



# Gender and politics research in Europe: towards a consolidation of a flourishing political science subfield?

Petra Ahrens<sup>1</sup> · Silvia Erzeel<sup>2</sup> · Elizabeth Evans<sup>3</sup> · Johanna Kantola<sup>1</sup> · Roman Kuhar<sup>4</sup> · Emanuela Lombardo<sup>5</sup>

Accepted: 9 November 2020 / Published online: 21 January 2021  
© European Consortium for Political Research 2021

## Abstract

Over the past twenty years, the field of “gender and politics” has flourished in European political science. An example of this is the growing number of “gender and politics” scholars and the increased attention paid to gender perspectives in the study of the political. Against this backdrop, we take stock of how the “gender and politics” field has developed over the years. We argue that the field has now entered a stage of “consolidation”, which is reflected in the growth, diversification and professionalization of the subfield, as well as in the increased disciplinary recognition from major gatekeepers in political science. But while consolidation comes with specific opportunities, it also presents some key challenges. We identify five such challenges: (1) the potential fragmentation of the field; (2) persisting hierarchies in knowledge production; (3) the continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science; (4) the changing link between academia and society; and (5) growing opposition to gender studies in parts of Europe and beyond. We argue that both the “gender and politics” field and political science in general should address these challenges in order to become a truly inclusive discipline.

**Keywords** Academic knowledge · Anti-gender movement · Gender · Intersectionality · Political science · Sexuality

## Introduction

Gender structures our understanding of all political phenomena and shapes such diverse issues as Brexit, COVID-19 or democratic backsliding (to name but a few). Indeed, the subfield of “gender and politics” has flourished in European political science over the last twenty years: There has been the establishment of a conference

---

✉ Silvia Erzeel  
silvia.erzeel@vub.be



and a new journal; gender, sexuality and intersectionality in the study of the political (and indeed what counts as the political) is increasingly recognized by the broader political science community (Mügge et al. 2016); and a growing number of scholars have revealed and contested biases against gender and politics research in the discipline and its institutions.

We take stock of how the “gender and politics” field has developed over the past twenty years, taking 2001 as a starting point because it serves the purpose of this anniversary issue of *European Political Science*. The development of the “gender and politics”-subfield, however, has a longer history, and can be traced back to the late 1970s and 1980s (Costa and Sawyer 2018; Lovenduski 2015). Given that “Gender and Politics” can no longer be considered a “new” or “emerging” field of study (see Dahlerup 2010 for a comparison), we ask in this article whether the subfield has now entered a new stage of “consolidation” and what this means for both the field itself and the discipline of political science. In order to answer these questions, we scrutinize different indicators of consolidation. For analytical purposes, we consider consolidation as a twofold process, characterized by both internal and external developments. Internal consolidation relates to the growth and integration of gender and politics research into a specialist (sub)field and autonomous knowledge community in political science. External consolidation relates to the external recognition that gender and politics research has received from other (sub)fields and major gatekeepers in political science (such as major political science associations and journals).

For the purpose of this article, we define “gender and politics” as a subfield of political science that is primarily concerned with the study of gender, sexuality and/or intersectionality perspectives in the study of the political. We, the authors, are committed to promoting a broad understanding of gender and politics research; we recognise the matrices of oppression that shape our politics and our societies (Hill Collins 2002) and the importance of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Yuval-Davis 2012) as a lens with which to analyse “complex gender equality” (Verloo and Walby 2012), comprising gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and other categories of social inequalities. We are aware that our knowledge is situated within a political science context mostly informed by the canons of the discipline in Europe and the USA, which shapes the way we approach gender and politics research. This reminds us of the need to keep decolonizing the discipline (Medie and Kang 2018; Mendoza 2012).<sup>1</sup>

In the following sections, we reflect upon the internal and external consolidation of European gender and politics research over the last two decades. We consider the growth and increased professionalization of the subfield, as well as the increased recognition it receives from the broader discipline of political science. Next, we discuss five key challenges that hinder the further consolidation of the field: (1) the

---

<sup>1</sup> We understand decolonizing to refer to those strategies which include and amplify the perspectives of those outside of the west and the global north (understanding that these terms are themselves to some extent a construct of western imperialist epistemology) to disrupt and contest our understanding of subjectivities (Sabaratnam 2011).



potential fragmentation and disintegration of the field, (2) persisting hierarchies in knowledge production, (3) the continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science, (4) the changing link between academia and “society”, and (5) growing opposition to gender studies in several parts of Europe. We argue that both the “gender and politics”-field and political sciences more in general will have to take up these challenges in the future in order to “become a truly inclusive discipline”—a question the EPS editors rightfully posed in the call for papers for this anniversary issue.

## **The consolidation of “gender and politics”—a twofold process**

Although the focus of this article is on how the “gender and politics” subfield developed over the past twenty years, what we find today builds on actions that started well before 2000 and are (slowly) materialising (Celis et al. 2013; Costa and Sawer 2018; Dahlerup 2010; Lovenduski 2015 for overviews). We understand the development of “gender and politics” as a twofold consolidation process resulting internally in a specialist subfield and externally in recognition by political science as a discipline.

### **Internal consolidation: growth, diversification and professionalization**

Over the years, the gender and politics subfield evolved from a primary concern with the study of “women in politics” to the study of “gender and politics” more broadly (Lovenduski 2015).

This evolution marks an expansion in research foci and strategies. Earlier studies were primarily concerned with making women’s political roles and activities more visible. Research questions developed out of a concern to explore the diversity of perspectives present in political life, to highlight women’s previously overlooked contributions to it, and to give a voice to their subjective experiences as marginalized groups. Recent studies pay relatively more attention to the study of gendered political processes, institutions and interactions. The research focus has shifted towards exposing and questioning gender hierarchies and inequalities in a variety of political phenomena. As part of this shift, increasing attention is also devoted to the study of men as “gendered beings” in politics (Connell 2002) and the interactions between gender and other social markers such as social class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age and disability (Crenshaw 1991; Hancock 2007; McCall 2005); although these perspectives and voices are still at risk of being marginalized in the field (see below).

A defining feature of politics and gender research is its rooting in, and dialogue with, two distinct academic disciplines: political sciences and gender studies. Thus, its research is often characterized by a multi- and interdisciplinary engagement to a degree that is often usual for gender studies, but less so for “mainstream” political science (see also Costa and Sawer 2018). Scholars within the politics and gender field often draw from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds such as



anthropology, economics, philosophy, sociology and others. A multi- or interdisciplinary lens allows gender and politics scholars to address political phenomena from a multiplicity of angles that enhance a comprehensive understanding of political problems. It also keeps scholars alert to the risk of becoming self-referential, which could narrow analytical capacities. Moreover, gender and politics research has also been shaped by different strands of political activism such as feminist, LGBTQI+ and anti-racist movements. Thus, politics and gender research can draw upon political sciences, gender studies, and activist involvement as related but distinct sources.

In European political science, since the late 1970s, a number of national political science associations (PSAs) created women's caucuses and/or committees on the status of women (Costa and Sawer 2018: 246). The transnational ECPR Gender and Politics Standing Group established in 1986 (originally "Women and Politics") brings together scholars around the world working on gender, sexuality and intersectionality in politics. The creation of this network proved to be foundational to the development, and eventual consolidation, of gender and politics as a subfield in Europe, not least because it "helped inspire activism and institutional transfer across European PSAs" (Costa and Sawer 2018: 245). Not only did such a network provide an intellectual network for those interested in similar research agendas but it also provided an important source of solidarity amongst scholars who very often found themselves to be marginalised within their own departments, universities and national political science associations. Not surprisingly, such politics and gender groups appear often to be among the biggest and most frequented PSA sub-entities and moreover extended their scope over time to include sexuality politics and intersectionality (Costa and Sawer 2018). Similarly, the role of the ECPR standing group has expanded over time and it performs a number of important functions which have helped the field of gender and politics to flourish, including organising gender panels at "mainstream" political science conferences and, perhaps most importantly, the establishment of its own biennial conference, the European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG).

ECPG conferences have grown exponentially and mirrors the growth of the subfield, with the "sections" resembling often other political science subfields.<sup>2</sup> Despite the growth in numbers, and the accompanying professionalization, the importance of solidarity, empowerment and community remain core values of the conferences, particularly the desire to create non-hierarchical supportive and welcoming spaces, especially for first-time attendees. In addition to the many friendships that have been made over the years, important and valuable special issues and edited collections have been published, which grew out of conferences, workshops and panels of the standing group. As the subfield grew, so too did the number of research papers produced, and it became clear that despite the existence of a number of excellent gender

<sup>2</sup> The first ECPG in Belfast 2009 had some 300 participants to the most recent in Amsterdam, 2019 which attracted over 850 attendees. The growth of the conferences Sections included: European Politics; Governance and Public Policy; International Relations; Political Participation and Public Opinion; Political Theory; Power and Representation; Research Methods; Social Movements and Civil Society; and extended in 2013 with a section on Intersectionality and one on Sexuality.



and politics journals, there was a demand for more: accordingly, the *European Journal of Politics and Gender* was launched in 2017 (Ahrens et al. 2018). The journal, like the conference, is committed to intellectual plurality—in terms of theoretical, methodological and empirical approaches. Its recent inclusion in SCOPUS rankings is testament to the quality of work published.

### External consolidation: disciplinary recognition

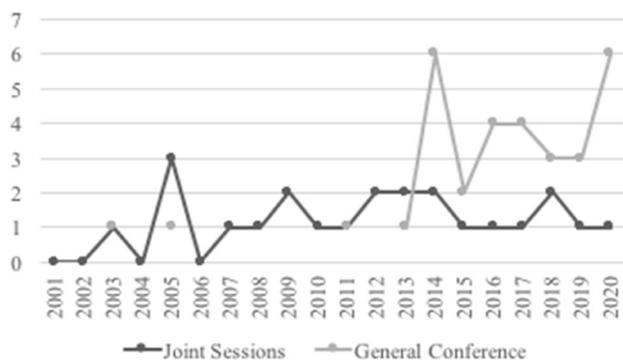
Internal consolidation proved essential to develop breadth, depth and impact, not least within our own discipline, political science. As for external consolidation, the gender and politics research received growing recognition and has—according to Kantola and Lombardo (2016)—contributed to the study of politics in four crucial ways. First, it has encouraged scholars to raise new research questions and to rethink old ones. Rather than accepting the relative under-representation of women and gender issues in political life as an “empirical reality” (and therefore unworthy of scrutiny), gender and politics scholars have made them the centre point of attention, by asking what the causes and consequences of this under-representation are, and how we can assess the normative implications thereof.

Second, gender and politics scholarship has introduced a variety of analytical approaches to the study of the political. There is a strong belief that the analysis of gender cannot simply be added to existing frameworks, concepts, theories and methods, but that the latter also need to be refined and rethought. The concepts of “gender” and “intersectionality” have helped scholars to rethink the analysis of power hierarchies (Connell 2002; Hancock 2007; Hill Collins 2002). Standpoint epistemologies have questioned too strong claims on “strong objectivity” made in some domains of political science and have instead emphasized the role of “situated knowledge” (Harding 2004: 81, 127).

Third, the subfield of gender and politics has also contributed to a new understanding of “the political”. Although many introductory textbooks on political science would show that “the political” has been defined in many ways by political scientists—ranging from the study of government and public life to the distribution of power—gender and politics scholars have specifically contributed to this discussion by drawing attention to the fact that “the personal is also political”. Hence, they have broadened the study of “the political” to include the study of the politics of everyday life (Phillips 1998).

Fourth, gender and politics scholars have, perhaps more than other subfields, paid attention to the connection between theory and praxis. For many gender and politics scholars, their academic work is connected to, even rooted in, a form of feminist commitment, either inside or outside academia. Inside academia, they question processes of knowledge production and engage in “critical scholarship with an explicitly normative dimension” (Celis et al. 2013: 9), also opening doors for other marginalized issues, such as LGBTIQ+ studies. Outside academia, feminist scholars regularly connect with women’s movements and women’s policy agencies to ensure the societal relevance and embeddedness of their academic work.





**Fig. 1 Absolute number of workshops and sections with focus on gender, sexuality and intersectionality perspectives at major ECPR conferences (2001–2020).** Note: The ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops take place annually. The ECPR General Conference takes place annually since 2014, and bi-annually in 2001–2013. Coding was based on information available on ECPR website. Coding for Joint Sessions based on workshop title and abstract for 2010–2020 and title only for 2001–2009. Coding for General Conference based on section title and keywords for 2014–2020 and title only for 2001–2013. No data available for General Conference 2001, 2007 and 2009.

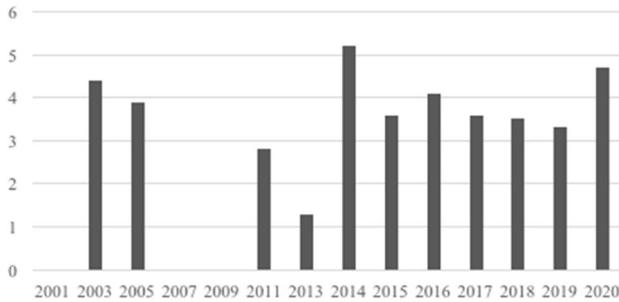
*Source:* Author calculations; data retrieved from ECPR website (<https://ecpr.eu/>, accessed on 27 October 2020)

Gender and politics is also increasingly mainstreamed in Europe’s major political science conferences, associations and top-ranked journals. Since the turn of the Century, gender and politics sections and workshops have become a fixture at the ECPR’s Joint Sessions of Workshops and General Conference (see Fig. 1). The Joint Sessions, which are organized annually and accommodate usually between 25 and 30 workshops, have continuously hosted one or two “gender and politics” workshops since 2007. At the General Conference, Europe’s largest gathering of political scientists, sections devoted to gender and politics are also a regular feature. Since the General Conference became an annual event in 2014, the yearly academic programmes have included between two and six sections with a topical focus on gender, sexuality or intersectionality perspectives, each accommodating between three to eight panels. A quick calculation based on the information available on the ECPR website indicates that on average 4% of the total number of panels organized at the General Conference include gender, sexuality or intersectionality as a primary focus (Fig. 2). In recent years, gender and politics scholarship also features among the conference highlights, with several roundtables devoted to the topic in the period 2016–2020.

By contrast, it is interesting to note that the field has not become *more* mainstreamed in European political science conferences over the years. Figures 1 and 2 do not reveal a significant increase in the percentage of workshops, sections and panels over time, but rather a steady presence. Moreover, most workshops, sections and panels organized at the ECPR conferences adopt a focus on “gender” and “women”. “Sexuality” and “intersectionality” perspectives remain less evident.

Turning to the integration in political science journals, we consider the percentage of articles with a primary focus on gender, sexuality and intersectionality views in ECPR’s five major journals in Table 1. Each of these journals has a





**Fig. 2 Percentage of panels with focus on gender, sexuality and intersectionality at ECPR General Conference (2001–2020).** Note: The ECPR General Conference takes place annually since 2014, and bi-annually in 2001–2013. Coding was based on information available on ECPR website: section titles and keywords for 2014–2020 and titles only for 2001–2013. No data available for General Conference 2001, 2007 and 2009.

*Source:* Author calculations; data retrieved from ECPR website (<https://ecpr.eu/>, accessed on 27 October 2020)

**Table 1** Percentage of articles with primary focus on gender, sexuality and intersectionality in ECPR journals (2001–2020)

	2001–2005	2006–2010	2011–2015	2016–2020
European Journal of International Relations	4%	2%	5%	3%
European Journal of Political Research	1%	2%	2%	6%
European Political Science	10%	2%	5%	9%
European political science review ( <i>since 2009</i> )	–	0%	4%	3%
Political Research Exchange ( <i>since 2019</i> )	–	–	–	3%

Author calculations; data retrieved from Web of Science (<https://www.webofknowledge.com>, accessed on 27 October 2020) or from journal websites in case information on Web of Science was missing. Only articles are coded, including shorter research or data notes, but no (book) reviews or editorials. Articles were included when the title or author keywords included one of the following: gender, feminis\*, sexual\*, intersectional\*, wom\*n

broad issue focus and welcomes contributions from a variety of subfields. Overall, the percentage of articles on gender and politics is not high—10% at best, but more often (much) lower; yet, some journals (e.g. EPS in 2001–2005 and 2016–2020) have increased the number of gender-related articles by publishing special issues or thematic sections on the topic. In the absence of a comparative yardstick, it is difficult to assess the level of gender mainstreaming in absolute terms. More important, therefore, is an assessment of over-time evolutions. In line with the findings for the conferences, there is also no clear upward trend in the number of publications on gender-related topics over time across the different journals (with the exception of EJPR). Rather, the overall picture that emerges is one of over-time fluctuations and stagnation. A combination of factors might account for these patterns, including author considerations regarding journal “fit” and success rates (Closa et al. 2020), the composition of editorial boards and the gendered consequences thereof (Deschouwer 2020), the gendered nature of the review and publication processes



(Teele and Thelen 2017; Stockemer et al. 2020; Grossman 2020), and the growing number and impact of more domain-specific journals.

Gender and politics has also become more institutionalised within political science curricula, through both elective courses and integration within existing programs (see European Political Science Special Issue 2016 for an overview). More prizes and awards have been named after women alongside the recognition of the contribution of gender and politics scholars to political sciences, while the number of women recipients increased (to some extent), despite a persistent “Matilda effect” (Costa and Sawyer 2018). Several PSAs have formally committed to monitoring gender equality in their organization, for instance, IPSA’s 2009 Gender and Diversity Monitoring Report or ECPR with its annual Gender Study (since 2017) and its first Gender Equality Plan (2018). Finally, mainstreaming gender and promoting gender equality and diversity has become an unavoidable (although not preclusive) criterion for grant applications to several funding agencies, not least the European Union research frameworks. Yet, despite these promising points, the picture across Europe is much more ambivalent as the future key challenges in the next section show.

## Future key challenges

While consolidation is a critical moment in the development of any field, it comes with specific opportunities and also presents some key challenges. As the previous sections discussed, the consolidation story is more nuanced—there is no “increasing” mainstreaming of gender. It is rather a story of fluctuation and perhaps even stagnation, at a rather low level, if one looks at the number of sections, panels and articles on gender in mainstream conferences and journals.

We have identified five key challenges that correspond to the processes of internal and external consolidation. Internal consolidation can be challenged by (1) potential fragmentation and disintegration and (2) persisting hierarchies in knowledge production. External consolidation, in turn, can be contested by (3) continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science, (4) the changing link between academia and “society”, and (5) growing opposition to gender studies in several parts of Europe and beyond.

## Potential fragmentation and disintegration

Growth—both in terms of depth and breadth—also introduces the challenge of “keeping the crowd together” while forging strong networks beyond subfields and often also other disciplines. Similar to the experience of political science as a discipline more broadly, a growing field often goes hand in hand with the development of more specialist niches, self-contained “knowledge communities”, and separate “reward systems” (Costa and Sawyer 2018: 267; Jenkins 2018; Vickers 2015: 20). While such increased levels of specialisation have important benefits, including the development of particular knowledge and increased diversification, it also has some drawbacks. Specialization might result in disintegration and fragmentation. When



different subfields (“gender and political representation”, “gender and European Union politics”, “gender and social movements”, ...) become separate “knowledge communities” operating as “self-contained silos made up of self-referential networks” (Vickers 2015: 20), the focus might shift from exchange *between* communities to exchange *within* communities. Not only might such a development limit the transfer of knowledge and innovation from one silo to another, it might also lead to the creation of “echo-chambers of disconnected knowledge” (Christensen and Ball 2019: 19). This is obviously at odds with the initial multi- or interdisciplinary foundations of gender and politics—a field that has prided itself in the fact that it values cross-boundary exchange.

### Confronting hierarchies in knowledge production

For gender and politics scholars, the social locatedness of the researcher and the conditions under which research is produced are crucial for thinking through *how* to confront persistent hierarchies in the knowledge production process (Hill Collins 2002; Harding 2004). Feminist and LGBTQ+ scholars have challenged the exclusion of women and sexual minorities and the marginalisation of gender and sexuality as legitimate frames of analysis within political science, thereby emphasising the importance of representation and diversity within the discipline. As such, it is vital that we acknowledge, confront and create strategies to resist the hegemony of voices from the global north, especially the voices from white scholars occupying positions of privilege (Medie and Kang 2018).

Reflecting upon the aspects of academia which give (and facilitate the giving of) lifeblood to its multiple intellectual projects—such as conferences, publishing, secure and permanent posts—quickly reveals the epistemic privileges and regimes that are sustained: conferences which are too expensive to attend and sometimes require visas; Anglo-American normative assumptions regarding what constitutes a research paper—both stylistically and substantively; and networks which reinforce patterns of exclusion within the job market. Thinking honestly about the power implicit within the gender and politics field necessitates that we act differently and devise new ways of working that offer not only greater accessibility but also offer a radically different vision of what academia could be. In this instance then we call for a greater reflection on praxis, and specifically recalling the role that social movements play as a key source of gender and politics research.

*How* we conceptualise the field of gender and politics necessarily shapes *who* we seek to include, and what flows from that in terms of *what* we consider legitimate and important knowledge. Interdisciplinarity and its importance for gender scholars is a critical aspect of this; avoiding the temptation to police the boundaries of politics and political science in order to create intellectual synergies across a variety of fields (Ashworth 2009). Refusing to shut down or close off what we consider political science to constitute is important, and mirrors concerns within feminist and LGBTQ+ social movements (Braidotti 1991), especially when we, as gender and politics scholars, recognise that politics is about power and that power is gendered (Ahrens et al. 2018). Creating opportunities and spaces in which we pay attention to



the politics of privilege but also to the politics of experiential knowledge, of stand-point theory, and of the politics of language, provides us with the opportunity to reimagine a more open and engaged political science. Bringing together the core strands within our field with theoretical frameworks which have not traditionally served as dominant frames or paradigms—notably postcolonial and decolonial theory—will raise fresh questions and challenges for us as a discipline forcing us to revisit received wisdoms, established concepts and traditional methods; for example, by making better use of decolonial research methods and better integrating participatory action research (PAR) into our methodology.

### **The reproduction of hegemonies and continued marginalization of feminist political analysis in “mainstream” political science**

The ongoing questioning of hegemonies and marginalizations in political science is another key challenge for politics and gender subfield. Despite the evidence of its expansion and increasing consolidation in European political science, dominant approaches within the discipline, that according to a political science textbook open to pluralism such as Colin Hay's (2002) are rational choice theory, behaviouralism and new institutionalism, still tend to treat gender and sexuality issues as a marginal area (Kantola and Lombardo 2017; Smith and Lee 2015: 50). Gender and sexuality teaching and research in European political science and other departments tends to be marginalized (Mügge et al. 2016), demonstrating a resistance to mainstreaming gender by actors that seek to maintain their privileged status quo (Verge et al. 2018). Men are overrepresented in the discipline and political science still perpetuates androcentric biases (Celis et al. 2013). While, at the initiative of the ECPR, European political science journals are beginning to analyse their gender publication gap (Grossman 2020; Closa et al. 2020), identifying a gender submission gap of 22% of at least one woman author in *European Political Science Review* and 27% woman leading author in the *European Journal of Political Research*, studies show that women are still underrepresented in political science publications despite their number in the discipline (Teele and Thelen 2017). Gender citation gaps, produced by implicit biases, lack of senior women scholars, and men's tendency to cite men, are problematic for women's career advancement and create the perception that men's research is more important than women's (Brown and Samuels 2018). Maliniak et al.'s (2013) analysis of IR top journals shows that articles authored by men obtain 4.8 more citations than women-authored articles in the period 1980–2006, after controlling for many variables. It was thanks to academic-activist platforms such as Women and People of Color Also Know Stuff!<sup>3</sup> that the lack of gender and diversity in conference panels, as well as the devaluing of women and people of colour's expertise in public institutions and the media was exposed (Wallace and Pepinsky 2019).

<sup>3</sup> See <https://womenalsoknowstuff.com> and <https://sites.google.com/view/pocexperts/home>, accessed 2 November 2020.



The relatively marginal status of gender and politics within political science not only underestimates the scope of this subfield but also influences the type of feminist political science approaches that are more accepted in the mainstream. Out of the five feminist approaches to political analysis that Kantola and Lombardo discuss in “Gender and Political Analysis” (2017), two have become more dominant in gender and politics debates: a women approach, that focuses on the role and position of women, and a gender approach, that focuses on the wider social structures that reproduce domination and inequalities. Approaches that focus on the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, age and other inequalities are recognised as important within the field, but are not consistently applied in research. Two approaches remain more marginal: discursive approaches, that focus on how gender is contested and constructed in political debates, and post-deconstruction approaches, that focus on the role of affects, emotions and bodily material in gender and politics.

The hegemonies and marginalizations reproduced within gender and politics are as problematic as those occurring in mainstream political science with gender studies. As crucial political phenomena such as democratization, democratic backsliding, economic crises, Europeanization or Covid-19 crisis need the whole plurality of political science perspectives to maximize the explanatory capacity of science, different feminist approaches to political analysis are needed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the political in all its angles (Guerrina et al. 2018; Kantola and Lombardo 2017). Consequently, implementing practices that make space for a diversity of voices, subfields, and approaches is crucial in the road to construct a truly inclusive and intellectually heterogeneous discipline.

### **The changing link between academia and “society”**

Linking “theory” and “practice” (i.e. praxis) is central to most feminist scholarship, and to gender and politics debates too as indicated above. Rather than simply describing and explaining “the political”, feminist political analyses seek to promote gender equality and diversity in social relations and politics (Kantola and Lombardo 2017). As Brown (2002) argues, connecting theory and political praxis is, indeed, needed to prevent debates within increasingly professionalized disciplines such as political science, from becoming self-referential and thus narrow in their analytical and imaginative capacities. Brown criticizes US political science as a professionalized discipline becoming accountable only to itself, where political scientists are their own audience and judges, and its existence justified by peer-reviewed journals, conferences and prizes (Brown 2002: 565).

The intimate and necessary link between academia and societal practices potentially constitute vulnerabilities within gender and politics scholarship, too. The rise of (radical) right populism has fuelled distrust in “elitist” or “leftist” science and constrains the relationship between academia, academic knowledge and the society. Gender and politics scholars have demonstrated the multiple ways in which feminist academic knowledge and societal critique can become co-opted and compromised, thus losing its critical political edge when trying to fit with the prevailing logics



of neoliberal governance (Caglar et al. 2013; Griffin 2015; Prügl 2016). New concepts such as market feminism (Kantola and Squires 2012), governance feminism (Prügl 2016), or crisis governance feminism (Griffin 2015) describe the transformations that engaging with neoliberal politics and policy-making brings for feminist knowledge. Consequently, some scholars argue that governance feminism has been markedly silent about the gendered underpinnings of global governance and financial governance, focusing instead on supporting institutional measures to enhance women's participation (Griffin 2015: 66).

Academic feminist actors face particular challenges of not being heard when they engage in political debates about the economy, especially in the context of neoliberalism and the dominance of austerity politics. Simultaneously, academic feminist actors who are willing and able to negotiate the terrain of such a political context have adopted specific strategies to do this. Such strategies require both “discursive virtuosity” (speaking the right language without compromising one's agenda) but also “affective virtuosity”, a term that Elomäki et al. (2019) have coined to move forward from the pessimistic governance feminism interpretations of these engagements to instead point to the ambivalences in the engagement with the neoliberal governance. Whereas discursive virtuosity is about manifesting command of contradictory aims and discourses in equality work (Brunila 2009), affective virtuosity entails not only the competence to analyse and negotiate the conflicting emotions in the room but also within oneself. Affective virtuosity then requires controlling one's feelings and emotions in gender equality work that is done with practitioners, yet it also makes openings for moving forward the gender equality agendas in hostile environments (Elomäki et al. 2019).

### **Growing opposition to gender studies programs and research**

Finally, growing opposition, known as “anti-gender movement” (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017), challenges gender studies programs and research in both Western and Eastern Europe. Gender studies departments and courses at universities have been attacked and denounced as nests of “gender ideology”. Several governments and research agencies restricted funding, abolished accredited study programs, defamed “gender” as conspiracy theory, denounced certain gender and sexuality research topics as ideological and unscientific, or publicly discredited respective scientists as a privileged elite spending taxpayers' money on irrelevant issues.

The anti-gender movement grew over the last fifteen years, emerging from groups of so-called concerned citizens, who were closely linked to the new evangelisation processes of the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually they have grown into a broad network of not only religious, but also nationalist, radical right-wing and other actors, united in their struggle against a seemingly unstoppable and irreversible process of ensuring gender equality and sexual rights.

The anti-gender movement ideology has penetrated and became part of some official state politics as well. Best-known is certainly the decision of the Hungarian government in October 2018 to revoke the accreditation of gender study programs in Hungary. Orbán's successful attack on university autonomy and academic freedom



led to Central European University (CEU) moving to Vienna, while the Hungarian Academy of Sciences lost its institutional and financial autonomy (Pető 2018). Similar anti-gender attacks increasingly appear also in other European countries, such as Poland, Italy, France, Romania and Bulgaria (Engeli 2020; Kuhar and Zobec 2017; Paternotte and Verloo 2020).

The denunciations, particularly when unchallenged by (political) science associations, threaten the gender and sexuality subfield: public funding calls exclude gender topics, scholars avoid gender-related topics for fear of political consequences or simply by political interventions into research processes (Paternotte and Verloo 2020). Over the years, we have witnessed several attempts of the anti-gender actors to establish an “alternative” field of knowledge production by negating “gender” as a concept and dismantling post-structural research in social sciences and humanities. Scientific journals run by anti-choice organizations, research institutes run by politicians, or methodologically problematic studies pushed through a peer review process and published in scientific journals, remain a key challenge for science and particularly gender and sexuality research<sup>4</sup> (Kuhar 2015; Paternotte and Verloo 2020). However, these attacks are also an opportunity for additional internal consolidation of the scientific field, as they create an increasing solidarity among politics and gender scholars.

## Conclusion

Over the past twenty years, the field of “gender and politics” has flourished in European political science, which is exemplified by its internal growth, diversification and professionalization, and increased disciplinary recognition. This consolidation creates specific opportunities, but also brings several key challenges which will require new, innovative and feminist thinking to safeguard gender and politics research in the twenty years to come.

Regarding internal consolidation, we ought to address internal hegemonies and marginalizations within gender and politics by practicing academic reflexivity (Bacchi 2009) or developing awareness regarding biases that shape political analyses. This includes among others practicing openness to theoretical and methodological pluralism, interdisciplinary work, the combination of different feminist approaches to political analysis, and the continuous contestation of unequal norms and practices in the subfield. One way to respond to this demand is by organizing conference sections more along research topics or problems, and less along political science subfields, thereby potentially breaking up “knowledge communities” and promoting interdisciplinarity as an advantage.

Important steps still need to be taken to support the participation and career (in terms of conference fees, awards, networks) of minority scholars, early career scholars, scholars from the Global South and scholars at risk. Next to earmarking support

---

<sup>4</sup> On a positive note, opposition could also become a potential source of internal consolidation as it could create solidarity among politics and gender scholars.



funds and fee waivers, one additional practical step could be to further explore online participation as a possibility to make conferences more accessible for those with limited travel opportunities.

External resistances to gender and politics research come in the form of continued marginalization of feminist political analysis and growing anti-gender attacks in several parts of Europe. Making political sciences more inclusive thus requires not only a strong commitment, but also targeted actions by all actors involved. PSAs can recommend to and support journals in a) recruiting gender-race-sexuality diverse editorial boards, b) including gender experts among reviewers by default, and c) regularly inviting special issues on gender and politics research. They can also promote positive action policies (quotas, awards, and recognition of support) for gender, sexuality and intersectionality research(ers). Further core actions can include making data on inequality visible and accessible, monitoring resistance, and encouraging and rewarding collaborations across political science subfields in conferences or journals with some of them specifically addressing opposition to gender equality in the discipline.

For the broader societal context, issues of gender, sexuality, race and intersectionality require further consolidation in European political science curricula in order to ensure the continuation of the subfield through new generations of scholars and practitioners. Such a focus needs stronger (supranational) institutional commitments protecting academic freedom and gender equality, such as limiting research funding for institutions without a gender and diversity equality plan. Simultaneously, research into democratic backsliding, particularly in terms of how it endangers (political) scientific research and academic freedom, requires strong support from funding agencies, PSAs and universities.

Considering the fact that (political) science is accused of being detached from “ordinary people” and everyday life experiences, we also need more thought and discussion (and research) into how to make a bridge. Engaging more with stakeholders and making more social impact research available can help to bring theory and praxis closer together. Concomitantly, developing and sharing individual and collective strategies of alliances and empowerment to make gender mainstreaming work and cope with resistances, might help to break through the status quo within academic, political, and economic institutions.

In sum, we need to return to the origins of gender, sexuality and intersectionality research.

## References

- Ahrens, P., K. Celis, S. Childs, I. Engeli, E. Evans, and L. Mügge. 2018. Politics and Gender: Rocking Political Science and Creating New Horizons. *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1(1–2): 3–16.
- Ashworth, L.M. 2009. Interdisciplinarity and International Relations. *European Political Science* 8(1): 16–25.
- Braidotti, R. 1991. *Patterns of Dissonance*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brown, W. 2002. What is Political Theory? *Political Theory* 30(4): 556–576.



- Brown, N., and D. Samuels. 2018. Beyond the Gender Citation Gap: Comments on Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell. *Political Analysis* 26: 328–330.
- Brunila, K. 2009. *Parasta ennen: Tasa-arvotyön projektitapaistuminen*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- Caglar, G., E. Prügl, and S. Zwingel. 2013. Introducing Feminist Strategies in International Governance. In *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*, ed. G. Caglar, E. Prügl, and S. Zwingel, 1–18. London: Routledge.
- Celis, K., J. Kantola, G. Waylen, and S.L. Weldon. 2013. Gender and Politics: A Gendered World, a Gendered Discipline. In *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, ed. G. Waylen, et al., 1–26. Oxford: OUP.
- Christensen, B., and L. Ball. 2019. Building a Discipline: Indicators of Expansion, Integration and Consolidation in Design Research Across Four Decades. *Design Studies* 65: 18–34.
- Closa, C., C. Moury, Z. Novakova, M. Qvortrup, and B. Ribeiro. 2020. Mind the (Submission) Gap: EPSR Gender Data and Female Authors Publishing Perceptions. *European Political Science* 19: 428–442.
- Connell, R.W. 2002. *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Costa, M., and M. Sawyer. 2018. The Thorny Path to a More Inclusive Discipline. In *Gender Innovation in Political Science: New Norms, New Knowledge*, ed. M. Sawyer and K. Baker, 243–275. Palgrave: Cham.
- Crenshaw, K. 1991. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. In *Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics' in Feminist Legal Theory: Readings in Law and Gender*, ed. K. Bartlett, and R. Kennedy, 57–80. San Francisco: Westview Press.
- Dahlerup, D. 2010. The Development of Gender and Politics as a New Research Field Within the Framework of the ECPR. *European Political Science* 9: 85–98.
- Deschouwer, K. 2020. Reducing Gender Inequalities in ECPR Publications. *European Political Science* 19: 411–415.
- Elomäki, A., J. Kantola, A. Koivunen, and H. Ylöstalo. 2019. Affective Virtuosity: Challenges for Governance Feminism in the Context of the Economic Crisis. *Gender, Work and Organization* 26(6): 822–839.
- Engeli, I. 2020. Gender and Sexuality Research in the Age of Populism: Lessons for Political Science. *European Political Science* 19: 226–235.
- European Political Science. 2016. Special Issue: Diversity and Inclusion in Political Science. *European Political Science* 15(4).
- Griffin, P. 2015. Crisis, Austerity and Gendered Governance: A Feminist Perspective. *Feminist Review* 109: 49–72.
- Grossman, E. 2020. A Gender Bias in the European Journal of Political Research? *European Political Science* 19: 416–427.
- Guerrina, R., T. Haastrup, K.A.M. Wright, A. Masselot, H. MacRae, and R. Cavaghan. 2018. Does European Union Studies have a Gender Problem? Experiences from Researching Brexit. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20(2): 252–257.
- Hancock, A.M. 2007. When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm. *Perspectives on Politics* 5(1): 63–79.
- Harding, S.G., ed. 2004. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge.
- Hay, C. 2002. *Political Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hill Collins, P. 2002. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, F. 2018. Gendered Innovation in the Social Sciences. In *Gender Innovation in Political Science. New Norms, New Knowledge*, ed. M. Sawyer and K. Baker, 41–61. Palgrave: Basingstoke.
- Kantola, J., and E. Lombardo. 2016. Gender and Politics Studies Within European Political Science: Contributions and Challenges. *Italian Political Science* 11(2): 1–5.
- Kantola, J., and E. Lombardo. 2017. *Gender and Political Analysis*. London: Red Globe.
- Kantola, J., and J. Squires. 2012. From State Feminism to Market Feminism. *International Political Science Review* 13(4): 382–400.
- Kuhar, R. 2015. Playing with science: sexual citizenship and the Roman Catholic Church counter-narratives in Slovenia and Croatia. *Women's Studies International Forum* 49: 84–92.
- Kuhar, R., and D. Paternotte, eds. 2017. *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: mobilizing against equality*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.



- Kuhar, R., and A. Zobec. 2017. The Anti-Gender Movement in Europe and the Educational Process in Public Schools. *CEPS Journal* 2(7): 29–46.
- Lovenduski, J. 2015. *Gendering politics: Feminising political science*. Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Maliniak, D., R. Powers, and B. Walter. 2013. The Gender Citation Gap in International Relations. *International Organization* 67: 889–922.
- McCall, L. 2005. The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs* 30(3): 1771–1800.
- Medie, P.A., and A.J. Kang. 2018. Power, Knowledge and the Politics of Gender in the Global South. *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1(1–2): 37–53.
- Mendoza, B. 2012. The Geopolitics of Political Science and Gender Studies in Latin America. In *Gender and Politics: The State of the Discipline*, ed. J. Bayes, 33–58. Barbara Budrich: Opladen.
- Mügge, L., E. Evans, and I. Engeli. 2016. Introduction: Gender in European Political Science Education—Taking Stock and Future Directions. *European Political Science* 15: 281–329.
- Paternotte, D., and M. Verloo. 2020. Political Science at Risk in Europe. Frailness and the Study of Power. In *Political Science in Europe. Achievements, Challenges, Prospects*, ed. T. Boncourt, I. Engeli, and D. Garcia, 287–310. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pető, A. 2018. Attack on Freedom of Education in Hungary: The Case of Gender Studies. Available at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2018/09/24/attack-on-freedom-of-education-in-hungary-the-case-of-gender-studies/>. Accessed 2 Nov 2020.
- Phillips, A., ed. 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: OUP.
- Prügl, E. 2016. How to Wield Feminist Power? In *The Politics of Feminist Knowledge Transfer: Gender Training and Gender Expertise*, ed. M. Bustelo, L. Ferguson, and M. Forest, 25–42. Palgrave: Basingstoke.
- Sabaratham, M. 2011. IR in Dialogue... But Can We Change the Subjects? A Typology of Decolonising Strategies for the Study of World Politics. *Millennium* 39(3): 781–803.
- Smith, N., and D. Lee. 2015. What's Queer About Political Science? *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17 (1): 49–63.
- Stockemer, D., A. Blair, and E. Rashkova. 2020. The Distribution of Authors and Reviewers in EPS. *European Political Science* 19: 401–410.
- Teele, D., and K. Thelen. 2017. Gender in the Journals: Publication Patterns in Political Science. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(2): 433–447.
- Verge, T., M. Ferrer-Fons, and M. González. 2018. Resistance to Mainstreaming Gender into the Higher Education Curriculum. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25(1): 86–101.
- Verloo, M., and S. Walby. 2012. Introduction: The Implications for Theory and Practice of Comparing the Treatment of Intersectionality in the Equality Architecture in Europe. *Social Politics* 19(4): 433–445.
- Vickers, J. 2015. Can we change how political science thinks? “Gender Mainstreaming” in a resistant discipline. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 48(4): 747–770.
- Wallace, S., and T. Pepinsky. 2019. Gender Representation and Strategies for Panel Diversity: Lessons from the APSA Annual Meeting. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 52(4): 669–676.
- Yuval-Davis, N. 2012. Dialogical Epistemology: An Intersectional Resistance to the ‘Oppression Olympics.’ *Gender & Society* 26(1): 46–54.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

**Petra Ahrens** is Senior Researcher in the ERC-funded research project EUGenDem at Tampere University, Finland. Her research focuses on gender policies and politics in the European Union, transnational civil society organisations, and gender equality in Germany. She co-chairs the ECPR Standing Group on Gender and Politics, serves on the organizing team of the next European Conference on Politics and Gender (2022), and is co-editor of the German journal *Femina Politica*. She has published in journals such as the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, and *West European Politics*, and her latest books cover “Gender Equality in Politics: Implementing Party Quotas in Germany and Austria” (2020, co-authored with K. Chmielewski, S. Lang, B. Sauer), “Gendering the European Parliament. Structures, Policies, and Practices” (2019, co-edited with L. Rolandsen Agustín), and “Actors, Institutions, and the Making of EU Gender Equality Programs” (2018).



**Silvia Erzeel** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium). Her research focuses on the causes and consequences of gender and social inequality in representative democracy, and also explores new ways of involving disadvantaged citizens in democratic processes. She has published recently in journals such as *Acta Politica*, *Politics & Gender*, *The Journal of Legislative Studies* and *West European Politics*. She is currently co-chair of the ECPR Standing Group on Gender and Politics and serves on the organizing team of the next European Conference on Politics and Gender (2022). She is also a member of the editorial advisory board of *EPS* and the editorial board of *Politics of the Low Countries*.

**Elizabeth Evans** is Reader in Politics at Goldsmiths University of London (UK). Her research explores the relationship between social movements, political parties and political representation, and is framed by an intersectional theoretical approach. Her work has been funded by the British Academy, ESRC, ISRF and the UK Government Equalities Office. She is the author of several books and articles that have been published in a wide range of journals including most recently in *Politics & Gender*, *International Political Science Review*, *Political Studies* and *Party Politics*. She is co-founding Editor of the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*. She is also past convener of the ECPR Standing Group on Gender and Politics, the European Conference on Politics and Gender, and the PSA's Women and Politics Group.

**Johanna Kantola** is Professor of Gender Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University (Finland). Her research centres on political parties and institutions, European Parliament and its political groups, gender equality policies, and theoretical questions about the state, representation and intersectionality. She is the director of the ERC Consolidator Grant (2018–2023) funded research project “Gender, Party Politics and Democracy in Europe: A Study of European Parliament’s Party Groups” (EUGenDem). She has (co-)authored several books and has recently published in journals such as: *European Journal of Political Research*; *Journal of Common Market Studies* and *Social Politics*. She is also past convener of the ECPR Standing Group on Gender and Politics, founder of the European Conference on Politics and Gender, and serves on the editorial advisory board of the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*. She is the Editor of Palgrave’s Gender and Politics Book Series with Sarah Childs.

**Roman Kuhar** is Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). He is currently Dean of the Faculty of Arts. His work has been published in academic journals, including *Critical Social Policy*, *Journal of Homosexuality* and *Women’s Studies International Forum*. He is the author of several books and co-editor of volumes on: (with J. Takács) “Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday life of LGBTIQ+ people in Eastern Europe” (2007), “Doing Families: Gay and Lesbian Family Practices” (2011) and (with D. Paternotte) “Anti-gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality” (2017). He also serves on the local organizing team of the next European Conference on Politics and Gender (2022) and is an associate editor at *Social Politics* (Oxford University Press) a member of the editorial advisory board of the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*.

**Emanuela Lombardo** is Associate Professor in Political Science at the Department of Political Science and Administration and member of the Institute of Feminist Research of Madrid Complutense University (Spain). She does research on gender equality policies and Europeanization, recently focusing on populism and de-democratization. She co-directs the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation funded project UNiGUAL (2017–2021 <https://www.unigual.es/en/>) and the research group Gender and Politics (GEYPO <https://sites.google.com/site/geypogeneropolitica/home>), with Maria Bustelo as Co-Pi. Latest publications include *Gender and Political Analysis* (with Johanna Kantola, Palgrave, 2017) and articles in *European Journal of Political Research*, *Policy and Society*, *Journal of Common Market Studies* and *Social Politics*. She coordinates the evaluation of gender research projects in social science for the Spanish Ministry of Research. She served as section chair for the European Conference on Politics and Gender and is a member of the editorial advisory board of the *European Journal of Politics and Gender*.



## Affiliations

**Petra Ahrens**<sup>1</sup>  · **Silvia Erzeel**<sup>2</sup>  · **Elizabeth Evans**<sup>3</sup>  · **Johanna Kantola**<sup>1</sup>  ·  
**Roman Kuhar**<sup>4</sup>  · **Emanuela Lombardo**<sup>5</sup> 

Petra Ahrens  
petra.ahrens@tuni.fi

Elizabeth Evans  
elizabeth.evans@gold.ac.uk

Johanna Kantola  
johanna.kantola@tuni.fi

Roman Kuhar  
roman.kuhar@ff.uni-lj.si

Emanuela Lombardo  
elombard@ucm.es

- <sup>1</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, 33014 Tampere, Finland
- <sup>2</sup> Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
- <sup>3</sup> Department of Politics and International Relations, University of London, Goldsmiths, UK
- <sup>4</sup> Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
- <sup>5</sup> Department of Political Science and Administration, Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, Madrid Complutense University, 28223 Pozuelo de Alarcón, Madrid, Spain

