

Politicised Language: Taking Stock of Gender-Inclusive Language Bans

ANICA WALDENDORF

Gender-inclusive language (GIL) is not merely a linguistic innovation but has been turned into a symbolic issue, taken up by anti-gender campaigns and fueling right-wing populism around the globe. The last half of 2025 has seen the adoption of new restrictions on the use of GIL in certain regions and public sectors of Brazil, Canada, El Salvador, Italy, and Mexico. Previously, parts of Argentina and some federal states of Germany had already implemented so-called GIL bans, where the use of certain types of gender-inclusive language are prohibited, for example, in public administration. In the following, I provide a short introduction to GIL before providing examples of recent restrictions on the use of GIL, discussing differences and commonalities. I then analyse how different political actors justify the regulation of GIL, especially against the background of existing literature that links the upswing in right-wing populism and authoritarianism with anti-gender campaigns.

Defining Gender-Inclusive Language

In the present context, GIL broadly refers to different ways of linguistically representing and including multiple genders. This includes both pronouns and person noun constructions that have been modified to be gender inclusive. Gender-neutral pronouns include, for instance, *hen* in Swedish, *iel* in French, and *they* in English. Strategies to create gender-inclusive person nouns vary by language such as replacing chairman with chairperson. In German, the word students can become, amongst others, *Student*innen*, *Student:innen* or *Studierende*. In Spanish, *niño* (child (masculine)) can become *nine*, *ninx*, *niñ@*, *niñe* or *niño y niña*.

GIL has been discussed and debated for many years across different countries and languages. The last decade has seen a re-emergence of the debate, including an increasing adoption of GIL in several countries and languages. This includes, for example, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, and Swedish (e.g. see Waldendorf 2024 for Germany). As GIL has become more popular, the criticism against it has also become louder. For example, Jutta Hergenhan (2020, 1) describes GIL as “one of the main controversies dividing public opinion in Germany” and locates it between “the increasing visibility and acceptance of gender diversity in society and, on the other, the intensification of antifeminist and ‘anti-gender’ activism” (Hergenhan 2020, 4).

Overview of Gender-Inclusive Language Bans

Whilst criticism was first only rhetorical, it has most recently culminated in GIL bans across different countries and contexts. I use the word ban to refer to different legal instruments, such as parliamentary laws, governmental decrees or internal administrative directives, that usually have a specific scope and apply to a specified context and should not be understood as comprehensive bans.

In some instances, the bans apply within a specific state or administrative area in a country, in others, they are country-wide. For example, the Mexican state of Chihuahua banned the use of GIL in public schools in October 2025 (Mexico News Daily 2025). The German state of Bavaria prohibited the use of GIL in schools and government bodies from April 2024, following similar bans in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt in 2023 (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes 2024). Most recently, Quebec has banned the use of GIL in official communication in 2025 (Cabinet du ministre de la Langue française 2025). In Argentina, Buenos Aires first implemented a ban on GIL in schools in 2022 (Lankes 2022), which was followed by a nationwide ban on GIL in the military in 2024 (Ministerio de Defensa 2024), alongside reports that a general ban for public institutions is underway (La Nacion 2024).

In 2025, country-wide bans were implemented in El Salvador, Brazil, and Italy. The regulations in El Salvador and Italy target schools and educational institutions (Trigueros 2025; Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito 2025), whereas in Brazil, it applies to government administration.¹ The French Senate has approved a bill to introduce a general GIL ban in 2023, although the bill has not yet been passed into law (Senat n.d.).

One striking difference is what types of GIL are banned. Most of the above-mentioned bans target linguistic innovations, such as *iel*, or *niñe*. However, the ban in El Salvador extends to *todos y todas*, a grammatically correct construction – not a neologism – that means ‘all’, and deliberately includes the grammatically feminine noun. In Argentina, the presidential spokesperson Manuel Adornis has reportedly advised to “avoid the unnecessary use of the feminine in all public administration documents” (quoted in John/Akbarzai/Calderon 2024). This stands in stark contrast to Germany, where such constructions are explicitly allowed.

Markus Söder, Minister President of Bavaria, even said: “In Bavaria, the following applies: Yes to performance, no to using gender-inclusive language and other nonsense, dear friends [fem.] and friends [masc.]”² at the Christian Social Union (CSU) party convention on October 11, 2024, revealing a clear separation between language that is inclusive towards women and language that is inclusive towards all genders (CSU 2024, transl. AW).

A further difference is the reasoning provided as to why the regulation was introduced. In Mexico, El Salvador, and Brazil, the bans are justified by arguing against supposed gender ideology. For example, Carlos Olson San Vicente, Deputy of the Chihuahua State Congress, posted on X on October 8, 2025:

WE DID IT! CHIHUAHUA IS THE FIRST STATE IN THE COUNTRY TO BAN INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS. No more ideologised language in classrooms or woke confusion: only the biological truth that there are only boys and girls, no 'niñes'. Common sense over ideology!³ (Olson 2025, transl. AW)

Similarly, the ban in El Salvador, issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, states: “Words like ‘amigue, compañere, nine, todos y todas, alumn@, jóvenxs, nosotrxs’ or any other linguistic deformation that alludes to gender ideology will not be admitted under any circumstances”⁴ (Trigueros 2025, transl. AW). Here, the ban directly refers to “ideología de género”, gender ideology.

In contrast, the bans in Canada, France, Italy, and Germany are justified by referencing correct grammar, consistency and accessibility as the main argument, rather than gender ideology. However, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), a far-right party in Germany that was the second strongest party in the 2025 election with 20,6% of votes (Die Bundeswahlleiterin 2025), has repeatedly opposed the use of GIL and submitted a motion to ban GIL to the German Bundestag, arguing for the supposed biological existence of only two sexes and resistance against imposed gender ideology (Deutscher Bundestag 2023, 1; AfD 2017, 47, 54; AfD 2025). In France, too, the official document does not mention gender ideology, yet Ann Coady (2024, 69) finds that those against GIL in France argue against a “woke ideology”. Moreover, Italy’s ruling far-right party Fratelli d’Italia (FdI) has also vowed to fight gender ideology (Donà 2022; Lavizzari 2025).

Gender Ideology, Anti-Gender Campaigns and Gender-Inclusive Language

GIL is no longer a simple linguistic innovation, if it ever was that. GIL has become politicised and, in some cases, instrumentalised. The above suggests that bans on GIL can become part of a wider anti-gender campaign against so-called gender ideology. As Paul Marx (2025, 6) has summarised: “right-wing politicians have identified GNL (gender-neutral language, add. AW) as a powerful symbol of gender-progressive value change to mobilize against”. This mobilisation can become part of anti-gender campaigns. These anti-gender campaigns can be understood as a countermovement against feminist movements, however, there is an alternative understanding where scholars “see that the assaults on women’s or LGBTI rights take part into a wider project, which strives to establish a new political – less liberal and less democratic – order” (Paternotte 2023, 84). This view sharpens the focus on not just eroding gender equality, but potentially also democratic order.

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Notes

- 1 Lei nº 15.263, de 14.11.2025, Article 5 XI. Internet: <https://normas.leg.br/api/public/binario/0ba102d9-6068-48d8-912f-f40ff0789b5c/texto> (8.1.2026).
- 2 "In Bayern gilt: Ja zu Leistung, Nein zu Gendern und anderem Unsinn, liebe Freundinnen und Freunde" (CSU 2024).
- 3 "¡LO LOGRAMOS! CHIHUAHUA ES EL PRIMER ESTADO DEL PAÍS EN PROHIBIR EL LENGUAJE INCLUSIVO EN ESCUELAS. No más lenguaje ideologizado en los salones ni confusiones woke: sólo la verdad biológica de que únicamente existen niños y niñas, no .niñes'. ¡Sentido común sobre ideología!" (Olson 2025).
- 4 "Palabras como 'amigue, compañere, nine, todos y todas, alumn@, jóvenxs, nosotrxs' o cualquier otra deformación lingüística que aluda a la ideología de género no será admitida por ninguna circunstancia" (Trigueros 2025).