

# Comparison of the acceptance of feminism between the East and the West

**Autor:** Zurdo Serrano, Marta (Grado en Estudios Ingleses).

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## Abstract

The following article will discuss the acceptance of feminism through the contrast between Western and Eastern countries. In order to do this, it will be considered the factors that have conditioned this reception: the historical context and various events that have taken place over the centuries, the influence of different religions, the policies that give precedence to one sex over another, the creation of different extremist groups and the loss and commodification of women's rights

**Keywords:** Feminism, West, East, religions, extremism, ideologies

**Título:** Comparación de la aceptación del feminismo entre oriente y occidente.

## Resumen

El siguiente artículo discutirá la aceptación del feminismo a través del contraste entre los países occidentales y orientales. Para ello se considerarán los factores que han condicionado dicha acepción: el contexto histórico y diversos acontecimientos transcurridos a lo largo de los siglos, la influencia de diferentes religiones, las políticas que otorgan preerencia a un sexo sobre otro, la creación de diferentes grupos extremistas y la pérdida y mercantilización de los derechos de la mujer.

**Palabras clave:** Feminismo, occidente, oriente, religiones, extremismo, ideologías.

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Throughout history, society has witnessed women's struggle for being recognized in a world monopolized by men. This obstacle course has evolved from the relegation and oblivion of a collective deprived of social rights, the emergence of the suffrage movement and the achievement of equal opportunities and freedoms. Nonetheless, gender equality searching has not been a quick and equitable process, namely, the impact has had more transcendence in western countries. This essay will argue the acceptance of feminism, contrasting western and eastern countries and considering the factors that have conditioned society's reception such as the historical events that determined the recognition of women in both axes, the influence of religion, the emergence of extremist groups and the lost and commodification of rights.

The provenance on one of the two main blocks of countries has its roots in the cold war, when two main states polarized the world. On the one hand, the United States influenced western countries and eastern countries were under the dominance of the Soviet Union. In other words, each state would apply the same doctrines they promulgated. The historical evolution on human rights was gradual, it began in 1776, when the Americans claimed their individual rights and desire of independence from England. Following their model, in France in 1789 *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* was proclaimed. However, like in the US, they made reference to the rights of men and not women's. The second industrial revolution introduced more social changes and led the emergence of the suffragist movement, by which women claimed their right to vote. One of them, Hubertine Auclert, founder of the French newspaper *La citoyenne*, coined for the first time the term "Feminism" in reference to the gender equality search, in contraposition to the polemic term that Dumas used to make reference about feminine men. During the both World Wars, women joined the working world. Awareness of social work increased their desire of voting rights and labour acceptance, and since then, women have reached more recognition within western area. Moreover, the Tsarist Russia was a dictatorship where society did not have any right to freedom until the revolution occurred in the early twentieth century. Then, under the Marxist influence, a socialist regime, that granted rights to all Russian citizens, was proclaimed. Later, in the twenties of the twentieth century a union of Russia with other Soviet republics like Ukraine and Belarus led to the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with Stalin at the head of a totalitarian government that pursued those opposed to his ideology. Despite the promotion of social rights and an attempt of creating a welfare state in the USSR, the Republic lost influence in Europe because of its external policy and because of being hit by a severe economic crisis, which had more impact on society causing poverty and riots in the streets. The fall of the system because of the results obtained in a referendum in favour of

the liberalization of the country, the establishment of Russia as country and the independence of the former Soviet republics, led to a desire for democratization of Eastern countries. However, the excessive power of the government prevented, in contrast to Western countries, the rise of feminist movements within the country or were reduced because they were considered part of the socialist struggle (Paxton 2014, pp.275-277). Thus, a focus of influence and the control of the government over citizens, determined the development of feminism. According to Freedman (2001, p.76), the concept of a feminist is reduced to the collective of a 'white, middle-class' woman, in other words, the prototype of Western women that did achieved the recognition of their rights.

The second factor that determines the repression of women is religion. As stated by Oxtoby (1996, pp.106-418), there is a huge variety of religions in the Eastern countries among which stand: Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Buddhist; all with a section set aside for women. Within the Hindu religion there are different visions of women, from goddess to servant, but all of them are summarized in the concept of women as the protector of the home and their duty of being obedient to their husbands, as required by *The Laws of Manu*. In Jain religion, the man possesses more privileges than the woman and, besides, she has to be reincarnated into a man to reach the 'final state of perfection'. In Buddhist tradition women were considered a 'distraction' although not a 'property' of men. The Confucian ideology also encouraged the dominance over women through the encouragement of the establishment of patriarchal families. Furthermore, the Sikh literature was created by men so, it has benefited them as well. They reserved for themselves the most important roles in their community. In a more extreme form, women are seen as ascetics, which means they should refrain from any pleasure. However, the problem is not the religion itself, but their radical interpretation and radicalization. This has resulted in the emergence of extremist groups that justify their actions in their personal view of traditional scriptures.

The third element that influences women of the East rather than the West is the extremist groups. Between the origins of the extremist groups, highlights the religion. They modify the bases of religion to validate their crimes. The influence of this groups, as International Civil Society Action Network (2014, p.8) declared, even affects 'political parties and religious authorities' despite of being reduced groups of member. In addition, inequalities with capitalist regimes are intensified, so, they refused all that they defend, as the self-determination of women. The influence of these terrorist groups clearly have more repercussion in eastern countries, where they have been originated, and where they apply their version of justice.

Finally, the last factor that has conditioned the improvement of women's right is the policy of each country. As has been mentioned previously, the current Russia was the stage of numerous social revolutions during the last century. The leader of the post-revolutionary Russia, Vladimir Lenin, adapted the communist ideology developed by Marx. In 1920, Lenin (cited in Paxton, p.274) stated: 'In law there is naturally complete equality of rights for men and women'. The socialist doctrine, did impulse the rights of workers and their participation in politics, men as well as women. However, Paxton (2014, p.275) clarifies that women did not occupy leading positions and their participation were merely symbolic. The fall of the government resulted in the fall of such privileges. The percentage of women's parliamentary representation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia of 2011 (Paxton, 2014, p.276) shows the reduced access to politics in such countries. Nonetheless, not only political rights have been undermined. As Bailey (2012, pp.6-7) acknowledges, eastern women should belong to a wealthy or influential family to acquire social rights as education, term known as "Wasta". To be more precise, the rights of women have become a merchandise, conversely to the obligatory nature of Western ones.

This essay has sought to demonstrate an awareness about the successful development of feminism in Western countries contrary to the Eastern countries. It has been pointed out the limitations on belonging from a different country where this movements started, due to the dismissal of the role of women for not having raised their voices, the religious influence and the literal application of their ancient principles instead of their adaptation in order to avoid the discrimination of a collective, the rise of extremists groups as a result of a radical reading of these religions and the policies that privilege men over women and limit their rights. This essay has tried to create a consciousness of the reality that millions of women are subjected to, and has shown how the feminist phenomenon has not been able to flourish in Eastern countries.

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