Gender Inequality in the Context of the Climate Crisis: The Case of The United States

Murgoci, Ioana

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Ioana Murgoci

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Leiden University & Clingendael Institute

Supervisor: Joana Cook
Second Reader: Madeleine Hosli

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Abstract

The climate crisis is an aggravating phenomenon that has been felt around the world. This research analysed gender inequality in the US in the context of the climate crisis and is based on the method of critical discourse analysis, a qualitative approach used for the study of discourse structures. The basis of this investigation is the following question – *How is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S responses to the climate crisis?* The analysis focused the last two presidential mandates of the U.S., the Trump presidency (2017-2021), and the Biden-Harris presidency (2021 – present). Subsequently, the analysis revealed that former President Donald Trump failed to produce an inclusive national strategy, having no consideration for the climate crisis nor any gender-related matter. By comparison, current President Joe Biden demonstrated more effort into tackling the gender inequality issue overall. However, throughout various proposals the Biden-Harris administration fails to remain consistent in empowering women to have more agency within the political system. The comparison also reveals different power dynamics of the mandates. Lastly, although President Biden has been more pro-active, the implementation and outcomes of his plans remain uncertain, thus a subject for future research.

Keywords: gender inequality, climate crisis, security, US public policy, feminist theory

List of Abbreviations

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

COP – Conference of the Parties

GCD – Geneva Consensus Declaration

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

UNCED – United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

US – United States

WEDO – Women's Environment and Development Organisation

WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction

Contents

Introduction

This study came into being after I read an article in *The Economist* presenting a new book that argued that political instability is linked to women's oppression. I believed this to be a critical step in understanding the sociology of women's position within our societies. At the same time, I wanted to explore how the climate crisis is connected to gender inequality, and the role of women within the climate crisis mitigation process. Thus, through this study I aim to offer not only more understanding into the interdependence of the fields but also emphasise the importance of the gender dimension in addressing the urgency of climate change, and the socio, political and economic consequences that we are experiencing. This study aims to thoroughly present the crucial links between the fields of climate crisis, public policy, and gender studies. The investigation focuses on two universal concepts and phenomena, the climate crisis and gender inequality. It is essential to include both and differentiate between the concept and the phenomenon in order to understand how much consideration is given to both within the public discourse. The phenomenon is the process as it unfolds and its real impact on individuals, and the concept refers to the interpretation of the phenomenon that is present within the institutional discourse. This research has the potential to contribute to creating more effective norms, and policies by understanding past and current circumstances and tendencies in the public space. The research has the following question at its core: *How is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S. responses to the climate crisis?*

The analysis will integrate the climate crisis as, first and foremost, a gendered crisis and a security issue impacting women disproportionately around the world. Recent studies link political instability with the oppression of women, particularly with the violation of women's rights (Hudson et al., 2020; Menz, 2016). In addition, the climate crisis creates circumstances more detrimental to women (Gaard, 2015), and their own agency within the process of developing public policy becomes crucial. To narrow down the focus, the study will focus on

the case of the United States (US). The study integrates this case because there is no language barrier to gathering information and data, and because the country is still in a position of power within the international political setting. In particular, the emphasis will lie on the former Trump administration and its mandate that started from January 2017 and lasted until January 2021, and on the current Biden administration and its mandate that started in January 2021. The method used is a qualitative method named critical discourse analysis. The aim is to understand the relationship between the two concepts and phenomena.

The First Political Order

In 2020, a study was published that focused on the relationship between women's systematic subordination and political instability (Hudson et al., 2020). The research presents the various causes behind women's subordination, and how they relate to women's dependence on men for the safety of their own physical security (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 2). The study's findings are the starting point of this research. The aim is to understand how the climate crisis is linked to political instability, and how both are related to gender inequality within a society. First, it is important to define key terms that will be used throughout this study. The "male security dilemma" is directly connected to the "security provision mechanism" that exists within most of our societies today (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 2). This means that men will seek to ensure their own physical security, and, in order to succeed, they create "male-bonded alliances, typically based on patrilineal (agnatic) relationships" (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 2). These alliances use dominance to succeed and ensure security (Hudson et al., 2020). In this context, women play a key role within this mechanism because they can biologically reproduce and ensure that the male line is continuing (Hudson et al., 2020). The main argument is that, because men depend on women to preserve their alliance, it is necessary for them to control

women (Hudson et al., 2020). The entire system of male-bonded alliances is defined as the Patrilineal/Fraternal Syndrome (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 2).

The Syndrome and Nation-State Security

Thus, against this background, the group's security is strictly linked to male alliances that rule through dominance. The study takes the argument further and claims that this security provision mechanism is embedded in "a fundamentally authoritarian and violent sexual order" which impacts the overall political order and the group's security – on a macro-level, the security of the nation-state (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 107). However, the nation-state level represents one out of two security provision mechanisms, and is defined as the new mechanism (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 23). The other mechanism, the old one, refers to the Patrilineal/Fraternal Syndrome that was mentioned and explained in the previous section. The new mechanism functions around the "state", the actor that is considered the primary authority within a society, having the ability to use force and the actor that is officially recognised by the public – the ones who are governed (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 23). It is difficult to identify the kind of mechanism that exists within a society (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 49). Different characteristics of a nation such as its democratic or authoritarian nature, or its economic position relative to other countries provide little evidence to understand and identify the system that citizens use for ensuring their security (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 49).

States today can comply with the Syndrome by exercising their power in line with patriarchal beliefs and principles especially when it comes down to the hierarchical order within the society (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 50). A patriarchal family is ruled by the male and the same hierarchy can also be identified in the behaviour of states and the manner in which the state treats its citizens – as subordinates or dependents rather than autonomous actors (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 50). Therefore, even if the mechanism that is in line with the

Patrilineal/Fraternal Syndrome does not exist anymore in, for example, Latin American countries, these countries still have a high level of violence perpetrated against women (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 51). In Latin American countries, this can be seen in the prevalent femicide as well as the unequal family laws (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 51). Most importantly, what needs greater emphasis is that common indicators for gender inequality – such as female literacy and the representation of women in parliament – are not sufficient to analyse and understand how much the Syndrome is embedded within a society (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 51).

The Syndrome and Environmental Security

In addition, the Syndrome has an indirect impact on what is defined as the human and environmental security of a nation-state (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 167). These concepts fit within a non-conventional framework that is used to measure the security of a nation-state (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 167). Within this framework, indicators that refer to "food security", "environmental quality of human life", or "social progress" help understand the political situation of a nation-state (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 167). The United States follows this non-conventional framework to predict and address political instability (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 167). Thus, this research aims to understand how the US, represented mainly by its president and governmental institutions, frames the climate crisis within its public discourse, and how gender inequality is accounted for within this discourse. The Syndrome goes beyond conflict and governance and has severe impacts on other societal aspects (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 167). Figure 1 portrays the categories that are the most affected. Categories such as "Indifference to environmental degradation" and "Food insecurity and malnutrition" along with higher risks of conflict are also directly linked to the climate crisis. The interconnectedness between these processes goes both ways meaning that the climate crisis creates and exacerbates social issues (Pörtner et al., 2022), while at the same time the existing effects of the Syndrome can

exacerbate the climate crisis. Countries that are in line with the Syndrome have reduced interest in mitigating climate crisis effects and tend to neglect issues such as clean air and water within their policy-making process (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 175). This approach eventually destabilises a country and creates security problems.
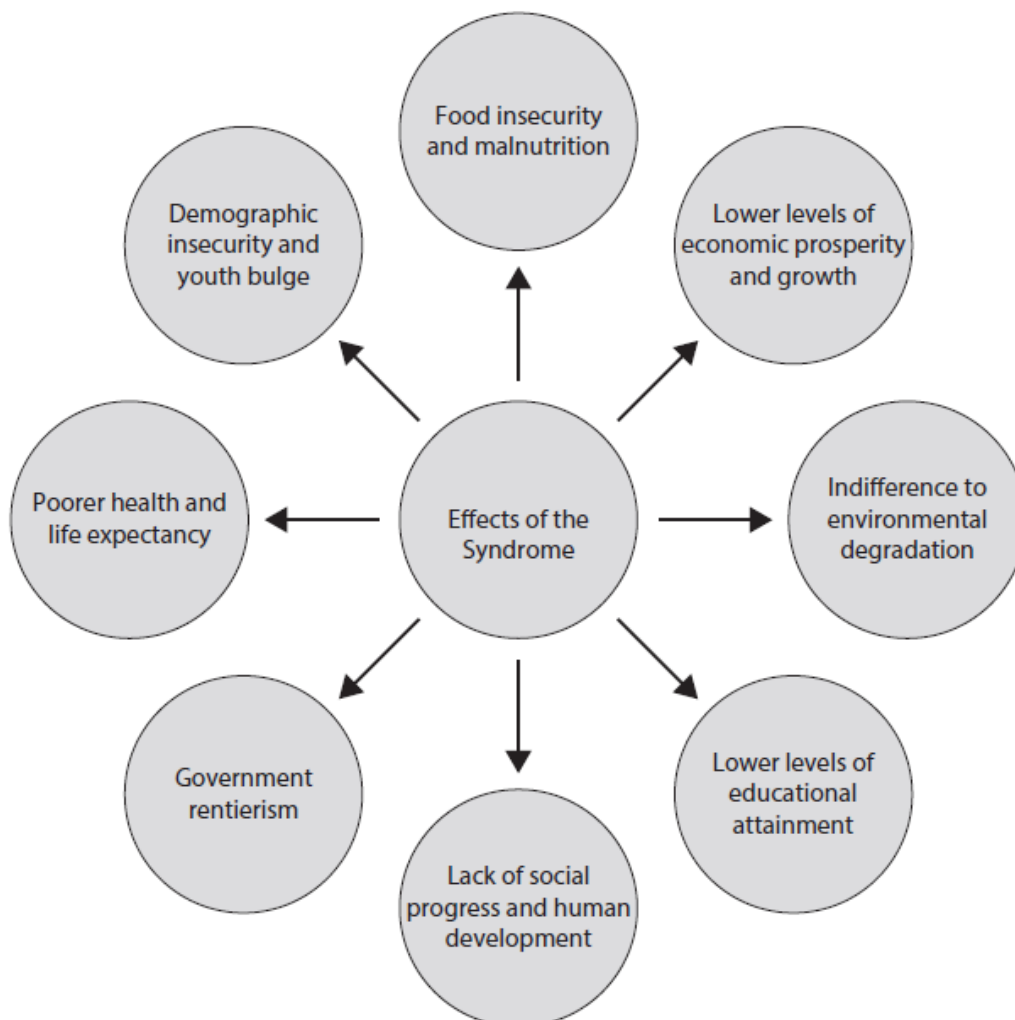

Figure 1. Effects of the Syndrome (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 168)

The Syndrome and Women's Voice

The study also places emphasis on how women voice their concerns within the current political system (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 176). Again, the comparison between the macro and the micro-level becomes relevant. The involvement of women within the state structures and

practices can be compared with women's involvement and power within the household (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 176). In "Syndrome-encoding countries", women have little to no involvement in household decision-making, however this translates to their limited participation within the higher levels of their community and, eventually, the national level (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 176). Thus, women's "values, priorities, and concerns" are not included in the societal discourse (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 176). In other words, women face hardship and discrimination, and the root cause is that they do not have the space to express what they want and need, and to make sure their wishes and needs are incorporated within the responses and practices of society, including the state.

The Gendered Impact of the Climate Crisis

The changes in climate not only lead to natural disasters such as drought, floods, and extreme weather events, but also put more and more pressure on our social, economic and political systems (IPCC, 2021). This phenomenon is affecting people around the world; however, vulnerable groups face a greater risk (Andrijevic, et al., 2020). There are different aspects that can make a person vulnerable such as race, ethnicity, and gender. This study focuses solely on the gendered impact of the climate crisis and how this is being reflected in US responses to climate change. The current societies are shaped based on gender roles and relations, from the micro level – families and household – to the macro level – political and economic institutions both on the national and international level (Hudson et al., 2020; Huyer et al., 2020). Advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment struggle to influence global, powerful actors including international and national institutions in a direction that brings substantial changes within our "debates, policies and practices" when it comes to the climate crisis (Huyer et al., 2020, p. 572).

Based on the gender differentiation, women make up the group that is most impacted by the climate crisis (Gaard, 2015). However, their vulnerability and exposure were not inherited but rather a result of the established gendered roles within societies, of discrimination and of poverty (Gaard, 2015, p. 23). Concretely, the facts present a clear picture. A study conducted in Sweden revealed that men's habits of consumption create more carbon dioxide emissions compared to the habits of women (Kanyama, 2021). In addition, the top 1 percent of biggest income earners, predominantly male, are responsible for more carbon dioxide emissions compared to the bottom 50 percent of people part of the same category (UNEP, 2020, p. xxv). This is equivalent to 70 million people that are situated at the top and 3.5 billion people that are at the bottom (UNEP, 2020). The consequences for women and girls are severe: 80 percent of people who are displaced as a result of the climate crisis are women (Habtezion, 2016). These consequences come on top of the existing gender economic gap which places women in a more vulnerable position in case of natural disasters, or economic crises. Women already spend more time than men on domestic and care work which is unpaid work (Seck et al., 2021, p. 118). Moreover, women are also more likely to experience loss in their paid work (Seck et al., 2021, p. 118). Lastly, in some parts of the world, the climate crisis consequences have a direct effect on women and girls' exposure to violence (Gevers et al., 2020). In Uganda, for example, women in need of food have to undertake longer journeys to find it which exposes them to sexual assault (Gevers et al., 2020). Therefore, against this background, the gender dimension of the climate crisis seems necessary in the process of finding solutions and mitigating its impacts.

Unfortunately, most of the evidence points out that there is little consideration of gender issues within the climate crisis discourse, and that the process of integrating gender in the discussion has been slow (Huyer et al., 2020). Instead, gender inequality is addressed as a different, separate issue (Raczek et al., 2010; as cited in Huyer et al., 2020, p. 573). Therefore,

this research aims to understand how public figures and institutions understand the relation between gender inequality and the climate crisis, and what meaning they attribute to both concepts and phenomena, and the relationship between them. It is important to note that the IPCC, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, lacks an equal female representation within its structural system having, for example, only 27 percent of author nominations for the IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C female (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018; Nhamo & Nhamo, 2018; as cited in Huyer et al., 2020, p. 573). This is a relevant example of an institution on the global level that shows that there is room for improvement when it comes to women's participation. On the national level, in the US, the Biden-Harris administration has acknowledged the lack of female representation within the country's political system in the beginning of their mandate. In their "National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality" (2021), the following data is included: "women fill only a quarter of seats in Congress and 30% of state executive and legislative positions", and within the private sector women remain underrepresented (p. 35). In other words, women have little agency to propose, contribute, and shape policies and practices, and integrate their needs into the process of mitigating the climate crisis.

Various advocates among which feminists aim to bring about more progress when it comes to gender equality (Huyer et al., 2020). Feminist advocates face substantial challenges mainly because strategies that have showed results in the past when it came to women's independence and equal position are now insufficient to touch upon greater and more deeper issues within "national debates, policies, and practices concerning climate crisis" (Huyer et al., 2020, p. 572). In 2018, UN Women (2019) found that there are more women confronting poverty than men. Poverty discrepancy is one aspect of how the climate crisis can deepen gender inequality. Nevertheless, gender inequality is rarely associated with the climate crisis in debates and policymaking processes (Raczek et al., 2010; as cited in Huyer et al., 2020, p. 573). In addition, advocates warned that without proper consideration of the gender aspect and

the social dimension of this crisis within the adaptation and mitigation approaches, the consequences felt by women both in the Global North and the Global South will drastically increase (Terry, 2009). Therefore, this study is relevant because it assesses whether gender inequality is part of the approach and dialogue of what has been and is still considered by some the world's most powerful country, the US. Despite the rise to power of other countries such as China and India, the US preserved its influence over state and non-state actors around the world. Thus, the US' behaviour can provide crucial insights into the position of gender inequality within the climate crisis public governmental discourse.

Women's empowerment was coined as a key matter on the international agenda in 2013 when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) addressed the issue of child marriage through a stand-alone resolution (Menz, 2016, p. 497). This way, the link between gender equality and a states' stability – whether economic or political – was recognised (Menz, 2016). In other words, gender (in)equality, security and a country's stability become interconnected and relevant for the context of this study. The climate crisis, a crisis that threatens people's access to basic resources such as water and food (Butt et al., 2020; Dankelman & Naidu, 2020), jeopardises both the physical security of people and the political and economic stability of their countries (UN Environment Programme et al., 2020; as cited in Dankelman & Naidu, 2020, p. 449). In addition, during the last decades, social and economic developments have had a patriarchal neoliberal character that increased inequality and discrimination through an uneven distribution of wealth among classes (Dankelman & Naidu, 2020, p. 449). Thus, the social, political, and economic components of the climate crisis make up a complex picture. For this reason, to understand how to tackle this crisis, all relevant actors – state and non-state – need to understand the "sociology of climate change" (MacGregor, 2010, p. 137). This understanding is crucial because it informs us on how different responses to the climate crisis are directly connected to power relations within our societies (Djoudi et al., 2013; Tschakert,

2012). Power dynamics hint towards social identities which, in the end, include gender as a key element (Djoudi et al., 2016, p. S248).

The reality indicates that climate emergencies affect women the most by threatening their lives and livelihoods and by increasing gender-based violence (GBV) (Abou-Habib et al., 2020, p. 224; Butt et al., 2020, p. 481; Dankelman & Naidu, 2020, p. 450). Consequently, the political and economic effects leave a mark on the society, disrupting different sectors such as health and education, and threatening women's security and dignity (Dankelman, 2010; as cited in Dankelman & Naidu, 2020, p. 450). However, the gender gaps within societies around the world have affected women and girls in various aspects of their lives. Starting with 2016, the progress that was achieved in closing these gaps has slowed down, and in 2019 a 31.4 percent gap still existed between men and women in areas such as employment, political leadership, and health (World Economic Forum, 2019, p. 5). It is estimated that this gap will close in another 99.5 years (World Economic Forum, 2019, p. 6). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how gendered the issue of climate crisis is and whether the gendered aspect of the issue is recognised by important actors in the process of policymaking. In this context, answering this study's research question – *How is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S. responses to the climate crisis* – sheds light on the characteristics that need to be accounted for in order to develop sustainable and inclusive solutions. The case of the US can offer insights into various positions on the issue of climate change because of its two-party political system, and its power within the international political arena. Moreover, the last two administrations present polarising political positions and, for this reason, allow for fruitful comparison when it comes to the main topics, gender inequality and the climate crisis.

As regard to the climate crisis, a substantial part of the dialogue on it argues against it, denying its existence (Marlow et al., 2021). Traditional media such as newspapers and tv programs are influenced by groups related to the fossil fuel industry, thus, having the power to

influence how this public issue is framed (Brulle & Aronczyk, 2019; Dunlap & McCright, 2015; Wetts, 2020). For this reason, the context of public statements, governmental documents and interviews is crucial for understanding the way gender inequality and the climate crisis are approached by public figures with political power. Despite the promise that social media would be the tool that is able to offer more freedom while maintaining its independence (Castells, 2012; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Mason, 2012; as cited in Marlow et al., 2021, p. 766), the public opinion on the climate crisis in the virtual world remains polarised (Kirilenko & Stepchenkova, 2014; Pearce et al., 2014; Roxburgh et al., 2019; as cited in Marlow et al., 2021, p. 766).

Therefore, there is little consideration for gender inequality within the discourse on the climate crisis, and when it comes to writing and implementing environmental policy. Although previous academic research includes gender inequality and discusses the gendered aspect of environmental issues and the climate crisis, this seems to not be enough in order to influence the public discussion. This study is extremely relevant because it can inform readers on the importance of context and on various positions that political leaders take publicly on climate-related issues and how gender inequality is accounted for in the case of these issues. The aim is to reach a better understanding of the power dynamics within the governmental discourse, and to check whether any tendencies or patterns can be identified more than once. The case of the US is the most suitable because of its domestic political duality and high rate of polarisation within its parties but also within its population. The role of the media is essential because it represents one of the main sources for gathering public statements and press releases. In addition, governmental documents and public speeches are also sources that can contain key information for this research. Lastly, the study is first and foremost based upon previous findings and later builds upon data gathered through primary sources. The research question remains relevant not only for the improvement of environmental policy but, most importantly,

for filling in the research gap on gender inequality's role within the process of responding and adapting to the climate crisis.

Links and Research Questions

The proposed research question – *How is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S. responses to the climate crisis?* – is based upon recent key political and economic events that have had a great impact on women in particular, and on existing literature that focuses on security issues, gender-related issues, and the climate crisis. This part presents the prior research that lies at the core of the research question, and the aim in trying to answer the proposed question. A recent study published in 2020 linked political instability with the oppression of women, particularly with the violation of women's rights (Hudson et al., 2020). The study presents empirical evidence proving that in trying to ensure collective security through power and dominance, male alliances undermine that exact security as a result of oppressing women within this process (Hudson et al., 2020, p.3). In this context, another study published in 2020 tested whether there is a causal relationship between climate change and political instability (Sofuoğlu & Ay, 2020). The findings showed that in all MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries there is at least one causal relationship from climate change to political instability (Sofuoğlu & Ay, 2020). In addition to this gendered relational power dynamic between men and women, women are more vulnerable and face more threat when it comes to climate emergencies (Andrijevic et al., 2020; Huyer et al., 2020; Sallan, 2020).

Causal Relationship

Therefore, first, there is evidence that political instability is linked with women's oppression, meaning that there is a positive causal relationship between political instability and women's oppression. The more a society oppresses women, the more instability that same

society will experience (Hudson et al., 2020). Second, there is evidence that links the climate crisis to political instability (Sofuoğlu & Ay, 2020). In other words, there is a positive causal relationship between the climate crisis and political instability meaning that the crisis' consequences can increase a state's political instability. In addition, as mentioned previously in this study, the climate crisis has a greater impact on women than men. Taking into account all these causal relationships, I argue that there is an indirect causal link between the climate crisis and the level of oppression that women are experiencing. In this context, this study is a step further in understanding how gender inequality is accounted for within the climate crisis mitigation process in the US. The disproportionately imbalanced power dynamic between men and women can be one of the reasons why women are impacted more by the current climate crisis. Moreover, their vulnerable position can also be the cause of inefficient policies and consideration towards their needs and gender-based differences such as the economic gender gap. Lastly, the lack of consideration for gender within environmental policy and governance can simply be explained consequently due to a lack of knowledge and information on the correlation between these three phenomena – gender inequality, political instability, and the climate crisis.

All these aspects need to be carefully analysed in order to understand why and how gender inequality was and is integrated in the governmental discourse. In order to have access to a diverse set of sources and in order to have more accurate findings, the study focuses on the case of the US. There are three sub-questions that lead up towards the main research question. The first question is *How is the climate crisis presented in the case of the US?* The aim is to understand the various positions within the American political system on the climate crisis, and the approaches that both the Democrats and the Republicans use. The second set of questions is *How or are their positions and approaches gendered? How is gender inequality accounted for in their governmental discourse?* This part of the research identifies the role of gender

within the politics relating to the climate crisis. The emphasis lies especially on whether gender is considered, and if it is, how it is integrated within different public interactions or statements. The former Trump administration will be contrasted to the Biden administration, however, the main subject throughout the research is the current administration. The third question is *How or are these being responded to within policy and practice?* With this question, the aim is to understand whether (if any) gendered positions and approaches influence environmental policy and its implementation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach of this study is based on the feminist approach and on the ecofeminist movement. Within the feminist approach there are two relevant branches that will contribute to this study – intersectionality and the postcolonial feminist approach. Intersectionality is a prominent feminist theory that has a strong focus on inequality while postcolonial feminist theory focuses more on "global power relations and interactions" (Kerner, 2017, p. 846). Both theories are equally relevant for this study's research question and analysis. Intersectionality adopts a local or national character when it comes to its methodological approach (Kerner, 2017, p. 847), while postcolonialism theory adopts a transnational approach pointing out the power-based differences between the North and the South (Kerner, 2017, p. 854). This juxtaposition is essential because the analysis includes the domestic level meaning the relationship between the American leading class, and the American population, and the influence of the US governmental discourse and actions across borders on the transnational and international level. First, existing literature on intersectionality focuses on "stressing, describing, and theorising" the various kinds of inequality and how they interact within the various subgroups of women (Kerner, 2017, p. 847). Second, postcolonial theories focus on the heterogeneous character of the global feminist project, specifically on the "*power*

relations among women" and the contradicting opinions that exist on the project's trajectory (Kerner, 2017, p. 847). Most importantly, postcolonial theorists, contrary to the intersectional scholarship (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 233) provide further suggestions on how solidarity can be achieved despite the existing differences within the feminist project (Kerner, 2017). Within intersectional research, postcolonial feminist theories fully adopt a global and historical perspective (Kerner, 2017, p. 855). These recommendations are crucial parts of the existing scholarship for the case of the climate crisis.

Postcolonial Theory in Relation to Intersectionality

The two branches of feminist theory diverge in their focus. Intersectionality grounds itself in the study of inequality, while postcolonial theory focuses on power relations (Kerner, 2017, p. 859). The latter can also be defined as the "global critical theory" since it is built upon a set of critiques of power (Kerner, 2017, p. 859). Postcolonial theory presents a more complex methodology because the phenomenon of power is more difficult to grasp in both theoretical and empirical manners compared to inequality which can be more easily interpreted (Kerner, 2017, p. 859). It is important to note that both theories have compatible goals (Kerner, 2017). Thus, it is not uncommon nor unwise to combine the two in order to assess a phenomenon. In this process, it is crucial to understand that while intersectionality makes more use of empirical evidence when looking at inequality, postcolonial theory is built upon presuppositions, in other words, assumptions on the power relations existent in the world (Kerner, 2017, p. 860). Against this background, combining the two theories can add value to the understanding of a phenomenon. This study integrates only one view of postcolonial theory – the focus on North-South power asymmetry (Kerner, 2017, p. 854).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a new concept within the broader feminist theoretical framework (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). In Europe and North America especially, the notion of intersectionality has taken the lead within gender research (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). Thus, it is not too much to argue that intersectionality "is well on its way to become institutionalised and included in the ongoing bureaucratization of politics" (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 234). The term was initially used in the 1980s when intersectional research was developed by the American lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991; as cited in Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 235). Crenshaw's aim is to stress that, until then, feminists, mostly white, separated themselves from black feminists failing to include them within the movement (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). This translated into a feminist agenda that only focused on the problems of a group represented by a middle-class, predominantly white women (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). After the term started to be used in Europe as well, its meaning became more powerful transcending the metaphor nature and developing into a theory or a methodology (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). In the 2010s, the concept developed even more and became part of the structuralist context (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). Later, American sociologist Leslie McCall was the first person who aimed to expand the role of intersectionality by defining it as a common approach for all feminist research (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013).

Nordic feminist scholar Nina Lykke (2005) discusses and argues for intersectionality defined and used as a "common nodal point" for any feminists that perceive the notion of power as more than one-dimensional aspect within different phenomena (as cited in Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 236). Similarly, American sociologist Kathy Davis (2008) describes intersectionality as a focal point bringing together different feminist threads (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 236). Davis (2008) states that "intersectionality is most often associated with US Black feminist theory and the political project of theorizing the relationships between

gender, class, and race" (p. 70; as cited in Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 236). Although intersectionality has structuralist roots, the concept developed into a theory defined by poststructuralist features (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 237). The transformation, however, is not entirely clear: "not only is the historization of the concept somewhat apprehensive, but the attempt to reformulate intersectionality (with its structuralist rooting) to fit into poststructuralism is also quite imprecise" (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 237). Despite the different nuances of intersectionality across time and space, today, the concept is used by everyone who is part of the feminist movement (Carbing & Edenheim, 2013). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that intersectionality "has been successful through the lack of ontology" not only failing to engage thoroughly with feminist theories but also failing to acknowledge that it is not possible for all feminist theories to be under its umbrella (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 245). In other words, throughout this study it is crucial to acknowledge how different aspects of one's identity might contribute to the different consequences and responses to the climate crisis; however, the focus will remain on the category of gender rather than class and race. Thus, intersectionality will not be used as an overarching concept within the feminist theory.

Women's Role based on Feminist Theory and Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a newly developed movement combining various approaches such as the ecological and the feminist approach (Hamad, 2013). The first significant action that displayed the role of women in environmental protection was the 1991 World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet organised by the Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) in Miami, Florida (WEDO, 2012; as cited in Gaard, 2015, p. 21). The Congress represented the "entry-point for feminism into the UN conferences on the global environment" giving future opportunities for further collaborations between feminists and

climate change activists (Gaard, 2015, p. 21). The congress represented the preparation phase before the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and the aim was to establish a common agenda based on consensus between climate activists. The 'Women's Agenda 21' (1991) which was the outcome of the congress included themes such as consumption, technology, and population (Gaard, 2015, p. 22). Nonetheless, during that period the focus was on women rather than gender resulting in the portrayal of women "as victims of environmental degradation in need of rescue" (Gaard, 2015, p. 21). The portrayal of women as vulnerable can shift the focus from more important matters such as gender inequality within decision-making (Seema, 2011). In other words, although limited, there was consideration of the issues women were confronting, however, there was little agency that women had in order to share their experiences and propose solutions. Therefore, what came next was a shift in how women were perceived in relation to societal structures: "the shift from *women as individuals* to *gender as a system structuring power relations* has been an important development in feminist responses to climate change" (Gaard, 2015, p. 22).

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism brought about an additional layer to feminist theory and the concept of intersectionality. Although feminist scholars such as Collins (1990) and Crenshaw (1991) stressed the importance and role of intersectionality as a concept that explains the relationship between mainly race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Gaard, 2015, p. 30), ecofeminism argues for the importance of other species and ecosystems in how we perceive and understand the existing power dynamics (Gaard, 2015). In the current context of the world, ecofeminism points towards the "erroneous assumption that humans and nature are at odds with one another" (Hamad, 2013, p. 3). Victoria Davion is the scholar who significantly contributed to shaping the field of ecofeminism (Mallory, 2018). Davion (1994a) argued that the feminist perspective

is needed to reach "a fuller understanding of the domination of nature by human beings", and for "the generation of a deeper environmental ethic" (p. 9). However, it is important to recognise the many criticisms that ecofeminism has received as a new movement (Mallory, 2018). Davion (1994b) points out that any idea labelled as an ecofeminist argument that is not part of the feminist movement, is essentially not an ecofeminist argument since ecofeminism is a new development of feminism (p. 278). In other words, ecofeminism does pose few problematic questions as a new branch of feminism. In this study, the focus lies on ecofeminism as the movement that acknowledges and draws attention to the relationship between nature and the human being, more precisely to the link between the oppression of women and nature's degradation (Mallory, 2018, p. 29).

Methodology

This part presents governmental documents and publications from both the Trump and the Biden mandate that are relevant for the study's research question: *How is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S. responses to the climate crisis?* The method that is used for coding and presenting the data is a critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA "is a theoretical and methodological framework that allows one to examine the constitutive role that discourses play in contemporary society" (Mills et al., 2012, p. 2). This approach is part of a broader category of qualitative research methods because it is a method that heavily relies on the interpretation of text rather than numbers, or statistics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 254). The focus of this study will be on the way gender inequality is used within the US governmental discourse on the climate crisis. First, this method is the most suitable for this study's topic because it centres entirely around language and its role in connection to the power relations within social, societal, and political life (Mills et al., 2012, p. 2). The focus is solely on the social problems and inequalities that exist in contemporary societies (Mills et al., 2012). Second, when using CDA

the critical stance of the researcher becomes part of the method (Mills et al., 2012). In other words, the researcher cannot guarantee neutrality, thus offering a unique critical perspective (Mills et al., 2012). Third, contextuality is a key aspect of CDA (Mills et al., 2012). In addition, this method focuses on discursive practices that refer to how the text was produced and how it is interpreted by the producer, thus, paying attention to the context, whether it is social, cultural, or institutional, and the meaning attributed to concepts and statements (Mills et al., 2012). Hence, contextuality offers a broader and more accurate perspective by looking at the context of the produced text. Lastly, intertextuality is a key aspect of CDA (Mills et al., 2012). This is to say that the researcher cannot analyse specific pieces of text without considering other texts relevant to the study's themes and topic (Mills et al., 2012).

The unit of analysis is gender inequality in relation to the climate crisis within the governmental discourse in the case of the US. Although the starting and overarching topic of my research is the climate crisis, the central focus is on the concept and phenomenon of gender inequality. I chose this phenomenon because previous literature has proved that there is little consideration of the role of gender within the politics of the climate crisis (Denton, 2002; Huyer et al., 2020; MacGregor, 2010). This issue has multiple consequences. First, few women are included in the decision-making and policy-making processes concerning the climate crisis. Second, women are among the most vulnerable groups from the social, political, economic and security points of view. Not only that their physical safety is more prone to be in danger, but they are more prone to displacement and economic struggle because of their role as caretakers, and their role when it comes to unpaid domestic work. Lastly, considering the differences between men and women, and including all women's needs not only helps create more inclusive policy, but also contributes to a better society overall since it has been proved that the well-being of women brings gains to everyone – women, men and the state (Hudson et al., 2020; Menz, 2016).

Most importantly, CDA is utilised when the researcher aims to "understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). Critical research has four essential properties. First, as mentioned in the previous sentence, critical research focuses on issues that have a social and political nature, thus both the social and political context of discourse are crucial for the analysis (Van Dijk, 3025, p. 467). Second, due to its focus on social inequalities, CDA requires a multidisciplinary approach integrating key themes and concepts from more than one field of study (Van Dijk, 2015). Third, through this method the analyst goes beyond merely describing the structure of the discourse and is aiming to explain this structure "in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 467). Lastly, and above all, CDA reveals how discourse structures "enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power abuse (dominance)* in society" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 467). In other words, CDA uses a critical lens developed by the researcher to understand, explain, and present the power dynamics and social inequalities present in the subject of their choice. Therefore, approaching this study's topic through CDA enables the researcher to understand the power dynamics that lie at the root of the relationship between gender inequality and the climate crisis. In order to analyse and organise the text, the qualitative analysis tool *Atlas.ti* was used.

Analysis

International vs National

There are many "policy debates, conventions, and agreements" on the international level that tackle the nexus between the climate crisis and gender inequality (Huyer et al., 2020, p. 576). However, national strategies, debates, and practices hold a crucial role for an effective response both on the international and on the national level (Huyer et al., 2020). The domestic

response is powerful because most international policy statements and agreements are not enforceable, thus legally non-binding for state and non-state actors (Huyer et al., 2020). In other words, international laws, policies, and agreements create an environment in which non-binding norms and standards can be developed and pushed forward (Huyer et al., 2020). This process allows climate activists and feminists "to lobby national governements to act on international commitments and standards" (Huyer et al., 2020, p. 577). Unfortunately, in the case of gender inequality, this process in which norms and standards shift from international to national level has brought about limited results in addressing the issue (Ampaire et al., 2020; as cited in Huyer et al., 2020, p. 583). A potential reason for the slow progress is that the root cause, i.e., structural inequalities within societies, is not addressed within the debate and policy-making practice concerning the climate crisis, and this leads to policies that focus only on short-term needs (Seema, 2011; Okali & Naess 2013; as cited in Huyer et al., 2020, p. 583). Thus, there is no guarantee that the international level can effectively influence the national level. Nevertheless, the international debates, norms and standards do create an environment that can help various actors in pushing for social change. The next section focuses on the national strategy of the US published at the beginning of the Biden mandate.

Biden-Harris National Strategy

This part presents pieces of text from the "National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality" published by the White House (2021) at the beginning of the Biden-Harris administration. Prior to analysing the text of the national strategy, it is essential to note that while the text is part of the micro-level of social order, the underlying themes such as power or inequality are part of the macro-level of analysis (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Van Dijk, 2015). This reiterates that the focus is on institutional discourse, with the concept of institution defined as "an established organization or foundation, especially one dedicated to education,

public service, or culture" (Mayr, 2015, p. 757). The strategy contains three main sections: "Guiding Principles", "Strategic Priorities", and "Implementation"; the second section contains the chapter called "Promote Gender Equity in Mitigating and Responding to Climate Change" (The White House, 2021c, p.5). The chapter begins with the following sentences:

> *Tackling the climate crisis requires ambition, innovation, and broad mobilization and will depend on the commitment and participation of all people. But gender-based discrimination and exclusion in climate policy decision-making at all levels of government current inhibit progress on a full range of solutions to address climate change and associated threats, such as extreme weather and disasters, natural resource depletion, and growing instability that puts homes, livelihoods, and security of millions at risk.* (The White House, 2021c, p. 30).

Despite the fact that the first sentence focuses on what is needed in order to address the climate crisis, the second sentence turns immediately towards the gender-related issues within the governmental system of the US. Gender inequality is linked to "climate policy decision-making", one of the processes that is intended to bring about progress in mitigating the effects of the climate crisis. The administration implicitly acknowledges that in order to combat these effects women are needed, and that they play a crucial role. This is a crucial acknowledgement that has not been explicitly made before by previous administrations. The later parts of this analysis will consider the Trump administration's approach to women's role within the climate crisis context.

Furthermore, multiple solutions are presented throughout the chapter in order to explain how the administration will ensure gender equity and equality. Amongst others, the most important are: "pursue gender parity in climate negotiations and climate science", "address gendered public health effects related to climate change", "seek to increase diverse representation in climate negotiations, diplomacy, policymaking, and the climate science

field", and "support broadening women's inclusion in the development of their communities" (The White House, 2021c, p. 30-31). These steps seem active steps towards mitigating gender inequality and the language proves that, through the usage of active verbs such as *address*, *seek*, and *support*. However, it can be argued that these solutions are rather vague because there is no account for how these goals will be achieved. Later in the chapter some of these steps are more thoroughly addressed and presented. For example, in the subsection called "Pursue Gender Parity in Climate Negotiations and Climate Science", the administration explains how they can seek a more diverse representation in fields such as climate negotiations, diplomacy, policy making and climate science. However, they only expand on how women and girls' education and training in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) will be promoted (The White House, 2021c, p. 31). They fail to explain how they will and can ensure women's involvement in climate negotiations, diplomacy, and policymaking.

To fully understand the overarching themes within the White House's plans, and to see the broader picture, I used the software, *Atlas.ti* to code the national strategy, identify common patterns, and create a word cloud. It is important to define the notions of theme and code within this qualitative study. The theme refers to the "unit of meaning" that I observed within the text sample, and the code is the "textual description" of the linguistic limits of a certain theme or part of a theme (Guest et al., 2014, p. 51). Despite the fact that assigning themes and concepts to pieces of text is a feature of thematic analysis, I will incorporate this technique in order to identify and categorise patterns within my data. First, in order to put together the numerous plans mentioned within the national strategy I created the code *solutions*. Further, I assigned it to any sentence, paragraph or textual part that includes a plan, a proposal, or a solution for how the Biden-Harris administration will achieve their goals on gender inequality and equity within the mitigating process of the climate crisis. By using *Atlas.ti* I created a word cloud with the words that regularly appeared in the text coded as *solutions*, thus the words that were most

often associated with the code *solutions*. In Figure 2, the cloud presents the common words that have been identified within all the texts coded as *solutions*: the bigger the word is the more often it was utilised within the document. Each word part of this cloud appeared at least once in every textual segment that was coded as *solutions*. The number of times each word appears is called occurring frequency (Atlas.ti, n.d.).

Figure 2. Word Cloud 'Solutions'

Figure 3 presents a new cloud with a different occurring frequency, this time ten, meaning that each word appeared at least ten times in each textual segment. The terms – *women, gender, including, will, and climate* – can be associated with three main fields. The group made of *women* and *gender* relates to the gendered dimension of the issue, *climate* refers to the climate crisis, and *will* relates to the administration's actions, in other words, it proves the document's nature – putting forward long-term strategies. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that these words can add little value to women's lives within the US society if the plans they represent are not put into practice. In addition, it is important to note what it means to make use of some of the words that were included in the Biden-Harris strategy. First, there are words

with a positive connotation such as *inclusive*, *parity*, *participation*, and *representation*. It can be argued that these words represent the goals that ideally would be reached through the strategy. Second, words such as *harassment*, and *underrepresented* have a negative connotation, however, Figure 2 shows that they were used often considering their size within the cloud. The frequency of these words – *harassment* and *underrepresented* – prove that there is acknowledgement when it comes to the phenomena they represent. For example, the word *harassment* can translate to gender-related phenomena present within societies such as sexual harassment, work-place harassment, and gender-based violence. It is important to acknowledge the already existing gender-related issues before making any promises. However, this is only an account of the way gender is considered on paper.

Figure 3. Word Cloud with the Most Frequently Used Words

At the same time, throughout two relevant chapters, "Promote Gender Equity in Mitigating and Responding to Climate Change" and "Advance Full Participation in Democracy, Representation, and Leadership", the word "should" appear on three occasions, and denotes a language that is more passive. The first time refers to how women "should play critical leadership roles in advancing climate goals at all levels of government" (The White House, 2021c, p. 31). Although this recognition is important, the text provides no evidence of real efforts and plans that would make these steps possible. The second paragraph in which "should" appears refers to opportunities "women and members of the underserved community should have access to" (The White House, 2021c, p. 31). The word "opportunities" refers to the new jobs that will be created because of the climate crisis mitigation process (The White House, 2021c, p. 31). Once again, the language is vague and general when it comes to the terms

that are being used. "Opportunities", "underserved communities" and even "new jobs" present little to no clear understanding on what types of changes and transitions will happen throughout the climate crisis mitigation process. In the last case, "should" is not directly stated but it is implied:

> *...countries that provide a safe and enabling environment for women to participate equitably in politics and public life produce more inclusive, and effective policy outcomes, are more peaceful, have higher economic growth, and are more stable as societies.* (The White House, 2021c, p. 34).

This text can translate to: if states aim to have more sustainable peace, be more stable, have more effective regulations, be more inclusive, and have a stronger economy, they should put their efforts into creating a welcoming political and public environment for women. Notwithstanding that the statement aligns with the 2020 study (Hudson et al., 2020) that linked political instability with women's oppression, the statement maintains the same ambiguous style, enumerating all the benefits but not presenting any concrete actions on how to achieve better female representation within the political system.

Only later in the document, several plans are outlined among which "strengthen our ability to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain a diverse group of people in our workforce", "promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in federal appointments, including Cabinet positions, judicial appointments, Ambassadorship, military appointments, and other senior posts", and "examine opportunities for women in non-traditional occupations, including in science and technology, law enforcement, security, and intelligence" (The White House, 2021c, p. 35). The language, in this case, offers a more detailed explanation on how the Biden-Harris administration will create and maintain an environment that empowers women within American society and political institutional structures. Nevertheless, there is no certainty how and whether these plans will come into place. Towards the end of this section, there is an

account of gender-related issues such as sexual harassment, and workplace harassment in general. The administration offers a more thorough solution for combating gender-related harassment: "amplifying training, education, and monitoring to create a culture that does not tolerate harassment or other forms of discrimination" (The White House, 2021c, p. 36). The style of the language is active and offers the reader more optimism about the feasibility of the proposal since concrete steps are presented. Overall, the document fails to realistically present the shortcomings and any other limitations that the strategy might have.

COP26

However, in different contexts, the Biden-Harris administration was not consistent with their position on the domestic level on arguing the importance of gender equity and equality within the climate crisis discourse. A relevant example is the latest Conference of the Parties (COP) known as COP26 that took place at Glasgow. The conference is a review meeting that takes place regularly with all the parties that have signed and ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). President Biden gave a speech at the conference that reflected upon several themes such as multilateralism, the future and current developments within the field led by the US (UNFCCC, 2021). Despite the fact that Biden reiterated the role of science, along with the severity of the current state of the world, including the economic impact the crisis comes with, he failed to address the socio-political consequences of the crisis including the gendered aspect of it (UNFCCC, 2021). Instead, Biden mentions that by addressing the climate crisis there is an opportunity to "create millions of good paying jobs and opportunities around the world" (UNFCCC, 2021). The tone of the speech seems promising and defensive at the same time, aiming to reassure people but also strengthen the US' role as a leader within the international community. Statement such as "the United States will be able to meet the ambitious target I set in the leader summit and climate back in April",

"the United States is not only back at the table but hopefully leading by the power of our example", and "we want to do more to help countries around the world" reinforce the idea that the US can be a role model for other countries and a country powerful enough to also be concerned with and invest in the progress of other countries (UNFCCC, 2021). The speech not only fails to take into account the socio-political aspects and consequences of the crisis, but also fails to touch upon the role of women as a vulnerable group within the mitigation process.

Trump's National Security Strategy

In contrast, the Trump administration has not published any strategy on gender equity and equality. The administration published a national strategy in December 2017 named "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (White House, 2017). Starting with the Table of Contents, the word *gender* or any synonym of the word misses from the strategy altogether (The White House, 2017). The table of contents is split into four pillars: "Protect The American People, The Homeland, and The American Way of Life", "Promote American Prosperity", "Preserve Peace Through Strength", and "Advance American Influence" (The White House, 2017, p. V-VI). This shows a different language with more nationalistic and populist tendencies. Phrases such as "American Way of Life", and "American People" argue for a unitary way of being and living within the US. This implies that any other way of being, and living are regarded and deemed as less important. In addition, the document contains a chapter on the regional context with subchapters on different regions such as the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere (The White House, 2017). Overall, the language of the document is harsher, and follows a realistic narrative that focuses only on the national security of the country and how to ensure it. On one hand, the document contains strategies on external issues or threats such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD), pandemics, and Jihadist Terrorists (The White House, 2017). On the other hand, the document

focuses on internal aspects such as the domestic economy, innovation, and renewal of military, and intelligence capabilities (The White House, 2017).

Nonetheless, in January 2021 the Trump administration published on its website – trumpwhitehouse.com – a list with *accomplishments*, in other words, what they have achieved in four years (Trump White House Archives, 2021). The word *gender* appears only one time in the list of *accomplishments*, referring to the importance of the gender dimension when deciding how to distribute resources within "communities disproportionately harmed by the (corona) virus" (Trump White House Archives, 2021). Nonetheless, the list contains a chapter named "Advanced women's economic empowerment". The first point under this chapter is "Included women's empowerment for the first time in the President's 2017 National Security Strategy" (Trump White House Archives, 2021). However, this is not accurate. In the 2015 "National Security Strategy", the Obama administration includes "women's equality and empowerment" under the subchapter called "End Extreme Poverty" (The White House, 2015). In addition, the Trump administrations mentioned several acts and laws that were advanced within the four years of taking office. Among others, the "Women, Peace, and Security Act" and the "Women Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act" are mentioned (Trump White House Archives, 2021). The act on peace and security acknowledges women's role within mitigating and resolving violent conflict stating that "peace negotiations are more likely to succeed and to result in durable peace agreement when women participate in the peace process" ("Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017", 2017, p. 1202). Thus, with this act the US promises to introduce a policy that ensures women's participation in conflict "prevention, management and resolution" ("Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017", 2017, p. 1203). In other words, the Trump administration acknowledged, at least on paper, the importance of including women within conflict prevention and resolution processes.

Considering the links between political instability and the climate crisis, and political instability and women's oppression both presented previously in this study, it can be argued that the Trump administration has failed to: 1) address the gendered aspect of the climate crisis, and 2) properly address the impact of the climate crisis on the American society overall. This is not surprising considering that the same administration has described the Paris Agreement as an "unfair, one-sided" international accord (Trump White House Archives, 2021). Moreover, the administration took pride in making more investments in unlocking "America's oil and natural gas" in order to reach the country's full energetic potential (Trump White House Archives, 2021). In line with this *accomplishment*, there are several others that prove the disregards of the administration towards the climate crisis: "cancelled the previous administration's Clean Power Plan", "approved the Keystone XL and Dakota pipelines", and made the US "the number one producer of oil and natural gas in the world" (Trump White House Archives, 2021). In addition to these actions that ultimately deny the climate crisis, the administration has inflicted on women's fundamental rights as well. Included in the list of *accomplishments* is the chapter called "Cherishing Life and Religious Liberty" (Trump White House Archives, 2021). In this chapter, the Trump administration takes pride in being the leader of a group of countries that have cosponsored *The Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family* (2020). The Declaration is an anti-abortion international declaration that was signed by thirty-four countries (GCD Intemarium Conference, 2021). In the list of *accomplishments*, and through the Declaration, the administration argues that there is no international right to abortion (Trump White House Archives, 2021). Therefore, the language and the context during the Trump administration reveals a period in which gender was barely accounted for within any political discussion, the conflict resolution remaining the only example for this administration's consideration. As for

the climate crisis, it would be fallacious to argue that there was ever a serious consideration of it from the Trump administration.

Political Context

The context around which these different national strategies developed is central to understanding the transition from one administration to another, and each predominant discourse. The mandate of Donald Trump left behind a list of changes that will impact American politics for many years to come ("Factbox: Donald Trump's Legacy - Six Policy Takeaways", 2020; Burgat & Glassman, 2021; "30 things Donald Trump did as president you might have missed", 2021). A field in which Trump managed to make the most impactful changes is the judiciary field ("Factbox: Donald Trump's Legacy - Six Policy Takeaways", 2020). During his mandate, the former President appointed three new judges within the US Supreme Court ("Factbox: Donald Trump's Legacy - Six Policy Takeaways", 2020). Today, the decision creates a very thin line between keeping abortion legal or overturning Roe v. Wade after more than half a century during which abortions remained legal (Gerstein & Ward, 2022). The discrepancy between the Trump and the Biden administration sends a strong message that the American society finds itself in a polarised debate. Trump's non-conventional behaviour, and what one would have thought illegal at times before his presidency, can be a new standard for future presidents (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). Moreover, according to this argument, it is the executive attitude that coined the Trumpist era, and that set an example for presidents to come (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). In other words, executive authority can appeal more, and be the core feature of a president, regardless of political affiliation. Another view perceives Trump's election as a mere coincidence of events that occurred at that time on both the national and international level (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). In the greater context, the far-right, populist

parties have started to gain popularity in the US, Europe and other parts of the world (Burgat & Glassman, 2021).

All these perspectives present part of the truth and highlight not only the fragility and flawed nature of the American presidency but also the power that is in the hands of the president (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). The American presidency is flawed because, in time, American presidents have gained more power as legislative leaders (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). Congress lost its policy authority at the expense of a stronger executive branch of the political structure (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). The issue that lies at the core of this structural change – "substituting executive action for legislation" – is durability (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). This is perfectly displayed in the context of the Trump-Biden transition. Trump has signed a great deal of executive orders, some of them cancelling state commitments such as the 2009 Paris Agreement. However, President Biden signed the US back into the Paris accord after just a few hours of being the 46th President of the US (Milman, 2021). It is crucial to note that this is not the only executive order that the Biden administration revokes aimed to address the climate crisis (Milman, 2021). This example depicts the issue of durability thoroughly. The president holds, in his pen, the power to set in motion executive orders, meaning that any future president can use the same power to entirely reserve what has been signed before (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). For this reason, when asking the question, *how is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S. responses to the climate crisis?* it is critical to take into account the political context since the discrepancies in addressing the climate crisis can be substantial based upon the president in power, and his personal and political characteristics.

Discussion

The interconnectedness between different concepts and phenomena

This study presented a range of concepts and phenomena all interconnected under the three major fields that relate to the research question: gender inequality, the climate crisis, and public policy. This section first reiterates the most relevant notions that were used throughout the study. The second part of the section centres around the feminist approach followed by an interpretation of the textual data through the feminist lens. Altogether, the aim is to reach a final understanding of how gender inequality is accounted for throughout two different mandates in the US, and to use developments within the feminist theoretical approach to make sense of the data. According to Hudson et al. (2020), and as mentioned before in this study, there are two levels that are critical for how we understand the relationship between men and women[1], the micro and the macro-level. The micro-level refers to the household, or the family, and is related to the old security provision mechanism, the Patrilineal/Fraternal Syndrome. The macro-level refers to the national level, the state including its political and economic institutions. These two levels offer a parallel that can help provide further understanding into security provision, and the practices and policies that come out as a result. In general, provision of security for a group or a nation is a fundamental concern for human beings. However, throughout the process of security provision, certain power relations and hierarchies come into place, and one of them is women's subordination by men at the micro-level first. Although men use dominance to ensure the group's security, they end up undermining that exact security by oppressing women in the process. At the macro-level, states act in the same manner imposing a hierarchy within a society based on patriarchal beliefs and practices. Thus, states can perceive the citizen as an autonomous actor within society or as a subordinate or dependent.

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[1] Men and women refer to people who identify as such.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to thoroughly understand how much of the Syndrome is present within our current state systems.

However, even if measuring how embedded the Syndrome is within a society is difficult, it is worth mentioning some of its effects. Among others, the Syndrome causes food insecurity, increases the chances of environmental indifference, and affects economic progress. All of these can be linked to the climate crisis, thus linking a state's level of compliance with the Syndrome with the way the same state responds to the climate crisis. In this context, as seen in the female representation within political systems, women's voice does not yet take up enough space. Following the micro and macro level, starting with the household level, women have little power in decision-making, especially in countries that have the Syndrome encoded within their societies. Afghanistan or South Sudan are two contemporary relevant cases (Hudson et al., 2020, p. 50). For example, in Afghanistan women are not allowed to be outside of their homes without a male companion (Gopalakrishnan, 2022). This impacts women's voice further on more macro levels such as women's involvement in their own communities, and eventually nationally, in political and economic institutions. In addition to this restrained position, in the case of the climate crisis, women are making up the group that suffers the most. It is critical to emphasise once again that this is *not* an inherited role but a result of gender roles, poverty, and discrimination. In addition to socio-economic consequences, the climate crisis increases the rates of gender-based violence and sexual harassment that women experience.

It is needless to say that women still participate in climate action and represent a significant part of the activists around the world that fight for faster and more effective change. However, there is much more room that needs to be freed up for women to be able to contribute and shape policies and practices and make sure that their needs are integrated. Current feminist and climate activists aim to bring about more equality between men and women when it come to the decision-making processes. However, even within the feminist movement there are

ideological discrepancies. The theoretical approach of this study combined three key branches of feminist theory: intersectionality, postcolonial theory, and ecofeminism. Intersectionality focuses solely on the inequality between different groups based on aspects such as race, gender and ethnicity, while postcolonial theory is a critical approach to power relations on the global level. Postcolonial theories focus more on how these discrepancies can be solved through solidarity (Kerner, 2017). Lastly, ecofeminism aims to bring together climate activist and feminists emphasising the importance of nature within the power dynamics of our societies. The ecofeminist approach points towards the relationship between human beings and nature and argues that research needs to shift its focus on the power dynamics of this interaction. The following paragraph discusses the data by using the arguments and principles of the three theoretical approaches.

Research questions

The remaining of this section is divided based on the three sub questions of this research. Hence, the first question is *How is the climate crisis presented in the case of the US?* The two mandates that this study presented portray a clear polarisation within the US political class. Based on the data taken from the Trump administration's "National Security Strategy of the United States of America", there was no acknowledgement of the urgency of the climate crisis. Worse yet, the climate crisis was entirely denied, and the focus shifted towards securing the country's energy independence and economic development. President Trump has proved his conviction through various actions such as withdrawing the US from the 2009 Paris Agreement and investing in the country's oil and natural gas resources. Analysed through an ecofeminist lens, the circumstances of those years (2017-2021) can be described as a full representation of humankind's domination over nature, disregarding the well-being of any other species and natural habitats in the process of securing the well-being and current lifestyle of

humans. In this context, it is important to remember that Trump also described the Paris Agreement as a "one-sided" accord (Trump White House Archives, 2021). The former President made it clear that he perceives the agreement as a deal that does not bring any benefit to the US or to the American people. However, making this decision without any consultation with the public shows that Trump had no consideration of the public opinion on the matter, thus treating American citizens as mere subordinates of the state. Therefore, within the climate crisis debate, there was a disproportionate distribution of power within the political system. Former President Trump was able to deny the climate crisis, sign executive orders that would endanger the environment, and make false claims without the possibility of any future repercussions (Burgat & Glassman, 2021). This can also be seen in the power the former President had in naming new judges and signing a set of executive orders to make legislative changes.

In contrast, the Biden administration seems more committed to address and work towards mitigating the climate crisis. First, the administration acknowledges the urgency of addressing the crisis both on the national and the international level. Second, so far, the immediate actions that the administration has taken prove that they are working on bringing the US back on track in the climate crisis mitigation focusing on international and national environmental policy. As mentioned previously, President Biden signed the US back into the Paris Agreement just a few hours after his inauguration. In addition, Biden signed an executive order on "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad" (The White House, 2021a). Through these actions the administration denotes a behaviour that prioritises the needs of citizens perceiving them as more autonomous actors. Nonetheless, international non-binding commitments and executive orders are promises written on a paper; there is little guarantee that all or most of them will come into existence. Similarly, however, President Biden used his executive power to be able to reverse Trump's policies and decisions. Whether it is for the

greater good of the citizens for one person to hold as much executive power remains a question worth asking and debating. The answer also depends on how the president makes use of this power. In the case of Biden, so far, the administration's focus seems to properly consider the urgency of the climate crisis taking into account some aspects that have not been included before in governmental strategies and plans.

One aspect is the gendered dimension of the climate crisis. The second set of questions is *How or are their (administrations') positions and approaches gendered? How is gender inequality accounted for in their governmental discourse?* Former President Donald Trump disregarded from the beginning the climate crisis to the point when he publicly denied its existence (Wise, 2020). In this context, it comes as no surprise that there was no consideration for the gendered impact and aspects of the climate crisis. Instead, the Trump administration focused excessively on the country's national security and economic growth. However, the measures that were taken to ensure security and economic growth came at the expense of other groups of people, hence, the intersectional lens was also entirely disregarded. The executive order that denied entry to the US to all Muslims, also known as 'The Muslim Ban ', is just one example of the type of actions taken by Trump to strengthen the US' national security (Pilkington, 2015). Again, his position of power allowed Trump to create and implement a ban that would discriminate based on race. This act goes hand in hand with his discourse, his national strategy including textual elements such as "Protect The American People, The Homeland, and The American Way of Life" (The White House, 2017, p. V-VI). There is only one context in which gender inequality is indirectly integrated. The case refers to the list of *accomplishments* that the administration has published at the end of its mandate (Trump White House Archives, 2021). The list contains a chapter called "Advanced women's economic empowerment". Although the chapter acknowledges the importance of women's participation within conflict resolution processes, the chapter fails to touch upon gender inequality further.

Thus, through this approach the Trump administration failed to properly acknowledge the social identity of half of the American population, while at the same time, establishing a harsh power hierarchy within American society starting from the state represented by the president and ending with the citizens.

The Biden-Harris administration sits at the opposite pole. This is because in the first few months of its mandate the administration published a "National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality" (The White House, 2021c). This is a first-ever national strategy of the US focused solely on gender inequality. The document contains various chapters, each centring around a different field. The document is in itself a statement whereby the administration acknowledges the power disproportionality and patent inequality within American society. The first section is called "Guiding Principles" and it includes a sub-chapter on the "Intersectional Approach". In this sub chapter, there is mentioning of "intersecting forms of discrimination" and "underserved communities" (The White House, 2021c, p. 8-9). The groups that the word *communities* refer to among others mentioned are: *Black*, *Latino*, *Asian Americans*, *Indigenous*, *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *persons with disabilities*, *persons who live in rural areas*, and *persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality* (The White House, 2021c, p. 9). This exhaustive list is proof that intersectionality is gradually institutionalised within the political system of the US. The emphasis on all the different groups of people within a society, and the acknowledgement of their different needs aligns with Crenshaw's (1991) aim to bring together all of them under the umbrella of intersectionality, as a branch of feminist theory. Therefore, even if only on paper, this recognition represents a momentous step for the feminist movement. Indeed, to have radical changes in the next few decades, these words need to be put into practice as well.

In addition to implementing an intersectional approach, gender inequality needs to also include the empowerment of women within all the decision-making processes. This is reflected

within the Biden-Harris national strategy. The sub chapter called "Promote Gender Equity in Mitigating and Responding to Climate Change" is the only part of the document that covers gender inequality in relation to the climate crisis. In this section, the administration immediately recognises the obstacles that exist and that are based on "gender-based discrimination and exclusion" within the climate crisis mitigation process (The White House, 2021c, p. 30). It is argued that these obstacles hinder the progress of the mitigation process. Again, this is a clear and strong recognition that can help feminist advocates bring about change both nationally and internationally. However, when it comes to women's involvement in climate negotiations, diplomacy, and policymaking, the administration fails to explain how they will increase female representation. Instead, they mention that they will "support broadening women's inclusion in the development of their communities' environmental protection plans and climate ambition strategies" (The White House, 2021c, p. 31). However, women's involvement and voice are just as needed on the micro-level, within families and communities, as on the macro-level, the state-level. This presents a grim picture that proves how strong gender-based power structures remain. Thus, the micro-level emphasis within the national strategy aligns with the arguments that gender is "a system structuring power relations" (Gaard, 2015, p. 22).

There is still a long way to go when it comes to women taking the lead at national and international levels. Although the role of women as essential actors within the climate crisis mitigation process was recognised, and it was admitted that without their inclusion there is an impact on the progress, the administration failed to integrate it at a nation-state level. Therefore, it can be argued that this is an example of tokenism. Although it is indeed important to integrate women locally, it is not enough if there is not enough representation within the higher level of the political system. In other words, in this case, the Biden-Harris administration only scratched the surface of the issue by failing to propose a more thorough plan for increasing female

representation within the climate crisis debate, and mitigation processes. This portrays a disproportionate power dynamic if we recall the statistics that the administration presented: "women fill only a quarter of seats in Congress and 30% of state executive and legislative positions" (The White House, 2021c, p. 35). Nonetheless, as proved in this study, and as mentioned in the national strategy of the Biden-Harris administration, the low participation of women means less stable countries both politically and economically. Consequently, this can increase inequality alongside an already uneven wealth distribution that has expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic ("Ten richest men double their fortunes in pandemic while incomes of 99 percent of humanity fall", 2022). Overall, this dynamic leaves a mark on the security of the entire society.

The third question is *How are the positions and approaches being responded to within policy and practice?* Former President Trump had denoted more realist tendencies in his national strategy plan. The Trump administration focused on national threats, the consolidation of the US military and defence capabilities, and the protection of the American way of living amongst others. In the same manner, the administration's policies were mainly directed to trade, investments, tax, and military actions. This way, the aim was to strengthen the power of the country, especially the hard power which refers to military power, resources, and economic independence. Thus, there was no mention of gender inequality within the Trump administration's national strategy. However, soft power holds a lot of importance within today's international political system. During this mandate, the US has gradually lost its credibility (Nye, 2020). Nye (2020) who coined the term "soft power" argues that "the president's looseness with the truth has debased the currency of trust that is needed in a crisis". Consequently, the US' actions can influence other state actors to act in a similar manner. In the end, this can come at the expense of the well-being of citizens and, unfortunately, affects some

groups more than others. Hence, intersectionality and power dynamics are essential for understanding the underpinnings of gender inequality and the climate crisis.

Under the Biden-Harris administration *The White House Gender Policy Council* was established through an executive order on International Women's Day in 2021 (The White House, 2022). In alignment with its *National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality*, the Biden-Harris administration established this first-ever council given the responsibility to lead "government-wide effort to advance gender equity and equality both at home and abroad" (The White House, 2022). The Council works together with other White House policy councils such as the Domestic Policy Council, National Security Council, and National Economic Council (The White House, 2021b). In addition, the council tackles a variety of topics that have a gender dimension such as health, economic security, and gender-based violence (The White House, 2021b). This is again the first-ever council in the US that focuses on gender equality and equity (The White House, 2021b). On the White House' website, the Biden-Harris administration published a list of steps that have been taken since they took office and that aim to offer equal opportunities and rights to all American citizens (The White House, 2022). Therefore, so far, the current administration seems to be respecting and fighting for achieving gender equality and equity despite the limitations and in some cases vagueness of their national strategy.

Conclusion

This study presented the interconnectedness of three major fields – gender inequality, the climate crisis, and public policy. To analyse discourse structures and styles of two American administrations, the study made use of the critical discourse analysis research method. It gave insights into relevant themes and issues that connect to the research question – *How is gender inequality accounted for in the U.S. response to the climate crisis?* – and distinguished between different social and political levels – micro and macro – based on gender within the American

society. The starting point, two different security provision mechanisms – the Syndrome, and the nation-state mechanism – offered insights into how power-relations are established in order to ensure security of one group or nation. Taking the gender dimension into account, the conclusion is that women face oppression from male-alliances that dominate to provide the security of the group, thus, providing security at the micro-level. Similarly, a state can adopt a behaviour that oppresses its citizens and abuses the power through institutional mechanisms such as executive orders, in the case of the US President's capabilities. In both contexts, certain hierarchies and power alliances or relations come into being, but also, in both cases gender-based power discrepancies exist. The most important insight, however, remains the proof that societies that oppress women also become more unstable politically because of it. This was a critical finding within the fields of gender and security studies, but also related to fields such the climate crisis.

In parallel but also interconnected with the phenomena of gender inequality and security insurance, the climate crisis adds another layer of inequality. In other words, as presented in this study, the crisis exacerbates social issues, and above all, deepens gender inequality, and impacts both the physical security of citizens and the political stability of a nation. Therefore, this study implicitly argued, based on this evidence, that the gendered dimension of the climate crisis must be considered within national policies and practices, and consequently, also at the international level. This means not only that the focus changes towards prioritising current gender-based discrimination, and inequality within societies, but also that more supportive mechanisms and opportunities are established for women to take part of the change that brings about gender equality and equity in various environments by being able to express their needs. To accomplish this, women and feminist advocates need a voice at all levels of our current political system.

Gender-based issues in relation to the climate crisis are also barriers that prevent faster progress in the case of the US. The data gathered from the national strategies of both the Trump and the Biden administration showed two different approaches. Former President Trump responded to the climate crisis by denying it and shifted the focus to the national security and the economic progress of the country. This approach came at the expense of the country's legitimacy, and soft power within the international political world. Overall, the Trump administration failed to account for gender inequality within both its policies, i.e., the national security strategy, and practices – executive orders and legislative proposals. By contrast, current President Biden stated his position on gender inequality and the climate crisis from the beginning of his mandate. The Biden-Harris administration published the first-ever national strategy that addresses gender equality and equity. Moreover, the administration established a council that works as an advisory panel for the White House. Thus, policies that regard essential fields such as health and education can receive the council's recommendations. This way, more inclusive and effective policies can be adopted. Lastly, the limitation of this study is that it examined only a narrow part of the US' policies and practices. Nevertheless, the main argument that remains valid for future research is the interconnectedness, and causal relationships between the presented phenomena. Future research on gender inequality and the climate crisis must acknowledge and challenge them all at once.

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