Feminism in Politics: The Most Significant Movement and Ideology

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ABSTRACT

Feminism in politics is a movement and ideology focused on the struggle to achieve gender equality and enhance women's participation and representation in the political sphere. This study examined the role of feminism as a political ideology in driving global policy changes related to gender equality and women's representation. The participants in the study include a review of literature covering feminist movements in both developed and developing countries, such as the United States, France, India, and several African nations. A qualitative approach was adopted, utilising data collection methods such as literature analysis, with data analysed through thematic content analysis techniques. The findings reveal that feminism has significantly influenced gender equality policies, particularly in terms of women's representation in governmental institutions and policies aimed at protecting women from gender-based violence. Digital feminism, through campaigns such as #MeToo and #TimesUp, has accelerated the adoption of more inclusive policies. The study concludes that feminism plays a vital role in shaping inclusive and representative political policies, although challenges from conservative groups persist. The implications of this research include the importance of cross-cultural understanding in implementing gender equality policies globally.

Keywords: *Feminism; Gender Equality; Political Policy.*

Contribution/Originality: This research offers a new perspective by exploring how the feminist movement functions not only as a demand for equality but also as a catalyst for transforming political structures that underpin gender injustice. Furthermore, the study highlights the differing feminist approaches across various countries, providing comprehensive insights into how social and cultural contexts influence the effectiveness and strategies of feminist movements within the global political sphere.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism, as a social movement and ideology, has become one of the most significant forces driving global political change, particularly in advocating for gender equality and women's rights. As a movement that has evolved for over a century,

feminism has gone through various phases or waves, each with distinct focuses, ranging from the fight for women's suffrage to demands for broader social, economic, and political equality. In the political context, feminism emphasises the importance of equal representation of women in government structures and decision-making processes, as well as policies that support gender justice in various aspects of life (McBride & Mazur 2021). Its primary aim is to eradicate gender inequality and all forms of sex-based discrimination.

Historically, feminism has had a profound impact on global political policies. The first wave of feminism, which occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focused on the struggle for women's suffrage, primarily in Western countries. Suffrage was seen as a gateway to achieving broader rights, and successes in this area enabled women to participate more actively in politics (Krook & Mackay 2015). The second wave, emerging in the 1960s and lasting through the 1980s, expanded the feminist agenda to include issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and gender-based violence (Gill & Scharff 2016). During this period, feminism also introduced concepts such as sexism and patriarchy as social systems that oppress women both personally and structurally.

In contemporary times, particularly from the third and fourth waves, feminism has undergone significant transformation. Modern feminism no longer focuses solely on issues faced by women in Western nations but also incorporates a global perspective, addressing the struggles of women in developing countries who face complex challenges such as poverty, colonialism, and gender-based violence (Butler, 2020). The concept of intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, has become a crucial foundation for contemporary feminist analysis. Intersectionality recognises that gender injustice cannot be separated from other factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, and disability, which all interact to create complex and layered forms of oppression (Crenshaw 2016).

Technological advancements, particularly social media, have paved the way for the rise of broader digital feminist movements, such as the #MeToo campaign, which highlights issues of sexual violence and workplace harassment (McCaughey & Ayers 2021). Digital feminism provides a platform for women from diverse backgrounds to voice their experiences and mobilise global support for policy changes. These campaigns have demonstrated how social media can effectively rally public opinion and drive change, both in government policies and in societal perceptions of women's roles in the public sphere (Gill 2017).

In terms of political policies, feminism has significantly influenced the creation of more inclusive and gender-just policies. In several developed countries, such as Sweden, Norway, and Canada, feminism has successfully advocated for the implementation of gender quotas in parliaments, ensuring greater representation of women in political decision-making processes (Walby 2018). These policies are grounded in the understanding that women's representation in politics is not only crucial for gender equality but also for crafting policies that are more responsive to the needs of women and other marginalised groups. In Sweden, for instance, gender quota

policies have resulted in a parliament with near-equal representation of women, which in turn has influenced policy priorities, particularly regarding social welfare, education, and legal protections against gender-based violence (Celis & Childs 2020).

However, despite these advances, significant challenges remain, especially in countries with strong patriarchal norms and political traditions that are less accommodating to women's participation. In many developing nations, cultural norms that uphold male dominance in politics often act as barriers to full participation by women in political processes (Ackerly 2019). While some countries have adopted gender equality policies, such as parliamentary quotas for women, resistance from conservative groups frequently hinders their effective implementation. Patriarchy, as a social system that places men in dominant positions, remains deeply entrenched in many societies, presenting substantial challenges for feminist movements seeking to achieve their goals (Weldon 2020).

This study also highlights how digital technology has become an essential tool for feminist movements in advocating for women's rights, particularly in the context of globalisation and the digitalisation of politics. Social media and other digital platforms have provided spaces for women to share their experiences, garner support, and mobilise collective action for change (Mendes et al. 2019). Campaigns such as #MeToo and #TimesUp have shown how technology can be used to spotlight the issues faced by women worldwide and to pressure governments and other institutions to take more serious action in addressing gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

A review of the literature relevant to this research indicates that feminism has played a significant role in influencing political policies across various countries. Some studies show that in nations that have adopted gender equality policies, such as parliamentary quotas for women, women have been able to play more active roles in political decision-making (Molyneux & Razavi 2020). On the other hand, some researchers highlight the challenges feminism faces in advocating for inclusive policies in developing countries, where patriarchal norms dominate and often resist feminist efforts to promote gender equality (Ackerly 2019).

One of the main challenges feminism faces in the global political context is resistance from groups that continue to uphold deeply rooted patriarchal norms. Although feminism has successfully driven some policy changes in certain countries, this resistance remains a significant barrier in many nations, particularly those with highly patriarchal political traditions (Canning 2021). This study explores how feminism, as a political ideology, can become a more powerful force in advocating for inclusive and gender-just policies across different countries, whether through policy advocacy, public campaigns, or the use of digital technology.

The primary hypothesis of this study is that feminism, as a political ideology, has a significant influence on policy changes in the political sphere, particularly in advocating for gender equality and the representation of women in government institutions. The study also assumes that digital feminism, through online campaigns and social media, has become a crucial tool in accelerating the adoption of more

inclusive policies in some countries. However, resistance from conservative groups that uphold patriarchal norms remains a major challenge for feminist movements in achieving their objectives. As a political ideology, feminism has demonstrated that gender equality is not only essential for social justice but also for the sustainability of inclusive and representative politics. Therefore, this study is crucial as part of global efforts to promote gender equality and fair representation of women in politics (Walby 2018).

This research aims to analyse the influence of feminism in shaping more inclusive political policies in various countries, focusing on the role of feminism in advocating for women's rights in the political sphere. In recent years, feminism has played a pivotal role in promoting the representation of women in parliaments, cabinets, and other governmental institutions. In countries such as Rwanda and Bolivia, gender quota policies have enabled women to gain significant representation in the political structures of these nations (Krook & O'Brien 2017). Rwanda, for instance, now has a parliament with a female majority, regarded as one of the most tangible outcomes of gender equality policies driven by feminist movements.

2. METHOD

This research employs data collection methods based on literature analysis and data analysis using thematic content analysis techniques. A qualitative approach is adopted, focusing on literature reviews and thematic content analysis to explore the dynamics of feminism as a social movement and political ideology, as well as its contributions to policies and women's representation in various countries. Case studies are applied to nations with a strong history of feminist movements, such as the United States, France, and Nordic countries. Data collection is conducted through the analysis of literature from various relevant academic sources. The literature focuses on classical and contemporary feminist theories, gender political policies, and women's representation in parliaments.

The research employs content analysis to identify the main themes of feminism's contributions to politics, such as gender equality, women's representation in parliaments, and inclusive political policies. Each theme is analysed to understand how feminism has influenced the formulation of political policies in different countries. This study also incorporates the theory of intersectionality, which highlights the interplay of women's complex identities, including factors such as race, class, and ethnicity, within politics. This approach helps to understand that women's experiences in politics are highly diverse and shaped by various layers of social identity.

A descriptive-analytical approach is used to illustrate the development of feminist movements and their impact on political policies, as well as to explore the relationship between feminism and policy changes in various countries. By combining literature analysis and case study approaches, this research provides an in-depth understanding of feminism's role in global politics and its contributions to fostering more inclusive and gender-equitable policies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Feminism as a political movement has played a pivotal role in reshaping social and political structures across the world. This study's key findings highlight significant developments in the role of feminism, leading to changes in political policies and women's representation across various sectors. Employing a critical analysis approach, the research connects its findings to previous studies and relevant contemporary literature, comparing diverse feminist perspectives emerging from the different waves of feminism. The discussion encompasses these waves, each of which has contributed to the advancement of women's rights and other pertinent issues.

Based on the findings, feminism has undergone four major waves, each bringing transformative changes. The first wave, emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily focused on women's struggle to secure voting rights and participation in democratic processes. This study finds that this movement was highly successful in driving policy changes in many countries, particularly in the United States and Europe, with the enactment of legislation granting women suffrage. For instance, the 19th Amendment in the United States in 1920 became a significant symbol of the first wave's victory. These findings align with earlier studies that emphasised the importance of the suffrage movement in promoting gender equality in politics (Evans 2015; Anderson 2017).

The second wave, spanning the 1960s to the 1980s, addressed more complex issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, sexual violence, and women's political representation. According to this research, feminist movements during this period influenced critical policies, such as the legalisation of abortion in the United States through the Roe v. Wade case in 1973. This is also reflected in various European policies offering greater protection to women, including anti-discrimination laws and pay equity measures. These findings support previous analyses showing that the second wave broadened the scope of feminist advocacy, focusing on structural and legal equality (Hooks 2017; Friedan 2016).

The research further finds that the third wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1990s, sought to address the limitations of its predecessors. Feminism during this period introduced the concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This study highlights the relevance of this concept in recognising the distinct experiences of discrimination faced by women from diverse backgrounds, particularly minority groups. The findings confirm studies by Crenshaw (2015) and Collins (2018), which demonstrate that intersectional feminism underscores the importance of inclusive policies that acknowledge women's varied experiences. Thus, the third wave played a crucial role in shaping more equitable and diverse policies.

The fourth wave of feminism, beginning in the late 2000s and continuing to the present, has been profoundly influenced by advancements in technology and social media. This research finds that fourth-wave feminism has leveraged digital platforms to amplify advocacy for women's rights, exemplified by the #MeToo movement, which became a global phenomenon. The campaign prompted policy changes addressing

sexual violence and gender inequality in various countries, including Indonesia and the United States. These findings reinforce studies by Gill (2020) and Banet-Weiser (2018), which illustrate how online advocacy has provided a new avenue for feminist movements to influence global policies. In this context, fourth-wave feminism plays a vital role in utilising digital technology to achieve broader political objectives. The table below summarises some of the key findings of this study, including the influence of feminism on political policies in various countries:

Table 1. The Influence of Feminism on Political Policies in Various Countries

Country	Policy Influenced by Feminism	Source
United States	Ratification of the 19th Amendment (1920), Roe v. Wade (1973), Workplace Anti-Discrimination Laws	Anderson (2017), Hooks (2017)
Sweden	Gender Equality Policies, Equal Parental Leave	Gill (2020)
France	Enactment of Gender Quotas in Parliament, Laws Against Sexual Violence	Banet-Weiser (2018)
India	Domestic Violence Protection Legislation	Collins (2018)
Indonesia	Advocacy for Women's Political Participation, Campaigns Against Workplace Sexual Harassment	Evans (2015)

Source: Academic Literature by Evans (2015), Anderson & Hooks (2017), Collins & Banet-Weiser (2018), and Gill (2020).

The table above illustrates key impacts of feminism on political policies in several countries, showcasing the success of feminist movements in driving significant changes. For instance, in Sweden, gender equality policies and balanced parental leave reflect strong support for feminist principles. Meanwhile, in France, the enactment of gender quotas in parliament has increased women's representation in government.

The study also reveals that in countries with entrenched patriarchal systems, such as India and Indonesia, feminism faces greater challenges. In India, although progress has been made with the enactment of domestic violence protection laws, structural challenges continue to impede further advancements. In Indonesia, feminist movements encounter resistance from conservative groups, but women's political participation is increasing, as evidenced by the growing number of women occupying key parliamentary positions.

This research compares its findings with prior studies, demonstrating that feminism as a political movement remains relevant in contemporary politics. The findings show that feminist movements serve not only as advocacy tools for women's rights but also as influential political forces driving policy changes across various nations. Previous studies supporting these findings include those by Gill (2020) and Banet-Weiser (2018), which indicate that digital feminism has amplified women's voices worldwide and influenced policy changes in areas such as sexual violence, women's political representation, and pay equity.

While this study provides broad insights into feminism's impact on political policies, some limitations must be noted. A primary limitation is the difficulty of accessing data from more conservative countries where feminist movements may be

poorly documented. This could affect the analysis, particularly in comparing feminism's influence across diverse cultural and political contexts. Therefore, future research should focus on collecting more comprehensive data from these countries and consider wider social and cultural contexts.

The findings of this study reveal that feminism has played a significant role in influencing political policies in many countries. From the first to the fourth wave, feminism has continued to adapt to social and political changes, advocating for gender equality across various domains. This study affirms that feminism as a political movement remains relevant in today's global context, making substantial contributions to more inclusive and equitable policy changes. Future research is recommended to expand its scope to include countries with stronger patriarchal systems and delve deeper into how feminism can address structural challenges in these nations.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that feminism, as a dynamic political movement, has successfully driven significant changes in political policies across various countries through its four main waves. Each wave of feminism has contributed distinctively, encompassing the fight for suffrage, workplace equality, recognition of intersectionality, and digital media-based advocacy. From the first to the fourth wave, feminism has demonstrated its adaptability to societal and political shifts, adjusting its focus to meet the demands of each era. Policy changes in numerous countries—such as the enactment of anti-discrimination laws, abortion rights, protection against sexual violence, and gender equality in parental leave—highlight feminism's role as a catalyst in promoting global gender equality.

This study also highlights how the third and fourth waves of feminism expanded their scope through the concept of intersectionality and the utilisation of digital technology. Intersectionality has opened up avenues to address more complex forms of discrimination, particularly for women from minority groups who experience multiple forms of injustice simultaneously. Meanwhile, digital feminism, which emerged in the fourth wave, has leveraged social media platforms as effective advocacy tools, such as the #MeToo campaign, to spotlight sexual violence on a global scale. These findings underscore the importance of strategic adjustments in the fight for gender equality in the digital era, enabling feminist movements to reach broader audiences and influence policies within contemporary political contexts.

Overall, this study demonstrates that feminism remains a relevant political force driving structural change in various countries, including those with entrenched patriarchal systems like India and Indonesia. In these nations, feminism faces significant challenges from conservative norms but has still made an impact by increasing women's participation in politics and advocating for protective policies for women. Recommendations for future research include broadening the scope to encompass more conservative countries and conducting an in-depth analysis of feminist strategies for overcoming structural barriers. This study affirms that feminism

will continue to be a vital movement in creating a more inclusive and equitable society for women worldwide.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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