion of ontological, tactical, catalytic, and educative authenticity as “thought-provoking” (2016:386), yet states that the criterion has not gained grounds within social research. Given its correspondence with action research, it was not used in this study.
rests on four sub-criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. All four have counterparts in quantitative research. Against the assumption that there are several ways to account for social reality, research should provide a **credible** account of it. To ensure credibility in findings, research should follow good practice and should either be submitted to respondent validation or triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The decision to use a triangulation of sources and methods for content analysis was anchored in this criterion. Additionally, bias of the study is reduced by using textual material collected using unobtrusive ways of data collection (Halperin & Heath: 2020:374).

According to Bryman (2016:384), **transferability** entails that qualitative research should provide thick descriptions that allow others to make their own judgements about the transferability of the findings. This also provides a point of reference for future research. However, a single case cannot be representative of all cases (Bryman, 2016:384; Flyvbjerg, 2006:223). The point of departure is thus that the Swedish case is of interest in and of itself, with the study seeking deep, contextual knowledge – not generalisable, context-independent knowledge.

Rather than reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest adopting an auditing approach through the notion of **dependability**. This means keeping a thorough record of the whole research process, and to let this audit trail serve as a basis for peer review along with the research findings. Yet, given the large scope of data produced by qualitative research, this ambitious idea is difficult to implement (Bryman, 2016:384-386). As such, this study instead adapts the more quantitative criterion of reliability, described by Halperin and Heath (2020) as “the measurement of an indicator yields the same results on repeated occasions” (p.191). When adapting this to qualitative research, it requires the researcher to be precise and accurate throughout the analysis to attain reliable findings (Borëus & Bergström, 2017a:18). The goal is not to measure, but to be systematic. The criterion was sought by re-coding segments of the material and critically examining the coding.

The final criterion of trustworthiness, **confirmability**, finds its equivalent in objectivity (Bryman, 2016:384). Rose (1997:305) argues that while it is important to be aware and reflect upon the positionality of the research, researcher and context, no research is truly objective or free from interpretation. Research starts from a specific position, making the knowledge used and produced situated. The upcoming analysis is partial by its very nature, given that knowledge used to build the analysis is situated, and so are the findings coming from the study itself. According to Ekström and Larsson (2010:16), this does not suggest an unscientific nature of research – rather, prior
knowledge of the context and field is indispensable. Bryman (2016:386) suggests that the important aspect is that research is conducted in good faith and that theoretical inclinations or personal values do not blatantly shape the research. However, it raises the demand for transparency, which is also vital for improving the replicability of the study (Boréus & Bergström, 2017a:19).

In line with this, it should be clarified that the premise for this work comes from a genuine curiosity for gendered perspectives to foreign policy and a normative claim that gender equality is an important goal. With regards to positionality, I identify as a woman and have grown up in one of the world’s most gender equal societies (UNDP, 2023). My own belief in the importance of women’s rights and gender equality makes me fundamentally positive to efforts to promote more gender equal societies. The analysis was, nevertheless, deeply anchored in previous research in the field and existing knowledge of the topic, while keeping an open mind to new findings arising from the analysis. The study still aimed to provide as fair answers as possible to the research questions and is transparent with its positionality. In that respect, this study combined three of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness – credibility, transferability, and confirmability – with transparency and reliability.

4.4.2. Ethical Considerations

Another consideration for this study was to adhere to ethical principles of research. Alan Bryman (2016) argues that ethical research principles generally concern four problem areas: “whether there is harm to participants; whether there is a lack of informed consent; whether there is an invasion of privacy; whether deception is involved” (p.125). The risk of transgressing ethical considerations has been significantly reduced by relying on data from readily available textual material. This way, their collection did not involve any invasion of privacy and there were no participants which this study would risk deceiving. Moreover, the data required no informed consent, since the texts were available for public use on official websites of the Swedish government, civil society organisations and news outlets. The risk of harmful impact was low for two main reasons. First, the study did not involve any direct participation of individuals. Second, although the FFP addresses some sensitive topics, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence, this study did not handle any material of sensitive nature. Against this backdrop, this study was conducted in accordance with ethical considerations for research.
4.5. Setting the Parameter: Delimitations of Study

Although Sweden’s foreign policy is tightly connected to domestic policies, it is the Government Communication of Sweden’s feminist foreign policy and related developments that is studied within this work. It should therefore be clarified that the national plan for gender equality was not examined, since the focus is on how Sweden has used the FFP to promote gender equality in the international arena, rather than domestically. Only the government communication is included since it had been passed as an official government program. The delimitation means that the action plans for the FFP is not included in the analysis. Sweden’s foreign policy also intersects with the policy for development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Yet, given the specific focus on the FFP, it is the creation, implementation and revokal of this specific policy that is of interest for this study. The development and aid policy is therefore not amongst the analysed material.

With regards to available material, there was a limited selection of material evaluating the policy impact and even less on how the recent dismantlement changes Sweden’s foreign policy. This study was conducted at a time where the effect of the new policy remains to be seen and is therefore not able to address what the most recent policy shift means in practice but could only discuss its potential implications.
5. Findings and Analysis: Understanding Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy

Through its FFP, Sweden paved the way for others to take responsibility for women’s needs and human rights. While the policy still causes ripples on the water, the country’s foreign policy has taken yet another turn, scrapping its explicitly feminist label. Following the recent policy revokal, how can the rise and fall of Swedish feminist foreign policy between 2014 – 2022 be understood?

The upcoming chapter works through the first three sub-questions of the thesis, which focus on the problem represented in Sweden’s FFP, how the policy was implemented in practice and the framing of the policy revokal. Cutting across these sections is the impact of Sweden’s long-standing role as norm entrepreneur for gender equality values. The thesis returns to this by summarising the findings regarding this fourth sub-question in the chapter’s final section.

5.1. The Rise of the First Feminist Foreign Policy: Problematising Sweden’s Policy Framework

This section focuses especially on the official FFP framework, by answering the first sub-question: What’s the problem represented to be in Sweden’s former feminist foreign policy?

Figure 1. Summary of key findings from WPR analysis
5.1.1. What’s the ‘problem’ represented to be in Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy?

Examining the government communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy (Regeringskansliet, 2019), it becomes clear that the overarching problem the policy aims to address is gender inequality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights. Although Thomson (2020:433) also found the problem representation in Sweden’s FFP to be gender inequality, this thesis offers elaborations of this problematization. The proposed solutions of the policy are aimed at achieving transformative change of gender-stereotyped norms, values and attitudes that create and uphold unequal power structures, which facilitate subordination and discrimination of women (Regeringskansliet, 2019:56). Importantly, this is perceived as a pressing issue since it creates barriers to their full enjoyment of human rights – which are key tenets of the policy. The central problem representation is connected to two ‘sub-problems’: the regression of progress made for women’s rights and gender equality, as well as the lack of knowledge and relevant data needed to find remedies to gender inequality.

The policy emphasises the undeniable effects of patriarchal structures, at individual and societal levels. Gender inequality exacerbates the negative impact of catastrophes that women may face, like conflicts and climate disasters, along with making them more vulnerable to gender-based violence (Regeringskansliet, 2019:4). Nevertheless, gender inequality affects all genders, and efforts to tackle the issue requires the involvement of men and women.

The initial three pillars of the policy are telling of the problem representations behind the government’s perception of gender inequality. The policy proposes to address gender inequality through advancing the rights, resources, and representation of women, thereby revealing that the lack thereof is considered an issue (Regeringskansliet, 2019:7). Structural gender discrimination is seen in a multitude of barriers, such as legislative, political, social, educational, labour, economic and health, where areas of SRHR are especially contested. This is described as hindering women's access to arenas like politics, labour markets and so forth. Gender inequality is represented as a structural issue of limited opportunities and access, rather than one of performance or capabilities. In essence, the policy addresses how the construction of gender enables some people to hold power over others. The feminist basis thus becomes evident, since feminist theories target power structures and who holds power over who (Butler, 1990).

Given that gender inequality is structural, the policy implies that spreading pro-gender norms at the individual level is insufficient. Instead, the issue ought to also be regulated by state, requiring
gender mainstreaming in policies and inclusive legislative frameworks, which is one of the most
prominent themes in the document (Regeringskansliet, 2019:56). Accordingly, successful
implementation of a gender perspective depends on creating mechanisms for follow-up and
accountability.

Building on the overarching problem in the policy - gender inequality - the regression of existing
rights is problematised, as “increased pushback and challenges of recent years imply a risk that
hard-won progress on gender equality will be lost” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:5). Any regression of
current progress is seen as a serious problem for human rights. For example, the policy has a strong
focus on SRHR, which is essential for reaching gender equality on the premise that “the full
potential of women and girls cannot be tapped without SRHR” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:13). Faced
with heightened opposition in this area, the government bolsters its efforts to safeguard existing
agreements and enhance normative progress.

Important parallels are drawn to recent years’ shrinking democratic space and its direct bearing on
women (Regeringskansliet, 2019:5). This growing trend hinders civil society organisations from
advocating for social development and accountability, while also eroding the agency and
empowerment of women. These regressions are seen as a connected problem, which runs the risk
of further undermining progress for gender equality.

Lastly, the policy emphasises that gender equality cannot be achieved without sufficient
knowledge. The lack of knowledge about gender inequality and relevant sex-disaggregated data is
therefore problematised as limiting potential for finding suitable remedies. To tackle this issue, the
government promotes knowledge building through collecting and analysing data, as these are seen
as “prerequisites for understanding, explaining and confronting lack of gender equality and barriers
to all women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:31). Given the
global nature of the issue, sharing insight is imperative, especially with countries lacking capacity
for knowledge building. The FFP therefore highlights that capacity building and knowledge
enhancement is best done through cooperation, dialogue and establishing alliances. Here, Sweden’s
normative leadership is described as key.

5.1.2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?
Regarding gender inequality and the structural barriers that it sets for women’s full enjoyment of
human rights, two paramount assumptions underpin the representation: the hegemony of a
patriarchal world order and the universality of human rights. Without an understanding of patriarchal, societal power structures as systematically discriminating against women, the aim of achieving gender equality makes little sense. While the existence of a global gender order has been confirmed in many studies (Regeringskansliet, 2019:5), it is an underlying presupposition taken for granted in the policy. Through this conceptual logic, the policy creates meaning of gender inequality.

The policy’s problematization assumes that all societies are more or less patriarchal. The negative impact of the gender-stereotyped norms that uphold this structure underpin the representation and are seen as unjust and dangerous. The document explicitly clarifies this belief, by stating that societies in all parts of the world are “characterised by stereotypical gender roles that disadvantage women and girls, as well as men and boys, and which reproduce gender-discriminatory behaviour” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:6). These norms affect all genders, but especially increases the vulnerability of women, particularly those from marginalised groups.

However, the very notion of gender is highly contested. Gender can be seen as one of the policy’s key concepts: an open-ended label whose fierce contestation necessitates further elaboration. Depending on one’s worldview, ‘gender’ can be filled with different meanings. While some resist the concept as a leftist notion of identity politics undermining traditional values (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017b), others would see it as an important social category, in need of adequate consideration for achieving equality and justice (IWDA, 2022). The latter perception is highly visible in the policy document.

Yet, essential for this analysis is not the wider issue of gender (inequality), rather, it is how the policy constructs these problems that are relevant. The policy addresses that although substantial progress is visible in several areas related to women’s rights, the progress meets not only underlying, but explicit contestation. As a result, the policy aims to “combat negative and gender-stereotyped norms and attitudes, particularly toxic masculinity norms, attitudes and behaviours” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:11).

These assumptions imply that gender-discriminatory and patriarchal structures are not naturally given but based on constructed gender-stereotyped norms. The policy highlights the binary of public (coded male) and private (coded female) realms of society. This entails that issues women are faced with are depoliticised or are not given space on the political agenda. Throughout the
document, gender inequality is often brought up in relation to issues that women face, but which are exempt from political regulation due to their placement in the private sphere. This includes SRHR, gender-based violence and men’s violence against women, and carrying most of the responsibility of unpaid work in the household. This problematization takes for granted that the personal is political.

Subsequently, this representation entails that gender unequal power structures are susceptible to change, primarily through normative and legislative change. The former highlights the importance of leadership in raising awareness and for spreading pro-gender norms and knowledge, while the latter emphasises the need for state regulation, by integrating gender perspectives in policies, treaties, and legislations. This connects the assumption that achieving gender equality requires normative leadership to the one that ‘enlightened’ states like Sweden must assume responsibility for this normative change.

Drawing inspiration from the SDGs the policy understands gender equality as a goal in its own right. Women and girls are seen as deserving of the same rights and opportunities as men and boys (Regeringskansliet, 2019:4). Gender equality is, nevertheless, also understood as a means to an end. The foundation of the policy builds on the assumption that gender equality would benefit all, through its positive impacts on society. Importantly, the transformative aim of the policy is anchored in the belief that gender equality is a prerequisite for democracy, enhances economic growth and stability, while also contributing to societal progress and sustainability.

At the heart of this problematization of gender inequality is the understanding of human rights as universal. According to the UN (n.d.), human rights are inherent and indivisible, and should be provided without discrimination. The policy expresses this understanding, without which it would not be an issue that half of the world’s population are systematically denied fundamental rights and freedoms. The notion of human rights is deeply rooted in most societies and in the discourse of the FFP document. Their universality is dependent upon their wide acceptance and through widely applied international human rights laws (UN, n.d.). Sweden’s former FFP is a good example of how norms of human rights are institutionalised in the international community.

Yet, what the policy presents as inherent and undisputable rights are not accepted by everyone. Oas (2020) is sceptical to FFPs perceptions of issues such as SRHR, arguing that feminists “push for human rights standards that do not exist, and never have existed, including an international
right to abortion” (p.7). Contradictions like these clarify that human rights can mean different things for different people. While Regeringskansliet (2019:13) is aware of the polarisation of some rights, particularly SRHR, the policy expresses a firm conviction of the universality of all human rights. This is of uttermost importance for understanding the problem representation.

Throughout the policy, the categorisation of women and men, girls and boys are central. It explicitly states the importance of integrating an intersectional approach, which acknowledges that these categories are not homogenous, but internally varied (Regeringskansliet, 2019:7). However, it remains unclear how this affects the implementation of the policy. The analysis shows that the policy handles the categories as more or less internally coherent and thereby runs the risk of homogenising women.

Lastly, the same understandings that construct gender inequality as a problem, in turn, mean that regression of established progress is problematic and constitutes a threat. The corresponding problem of lack of knowledge related to gender inequality is also evident. The policy proposes remedies through advancing knowledge building efforts and dialogue between a multitude of actors. Calling for increased collection of sex-disaggregated data, it also suggests that achieving gender equality requires a better understanding of how sex and gender affect discrimination – the more we learn about these structural injustices, the more likely we are to change them (Regeringskansliet, 2019:32). This also ties back to the assumption that ‘enlightened’ states must assume responsibility and leadership for normative change. Highlighting Sweden’s global leadership for gender equality and human rights, the policy states that “Sweden's explicitly feminist foreign policy plays a key role as an opposing force” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:4) to conservative forces, favouring traditional values and combating pro-gender norms.

5.1.3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

To understand how the government perceives gender inequality as a central concern for foreign policy, it is important to examine the policy in light of the legislative and steering documents that paved the way for this problematization. Importantly, the FFP is deeply rooted in international commitments and legislations related to the rights of women, such as CEDAW and WPS. It is in relation to these that the problem representation above was facilitated. For instance, the policy states that “[w]ithin these frameworks, gender equality is considered a prerequisite for progress in all areas of society” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:9). These resolutions established the mechanisms which facilitated the emergence of the problem representation in the FFP.
Frequently referenced in the policy are national steering documents, through which gender equality gained grounds as an important issue for Swedish policy. Notably, the WPR analysis shows that the FFP is seen as a continuation of national commitments to gender equality. Gender equality was already an important goal in domestic policies, not least as a human rights respecting approach. This is apparent in references to domestic steering documents, such as Sweden’s Gender Equality Policy and the national strategy to prevent and combat men’s violence against women (Regeringskansliet, 2019:8).

The problem representation of gender inequality builds upon previous efforts to promote human rights and gender equality. It is a way to further enhance existing ambitions. Long before the FFP, Sweden was known for its progressive gender equality policy. Parallels are drawn to important reforms in the 1970s, when Sweden for example introduced the Gender Equality Act and gender-neutral, shared parental leave (Regeringskansliet, 2019:7). Together, the government and civil society promoted progress for women and girls, which led to important steps to incorporate what had formerly been treated as “women’s issues” into domestic policy.

Previous efforts for gender equality have also played an important role for Sweden’s image in the international arena. Taking a strong stance for progressive gender equality norms enabled Swedish governments to perform nation branding through norm entrepreneurship. This should be seen in the light of Sweden’s legacy as a moral superpower and the government’s ambition to counteract conservative forces fostering gender-stereotyped attitudes and norms (Regeringskansliet, 2019:5). The problem representation of gender inequality thus clearly derives from the perception that Sweden has international credibility in this area, and thus should take the lead for progress on gender equality (Regeringskansliet, 2019:33).

Taking a step back from the policy document itself, Sweden’s legacy as a welfare state, with a strong support net and state regulation is also highly relevant. A state aiming to protect all citizens cannot be seen as successfully having done so if it does not respect the rights of all. The conviction to protect women against gender-based discrimination transcends national borders, into the international realm. Gender equality is seen as benefiting the state, with more stability, economic growth, strengthened democracy and progress in all forms of societal development.
Importantly, the problem represented is anchored in the government’s existing view of gender inequality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights. It has been expressed in the foreign policy declarations made since the government came into power in 2014, until the passing of the official government program in 2019. How gender inequality is problematized in the yearly declarations from 2015–2019 aligns well with findings from the policy framework. Already in 2015, Margot Wallström declared that the feminist ambition should integrate every aspect of the nation’s foreign policy, since women’s rights are human rights too. Based on assumptions of ‘the hegemony of a patriarchal world order’ and ‘the universality of human rights’, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs said that “[i]t is the Government's firm intention that, in a time of turmoil, Sweden will take global responsibility by being a strong voice in the world. For freedom, peace and human rights. For democracy, equality and solidarity” (Utrikesdepartementet, 2015:8).

This view is also presented in several articles from October and November 2014, featuring statements by Wallström, in which similar priorities are brought to light. This includes efforts for SRHR and inclusion of women in peace processes in particular. Wallström explicitly claims that gender equality would benefit all through furthering societal progress, while also emphasising the need for Sweden to take on global leadership by using soft power to promote pro-gender norms. The news articles and declarations of foreign policy have been used to verify and strengthen the findings from the WPR analysis but will not be further elaborated.

These previous sections have examined what is presented in the policy. Yet, amid all it addresses, there are also factors which are not disclosed. For this reason, the upcoming section of the WPR findings looks at what remains unsaid.

5.1.4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?

Through the problem representation of gender inequality, the policy states that it will incorporate consideration of other, intersecting forms of discrimination, seeing as other forms of marginalisation can affect gender-based discrimination. Yet, although the government argues that there is a risk that “unequal conditions will be exacerbated by factors and grounds for discrimination other than gender and age, which can often reinforce the marginalisation” (Regeringskansliet, 2019:5), it remains unclear how these considerations are incorporated in its implementation. The policy says that neither ‘women’ or ‘men’ are homogenous categories, but overall, the analysis does not show how the problem of gender inequality affects people differently.

---

8 For a full list of supporting material, see Table 3 on page 26.
Looking past the surface of intersectional references, the exasperated vulnerability of individuals suffering from several grounds for discrimination remains an underexplored silence. To what extent does intersectionality become more than a buzzword?

Nevertheless, gender-stereotyped norms not only impact women, but can inflict harm on all genders. While destructive gender-stereotyped norms are frequently mentioned as a ground for discrimination of women, their impact on men is not elaborated. Both militarised and hegemonic masculinity have a negative impact on men, with some forms of masculinity privileged at the cost of others. Although the policy focuses on facilitating the full enjoyment of human rights for women and girls, there would be space to expand the protection of all genders to structural discrimination. For instance, the problematisation does not mention that while gender-stereotyped norms lead to women and children becoming more vulnerable to sexual violence during conflicts, civilian men are also negatively impacted by their gender, since the categories ‘women’ and ‘children’ signal civilian status in a way that unarmed male does not – making men more vulnerable to gender-based killings during conflict (Carpenter, 2003). While mentioned, the impact of gender-stereotyped norms on men is left unproblematic.

Although representation is one of the pillars of the policy, and for its problem representation, it could be further problematised if representation in number results in representation in perspectives covered. If measures to achieve gender equality merely extend to adding women into patriarchal structures, these efforts run the risk of signalling a false sense of progress. Consequently, it could be argued that such a false sense of accomplishment may hinder further challenging gender-stereotyped norms, behaviours, and power structures. According to Irsten (2019), whose evaluation of the FFP is presented below, gender equality “requires fundamental changes in structure; and new structures to be created” (p.4). Doing what is commonly referred to as ‘add women and stir’ will not achieve transformative aims. The representation aspect of the problematization could therefore be further nuanced.

Another chief silence is the perspective of the recipients of the policy. Although the document presents results of the first years of implementation, it does not address how it has been perceived by the receiving countries. Striving for inclusivity, giving more space to the experiences and voices of those which the policy aims to help could have strengthened the policy, and would have been more in line with its feminist aim. These experiences should arguably play an important part in the problematization of gender inequality.
There are also alternative ways in which the problematization could have been thought about. Importantly, the problem is presented in a way that emphasises the societal structures which impede women from accessing spheres such as education, labour market or politics – exclusion that hinders their advancement in society and poses barriers to their rights and freedoms. If one did not believe in structural discrimination of women, the issue of gender inequality could have instead been perceived as women lacking competence or capability on par with men. This is clearly not how gender inequality is perceived in the FFP. If the government had instead constructed economic growth or security from armed conflict as the main problem to be addressed through the foreign policy, gender equality could instead have been seen merely as a means to an end. In this policy, gender equality is also seen as a goal in and of itself.

In accordance with Bacchi’s (2009:19) suggestion for self-reflexivity, it is important to reflect critically about the role of the researcher in relation to the analysis. The positionality and situated knowledge behind this study will undeniably have an impact on the interpretive analysis above. Here, rather than subjecting the WPR analysis above to its own WPR analysis, an elaboration of self-reflexivity of the researcher has been provided under ‘Methodological Reflections’.
5.2. Successful or Contradictory? Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice

Although the previous section focuses on the problem representation within Sweden’s FFP and how the government proposed to solve gender inequality, the WPR analysis integrates policy and impact, since both were integral parts of the policy document. The upcoming section provides further findings from evaluative documents of the policy’s impact, by addressing sub-question two: How was the policy implemented in practice?

Figure 2. Summary of key findings from the coding of policy impact
5.2.1. Successful Implementation: Norm Entrepreneurship and Wielding of Soft Power

In both evaluative documents by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs\(^9\), Sweden's government focuses on the areas in which the policy has been successfully implemented. Already in the policy document, many examples of successful implementation are brought up. While Irsten (2019)\(^10\) and Concord (2017)\(^11\) discuss successes, they paint a more nuanced picture of the policy’s effect in practice.

Amongst the six external goals of the FFP, the content analysis of the four evaluative documents underlines the successful promotion of SRHR as the most prominent accomplishment of the policy. According to the government, Sweden has played a vital role in strengthening the EU's support of SRHR and has dedicated resources substantial support to the UNFPA – something that has led to the successful providal of contraceptives to millions of people, the prevention of hundred thousand of unplanned pregnancies and unsafe abortions, as well as having lowered maternal mortality (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021:1; Utrikesdepartementet, 2019:10). Concord (2017:13) shares the perception that Sweden has been an important advocate for SRHR in the international arena.

The findings also illustrate the successful involvement of women and girls in “participation in prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in building peace after conflict”\(^12\) (Utrikesdepartementet, 2018:17). This enjoys a consensus within the examined material. Irsten (2019) argues that “the emphasis on conflict prevention is one of the strongest aspects of Sweden’s feminist foreign policy on the whole” (p.1) and Concord (2017:24) state that Sweden has highlighted how women can be key actors for achieving stability and sustainable peace. This way, the policy has furthered meaningful participation of women, both in nation-building along with negotiating and maintaining peace deals (Concord, 2017:24). The integration of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has been integral to these efforts. The primary example of successful promotion of women in peace processes is the creation of the Swedish mediation network for women, through the Folke Bernadotte Academy. This achievement is emphasised by the government (Utrikesdepartementet, 2019:9; Utrikesdepartementet, 2021:3) and Concord (2017:24).

---

10 Gabriella Irsten works for the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. Her analysis of the Swedish FFP was written in collaboration with Heinrich Böll Stiftung.
11 Concord is a platform for Swedish civil society organisations.
12 Author's translation
Findings from the deductive coding show progress for economic rights and empowerment of women. Importantly, special priority has been attributed to this ambition in the *Handbook to Feminist Foreign Policy* (Concord, 2017:7). Other efforts, like contributions to the World Bank’s knowledge building about legislative barriers to women’s economic empowerment and ensuring integration of gender perspectives and goals for inclusive growth in recommendations from governing financial bodies are central (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021:6; Utrikesdepartementet, 2019:12). This exemplifies how Sweden has used its position to enhance and spread knowledge of gender inequality. The inductive coding emphasised this, with much material focusing on Sweden’s important role in establishing models for integrating gender perspectives.

The evaluation by the Swedish government (Utrikesdepartementet, 2019; Utrikesdepartementet, 2021) highlights successful promotion of the three remaining external goals, to contribute to women’s and girls’: “Freedom from physical, psychological and sexual violence”, “Full enjoyment of human rights” and “Political participation and influence in all areas of society” (Utrikesdepartementet, 2018:17). Yet, neither Concord (2017) nor Irsten (2019) support these claims to the same extent. They are therefore not as frequently coded as the three other goals. This will, however, be elaborated under ‘Failure in Implementation’.

Furthermore, there is an overlap between the codes ‘successful implementation’, ‘soft power’ and ‘norm entrepreneur’. Amongst the references under ‘soft power’, examples range from how Sweden has taken a global leadership position for SRHR through alliance building and sustained efforts which have led to the integration of SRHR in for instance the *EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024* to advocating for harsher stances against regimes guilty of sexual and gender-based violence, something which has now become a sanctionable offence in the UN Security Council (Concord, 2017:13; Utrikesdepartementet, 2021:2; Utrikesdepartementet, 2019:6). These constitute examples of how the government has used diplomacy, policies, and norm promotion to attract others to follow suit – all soft power resources to achieve their goal of gender equality. Additionally, the inductive coding underlined the importance of successful alliance building along with support of and cooperation with civil society.

The findings highlight how successful implementation of the policy is intimately connected to norm entrepreneurship. Sweden has actively advocated for political leaders to adopt pro-gender norms, for instance through “the inclusion of women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of their human rights in resolutions and statements by the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights
Council” (Utrikesdepartementet, 2019:4). Policy goals are met by challenging the way societal problems are understood and pushing states to change gender-discriminatory behaviour, which are other indicators of norm entrepreneurship. Swedish leadership is also accentuated under inductive codes.

Under the deductive code ‘norm entrepreneur’, references are made to how gender equality is already an established priority for other Swedish policies (i.e., Sweden’s development and aid policy) and that efforts to promote gender equality have been strengthened through action plans for the FFP (Irsten, 2019:1). Through norm entrepreneurship the international community can further their commitments to gender equality, and several states have followed in Sweden’s footsteps, further promoting global efforts for gender equality (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021:1). Thus, the coding and the analysis thereof underline the interplay between successful implementation, soft power, and norm entrepreneurship.

5.2.2. Failure in Implementation: Hard Power and Weapons Export at Odds with Policy

With regards to less successful areas of the policy, the former government has not presented any important shortcomings in its policy evaluations (Utrikesdepartementet, 2019; Utrikesdepartementet, 2021). This in itself is interesting given the upcoming discussion. Concord (2017) and Irsten (2019), conversely, provide examples of struggle and outright contradiction. First, the most frequently coded failure in implementation regards the strengthening of the full enjoyment of human rights for women and girls. This is primarily - but not exclusively - due to Sweden’s weapons export, and the contradiction this poses to the policy’s feminist ambition (Concord, 2017; Irsten, 2019). This connection is clarified under the overlapping codes ‘Failed promotion of full enjoyment of human rights’ and the inductive theme ‘Non-cohesive policy’, constituted by the codes ‘Double standards’ and ‘Actions undermining own legitimacy’. Concord (2017) argues that munition export undermines the credibility of the FFP, since it supports states which systematically discriminate women and uphold norms directly at odds with the policy:

“Our must recognize and attach considerable importance to the legitimising effect of the arms trade. It is unacceptable that countries that violate the human rights of women and girls are allowed to purchase military equipment from a country that claims to pursue a feminist foreign policy.”13 (p.26)
The transformative aim of the policy is also impeded by the arms export policy, which Irsten (2019) describes as “directly counterproductive to Sweden’s efforts in other policy areas, such as promoting peace, democracy, and human rights for all people” (p.2). It could be argued that Sweden’s arms trade instead legitimises the very structures - both patriarchal and militarised - its feminist ambition aims to transform. Notably, this contradiction is not addressed by the Swedish government in its evaluations. Although the fourth pillar of the FFP, ‘reality’, calls for critical, contextual reflection of the reality of the individuals it aims to help, such reflection is evidently lacking in relations to conflicts where economic profit from arms trade has been premiered over promoting security and women’s rights.

The findings underline a similar contradiction in Sweden’s harshened migration policy (Concord, 2017:30). Concord argues that changes in migration policy counteract the ambition to strengthen human rights of women and girls who have been forced to flee, emphasised in Sweden’s 2017 FFP action plan, which stressed the rights and protection of refugee women. Concord, nonetheless, finds these considerations lacking in new migration and refugee policies, with the temporary asylum legislation posing barriers to family reunification and increasingly causing women and children to be left behind in refugee camps, conflict zones and dangerous transit routes – thereby significantly increasing the risk of trafficking, gender-based and sexual violence (Concord, 2017:5). The inductive code ‘Other policies at odds with FFP’ constitute an important finding, highlighting how the government is faced with problems of its own creation: thereby hindering important avenues for change.

Second, although one of the successes of the FFP relates to the participation of women in “prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in building peace after conflict” (Utrikesdepartementet, 2018:17), this goal has not unreservedly been successful. Rather, Concord (2017) and Irsten (2019) emphasise both successes and failures in relation to this ambition. Irsten (2019:5) finds that women are met with barriers to participating in the armed forces since their bodies and reproductive systems are seen as a hindrance to participating fully, while the policy area of security remains amongst the most male-dominated ones in the country. Additionally, Concord (2017:25) emphasises the contradictory behaviour related to the 2016 Colombia peace process. Here, Sweden made efforts to strengthen the role of women in the peace process, while simultaneously paving the way for export of munition – thereby risking to undermine the peace deal and limiting women’s room for action, since increased access to weapons heightens the risk of discrimination and violence against them.
Third, the analysis illustrates failures in promoting freedom from physical, psychological, and sexual violence against women. Once again, Concord (2017) and Irsten (2019) primarily draw parallels between Sweden’s weapons exports and how this severely limits and counteracts this aim. Just in 2018, six states participating in the armed conflict in Yemen - “the largest humanitarian crisis in the world with devastating consequences on women and girls” (Irsten, 2019:2) - were supplied with Swedish military equipment. Women living in these settings are particularly vulnerable to gender-based and sexual violence. Sweden supplied weapons can be used to threaten, abuse, and kill them. The weapons export is therefore seen as the major hindrance to successful promotion of women’s freedom from violence.

Although some material has been coded under ‘failed promotion of economic rights and empowerment’ and ‘failed promotion of political participation and influence in all areas of society’, these codes are not as prominent. Fewest reservations are made against how the Swedish government has promoted SRHR through its foreign policy.

All in all, the major issue of the policy’s implementation is clearly Sweden’s weapons export. Central to this contradiction is the way in which it enables further militarisation of societies and other’s use of hard power. In references coded under ‘hard power’, both Irsten (2019) and Concord (2017) problematize the spread of weapons and its impact on women’s security. The report from Concord (2017:26) explains that the build-up of hard power and military means is often done at the expense of resources for healthcare, education, and clean water – all which have direct impact on the safety and lives of women. Increased access to weapons affects women not only through direct threats to their safety, but also through the limits this poses on their participation in the public sphere. Destructive gender-stereotyped norms can also be reproduced by the use of hard power and increased militarisation of society. This way, the double standard of Sweden’s arms export facilitates oppressive regimes’ use of hard power and constitutes “the biggest flaw in Sweden’s feminist foreign policy” (Irsten, 2019:3).
5.3. The Fall of Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy

In this section, the last stage of the policy lifecycle is elaborated by answering the third sub-question: How was the policy revokal framed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs?

On February 15, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tobias Billström, held the first declaration of foreign policy of Sweden’s new right-wing government (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). During his speech, Billström positions the government’s policy line in a harshened context for foreign policy:

“Sweden finds itself in a new era. There is no other way to describe it. The rumblings of large-scale war are being heard again in Europe and we are undergoing the biggest reassessment of our foreign policy since we joined the European Union [...] it is not only Ukraine's freedom that is at stake, but also our freedom here in Sweden. Russia’s goal is to replace the European security order”\(^{14}\) (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023:1)

\(^{14}\) Author’s translation
The declaration presents a securitization of politics, perceiving the security order under threat. The codes ‘security order under threat’ and ‘securitization of politics’ are thus closely related to the current priorities of the government: the NATO application process and showing solidarity with Ukraine (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023).

This also facilitates a large focus on security, where the theme ‘Security’ builds upon a range of different notions of the concept. Notably, a focal point is strengthening state security, especially through military capabilities and alliances. In addition, the new policy presents an increased focus on cyber security. While some aspects of the policy, such as references to human rights breaches in Iran and the focus on individuals’ needs in Ukraine, signal the perspective of human security, this is done to a lesser extent than state or national security (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). In turn, the declaration of foreign policy illustrates frequent references to the use of hard power. There are several examples of how military capacities are seen as ways to achieve political goals and increase national stability, which is especially the case with regards to NATO.

However, not a lot is said regarding gender equality and the rights of women. The word ‘kvinnor’ (women) is used four times in the declaration, in three different places: in relation to Ukraine, Afghanistan and the general priority ascribed to strengthening the rights of women around the world. In connection to this, explicit references to gender equality are made on two occasions in the document, both at the end of the policy declaration (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023:8). The findings present few references coded under ‘Gender equality and women’s rights’. Although the revokal of the FFP was made known by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in October 2022, four months before this speech, the revokal is not directly addressed in the declaration. Billström does, nevertheless, comment on the policy shift in several articles.

To the media, Tobias Billström clearly states that the government will discontinue with the FFP. Billström’s statement to the newspaper Aftonbladet, cited in the introduction of this work, summarises his view of the revokal of the feminist label:

“Gender equality is a fundamental value in Sweden and also for this government, but we’re not going to conduct a feminist foreign policy. The label has not fulfilled its purpose and obscures the fact the Swedish foreign policy must be based on Swedish values and Swedish interests”\footnote{Author’s translation} (Granlund, 2022:00.49)
Yet, both in the analysed articles and in the declaration, Swedish interests and democratic values are described as the centre of the new policy line (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023:8). While Billström argues that gender equality remains a core value of the government, several articles exhibit material coded as ‘FFP at odds with Swedish values and interests’. Simultaneously arguing that gender equality will remain central while also arguing that having a FFP does not serve Swedish interests is portrayed as paradoxical in some articles, while others see it as a natural result of the policy not fulfilling its purpose. However, if a major point of criticism against the FFP was that some perceived it as token politics, more concerned with signalling a normative stance than achieving actual change, then what signal does its revokal send?

While Billström does not further clarify how feminist interests are at odds with Swedish ones, he does signal that the FFP has not lived up to its goals. Nevertheless, this point is not further elaborated in the examined material and most references found under both ‘Failure in implementation of FFP’ and ‘Successful implementation of FFP’ are more telling of the journalists’ personal views than Billström’s.

According to Billström’s statements in the news articles, the shift will better serve ‘Swedish interests and values’ than the FFP. In the foreign policy declaration, the Minister for Foreign Affairs says that the government is increasingly focusing on neighbouring areas and the European context, rather than having a global focus (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023:1). This is nuanced in the articles, which illustrate how the code ‘Shifting from the global to the local’ can be attributed to the ‘Harshened context of foreign policy’, as threats to the European security order call for new priorities.

Several news articles also underline the narrowed scope for foreign policy, describing it as shifting away from a global perspective - where the former government put greater emphasis on international leadership with regards to humanitarian, moral and normative ambitions - towards a local perspective. These findings ought to be related to Tobias Billström’s statements in a seminar for the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, where he argued that the war in Ukraine signals a new epoch of Swedish foreign and security policy (Utrikespolitiska institutet, 2022). Not only does the war call for strengthened European solidarity and new military commitments to unite the West, but it is also described as a battleground for democratic values.
These arguments align with the recent declaration (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023). Focus seemingly has shifted from gender equality values to broader democratic values. The policy focuses less on using soft power resources to promote gender equality through its role as norm entrepreneur abroad, and more on achieving stability in Sweden and neighbouring countries. The content analysis stresses that while the Social Democrats and their FFP has been guided by the global strife for gender equality, the new government led by the Moderate Party have other priorities for foreign policy: strengthening Sweden’s security and military capacities through joining NATO.

5.4. Sweden: Letting Go of the Normative Lead?

Throughout the sections above, the fourth sub-question has been interwoven. Nevertheless, this section summarises findings made in relation to the question: How can these policy developments be understood in the context of Sweden’s long-standing role as norm entrepreneur for gender equality values?

First, the WPR analysis shows that the fundamental problematization in the policy - gender inequality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights - rests on assumptions of the universality of human rights and the hegemony of a patriarchal world order. Importantly, this is connected to the belief that ‘enlightened’ states must assume responsibility and leadership for normative change. The problem representation builds upon conceptual logics of previous efforts to promote human rights and gender equality.
Sweden’s stance for gender equality has allowed previous governments to conduct nation branding through norm entrepreneurship. Its role as a norm entrepreneur has constructed and reproduced an internal identity and international brand of Sweden as a progressive nation, moral superpower, and gender equality forerunner. This finding is in line with Nylund, Håkansson and Bjarneånd’s (2022) argument that promotion of gender equality has been paramount for Sweden’s internal and external image. Sweden’s long-standing role as norm entrepreneur for gender equality values has played a vital role for the emergence of its FFP and how the problem was constructed in the policy document.

What is more, the content analysis of the policy implementation shows important links between successful implementation and norm entrepreneurship. To achieve its goals, the policy is reliant upon others to follow suit – without support, Sweden struggles to push for the integration of gender perspectives in central international agreements and legislations. Through its leadership, Sweden aims to push states to change gender-discriminatory behaviour and challenge the way that societal problems are understood by integrating gender considerations. Successful norm promotion is necessary to further global efforts for gender equality and therefore intimately connected to norm entrepreneurship. While gender equality is an established priority in other policy areas, the FFP strengthened Sweden’s commitment and credibility to push for further gender-based reforms.

Conversely, the policy revokal expresses a step back from Swedish leadership and norm entrepreneurship for pro-gender norms and values. Rather than using normative leadership to promote gender equality in the global arena, the current government’s foreign policy line is focused on achieving military stability on the local front. Here, one of the analysed articles emphasises how recent changes will come to change the international image of Sweden. Jan Hallenberg, from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, argues that recent developments in foreign policy will undoubtedly shed new light on Sweden in the international community, following the FFP revokal and simultaneous decrease in humanitarian aid budget. Priorities are shifting “from a moral superpower to Swedish interests” (Hallenberg in Thurfjell, 2022).

In the light of this, the next chapter turns to the remaining task of explaining how the substantial findings presented in chapter five answer the overarching research question. With the aim of drawing together the answers to the four sub-questions of the thesis, chapter six presents how one can understand the rise and fall of Swedish feminist foreign policy between 2014 – 2022.
6. 2023, what can be learnt? Discussing the Implications.

Against the backdrop of the sub-questions, a clear impression of Sweden’s FFP emerges: from its launch in 2014, to the aftermath of its revokal in late 2022. Sweden constitutes a historically important case for the developing political phenomena of FFP. It can offer insight into what motivates a state to adopt such a policy, how it can become a useful tool for progress for gender equality, where the difficulties lie and what might be the reason for dismantling the approach altogether. Structured according to the lessons learnt from the Swedish case study, this chapter draws together the findings to provide answers to the overarching research question: How can the rise and fall of Swedish feminist foreign policy between 2014 – 2022 be understood?

**Figure 5. Understanding Swedish FFP between 2014-2022: Summary of key findings of thesis**
6.1. What has Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy Taught Us?

The creation of the world's first explicitly FFP brings about several important lessons. First, its response showed how leadership and ‘brave stances’ can pave the way for important reforms. Kouvo (2020:66) describes how Sweden’s unprecedented policy approach was met with curiosity by the international community. Its ripple effect is visible not just amongst governments, but also in think tanks and civil society alike. By extension, this is vital for getting feminist perspectives to set the tone in the battle of ‘whose story wins’ in a polarised landscape (Nye, 2013:3). A key lesson is arguably the importance of norm entrepreneurship in setting the stage for others to take responsibility for the unique needs of women – something which is crucial for any state wishing to pursue ethical foreign policy (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016:332).

The analysis shows that Sweden’s norm entrepreneurship was integral for implementing the approach, where soft power resources like values, policies, nation branding and diplomacy helped the government pursue its goals. This is especially evident with regards to the most successful areas of implementation: SRHR, participation in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as economic rights and empowerment. This thesis argues that these efforts to put women’s rights front and centre set a precedent for other governments and put gender equality higher up on the international agenda, something which illustrates the importance of normative leadership in rethinking and redefining the possibilities of foreign policy.

What is more, the Swedish case has taught us that the policy is more than just an idealistic approach to what foreign policy ought to be – it can have a real impact for stability and security on a local as well as global level (George, 2022; Egnell, 2014). Under ‘Findings and Analysis’, examples illustrate the real-life effect of the policy for instance in terms of SRHR and in assuring the agency of women in peace negotiations. According to Egnell, FFPs not only find justification from a rights-based perspective. Integrating special considerations of women, peace and security also serve as “an instrument for preventing armed conflict, building peace where violence is already a fact, and promoting reconciliation and reconstruction processes after wars” (Egnell, 2014: para.3). Egnell (2014) and Bjarnegård et al. (2015:101) argue that societies with a high level of gender equality are less prone to violence, corruption, and conflict. The development of FFPs is anchored in research highlighting the link between security, prosperity, and gender equality – thereby providing both security and economic incentives for a gender inclusive approach to foreign policy (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020:15).

16 Author’s translation
Another lesson learnt comes from the debate surrounding FFPs, which showcase how shifting from traditional notions of security – often military threats to the nation – to human security opens for security threats otherwise overlooked (Egnell, 2014). This includes pressing global issues like climate change, pandemics, poverty, and gender-based violence, which Egnell argues constitute the most urgent threats to human lives today.

Yet, pursuing a FFP is not always comfortable. If anything, the diplomatic crisis between Sweden and Saudi Arabia in 2015 showed this. The crisis followed a statement by Margot Wallström, who publicly criticised Saudi Arabia for violations of human rights, especially women’s rights, and their dictatorial regime – calling the use of public flogging a ‘mediaeval’ practice. Wallström told Jenny Nordberg (2015) at the New Yorker that “[i]t’s time to become a little braver in foreign policy” (para.16), but industrialists and other Swedish politicians were not happy experiencing the FFP in practice. According to Saudi Arabian representatives, Wallström’s statement caused them to abruptly recall its ambassador and declare that they would no longer grant new visas to business travellers from the country. Although Wallström did not back down from her statement, a Swedish delegation was sent to smooth things over. This diplomatic crisis underlines the double standard this thesis finds in relation to the policy implementation: Otherwise vocal advocates of women’s rights and human rights fall silent when voicing concerns put political alliances at risk and threaten short-term economic interests (Nordberg, 2015).

Consequently, this thesis argues that FFPs cannot be implemented only when it suits governments. The findings illustrate that the least successful policy areas – women’s freedom from violence, participation in peace processes, and access to human rights – are connected to contradictory behaviour due to other interests or policies being at odds with the FFP. Primarily, this includes Sweden’s economic interests in weapons export and its harshened migration policy. Facilitating others’ use of hard power and strengthening their own capacities, the government contradicts the aim of the policy and undermines their credibility in pursuing it. This indicates that the feminist ambition ought to be integrated at all policy areas and levels if it is to succeed.

Another lesson learnt from criticism against the policy: mechanisms for follow-up and evaluation are integral to the success of the approach. Although Sweden’s FFP has been described as the most comprehensive attempt to date (Thompson, Ahmed & Khokhar, 2021:2), no policy is without issues. This author argues that shortcomings found in the policy and its implementation does not mean that the policy should have been discarded – rather, the flaws show room for
improvement, which call for constant evaluation and reform. Similarly, Zilla (2022) argues that “Sweden’s monitoring and (independent) evaluation and impact analysis are weak” (para.37).

Here, a more thorough integration of the realities of women constitutes another lesson learnt. The fourth pillar of Sweden’s FFP, reality, should have played a more prominent role. Not only is this evident in the contradictory arms trade to repressive regimes, but it also relates to postcolonial criticism of the policy framework. According to Zilla (2022), some criticise states pursuing FFPs for ‘feminist imperialism’ through the “imposition of Western norms whose basis in a liberal feminism (or feminist universalism) fails to do justice to the diversity of cultural contexts” (para. 40) under the impression that women in the Global South require saving by the Global North. Feminist universalism thereby runs the risk of justifying notions of moral obligations that undercut unique narratives and experiences of women outside the West (Rosamond, 2013:325).

This criticism is particularly interesting in relation to Dahl’s (2006) account for Sweden’s claim to moral superiority, which it perceived as legitimising its activist approach. Thompson and Clement (2019) stress problems related to how the discussions around human rights often fail to integrate the individuals it aims to help: “[w]hile well-intentioned, such approaches can perpetuate, rather than dismantle, inequalities and systems of oppression (p.5). Learning from criticism posed against Sweden, the integration of the reality of women, therefore, ought to be key in all FFPs.

The Swedish case also illustrates that if the approach lacks majority support within domestic politics, it will not be long lived. Sweden, like any other state, is not a unified actor. Before its fall, domestic battles over the policy made its future unclear (Thompson & Clement, 2019:6). While this is a political reality for many FFP states, it is nevertheless something that must be addressed promptly. If not, Thompson and Clement argue that attacks from political opponents would leave little incentive for governments to develop, or even continue, the policy approach.

Interestingly, Jezierska and Towns (2018) argue that recognizing ongoing feminist struggles within Sweden, for instance the contestation of the FFP, could prove beneficial for the country – “Not only might this convey less smugness, but it would also cast light on the contentious processes entailed in gender equality work, processes that others may recognize, identify with and perhaps learn from or take part in” (p.61). The scholars highlight how the notion of ‘Progressive Sweden’ makes the feminist strife for reform target for efforts to refute and disprove its pressing nature: If gender equality norms already enjoy wide support, then why is reform needed? Transparency
surrounding internal battles of the policy could thereby serve to further the awareness of the need for additional reforms – even though Sweden is often seen as one of the world’s most gender equal societies (Jezierska & Towns, 2018:61-62).

6.2. Once a Norm Entrepreneur, Always a Norm Entrepreneur?\(^{17}\)

Sweden’s willingness to put gender at the heart of international relations can arguably be traced to the country’s self-identity as a moral superpower and influential norm entrepreneur. The development of the policy is anchored in a long history of actively using legal, political, and economic instruments to promote change within the international arena (Dahl, 2006:898). This study indicates that the former government held the belief that change is necessary for a just world and that Sweden ought to be one of the countries - if not the country - to take the lead in this transformation. The assumptions behind the representation of gender inequality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights shaped their governing processes and highlighted the pressing nature of the issues at stake. It also expressed a belief that foreign policy is a suitable vessel for efforts promoting gender equality and women’s rights.

Nonetheless, this study serves as a reminder that progress for gender equality and women’s rights is not always straightforward. At the same time as an increasing number of states prioritise gender equality domestically and internationally, the recent backlash against gender equality “puts many of the hard-fought gains that women have achieved in jeopardy” (UN OHCHR, 2020:11). Even the very concept of gender is highly contested.

These developments imply susceptibility to a polarised political landscape. Within the European political context, the last decade has seen a rise in conservative values, nationalism, populist right parties, and anti-gender movements (Jezierska & Towns, 2018; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017b). In Sweden, the discussion on gender equality has also grown polarised. When the current government came into power last year, they did so with support of the Sweden Democrats – a party internally conflicted over notions of gender equality (Towns, Karlsson & Eyre, 2014:238). Simultaneously enforcing competing nationalist narratives, the Sweden Democrats have taken on the challenge of integrating traditional gender roles, while “hailing the equality and similarity of the sexes as the ‘Swedish way’” (Towns, Karlsson & Eyre, 2014:238) and distinguishing factor against the immigrant ‘other’. This ought to be seen in relation to the domestic tug of war over Sweden’s FFP.

\(^{17}\) Reference to Dahl’s (2006) article ‘Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?’. 
Before the government shift, representatives from the now ruling parties – the Moderates, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats – expressed conflicting opinions on the feminist label of the policy (Suni, 2018). Therefore, it was not entirely surprising that the government decided to scrap it, Sweden’s long-time commitment as a norm entrepreneur for pro-gender values notwithstanding. History has shown that efforts for progressive gender equality reform seldom go unchallenged and fluctuations in gender politics often follow political shifts (George, 2022).

In 2022, Swedish politics underwent significant changes. After the outbreak of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, the Social Democratic government officially let go of the epoch-defining non-alignment policy when it applied for NATO membership. Faced with a harsher context for politics and security, the newly appointed right-wing government started its term of office with revoking the FFP. The new Minister for Foreign Affairs claimed that the policy had not fulfilled its purpose and implied that it was even at odds with the values and interests of the country (Granlund, 2022).

What, then, do the policy developments indicate about the future of Swedish foreign policy, and by extension for other ‘women-friendly’ states? Thomson (2022:9) argues that states adopt FFPs to distinguish themselves from other states and be perceived as a ‘good state’. Thomson’s argument also extends to governments’ distinction from former ruling parties. Reversing this line of reasoning, the recent policy revokal ought to be seen in relation to internal struggles over gender equality, but also in relation to the current government’s ambition to establish its own framework for foreign policy - distinct from its predecessor.

Yet, this thesis has already established that the single case cannot be representative of all cases, and as such the fall of Sweden’s FFP should not be seen as representative of how other states’ policy frameworks will come to develop (Flyvbjerg, 2006:223). The mechanisms that caused the Moderate led government to want to distinguish itself from the former Social Democratic one are, however, not exclusive to Sweden. Since most FFP countries have adopted their policies in recent years, the general impact of governmental changes remains unknown. On the one hand, some might see the revokal of Sweden’s policy as a test to similar approaches elsewhere. On the other hand, a blow to the feminist ambition of Swedish foreign policy could potentially strengthen the determination of feminist movements abroad (George, 2022).
Although Swedish commitments to gender equality have remained in place over the previous decades, no matter where on the political spectrum the government has been found, the recent decision is arguably not without importance. If one needs to understand FFPs “in terms of not only its content, but also what states use it to signal to the world about themselves”, as Thomson (2022:11) argues, what is the revokal of such a policy used to signal? While Tobias Billström has stated that Sweden’s commitment to gender equality remains firm, it is yet too early to tell how much of an impact the scrapping of the label will have on foreign policy in practice.

However, it could be argued that while concerned with the issue, the new policy signals a shift from the global leadership position when it comes to ‘spreading the light’ of gender equality by pursuing norm entrepreneurship. Moreover, its local shift is motivated by what is seen as a dissonance between Swedish interests and the quest to be a global gender forerunner. The government instead increases its focus on military capacities and alliances, which are perceived as beneficial for national security (Utrikesdepartementet, 2023; Utrikespolitiska institutet, 2022). Interestingly, Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond (2016) argue that FFPs are not as pacifist as often assumed – rather, the approach can balance soft and hard power and “does not rule out the use of force in very exceptional circumstances” (p.330). Although this openness to hard power has been criticised by feminists, it could arguably have left room for the new government’s priorities.

Despite what the shift in label might or might not indicate, one thing is certain: the FFP put women’s rights on top of Sweden’s agenda for its international relations – should anyone attempt rollbacks on these issues, it would be done on full public display (George, 2022). Given Billström’s public assurances of maintained commitments to gender equality, it could prove difficult to overturn existing policies. On paper, Sweden’s FFP may have been reversed – yet “its legacy at home and abroad cannot be fully erased” (George, 2022: para.20).

In sum, Sweden’s FFP shows that norm entrepreneurship can pave the way for reform, feminist approaches to foreign policy can have real impact for creating stability and security, while shifting towards human security can underline security threats otherwise overlooked. It also illustrates that pursuing such an approach is not always comfortable. Learning from the shortcomings of Sweden’s policy, successful implementation requires follow-up and evaluation, where the realities of women ought to be central for how the approach is pursued in practice. Finally, without enough domestic support the policy might not survive political shifts. After decades of self-proclaimed moral superiority and ambition to lead the way to gender equality, will Sweden henceforward take a step back and become just one country amongst all others?
7. Concluding Remarks

In recent years, an increasing number of states have followed in Sweden’s footsteps by putting gender equality norms at the heart of their foreign policies. Yet, the founding nation now - at least rhetorically - moves in the opposite direction. With the new government claiming that gender equality remains a core value, how was the dismantlement of the flagship policy motivated? In the aftermath of its recent revokal, how does one begin to understand the rise and fall of Sweden's feminist foreign policy?

This thesis argues that Sweden’s long-standing commitment to gender equality facilitated its creation of the world's first FFP and played an integral role for how the country pursued its feminist ambition through implementing said approach. With the pioneering policy now revoked, the new government redefines the foreign policy line. Shifting away from global, moral ambitions associated with its leadership for women’s rights, Sweden now seems to focus less on normative leadership and more on strengthening hard power resources like military capacities – a decision framed by a harsher political and security context.

Within this work, Sweden’s official FFP document has been examined using a critical policy analysis inspired by WPR theory. Moreover, declarations of foreign policy, evaluations of impact and news articles have been explored using a qualitative content analysis, combining open coding with a theoretically integrated conceptual framework centred around norm entrepreneurship, soft power, and hard power.

Consequently, the study found that the underlying issue of the policy was gender inequality as a structural issue and barrier to human rights. This problem representation is based upon the universality of human rights and the hegemony of a patriarchal world order – a world order the government perceived in need of transformation. Sweden’s previous commitments to gender equality and human rights, legacy as a welfare state, nation-branding through normative entrepreneurship and national as well as international legislations have contributed to this understanding.

With regards to what are arguably the most successful areas of impact - SRHR, involvement in peace and conflict resolution as well as economic empowerment - norm entrepreneurship and soft power resources were key. The Swedish feminist foreign policy was the first of its kind. Looking at how the policy emerged, where it met with success, where it struggled, and how it was recently
dismantled, the policy gave rise to several important lessons. It emphasised the importance of norm entrepreneurship in paving way for reform, how feminist ambitions for foreign policies can have a real impact for creating stability and security, along with showing the potential of how human security can highlight security threats otherwise overlooked.

Yet, it also showed that pursuing a FFP is not always comfortable. The findings illustrate areas of struggle: women’s freedom from violence, human rights and involvement in peace and conflict resolution. Inconsistencies and contradictions arise when other policies or economic interests are counteracting the feminist aim. The Swedish arms trade to repressive regimes is found to be the most pressing example of these pitfalls. The recent policy revokal has been framed in terms of such policy shortcomings, a perception of ‘feminist’ being a misleading label, and a security order calling for new priorities. The findings highlight a dissonance between what is currently understood as Swedish interests and leadership for the internationalist feminist quest.

Furthermore, this relates to some final lessons: Mechanisms for follow-up and evaluation are integral to the success of the approach and one cannot bypass the necessity of thorough integration of the realities of women. What is more, the policy revokal taught us that without enough support within domestic politics, its life expectancy is not long. As the global political pendulum swings towards a more inclusive approach to foreign policy, Sweden is swinging back towards traditional notions of security and foreign policy.

7.1. Reflection and Avenues for Future Research

This work offers a comprehensive overview of Sweden’s FFP from its launch in 2014, to its fall in 2022. It, nevertheless, provides just one account of social reality and complementary examinations of the phenomena are thus welcomed. Despite the limitations posed by positionality, interpretations and the situated nature of knowledge noted earlier, this work provides a credible understanding of Sweden’s pioneering policy approach. The overarching focus on the full lifespan of the FFP is one of the major strengths of the project, as most other studies focus on one specific stage in these developments, like the decision-making process leading up to the policy or the document itself. This focus entailed that the FFP has been subject of in-depth examination, but also leaves room for future research to explore how it intersects with other overlapping policies, such as the development cooperation and humanitarian aid or migration policies.

18 See section ‘Methodological Reflections’ in chapter five.
Regarding the policy’s effect in practice, this thesis primarily examines the impact of the first years of the policy’s implementation, since no material critically evaluating its shortcomings was identified after 2019. While there is an evaluation conducted by the government as recently as 2021, this does not critically address the failures of the policy, like the two critical evaluations made by Concord (2017) and Irsten (2019) do. Building on the impact overview that this thesis has provided, future research could expand upon developments made primarily in the last years of implementation.

Although this thesis provides insight into how Sweden conducted its FFP, these findings come from the perspective of implementing and not experiencing the policies. Future avenues for research could therefore develop this impact-related knowledge by analysing the experience of the receiving countries and individuals. So far, few have done so - yet this would be particularly interesting as one of the criticisms posed against the policy approach is how it has been used by powerful Western states for the benefit of the racialized ‘other’.

Finally, this study was initiated in the months following Sweden’s dismantlement of its FFP. While it offers a first look into what motivated the new government to revoke the policy, it remains too early to know what impact this will come to have. Future research would do well in further elaborating the motivations for the policy shift provided here, by exploring what the policy revokal truly came to mean for Swedish foreign policy in practice.

### 7.2. Contributions

In sum, this thesis contributes to the field of Global Politics by furthering the knowledge found at the nexus of foreign policy and gender, by providing a comprehensive overview of the full lifecycle of the unprecedented Swedish FFP. It presents new insights on the integration of gender in foreign policy, which is paramount given that the literature review highlights the scarcity of research within this sub-field. The study also sheds light on to what extent the commitments made in Sweden’s FFP were pursued in practice. Scholars on the topic (for instance Aggestam & True, 2020) have highlighted the need for further contributions along these lines.

Additionally, the study offers a first understanding of the revokal of the feminist label, by examining how the Swedish government framed the most recent shift related to its pioneering policy. This work is amongst the first to do so – and is thereby bringing the discussion surrounding this historically important case up to date.
Although the literature review highlights how the FFP constitutes a political tool to promote and integrate pro-gender norms in political processes on both local and global levels, the topic remains under-researched. ‘The Rise and Fall of Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy’ has offered new insights into a policy framework which has sparked considerable interest as of late, through its unprecedented way of integrating gender at the core of foreign relations. It thereby contributes with knowledge to the emerging academic field of FFP and the global movement for gender equality – for which such policies can have real, valuable impact.


