

## Feminism & 2020 U.S Presidential Elections: A Feminist Account of the Causes and Effects of 2020 U.S Election

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### ABSTRACT

*Drawing from Judith Squire's feminism, mentioned above, this essay demonstrates and analyses the process and result of the recently held 2020 US Elections with a feministic view. It establishes how the majority of women in the US are now identifying themselves as feminists and how feminist causes significantly influenced the result of this election. Additionally, the paper will also analyse the subsequent positive effects of the 2020 US Election on feminism.*

### INTRODUCTION

We have recently witnessed the conclusion of the 59th quadrennial presidential elections of the United States and we are still in between the high tension political twists and turns that are taking place during the transition of the administration. As the USA has seen 4 years of heightened protests on several issues of racism, misogyny and xenophobia, the problems of women remained at the forefront throughout these years. From the matter of curbing women's agency from their own body by promulgating abortion laws to maltreatment of black women and women of colour through police brutality, women witnessed the ill-treatment of both, their gender as well as individuality in the Trump administration. In reaction to this, they led one of the historic defiances against the government. This historic neo-feminist struggle aimed for new heights of women emancipation advancing the already empowered history of feminism. It seems as if the plight of women in the last 4 years made them realise the power of their collective voice, drawing them to the ongoing feminist movement and aspiring for the collective female empowerment with new facets of intersectionality which disrupted the socio-political atmosphere of the United States of America and brought women's issues at the frontline amidst the chaos of US Presidential Election.

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## THE 2020 U.S ELECTION

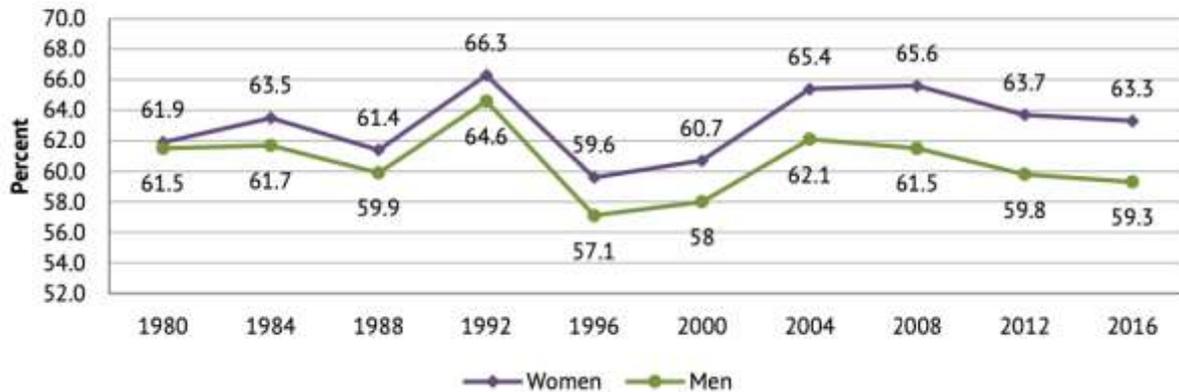
The 2020 elections which started with the Primaries and Caucuses have now concluded, though the presidential inauguration hasn't taken place yet. Just like every 4 years, the US Presidential Election happened on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of November, that was 3<sup>rd</sup> November this year. The Democratic party nominee and former Vice President Joe Biden and Californian senator Kamala Harris defeated the Republican President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence. After winning, Biden stands elected as 46th president of the United States by securing 306 seats against the 232 seats secured by Trump while the benchmark to win the election was 270 seats (CNN Politics 2020). This high-stakes election took place amid the unprecedented pandemic of COVID-19. Despite this, the election saw the highest voter turnout since 1900, with each of the two main candidates receiving more than 74 million votes (CNN Politics 2020). This election saw many feminist angles, while more women voted than men and women's issues were at the forefront, the election of the first African American, first Asian-American, and first female vice president also re-sparked the debate of feminism and significance of women in American politics.

## HISTORY OF WOMEN SUFFRAGE IN USA

It will be unfair to the feminist struggle and the 1<sup>st</sup> wave feminism to talk about feminism and voting without talking about the history of women's suffrage. Women's suffrage, the legitimate right of ladies to cast a ballot, was made possible in the United States with the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Although this was a milestone, it still took quite a few years before all ladies, especially women of colour, could exercise their democratic right of voting. In 1924, the Snyder Act provided the Native Americans with their citizenship rights which came with the right to vote (Center for American Woman and Politics, 2020). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 conquered the legal obstructions that forestalled racial minorities, particularly Black citizens in the South, from practising their right to vote as ensured under the 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the US Constitution. In 1975, voting rights were extended to the "language minorities," including the individuals who speak Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Spanish dialects, by making translation medium compulsory for the citizen enrollment data and ballots (Center for American Woman and Politics, 2020). To provide a contrasting figure, in 1920 only 36 percent of women voted in the 1920 official political race—contrasted with 68 percent of men (Bonk, 2020). Compared to this number, the voting percentage of women now is enormous and demonstrates the climbing participation of women in US politics. The graph below shows the exponential rise of female voters. With such enormous participation of women,

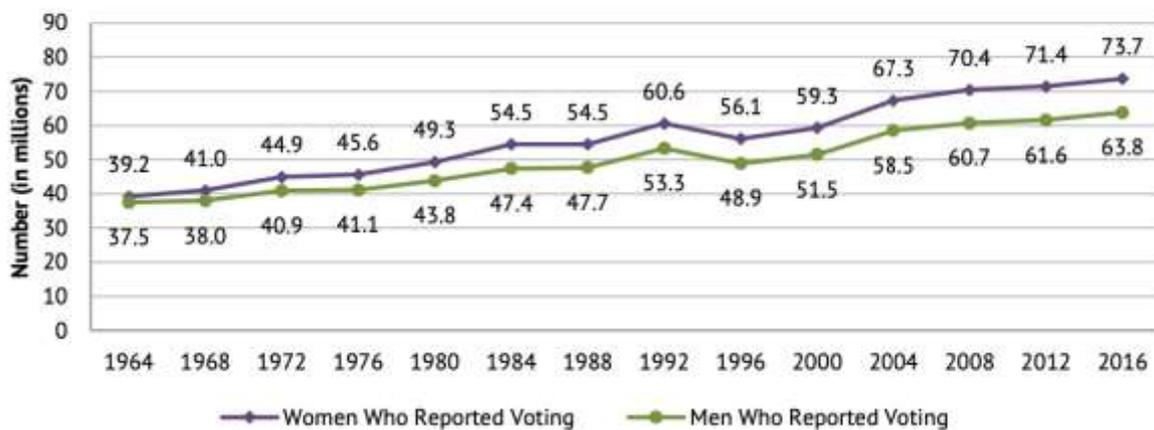
the feminist cause became even stronger in the USA as women’s priorities started playing a major role in elections.

**Figure 1. Proportion of Eligible Adult Population Who Reported Voting**



Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

**Figure 2. Number Who Reported Voting**



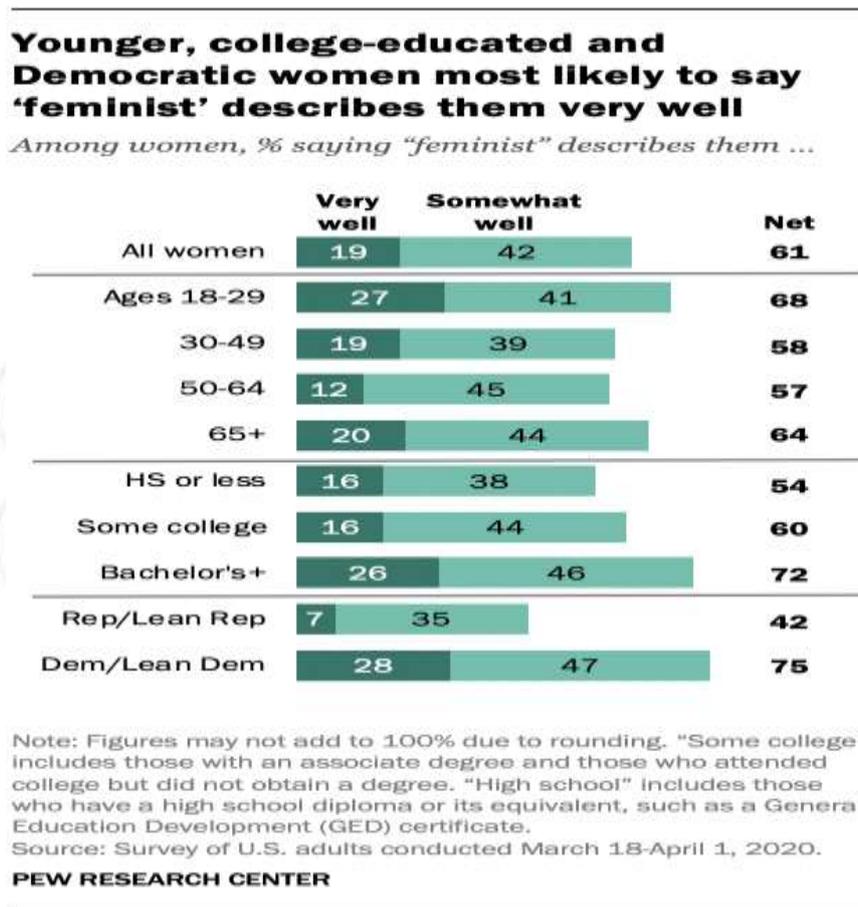
Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

### THE RISING POPULARITY OF FEMINISM IN AMERICAN WOMEN

Although not every women’s issue and feminism is intrinsically connected but according to recent research, more and more women, particularly in the USA are now identifying themselves as feminists. Around 60% of American women at present believe that the word “feminist” describes them very (19%) or somewhat (42%) well (Barosso, 2020). This research also demonstrates that the identification of feminism in women grows even stronger as a woman is educated. About seven-in-ten women with at least a bachelor’s degree (72%) say the term feminist

describes them very or somewhat well, compared to 56% of women with less education (Barosso, 2020). According to the same research, we also come to know that majority of these women find that feminism is empowering and have benefitted them in some way or the other. The demonstration of American women being an active contributor to the feminism of the land makes it clear that women's issues can easily be deemed feminist issues now. Applying this reasoning, and having the support of graphical evidence mentioned below, this essay treats and illustrates women’s issues as feminist issues throughout its course.

Figure 3:



Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 12-April 1 2020.)

### FEMINIST REVOLT AGAINST TRUMP AND ITS CAUSES

Trump’s loss points us to the indefatigable efforts of American women that paid off. The journey of feminism through the last 4 years have been nothing but the dance of dissent and backlash in American politics. Numerous ladies saw Trump's political decisions and personal behaviour as a danger to their privileges and the defeat of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 US elections as the

defeat of their feminine power (Kurtzleben, 2020). Following Trump's inauguration, the women's resistance grabbed hold, with ladies holding protests of defiance across the United States, many times across the globe. The feminist protest marches of January 2017 were historical as women overflowed the roads of America with witty dissent signs and numerous symbolisms (Kurtzleben, 2020). These sporadic dissents culminated and resulted in the defeat of Donald Trump. Following are the major issues that caused this massive resurgence and disrupted the course of this election:

### **Threat to Abortion Rights**

Feminists who have constantly fought for the right of absolute agency of women over their life and body were shocked when the Trump administration appointed Amy Coney Barrett for the US Supreme Court, and said it was "certainly possible" that they could proceed to reddecide *Roe v Wade*, the milestone 1973 Supreme court decision that authorized abortion up to 24 weeks into pregnancy (Nagesh, 2020). This started when the Alabama Republican government made the law called the 'Human Life Protection Act' which called for a complete ban on abortions, except in cases of incest and rape, which prescribed doctors carrying out abortions 99 years in jail (Rojas and Blinder, 2019). As the issue is sub judice, the role of Supreme court judges becomes extremely important. With the right-leaning and anti-abortion attitude of Barrett, her appointment stands as a threat to women's rights. Rarely has a U.S. political race witnessed such a sex partition with such tremendous ramifications for feminism but to Democrats' happiness, this disparity led to the majority of women voting for Biden-Harris. Now it's upon the Biden administration to come up with legislations that will secure women's right over their body.

### **Increased Sexual Violence and the #MeToo Movement**

The #MeToo movement which started in America provided a collective stimulation for women to talk about their experiences of sexual molestation or assault in public. This resulted in the disclosure of how powerful men exploit women using their authority and more often, it goes unreported. This account of sexual violence stands exceptionally prevalent in American politics as many women came out with horrifying claims of sexual violence, done mostly by Republican statesmen. Republican politicians such as Roy Moore, Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh were accused of molesting subordinate women. There were multiple sexual assault claims against Trump himself, amounting almost to two dozen (Kurtzleben, 2020). Trump is even considered the primary reason for the success of the "Me Too" movement. The *Access Hollywood tape*, where he talked of groping women ahead of the 2016 election (Kurtzleben, 2020),

helped set the feminist stage for outing powerful men including high-level politicians. Such a series of molestation and political abuse of power turned woman against Trump and the Republican party.

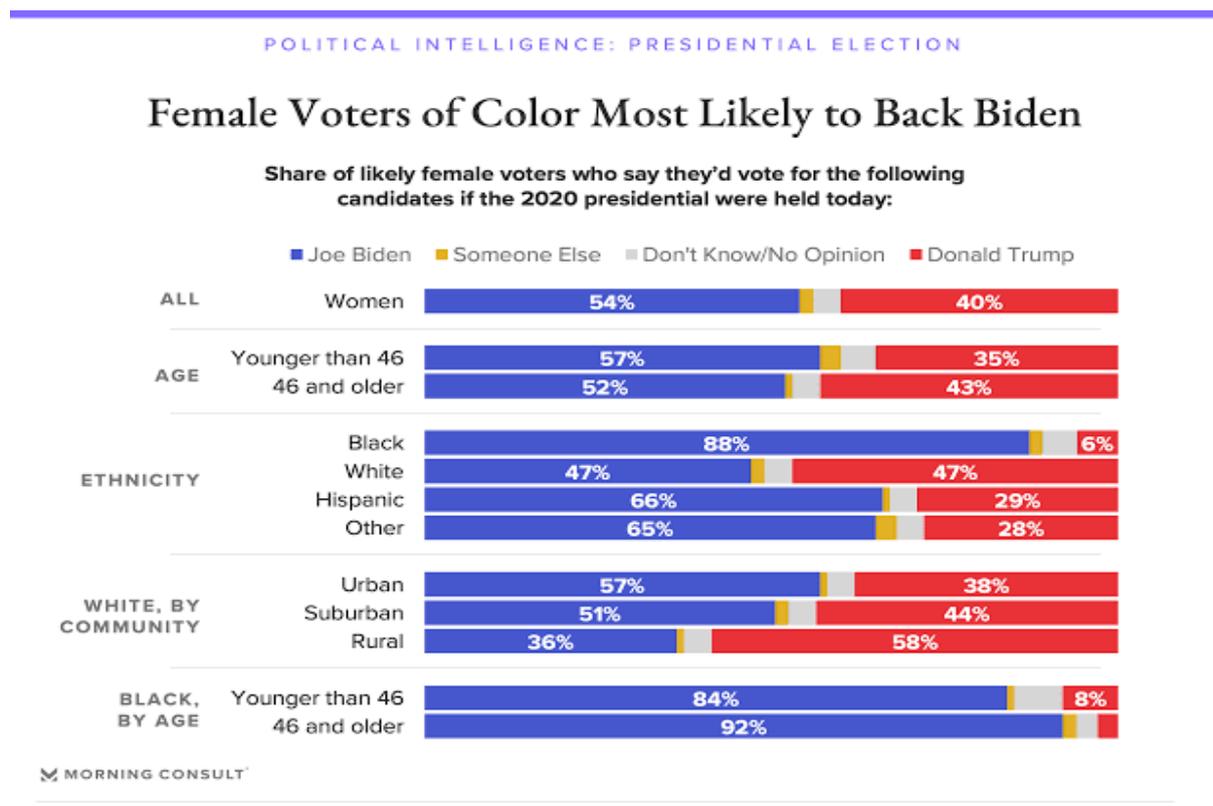
### The Impact of the Pandemic on the American Women

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the whole population across the world. But its effect is greater on women who not only have to support their family financially but also have the primary responsibility of taking care of their family domestically. American women who are globally known to be ambitious and career-oriented are now facing removals from their workplaces. This also stems out from the feminist argument that how women are considered as secondary workforce and are first to face such evictions. The pandemic has also hit the marginalised women the hardest, economically, socially and medically. It has caused what some people are naming a "she-cession" (Nash, 2020). Fear of the removal of Obama Care or the Affordable Care Act added on to the woes of women. The Trump loss meant added attention to the assistance of women workers, increased family support, and release of funds for childcare. After the elections and a Democrat win, that's what American feminists are expecting from the Biden Administration.

### Police Brutality against Racialised Women

As the Black Lives Matter picked up the pace after the death of George Floyd, the whole world came together against racial discrimination but this movement provided a prism that mostly Black men are affected by such discrimination, which is not true. The name of Breonna Taylor is enough to prove that how racialised women have suffered in America. Breonna Taylor, a black woman of the state of Louisville was killed by police officers, just weeks before Floyd. Officers burst into her apartment while she was asleep late at night without knocking. After Taylor's boyfriend fired and wounded an officer because he was startled, the officers shot Taylor at least eight times in her own home (Gupta, 2020). Breonna is just one example of the many women who have suffered discrimination because of their race. Trump's constant support for the Police and the white supremacists and the failure to implement police reforms turned all racialised women against him, leading to his defeat. Below mentioned data from a poll conducted in October 2020, gives us a picture of the voting attitudes of American women. We can see how women of colour were voting against Trump and the Republican administration.

Figure 4:



Poll conducted Oct. 3-5, 2020, among 8,441 likely female voters, with a margin of error of +/-1%.

Source: Morning Consult, 2020.

### FEMINISTIC EFFECTS OF THE 2020 U.S ELECTIONS

Women who were key players of this women's resurgence have felt the shift from defiance to fear and anxiety but in the end, it paid off. Feminist power demonstrated by the dissent protests had practical implications and socio-political disruptions, which initially got demonstrated in the midterm elections of 2018 when an extraordinary number of ladies pursued office and many of them won, with numerous firsts. Ladies like Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez became the flagbearers of the feminist strategies (Nash, 2020). The feminist engagement with the 2020 US elections resulted in certain positive effects and advancements of feminism. Some of them are mentioned below:

#### A Rising Feminist Icon

Trump's defeat in this election simultaneously paved the way for the allotment of the USA's first female Vice president who is half black and half South-Asian. This is being viewed as a tremendous elevation for the feminist stream of American politics as Harris has emerged as a feminist role model for not only women but also for the people of colour as she'll take on the second-most powerful position of the land after the presidential inauguration. This might be particularly motivating for racialised American ladies who are facing extreme difficulties due to COVID-19 along with the financial, social and medical constraints at present (Nash, 2020). Thus, the US elections ended up giving feminism its new role model.

### **Increased Support for Intersectional Feminism**

Intersectional Feminism refers to how different social facets such as race and sex play an important role in the identification of feminism. This intersectionality was significantly highlighted during the 'Black Lives Matter' movement because the whole movement was unequivocally supportive of women of different races further supporting LGBTQ community and particularly trans-women (Kurtzleben, 2020) as women across different races and sexes collectively played key roles in the protest and thus provided a broad scope for the feminist intersectionality to play. This effect was exceptionally evident when a huge number of women of colour ran for congress positions this year. Virginia Delegate Danica Roem made history as the first openly transsexual individual elected to any legislature in America. Additionally, the Center for Public Integrity announced that 51 such transsexual individuals ran for various offices the accompanying year, with wins in Colorado and New Hampshire (Weiss-Wolf, Morrison and Millard, 2020). Such intersectional development borne out of the feminist struggle of US elections paves a new way for feminism.

### **More Women In Politics**

One region where the impact of Donald Trump and US Elections was crystal clear was in women pursuing leadership positions. 30,000 American ladies keen on pursuing office positions registered themselves in the Democratic assembly during the 2018 midterms, contrasted with less than 1,000 in 2016 (Kurtzleben, 2020). There are 127 ladies presently serving in the 116th U.S. Congress—26 in the Senate and 101 in the House. This year, at any rate, 267 women of colour were major party contenders for Congress. In 2020, almost a third (29 percent) of the 7,383 state law-makers cross country are ladies, who hold 519 of the 1,972 state senate seats and

1,637 of the 5,411 state legislature or got collective seats (Weiss-Wolf, Morrison, Millard, 2020). All this data points us towards the effects of the resurgent rise of feminism during the 2020 U.S Elections.

### CONCLUSION

The 2020 US elections when clubbed with feminism brought with itself wide ramifications which disrupted not only the course of U.S politics but feminism itself. In the past 4 years, Trump administration has made policies that affected the women across classes, races and sexes which led to the unification of women, advancement of feminism and rise of its intersectionality. As Squires point out “to realize fundamental transformations in gender relations, is overtly political in the sense that it seeks to make more equal the power relations between men and women” (2004) therefore its crucial for a democratic state such as the USA to provide women with the gender equality they deserve. But one can ask whether the newly elected Biden administration will be able to fill the feministic void created by the Trump administration? Furthermore, the question of what precisely makes an individual a feminist still remains unanswered.

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