



THE G7 AND DEMOCRACY, GENDER EQUALITY, AND DEMOCRATIC INCLUSIVITY

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ANALYSIS OF PAST G7 LANGUAGE AND COMMITMENTS ON DEMOCRACY, GENDER EQUALITY, AND DEMOCRATIC INCLUSIVITY

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

We carried out in-depth analysis of G7 Communiqués and relevant statements going back to 2014. We focused on the Leaders' Communiqués, Communiqués or Statements from the Foreign Ministers, Development Ministers, and Gender Equality Ministers (where relevant), and any subject-specific Statements that touched on the theme of gender equality and/or democracy.

We grouped the most promising language into relevant themes (based on the priorities identified by the literature review of feminist perspectives on gender equality and democracy) and based on how 'established' these concepts are in past G7 language and commitments (which can help inform our recommendations and can influence prioritization and advocacy strategies).

Annex 1 outlines the most promising language specifically related to democracy and gender equality and/or inclusive governance.

Well established ('ground' should be held and the best language retained)

- The importance of women's participation/leadership/representation
- The need to protect human rights defenders
- The links between gender equality and more democratic, stable, prosperous societies
- Advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda
- Preventing and tackling gender-based violence (offline and online), going beyond 'sexual violence in conflict'

Emerging consensus (some language exists over multiple G7 years and can be built upon)

- Respect for diversity and freedom from discrimination
- Protecting civic space and press/media freedom
- Increasing aid for gender equality
- Recognising the rollback in women's rights
- Protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ people

New 'ground' (infrequent mentions, but some nascent language as a starting point)

- The importance of supporting (specifically funding) women's rights organisations
- Promotion of Feminist Foreign policies (FFP)
- Protection and promotion of abortion rights

OVERALL TRENDS RELATED TO DEMOCRACY AND GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality was acknowledged as an aspect of promoting good governance for the first time at the 2007 Heiligendamm Summit. The 2017 Taormina Summit saw a big shift in the G7's recognition of the importance of mainstreaming gender equality into all policies. In 2017, the G7 countries not only recognized gender equality as fundamental for fulfilling human rights but also adopted the first 'G7 Roadmap for a Gender Responsive Economic Environment.' The Roadmap outlines "structural policies falling within our central governments' jurisdiction that are likely to have the greatest impact in delivering gender equality through enabling women's labor force participation, entrepreneurship, economic empowerment and thus their full and equal participation in society."

Communiqués from 2017 recognize that there are human rights violations and abuse at play globally that disproportionately impact women. However, the overall approach to talking about democracy shifts towards enabling women's participation and framing gender equality as a barrier to sustained economic growth and a contributor to maintaining peace and stability.

'Democratic values' are mentioned in several Communiqués (2019, 2020, 2023), but these values are not defined. Mentions of 'Democracy' increase in later years, especially in 2018, 2021, and 2023 when there were dedicated statements on the theme. The 2018 *'Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats'* focused on foreign threats to G7 democracies, but in 2021 Cornwall (*'Defending Democracy from foreign threats and Championing shared values'*) and 2023 Hiroshima (*'Open Societies Statement'*) broadened out to consider the value of 'democratic values' and 'open societies' globally.

It is interesting to track shifts in the 'Preamble' language and statement of shared values, which tends to be mentioned around the beginning of the Leaders' Communiqués. Over the years, we observe a general shift in language becoming more inward-focused and more focused on the idea of a 'rules-based international order' and on 'foreign threats.' While human rights continue to be mentioned in this Preamble language, over the years language on human rights throughout the G7 outcome documentation is less prominent.

FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRACY, GENDER EQUALITY, AND DEMOCRATIC INCLUSIVITY

SUMMARY

“A country in which more than half the population is subordinated politically, socially, economically and culturally is not a democracy.”¹

Gender equality and democracy are deeply interconnected: gender equality is both a consequence of greater democracy and a force that contributes to increased democratisation. However, we know that, globally, the foundations of democracies are at risk because of drivers including rising economic inequality, increasing societal and political polarisation, the closing of civic space, violence (both offline and online), and spreading crisis and conflict. Pressures on democracy are taking place at the same time as global progress on gender equality is slow and fragile. As democracies weaken, progress on gender equality is also at risk. Conversely, advancing gender equality would help to revitalise democratic systems.

DEMOCRACIES AROUND THE WORLD ARE UNDER THREAT

Democracies worldwide – old and new – are experiencing ‘democratic decline,’ ‘democratic backsliding,’ and ‘democratic regression.’² Organizations such as Freedom House and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) have been publishing evidence of a steady and gradual erosion of democratic principles and practices across most regions.³ For example, Freedom House’s 2024 report found that global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive

1 Zoe Marks and Erica Chenoweth (2023, May 15), “The Patriarchs’ War on Women”, <https://msmagazine.com/2023/05/15/patriarchy-war-on-women-lgbtq-reproductive-rights/>

2 Vanessa Williamson (2023, October 18), “Four things to know about democratic erosion”, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/four-things-to-know-about-democratic-erosion/>

3 Mandakini D. Surie, Sumaya Saluja and Nicola Nixon (2023, March), “A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, And Nepal”, *Asia Foundation* https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/GovAsia_2.2_Glass-Half-Full-Civic-Space-and-Contestation-in-Bangladesh-Sri-Lanka-and-Nepal.pdf

year, documenting instances of election manipulation, prohibition of political parties, and misinformation in a range of countries.⁴ The report also found that more than three quarters of the world's population lives in a country that has some [restrictions on freedom]—the highest proportion in more than 25 years.⁵

PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY IS ALSO SEEING STAGNATION AND DECLINE

At the same time, gender equality progress is increasingly under threat. The Equal Measures 2030 2024 SDG Gender Index reveals no country is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Alarming trends show nearly 40% of countries stagnating or regressing on gender equality since 2019. The number of countries that are actually moving in the wrong direction has jumped in recent years; the United States is one of the countries that regressed on gender equality between 2019 and 2022. If this trend towards stagnation and decline continues, gender equality in 2030 could be worse than when the SDGs were agreed in 2015, jeopardizing nearly 74% of SDG targets.

Looking at the performance of the G7 countries on the latest SDG Gender Index, we can see that significant gender equality challenges remain within this group of countries (see Table One). None of the G7 countries achieved a 'Very Good' score on the Index (more than 90 out of 100) and none of them ranked in the top 10 globally on gender equality. Amongst the seven countries, Germany had the highest score on the Index in 2022, and the United States the lowest. Looking at how the G7 countries have been progressing in recent years, only Italy made 'Fast Progress' and Germany made 'Some Progress.' The rest of the G7 countries stagnated with 'No Progress' and the United States moved in the wrong direction.

TABLE ONE: G7 COUNTRIES' PERFORMANCE IN THE EM2030 SDG GENDER INDEX⁶

		Index Score (out of 100)			Progress (2019-2022)			
G7 Rank Countries		2015 Score	2019 Score	2022 Score	Global Rank (2022)	Score Category (2022)	Change in points (average per year)	Pace of Progress
1	Germany	83.8	83.7	85.1	11	Good	0.5	Some Progress
2	Canada	82.3	82.7	82.4	18	Good	-0.1	No Progress
3	United Kingdom	81.8	81.1	81.4	21	Good	0.1	No Progress
4	France	80.7	81.0	80.4	24	Good	-0.2	No Progress
5	Italy	73.8	74.8	77.1	31	Fair	0.8	Fast Progress
6	Japan	75.5	76.2	76.3	35	Fair	0.0	No Progress
7	United States	74.3	75.4	74.6	40	Fair	-0.3	Decline

4 Freedom House (2024, February), "Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict", https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf

5 *Ibid.*

6 EM2030 analysis based on data from the 2024 SDG Gender Index, all of which can be explored on the EM2030 website: <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/explore-the-data/>

The Index findings reinforce other trends related to global gender equality that can be observed in recent years. For example, there are multiple examples of formerly accepted language on women's rights being removed from international agreements.⁷ A number of donors – both government and private philanthropy – are de-prioritising women's rights at the same time as anti-gender financing is rising.⁸ The number of members of the European Parliament whose politics can be described as 'anti-gender' has doubled, to 30 percent, compared to the last legislature.⁹

THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND GENDER EQUALITY

"It is not a coincidence that women's equality is being rolled back at the same time that authoritarianism is on the rise. Political scientists have long noted that women's civil rights and democracy go hand in hand, but they have been slower to recognize that the former is a precondition for the latter."¹⁰

It is not a coincidence that we are seeing a decline in democracy at the same time as the world is stagnating and declining on gender equality, as they are interconnected. Actions taken to promote gender equality will also strengthen democracy (including citizen participation and state-citizen accountability). And actions taken to promote democracy – when conducted with a gender lens – are likely to promote gender equality.

A wide range of research studies reinforce the links between democracy and gender equality:

- One study looking at egalitarian attitudes found that gender equality is much more prevalent in democratic countries. On average, minimally democratic countries exhibit 33% lower levels of egalitarian gender attitudes compared to fully democratic countries, while hybrid and authoritarian regimes display over 60% lower levels.¹¹
- Evidence also shows that development of democratic institutions aligns closely with the rise of women in public life.¹²
- Research from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security highlights strong correlation between women's status (measured by the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index) and a country's level of democracy (measured in terms of election integrity, freedom of association and assembly, and checks on executive power).¹³

7 Kerry Cullinan, (2024, May 28), "Conservative Member States Balk at References to 'Gender' in WHA Resolutions," *Health Policy Watch*, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/conservative-member-states-balk-at-references-to-gender-in-wha-resolutions/>

8 Rachel George and Nilima Gulrajani (2023, June), "Trends in development finance for gender: Mapping risks and opportunities for funders," ODI Global, https://media.odi.org/documents/ODI-Trends_in_development_finance_for_gender.pdf

9 Damjan Denkovski, 2022. "Disrupting the multilateral order? The impact of anti-gender actors on multilateral structures in Europe?", *Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy*, https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Study_Disruptingthemultilateralorder_nov2022.pdf

10 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks (2022, Feb 8), "Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women", *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>

11 Zagrebina, Anna. (2020). Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Does Being a Democracy Matter?. *Comparative Sociology*. 19. 305-334. 10.1163/15691330-BJA10008.

12 Ronald, Inglehart & Norris, Pippa & Welzel, Christian. (2002). Inglehart, R., P. Norris & C. Welzel (2002). "Gender Equality and Democracy." *Comparative Sociology*. 1. 235-265. 10.1163/156913302100418628.

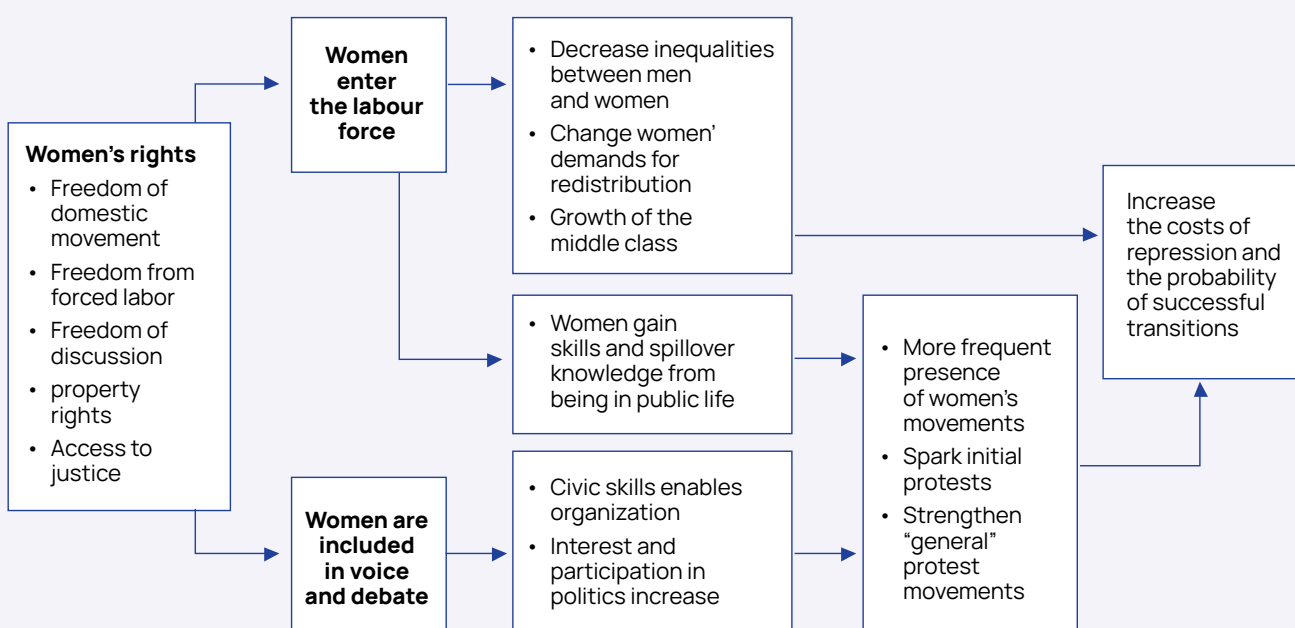
13 Elena Ortiz, Joshua Allen, Robert U. Nagel, and Jessica M. Smith (2023, March), "Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy", *Georgetown Institute for Peace and Security*, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Exploring-the-Links-between-Womens-Status-and-Democracy.pdf>

- States that invest in women are more likely to be wealthy, stable, and democratic. It is for these reasons that gender equality has been described as “the taproot of international security.”¹⁴

While many studies have demonstrated the links between gender equality and democracy, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) has gone further to identify the actual pathways through which women's rights contribute to democratic success (see the diagram in Figure 1 for a visual representation):

- **Basic liberties as a Foundation:** If women are denied basic liberties and rights, then they will have a lower standing on the labour market and in the public sphere.
- **Economic empowerment:** Women's entry into the workforce increases demands for public goods like affordable childcare and redistribution policies, fostering a more responsive and inclusive political system.
- **Civic Skill Development:** In addition, only when women have basic liberties and rights are they able to develop the skills required to organize movements that oppose authoritarian rule. This leads to increased civic skills in the population and a strengthening of civil society organizations, as a result of which regime changes are more likely to occur.
- **'Cost' of Repression:** Enhancing women's rights raises the societal cost of repression. By reducing inequality and expanding the middle class through women's labor participation, the groundwork is laid for sustainable democratic transitions.

FIGURE 1: HOW WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONDITION SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO DEMOCRATIC RULE



Source: No Democratic Transition Without Women's Rights: A Global Sequence Analysis 1900-2012, Yi-ting Wang, Patrik Lindenfors, Akseel Sundström, Fredrik Jansson and Stefan I. Lindberg

14 This compilation of facts are all from this Equal Measures 2030 article, with original sources provided for each: <https://equalmeasures2030.org/press/a-world-with-gender-equality-would-not-push-for-endless-war/>

The links between gender equality and democracy have been described as a 'virtuous circle.' There is "extremely robust evidence that links gender empowerment to improved human capital. For example, free and fair elections are linked to higher life expectancy for women, more gender equality in educational attainments, higher participation in society and in the labour force."¹⁵

Additionally, enhancing women's political empowerment contributes to improvements in key human development outcomes including access to health and education, and objective measures of under-five mortality rates and female school completion), even in countries with "adverse conditions of governance" (i.e., autocracies).¹⁶ Notably, fully democratic nations, on average, have 94% lower infant mortality rates than closed dictatorships.¹⁷

Gender equality is also one of the strongest predictors of peace – more so than a country's wealth, level of democracy, or religious identity.¹⁸ Gender-equal countries are less likely to go to war¹⁹, less likely to use force first during conflicts²⁰, and less likely to be involved in violent international crises.²¹

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE 'AUTHORITARIAN PLAYBOOK'

"...fully free, politically active women are a threat to authoritarian and authoritarian-leaning leaders—and so those leaders have a strategic reason to be sexist."²²

The rise of authoritarian regimes has resulted in amplified attacks on women's and LGBTQI+ people's bodily and political autonomy: far-right movements in countries led by authoritarian-leaning leaders, such as Brazil, Hungary, and Poland, have promoted traditional gender roles as markers of patriotism.²³

One study that investigated authoritarian movements across many countries and time periods found evidence that these movements tend to target five areas of life that especially affect women's rights:²⁴

- 1 Attacking bodily autonomy (including abortion laws and SRHR services)
- 2 Restricting (directly or indirectly) women's participation in workplace/political life
- 3 Promoting the traditional 'values' related to women's roles (as wives, mothers, and caregivers)

15 Beer, C. Democracy and Gender Equality. *St Comp Int Dev* 44, 212–227 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9043-2>

16 Hornset, N., & de Soysa, I. (2021). Does Empowering Women in Politics Boost Human Development? An Empirical Analysis, 1960–2018. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 23(2), 291–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1953450>

17 Wang, Y., Mechkova, V., & Andersson, F. (2019). Does Democracy Enhance Health? New Empirical Evidence 1900–2012. *Political Research Quarterly*, 72(3), 554–569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918798506>

18 Hudson, V. M., Ballif-Spanvill, B., Caprioli, M., & Emmett, C. F. (2012). *Sex and World Peace*. Columbia University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/huds13182>

19 Caprioli, M. (2000). Gendered Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research*, 37(1), 51–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343300037001003>

20 Caprioli, M. (2003). Gender Equality and State Aggression: The Impact of Domestic Gender Equality on State First Use of Force. *International Interactions*, 29(3), 195–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620304595>

21 Caprioli, M., & Boyer, M. A. (2001). Gender, Violence, and International Crisis. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45(4), 503–518. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176309>

22 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks (2022, Feb 8), "Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women", *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>

23 *Ibid.*

- 4 Reducing penalties for domestic or sexual violence
- 5 Reinforcing strict gender/sexual hierarchies (women are subjugated to men, people who don't fit within this 'ideal' gender hierarchy are criminalised)

Activism by women and gender minorities serves as an engine of genuine democratic progress, making it a direct threat to authoritarian leaders.²⁵ Women's groups and LGBTQI+ communities, are seen as threats and obstacles to consolidating power: some examples include Russia, China, Hungary, Georgia, and Belarus, where women human rights defenders have been targeted.²⁶

Another notable tactic that has been employed by authoritarian regimes is 'autocratic genderwashing' which uses the appearance of advancing gender equality to mask undemocratic practices. Autocrats may employ pro-feminist rhetoric, introduce quotas, or highlight women's political representation, but these measures often exist within a framework that tightens their control rather than empowering women. Examples include Algeria and Mozambique, which have been successful at ostensibly advancing women's political rights while effectively undermining them."²⁷

DEMOCRACY AND THE RIGHTS OF LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

Another notable rhetorical feature of the anti-gender movement is its use of human rights language to undermine LGBT rights.²⁸ Feminist literature underscored that attacks on LGBTQI+ people and their rights can be a "bellwether of broader democratic backsliding."²⁹ . Efforts to stigmatize LGBTQI+ people frequently signal deeper erosions of democratic norms and institutions, such as curtailing judicial review, cracking down on independent media, and enacting other illiberal measures.³⁰ The Global Acceptance Index which measures public attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people and their rights across 175 countries, has found that anti- LGBTQI+ movements³¹ adopt national, regional, and global strategies that rely on political authoritarianism, the spread of misinformation, and grassroots mobilization.

In some contexts, these actions usher in anti-LGBTQI+ legislations and, at the same time, bolster the political fortunes of authoritarian leaders. The struggle for LGBTQI+ rights should be understood as part of a broader struggle against authoritarianism, which thrives on the erosion of human rights and freedoms, particularly of the most vulnerable groups.³²

The EM2030 SDG Gender Index includes an indicator that measures "the extent to which laws criminalise, protect or recognize sexual orientation, gender identification (SOGI) and same-sex relationships."³³ Among the G7 countries, on this indicator Canada and

24 Interview with Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks (2022, Nov 2): <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policycast/why-empowered-women-are-authoritarianisms-targets-and-how-they-can-be>

25 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks (2022, Feb 8), "Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women", *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>

26 Kathleen J. McInnis and Kyleanne Hunter (2024, Nov 19), "Gender Wars Are an Early Warning Sign for Authoritarianism," *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/11/19/gender-wars-are-an-early-warning-sign-for-authoritarianism/>

27 Gabrielle Bardall (2019, October 30), "Autocrats use feminism to undermine democracy," *Policy Options*, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2019/autocrats-use-feminism-to-undermine-democracy/>

28 Mauricio Albarracín-Caballero (2022, September 6), "How Targeting LGBTQ+ Rights Are Part of the Authoritarian Playbook," *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/06/how-targeting-lgbtq-rights-are-part-authoritarian-playbook>

29 Ari Shaw (2023, October 12), "Why Anti-LGBTQ Attacks Matter for Democracy," *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/article/why-anti-lgbtq-attacks-matter-democracy>

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

France stand out as leaders with near perfect 100 scores. Germany, has made significant progress, improving by 20.9 points since 2015, though its score of 66.7/100 still lags, placing it on par with countries like Honduras and Albania and far from the standards expected of G7 nations. The situation is more troubling in Japan and the US, with scores of 56.3/100 and 52.1/100 respectively. On this indicator the US has made no progress since 2015, a stagnation that coincides with a troubling wave of nearly 500 anti-LGBTQI+ bills proposed in conservative legislatures.³⁴

Research highlights a strong connection between democracy and the rights of LGBTQI+ people. A 2018 study found that inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in a country's laws and policies is strongly associated with democratic governance, the rule of law and a free press.³⁵ The study noted that countries with high levels of LGBTQI+ acceptance are more likely to have free and fair elections, strong rule of law, civil liberties protections, and minority rights.³⁶ These nations also tend to have higher GDP per capita: "economic development and LGBT inclusion are mutually reinforcing."³⁷ Moreover, anti-LGBTQI+ attacks signal democratic backsliding, while stronger protections for LGBTQI+ people can help prevent further democratic erosion by reducing political polarization and economic instability.³⁸

THE UNDERLYING DRIVERS OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

RISING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Economic inequality has been found to have serious consequences for political equality, government stability, and on whether individuals support democracy itself.³⁹ In 2022, 10 per cent of the population held 76 per cent of the world's wealth.⁴⁰ Looking at the Index, income inequality (EM2030 SDG Gender Index Indicator 10.1) stagnated or got worse in three quarters of countries between 2019 and 2022; the 10 countries where the score worsened most were Malta, the Netherlands, Estonia, Mali, Finland, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, and Colombia.⁴¹

What role does economic inequality play in harming democracy? Economic inequality concentrates power among the wealthy elite. This power enables the affluent to influence rules, including tax policies, competition laws, and media ownership, further entrenching disparities. Such 'captured' democracies often neglect the rights of women and girls, and the most marginalized (and least powerful) more generally. Additionally, high inequality fuels societal polarization, weakening consensus on equality, social justice, and democratic values.⁴²

32 Mauricio Albarracín-Caballero (2022, September 6), "How Targeting LGBTQ+ Rights Are Part of the Authoritarian Playbook," *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/06/how-targeting-lgbtq-rights-are-part-authoritarian-playbook>

33 See indicator 10.5 in the 2024 SDG Gender Index: <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/explore-the-data/indicators-and-scores/>

34 Annette Choi (2024, January 22), « Record number of anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced in 2023, » *CNN* <https://www.cnn.com/politics/anti-lgbtq-plus-state-bill-rights-dg/index.html>

35 Ari Shaw (2023, September 26), "The global assault on LGBTQ rights undermines democracy," <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2023-06/global-assault-lgbtq-rights-undermines-democracy>

36 *Ibid.*

37 M.V. Lee Badgett, Kees Waaldijk, Yana van der Meulen Rodgers (2019), The relationship between LGBT inclusion and economic development: Macro-level evidence, *World Development*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.03.011>.

38 Ari Shaw (2023, October 12), "Why Anti-LGBTQ Attacks Matter for Democracy," *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/article/why-anti-lgbtq-attacks-matter-democracy>

39 Huang KP. (2023). Support for Democracy in the Age of Rising Inequality and Population Aging. *Soc Indic Res.* 2023;166(1):27-51. doi: 10.1007/s11205-023-03061-5

40 Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., Zucman, G. et al. World Inequality Report 2022, World Inequality Lab https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/01/Summary_WorldInequalityReport2022_English.pdf

41 EM2030 analysis based on the 2024 SDG Gender Index: <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/explore-the-data/>

SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL POLARISATION

Political and societal polarisation makes it harder for democracies to function by diminishing a sense of shared values and trust in institutions. The rise of right-wing, nationalist, populist, and antidemocratic governments bring with them a rise in anti-feminism⁴³, as well as immediate and tangible impacts on laws, policies, and investments in women's and girls' rights to health, education, and more.⁴⁴

Worryingly, there is also a growing gap between the values held by young men and young women: survey data from countries including China, Germany, Poland, South Korea, Tunisia, the United States, and the UK have shown that young women's views on key social issues – such as gender equality – tend to be far more progressive than those of young men.⁴⁵

The rise of online misogynistic figures and platforms Reddit's "manosphere" spaces contribute to a growing ideological divide. Feminist literature warns of the weaponization of "anti-feminism" to stoke broader reactionary politics, reinforcing patriarchal norms and legitimizing state control over women's autonomy. The political consequences of this divide are evident in the rise of policies that criminalize sexual and reproductive rights.

WIDESPREAD DISINFORMATION

Democratic systems rely on informed participation, however growing disinformation⁴⁶ disproportionately weakens the civic participation of women, girls and marginalised groups. More recent instances indicate the use of disinformation as a tool for polarization. Disinformation is not just a technological or political problem but a deeply gendered issue that threatens democracy and women's rights.

Anti-democratic movements use disinformation to weaken institutions, discredit independent media, and justify repressive policies. Misogynistic and patriarchal narratives are amplified to undermine social cohesion and entrench inequality, weakening democracy by fostering distrust and polarization. For instance, during the #MeToo movement, online disinformation campaigns claimed false accusations were widespread, trivializing survivors' experiences and undermining public trust.

CLOSING CIVIC SPACE AND REPRESSION

Civic space is a cornerstone of functioning democracies. Protected civic space, anchored in international and national legal frameworks, benefits the whole of society and is fundamental to democratic resilience.⁴⁷

Global civic freedoms are under attack. Freedom House's 2024 report marks the 18th consecutive year of declining global freedom cataloguing examples of election

42 Huang KP. (2023), Support for Democracy in the Age of Rising Inequality and Population Aging. *Soc Indic Res.* 2023;166(1):27-51. doi: 10.1007/s11205-023-03061-5

43 ti-feminism and anti-democratic developments. *Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy*, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CFFP-strongmen-and-violence.pdf>

44 Giovanna Coi (2024, March 8), "If far right surges in EU election, women's rights could be imperiled," <https://www.politico.eu/article/women-rights-peril-if-far-right-eu-election-surge-activists-say/>

45 www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998

46 The Economist (2021, January 13), "A growing number of governments are spreading disinformation online," <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/01/13/a-growing-number-of-governments-are-spreading-disinformation-online>

47 OECD, The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2022/12/the-protection-and-promotion-of-civic-space_c8a8caac/Civic%20Space%20Highlights-4a_ENG_final.pdf

manipulation, prohibition of political parties, and misinformation in a range of countries.⁴⁸ In 2023, CIVICUS reports that some 72.4 percent of the global population lives in countries with “repressed and closed civic space”, with 30 percent of the world living in countries where civic space is ‘completely closed.’⁴⁹ Women’s rights advocates, journalists, and human rights defenders are frequent targets of state and non-state actors, facing harassment, imprisonment, and violence: The assassination of Brazilian human rights activist and politician Marielle Franco in 2018 and the ongoing persecution of women’s rights defenders in Iran, such as Narges Mohammadi, illustrate the heightened risks for women in activism.

The 2024 SDG Gender Index (EM2030 SDG Gender Index Indicator 10.2) found that 91 out of 139 countries were rated ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ in an expert assessment of whether the country protects ‘personal autonomy, individual rights, and freedom from discrimination’ in 2022.⁵⁰

Alarmingly, expert assessments of ‘women’s rights to openly discuss political issues, both in private and in public spaces’ (EM2030 SDG Gender Index Indicator 10.4) saw a consistent decline from 2015 to 2022 across all regions, with Asia and the Pacific experiencing the most significant setbacks, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵¹

The repression of women’s rights advocacy and activism is particularly pronounced in countries where authoritarianism is rising. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has effectively erased women from public life, banning girls from secondary education, restricting female employment, and violently suppressing protests. Similarly, in Russia, feminist anti-war activists have been detained for opposing the war in Ukraine.

Another aspect of civic space covered by the EM2030 SDG Gender Index tracks laws related to ‘freedom of association and collective bargaining rights’ (EM2030 SDG Gender Index Indicator 8.3). The UK, France, Japan and the US have all seen declines on the extent of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in law in recent years, and Germany has stagnated.

Restrictive NGO laws and philanthropic protectionism, first emerging in the early 2010s, have played a significant role in stifling civic engagement. The backlash against global movements has also intensified, with organizations such as the United Nations and feminist donors facing growing restrictions on their work. The 2010s are now associated with democratic backsliding, resurgent far-right populism, nativist politics, and the rise of new religious-right alliances.”⁵²

48 Freedom House (2024, February), “Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict”, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf

49 People Power Under Attack 2024, CIVICUS Monitor, December 2024, <https://civicusmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/GlobalFindings2024.EN.pdf>

50 EM2030. A gender equal future in crisis? Findings from the 2024 SDG Gender Index (Seattle: Equal Measures 2030, 2024). <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/>

51 *Ibid.*

52 Ben Hayes and Poonam Joshi (2020), “Rethinking civic space in an age of intersectional crises: a briefing for funders,” *Funders Initiative for Civil Society*, <https://global-dialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FICS-Rethinking-Civic-Space-Report-FINAL.pdf>

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE)

The targeted violence against women in politics and human rights defenders (HRDs) represents a direct assault on democratic institutions: "The insufficient implementation of laws aimed at protecting women from gender-based violence and advancing gender equality erodes democratic resilience and undermines faith in the rule of law."⁵³ As these actors serve as crucial watchdogs, advocates, and representatives in democratic systems, violence against them has a multiplier effect - it not only silences individual voices but deters other women from entering politics or engaging in rights defense, creating a cycle of exclusion that weakens democratic representation and accountability. In the UK, for example, women are 50% less likely than men to participate in online political discourse."⁵⁴

Thus, violence - both online and offline - poses a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and undermines democratic values. The scale of this crisis is staggering. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 82% of surveyed women parliamentarians have experienced psychological violence.⁵⁵ In 2023 alone, at least 300 human rights defenders were killed globally, with detention of human rights defenders documented in 58 countries.⁵⁶ A comprehensive study across ten countries (Brazil, India, United States, Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Tunisia, Belarus, Myanmar, and Zimbabwe) reveals that women activists consistently face political violence and intimidation, ranging from online threats to legal persecution and physical abuse.⁵⁷

Technology has intensified these threats. Digital violence against women in politics has become pervasive, with serious harmful effects."⁵⁸ Women politicians are disproportionately subjected to gendered disinformation, discouraging their participation and eroding democratic representation. such as attacks targeting their appearance, perceived emotionality, agency, false narratives about their qualifications, and threats of violence.⁵⁹ Such disinformation may come in different forms, from harmful graphics to conspiracy theories:

53 Elena Ortiz, Joshua Allen, Robert U. Nagel, and Jessica M. Smith (2023, March), "Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy", Georgetown Institute for Peace and Security, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Exploring-the-Links-between-Womens-Status-and-Democracy.pdf>

54 Hannah Phillips, Agostina Bergia, and Rosario Grimà Algora (2024, February), "Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics," Blavatnik School of Government, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Strengthening-democracy-reducing-threats-women-politics.pdf>

55 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016, October), "Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians," <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

56 Front Line Defenders, "Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2023/24", https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1578_fld_ga23_online_u03.pdf

57 Saskia Brechenmacher, Erin Jones, and Özge Zihnioğlu (2024, March 21), "On the Front Lines: Women's Mobilization for Democracy in an Era of Backsliding," <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/03/on-the-front-lines-womens-mobilization-for-democracy-in-an-era-of-backsliding?lang=en>

58 Hannah Phillips, Agostina Bergia, and Rosario Grimà Algora (2024, February), "Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics," Blavatnik School of Government, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Strengthening-democracy-reducing-threats-women-politics.pdf>

59 Maria Giovanna Sessa (2020, December 4), "Misogyny and Misinformation: An analysis of gendered disinformation tactics during the COVID-19 pandemic," <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/misogyny-and-misinformation:-an-analysis-of-gendered-disinformation-tactics-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

- A known example of graphics usage is the case of Ukrainian parliamentarian Svitlana Zalishchuk who, following a pro-women's rights UN speech, experienced a year-long social media disinformation campaign consisting of fabricated sexualized information and images.⁶⁰
- Another example is when Australia's Ambassador for gender equality (Stephanie Copus Campbell) faced online abuse after posting a video on Twitter. The video received more than 6 million views within days, and a barrage of online abuse disparaging Stephanie Copus Campbell's appearance and questioning her gender identity.⁶¹

Deepfake pornography has emerged as a powerful weapon against women in politics - in the United States, nearly one in six women in Congress have been victims of AI-generated pornographic imagery.⁶² The American Sunlight Project's identification of 35,000 instances of deepfake content depicting 26 members of Congress, 25 of them women, illustrates the gendered nature of these attacks.⁶³ In the UK, over 30 female politicians, including Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, were targeted by a deepfake porn website.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the widespread use of Pegasus spyware against human rights defenders has created a chilling effect, causing many to alter or halt their vital work.⁶⁵ With spyware access suspected in 49 of 70 countries studied in the 2023 Freedom on the Net report,⁶⁶ and technologies like facial recognition being deployed to enforce strict morality codes in countries like Iran, surveillance presents a systemic threat to democratic activism.⁶⁷

These barriers to participation have serious implications for democracy: "Since the likelihood of adopting gender-equality policies is so much higher when women – including a diversity of women – are present, the politics of gender parity in political institutions is essential for the elimination of all discrimination against women, as well as for the revitalization of democracies."⁶⁸

Yet, despite commitments to gender parity, women's political participation remains inadequate across G7 nations. Japan's House of Representatives comprises only 15.7% women in 2024, far below the global average.⁶⁹ More concerning is the backsliding in ministerial positions, with France (-15% pts), Italy (-17% pts), and Japan (-14% pts) showing significant declines in the percentage of women representatives.

60 Nina Jankowicz, Jillian Hunchak, Alexandra Pavliuc, Celia Davies, Shannon Pierson, Zoë Kaufmann (2021, January), "Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, And Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online" https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Report%20Malign%20Creativity%20How%20Gender%2C%20Sex%2C%20and%20Lies%20are%20Weaponized%20Against%20Women%20Online_0.pdf

61 Anna Macdonald (2023, February 15), "Australian ambassador for gender equality Copus Campbell abused online," *The Mandarin*, <https://www.themandarin.com.au/212336-australian-ambassador-for-gender-equality-campbell-abused-online/>

62 France 24 (2025, January 6), "Form of violence: Across globe, deepfake porn targets women politicians," <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250106-form-of-violence-across-globe-deepfake-porn-targets-women-politicians>

63 *Ibid.*

64 Jim Waterson (2024, July 1), "British female politicians targeted by fake pornography," *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/jul/01/british-female-politicians-targeted-by-fake-pornography>

65 Dunja Mijatović (2023, January 17), "Highly intrusive spyware threatens the essence of human rights," *Council of Europe*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/highly-intrusive-spyware-threatens-the-essence-of-human-rights>

66 Freedom House (2024, February), "Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict," https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf

67 Rachel George (2023, December 7), "The AI Assault on Women: What Iran's Tech Enabled Morality Laws Indicate for Women's Rights Movements," <https://www.cfr.org/blog/ai-assault-women-what-irans-tech-enabled-morality-laws-indicate-womens-rights-movements#:~:text=Iran's%20morality%20police%20have%20frequently,on%20camera%20without%20their%20headscarves.>

68 Dahlerup, D. (2018). *Has Democracy Failed Women?* Polity Press. Democratic Futures series

69 World Bank, Data Bank, https://databank.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.MNST.ZS?id=2ddc971b&report_name=Gender_Indicators_Report&populartype=series

While globally 70% of countries have quotas designed to increase women's representation, among G7 countries only Italy has implemented such measures.⁷⁰ Moreover, whilst 134 countries have adopted one type of gender quota for the lower house of parliament, many fall short of targets and political parties fail to comply. This highlights the importance of accompanying quotes with strong accountability mechanisms.

CRISIS, CONFLICT AND FRAGILITY

Societies that tolerate gender discrimination and oppressive gender norms are more prone to experiencing instability.⁷¹ Research from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security reveals a clear correlation between gender inequality and societal instability. Countries with higher levels of gender inequality not only experience more violence and conflict but also score lower on democratic indices and show greater vulnerability to democratic backsliding.

The latest Global Peace Index⁷² showed that conflict deaths in 2023 were the highest this century, with escalating violence in both interstate and intrastate conflicts. Simultaneously, globally, military spending has continued to rise, despite austerity measures in many countries that disproportionately impact women's social and economic rights. Military expenditure increased as a share of GDP between 2019 and 2022⁷³, even as governments justified cuts to public services under fiscal constraints. The number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries reached 614 million in 2022, 50 per cent higher than the number in 2017.⁷⁴

Conflict and fragility are inherently gendered. Of the bottom 10 countries in the 2024 SDG Gender Index, all are considered by the OECD to be 'Fragile' and six are considered 'Extremely Fragile' (Afghanistan, Chad, DR Congo, Burundi, Congo, and Haiti).⁷⁵ War and militarization reinforce patriarchal structures by prioritizing militaristic governance over participatory democracy. Literature indicates that militarization of societies leads to the entrenchment of authoritarianism, the erosion of civil liberties, and the systematic targeting of feminist activists and peacebuilders.

Conflict heightens existing gender inequalities by limiting access to education, healthcare, and political participation. Research highlights how conflict-affected states are less likely to ensure gender-responsive governance, with women's rights deprioritized in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.⁷⁶ Substantial evidence from ongoing conflicts reveals the challenges faced by women and girls, including barriers to safe access to water, food, fuel, and shelter, increases in GBV, and decreased access to education, healthcare, and safe spaces, in addition to the breakdown of community and support structures.⁷⁷

70 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Gender Quotas Database, (<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/database>)

71 Text from a speech by US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken to the Summit for Democracy on March 28th, 2023, in the Dean Acheson Auditorium at the State Department, Washington, DC. "The Status of Women is the Status of Democracy" <https://www.policymagazine.ca/the-status-of-women-is-the-status-of-democracy/>

72 Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney, June 2024. <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/global-peace-index/>

73 EM2030. A gender equal future in crisis? Findings from the 2024 SDG Gender Index (Seattle: Equal Measures 2030, 2024). <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/>

74 UN Women (2023, October 23), "Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes, according to UN Secretary-General report," <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/10/women-are-increasingly-at-risk-in-conflict-underrepresented-in-peace-processes-according-to-un-secretary-general-report>

75 States of Fragility, 2022: <https://www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/>

76 Prügl, Elisabeth. (2015). "Neoliberalising Feminism." *New Political Economy*, 20(4), 614-631.

77 OHCHR, "Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/womens-human-rights-and-gender-related-concerns-situations-conflict-and-instability>

Despite ample evidence that women's participation fosters more robust democracies and more durable peace agreements, women remain systemically excluded from peace processes.⁷⁸ Between 1992 and 2019, only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes were women.⁷⁹ In 2022, out of 18 peace agreements, only six included provisions specifically relating to women, girls, or gender.⁸⁰ Examining national security through a gender lens has been described as an "under-utilized prism."⁸¹

78 UN Women (2023, October 23), "Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes, according to UN Secretary-General report," <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/10/women-are-increasingly-at-risk-in-conflict-underrepresented-in-peace-processes-according-to-un-secretary-general-report>

79 UN Women. (2020). *Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security*. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

80 UN Sustainable Development Group (2023, October 23), "Women are increasingly at-risk in conflict, underrepresented in peace processes: New UN Secretary-General Report," <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/women-are-increasingly-risk-conflict-underrepresented-peace-processes-new-un>

81 Kathleen J. McInnis and Kyleanne Hunter (2024, Nov 19), "Gender Wars Are an Early Warning Sign for Authoritarianism," *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/11/19/gender-wars-are-an-early-warning-sign-for-authoritarianism/>

‘WHAT WORKS’ IN PROMOTING THE VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF DEMOCRACY AND GENDER EQUALITY?

Based on the feminist literature review and on the analysis of past G7 language and commitments, we have identified six areas where action is needed and progress seems possible. These six areas align with our Policy Recommendations in Section 4. We will start by examining some examples of ‘what works’ in each of these six areas, before moving on to specific recommendations that could be taken forward by the G7 in 2025.

a. Continually reinforcing values of democracy, human rights and equality, including through upholding and strengthening existing conventions and frameworks

WHY?

A basic starting point, but of critical importance (especially at this moment in history) is of States reinforcing and upholding existing conventions and frameworks. These normative instruments, developed and refined over decades and reinforced in past G7 meetings, remain fundamental. Championing human rights and these frameworks is essential, even if they are imperfect. As highlighted in Section 3, there is ample evidence that conservative countries are objecting to key human rights and gender equality terms that have been commonly accepted and well established in international agreements for years. For example, the terms “gender responsive” and “advancing gender mainstreaming” in behind-the-scenes negotiations on several resolutions before the World Health Assembly (WHA).⁸² There have also been some objections to the use of “gender equality” and “sexual” in some instances – alongside a long-standing objection to the use of “rights” when referring to sexual and reproductive health.⁸³ “Gender” references have already been stripped from the World Health Organization’s (WHO) draft pandemic agreement.⁸⁴ At least

82 Kerry Cullinan, (2024, May 28), “Conservative Member States Balk at References to ‘Gender’ in WHA Resolutions,” *Health Policy Watch*, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/conservative-member-states-balk-at-references-to-gender-in-wha-resolutions/>

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*

five other resolutions have become bogged down by objectives from conservative member states, particularly Russia, Egypt, Iran and Nigeria.⁸⁵

Through the past analysis of G7 language, we also observed a general shift in language becoming more inward-focused and more focused on the idea of a ‘rules-based international order’ and on ‘foreign threats.’ While human rights continue to be mentioned in this Preamble language, over the years language on human rights throughout the G7 outcome documentation is less prominent.

HOW

Champions of gender equality and democracy need to protect existing language in international agreements and ensure that their delegations have clear guidance and strong support to push-back on efforts to weaken existing and upcoming conventions and frameworks. Public statements reinforcing the importance of key frameworks and conventions play an important norm setting and signaling role. Demonstrating political will by ensuring the most senior Government representatives are engaged in processes to agree conventions and frameworks related to democracy and gender equality is important. Key moments – like the Beijing+30 anniversary in 2025 – provide the opportunity to celebrate past gains and reinforce global leadership on progressive issues. They should receive commensurate political attention and resources.

b. Actively countering the global “rights roll-back” and taking steps to increase civic space

WHY?

Section 3 has outlined in detail the scale of the challenge from anti-gender movements and authoritarian leaders and the trends towards reduced civic space across the globe.

HOW

The feminist literature provides examples of countries making positive progress on expanding civic space and protecting freedom of expression, showing that change is possible. From within the G7 countries, CIVICUS points out the example of Japan, which has bucked the global trend towards reduced civic space and improved its score in the 2024 CIVICUS Monitor, joining the ranks of ‘Open’ countries worldwide. Japan’s upgrade to an open rating reflects the fact that over the year, civil society groups have been able to undertake their work without barriers and the right to peaceful assembly has generally been respected and protected. Further, media have been able to operate without major restrictions.⁸⁶

The Open Government Partnership is a positive example of collaborative efforts to protect civic space. All of the G7 countries except for Japan are part of the Open Government Partnership, which gathers concrete examples of actions taken by OGP member countries to protect civic space and defend activists and journalists. The Paris Declaration, adopted by the OGP Steering Committee on behalf of the membership in 2016, commits to: “protect, consistent with international law, freedom of expression, including for the press and all media, defend the role of journalism as a crucial force for transparency and accountability, and stand up against attacks and detention of journalists. Moreover, the OGP theory

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ People Power Under Attack 2024, CIVICUS Monitor, December 2024, <https://civicsmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/GlobalFindings2024.EN.pdf>

of change upholds civil society engagement as one of the four forces needed for open government reform.⁸⁷

The U.S. Agency for International Development's "Democracy Delivers Initiative"⁸⁸ and the U.S. Department of State's "Fundamental Freedoms Fund"⁸⁹ also exemplify proactive initiatives to strengthen civic spaces in countries facing pivotal moments. These initiatives provide timely support aimed at fostering democratic resilience and protecting fundamental freedoms and can be built upon to improve the G7's Rapid Response Mechanism enabling democratic actors to better navigate emerging challenges and capitalize on windows of opportunity. Unfortunately, the crisis imposed on USAID since the new Trump Administration took over in January 2025 means these initiatives are unlikely to advance with US leadership, but other countries could take up the mantle to continue the work.

Canada, the European External Action Service, Germany, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have jointly worked on research to "assess tactics used by foreign state and non-state actors to sow gendered and other identity-based disinformation across the world and build upon its findings."⁹⁰ This is an important initiative to identify and tackle emerging threats from authoritarian regimes that are using gender ideology as a tool to polarise societies and weaken democratic processes. However, this research has been removed by the current 2025 Trump government.⁹¹

c. Funding and supporting women's organisations and movements as 'bulwarks,' 'catalysts,' and 'fortifiers' of democracy

WHY?

Women have long been catalysts, defenders, and architects of democracy, often at great personal risk. Across the globe, their activism has challenged authoritarianism and advanced democratic ideals.⁹²

- In United States (2017) and Brazil (2018) millions of women mobilized against President Donald Trump and President Jair Bolsonaro, viewing them as threats to both women's rights and democracy.
- In Poland, women took to the streets during the COVID-19 pandemic to protest the ruling Law and Justice Party, their activism catalyzed by the government's aggressive rollback of reproductive rights.
- Women have also led nonviolent resistance movements in Belarus and Myanmar against authoritarian power grabs, while in India, Iran, and Sudan, they have spearheaded mass protests against exclusionary regimes.

87 "Open Government Partnership (2019, May), "Global Report: Democracy Beyond the Ballot Box", https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Global-Report_Defending-Activists-Journalists.pdf

88 USAID, "Democracy Delivers," <https://www.usaid.gov/democracydelivers>

89 United States Department of State, "DRL Fundamental Freedoms Fund," <https://2017-2021.state.gov/drl-fundamental-freedoms-fund/>

90 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), "Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse calls for urgent action on countering gendered disinformation," <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse-calls-for-urgent-action-on-countering-gendered-disinformation#:~:text=Stakeholders%20affirmed%20the%20need%20for,freely%2C%20safely%20and%20without%20fear.>

91 United States State Department, <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>

92 Saskia Brechenmacher, Erin Jones, and Özge Zihnioğlu (2024, March 21), "On the Front Lines: Women's Mobilization for Democracy in an Era of Backsliding," <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/03/on-the-front-lines-womens-mobilization-for-democracy-in-an-era-of-backsliding?lang=en>

Case studies covering Brazil, India, the United States, Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Tunisia, Belarus, Myanmar, and Zimbabwe reveal that that women are not only leading and participating in antiauthoritarian action: they are also changing how the struggle for democracy is defined and fought. They advocate for a vision centered on equality, minority rights, and the sociopolitical inclusion of marginalized groups.⁹³

Autocrats and illiberal democrats often perceive women's empowerment as a direct threat—a testament to the transformative power of women's activism in expanding and fortifying democracy.⁹⁴

Women's resistance to authoritarianism is not a new phenomenon. Historical examples illustrate the sustained impact of women's movements in challenging oppressive regimes women have been among the first to speak up against authoritarian rule in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Chile and Brazil,⁹⁵ in Sub-Saharan African countries⁹⁶ as well as in some countries in the Middle East and North Africa.⁹⁷

- Groups in the 1970s in authoritarian Chile and Argentina campaigned against human rights violations: In the urban protests during the 1980's against repression in authoritarian Brazil, 80% of the people are believed to have been women.⁹⁸ [I]n Morocco, women's groups were central actors in the country's democratization during the 1990s.⁹⁹
- In South Africa, women's organization had a tremendous impact in the struggle against apartheid.¹⁰⁰
- In Kenya, the early 1990s saw women at the forefront of often violent protests in support of imprisoned human rights activists.¹⁰¹
- In Sierra Leone ... women were the only group that openly defied soldiers and demonstrated for a free vote.¹⁰²
- In Niger, several thousand women demonstrated against the exclusion of women representatives from a preparatory commission charged with organizing the country's National Conference in 1991.¹⁰³

Cross-country research hypothesizes that it is because women's organizations are often outsiders of conventional politics that they may be able to operate under the radar of authoritarian regimes oppressing established opposition parties and extending the space allotted for civil society organizations, thus creating a foundation for protests in the initial

93 *Ibid.*

94 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks (2022, Feb 8), "Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women", *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>

95 Waylen G. Women and Democratization Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics. *World Politics*. 1994;46(3):327-354. doi:10.2307/2950685

96 Tripp, A. (2001), Women's Movements and Challenges to Neopatrimonial Rule: Preliminary Observations from Africa. *Development and Change*, 32: 33-54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00195>

97 Yeşim Arat, Toward a democratic society: The women's movement in Turkey in the 1980s, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 17, Issues 2-3, 1994, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(94\)90030-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(94)90030-2).

98 Waylen, Georgina, *Engendering Transitions: Women's Mobilization, Institutions and Gender Outcomes*, Gender & Politics (Oxford, 2007; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Sept. 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199248032.001.0001>

99 Valentine M. Moghadam (2009), Feminism, legal reform and women's empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa. *International Social Science Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2009.00673.x>

100 Waylen, Georgina, *Engendering Transitions: Women's Mobilization, Institutions and Gender Outcomes*, Gender & Politics (Oxford, 2007; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Sept. 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199248032.001.0001>

101 Tripp, A. (2001), Women's Movements and Challenges to Neopatrimonial Rule: Preliminary Observations from Africa. *Development and Change*, 32: 33-54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00195>

102 *Ibid.*

103 *Ibid.*

phases of transition.¹⁰⁴ Waylen argues that the impact of women's movements is important in initial phases of transition, before conventional forms of politics take form. As outsiders to orthodox politics, women's groups “formed the first organized and open opposition to authoritarian governments, helping to bring about the ‘end of fear.’”¹⁰⁵ Tripp notes that women's groups in African countries undergoing transitions “were among the first to take advantage of new openings to establish a wide array of formal and informal associations at both the local and national levels.”¹⁰⁶

The protection of democracy and gender equality requires investment, yet global trends are pointing to dramatic cuts in funding. According to the OECD, the share of ODA with gender equality objectives has dropped to 42% - a worrying decrease from 45% in 2019-20.¹⁰⁷ Even more concerning, funding to women's rights organizations and feminist movements remains under 1% of already limited gender equality ODA.¹⁰⁸

“Robust development assistance programs that address the root causes of poverty and political disaffection, including education, security and health programs, all contribute to countering autocratic influences at their root.”¹⁰⁹ Despite this, recent executive orders from the Trump administration threaten to dramatically reduce U.S. foreign assistance, particularly funding that supports gender equality and women's rights. These orders, which aim to cut foreign aid by up and reinstate expanded versions of policies like the Global Gag Rule, would have devastating implications for global gender equality programming.¹¹⁰

WHAT WORKS

Several successful models demonstrate the power funding women's rights organisations can have in securing fundamental rights. Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), launched in 2017, has focused on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls as a core focus of its development efforts, and as a result has helped secure \$40 billion in global commitments to accelerate gender equality progress.¹¹¹

Canada has a strong history of supporting women's rights organizing, including through CIDA's Gender Funds (in the late 1990s and early 2000s): CIDA's strategy was to provide funding targeted to women – for their economic advancement, to provide educational opportunities, to enable them to organize around issues of violence and discrimination. The Funds emerged from Canada's first ‘Women in Development (WID)’ strategy of the mid 1980s and evolved from supporting social welfare projects to direct funding for women's human rights and women's economic empowerment. The Gender Fund from Pakistan¹¹², for example, performed well in CIDA's impact evaluations: “Long and persistent investment

104 Yeşim Arat, Toward a democratic society: The women's movement in Turkey in the 1980s, Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 17, Issues 2–3, 1994, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(94\)90030-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(94)90030-2).

105 Waylen G. Women and Democratization Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics. *World Politics*. 1994;46(3):327–354. doi:10.2307/2950685

106 Tripp, A. (2001). Women's Movements and Challenges to Neopatrimonial Rule: Preliminary Observations from Africa. *Development and Change*, 32: 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00195>

107 OECD, “Development Finance for Gender Equality 2024,” https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-finance-for-gender-equality-2024_e340afbf-en.html#:~:text=However%2C%20despite%20a%20rise%20in,22%20than%20in%202019%2D20.

108 Emilie Tant, Ján Michalko (2024, August 29), « Why donors must finance feminist movements,” ODI Global, <https://odi.org/en/insights/why-donors-must-finance-feminist-movements/#:~:text=This%20means%20that%20feminist%20movements,%24204%20billion%20for%20the%20year>

109 Gabrielle Bardall (2019, October 30), “Autocrats use feminism to undermine democracy,” *Policy Options*, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2019/autocrats-use-feminism-to-undermine-democracy/>

110 IPPF, “The Global Gag Rule \$60,000,000 potential lost funding for IPPF,” <https://www.ippf.org/global-gag-rule>

111 Government of Canada, “Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy,” <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/canada-international-action/climate-finance/commitment/feminist-international-assistance-policy.html>

112 Rhonda Gossen (2024, September), “The Twelfth of February: Canadian Aid for Gender Equality during the Rise of Violent Extremism in Pakistan”

in equality between women and men by CIDA at the institutional level and within the Pakistan Program has led to notable results...with a small budget the Program has achieved significant value for money, in part because of the ability to respond quickly to emerging events and opportunities.”¹¹³ Canada’s more recent Women’s Voice and Leadership fund¹¹⁴ (which was renewed in 2024) and its ground-breaking investment in the Equality Fund¹¹⁵ demonstrate continued commitment to investing in women’s rights organizing.

The Netherlands offers another compelling model through its Leading from the South fund, which has provided 122 million euros since 2017 to support women’s rights activism in the Global South. The program has supported over 280 women’s rights organizations, leading to measurable improvements in gender-responsive policies and social protection schemes.¹¹⁶ Domestically, the Netherlands’ €96.5 million investment in family planning initiatives provided 8.5 million women and couples with modern contraceptive methods, averting approximately 2.6 million unintended pregnancies, 936,000 unsafe abortions, and 2,792 maternal deaths in low- and middle-income countries.¹¹⁷ This investment not only improved health outcomes but strengthened women’s ability to participate fully in civic life. Unfortunately the Netherlands have drastically shifted their international aid priorities over the past year.

d. Increase the leadership and representation of women in politics (and beyond)

WHY?

Women’s electoral representation promotes gender equality. A recent study showed that the presence of a female president significantly increases the frequency of female parliamentary speech making leading to women’s political empowerment.¹¹⁸ Studies show that citizens in countries with gender quotas succeed in raising awareness about female underrepresentation leading to stronger support for female participation.¹¹⁹

Yet only 12 countries in the world had gender parity in their parliament in 2022 (EM2030 SDG Gender Index Indicator 5.4) and they are found from regions across the world:

- Four in Latin America and the Caribbean (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Nicaragua)
- Three in Europe and North America (Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)
- Two in Sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal and South Africa)
- One in Asia and the Pacific (New Zealand)
- One in the Middle East and North Africa (United Arab Emirates)

¹¹³ Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (2006, October), “CIDA Pakistan Program Evaluation) https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/amc-gac/CD4-84-2006-eng.pdf

¹¹⁴ Government of Canada, “Women’s Voice and Leadership Program,” https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/wvl_projects-projets_vlf.aspx?lang=eng

¹¹⁵ <https://equalityfund.ca/>

¹¹⁶ Government of the Netherlands, “Making Change Happen: The Leading from the South I Programme and Women’s Rights Organisations in the Global South,” https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/documenten/reports/2021/10/30/end-evaluation-of-the-policy-framework-leading-from-the-south/Leading+from+the+South+evaluation_Policy+Brief.pdf

¹¹⁷ Guttmacher (2024, Nov 12), “The Impact of Dutch International Assistance for Family Planning and HIV, 2024,” https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/policy_analysis/file_attachments/just-numbers-impact-dutch-international-assistance-family-planning-and-hiv-2024.pdf

¹¹⁸ WAHMAN M, FRANTZESKAKIS N, YILDIRIM TM. From Thin to Thick Representation: How a Female President Shapes Female Parliamentary Behavior. *American Political Science Review*. 2021;115(2):360-378. doi:10.1017/S000305542100006X

¹¹⁹ Fernández JJ, Valiente C. Gender quotas and public demand for increasing women’s representation in politics: an analysis of 28 European countries. *European Political Science Review*. 2021;13(3):351-370. doi:10.1017/S1755773921000126

WHAT WORKS

Women’s political participation:

- Between 1995 and 2012, many countries implemented quotas globally, and one study found a correlation between quotas and women’s political representation. Women’s political representation jumped from 11 percent to 21 percent during that time.¹²⁰ Quotas are also associated with women being elected to government positions even more so than democratic ideals, economic development, or religious norms.
- Countries that lead the way on gender quotas are concentrated in Africa, Latin America, and Asia: Mexico and Indonesia have quotas that regulate the gender balance on the ballot; China, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania have quotas that reserve a certain percentage of seats for women.
- A recent case study outlines Nepal’s experience adopting a landmark quota system to guarantee the representation of women – including women from marginalized groups – across all levels of government, and the role that women’s organisations played in pushing for this change.¹²¹

Violence against women and girls (particularly in politics):

- Addressing gender-based violence against women in politics requires a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach combining legal frameworks, monitoring mechanisms, technology regulation, and civil society support. Most countries do not have laws specifically designed to protect politicians against violence. Activists in a number of countries have pushed for legal reforms that would formally recognize the specific threats facing women in politics and close existing protection gaps. In 2012, Bolivia became the first country to explicitly criminalize violence against women in politics, followed by others, including Brazil and Tunisia.¹²² These laws are most effective when they are part of a comprehensive framework that compliments clear legal definitions with structured monitoring systems, and data collection mechanisms.¹²³
- Effective monitoring requires sophisticated, multi-method approaches. The US Summit on Democracy highlighted the importance of building stronger evidence bases on gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated violence.¹²⁴ This includes collecting intersectional data that considers impacts across different ethnic and racial groups, employing mixed-method research to provide nuanced insights into the prevalence and nature of such violence. Implementation must be supported by adequate resources and training for relevant authorities, including police, judges, and election officials.

120 Jaya Nayar (2021, November 29), "Equal Representation? The Debate Over Gender Quotas (Part 1)," <https://hir.harvard.edu/equal-representation-the-debate-over-gender-quotas-part-1/>

121 EM2030. A gender equal future in crisis? Findings from the 2024 SDG Gender Index (Seattle: Equal Measures 2030, 2024). <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/>

122 Library of Parliament (2022, September 15), Hill Notes, "Violence Against Politicians in Canada and Internationally," <https://hillnotes.ca/2022/09/15/violence-against-politicians-in-canada-and-internationally/>

123 Hannah Phillips, Agostina Bergia, and Rosario Grimà Algora (2024, February), "Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics," Blavatnik School of Government, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Strengthening-democracy-reducing-threats-women-politics.pdf>

124 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/28/the-status-of-women-is-the-status-of-democracy-advancing-womens-political-and-civic-participation-and-leadership-at-the-second-summit-for-democracy/>

125 <https://counterhate.com/blog/star-framework-safety-by-design/>

126 Hannah Phillips, Agostina Bergia, and Rosario Grimà Algora (2024, February), "Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics," Blavatnik School of Government, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Strengthening-democracy-reducing-threats-women-politics.pdf>

- Technology platforms and social media companies play a crucial role in prevention and response. They should be required to implement “safety by design” principles, including transparent content moderation systems that address gendered hate speech and harassment.¹²⁵ These systems must be supported by both automated tools and human moderators trained to understand how online violence manifests across different languages and contexts.¹²⁶ Companies should also provide regular, transparent gender-disaggregated reporting on their handling of gender-based harassment.
- Civil society are innovators in understanding violence against women and politics through monitoring, providing support for politically active women, and agitating for change. They provide vital services including monitoring incidents, supporting politically active women, and advocating for change. Programs like Take Back the Tech demonstrate how civil society initiatives can combine digital safety training with advocacy.¹²⁷ Academics and academic institutions can also play a role in monitoring programs to map violence against women in politics locally and globally.¹²⁸ Governments and technology platforms should actively engage with these organizations’ expertise while providing sustainable funding for their work.

Success requires coordinated action across these domains, supported by adequate resources and clear accountability mechanisms.

e. Advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda including through increasing funding and monitoring frameworks

WHY?

As outlined in Section 3, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda represents a crucial nexus between gender equality and democratic stability. Evidence demonstrates that women’s meaningful participation in peace processes increases the likelihood of lasting peace by 35%.¹²⁹ The presence of women in national legislatures particularly influences post-conflict stability, with higher female representation associated with more durable peace following ceasefires or negotiated settlements.

WHAT WORKS

Several G7 nations have developed effective approaches to implementing the WPS agenda. The United States’ 2023 Strategy and National Action Plan represents a comprehensive framework for leveraging WPS to counter authoritarianism, notably recognizing online misogyny as an early indicator of democratic decline.¹³⁰ The United Kingdom has taken concrete steps by integrating gender advisors into defense and peacekeeping missions¹³¹, while Sweden’s Women’s Mediation Network has created a model for promoting women’s inclusion in peace negotiations globally.¹³²

127 <https://www.takebackthetech.net/>

128 Hannah Phillips, Agostina Bergia, and Rosario Grimà Algora (2024, February), “Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics,” Blavatnik School of Government, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Strengthening-democracy-reducing-threats-women-politics.pdf>

129 <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>

130 Kathleen J. McInnis and Kyleanne Hunter (2024, Nov 19), “Gender Wars Are an Early Warning Sign for Authoritarianism,” Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/11/19/gender-wars-are-an-early-warning-sign-for-authoritarianism/>

131 HM Government, “UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022,” https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6023aa12e90e0711c8c3d4e3/UK_NAP_Guidance_on_Strategic_Outcome_2-Peacekeeping.pdf

132 The Swedish Women’s Mediation Network, <https://fba.se/en/about-fba/publications/the-swedish-womens-mediation-network/>

The success of these initiatives often relies on meaningful engagement with civil society. When WPS agendas facilitate collaboration between female delegates and women's civil society groups, peace agreements show higher implementation rates and more comprehensive content. Local women's organizations provide crucial grassroots knowledge and experience that strengthen conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.¹³³

f. Promoting and implementing Feminist Foreign Policies

WHY?

As changes in women's rights and gender equality often serve as early warning signs of democratic backsliding, FFPs enhance the G7's collective capacity to identify and address emerging threats to democracy. By integrating gender analysis into all aspects of foreign policy, FFPs enable more comprehensive and effective responses to global challenges while strengthening democratic resilience.

The adoption of FFPs by G7 nations would serve multiple strategic objectives. First, it would provide a framework for countering authoritarian narratives that frame gender equality as a Western imposition rather than a fundamental aspect of democratic governance. Second, FFPs improve policy coherence across trade, defense, and development, leading to more effective diplomatic engagement. Finally, this approach creates more resilient international partnerships by addressing root causes of instability and inequality.

As the 2024 Development Finance for Gender Equality Report states, “Every development intervention has an impact on gender equality, whether intended or not, and excluding gender equality objectives from policies, programmes or investments leads to missed opportunities to advance on several fronts in parallel.”¹³⁴

WHAT WORKS

The success of FFP implementation across various contexts demonstrates its transformative potential. Mexico's 2020 FFP set a new global standard through its comprehensive approach and clear timelines, extending beyond traditional gender equality measures to encompass sexual rights, bodily autonomy, and climate action. The policy's ambitious goals include achieving full employment parity, equal pay, and applying a gender lens to every foreign policy position by 2024.¹³⁵ Chile's experience shows rapid concrete progress is possible - female ambassadorship doubled from 12 to 24 percent in just four years. Finland's FFP has demonstrated the potential for international impact, playing a crucial role in developing gender mainstreaming guidelines in Tanzania and supporting their comprehensive National Gender and Women's Development Policy.¹³⁶

133 Magda Lorena Cárdenas and Sumbal Javed (2023, April), “The Role of Women's Organizations in the Peace Architecture: A Missing Piece?”, https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/think7-uploads/2023/04/T7JP_TF4_The-Role-of-Womens-Organizations-in-the-Peace-Architecture-A-Missing-Piece.pdf

134 OECD, “Development Finance for Gender Equality 2024,” https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-finance-for-gender-equality-2024_e340afbf-en.html#:~:text=However%2C%20despite%20a%20rise%20in,22%20than%20in%202019%2D20

135 Gender Security Project: <https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/feminist-foreign-policy-countries/mexico>

136 OECD (2024, September), “Advancing gender equality as a foreign policy priority through Finnish development co-operation,” https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-co-operation-tips-tools-insights-practices_be69e0cf-en/advancing-gender-equality-as-a-foreign-policy-priority-through-finnish-development-co-operation_006dd448-en.html

Sweden's implementation of FFP offers particularly compelling evidence of institutional transformation. The policy led to significant increases in women serving as ambassadors, gender-focused aid spending, and the integration of gender equality provisions in trade agreements.¹³⁷ Notably, Sweden worked with UNCTAD to develop a “Trade and Gender Toolbox”¹³⁸ for assessing trade policies’ impacts on gender equality. Even after a change in government policy, many reforms have proved durable - by 2022, 55% of embassy staff had received gender equality training, embedding these principles in diplomatic practice.

This momentum continues to build. In July 2024, 19 countries, including G7 members Canada, France, and Germany, signed a declaration that “celebrate(s) the implementation of Feminist Foreign Policies and other initiatives in our countries to provide foreign policies with a gender focus, recognizing them as tools to respond to current and future challenges from a human rights perspective and for the strengthening of democracy, with innovative solutions that put equal rights at the center of the international agenda aiming for a better tomorrow for all people.”¹³⁹ This growing coalition demonstrates both the feasibility and the strategic value of FFP adoption

137 Rachel A. George (2022, November 18), “Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy Can't Be Undone,” <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/18/sweden-feminist-foreign-policy-billstrom-gender-equality/>

138 UNCTAD Trade and Gender Tool Box: <https://unctad.org/publication/unctad-trade-and-gender-tool-box>

139 III Ministerial and High-Level Representatives on Feminist Foreign Policies: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/925394/Declaration_CoPEF_Ingle_s.docx.pdf

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the six areas identified in Section 3 ('What Works') we have developed these further into specific recommendations for the G7 countries, mindful of the analysis of G7 language and commitments (see Section 1 and Annex 1).

Recommendation 1: G7 countries must reinforce their shared values of democracy, human rights and equality, including through upholding and strengthening existing conventions and frameworks

Given the uncertainty facing the world and the strength of attacks on democracies, and on women, LGBTQI+ people, and other marginalised groups in particular, the G7 2025 needs to have a basic foundation that reasserts basic human rights, shared democratic values, and that upholds the importance of rights frameworks and conventions.

Defending established language and upholding existing frameworks and conventions

- The G7 must take a stronger leadership role in defending established rights language and ensuring meaningful civil society participation in global governance.
- Annex 2 shows the evolution of Preamble language from past G7 Communiqués; previous language that strongly recognized the importance of human rights could be brought back in more prominently
- As a basic starting point, all G7 countries should ensure they have ratified all relevant gender equality standards, including CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention, and the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (C190)

Resist rollbacks in SRHR language:

- We call on G7 leaders to reaffirm and strengthen commitments to "defend and promote SRHR in the face of rollbacks" and advocate for "inclusion of the SRHR information and as part of the essential element of universal health coverage (UHC) at the primary health care level."
- (More ambitious) And reinstate explicit language on safe and legal abortion in future G7 Leaders' Communiqués
- (More ambitious) Host a high-level summit that brings together women's rights defenders and champions globally to share their experiences and strategies with one another and G7 representatives.

More clearly define G7 'democratic values' and take steps at home to strengthen democratic institutions

- As leaders of democratic processes and institutions, G7 nations should reaffirm their commitment to the following:
 - Maintaining independent judicial systems free from political interference
 - Protecting the autonomy of oversight bodies and regulatory authorities
 - Preserving parliamentary powers of scrutiny and oversight
 - Safeguarding media independence and freedom of the press
 - Publicly condemn any attacks on independent judicial systems, oversight bodies, regulatory authorities, parliamentary powers and media independence, at home and abroad.
 - Maintain consistent funding and support for key multilateral institutions and treaties regardless of domestic political changes
- Maintain commitments to the Open Government Partnership and advocate for Japan to join.

Recommendation 2: Agree a G7 strategy to counter the global “rights roll-back” and increase civic space

The G7 has consistently recognized the critical importance of protecting civil society and human rights. In their 2024 communiqué, G7 leaders expressed “strong concern about the rollback of rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people around the world,” condemning “all violations and abuses of their human rights and fundamental freedoms” and committing to “promoting, and protecting their rights in all spheres of society, and consistently mainstreaming gender equality in all policy areas.” This built on their 2023 recognition of “the integral role civil society plays, including by reaching those in vulnerable situations.” of civil society’s integral role in reaching vulnerable populations and their commitment to defending sexual and reproductive health and rights in the face of global rollbacks.

Establishment of a Civic Space Task Force

- The G7 should establish a dedicated Civic Space Task Force to systematically monitor and respond to threats against civil society organizations. This body would coordinate rapid support mechanisms for organizations under threat, particularly those operating under authoritarian regimes or in conflict zones. The Task Force would serve as a central point for coordinating G7 responses to civic space restrictions and enhancing engagement with civil society actors.

Enhancement of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism

- The G7’s own Rapid Response Mechanism is currently focused entirely on “foreign threats to G7 democracies”, but as a tool it could be expanded to sharing intelligence on shifts in civic space globally.
- The RRM monitors threats against media and information environment, and the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms which are signifiers of democracy. We call on the G7 to formally recognize attacks on Human Rights Defenders, civic space and rollbacks of gender equality as direct threats to democracy.

- The RRM should also incorporate mandatory gender impact assessments in all RRM activities, ensuring that responses consider the unique needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ individuals and ensure meaningful participation of women and diverse gender groups in RRM decision-making processes and implementation.
- Regular monitoring and assessment of state-civil society partnerships should be conducted, with results reported annually to ensure accountability and enable adaptive management of the strategy.
- Build from the United States' Fundamental Freedoms Fund mentioned above to establish a joint G7 Democratic Support Fund with pre-allocated emergency budgets that member countries can rapidly deploy when democratic backsliding or new openings occur
- Continue research from Canada, the European External Action Service, Germany, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States which jointly assessed tactics used by foreign state and non-state actors to sow gendered and other identity-based disinformation across the world and build upon its findings.

Recommendation 3: Increase G7 funding for women's rights organisations and movements specifically, and gender equality more generally

In 2022, G7 Leaders committed to “make every effort to collectively increase the share of G7's bilateral allocable ODA advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment over the coming years.” In 2023, they called “for a continuous, holistic and comprehensive approach to promote gender equality by creating a “nexus” that bridges the political and security, economic and social spheres and advocate for maximizing the efficiency and the impact of multi-sectorial policies and of our actions across diverse dimensions of policy implementation. We stress the importance of such a nexus approach in our foreign and sustainable development policy and in our ODA and endeavor to support the nexus. We reaffirm our commitment to make every effort to collectively increase the share of our bilateral allocable ODA advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment over the coming years.” In 2024, they stated “We reiterate our commitment to collectively increase G7 ODA for gender equality and we will explore ways to do this at the nexus of climate change and gender, particularly in Africa.”

Establish a Fund to direct resources towards women's rights organisations and movements, given their central role in defending and enhancing democracies

- G7 countries have examples to build upon (Canada's Gender Funds, Women, Voice and Leadership Fund, and the Equality Fund; France's Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (FSOF))
- In line with pooled funds that the G7 have mobilized in the past, a fund directed towards supporting civil society directly and women's organisations in particular could be a low cost/high impact way to strengthen democracy

Increase ODA for gender equality, and improve accountability and tracking

- Whilst the G7 have committed to increase ODA over the coming years, it is important for accountability and transparency purposes for them to commit to specific targets and timelines.

- Reiterating previous W7 demands, we call for G7 leaders to “ensure that at least 85% of the entirety of their ODA, in terms of volume, integrates gender as a significant or main objective by 2027, of which at least 20% dedicated to projects with gender equality as their main objective.”
- Commit to ensure that 100% of ODA is reviewed according to the OECD Gender Equality Policy Marker.
- Establish an accountability mechanism to ensure that the projects marked with the policy markers actually meet the OECD minimum requirements.

Reaffirm the importance of international aid

- ODA has played a crucial role in facilitating systemic and structural changes critical to ensuring women’s full participation in all political, governance and security structures. In response to new emerging data on decline in ODA assistance to developing countries we urge G7 countries to work closely with civil society to identify a strategic plan to reverse this decline.
- We recommend a roundtable discussion on this theme and advocate for this being a standing agenda point in G7 negotiations going forward
- Commit that ODA will not fall below 0.5% of GNI and will return to 0.7% by 2027.
- Commit to ensure the continuity of foreign aid programs that support democratic institutions and human rights abroad through political transitions

Recommendation 4: Promote the leadership and representation of women in politics (and beyond), both at home and internationally

G7 Leaders have consistently committed to preventing and responding to GBV and funding programmes to do so, particularly in conflict settings. However, emerging forms of violence and escalated attacks on Human Rights Defenders requires action from the G7 as violence against women in politics and human rights defenders represents a direct assault on democratic institutions. Women’s rights organisations, activists and human rights defenders also play an outsized role in combatting authoritarianism and promoting democracy.

The G7 Leaders have committed to protecting civil society, HRDs and the meaningful participation of women. In 2019, Leaders stated that they “stand with civil society leaders who defend the rights of women and girls and unequivocally condemn the threats and violence they might face because of their action” and later in the 2022 Democratic Resiliencies Statement committed to: “Guarding the freedom, independence and diversity of civil society actors, speaking out against threats to civic space, and respecting freedom of association and peaceful assembly;... Advancing programmes for the protection of human rights defenders and all those exposing corruption;... Protecting civic space, upholding transparent, accountable, inclusive and participatory governance, including by advancing women’s full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in civic and political life.”

Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom have all committed to the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse, with key actions including: Combatting technology-facilitated violence targeting women in politics and public life, including gendered disinformation; Advancing U.S. policies to prevent and

respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence; Deepening the evidence base on gendered disinformation; Expanding data and research on technology-facilitated gender-based violence

In a joint statement, these countries called 'upon states to join us in recognising and taking action to counter the threat of gendered disinformation to democracies globally. We urge technology and other private companies to take appropriate action to respond to this threat, including a commitment to a Safety-by-Design approach to the development and deployment of platforms and technologies.

PROPOSED ACTION

Tackle Gender-Based Violence against women in politics

- Develop comprehensive national legislation modeled on successful frameworks from Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Tunisia that specifically criminalizes violence against women in politics both online and offline. This requires developing comprehensive national action plans with dedicated resources and mechanisms for data collection and enforcement.
- Reaffirm the importance of tackling all forms of gender-based violence including in our societies, supporting those affected and holding perpetrators to account with the aim to address the culture of impunity, while making all efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. In doing so, explicitly recognise emerging forms of tech-facilitated violence, and violence against women in politics.
- Report on developments to address violence against women in politics in international and regional human rights mechanisms country reports. Colombia, for example, submits updates to organizations like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.
- Canada, the US and the UK must uphold commitments to the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse and encourage Japan, Germany and Italy and France to join this partnership.

Protecting Human Rights Defenders

- All G7 EU member states are bound by and committed to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. They place particular emphasis on protecting human rights defenders in third countries and enabling a civil society space in which they can carry out their work. We welcome a pragmatic discussion on how these commitments can extend to the G7 countries with specific discussion on how commitments can translate into improvements in policy, funding and at operational levels.
- Building on this, the G7 should adopt a comprehensive Action Plan that promotes and protects the right to defend human rights. This should include explicit condemnation of countries using AI and surveillance to target defenders, and concrete measures to enable civil society space.

Addressing tech-enabled violence

- The G7 must take decisive action to address emerging technological threats. This includes:
 - Recognizing deepfakes as a form of disinformation and gender-based violence
 - Consider provisions from the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA) to address deepfake pornography and AI-facilitated violence against women including implementing a system that categorizes AI technologies based on their potential risk, with stricter regulations for higher-risk applications
 - G7 collaboration to hold social media/tech companies accountable for online gender-based violence, hate speech, gendered disinformation and to implement AI-powered deepfake detection tools.
 - Require social media and tech platforms to implement “safety by design” principles, including transparent content moderation systems that address gendered hate speech and harassment.
 - Continue to review and update the International Code of Conduct for Advanced AI Systems to take account of AI-based surveillance and violence and ensure a gender-lens is applied to this code through the inclusion and participation of women's rights organisations, human rights defenders and civil society.
 - The G7 leaders have already stated that both the Guiding Principles and the Code of Conduct “will be reviewed and updated as necessary” to remain fit for purpose and responsive to rapidly evolving technology and committed to conducting “ongoing inclusive multistakeholder consultations” as part of the review process.
- Tackle other barriers to women's participation in politics
 - G7 leaders have committed to “Promoting the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in the labor market and decision-making positions across all sectors by implementing policies and initiatives aimed at addressing and eliminating structural barriers, promoting gender equality, and ending occupational and sectoral segregation and all forms of employment discrimination against women, including those related to maternity” As a result of this commitment, we call on all G7 countries to promote and implement gender quotas requiring political parties to nominate an equal number of male and female candidates for elections with financial penalties for non-compliance.

Recommendation 5: Further deepen action on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda including through increasing funding and monitoring frameworks.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has been well recognized in G7 documentation over many years, and they have committed to “supporting efforts by other countries, both financially and technically, to establish and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security or similar gender-equality related strategies.” They have recognized “that countries that are more equal are also more stable, more peaceful and more democratic [and] are resolved to strengthen the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS)”. Despite these consistent commitments and affirmations, gaps remain in monitoring and accountability around its translation in policies, funding

mechanisms and advocacy. Currently, 104 United Nations (UN) member states have issued a NAP, yet, in practice, only 43% of them contain an allocated budget. Among G7 members, only Canada's NAP has an allocated budget.¹⁴⁰

Increase funding and budgeting for NAPs and ensure NAPs are fully costed

- Given the importance of women and grassroots organisations involvement in peace negotiations, we also call for reporting and transparency on the amount of funding directed towards women-led grassroots organisations.
- Ensure NAPs comprehensively address women and girls' rights, both domestically and internationally
- Create a G7-wide accountability framework to monitor the implementation of UNSCR 1325 principles across peacekeeping, humanitarian, and security operations.

Introduce a 30% quota for the representation of women in peace negotiations.

Recognise the importance of including grassroots and civil-society organisations in peace processes.

- G7 countries should also adopt the UN Secretary General's commitment to dedicate at least 15% of UN-managed funds in support of peacebuilding to projects whose principal objective is to address women's specific needs.
- Develop a standardized monitoring framework to measure NAP impacts and encourage countries around the world to produce a monitoring and evaluation impact report at the end of each NAP cycle.
- This could include specific indicators on Women's participation in politics and peace-making negotiations; the number and scale of interventions against GBV; How many are reached in training programmes, etc.

Recommendation 6: Commit to implementing Feminist Foreign Policies (FFP), and supporting partner countries to do the same and take steps to further strengthen G7 accountability for its existing gender equality commitments

In 2024, Canada, France and Germany from the G7) signed a declaration that “celebrate(s) the implementation of Feminist Foreign Policies and other initiatives in our countries to provide foreign policies with a gender focus, recognizing them as tools to respond to current and future challenges from a human rights perspective and for the strengthening of democracy, with innovative solutions that put equal rights at the center of the international agenda aiming for a better tomorrow for all people.” “Under the German Presidency, the G7 has committed to an ambitious gender transformative agenda, with gender equality being a cross-cutting and guiding principle for all policy objectives.” Applied to its full means, this should translate to a feminist foreign policy. (2022 Joint Statement of the G7 Gender Equality Ministers)

¹⁴⁰ Magda Lorena Cárdenas and Sumbal Javed (2023, April), “The Role of Women's Organizations in the Peace Architecture: A Missing Piece?”, https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/think7-uploads/2023/04/T7JP_TF4_The-Role-of-Womens-Organizations-in-the-Peace-Architecture-A-Missing-Piece.pdf

Strengthening language on foreign policy

- The G7 should at least return to the language from 2023 related to feminist foreign policies: “We reaffirm the Leaders’ Commitment...to strengthen their rights, resources and opportunities in the spirit of feminist development, foreign and trade policies.”
- Building on the 2024 G7 Leaders Communique’s commitment to “promote applying a gender transformative, multi-sector approach to our foreign policy, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation, including on climate resilience, food security, education and migration”, we welcome G7 leaders adopting and resourcing a gender-transformative approach to trade, defence, diplomacy, migration, and security.
- Build on the UNCTAD Trade and Gender Toolbox to develop and institutionalise frameworks to evaluate the impact of trade reforms on women and gender inequalities prior to their implementation.

Improving Implementation and monitoring

- Where G7 states have a feminist foreign policy or have publicly committed to women and girls’ rights, ensure implementation, monitoring and public review of these commitments and policies.
- Mainstream gender considerations into policy developments on climate security.
- Ensure a gender perspective is integrated across all public policies and sectors, not just those specifically focused on women’s issues.
- G7 leaders (Canada and France) that have adopted FFP should advocate for FFP and encourage other countries to join.
- Establish inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms to ensure gender considerations are integrated across foreign, trade, and development policies

Enhancing the G7 Gender Dashboards

- The G7 Gender Dashboards are critical for informing gender-transformative policies. “The G7 Dashboard on Gender Gaps covers key indicators across a range of policy areas that are relevant to the advancement of gender equality.” However, the inclusion of additional indicators and analyses would enhance the effectiveness of the data collected and thus the policies they inform. These include:
 - Measures of plurality and civic space given the links to civic space
 - Tracking progress on crucial laws (especially those that are most closely associated with rising authoritarianism, including laws related to the rights of LGBTQI+ people and sexual and reproductive health laws) would also be helpful additions
 - A composite measure like the SDG Gender Index would be a helpful addition (it has recently been adopted by the Gates Foundation Goalkeepers report as the standard tracker of global gender equality)
- Further consultation with civil society and feminist data organisations could help improve the G7 Gender dashboards.

Strengthen Commitments to gender equality through a universal gender lens.

- We urge G7 leaders to apply a gender lens to all negotiations and declarations emerging from meet-up in 2025. This can include 1) ensuring women's representation in leadership in all events and meetings in the lead up to and during the G7 meet up 2) ensuring that gender is a key standalone component to all meetings and dialogues with clear gender transformative commitments as outcomes to deliberations
- Committing to release a statement from G7 Gender Ministers every year

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH AREAS

Digital democracy and its implication on processes in the global south, more specifically what are some of the unique challenges and opportunities for digital democracy in the Global South and what role does international cooperation play in combating cross-border digital threats (e.g., foreign interference, disinformation campaigns) and regulating digital democracy. Some specific suggestions include:

- **AI in elections:** “Democratic governments, civil society, and technology companies should defend against the harms of artificial intelligence during election periods. As noted in Freedom on the Net 2023, artificial intelligence (AI) has increased the scale, speed, and efficiency of online harms and digital repression during electoral periods, and the affordability and accessibility of generative AI technology has lowered the barrier of entry to the disinformation market. Against this backdrop, political parties, committees, and campaigns should refrain from intentionally misrepresenting candidates in advertising that features AI-generated or AI-manipulated imagery.”
- **AI in government systems:** AI is increasingly being used in [government decision-making](#) but biased AI systems that encode and amplify historical gender and racial biases, will harm underprivileged groups and lead to unfair and discriminatory outcomes. G7 countries that are adopting AI systems into their governments, must seek the input of women and other marginalised groups in AI development and policymaking. They must also implement robust safeguards and oversight mechanisms for AI in government systems and develop proper AI governance frameworks to ensure that AI deployment aligns with democratic values and human rights
- **Surveillance and data extraction for HRD:** “Democratic governments should address the apparent proliferation of spyware attacks against HRDs in exile. Governments in at least 49 of the 70 countries studied in the 2023 Freedom on the Net report were suspected of having access to sophisticated spyware or data extraction technologies. Some reports have indicated that even democracies may have misused commercial spyware against HRDs. Democracies should ensure that any surveillance they undertake is legal, necessary, and proportionate. They should consider joining the Export Controls and Human Rights Initiative and uphold the principles of the Joint Statement on Efforts to Combat the Proliferation and Misuse of Spyware”
 - An American organization founded by Google and IBM is collaborating with Semptian, a Chinese company that assists China’s authoritarian government in conducting mass surveillance against its citizens. Semptian’s Aegis system, integrated into China’s phone and internet networks, enables the government to secretly collect people’s email records, phone calls, text messages, cellphone locations, and web browsing histories. The merging of communication infrastructures with surveillance

capabilities has given tech companies unprecedented power to impact human rights and democratic processes (<https://theintercept.com/2019/07/11/china-surveillance-google-ibm-temptation/>)

- **Political influence of tech companies:**

- **Lobbying and financing:** Big tech companies pour immense resources into circumventing threats of action over anti-competitive practices, higher taxation, and regulations. They have developed significant lobbying efforts in Washington and access to opaque avenues for political influence online. In 2021 alone, Facebook, Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, Uber, and Twitter spent nearly 70 million dollars lobbying the U.S. government, exceeding the 65 million dollars they had collectively spent in 2020.³⁴ Unilaterally, Meta Platforms spent 20 million dollars, and Amazon spent 19 million in 2021 – the most either company has ever spent on lobbying.³⁵ The increasing funds point to these companies' mounting efforts to influence policy decisions. For comparison, big tech spent in the past year three times of what they had spent a decade ago <https://www.fikerinstitute.org/publications/the-rising-political-power-of-silicon-valley>
- **Silencing:** Tech companies have the ability to regulate who can access their platforms, potentially influencing who can participate in the public sphere. Twitter's ban of former President Trump, and the subsequent purchasing and un-banning by Elon Musk highlights tech companies concerning influence over whose voice is heard and whose is not. <https://www.fikerinstitute.org/publications/the-rising-political-power-of-silicon-valley>
- **Social Media:** Digital hyper-partisan tactics, including online ads misrepresenting candidates and bots shaping opinions on divisive issues, are designed to undermine public confidence in the electoral process
- **Tech facilitated genocide:** The tech-facilitated genocide in Myanmar, primarily involving Facebook, demonstrates how social media platforms can be weaponized to incite violence and undermine democracy. Monopolisation by tech giants like Facebook and their algorithms made it easier for the military (Tatmadaw) to rapidly spread dehumanizing narratives about the Rohingya fueling hatred and violence. Inadequate content moderation in local languages can leave vulnerable populations exposed to hate speech and disinformation. The amplification of extremist content by algorithmic systems poses a significant risk to democratic processes globally
- **Internet shutdowns by governments.** According to the #KeepItOn Report, in 2022, there were 187 internet shutdowns in 35 countries.¹⁴¹ 133 of these occurred alongside some form of violence, a consistent rise since 2019. "In some contexts, like Iran, authorities responded to protests with brutal crackdowns and internet shutdowns, and in other contexts, such as during conflicts and war, governments, warring parties, or military regimes deployed shutdowns in apparent attempts to hide human rights and humanitarian law violations such as murder, torture, rape, and other war crimes." Shutdowns also have a disproportionate effect on women, as they are more likely "than men to depend on the internet to access sexual and reproductive health information, to complete their education, or to generate financial income for themselves and their families"

¹⁴¹ Access Now, "Weapons of control, shields of impunity: Internet shutdowns in 2022," <https://www.accessnow.org/internet-shutdowns-2022/>

ANNEX 1: 'MOST PROMISING LANGUAGE', GROUPED BY COMMON THEME AND BY 'ACCEPTANCE' IN PAST G7 DOCUMENTATION

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
A - Well established ('ground' should be held and the best language retained)		
The importance of women's participation/ leadership/ representation	<p>"We reaffirm the Leaders' Commitment to ensure full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity as well as LGBTIQ+ persons in politics, economics, education and all other spheres of society, independent of their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation and to strengthen their rights, resources and opportunities in the spirit of feminist development, foreign and trade policies." (Gender Ministers, 2022)</p> <p>"We affirm our commitment to SDG 5.5, and call for the full, equal, active and meaningful participation and leadership of women and women's rights organisations at local, national, and international decision-making in the COVID-19 recovery." (Foreign & Development Ministers, 2021)</p> <p>"Concerned that, in all countries, including the G7, women's participation in political, economic and public life remains uneven, we decide to:</p> <p>Recommend that G7 countries take action to increase the representation of women in all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life by 2022.</p> <p>Encourage the private sector to value women's active role in private companies by developing positive actions, such as leadership trainings and gender equality labels/certifications, and promoting role models.</p> <p>Encourage a more balanced representation of women in G7 delegations, namely among Sherpas, as well as in G7 working groups and the whole staff working on G7 in respective administrations." (Gender Roadmap, 2017)</p>	<p>The importance of women's full and equal participation is recognized frequently throughout G7 documentation, but most often as it pertains to conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping</p> <p>We have reflected language here that recognizes the importance of participation and representation more generally</p>

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
The need to protect human rights defenders	<p>"We will work towards safeguarding a free space for civil society, while ensuring the safety of human rights defenders." (Foreign Ministers, 2015)</p> <p>"We reaffirm the importance of the independent voice of human rights defenders and other civil society actors as well as of partnerships between states and civil society in the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedom." (G7 Leaders Communique, 2016)</p> <p>"We commend the decisive role of women leaders, women human rights defenders and civil society organizations in courageously supporting health, safety, and equal rights, participation and equal opportunities of women and girls around the world, in some cases at great personal risk." (Paris Declaration on Gender Equality, 2019)</p> <p>"Attempts to influence, pressure or threaten individuals...this may include... attempting to silence human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists critical of state actors." (Declaration "Defending Democracy from foreign threats and Championing shared values", 2021)</p> <p>"We commit to...advancing programmes for the protection of human rights defenders and all those exposing corruption..." (Democratic Resiliencies Statement, 2022)</p>	<p>There is helpful language related to human rights defenders across several G7 outcome documents</p> <p>Occasionally this specifically references women human rights defenders, but less often</p> <p>In several examples, it is connecting to key democracy concepts such as civic space and anti-corruption</p> <p>Rarely is the subject connected to funding for human rights defenders</p>
The links between gender equality and more democratic, stable, prosperous societies	<p>"Recognizing that countries that are more equal are also more stable, more peaceful and more democratic..." (Leaders Communiqué, 2018)</p> <p>"Achieving gender equality is imperative as we strive for resilient, inclusive democratic societies, and to counter the rising tide of authoritarianism and backlash against women's and girls' rights across the globe." (Leaders Communiqué, 2022)</p> <p>"...as we strive for free, resilient, inclusive, gender-equal, democratic societies based on a functional and inspirational gender equality machinery." (Gender Equality Ministers, 2022)</p>	<p>There is some helpful language linking gender equality to more democratic, stable, peaceful, etc. societies</p> <p>The feminist literature supports this, and it provides a good basis to make the argument for direct commitments to advance gender equality and support women's rights organisations</p> <p>The 2022 language about "gender equality machinery" is odd and it is worth understanding what they had in mind with this phrasing</p>

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
Advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda	<p>“...we commit to advancing, implementing and strengthening the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda including its application to disaster risk reduction (DRR), through partnership with the WPS-Focal Points Network and support for National Action Plan development, and to promote intersectional approaches.” (Leaders Communiqué, 2023)</p> <p>“[We commit to]...enhancing coordination among G7 members to support women’s participation in peace processes including in their roles as negotiators, mediators and peacebuilders; and encouraging initiatives aimed at increasing the full, meaningful and equal participation of women in peace processes, peacemaking and peace building, including in the framework of the G7 Women, Peace and Security Partnerships Initiative in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements and through support to relevant local women peacebuilders and women’s organizations.” (Dinard Declaration on Women, Peace and Security, 2019)</p>	<p>Language related to Women, Peace and Security is very well reflected across many years of G7 documentation. It first features in the Foreign Ministers Meeting Communiqué as far back as 2015</p> <p>Action is linked to Resolution 1325 in 2016, but the Resolution commitments are less present</p> <p>Generally, there is little around monitoring and accountability for WPS commitments (including its translation in policies, funding mechanisms and advocacy.</p> <p>Within WPS, sexual violence in conflict surfaces as common ground of concern (with UK, Canada and Japan taking lead on deliberations and commitments around it).</p> <p>Emphasizing the role of women in peacekeeping and the need to ensure women’s leadership in peacekeeping efforts comes up frequently.</p>

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
Preventing and tackling gender-based violence (offline and online), going beyond 'sexual violence in conflict'	<p>"...Attempts to undermine democratic processes and their outcomes, as well as public confidence and trust in them. This may include: Intimidating or threatening candidates, particularly women and minorities." (Declaration "Defending Democracy from foreign threats and Championing shared values", 2021)</p> <p>"We stand with civil society leaders who defend the rights of women and girls and unequivocally condemn the threats and violence they might face because of their action." (Paris declaration on gender equality, 2019)</p> <p>"We condemn intimidation, harassment and violence against journalists, noting that women, and those in marginalised and vulnerable situations, are disproportionately targets, both online and offline." (Foreign & Development Ministers, 2021)</p> <p>"Online violence cannot be separated from other types of violence against women and girls. Like intimate partnership violence, it is rooted in gender inequality, discriminatory social norms and unequal power relations." (Paris declaration on gender equality, 2019)</p> <p>"We invite Interior Ministers to work on a G7 agreement on sharing of information and best practice on tackling existing and emerging online forms of gender-based violence, including forms of online abuse." (Leaders Communiqué, 2021)</p>	<p>Up until 2019, violence was mentioned almost exclusively related to sexual violence in conflict and the WPS agenda</p> <p>More recently, the concept of gender-based violence and harassment (offline, but especially online) has become a major focus</p>
B - Emerging consensus (some language over multiple years that can be built upon)		
Respect for diversity and freedom from discrimination	<p>We emphasize the importance of promoting pluralism, moderation, tolerance, and gender equality..." (Foreign Ministers, 2016)</p> <p>"We recognise the importance of diverse voices in shaping public debate, promoting transparency and ensuring accountability." (Foreign & Development Ministers, 2021)</p> <p>"It is imperative for the G7 to lead global efforts towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity." (Promoting Gender Mainstreaming through the Nexus Approach, 2023)</p> <p>"...we commit to cooperate together and with partners to: Strengthen open societies globally by protecting civic space and media freedom, promoting freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of religion or belief, and by tackling all forms of discrimination, including racism..." (Open Societies Statement, 2021)</p>	<p>The concept of pluralism (including diversity and discrimination) came up in 2016, but then not again until 2021.</p> <p>There is nascent recognition (see 2021 and 2023) of the importance of diversity and freedom from discrimination, as essential parts of open and democratic societies</p> <p>The language of diversity is recognized most often in the phrase 'women and girls in all their diversity'</p> <p>There are occasional mentions of marginalized/marginalised groups, minority groups but only one mention of racism</p>

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
Protecting civic space and press/ media freedom	<p>"We are also concerned by the increasing restrictions imposed on political activity, press freedom and civil society space, both formal and informal, by governments in many parts of the world." (Foreign Ministers, 2016)</p> <p>"...we commit to cooperate together and with partners to: Strengthen open societies globally by protecting civic space..." (Open Societies Statement, 2021)</p> <p>"We commit to championing media freedom as a vital part of upholding democracy and human rights around the world." (Foreign & Development Ministers, 2021)</p> <p>"We commit to...protecting civic space, upholding transparent, accountable, inclusive and participatory governance, including by advancing women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in civic and political life." (Democratic Resiliencies Statement, 2022)</p> <p>"Attempts to undermine trust in democratic institutions and processes, influence independent media, manipulate civic discourse, close civic space, damage social cohesion and threaten public health." (Democratic Resiliencies Statement, 2022)</p>	<p>The language of 'civic space' seems to be newer, appearing in the 'democracy' focused statements in 2021 and 2022</p> <p>These statements are sometimes gender-blind, but there is recognition in several places that women are especially affected</p> <p>There is potential to bring this into more mainstream G7 documents, including as a rationale for providing direct support to women's rights organisations</p>
Increasing aid for gender equality	<p>"We commit to make every effort to collectively increase the share of G7's bilateral allocable ODA advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment over the coming years." (Leaders Communiqué, 2022)</p> <p>"We reaffirm our commitment to make every effort to collectively increase the share of our bilateral allocable ODA advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment over the coming years." (Leaders Communiqué, 2023)</p>	<p>There was reasonably strong language around increasing ODA for gender equality in 2022 and 2023, but unfortunately this seems to have fallen away in 2024</p>
Recognising the rollback in women's rights	<p>"We express our strong concern about the rollback of women's and girls' rights in particular in time of crisis and we strongly condemn all violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms for women and girls and LGBTQIA+ people around the world." (Leaders Communiqué, 2023)</p> <p>"We express our strong concern over the global rollback of women's and girls' rights in particular and the disproportionate impact of conflict and crisis on them." (Foreign Ministers, 2023)</p> <p>"We express our strong concern about the rollback of the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people around the world in particular in time of crisis and we strongly condemn all violations and abuses of their human rights and fundamental freedoms." (Development Ministers, 2024)</p>	<p>Language recognizing a global rollback in women's rights has been fairly strong and consistent in the last couple of years; this momentum should be built upon</p> <p>This could be made more concrete through inclusion of a fact like this one from the EM2030 2024 Index: "40% of countries are stagnating or backsliding on gender equality."</p>

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
Protecting the rights of LGBTQIA people	We reaffirm our full commitment to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of all individuals...and in supporting diversity, including of sexual orientations and gender identities." (Leaders Communique, 2021)	In recognition of the role that attacks on LGBTQIA rights play in authoritarian 'playbooks', we have noted language related to LGBT+ rights
	"We seek to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of... LGBTQI+ persons in politics, economics, education and all other spheres of society." (Leaders Communique, 2022)	Recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity seems to have been introduced around 2021, but tends to be vague language calling out the rights of LGBT+ people without linking that to action or commitment (except as it pertains to SRHR)
	"We reaffirm our full commitment to a sustained focus on realising equality between women and men as well as transgender and non-binary people, and to ensuring that everyone – independent of their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation – has the same opportunities and is protected against discrimination and violence" (Leaders Communique, 2022)	
	"We reaffirm the Leaders' Commitment to ensure full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of...LGBTIQ+ persons..." (Gender Ministers, 2022)	
	"...independent of their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation..." (Gender Ministers, 2022)	
	"We further recognize the essential and transformative role of comprehensive SRHR in gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, and in supporting diversity, including of sexual orientations and gender identities." (Leaders Communique, 2023)	
	"Together, we counter the rising tide of authoritarianism and a backlash against women's, girls', and LGBTQI+ persons' exercise of their rights across the globe." (Gender Ministers, 2022)	
	"We express our strong concern about the rollback of the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people around the world." (Development Ministers, 2024)	
	"We acknowledge that gender equality will not be achieved without the full involvement of and active cooperation with women's rights, feminist, LGBTQIA+ civil society and non-governmental organizations, youth leaders, and the private sector." (Gender Ministers, 2024)	
	"We express our strong concern about the rollback of the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people around the world." (Leaders Communique, 2024)	

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
C - New 'ground' (infrequent mentions, but some nascent language as a starting point)		
The importance of supporting (specifically funding) women's rights organisations	<p>"Mobilize the international community, including through working with the private sector, civil society and women's rights organizations, to develop strategies to improve prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based abuse, harassment and the threat of violence in digital contexts..." (Charlevoix Commitment to End Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Abuse and Harassment in Digital Contexts, 2018)</p>	<p>There is frequent mention of women's organisations/women's rights organisations since 2018</p>
	<p>"...requires recognition of important and necessary peacebuilding work that women's organizations and civil society undertake...Inclusive peace processes necessitates providing support to women and women's organizations as well as creating receptive environments for their full, meaningful and equal participation." (Dinard Declaration on Women, Peace and Security, 2019)</p>	<p>However, this has been included in the 'New Ground' category because the language is of 'supporting' and stops short of calling for funding</p>
	<p>"We commit to....and through support to relevant local women peacebuilders and women's organizations." (Dinard Declaration on Women, Peace and Security, 2019)</p>	<p>This provides the opportunity to go beyond the language of supporting to also mentioning funding</p>
	<p>"We recognise that women's rights organisations strengthen women's and girls' inclusion in public life and play a vital role in ensuring their issues are heard and amplified, and their needs are met." (Foreign & Development Ministers, 2021)</p>	
	<p>"We...call for the full, equal, active and meaningful participation and leadership of women and women's rights organisations at local, national, and international decision-making in the COVID-19 recovery." (Foreign & Development Ministers, 2021)</p>	
	<p>"Increasing efforts to ending all forms of gender-based violence...including by considering supporting...civil society organizations including women's rights organizations working on these issues." (Gender Ministers, 2024)</p>	
	<p>"We acknowledge that gender equality will not be achieved without the full involvement of and active cooperation with women's rights, feminist, LGBTQIA+ civil society and non-governmental organizations, youth leaders, and the private sector." (Gender Ministers, 2024)</p>	

Topic	Examples of best language	Comments
Promotion of Feminist Foreign policies (FFP)	<p>"We reaffirm the Leaders' Commitment...to strengthen their rights, resources and opportunities in the spirit of feminist development, foreign and trade policies." (Gender Ministers, 2022)</p> <p>"We will promote applying a gender transformative, multi-sector approach to our foreign policy, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation..." (Leaders Communiqué, 2024)</p>	<p>The best language that opens the door to call for Feminist Foreign Policies seems to have emerged in 2022</p> <p>Unfortunately, the next mention in 2024 loses the word Feminist and refers more vaguely to gender transformative approaches</p>
Protection and promotion of abortion rights	<p>"We reaffirm our full commitment to achieving comprehensive SRHR for all, including by addressing access to safe and legal abortion and post abortion care." (Leaders Communiqué, 2023)</p>	<p>In recognition that targeting abortion laws are often part of an 'authoritarian playbook', we have captured language related to abortion</p> <p>There was well-publicised disagreement about this language in 2024 and unfortunately it was removed</p>

ANNEX 2: EVOLUTION OF 'PREAMBLE' LANGUAGE RELATED TO DEMOCRACY, GENDER AND DEMOCRATIC INCLUSIVITY (2015 TO 2024)

We believe in open economies, open societies and open governments, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, as the basis for lasting growth and stability.	2014
We, the G7, emphasise the importance of freedom, peace and territorial integrity, as well as respect for international law and respect for human rights.	2015
We remain bound together as a group guided by our common values and principles, including freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.	2016
We are bound together by our shared values of freedom and democracy, peace, security, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. We are determined to coordinate our efforts in promoting the rules-based international order and global sustainable development.	2017
We, the Leaders of the G7, have come together...guided by our shared values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and our commitment to promote a rules-based international order.	2018
We, the Leaders of the G7, share common democratic values that are central to the development of free, open, well-governed, pluralistic and prosperous societies and recognize that equality is a core component of democracy.	2019
Recognizing the importance of shared values, including freedom of inquiry, merit-based competition, openness, transparency, and reciprocity, as well as the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, privacy, and democratic values in international cooperation;	2020

<p>As democratic societies we support global institutions in their efforts to protect human rights, respect the rule of law, advance gender equality, manage tensions between states, address conflict, instability and climate change, and share prosperity through trade and investment. That open and resilient international order is in turn the best guarantor of security and prosperity for our own citizens.</p> <p>We are at a critical juncture, facing threats to freedom and democracy from rising authoritarianism, electoral interference, corruption, economic coercion, manipulation of information, including disinformation, online harms and cyber attacks, politically motivated internet shutdowns, human rights violations and abuses, terrorism and violent extremism. We also face threats to our social fabric from persistent inequalities and discrimination, including racism and resistance to gender equality.</p>	2021
<p>As open democracies adhering to the rule of law, we are driven by shared values and bound by our commitment to the rules-based multilateral order and to universal human rights.</p> <p>...in recognition of the dramatic changes in the geopolitical situation since [2021] and the significant threats to democratic systems around the world, we remain steadfast in our commitment to defending peace, human rights, the rule of law, human security and gender equality, as recognised by international law</p>	2022
<p>We will champion international principles and shared values by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upholding and reinforcing the free and open international order based on the rule of law, respecting the UN Charter to the benefit of countries, large and small; • Strongly opposing any unilateral attempts to change the peacefully established status of territories by force or coercion anywhere in the world and reaffirming that the acquisition of territory by force is prohibited; • Promoting universal human rights, gender equality and human dignity; • Reiterating the importance of multilateralism including the role of UN and international cooperation in promoting peace, stability and prosperity; and • Strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system and keeping pace with the evolution of digital technologies. 	2023
<p>We reiterate our shared belief in democratic principles and free societies, universal human rights, social progress, and respect for multilateralism and the rule of law.</p>	2024