



# The Backlash Equation

*Rising Women's Employment + Male Resentment = Authoritarian Gains*

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GOVT-650: Political Analysis // **Illustration:** Mrinalini Godara.

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# Background Information

## Sources:

- World Economic Forum, 2024
- The White House, 2025
- Pew Research Center, 2023

Current estimates put taking at least 134 years to achieve full gender equality globally

Trump's 2025 Women's History Month proclamation framed gender equality as "radical ideology" and praised policies that force women into traditional roles

Despite progress, 1 in 4 U.S. men still believe feminism has 'done more harm than good'—a figure that rises to 37% among young men

Women's workforce  
participation rates



Reactionary Backlash



Increased vote share for  
Far-Right Parties and  
Politicians

# Research Question

Whether rising women's labor force participation rates in the U.S. has provoked reactionary conservative backlash, and whether this backlash translates into greater electoral success for far-right authoritarian candidates.

# Research Aims and Significance

- Test backlash theory using the United States as a case study.
- Isolate the role that increases in gender equality in the paid labor market play in driving support for the far-right.
- This would help explain widening gender gap in voting (e.g., young men: +20% GOP support).
- Links labor market trends to authoritarian threats.

# Theory and Hypothesis

## Hypothesis pt 1:

Increased female labor force participation rates → a rise in reactionary conservative backlash.

## Hypothesis pt 2:

Reactionary conservative backlash → a rise in far-right electoral victories (GOP vote share, especially men).

## Reactionary Backlash

**Theory:** Progress towards gender equality can provoke reactionary responses from those who perceive gender equality as a threat to traditional power structures.

**Male Flight:** The phenomenon where men leave or avoid fields, industries, or institutions as women become the majority

# Data Sources

## Labor Force Participation Rates

- U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. (2025). *Civilian labor force by sex, 1948-2025* [Data set].
- U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. (2025). *Labor force participation rate of women by age, 1948-2025* [Data set].
- U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. (2025). *Women's earnings by race and ethnicity as a percentage of White non-Hispanic men's earnings, 1987-2025* [Data set]

## Electoral Data

- ROPER Center for Public Opinion Research (multiple)

# Controls

- Economic grievances, such as unemployment rate or income levels
- Education levels
- Technology Changes
- Religiosity
- Demographic information (race, age, location)

# Analysis

## Time-Series Cross-Sectional Analysis that examines

- Longitudinal trends: How women's labor force participation (WLFP) and GOP vote share change over time.
- Cross-state variation: Differences in these relationships across U.S. states.

# Methodology

# Findings

- I expect to find that there will be a positive correlation between women's labor force participation rate and male support for conservative political parties (GOP)
- Amongst subgroups, unemployed, less educated, white men show the strongest backlash
- The control variables of religiosity and economic grievances are expected to have an impact but not to fully explain the reactionary conservative backlash

# Conclusions and Future Research

## Conclusions:

- Backlash theory holds in the U.S.; rising labor force participation rate drives far-right support.
- Policy implication: Gender equality efforts may face political resistance.

## Future Research:

- State-level analysis (e.g., abortion bans' impact on WLFP).
- Global comparisons (U.S. vs. Europe's labor protections).
- Individual-level analysis (e.g., do more sexist GOP politicians get more support than others)