

F A S H I O N

IN

P O L I T I C S



World leaders are held responsible for making major decisions for their country. With that power comes the obligation to attend a variety of high-profile events as a representative of their country and people. A key part of attending these events is dressing the part. While it's typical to see men attend events in a typical tuxedo or suit, women often

exercise more freedom with their fashion choices. This could be anything from custom outfits made for the event to major trendsetting pieces and ensembles emblematic of their country's history. Some women have become known for their iconic style, with their influence being seen in current trends. Take a look at political fashion icons and how they impacted both policy and the fashion world.



MICHELLE OBAMA

Michelle Obama was the first lady to former United States President Barack Obama, who served two terms from 2009 to 2017.

While in office, Michelle Obama was known for being highly influential in her husband's presidency. She started initiatives like "Let Girls Learn," which helped adolescent girls access quality education, and "Let's Move!," which tackled childhood obesity by providing healthier food options in schools.

Michelle Obama also has a significant influence on fashion. She uses her platform as a way to not only wear statement colours and unique silhouettes, but also to wear clothes made by lesser-known designers.

Some designers include Isabel Toledo and Jonathan Simkhai. However, she remains privy to some major designers and ready-to-wear brands, such as Jason Wu, Michael Kors and J. Crew.

What works about Michelle Obama's style is that she looks polished and relatable. Many of her initiatives led her to be close with citizens, so being approachable was key in creating her image. This style was successful throughout her years in the White House and following the publication of her memoir *Becoming* in 2018.



DIANA PRINCESS OF WALES

Diana grew up as British nobility, but wasn't prominent in the public eye until her engagement to Prince Charles III. She grew up as Lady Diana, the daughter of the eighth Earl Spencer, a British nobleman. Her engagement to Prince Charles III was announced in 1981 and was a globally televised event. The couple held celebrity status internationally, and Diana took on a large role in fulfilling her royal duties. She was the president or patron to more than 100 charities and was largely involved in work dealing with homelessness, disability and HIV/AIDS. Her work

made her largely popular with citizens, and they felt close to her. She was even known more casually as "Princess Di" throughout her life.

Diana died in 1997 after a car crash in Paris. After her death, she was dubbed the "People's Princess" due to her role with the citizens and the parasocial relationships they had developed with her.

Following her death, Diana made a sizable impact on the fashion scene. She was known for embracing bold styles and being a trendsetter of the time. While she was under royal restrictions during her marriage, it was clear that Diana felt freer after separating from Prince Charles III in

1992, eventually divorcing in 1996. Even after their split, she was still regarded as a member of the Royal Family. Diana was known for her street style, seen wearing biker shorts with oversized crewnecks and jeans with oversized blazers.

Some of her looks were so popular they earned their own names and are still referenced to this day, such as the "Travolta Dress," a dress she wore while dancing

with John Travolta in The White House. Perhaps her most notable look was her "Revenge Dress," a black, off-the-shoulder dress with an asymmetrical hem. The dress is iconic because it stole the front page news headlines from Prince Charles III, who, on the same night, announced his infidelity, cheating on Diana with Camilla Parker Bowles.



JACINDA ARDERN

Jacinda Ardern was the Prime Minister of New Zealand from 2017 to 2023. Her term started with a lot of initial popularity, dubbed “Jacindamania.” This reputation stemmed from her advocacy and representation of women, as well as the issues she aimed to reform. These issues included free university education, immigration and the alleviation of poverty among children. Throughout her term, she became an increasingly popular feminist figure internationally. While in

office, she faced several struggles, such as a terrorist attack on one of the country’s mosques in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Her handling of these issues was met with disagreement from citizens. After mounting protests, Ardern resigned from the position in 2023. Part of what made her so likable early on was her relatability that stemmed from her wardrobe. Ardern leaned on New Zealand designers, such as Kate Sylvester and Juliette Hogan, and took a very

relaxed approach to her professional dress code. Many of her outfits consisted of longer, flowy dresses and looser outfits. These styles were similar to what women throughout New Zealand were wearing at the time, making her relatable. This relatability contributed to her reputation as an advocate for women. It also stood as a symbol of her handling her position of power in a gentle way, something not typical of world leaders.



Former United States first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Jacqueline (Jackie) Kennedy Onassis was the first lady to Former President John F. Kennedy (JFK). JFK served as president from 1961 to 1963, before he was assassinated in November 1963.

Jackie Kennedy was crucial in redefining how the American public saw the presidency. As one of the first widely televised presidencies, citizens were able to view the Kennedys not just as their nation’s leaders, but as an American family.

Jackie Kennedy was a proponent of the White House’s restoration, arts and culture advancement and international relations. Her role as a mother was publicized and contributed to the view of the Kennedys as the ideal American family. After JFK’s assassination, Jackie Kennedy was responsible for creating the image of “Camelot” that is now associated with the Kennedy era. “Camelot” was a reference to the 1960 Broadway musical of the same



JACQUELINE KENNEDY ONASSIS

name. The musical makes reference to the myth that the Knights of the Round Table built a mythical image of JFK’s term. Camelot persisted as a romanticized representation of the youth and glamour associated with the Kennedy presidency.

Jackie Kennedy’s fashion has also become something widely associated with this image of “Camelot.” Her wardrobe included a lot of monochromatic looks, boat-neck tops and Chanel suits. A simple summer shift dress was also a staple in her wardrobe.

These iconic style pieces portrayed Jackie Kennedy as a polished first lady, contributing to her reputation within “Camelot” as a put-together mother figure. Her style portrayed her as a professional and emphasized her significant role in her husband’s presidency.

YINGLUCK SHINAWATRA

STYLE IS KEY

women, style is key to the public's perception. As the women on this list demonstrated, it's not about what brand the clothes came from; it's about how you wear them. The wrong outfit can sour the public, and the right one can become iconic enough to remain a talking point for decades to come.



Yingluck Shinawatra served as the first female Prime Minister of Thailand from 2011 to 2014. Shinawarta didn't start in politics, working at her family's businesses until she eventually decided to run for Prime Minister,

inspired by her brother. Shinawarta was elected shortly after her brother's controversial term. In her own term, Shinawarta also faced struggles, primarily due to her involvement in the rice-subsidy program,

which caused massive losses for farms throughout the nation. It was reported that Shinawarta fled the country, and she was later sentenced to five years in prison. Despite the turmoil of her term,

Shinawatra used fashion as a way to bring attention to Thai fabric. During her term, she used fashion as a way to encourage Thai people towards energy-saving measures, encouraging people to dress cooler to

avoid needing air conditioning. Shinawarta also implemented a "no suits while attending meetings" policy to show that this was an effort on all fronts. Many of her looks featured colourful Thai silk, but brought

in a more put-together, business look, inspired by her roots with her family businesses. This put an emphasis on Shinawarta as an active, modern woman, creating a seamless blend of traditional and modern professional looks.