

Largest global study on violence against women finds feminist movements hold the key to change

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A new study on violence against women conducted over four decades and in 70 countries reveals the mobilization of feminist movements is more important for change than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians.

The study in the latest issue of [American Political Science Review](#) (APSR), published by Cambridge University Press for the American Political Science Association (APSA), found that in feminist movements that were autonomous from political parties and the state, [women](#) were able to articulate and organize around their top priorities as women, without having to answer to broader organizational concerns or men's needs. Mobilizing across countries, feminist movements urged governments to approve global and regional norms and agreements on [violence](#).

Strong, autonomous feminist movements were the first to articulate the issue of [violence against women](#) and the key catalysts for government action, with other organisations sidelining issues perceived as being only important to women. Strong movements commanded public support and attention, and convinced the media the issues were important for public discussion. In countries that were slower to adopt policies on violence, feminist movements leveraged global and regional agreements to push for local policy change.

S. Laurel Weldon, co-author of the study, said: "Violence against women is a global problem. Research from North America, Europe, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia has found astonishingly high rates of sexual assault, stalking, trafficking, violence in intimate relationships, and other violations of women's bodies and psyches. In Europe it is a bigger danger to women than cancer, with 45 per cent of European women experiencing some form of physical or [sexual violence](#). Rates are similar in North America, Australia and New Zealand and studies in Asia, Latin America and Africa show that violence towards women there is ubiquitous."

The scope of data for the study is unprecedented. The study includes every region of the world, varying degrees of democracy, rich and poor countries, and a variety of world religions – it encompasses 85 per cent of the world's population. Analysing the data took five years, which is why the most recent year covered is 2005.

Mala Htun, co-author of the study, adds: "Social movements shape public and government agendas and create the political will to address issues. Government action, in turn, sends a signal about national priorities and the meaning of citizenship. The roots of change of progressive social policies lie in civil society."

More information: 'The civic origins of progressive policy change: combatting violence against women in a global perspective, 1975-2005' is published in the latest issue of *American Political Science Review* and is available online at: journals.cambridge.org/psr

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