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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

Gender and Political Recruitment

Introduction

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Twenty years ago, Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski published the classic work *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament* (1995), one of the most comprehensive accounts of legislative recruitment thus far. Seeking to explain the social bias evident in legislatures worldwide, Norris and Lovenduski focused on the central role of political parties, arguing that the outcome of parties' selection processes could be understood in terms of the interaction between the *supply* of candidates wishing to stand for office and the *demands* of party gatekeepers who select the candidates. Indeed, in most countries, political parties control not only which candidates are recruited and selected, but also are the central actors involved in adopting and implementing candidate selection reforms such as gender quotas. Yet, two decades later, systematic studies of the "secret garden" of candidate selection and recruitment have been few and far between in the gender and politics literature. It therefore seems a particularly appropriate time to revisit the core preoccupations, puzzles, and challenges that remain in the field of gender and political recruitment.

Each of the essays in this Critical Perspectives addresses the question of how to study the political recruitment process from a gendered perspective. In keeping with the pluralist nature of feminist political science, the contributors employ a broad range of approaches and perspectives to explore new directions for theorizing and researching the dynamics of the recruitment process. Several of the contributors draw on recent advances in the growing field of feminist institutionalism, which has sought to specify more clearly the influence of informal institutions and their gendered interplay with formal rules (Bjarnegård 2013; Chappell and Waylen 2013; Kenny

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2013; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay and Waylen 2014). As Bjarnegård and Kenny's contribution to the Critical Perspectives notes, studying informal institutions is important not only because the informal "rules of the game" shape party selection practices, but also because they may undermine formal rule changes in the recruitment process, such as gender quotas.

Subsequent contributions highlight the importance of institutional configurations — that is, how the gendered interaction of particular institutions can facilitate or block the selection of women candidates (cf. Krook 2009). In their contributions, Verge and Dittmar reflect on the gendered ways in which the dynamics of supply and demand interact with each other and with wider institutional and political factors. Focusing primarily on strong parliamentary democracies, Verge makes the case for further exploration of the "feedback effects" between supply and demand, arguing that gendered party practices have a significant and constraining effect on candidate supply. Dittmar, meanwhile, argues that studies of women in American politics have focused too often on the recruited at the expense of the recruiters and outlines a more comprehensive and strategic approach to female candidate recruitment.

In focusing on the gendered institutional context in which recruitment takes place, the contributions in this Critical Perspectives move the conversation forward from talking about women *in* party politics to explicitly scrutinizing the gendered bias of party organizations and political representation (Bjarnegård 2013; Lovenduski 2005; Verge and de la Fuente 2014). Adopting a gendered and relational approach also has broader implications for the intersection of gender with other axes of power (including ethnicity, race, and class, among others). As Celis, Erzeel, and Mügge outline in their contribution, an intersectional approach takes us beyond a traditional focus on women's (in)equality to look at more complicated patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the recruitment process. From a different perspective, Murray's contribution contends that theoretical and empirical definitions of merit may also privilege social elites, including men, ethnic majority groups, and those from privileged backgrounds. Together, these contributions point to a number of routes forward for exploring the ways in which parties encourage or inhibit women's access to political office, thus enabling a better understanding of how increases in women's numerical presence might be achieved.

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Revealing the "Secret Garden": The Informal Dimensions of Political Recruitment

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Candidate selection and recruitment has been notably described as the "secret garden" of politics — an obscure process, often hidden from view, that is regulated largely by internal party rules, informal practices, and power relationships (cf. Gallagher and Marsh 1988). In this contribution, we contend that informal party practices and their gendered consequences are critically important for understanding the continuity of male political dominance and female underrepresentation.

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