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## Issue Brief: Women/Gender Issues and Protest Politics

### Key Words

Gender, women, equality, protest, strike, interest group

### Description

This issue brief outlines historical turning points in gender inequality issues in the political sphere. It discusses how gender inequality politics has been addressed through interest group protests.

### Key Points

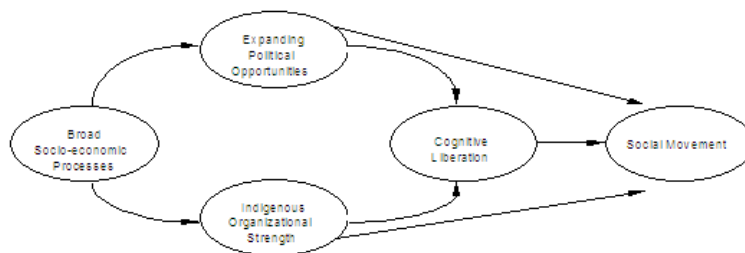
- Gender inequality is a long-standing, historical political issue.
- The formation of feminist interest groups and protests in recent decades has influenced radical policy and ideological changes.
- The most historic turning point was the ‘Women’s Strike for Equality’, in New York in 1970
- Protests have helped reduce inequality between genders over time, however the fight continues to reduce the gap even further.

### Issue Brief

Social Movements are:

- collective challenges
- based on common purpose
- and social solidarities
- in sustained interaction
- with elites, opponents, and authorities

(Tarrow, 1998)



Source: Doug McAdam – Political Process Model

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Social movements have been used as a means of pushing policy makers to implement policy changes. In addition, social movements have been used to create mass awareness of issues in order to push people to question traditional ideologies. Social movements have been used for such purposes in the feminist struggle for gender equality in America.

Historically, women have not shared the same rights and liberties as men. Therefore, it has been men rather than women who have assumed and held on to positions of power in politics and society, making men the 'members' or elites, and women the 'challengers' or 'movement group', who are outside the circle. (McAdam 38).

McAdam explains that 'movements develop in response to an ongoing process of interaction between movement groups and the larger sociopolitical environment they seek to change' (McAdam 40).

The figure above shows that the generation of insurgency, or a collective social movement is based upon the confluence of three key factors. The expansion of political opportunities combines with indigenous organizations of the minority community to give insurgents the 'structural potential' for successful collective movement. This potential is therefore developed into actual insurgency through cognitive liberation. All three factors, combined with the final stage of cognitive liberation are necessary in social insurgency.

**GENDER  
EQUALITY  
NOW!**



The Suffrage Movement serves as an example of an arguably successful social movement. In 1913, 8,000 suffragists marched down Pennsylvania Avenue the day before Woodrow Wilson was elected president to rally for equal rights while police tried to pacify the protesters. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was instituted in 1920. This policy implementation was likely influenced by the successful social insurgency that gave rise to the Suffrage Movement.

Regardless of policy implementation, traditional gender roles were largely maintained. In 1962, more than two-thirds of the women agreed that important family decisions should be made by the man of the house. (Coontz).

Betty Friedan pioneered to transform the attitudes of women. Feminists urged women to challenge the assumption, at work and at home, that women should always be the ones who make the coffee, watch over the children, pick up after men and serve the meals. (Coontz).

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On March 20<sup>th</sup> 1970, Betty Friedan called for a nationwide women's strike on August 26<sup>th</sup> 1970, which was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's equal right to vote. Friedan wanted a revolution against sexual oppression. She proposed that on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, women should occupy the political decision-making arena and sacrifice a night of love and household chores to make the political meaning clear. (Bazon).

The Women's strike for Equality was a landmark day in the coalition of feminists for a common purpose and Betty Friedan for creating a social movement to fight for three things – repeal of antiabortion laws, establishment of child-care centers and equal opportunity in jobs and education.



Over the next 30 years there was a revolutionary transformation of attitudes towards traditional gender roles in America. However it was not instant. Even in 1977, two-thirds of Americans believed that it was “much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.” But, by 1994, two-thirds of Americans rejected this notion. (Coontz).

It can be seen therefore that social movements that meet the criteria of the ‘political process model’ have been used through the century to push for policy changes such as the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and also to create social awareness of the issue of gender equality among the mass population, which has been successful in challenging traditional ideologies.

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