

## RESEARCH

### **Methods, methodologies and epistemologies in the study of gender and politics**

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This ‘state of the art’ contribution reviews the methods, methodologies and epistemologies employed in gender and politics scholarship over time. We discuss the orientations and approaches of early scholars of Women and Politics, who challenged the claims that political science was both gender-neutral and objective, through more recent debates in political science over methodological pluralism, transparency and replicability. We trace the broadening of the subfield, marked by greater appreciation and use of quantitative research and by greater use and tolerance of quantitative approaches. We point to obstacles and promising directions in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research, demonstrating the methodological pluralism of gender and politics research today.

**Key words** methods • methodology • epistemology • gender • politics • feminist

#### **Key messages**

- Early scholars of Women and Politics challenged claims to gender neutrality and objectivity in political science.
- Over time, the subfield has incorporated more quantitative approaches.
- Today the study of gender and politics is characterized by methodological pluralism.

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### **Introduction**

The subfield of gender and politics has developed into a robust area of study that employs a wide range of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches. This ‘state of the art’ contribution discusses the methods, methodologies and epistemologies that have been employed in gender and politics scholarship over time

and highlights research that is on the ‘cutting edge’ of our subfield today, with a focus on developments in the US literature.<sup>1</sup> Methods are the specific techniques adopted to gather evidence, whereas methodologies are rationales for how research should proceed, including the assumptions that underlie the research process. Epistemologies are theories of knowledge that set forth our assumptions about the social world and influence the decisions that researchers make, including what to study and how to study it (Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Overall, if methods are tools, methodologies are the toolboxes, and epistemology is ‘more about “oughts” rather than “is’s”’ (Becker, 1996: 54; see also Moses et al, 2005).

In order to judge the ways in which scholars endeavour to answer social-scientific questions, it is important to recognise that methods themselves are both gendered and political. Methods are gendered because quantitative techniques are generally associated with men, who are broadly stereotyped at being better at mathematics: men are overrepresented in social science subfields that emphasise quantitative methodology; and women are more likely than men to publish using qualitative methods and in journals that publish more qualitative methods (Breuning and Sanders, 2007; Evans and Moulder, 2011; Shames and Wise, 2017; Teele and Thelen, 2017).<sup>2</sup> Methods are also political because social scientists set standards for how social science should be done. These standards change and are often the subject of debate. Those in positions of power within academia – like editors, tenured professors and established scholars – decide which methods are taught, what techniques are appropriate for publication and whether academics specialising in certain methods should be hired, promoted and deemed as distinguished. We take the position that no particular approach is singularly feminist or more conducive to answering questions about gender and politics than others, and that methods should be selected based on the type of question being asked or problem being investigated.

## **A brief history of methodologies and epistemologies in gender and politics**

In the 1970s in the US, political science was a male-dominated discipline that purported to be gender-neutral, studying the genderless citizen, voter, politician and institution. The study of women and gender inequalities was rare. Indeed, the *American Political Science Review (APSR)*, the flagship journal of the American Political Science Association (APSA), published only three articles on Women and Politics in the entire decade of the 1970s and seven articles in the 1980s. The pattern was similar in high-profile journals in international relations and comparative politics.

In the 1970s and 1980s, mirroring feminist turns in other disciplines, feminist political scientists pointed to an androcentric bias (Bourque and Grossholtz, 1974), challenging the discipline to include gender as a category of analysis.<sup>3</sup> Feminist scholars – particularly political theorists and international relations scholars – deconstructed and reassessed the key concepts, theories and assumptions of political science in light of these new ideas. Feminist research engaged in work that was often interdisciplinary brought women to the centre of analysis, gave weight to women’s subjective experiences and experiential knowledge, and rejected the idea of ‘objective’ reality. Feminist scholarship questioned hierarchical ways of creating knowledge and sought to recognise the importance of examining women’s experiences.

Many early feminist critiques of political science methodologies were challenges to positivism – a way of knowing often seen as preoccupied with objectivity, replicability and causality (Bryman, 1984). Positivism is grounded in the scientific method and the belief that there is one, true reality that can be discovered by devising hypotheses, operationalising those hypotheses and testing them with evidence that was collected and manipulated (Hesse-Biber, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Feminists critiqued positivism on a range of grounds. They argued that research design, data collection and analysis created an aura of objectivity but, in fact, research was infused with unacknowledged external influences. Feminists saw surveys, experiments and statistics as attempts to measure and analyse an objective reality – when none existed – and as tools for researchers to distance themselves from their objects of study – when they thought that researchers should reflexively situate themselves in their research and in relation to their subjects (Bowles and Klein, 1990). They advanced an epistemology that saw knowledge as partial, grounded, infused by power relations and relational. These ways of thinking often translated into particular methods – often in-depth, face-to-face, unstructured or semi-structured interviews, usually of women, aimed at amplifying women’s voices and describing their experiences. Feminist positivists, though few in number, argued that it was possible to do quantitative work but that positivists needed to examine their cultural assumptions and the ways in which research questions were posed. They pointed out, in their defence, that qualitative researchers also used methods developed from a patriarchal standpoint. However, many feminists remained deeply suspicious of feminist positivists because they appeared too deeply steeped in the dominant philosophies of science and an ‘add women and stir’ approach.

Feminist criticism of political science fuelled the growth of a new field of study: Women and Politics. Between 1970 and 1990, the study of Women and Politics expanded dramatically. The number of dissertations completed in the subfield grew, and journals such as *Women & Politics* were founded (in 1980) to disseminate the growing scholarship. However, this expanding scholarship was segregated, with feminists often speaking mostly to themselves. Indeed, a review of research published between 1980 and 1991 found that nearly a half of political science articles focusing on women were published in *Women & Politics*, and although studies profiling or including women were becoming more common ‘mainstream’ political science was ignoring feminist epistemology (Kelley et al, 1994).

The 1990s and 2000s saw further expansion of the subfield. Although the number of dissertations on Women and Politics began to drop off, the number of published articles in the subfield continued to grow, and the number of gender and politics journals expanded.<sup>5</sup> During this period, the subfield went through at least three major transformations. First, reflecting changes across the academy, gender and politics research shifted its focus from ‘women’ to ‘gender’. The establishment of *Politics & Gender* as the journal of the APSA Women and Politics Research Section (in contrast to its predecessor, *Women and Politics*) marked this shift in American political science and was evident in its stated mission (see Beckwith and Baldez, 2005). This shift to gender encouraged researchers to go beyond studying women to examine how political institutions are gendered, how and why power and resources are distributed unequally, and how gender enables and constrains political behaviour. The rise of new questions reinvigorated conflicts over epistemology and methodology as some scholars questioned whether quantitative measures and methods were ill suited to understanding the relational and power-laden concept of ‘gender’.

A second transformation was inspired by the work of legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), who insisted that gender could not be understood in isolation from other axes of power and oppression. Building on the earlier insights of Black feminist and anti-racist scholars and activists (eg Combahee River Collective, 1982; Davis, 1981), Crenshaw (1989) coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to frame the complex and often compounding ways in which systems of racism and sexism intersect to shape the experiences of Black women. Intersectionality quickly spread across the academy, transforming feminist scholarship and impacting a wide array of disciplines. Intersectionality challenged gender and politics scholars to: (1) recognise differences among women and centre the experiences of women from marginalised groups; (2) examine how gender is inseparable not just from race, but also from class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, ability, age and other social categories; (3) focus on power and hierarchy; and (4) acknowledge the complex ways in which inequalities are produced and reproduced (for a review, see Hughes and Dubrow, 2018). The rise of intersectionality also spurred debates over who should do intersectional research and over the appropriate methodologies to study intersectionality (Weldon, 2006; Davis, 2008; Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Anthias, 2012; Bilge, 2013; Hancock, 2016).

A third important transformation was the increasing use and acceptance of positivist research and quantitative methods by feminist scholars. First in American politics, and later in comparative politics, quantitative research in gender and politics became more common. Many young academics, who had received training in a wide range of statistical techniques, were applying those tools to research questions involving gender. In the 1990s and 2000s, gender and politics research began to see the increasing use of quantitative cross-national analysis. Soon, the repertoire of methods also expanded to mixed-methods designs – research that intentionally mixes together quantitative and qualitative data and analysis to form a more complete understanding of a research question or problem (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2006). Although critical feminist theory and interpretive and constructivist qualitative approaches remained prominent in the subfield, methodologies and methods diversified.

Although quantitative research was beginning to find its way into Women and Politics journals, qualitative research in this subfield was still largely excluded from the most prestigious journals in American political science. Indeed, out of 425 articles published in *APSR* between 1991 and 2000 on Women and Politics, only five were qualitative articles (Pion-Berlin and Cleary, 2005). Feminist comparativists and political theorists, in particular, responded by participating in and leading key initiatives to validate qualitative work. Gender scholars were among the leading proponents of the Perestroika movement, which emerged in 2000 to critique what many saw as the hegemony of rational choice theory, deductive theorising, formal modelling and quantitative research in American political science, and to call for a greater plurality of epistemologies and methodologies (Monroe, 2005).

Where does this leave gender and politics methods, methodologies and epistemologies today? The subfield is a ‘big tent’ under which a broad range of social science research methods are employed. On the one hand, if there is a quantitative tool available in political science, gender and politics researchers are using it. Indeed, Stauffer and O’Brien’s (unpublished) review of *Politics & Gender* (2005–17) found that 58% of the articles used some form of quantitative analysis, and that the methods employed were inclusive and varied, drawing from both observational and experimental data and ranging in complexity.<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps a surprising turn given

the methodological and epistemological leanings of feminist political scientists of the 1970s and 1980s.

On the other hand, qualitative and mixed-methods scholarship remains widely employed, and qualitative methods have also diversified to include a wide range of ways to collect and process data: interviews, life histories, focus groups, participant observation, ethnography, archival methods, content analysis, discourse analysis and process tracing. Gender and politics scholars also continue to defend qualitative methods in political science, most recently, pushing back against the Data Access and Production Transparency (DA-RT) initiative.<sup>7</sup> DA-RT was launched in 2012 as ‘an effort to codify, institutionalize and reinforce a more “rigorous” practice of data access and research transparency in political science’ and to allow others to replicate test results (Isaac, 2015: 274). Many gender and politics scholars have argued, along with others, that the data access and transparency reforms fail to appreciate the ethical and practical challenges involved in making public data from human subjects and in replicating qualitative research. The drawbacks of DA-RT have been especially visible to comparativists working in non-democratic contexts, where requirements to share interview or ethnographic data may endanger study participants.<sup>8</sup>

In the next sections, we delve more deeply into the state of gender and politics methods today, considering some obstacles facing the subfield and promising directions as demonstrated by recent and ongoing research. In these sections, we zero in on our areas of expertise: comparative and cross-national research.

## **Obstacles and promising directions in quantitative cross-national research**

At its origins, comparative research on gender and politics was decidedly qualitative. Influenced by comparative work in sociology and anthropology, the qualitative case study was queen. However, in the 1980s and early 1990s, a handful of scholars began to use statistical approaches to analyse differences across countries (eg Rule, 1981; Norris, 1987; Oakes and Almquist, 1993). These researchers cobbled together country-level data and measures from global handbooks, government sources and international organisations to study variation in women’s parliamentary representation across Europe and other industrialised countries.

From the early 1980s and continuing for roughly a quarter-century, comparative quantitative research focused almost exclusively on women’s numerical representation in parliaments (for a review, see Paxton et al, 2007). In the 2000s, cross-national research on women’s political representation continued and began employing more sophisticated quantitative techniques, such as event history analysis, latent growth curve analysis and hierarchical linear modelling (eg Paxton et al, 2006; Alexander, 2012; Paxton and Hughes, 2015). Cross-national researchers also broadened their focus slightly, building up bodies of knowledge about women’s representation in executive cabinets (eg Krook and O’Brien, 2012; Arriola and Johnson, 2014; Barnes and O’Brien, forthcoming) and the spread and impact of legislative gender quotas (for a review, see Hughes et al, 2017a). Yet, given the breadth and variety of politics and political positions, the focus of much quantitative cross-national research has been surprisingly narrow.

Why the overwhelming focus on gender equality in parliaments by quantitative gender and politics scholars? Is understanding variation in women’s inclusion in

national legislatures inherently more important or interesting than, for example, gendered patterns of representation among voters, party leaders, mayors, judges, security forces or activists? We think not. The likely reason is a simple one: researchers study what they can using the data that are available and of sufficient quality and consistency across a large number of countries.

In the gender and politics subfield, a wide variety of consistent and comparable cross-national indicators have simply not been available. What have been available are data on women's parliamentary representation. For over 30 years, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) – an intergovernmental organisation with the world's parliaments as its members – has collected data on women's parliamentary representation for all independent countries.<sup>9</sup> The growing body of research on women ministers and gender quotas followed new data becoming available. In the 2000s, the IPU began disseminating data on women's share of cabinet ministers, and quota data became widely available in 2003 with the launch of the Global Database of Quotas for Women, which maintains information about gender quotas around the world (International IDEA, 2017). Yet, compared to other areas of study, the lack of high-quality cross-national measures of gender equality in politics is striking.

The relative dearth of gender and politics data across countries is especially visible when looking at databases that house gendered data. For instance, the United Nations Statistics Division (2017) Gender Info Dataset pulls together 116 indicators of women's health, education, employment and gender equality across society. The only indicators of gender equality in politics are women's share of parliamentary seats in the lower house and the upper house. The World Bank's (2017) Gender Data Portal is broad in its scope, including 631 gendered indicators across five categories, including public life and decision-making. Only two of these indicators focus on politics: women's share of parliamentary and women's share of ministerial positions. Even the 2017 Global Women's Leadership Initiative Index, which boasts the 'world's most comprehensive data framework to study women's leadership' – spanning 154 data sets and 16,202 data points – reveals that measures covering a range of decision-making positions are only available for European countries (Woodrow Wilson Center, 2017).

What does this all mean for quantitative methods in the study of gender and politics today? It is true that gender and politics scholars are increasingly sophisticated in their quantitative training and are bringing diverse tools with which to analyse data. Yet, we contend that identifying the 'cutting edge' of quantitative research methods for comparative gender and politics research involves efforts to collect new and different forms of data and to create high-quality measures for academic use. Put simply, sophisticated analytic techniques mean nothing without good data and measurement.

Today, comparative gender and politics scholars are growing the range of 'politics' under study by collecting new data. They are collecting and analysing data on positions never before studied systematically across countries, such as diplomats (Townsend et al, 2018) and legislators in local governments (Sundström and Stockemer, 2015). Much of this path-breaking work is also longitudinal, which enables more sophisticated analytic techniques. Examples of cross-national, longitudinal work that expands beyond parliaments includes studies of party leaders (O'Brien, 2015), judges on high courts (Escobar-Lemmon et al, 2013) and women's political empowerment more broadly (Sundström et al, 2017). Quantitative measurement of women's international organising is advancing (Hughes et al, 2017b).

It is not just gendered data on political representation and leadership that are limited. Comparative scholars interested in public opinion face similar challenges. Large repositories of public opinion data – such as the World Values Surveys, the European Values Survey, the Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asian Barometer and Americas Barometer – devote not even 5% of their questionnaires to gender-related items (Alexander and Bolzendahl, 2017). As a result, political scientists hoping to understand or to control for attitudes about gender must make do with a handful of crude measures, typically that assess gender role attitudes. The implication seems to be that whatever else we need to know about gender can be assessed by asking a single demographic question about an individual's sex and then comparing those who tick 'female' to those who tick 'male'. Ultimately, these surveys afford researchers little ability to engage with current theorising about gender.

Although the terminology of gender is widely used, survey researchers still regularly use sex as a proxy for gender. Using a single demographic question about an individual's sex treats everyone as constituting part of a binary, fails to capture the spectrum of gender identities and gender expression, and overlooks the experiences of transgender people (Westbrook and Saperstein, 2015). New research looking at how people self-identify on a continuum of gender identity from most masculine to most feminine finds that only one third of the respondents place themselves at the endpoints of the continuum (Bittner and Goodyear-Grant, 2017). Gender and politics researchers should push for more widespread use of such measures, not only because they better capture gender as a concept, but also because gender identity matters. Indeed, Amanda Bittner and Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant (2017) show that when tested, gender identity shapes opinions on a host of political issues.

Today's scholars are thinking about ways of pushing forward the measurement of gender attitudes and gender inequalities in cross-national survey research, including scholarship on how power is negotiated in households, access to sexual health services, cultures of masculinity and gendered violence (Alexander and Bolzendahl, 2017). One promising direction in survey research is the increasing use of survey experiments. We are now beginning to see survey experiments used in comparative politics and international relations research on gender and politics (eg Bush and Jamal, 2015). Looking to the future, survey experiments could allow researchers to investigate gender stereotypes and biases that have historically been challenging to find and measure.

Another obstacle for cross-national, quantitative research has been responding to the intersectionality imperative. Laurel Weldon (2006: 246) called for a comparative politics of gender that 'investigates the autonomous effects of gender structures, as well as the interaction of gender structures with axes of gender, race, and class'. Researchers have since been articulating the methodological obstacles posed by comparative research on intersectionality (Dubrow, 2008; Hughes, 2013, 2015; Hancock, 2016). Yet, numerous challenges to data collection and measurement remain. Researchers may want to take the basic step of acknowledging differences among women and among men along other axes of inequality (eg ethnicity, race, sexuality). However, researchers still face data and measurement barriers. Cross-national statistics on 'women' and 'men' rarely disaggregate their data along more than one axis at a time, and when they do, differences in demographics, in the structure of inequalities and in data-collection methods often render measures uncomparable across countries (Hughes, 2015). Survey researchers who want to take seriously the multiplicity of

individuals' identities typically face 'small-N' problems, where there are too few observations in the sample to permit such an analysis, and it is often unclear how to adapt survey questions to better capture the complexities of intersectional identities and experiences (Hughes and Dubrow, 2018). Nevertheless, scholars around the world are persisting, collecting and analysing intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, indigeneity, age and national origin.

Given that many of the changes in the field are related to limitations in available data, one possible direction for cross-national gender and politics scholarship is to look to 'big data'. Political scientists are increasingly working with massive data sets (eg Twitter, with approximately 200 billion tweets per year) and using machine learning to code data at a scale never before possible. If gender and politics researchers were to take up these approaches, we could see dramatic increases in the availability of cross-national data, along with individual-level data with such large N's that quantitative scholars could apply theories of intersectionality to more systematically investigate variation among women and among men.

### **Advances in qualitative and mixed-methods research**

A review of qualitative and mixed-methods comparative research on gender and politics today suggests both that methods have become more rigorous, systematic and are being pushed in new directions, and that scholars are trying out new approaches and developing new techniques. With the transition from studying women to studying gender, qualitative fieldwork has become more inclusive of men's perspectives and voices, even if women remain the focus of the study. Historically, these studies put the focus on women's experiences and often drew from interviews with women only. For example, Hannah Britton's (2005) *Women in the South African Parliament*, which focused on the challenges that Black women faced as they entered South Africa's Parliament in 1994, did not acknowledge the difficulties that Black men might have faced, even though black men were also entering legislatures for the first time. In contrast, 10 years later, in her research on women's activism in Niger, Alice Kang (2015) interviewed almost the same number of men as she did women.

As with quantitative research, qualitative scholars have also struggled with how to operationalise intersectionality. Life histories and other narrative approaches offer promising tools. Nadia Brown (2014), for example, collected life stories of Black female state legislators in Maryland and conducted participant observation in her study of how legislators' varied identities shaped their decision-making around policies, looking at both their convergences and their divergences. She developed a theory of representational identity to analyse what happens when their various identities conflict. Brown found that collecting life histories allowed her to tease out the tensions between the various identities.

The growing sophistication of qualitative research is also visible in the developing field of feminist institutionalism, which looks at the gendered nature of institutions, norms and practices, both formal and informal. As the gendered nature of institutions is so difficult to study, scholars are using a wide range of methods. Those conducting ethnographies of institutions and participant observation paid particular attention to how less visible and more unconscious practices engendered institutions (Chappell, 2006; Crewe, 2014). Studies of political parties involved in-depth interviews to understand how gender relations operated on a day-to-day basis (Bjarnegård, 2013;



Kenny, 2013). They sought to identify common causal mechanisms of power continuity and change through case studies (Mackay et al, 2010; Kenny, 2013). Others have engaged in textual analysis and process tracing.

Historical institutionalism is a variant of new institutionalism employed in American political development and, more recently, in comparative politics. A major focus of this work has been on the gendered nature of the welfare state in the US (Mink, 1995; Abramowitz, 1996). For example, Suzanne Mettler (1998), in her path-breaking work *Divided citizens: Gender and federalism in New Deal policy*, showed how gendered social policies developed in the context of the New Deal evolved into a two-tiered structure under the Social Security Administration, with generous benefits for male workers and minimal support for poor single mothers. Along these same lines, Theda Skocpol (2009), in *Protecting soldiers and mothers*, showed how the US, which has often been thought of as having a stingy welfare state, was actually a leader in providing generous benefits to Union Civil War veterans and their families. Later, women's local and national organisations pressed for and gained legislation regarding labour, health and education to help mothers and children, creating what Skocpol regarded as a uniquely maternalist welfare state. This was long before women gained the right to vote.

There has also been feminist institutionalist work on women in the context of processes of political change associated with great events, such as wars, economic disruptions and regime change, as well as large-scale historical processes, such as democratisation and political modernisation. When looked at through a gender lens, many of the more conventional accounts of these developments are challenged (Ritter, 2006, 2007). For example, Georgina Waylen's (2007) study of the last wave of democratic transitions – *Engendering transitions* – traced a combination of path-dependent processes to examine the timing and sequencing of reforms and how these influenced changes later on and allowed women to engage in institutions over time. It examined why democratisation has had such limited women's rights outcomes in so many contexts, such as Latin America and Eastern Europe.

A large body of institutional research has looked at case studies of countries that have adopted quotas and other women's rights policies, agencies of the welfare state, women's policy machineries across the globe (McBride and Mazur, 2013), and other types of institutional analysis. They have used a variety of methods, ranging from Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to critical frame analysis. There has been considerable cross-fertilisation around the world when it comes to the application of these methodologies.

Carol Lee Bacchi's (1999) work has been one of the most important influences on American and European thinking regarding critical frame analysis in women's rights policy adoption. A constructivist, she developed a 'What is the problem?' approach that has informed much research in the US analysing the adoption of women's rights policies. She examined various gender policy issues in Western countries to show that what matters is how one frames, defines and contextualises the question. She suggests that we ask: 'What assumptions underlie the representation of issues in a particular policy?'; 'What are the competing constructions of that issue?'; 'Who wins and loses from the policy?'; 'How are men and women constructed in this framework?'; and 'What remains unproblematised in the policy framework?'. If the problem was framed differently, how would the policy response change? Thus, Bacchi suggests that policy

studies often treat policies as efforts to address problems rather than taking a step back to examine the way in which the problem is framed.

One of the most researched areas of interest in this institutionalist turn relates to the adoption of gender quotas. Of particular note is Mona Krook's (2009) *Quotas for women in politics*, which was published at a time when most of the studies of quotas had been single-country studies. In explaining why quotas were adopted, which actors were involved in quota campaigns and what impact they had on female political representation, she sought to identify more general patterns in quota adoption, using three paired comparisons of countries that had adopted reserved seats, party quotas and legislative quotas to show that even if actors vary, all countries have experienced international influences and quota campaigns invoke normative arguments for quotas and target female voters. It looks at how institutional practices are expanded, blocked and converted for new purposes.

Finally, a new body of comparative work on institutions has emerged among legal scholars in the US, Europe, Australia and Africa, but also increasingly in other parts of the world. Content analysis and textual analysis are popular methods in this subfield. Political scientists, for example, have been interested in the ways in which women's rights activists mobilise to secure their rights within constitutions and the extent to which constitutions provide for women's rights. Legal scholars, not surprisingly, have focused more on judicial interpretations of constitutional provisions (Baines and Rubio-Marin, 2005; Irving, 2008). They also look at internal regulations and informal practice to see how these provisions are operationalised (O'Rourke, 2014).

Mixed-methods research is also becoming more sophisticated by paying more attention to the ways in which the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study inform and dialogue with one another. Today, mixed-methods designs typically employ nested analysis: statistical analysis guides case selection and tests hypotheses generated by small-N studies, and small-N studies assess statistical studies, generate theories from outsiders and other cases, and develop better ways to measure patterns (Lieberman, 2005). In recent gender and politics research, we have seen excellent examples of large-N cross-national studies informing qualitative work and vice versa (eg Wängnerud, 2015; Barnes, 2016).

For example, Tripp's (2015) book, *Women and power in postconflict Africa*, sought to explain why countries coming out of conflict in Africa had higher levels of female political participation than other countries, and why they had passed more legislation around women's rights. This study had been informed by an earlier study, *Women and politics in Uganda* (Tripp, 2000), based on fieldwork and a country-wide survey. The 2015 book also built on a longitudinal study with Melanie Hughes (2015), which used latent curve analysis to make the same argument statistically. The statistical study further substantiated a comparative study that included three cases (Uganda, Liberia and Angola) to show how and why these post-conflict trends emerged in Africa at a particular moment in history and which mechanisms brought about these patterns, namely, how the end of conflict disrupted society and allowed for women's mobilisation to take advantage of opportunities that presented themselves (peacemaking processes, new constitution-making processes, new elections and electoral rules, etc), and how they used changing international norms to their advantage. The book allowed her to flesh out the conditions under which these patterns became evident and ask questions about their implications, as well as the limitations of the trends.

## Conclusion

Gender and politics scholarship has changed a great deal over the last 40 years. Gender and politics developed as a subfield critical of mainstream positivist political science and with a clear preference for theoretical, conceptual and qualitative work. Over time, gender and politics scholars began using a broader range of methods, seeing feminism as driving the choice of question, and the choice of method following from the question.

Increasing use and acceptance of quantitative and mixed-methods studies within the subfield does not mean that the field has abandoned its roots. Particularly political theorists and comparativists, but also the women political scientists and scholars of gender and politics more broadly, have remained vigorous in their critiques of the methodologies of mainstream political science, calling for greater appreciation of qualitative research. They are pointing to the ways in which new pressures for transparency and replicability in the field can be problematic in qualitative research, opting instead to promote research integrity. Furthermore, many scholars in the subfield, regardless of methodological orientation, remain committed to: promoting women's agency and gender equality; encouraging greater reflexivity about research and situating oneself vis-à-vis one's subjects; challenging conventional understandings of politics that are blind to how cultures, societies and institutions are gendered; and engaging with intersectionality.

Today, there is no singular method or even set of methods that define the subfield. Scholars are employing a broad range of methods, methodologies and epistemologies, and although they are still pushing theoretical and conceptual boundaries, they are also pushing methodological ones. Although divides and debates between scholars of different orientations are not entirely a thing of the past, most gender and politics scholars can agree that the field is best advanced by championing a pluralist vision for the field – one that appreciates the value of different tools, provided they are appropriate to the questions being asked.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Author biography

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> As scholars based in the United States, we are well positioned to focus primarily on the past, present and future of gender and politics scholarship in the US. However, it is impossible to tell this story without recognising the influence of academics in Europe and elsewhere on American political science, and that many research projects today involve collaborations between Americans and scholars elsewhere in the world.

2. The gendered divide may be more pronounced in the US than in Europe, especially in some European countries. Social science in Europe has historically been more qualitative, case-oriented and potentially more pluralist than in the US. However, methodologies across Europe and North America have been converging (Moses et al, 2005), making debates and divides in the US more relevant in Europe today.
3. Not all gender and politics scholars identify as feminists. However, it is impossible to tell a methodological history of the gender and politics subfield in the US without feminist political scientists. Of course, feminists are not a monolithic group, and feminist research does not constitute a homogeneous set of ideas or approaches. Our summary therefore attempts to reflect the thrust of feminists' methodological and epistemological influences on gender and politics scholarship during the last 40 years.
4. There is no single definition of positivism. Notions of positivism and its role in social science differ across disciplines, subfields, countries and time. Here, we speak of positivism in ways in which it is often understood in feminist circles and the grounds upon which it was criticised by early feminist political scientists.
5. Examples include: *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* (founded in 1994); *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (1999); *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* (2005); *Feminist Theory* (2000); and *Politics & Gender* (2005).
6. Notably, our own analysis in a broader range of journals (*American Journal of Political Science*, *APSR*, *Comparative Political Studies* and *European Journal of Political Research*) over a shorter time period (2014–17) produced similar results: 62% of gender and politics articles used some form of quantitative analysis. (Full results are available from the authors upon request.)
7. Gender and politics scholars who have vocally opposed DA-RT include, for example, Nancy Hirschman, Mala Htun, Milli Lake, Jane Mansbridge, Jennifer Piscopo, Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, Aili Mari Tripp and Elisabeth Jean Wood.
8. The Women's Caucus for Political Science (2017) challenged the DA-RT initiative on these grounds, but also argued that substantive research in some areas of gender scholarship – particularly the study of domestic abuse, human trafficking, abortion and maternal health – may be hindered by DA-RT, regardless of method. They further argued that 'many of those who will be most disadvantaged by DA-RT are women and scholars of color in the profession'.
9. Data were made publicly available first through the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) *Human development reports*, subsequently through IPU reports on women in politics and ultimately through the IPU's website and PARLINE database (UNDP, 1991; IPU, 1995, 2017a, 2017b). In 1995, the IPU also published historical data on women's parliamentary representation for elections dating back to 1945, opening the door to the more sophisticated longitudinal techniques of the 2000s (IPU, 1995; Paxton et al, 2008).

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