

Project NeoWave: Comparative Analysis of Conservatism and Gender Impacting Women in USA and India

Shivansh Gupta¹ and Meaghan Blight[#]

¹Heritage International Xperiential School

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of conservative ideologies on gender dynamics in the USA and India since 2010. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, it explores how conservative movements, policies, and cultural norms influence gender roles and expectations. An extensive literature review and policy analysis reveal how conservatism—defined in both countries with its emphasis on profit, output, and traditional gender roles—has shaped systemic oppression and social structures. The research traces conservatism's historical evolution, highlighting factors like religion, post-colonialism, male dominance, economics, and cultural influences. It discusses significant events affecting gender equality, focusing on the BJP's policies in India and the Republican Party's influence during the Trump administration in the USA. The study evaluates these parties' impacts on women's representation, economic opportunities, and social norms. Central to the analysis is Project NeoWave, the fifth wave of feminism, which advocates nuanced rights for women, systemic reforms, and new approaches to gender equity. The study compares conservatism's political, social, and economic effects in both countries, examining employment, wage gaps, societal expectations, and the role of traditional values. It also evaluates policies addressing gender and minority development, proposing recommendations that integrate Project NeoWave's principles with conservative frameworks. By advancing the discourse on conservatism and gender dynamics, the study offers insights for policymakers and advocates, aiming to foster an equitable society through tailored strategies that balance progressive and conservative values.

Introduction

Definition of Conservatism

Conservatism is often viewed primarily as a political ideology, but it is essential to understand it in a broader, more abstract context for this paper. Conservatism should be seen as a system of beliefs deeply intertwined with cultural and religious norms rather than confined solely to the political arena. This distinction is crucial for understanding the social dynamics of women under conservative ideologies, as it extends beyond political conservatism to encompass the maintenance of traditional power dynamics through culturally ingrained norms and institutions[1].

About women and current gender dynamics, conservatism typically exerts a restrictive influence on legislative measures that could benefit women, often prioritising cultural preservation over utilitarian outcomes. For instance, the effective implementation of anti-violence against women (VAW) legislation requires complex policy frameworks that frequently clash with conservative values[2]. Based on a critical analysis of multiple sources, conservatism as it pertains to women can be understood in three key dimensions:

Traditional Values and Gender Roles: Conservatism often dictates strict societal norms that women must adhere to, reinforcing predefined gender roles. Bangladesh is an example of this, where cultural norms heavily influence women's roles in society[3].

Conservatism as a Purposeful Way of Life: For many women, conservatism is not merely a social regulation but a meaningful way of living. Domestic work, for instance, is often perceived not as forced labour but as a choice shaped by upbringing in a conservative household[4].

Conservatism and Familial Structure: Conservatism is deeply rooted in family structures, often forming the core of one's identity and self-worth. This familial emphasis strengthens conservative values, embedding them within individuals' personal identities [5].

This paper delves into the impact of conservative ideologies on gender dynamics in the USA and India, analysing socio-political landscapes, cultural norms, and policies. It also explores the emergence of Project NeoWave, the fifth wave of feminism, through a comparative analysis and proposes policy recommendations to support gender and minority development.

Importance of studying conservatism's impact on gender dynamics

Understanding conservatism's impact on gender dynamics is crucial for addressing systemic gender inequalities that permeate various aspects of society, including social, emotional, work, economic, and political spheres. By examining how conservative ideologies shape gender roles and expectations, we can better identify the root causes of these inequalities and develop targeted solutions.

Addressing Systemic Gender Inequality: Analyzing conservatism's role in perpetuating gender inequality is essential for tackling issues that affect a nation's social, emotional, work, economic, and political conditions. This understanding is vital for creating effective interventions addressing gender-based disparities' foundational causes [7].

Supporting Marginalized and Vulnerable Women: The study is significant for aiding the most marginalised and vulnerable women who face systemic oppression, lack of autonomy, historical marginalisation, and limited opportunities for improvement. By highlighting the impact of conservative values on these groups, policymakers can craft more inclusive and supportive strategies to empower these women.

Informing Policy Development: Investigating conservatism's influence on gender dynamics provides critical insights for future policy-making. By addressing one of the most fundamental causes of gender discrimination, this research can help create nuanced policies that more effectively tackle gender issues, ensuring that legislative measures are well-informed and impactful.

Enhancing Understanding of Human Dynamics: Studying conservatism's impact on gender roles offers a deeper understanding of human dynamics, allowing for developing policies more tailored to individual needs. This approach also considers the influence of male-dominated values and their effects on various stakeholders, promoting a more equitable and inclusive societal framework.

This multifaceted exploration of conservatism's impact on gender dynamics is crucial for addressing current gender inequalities and laying the groundwork for a more just and equitable future[8].

Overview of India and USA's socio-political landscapes

India's socio-political landscape is characterised by its complex and diverse democracy, with a multi-party system reflecting its vast cultural, linguistic, and regional diversity. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has dominated Indian politics recently, particularly since 2014. Focusing on Hindu nationalism, economic reforms, and significant infrastructural development has marked the BJP's governance. However, the party's policies have also sparked controversies, especially concerning issues like religious intolerance, the treatment of minorities, and challenges to democratic institutions. India's political environment continues to evolve, with debates over secularism, federalism, and social justice playing crucial roles in shaping the nation's future[9].

As of August 2024, the United States is entrenched in a highly polarised socio-political landscape, with the upcoming presidential election amplifying existing divisions. Economic concerns, particularly inflation and the cost of living, are paramount, influencing voter sentiment and policy debates across the political spectrum. This anxiety is compounded by partisan divides, with Democrats and Republicans sharply opposed on critical issues such as immigration, healthcare, and gun control.

The "culture wars" continue to escalate, with reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ issues, and racial equality at the forefront. In this context, figures like JD Vance have fueled the polarisation further by attacking Kamala Harris's personal life, labelling her a "cat lady" for not having children, thus invoking traditional conservative critiques of women in power. Vance's journey from poverty in Kentucky to Yale Law School—immortalised in his memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* (now a Netflix film)—has also resonated with specific segments of the electorate, who view it as a rags-to-riches story that aligns with the values of self-determination and resilience in a divided America. However, this narrative is contentious, as critiques of his stance on reproductive choices, such as IVF, continue to surface, reflecting deeper ideological battles over family values.

Moreover, the legacy of the Trump administration looms large as populist sentiments and debates over national identity persist, shaping the broader political narrative. These dynamics influence the immediate political climate and hold far-reaching implications for the future of American governance and social cohesion[10].

Understanding Conservatism

Historical context of conservatism in India and the US

Conservatism in India and the United States has evolved under different historical conditions, yet both share a strong foundation in traditional values and national identity.

In India, conservatism is deeply intertwined with post-colonial nationalism and Hindu religious values. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose in 2014 under Narendra Modi and has seen a resurgence of Hindu nationalism, influencing both political and cultural norms. The BJP's governance emphasises traditional family structures and economic conservatism, often at the expense of progressive gender reforms[11].

In contrast, conservatism in the United States, particularly under the Republican Party, has emphasised limited government, free-market economics, and traditional Judeo-Christian values. The Trump administration saw a resurgence of populist conservatism, with significant opposition to progressive social movements such as LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality.

Fundamental principles and beliefs of conservative ideology

The core beliefs of conservatism in both nations include:

A commitment to traditional family structures and gender roles.

Opposition to large-scale government intervention, particularly in economic affairs.

A strong national identity is often tied to religious values.

Reasons for the Persistence of Conservatism

Conservatism persists due to its deep cultural and religious roots, which offer stability amidst rapid social changes. In India, the persistence of caste and religious identity reinforces conservative ideologies. In the United States, economic insecurity and the fear of cultural displacement drive many toward conservative political movements, especially among rural and working-class populations.

Conservatism and Gender Dynamics

Theoretical Framework: Gender Roles and Expectations Under Conservative Ideologies

Conservative ideologies often reinforce traditional gender roles, where women are expected to fulfil domestic duties and uphold family values. This framework views the family as the central unit of society, with women playing a subordinate but essential role.

Arguments For and Against Conservatism in Gender Dynamics

Proponents of conservatism argue that traditional gender roles provide stability and ensure the well-being of families and children. They believe that conservatism preserves cultural heritage and moral values.

Opponents argue that these ideologies perpetuate gender inequality by restricting women's rights and opportunities, particularly in the workforce. Critics highlight the economic disadvantages women face under conservative policies, including wage gaps and limited career advancement.

Conservatism in India

Political Influence: BJP's Policies Since 2014

Since coming to power in 2014, the BJP has promoted policies that reinforce traditional gender roles. While some economic initiatives have sought to empower women, the focus on Hindu nationalism and cultural conservatism often marginalises WGM individuals. Policies such as the Triple Talaq ban have been framed as empowering women but are criticised for their selective application of gender justice.

Economic Impact: Opportunities and Challenges for Women and WGM Individuals

The economic impact of conservatism in India is mixed. While women have opportunities in sectors such as education and healthcare, conservative cultural expectations limit broader participation in the workforce. Women's labour force participation remains one of the lowest among G20 nations, and the wage gap continues to widen, particularly in rural areas.

Social and Cultural Expectations: Traditional Gender Roles and Family Structures

Conservatism in India is closely tied to family structures, where women are expected to maintain traditional roles as caretakers and homemakers. These roles are often reinforced through religious teachings and societal expectations, limiting women's autonomy and professional growth.

Policy and Mitigation Efforts for Gender and Minority Development

Policies such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) initiative aim to improve gender equity. However, deeply ingrained cultural norms often undermine these efforts. While some successes have been made, such as enhanced female literacy rates, broader structural changes remain slow.

Conservatism in the United States

Political Influence: The Republican Party and the Trump Administration

Under the Trump administration, conservatism in the United States saw a strong resurgence, particularly in opposition to progressive policies regarding gender and minority rights. Trump's conservative Supreme Court appointments and policies restricting reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ protections have had lasting impacts on gender dynamics. The influence of figures such as JD Vance, who used traditional family values as a platform to critique progressive leaders like Kamala Harris, exemplifies the persistence of conservative ideologies in the US.

Economic Impact: Opportunities and Challenges for Women and WGM Individuals

While some conservative policies promote individual entrepreneurship and deregulation, they often disadvantage women and WGM individuals, particularly in terms of wage equality and employment opportunities. The rollback of affirmative action and Title IX protections under the Trump administration has disproportionately affected gender and racial minorities, limiting opportunities for equitable hiring and career advancement.

Social and Cultural Expectations: Gender Roles and Societal Norms

Conservative values in the US emphasise traditional gender roles, often positioning women as primary caregivers and men as breadwinners. This cultural framework limits the social mobility of women and reinforces gender-based inequalities, particularly in rural and religious communities [12].

Policy and Mitigation Efforts for Gender and Minority Development

Under the Biden administration, efforts have been made to reverse some of the conservative policies that disproportionately affected gender minorities. Title IX reforms and initiatives promoting diversity in hiring have sought to address these inequalities. However, the Supreme Court's ruling on affirmative action represents a significant setback for gender and racial equality, highlighting the ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative forces in US policy-making[13].

Project Neowave: The Fifth Wave of Feminism

Definition and Emergence of Project Neowave

Project Neowave represents a conceptual "Fifth Wave of Feminism," designed to address current limitations within the feminist movement, drawing on elements of conservatism while maintaining the core goal of empowering women. It proposes to blend conservative values and progressive feminist ideals, creating a more adaptable framework that can better appeal to a broader audience, including those who align with conservative ideologies. To understand where Project Neowave fits into the broader feminist movement, it's essential to first outline the four historical waves of feminism. The First Wave focused on voting, the Second Wave on reproductive rights and workplace equality, the Third Wave introduced more intersectionality, and the Fourth Wave used digital tools and social movements to combat sexual harassment and other forms of systemic inequality[14].

Project Neowave builds on these foundations by proposing a new regulatory approach for policy change. It does not seek to replace previous feminist efforts but rather to address persistent issues, particularly conservatism extremism and radical feminism, by integrating practical conservative ideals into feminist advocacy.

Key characteristics of the new wave of feminism

Conservatism Extremism: Project Neowave aims to counter the use of conservative ideology to justify barriers for women, such as systemic discrimination and domestic violence. It emphasises using conservative frameworks to uplift women's rights rather than hinder them.

Radical Feminism: While acknowledging the contributions of radical feminism, Project Neowave critiques its sometimes overly aggressive approach, which can alienate potential allies and discredit the movement. For instance, where radical feminism equates all forms of chivalry with patriarchy might be seen as counterproductive.

Gender Discrimination and Patriarchy: The project recognises the continued existence of gendered discrimination and systemic patriarchy but offers a pathway for utilising conservative values, like family integrity and responsibility, to promote gender equality in a culturally sensitive manner.

Project Neowave's innovative approach lies in its strategic use of social movements and the current social media mechanisms, including cancel culture, to push for legislative changes. It offers an opportunity to build a bridge between conservative strongholds and the feminist movement by demonstrating that these ideologies can coexist and support each other when properly aligned.

Examples of radical feminism and its influence

Historically, radical feminism emerged as a critique of the societal structures that uphold patriarchy. However, in recent years, some radical feminist perspectives have been criticised for their exclusionary or extreme views. For example, rejecting practices such as chivalry outright as oppressive might alienate those who believe these acts come from positive intentions, thus losing support from potential male allies and even women who may not identify with such extreme positions[15].

Project Neowave seeks to incorporate these critiques by advocating for balance. It aims to temper some of radical feminism's more divisive tendencies to create a movement that is both inclusive and effective without losing sight of its core objectives.

Efforts within Project Neowave to address gender minority development

Project Neowave is distinct in its application of feminist principles to support Women and Gender Minorities (WGM):

Curbing Liberal Radicalism: It promotes the idea that extreme liberalism, especially when unmoderated, can alienate gender minorities and even those within the feminist movement who advocate for incremental change.

Integrating Conservative Learnings: Project Neowave draws on conservative lessons, such as the value of family unity and community support, to offer a more inclusive environment for WGM individuals.

Advocacy Through Social Movements: It acknowledges that while court appeals and government challenges are valid, social movements—especially in the age of social media—are the most effective way to bring about legislative change for WGMs and broader society.

Critiques and potential harms of radical feminism

Extremism Alienates Potential Allies: Radical feminism's confrontational tactics can sometimes overshadow the movement's core goals, alienating moderates and reinforcing negative stereotypes. This could result in a lack of mainstream support.

Discouraging Men's Participation: When feminism is perceived as being hostile toward men, it can discourage male allies from engaging in the movement, which is counterproductive to gender equality goals.

Exclusion of Vulnerable Women: Radical feminism can sometimes be inaccessible to the most vulnerable women, particularly those in conservative societies or lower socio-economic statuses. Project Neowave, however, aims to build bridges rather than walls, ensuring the movement is open to all women.

Discussion on the ideal model movement that integrates conservative factors to support the most vulnerable individuals effectively

New Domesticity is one of Project Neowave's strategies to integrate conservative ideals into the feminist movement. It seeks to reframe traditional domestic roles—such as caregiving and homemaking—not as limitations on women but as empowering choices. This concept is precious because it appeals to conservative men and women by reinforcing values they already uphold while allowing space for progressive empowerment. The goal is not to insist that women should only be homemakers but to validate these roles for those who choose them. This validation builds a bridge between conservative and feminist ideologies, showing that they can coexist in a way that supports the most vulnerable individuals.

Comparative Analysis

Conservatism as a political and social ideology has had profound and lasting effects on gender dynamics, both in the United States and India. While the specific cultural and political environments of each country differ, there are significant similarities in how conservatism shapes gender roles, political representation, and economic opportunities for women and gender minorities (WGM). However, the differences are also crucial in understanding conservatism's diverse challenges and consequences for gender equality in these nations.

Similarities in conservatism's impact on gender dynamics

Economic: Employment opportunities and wage gaps

In both India and the United States, conservatism has contributed to persistent wage gaps and limited employment opportunities for women and gender minorities. This limitation is often tied to the traditional conservative belief that men are the primary breadwinners while women are better suited to roles within the household. As a result, conservative policies in both nations tend to resist legislative efforts to bridge wage disparities and provide equal employment opportunities for WGM individuals.

In India, women's participation in the workforce is significantly lower, particularly in rural areas, where conservative norms are more rigidly enforced. For instance, the cultural expectation that women prioritise caregiving roles often excludes them from the formal economy. According to Kabeer and Mahmud, women in India face unique challenges within the informal economy, where they are more vulnerable to wage discrimination and lack labour protections

Similarly, in the United States, while the labour force participation rate for women is higher, wage gaps persist, especially in conservative-dominated regions. Conservative opposition to progressive economic policies, such as gender-based affirmative action and equal pay legislation, has hampered addressing these inequalities.

The Trump administration in the U.S. exemplifies how conservative economic policies can disadvantage women and gender minorities. By rolling back Title IX protections and limiting workplace equality initiatives, the administration exacerbated existing disparities in pay and employment opportunities for women and WGM individuals [16].

Similarly, in India, while economic initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have sought to empower women, the conservative focus on maintaining traditional family structures has often undermined these efforts.

Political: Representation and participation of women and WGM individuals

Conservatism in both the U.S. and India has led to the underrepresentation of women and gender minorities in political leadership roles. Political conservatism often advocates maintaining traditional power structures, where men dominate leadership positions and decision-making processes. The resistance to gender quotas and other affirmative action policies is a hallmark of conservative governance in both countries, resulting in fewer women in key political positions.

In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), since coming to power in 2014, has reinforced traditional gender roles through policies that marginalise WGM individuals. Despite some reforms, such as the Triple Talaq ban, which was touted as empowering Muslim women, critics argue that these initiatives have been selective in applying gender justice and have failed to address the broader issue of gender equality.

The lack of representation for women in political leadership positions remains a critical issue, with conservative elements within the BJP resisting efforts to introduce gender quotas or other reforms that would ensure a more equitable distribution of political power.

Similarly, in the United States, the conservative influence under the Trump administration saw a decline in efforts to promote gender equality in political representation. By appointing conservative judges to the Supreme Court and rolling back key policies related to reproductive rights and gender protections, the administration reinforced traditional power structures that limit the participation of women and WGM individuals in politics. A study published by the Council on Foreign Relations highlights how conservative governance often leads to lower levels of women's representation in decision-making roles, further entrenching gender disparities[17].

Social: Societal expectations and traditional gender roles

In both nations, conservatism emphasises traditional gender roles, where women are primarily seen as caregivers and men as breadwinners. These roles are reinforced through cultural norms, religious teachings, and conservative social policies. In India, Hindu conservatism strongly supports the idea that women's primary role is within the home, taking care of family and children. This expectation is prevalent, especially in rural areas, where women's autonomy and professional opportunities are severely limited by societal norms.

Similarly, in the United States, Christian Evangelical values play a significant role in shaping conservative views on gender roles. Conservative rhetoric in the U.S. often emphasises the importance of the nuclear family, with women expected to prioritise motherhood and homemaking over professional aspirations. This cultural framework limits social mobility for women and perpetuates gender-based inequalities, particularly in more rural and religious communities.

Cultural: Influence of religion and traditional values

India and the United States have deeply rooted religious and cultural traditions that shape their conservative values. In India, Hindu conservatism promotes a cultural framework that emphasises the importance of family and traditional gender roles. This religious influence extends into political and economic life, where women are often expected to conform to societal norms that prioritise family responsibilities over professional or political ambitions.

In the United States, Christian conservatism similarly upholds traditional family structures and gender roles. Evangelical Christianity plays a central role in shaping conservative values around gender, particularly in opposition to reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, and gender identity protections. The emphasis on family and traditional roles significantly impacts how conservative policies are crafted and implemented in both nations.

Differences in conservatism's impact on gender dynamics

Economic: Varying Levels of Access and Opportunity

While both countries experience wage gaps and employment disparities under conservative governance, the specific challenges faced by women and WGM individuals differ significantly. In India, women's access to economic opportunities is severely restricted, particularly in rural areas where conservative cultural values are more rigidly enforced. The informal economy plays a significant role in women's employment in India. Still, it also exposes them to more significant risks of wage exploitation and lacks the protections afforded to workers in the formal economy[18].

By contrast, in the United States, conservative policies often promote entrepreneurship and deregulation, which can create opportunities for some women. However, these same policies also undermine critical protections, such as Title IX, which is essential for ensuring equal access to employment and education for women and WGM individuals.

Political: Differences in Policy Approaches and Outcomes

Conservative governance in India and the United States takes different approaches to gender-based political reforms. In India, conservative politics under the BJP is closely tied to Hindu nationalism, which influences how gender policies are framed. For example, the Triple Talaq ban, while framed as empowering Muslim women, has been critiqued for selectively applying gender justice without addressing broader issues of gender inequality.

In contrast, the U.S. has seen a conservative focus on curtailing reproductive rights and restricting gender identity protections, primarily through judicial appointments and legislative changes made during the Trump administration.

Social: Diverse Societal Reactions and Adaptations

The social reactions to conservatism also vary significantly between the two countries. In India, traditional family structures remain rigid, and societal norms strongly support conservative values that limit women's autonomy. In contrast, the U.S. experiences diverse societal reactions to conservatism. While rural and religious communities tend to uphold traditional gender norms, urban and progressive regions offer more excellent resistance to conservative policies and social expectations.

Cultural: Distinct Cultural Practices and Beliefs

The cultural differences between India and the United States are evident in how conservatism influences gender dynamics. In India, Hindu nationalism plays a central role in shaping conservative gender norms. In contrast, in the United States, Christian conservatism informs debates around reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, and gender identity protections. These cultural influences profoundly impact how gender roles are constructed and maintained in each nation.

Policy and Mitigation Efforts

Significant efforts have been made in both India and the United States to promote gender and minority development through various policies. However, these policies' outcomes and effectiveness vary due to political, social, and economic differences.

Evaluation of policies aimed at gender and minority development in both countries

In India, The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has implemented several policies to promote gender equality, including social welfare schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child). However, critics argue that while these initiatives have improved education and awareness, they have not fully addressed deep-seated patriarchal norms. India's gender quota law, which reserves seats for women in local governments, has proven to be a successful initiative for improving women's political representation at the grassroots level. Research shows that these quotas have increased women's participation in politics and governance, leading to more policies that cater to female citizens' needs, such as public goods provision and education for girls[19].

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Traditional gender norms and a lack of political will from male party leaders continue to limit the broader advancement of women in higher political offices. Furthermore, minority women, particularly Muslim women, have been at the forefront of protests against government policies, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender and minority rights.

In the United States, the Biden administration has introduced the National Gender Strategy, the first-ever comprehensive federal strategy to address gender inequality. This strategy focuses on ten priorities, including improving women's economic security, ensuring access to healthcare (including reproductive services), and eliminating gender-based violence. The approach also emphasises intersectionality, recognising the compounded discrimination faced by racial, sexual, and gender minorities[20].

While the strategy aims to address systemic gender inequalities, the U.S. has faced setbacks, especially during the Trump administration, which saw rollbacks in policies related to reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ protections. Despite this, initiatives such as Title IX reforms under the current administration are working to ensure equal opportunities in education and employment for women and minorities. The U.S. struggles to close the wage gap and increase political representation for women and minorities. However, there has been notable progress in electing women to Congress and other leadership roles[21].

Successful initiatives and their impact

Gender Quotas in India: Implementing gender quotas in local governments has had a positive impact on women's representation, governance responsiveness, and policy outcomes favoring women. However, these reforms have also faced backlash, particularly from male leaders who resist challenges to traditional power structures.

National Gender Strategy in the U.S.: The Biden administration's strategy is notable for its whole-of-government approach, emphasising collaboration across federal, state, and local levels to mainstream gender equality into all aspects of governance and policy. The strategy has the potential to make substantial progress in economic security, healthcare access, and addressing gender-based violence.

Recommendations for future policy and advocacy efforts

Gender-Responsive Conditional Grants

Problem: Persistent gender wage gaps and lack of economic opportunities for women and gender minorities.

Recommendation: Introduce Gender-Responsive Conditional Grants that provide direct funding to companies, NGOs, and startups that meet gender-equality benchmarks. This can include transparent hiring practices, equal pay audits, and female representation in leadership. Companies that close the wage gap and promote diversity would receive additional tax benefits or funding, creating financial incentives for inclusivity.

Inspired by: The success of conditional cash transfers in social programs like India's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, but with a focus on corporate gender parity.

Work-Life Integration Policies

Problem: Traditional gender roles in both countries expect women to manage household responsibilities alongside professional duties, reducing career advancement opportunities.

Recommendation: Implement Work-Life Integration Policies that promote paid caregiving leave for both genders in all sectors. Rather than maternity leave focusing solely on women, this policy would mandate that men take equal caregiving responsibilities. By framing caregiving as a societal duty and including incentives for employers who adopt flexible work arrangements, we can address ingrained social norms limiting women's progress.

Inspired by Sweden's paternity leave policy, which enforces leave for men to ensure shared caregiving responsibilities.

Intersectional Advocacy Hubs

Problem: Gender policies often fail to address the compounded challenges faced by minority women and gender minorities (e.g., Muslim women in India and LGBTQ+ individuals in the U.S.).

Recommendation: Establish Intersectional Advocacy Hubs as resource centres for minority women and WGM individuals, providing access to legal aid, job training, mental health resources, and financial literacy programs. These hubs would also serve as policy incubators, where experts and marginalised community members work together to develop laws that cater to intersectional challenges. This would ensure that policies are shaped by the lived experiences of those most affected by systemic discrimination. Inspired by The Biden administration's intersectional approach to gender equity

Gender Equality Investment Framework (GEIF)

Problem: Systemic underinvestment in women-led enterprises and gender-diverse organisations.

Recommendation: Create a Gender Equality Investment Framework (GEIF), a public-private investment model with funds allocated explicitly to women-led startups and businesses promoting gender equality. This could be coupled with public procurement policies prioritising gender-inclusive companies for government contracts. Additionally, community investment bonds can encourage local participation in the growth of women-led businesses.

Inspired by: Public procurement initiatives in several European countries that reward inclusive companies

Inclusive Digital Literacy Programs

Problem: Women and gender minorities face a significant digital divide, particularly in rural areas.

Launch Inclusive Digital Literacy Programs to close the digital divide for women in rural areas and marginalised communities. This initiative would focus on training women and WGM individuals in technical and digital skills, providing them with the tools to participate in modern economies. In partnership with telecom companies, governments could offer subsidised digital devices and internet access in underserved areas, combined with sector-specific training.

Inspired by The World Bank's strategy of increasing access to technology for women and underserved groups

Community-Led Gender Violence Monitoring Units

Problem: Gender-based violence is rampant, with legal systems often failing to provide timely justice, particularly in rural areas.

Recommendation: Establish Community-Led Gender Violence Monitoring Units where local volunteers are trained in gender-based violence (GBV) intervention and legal processes. These units, supported by local governments and NGOs, would ensure that victims receive immediate support, from medical care to legal aid. The units would also collaborate with law enforcement agencies to monitor and report gender-based crimes, ensuring accountability.

Inspired by India's One-Stop Centers for GBV victims, but expanded into community-led initiatives

Cultural Change Campaigns

Problem: Deep-rooted cultural norms that reinforce traditional gender roles and limit the aspirations of women and gender minorities.

Recommendation: Governments and NGOs should launch Cultural Change Campaigns that use media, entertainment, and education to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. These campaigns could feature role models from diverse backgrounds, showing women in leadership, STEM, and other non-traditional roles. By working with influencers and cultural leaders, these campaigns aim to shift public perceptions of gender roles.

Inspired by: The "This Girl Can" campaign in the UK successfully shifted perceptions about women in sports.

Decentralised Gender Audits

Problem: Gender inequality within companies and institutions often goes unnoticed due to a lack of transparency and accountability.

Recommendation: Mandate Decentralized Gender Audits conducted by independent auditors who evaluate companies' and government institutions' compliance with gender equality goals. These audits would assess areas like wage equality, leadership representation, and anti-discrimination policies. Companies that meet gender parity goals would receive public recognition and tax incentives, while those failing to comply would face penalties.

Inspired by: The gender parity assessments several Scandinavian countries use to ensure workplace equality.

Integrating Project Neowave's principles with conservative values to create effective policies

Project Neowave proposes a nuanced approach to gender equality, integrating progressive feminist ideals with conservative values to create sustainable policies. Project Neowave can push for policies that respect conservative cultural norms while advancing women's rights by focusing on commonalities, such as the importance of family and community. For example, promoting the idea of new domesticity, which values caregiving roles traditionally held by women while advocating for equal economic opportunities, can appeal to conservative bases in both countries.

Project Neowave can also advocate for gender-sensitive policies that emphasise family integrity and community support, presenting them as beneficial to society. By framing gender equality as a means to strengthen communities and economies rather than a threat to traditional values, Project Neowave could bridge the gap between conservative and feminist ideologies.

In conclusion, while both countries have made progress in promoting gender and minority rights, future efforts must address the remaining structural challenges. By integrating Project Neowave's principles into policy discussions, both India and the United States could find ways to balance progressive reforms with conservative values, ultimately creating more inclusive and sustainable policies.

These creative policy recommendations aim to tackle the root causes of gender inequality by integrating elements from previous successful initiatives while adding new, forward-thinking strategies. They focus on economic empowerment, intersectional inclusion, and systemic change, ensuring that women and gender minorities can thrive in India and the United States. By promoting policies that balance conservative values with progressive goals, Project Neowave seeks to create sustainable and inclusive pathways for gender and minority development.

Personal Review/Reflection

Reflecting on this research, I've experienced a profound shift in my understanding of conservatism and its intricate role in shaping gender dynamics. At the start of this journey, I saw conservatism as purely restrictive, a force that sought to confine women within rigid, patriarchal structures. Coming from a conservative family, I have seen this firsthand—traditional gender roles being reinforced through culture and religion. It often felt like conservatism was synonymous with oppression, a system designed to limit women's opportunities and keep them tethered to societal norms that I had always seen as stifling. My initial perception was that conservatism primarily served the interests of men, especially in maintaining power and control over women. Being a cisgender male, I've had the privilege of navigating through life with relative ease. Still, I have seen how the same cultural norms have affected the women in my family—limiting their access to opportunities that seemed effortlessly available to me.

However, as I delved deeper into the topic, I realised that conservatism is not necessarily a force for harm. It holds a capacity to preserve cultural identity, foster social cohesion, and even uplift women in ways that liberal frameworks sometimes overlook. It was surprising to learn that conservative women are not always passive victims of oppression but can be active participants in preserving traditional values that provide them with a sense of purpose and meaning. There's a strong argument for how conservatism—particularly cultural and religious values—can offer a stabilising force, protecting against radical disruptions that could potentially harm societal cohesion. For instance, Project Neowave, the conceptual model I've developed, aims to harness the positive aspects of conservatism, like family integrity and community values, and merge them with the feminist push for gender equality. I've come to see that conservatism can, in fact, support women's empowerment by offering them a framework that aligns with their cultural or religious beliefs while also advocating for broader rights and opportunities.

I also discovered that radical feminism, which I initially dismissed as a theoretical exaggeration, does indeed exist and can, at times, cause more harm than good. It became clear to me that while radical feminism has its place in challenging entrenched power structures, it can alienate potential allies and perpetuate the notion that feminism is a divisive movement. The term "radical feminism" isn't merely a myth or an exaggeration; in some contexts, it has played

a part in making feminism appear overly combative and disconnected from the needs of everyday women. This realisation challenged my biases, as I had always assumed that the more radical the approach, the more effective it was in dismantling oppressive systems. However, through this research, I learned that radicalism—whether conservative or feminist—can backfire. Change is often more sustainable when it incorporates multiple perspectives, including those of conservative women who may not see themselves as oppressed but rather as empowered through their roles in traditional systems.

One of the most valuable lessons I gained was understanding the plight of Women and Gender Minorities (WGM). While I had previously grouped their experiences with that of women in general, I now recognise the distinct challenges WGM individuals face, especially within conservative frameworks. Their inclusion in this study was crucial because they are among the most vulnerable groups affected by gender-based discrimination, often navigating not just patriarchy but also social stigmatisation that stems from their gender identity. This new understanding deepened my sense of empathy for how complex and layered gender inequality can be—especially for those who do not fit into the binary gender norms reinforced by conservative societies.

Reflecting on my initial views, I can see how much my perspective has evolved. I no longer view conservatism as entirely negative but as a complex system with benefits and drawbacks. If applied thoughtfully, it can empower women by reinforcing strong, community-focused values while embracing necessary reforms for gender equality. On the other hand, radical feminism—once something I saw as a progressive necessity—now feels, in certain instances, like a misstep that hinders the broader feminist movement by alienating people who might otherwise support its goals. I've learned that new domesticity, for example, doesn't have to be regressive but could bridge conservative and feminist ideals, encouraging women to thrive in and outside the home. This balanced approach seems to be the way forward.

In summary, I believe the solution is creating systems that integrate the best aspects of conservative stability and progressive change. Project Neowave represents my vision for a new feminist movement that respects cultural values while pushing for the empowerment of women and WGM individuals. As someone passionate about policy and systems change, I now realise the importance of cultural sensitivity in any advocacy work. My recommendations moving forward would be to push for policies that respect the conservative roots of communities while fostering economic, social, and political opportunities for all genders. This means crafting laws that provide equal access to opportunities without disregarding the traditional values that hold meaning for so many people. In doing so, we can create a system where gender equality is not a threat to tradition but a natural evolution.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

The research revealed several key findings regarding conservatism's impact on gender dynamics in India and the United States. First, conservatism reinforces traditional gender roles in both countries, where women are often seen as primary caregivers, limiting their professional opportunities. In India, this is driven by Hindu nationalism, while in the U.S., Christian Evangelical values uphold similar norms. This cultural conservatism contributes to wage gaps and employment disparities in both countries, with conservative policies often resisting gender-based reforms like affirmative action and Title IX protections. Politically, conservatism has led to the underrepresentation of women and WGM individuals in leadership roles, with policies like India's Triple Talaq ban and conservative reforms in the U.S. reinforcing gender inequality in both political and social participation.

Religiously rooted conservative values in both countries create barriers to gender equality, as they emphasise maintaining traditional family structures. However, the study also introduced Project Neowave, a conceptual feminist movement that seeks to integrate conservative values with feminist ideals. It proposes using conservative values like family integrity to bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and modern gender equality goals. Ultimately, the research

highlights the complexity of conservatism's role in shaping gender dynamics and stresses the need for policies that balance traditional values with progressive reforms to achieve a more inclusive and equitable society.

Implications for Future Research and Policy-Making

The findings of this research highlight the need for future policy efforts to be more nuanced and inclusive, particularly in addressing the unique challenges WGM individuals face. Future research should delve deeper into the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, especially in conservative contexts where traditional norms are deeply entrenched. There is also a need to explore the role of men as allies in gender equality movements, as the current focus on radical feminism sometimes alienates potential male supporters. Policymakers must focus on culturally sensitive solutions that respect traditional values while ensuring equal opportunities for all genders.

Final Thoughts on Conservatism's Role in Shaping Gender Dynamics

The research underscores the complex role conservatism plays in shaping gender dynamics in both India and the United States. While conservatism often reinforces patriarchal structures, it can also offer pathways for community-driven empowerment if the values it promotes—such as family, stability, and cultural identity—are harnessed to support progressive gender policies. The persistence of conservatism is not solely due to its opposition to change but because it offers many people a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging.

Vision for a Model Movement

My vision for a model movement—Project NeoWave—strikes a balance between conservative and feminist ideals. It is a movement that respects tradition while advocating for policies that address modern challenges such as wage gaps, underrepresentation in politics, and gender-based violence. By integrating conservative values like family unity and social responsibility with feminist goals of empowerment and equality, Project NeoWave can appeal to a broader base, including those who may feel alienated by radical feminism. This balance will be vital in crafting sustainable and effective policies that uplift women and WGM individuals, making them active participants in traditional and progressive spaces.

In summary, by acknowledging the merits of conservatism while advancing feminist ideals, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society that benefits everyone, regardless of gender or cultural background. This research provides the groundwork for future policy efforts and advocacy strategies that are innovative and deeply attuned to the values and beliefs that shape our societies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Meaghan Blight (President, Wesleyan College) for extending her help in carrying out, editing, improving and consolidating this research.

References

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Conservatism." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, plato.stanford.edu/entries/conservatism/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.

- Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005." *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 54, no. 12, 2021, pp. 2051–2081, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00104140211024313>. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Kabeer, Naila, and Simeen Mahmud. "Mainstreaming Gender in Social Protection for the Informal Economy." *World Development*, vol. 103, 2018, pp. 230-240, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X18302080>. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Hymowitz, Kay Parker. "Why Conservative Women Report Being the Happiest—and How You Can Be Too." American Enterprise Institute, www.aei.org/op-eds/why-conservative-women-report-being-the-happiest-and-how-you-can-be-too/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Hallowell, A. J. "Conservatives and the Family." The Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal, kirkcenter.org/kirk-essay-conservatives-and-the-family/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Cambridge Core. "Gender Politics and Conservatism: The View from the British Conservative Party Grassroots." *Government and Opposition*, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/government-and-opposition/article/gender-politics-and-conservatism-the-view-from-the-british-conservative-party-grassroots/110FE2674F196BB84C5424F2C88F2444. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Oxford Academic. "Gender Equality and Conservatism." Oxford University Press, academic.oup.com/edited-volume/28063/chapter/212060501. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- BBC. "India Election 2024: Why it Matters for the World." BBC News, 12 Apr. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-65047658. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Pew Research Center. "Top Problems Facing the US: Inflation, Affordable Health Care, and Partisan Cooperation." Pew Research Center, 2024, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2024/08/01/top-problems-facing-the-us-inflation-affordable-health-care-partisan-cooperation/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Brookings Institution. "Geopolitical & Economic Outlook 2024: Democracy and the Splintering." Brookings Institution, www.brookings.edu/research/geopolitical-economic-outlook-2024-democracy-and-the-splintering/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Evans, Jonathan, et al. "Gender Roles in the Family." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 2 Mar. 2022, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/gender-roles-in-the-family/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2024.
- Pew Research Center. "Public Views on Changing Gender Roles." Pew Research Center, 2023, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2023/05/25/public-views-on-changing-gender-roles/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.
- Brookings Institution. "The Biden-Harris Administration's Gender Strategies and Policies: Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities." Brookings, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-biden-harris-administrations-gender-strategies-and-policies-strengths-challenges-and-opportunities/>. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.
- Pew Research Center. "A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality." Pew Research Center, 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/a-century-after-women-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-see-work-to-do-on-gender-equality/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.
- Pew Research Center. "How the Political Typology Groups View Major Issues." Pew Research Center, 9 Nov. 2021, www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/how-the-political-typology-groups-view-major-issues/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.
- "Catalyzing Gender Equality: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Title IX and Conservative Economic Policies." Cambridge Core, 2023, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/government-and-opposition>. Accessed 1 Oct. 2024.
- Council on Foreign Relations. "The Fight for Gender Parity." Council on Foreign Relations, 2023, www.cfr.org/blog/fight-gender-parity. Accessed 1 Oct. 2024.
- Williams, Colin, and Ardiana Gashi. "Evaluating the Wage Differential between the Formal and Informal Economy: A Gender Perspective." *Journal of Economic Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2021, pp. 735-750, Emerald Publishing Limited, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JES-01-2021-0019>. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.

Brechenmacher, Saskia. "India's New Gender Quota Law Is a Win for Women—Mostly." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 26 Sep. 2023, www.carnegieendowment.org/indias-new-gender-quota-law-is-a-win-for-women-mostly/. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.

The White House. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality. The White House, Oct. 2021, www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National-Strategy-on-Gender-Equity-and-Equality.pdf. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.

World Bank. World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024–2030: Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet: World Bank Group, 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/raising-world-bank-groups-ambition-gender-equality>. Accessed 21 Oct. 2024.