

Women's Voting Rights in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality is a global issue as men tend to earn more than women in almost every country. However, some countries such as the US have made huge progress in trying to bridge that gap. Women's suffrage as well as other forms of gender inequality have been a contentious issue in many nations for many decades. Gender inequality is further compounded by other forms of inequalities are prevalent in various social domains such as race, social class, and education. These pertinent issues gave rise to the social movement commonly known as feminism. It is important to note that feminism encompasses nearly all issues related to the emancipation of women. This includes any social aspect that can be leveraged to elevate women's status in the society; socially, politically, and/or economically. Feminism challenges some of the traditional views regarding how women are regarded within society as well as their roles and position in society. The late 19th century's struggle for women's rights in the U.S was one of the more profound occurrences that basically marked the emancipation of women in modern society. Other countries such as Brazil also replicated the struggle for women's rights from their counterparts in other countries across various domains such as across political and economic spheres. This paper will focus on women voting rights in Brazil. Women in Brazil were granted their suffrage in 1932, making Brazil the fourth country in the Western Hemisphere (after Canada, the United States, and Ecuador) to grant voting rights to women. While all women were granted the right to vote in 1932, some diffuse and formal barriers still constrained their accorded political participation and engagement in this sphere. Historically, women suffrage in Brazil was enshrined in the country's constitution in 1934. This victory for women came after many struggles and protests. The US was greatly admired by early Brazilian feminists based on its reputation for fighting for women's rights. However, even though women's suffrage was granted, the country (Brazil) is still a long way from achieving gender equality concerning political participation. Only about 12% of women have been elected to political positions almost a century later after women were granted the right to vote, even though women account for the largest percentage of its population and voters. Brazil modelled its women's rights movement on the US, and therefore, there are similarities regarding women's suffrage and equal rights. The patriarchal traditions of Iberian culture have greatly impacted the societal roles of Brazilian women. These traditions hold women subordinate to men in the community and familial relationships. Brazil and US have similar laws addressing the issue of gender inequality; therefore, both countries can achieve this goal if the laws are enforced by the latter. The indisputable importance of achieving women's descriptive political sphere representation pushed Brazilian feminists to become more strategic, highlighting the significance of having more women participate in their voting processes.

Key words: Women suffrage, voting rights, patriarchal, feminism, familiar relationships

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

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Women in Brazil were granted their suffrage in 1932, making Brazil the fourth country in the Western Hemisphere to grant voting rights to women (Bähre & Diniz, 2020). It was then enshrined in the country's constitution two years later. This victory for women was not handed on a silver platter; the achievement came after many struggles and protests. As mentioned earlier, Brazil became the fourth country to grant women suffrage after Canada, the United States (US), and Ecuador (Jaquette, 2018). The US was greatly admired by early Brazilian feminists based on its reputation for fighting for women's rights. However, even though women's suffrage was granted, the country (Brazil) is still a long way from achieving gender equality concerning political participation (Bähre & Diniz, 2020). According to Jaquette (2018), only about 12% of women have been elected to political positions almost a century later after women were granted the right to vote, even though women account for the largest percentage of its population and voters. Being the fourth country to grant women suffrage means that Brazilian women were among the first to be given the right to vote in the Latin American region. However, their political empowerment lags much compared to some regions' countries (Jaquette, 2018). For instance, Costa Rica achieved women's suffrage in 1945 but has surpassed Brazil when it comes to pushing for gender equality; it has managed to close the political empowerment gap by 55 percent (Arretche, 2018). In Brazil, women still account for a very low proportion of elected political posts; as mentioned earlier, women are greatly underrepresented in politics, making this the area in which the country's backwardness is highly visible and resounding (Arretche, 2018). This paper contributes to the continuing discussions regarding the gender role in political-institutional studies. In this context, focusing on the increased female politicians' under-representation in Brazilian legislative politics, this essay highlights the significance of historical legacies and political institutions in developing systems that do not marginalize women in electoral politics or the voting realm. Brazil remains the unique case in exploring women's descriptive and enormous under-representation within electoral politics despite the expanded receptiveness of Brazilian female voters (Jaquette, 2018). The general public considers that having many women in politics and the voting processes or public spaces would improve Brazil's electoral procedures and politics. Brazilian voters have indicated their lack of fear in giving women their voting rights by electing their first woman presidential candidate, Dilma Rouseff, in the 2010 election that saw more than two-thirds of the voter population being women. The main argument here is that this female president's election formed the landmark for gender equality and indicated a country that has attained a positive gender level in electoral politics.

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FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Patriarchal Traditions in Brazil

The patriarchal traditions of Iberian culture have greatly impacted the societal roles of Brazilian women. These traditions hold women subordinate to men in the community and familial relationships (Batista Pereira & Porto, 2020). The Iberian culture develops strong practices for male dominance; even though the country (Brazil) is trying to relax some of these traditional rules as it strives to embrace the western culture that promotes gender equality, the strategy it is using to address this issue is not as effective as the strategies used by other countries to achieve the same objective (Batista Pereira & Porto, 2020). Many countries that have made progress in achieving gender equality in terms of political representation throughout history tend to do so by imposing quotas; that strategy has proven to be effective in increasing the presence of women in politics, and it also works when used to improve the presence of other minority groups (Quartim de Moraes, 2020). Adopting this strategy can help Brazil close the political empowerment gap by a high percentage, possibly putting it at par with the US or other European countries. Moreover, in 1824, March 24 Constitution that Dom Pedro I granted introduced the active citizens' concept that implied who elected the local administrators and nominated other voters in selecting parliamentary candidates (Quartim de Moraes, 2020). Of course, at this time, the real deal was that in the parochial or local governments elections, every active citizen or the free people aged above 25 and possessed the least annual income or properties worth 100,000 reis were allowed to vote for their chosen politician. However, the census suffrage was the voting process using income to define who voted or could not vote, as the constitution undoubtedly eliminated gender equality from the 18th century's political vocabulary (Batista Pereira & Porto, 2020). Brazil has increasingly witnessed further debates around the quotas' adoption to extend its women's presence in political party leadership and institutions, as accompanied by the country's democracy returns. Since then, the political spectrum in the region has followed suit, thereby explaining the increasing percentage of female participation in the voting process.



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Prominent Brazilian Activist for Suffrage
b. August 2, 1894 –
d. September 16, 1976)

<https://portal.fgv.br>

METHOD(S)

I did historical research in the archive for origins of Brazilian Feminism, American Feminism, and Feminism in the United Kingdom.



<https://americasouthandnorth.wordpress.com/>

CONCLUSIONS

Women's suffrage was initially denied due to many inequalities, including race, social class, and literacy. Even skin color was a factor in determining social class, and each class had its obstacles to overcome. Feminism embraces all facets of the emancipation of women and includes any struggle designed to elevate their status socially, politically, or economically; it concerns women's self-concepts as well as their position in society. On the other hand, the women's rights movement defined the emancipation of women more narrowly as the winning of legal rights as occurred in the US in the late 19th century. Brazil became the fourth country to grant women suffrage after Canada, the United States (US), and Ecuador. Brazil modelled its women's rights movement on the US, and therefore, there are similarities regarding women's suffrage and equal rights. Gender inequality is a global issue as men tend to earn more than women in almost every country; however, some countries such as the US have made huge progress in closing that gap. Brazil and US have similar laws addressing the issue of gender inequality; therefore, both countries can achieve this goal if the laws are enforced by the latter.