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**Original Work Title: Global Gender Inequality: The Impact of State Policies, Far-Right Movements, and the Middle East and Africa on Women's Rights, Resulting in Global Regression.**

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**The Global Regression of Women's Rights and the Relevance in Today's Political Climate.**

## **Abstract**

Since the second wave of the women's rights movement in the 1960s, women have continued their struggle through alt-right political lenses, gender-based violence, and economic inequality. This paper examines gender regression as a deliberate and intentional trend—both historically and in current political climates—as a global phenomenon impacting future generations and human rights security based on gender and sexuality.

The framework for this study employs a comparative analysis of Western and Eastern cultures, assessing governmental and societal barriers. The findings suggest that the securitization of gender remains uneven across societies, as women's security is less often treated as a human right compared to that of men. Achieving equal securitizations for all members of society is essential for genuine social and human progress.

## **Introduction**

This paper examines why the issue has become particularly pressing in today's political context. Before addressing these issues, a timeline from the past forty years is highlighted. As outlined in that timeline, the regression of women's rights has occurred in distinct waves, each shaped by global political developments. An interview with UN Women on Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World (Heung) suggests a key correlation in the post-COVID period, where regression re-emerged in the 2020s under the banner of protecting the family structure [2].



This timeline reflects the type of regression seen currently. “During COVID, women were expected to stay home to look after the household by performing domestic duties, including caring for children and ensuring that their male counterparts were not interrupted in their work environments outside of the house.” This interview highlights that women’s contributions outside the household are limited and economically undervalued.

### **Global Rise of Far-Right Politics**

Since the 1980’s far right political movements have gained previously unseen power across the Global North and South, contributing to regression and the undermining of women’s rights.

While these political movements have gained power for a variety of reasons, the political outliers and reoccurring trend are that the far-right movement has been using securitization speech to foster a sense of nationalism.

What is meant by securitization speech and nationalism, the government develops specific messaging designed to lay the framework of possible threats to autonomy, thus invoking citizens reactions to align with governments political agendas. In 2021, thenformer now current United States President, Donald Trump famously invoked rhetoric, - securitization speech which had severe impacts on the ability for women in the African regions to participate in the economy specifically in Ethiopia, with regards to the Ethiopian Renaissance dam and the diplomatic relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia.

Trump’s message was to instigate Cairo to ‘blow up’ the GERD. (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam). If Trump’s usage of securitization speech was effective, the result was a security issue for African women, thereby creating a collapse in economies which relied on women led businesses and communities alike. Nationalism has become a central concept for the far-right movement, particularly in the United States with Donald Trump, the 47th United States President and Brazil’s President, Jair Bolsonaro.

The far-right winged leaders have framed national identity to shape policy rollbacks and societal control. Donald Trump takes nationalism further and “flirts” with Christian nationalism, meaning nationalism with a religious undertone. The difference is the fear of God, versus the fear of tribalism within nationalism, that is to say, nationalism focuses on domestic issues and domestic dominance- which can to an extent be considered racism, and the other side of the coin is holding legal and illegal immigration as political hostages.

Finlayson, argues, that Jagger [1], has a hard time defining nationalism in a way that is not racist and further develops her commentary to include the liberal nationalist- that is liberal nationalism is to a value of ‘national identity’ or ‘national culture’, and nationalist, states have stronger obligations to their own citizens – and fellow citizens to one another – than to outsiders.

This conceptualised theme of nationalism also has a direct impact on policies in Brazil, but the main difference is protectionism of resources through the guise of nationalism. Protectionism in Brazil restricts women’s ability for independent government and autonomy as is the case with Female led tribes within the Amazon rain forest. According to Thalji “Struggles of Brazilian indigenous groups, including those related to control of the land, rapid de-forestation, “acculturation” diseases such as alcoholism, loss of indigenous knowledge, and social defragmentation that resulted in increased violence” can be indirectly traced to nationalism [6].

Furtherance, Bolsonaro introduced legislation to abolish the women’s ministry, thereby dismantling women’s rights in Brazil. In these examples, the impact of women’s rights are human rights issues as these two states have become oppressive towards women to the extent that women are not able to make health care decisions, including legislation which presents abortion as a homicide after 22 weeks. (PL 1904/2024).



## **Domestic vs. International Paradox**

### **Domestic Paradox**

The domestic paradox surrounding the United States exposes a certain irony. The United States, champions itself as a human rights leader globally, while domestically rolling back its own human rights legislation. With the greatest impact to American women. Thematically speaking it's about state level control- which is misaligned with personal autonomy.

As previously discussed briefly, the redaction of Roe V. Wade, affects a women's participation in society, disproportionately by race and by economics. The discrepancy creates a patchwork system where rights depend on geography, i.e.- women in California have access to abortions, but women in Alabama have to travel to a state which provides abortions, thus adding an extra cost to women in need of medical services and then having the worry of possibly dealing with a legal consequence and threats of imprisonment if an abortion is performed outside of their respective state.

The Alabama Human Life Protection Act, effective 2022, legislates that abortion of any type is a felony, including in instances of rape and incest. The only exception is if the would-be mother's life is at risk. [7], Emergency contraception in a historic southern city..., draws the contrast of the geographic differences highlighting the impact of diverse communities where emergency contraceptives are widely unavailable. "The disproportionate effect on poor, rural, and minority women are subjected to reduced autonomy, workforce withdrawal, and long-term economic impact, thereby limiting a women's participation in the workforce and to an extent forced into motherhood".

This law on its face value highlights the domestic paradox of the United States, repeals women's rights on its own soil, and imposes political and economic sanctions on countries who also engage in similar behaviour.

### **International Paradox: The United States**

Has had significant failures as defenders of human rights on the international stage. While engaging in patterns of domestic regression towards the rights of women, domestically, the international paradox was framed as protecting the rights of women abroad. Specifically in Afghanistan.

The United States declared war on Afghanistan as a response to the 911 attacks, but as a secondary issue, used the premise for staying in Afghanistan after Osama Bin- Laden's death, to protect women's rights through the removal of the Taliban. Paul Rogers, "Why we're Losing the War on Terror", [4] draws the conclusion that the United States of America is losing the war on terror because, essentially, they don't understand the issues in the Middle East and don't care to understand the issues within the region.

This paradox led to failure, led to America's longest ground war 20 years and did nothing to stop the Taliban. America's so-called protectionism of women's rights, human rights in Afghanistan led to a domestic rise in nationalism and radicalization in the country. The end result was a return of the Taliban, a failed withdrawal of United States troops and complete retraction of women's rights within Afghanistan which destabilized the country, leading to a security issue as women in Afghanistan had limited rights and now have no rights and are not allowed to be seen in public at all.

Women are not allowed to participate in the economy, are not allowed to be educated and have no say over their sexual or reproductive health. The international paradox is America defending rights of others and does not afford that right to its own citizens.

### **Societal and Religious Contexts Amplifying Regression**

The Middle East and Africa illustrate how political power, intertwined with religion, fuels the regression of women's rights. This is due to a lack of separation between church and state.



The concept of separation of church and state is mainly an American principle. Many Islamic countries within the Middle East and Africa have a deeply rooted foundation of religion and political overlap.

The countries Pakistan, Iraq and Somalia demonstrate through their domestic religious rituals and cultural factors, that there is strong influence to intersect political conservatism- thereby impacting women's rights and security. Somalia practices female genital mutilation, a harmful and painful practice which results in sexual and psychological/ mental health issues. This form of regression is relevant because it undermines gender equality and highlights gender inequities.

A systematic review in several African and middle eastern countries, including Ethiopia, Egypt, Senegal Iran and Iraq found that 11 studies which assessed the burden of adverse mental health outcomes among a comparison group (control group), eight of these studies concluded that there was a higher burden of adverse mental health outcomes among women and girls who underwent female genital mutilation.

Iraq has a lower rate of female genital mutilation of girls under 15 (around 8 %), but in contrast has introduced legislation for young girls as young as 9 years of age to be married and lowered the age of consent to sexual activities without requiring parental approval. The justification is cultural. This legislation effectively normalizes and denies sexual abuse by much older male counterparts allowing generational abuse to continue.

Pakistan does not widely subscribe to female genital mutilation; however, under its laws or Hudood Ordinances, the legal system allows sexual violence against women to go largely unpunished. Women have little to no legal recourse unless they can provide evidence that meets extremely high standards.

Specifically, the law requires testimony of four male witnesses of good character in order for a rape to be taken seriously. If this condition is not met a woman may be charged with adultery which is considered sex outside of marriage and can carry a sentence of death.

Pakistan's Hudood Ordinance of 1979 raises an issue, if a woman cannot provide sufficient evidence that a rape occurred, she can be charged with Qadhi- filing a false police report and can face further legal penalties death or imprisonment. Under these circumstances, women are reluctant to file complaints for fear of punishment harsher than rape and therefore increasing further violence against them. These regional examples, although culturally distinct, reflect a larger global trend towards regression of women's rights.

This is not confined to the Middle East and Africa as similar patterns are emerging in the global North and West, where political actors borrow tactics from their international peers. within their own countries. Kaul suggests that Trump took directly from the playbooks of others and adapted their strategies to meet domestic political goals [3].

### **Urgency and Timeliness**

The topic of global regression is critical and relevant because of the rise of social media where consumers of media are able to witness human rights atrocities in real time. The trend is not a one off but rather a reoccurring theme where individuals have to face complexities of government securitization paired with individual human rights violations as it pertains to freedom of expression, mobility, women's health issues and sexuality.

The issue of the usage of social media forces political protests against governments thus leading to governments having to act in accordance with their own legislation and with international scrutiny whereby governments are forced to make changes based on international outcry. In Egypt the Arab Spring movement brought change- albeit short lived, increased the advancement of women's rights before a partial revocation.



According to Prasad, “some countries experienced short-term reform, many reverted to authoritarian rule, highlighting the fragility of revolutionary gains [5].” This is true, with Egypt. The Arab Spring movement, spread throughout Africa and the Middle East and set the stage for global change and the framework for the #metoo movement which started in the United States but spread across international boundaries.

While the issue of international regression is addressed through diplomacy, -diplomacy acts as political theatre. More needs to be done through international economic sanctions not through military force as that hasn't worked in the past as we have learned through Afghanistan.

If the international community relies on symbolic diplomacy only, it risks further destabilization as a long-term effect and deepens inequality, inequities and advances agendas of repressive governments, which becomes an international human security crisis.

This piece explored how women's rights have shifted into a pattern of regression in various parts of the world, highlighting where religion and politics mix.

The Middle East and Africa demonstrate how cultural practices like female genital mutilation and laws in Pakistan and Iraq keep women from having equal rights. But this isn't just a local phenomenon—it's globally, with participation from the west, where political leaders borrow ideas from each other to push back on women's freedoms. Social media's role is to document and expose human rights abuses as they happen in real time, pushing governments to react, sometimes with protests and international pressure.

Movements like the Arab Spring and #MeToo have made some progress but also exhibited how fragile these changes are. Governments often roll back reforms.

Diplomacy has failed or hasn't gone far enough and isn't enough anymore. Internationally real actions like economic sanctions instead of military force is needed or the concept of regression expands inequality and repression even deeper leading to human security issues.

## **Methodology**

This paper employs a qualitative comparative methodology, drawing on secondary sources including legislative texts, academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports. A thematic analysis approach is used to identify patterns of gender regression across distinct political, cultural, and geographic contexts—specifically the United States, Brazil, the Middle East, and Africa. The comparative framework allows for cross-regional identification of shared structural drivers of women's rights regression, tracing the intersection of far-right nationalism, religious conservatism, and state-level legislative rollback as reinforcing mechanisms of gendered inequality.

## **Conclusion**

The regression of women's rights is not an isolated or recent phenomenon, but a continuing global pattern shaped by politics, religion, and ideology. The chapter illustrates how far-right movements, religious conservatism, and nationalism intersect to undermine women's autonomy and participation in both Western and non-Western societies. From the rollback of reproductive freedoms in the United States and Brazil to the persistence of gender-based violence and restrictive cultural practices in the Middle East and Africa, these examples reveal a shared erosion of equality disguised as moral ornamental protection. Although social media and transnational activism have heightened global awareness, they have also exposed how fragile progress remains.

Lasting improvement will depend on treating women's rights as a core component of human security—ensuring that political, legal, and economic systems safeguard equality with the same urgency afforded to other dimensions of national and global security.



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