In Memoriam

Mala Nani Htun

Mala Nani Htun, Distinguished Professor of political science at the University of New Mexico, passed away from cancer in January. She was 55. It is a heartbreaking loss for her family and her many friends and colleagues. Mala was a pioneer of research on gender and politics, whose contributions advanced our understanding of the causes and consequences of state action to promote equal rights more generally. She demanded excellence from herself and her colleagues, challenged orthodoxies of all kinds, and worked hard to make academia a more welcoming place. Mala was a force of nature who attacked her scholarly work and her professional service with the same energy and joy with which she attacked the ski slopes. She had an irreverent sense of humor and drew in friends, colleagues, and students as co-conspirators when it came to having fun.

Mala received her BA in international relations from Stanford University in 1991 and her PhD. in political science from Harvard in 2000. She taught at the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College from 2000 to 2011. During that time she held prestigious fellowships at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at Notre Dame, and the Council on Foreign Relations in Tokyo. In 2011, she joined the political science faculty at the University of New Mexico. Over the course of her career, she worked as a consultant for the World Bank, UN Women, Inter-American Development Bank, and Inter-American Dialogue. She won a Carnegie Fellowship in 2015, and she was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2024.

Mala published three books with Cambridge University Press and more than 20 articles in peer-reviewed journals, including the American Political Science Review. Her citation count is high (over 8,000 on Google Scholar, although Mala would likely object to us invoking this measure) and impressively, that impact is spread across multiple publications rather than concentrated on just a few. At a recent conference sponsored by the Empirical Study of Gender Research Network, nearly every paper cited Mala's work with little overlap in which one they cited.

Mala's first book, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce and the Family Under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies*, is based on her award-winning dissertation. It's an ambitious and brilliant project that explains policy change in these three issue areas across two distinct historical periods in three countries. The conventional wisdom had suggested that democratization and feminist mobilization were necessary to advance women's rights policy. However, Mala showed that reform could occur even under authoritarian rule, when feminists and middle-class male lawyers were able to join forces to take advantage of Church-state conflicts.

Her second book, *Inclusion Without Representation in Latin America*, examines the impact of policies to incorporate women, Afro-descendants, and indigenous peoples into politics in Latin America. She asked, why did women get quotas while Blacks and Indians did not? While most research on identity politics tends to look at race *or* gender *or* ethnicity, this book breaks new ground by analyzing the status of all three simultaneously and comparatively, across six countries in the region.

Her third book, *The Logics of Gender Justice*, written with Laurel Weldon, explains cross-national variation in women's rights policy with a particular focus on why countries are advanced in some areas of women's rights and not others. The main argument is that there are distinct pathways to reform for different issues. Women's rights cannot be accounted for by a single explanation but must be disaggregated into distinct logics. Htun and Weldon test this claim against an original dataset that covers multiple issues over four decades in 70 countries. It won the award for Best Book from the Human Rights Section of the International Studies Association.

Reflecting on Mala's contributions to the discipline, her long-time mentor and friend, Jenny Mansbridge, said, "Mala was incredibly insightful, careful in her research, and revelatory in her findings. We needed her intelligence and empathy in our profession, and we need her still, particularly now."

Mala was a dedicated citizen of the profession. Her service to APSA is literally unparalleled. She was asked by not one, not two, not three, but four separate APSA presidents to serve on their task forces. Why? Because she brought brilliant and utterly fresh (sometimes off-the-wall) ideas to the table and because she could be counted on to work tirelessly to bring them to fruition. She was the mastermind behind APSA's 2018 Hackathon for Diversity and Inclusion, an event she co-organized with Al Tillery. The Hackathon prompted another former APSA president (Margaret Levi) to remark: "In 40 years of coming to APSA, I've NEVER seen such energy AND good content." Together with Frances Rosenbluth, Mala co-chaired the 2018-2019 Task Force on Women's Advancement in the Profession, a project that produced a statistical study on the relative success of men and women in publishing in the profession's most prestigious outlets and a more qualitative study tracking the career trajectories of specific cohorts. Under her leadership, the Task Force also launched a mentoring project and an interactive database on the progress of women and underrepresented minorities across the country's largest political science departments, both of which continue to this day.

Mala also applied her energy and enthusiasm to the cause of enhancing opportunities for women and underrepresented minorities in her home institution and beyond. Her efforts at UNM in this regard were legendary. Frank Dobbin, who served on the external board she created for her work on diversity at UNM, summarized her contributions: "Mala was a passionate advocate for women and people of color in academia, devoting so much time to the innovative and evidence-based ADVANCE program for women in STEM–with major backing from the NSF–that she co-founded at UNM, and that is still going strong. I feel lucky to be able to call her my friend." Mala also led a three-university team that received an AGEP Catalyst Alliance grant from the NSF aimed at promoting the recruitment,

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retention, and advancement of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in STEM. As fellow team-member Magda Hinojosa, wrote, "Mala wasn't just the intellectual architect of the project—she was our fearless leader, always ready to ask the most uncomfortable of questions and interrogate assumptions. In small individual efforts and big system-changing ways, Mala sought to make the academy a place where everyone could belong."

It is not an exaggeration to say that Mala's mentoring proved pivotal in advancing the careers of many people. She advocated ferociously for junior colleagues, providing encouragement at key moments and generously folding them into her research. She co-authored with more than 50 people, many of them younger scholars at universities throughout Latin America.

Mala was a dazzling scholar, but she was also super fun and often outrageous. As Dawn Teele remembered, "It was Mala who first showed me that you can have a serious talk about your research while making dinner; that the messiness of life–kids scrambling for ballet slippers or getting onto the bus–could be paired with a serious commitment to one's own work. She also loved to sneak in a little shopping any time we were at a conference." She lit up every room she entered with her mischievous intensity and magnetism. Long before selfies were commonplace, Mala brought a selfie stick to APSA and made everyone she saw stop and take a photo with her. She brought her kids–Zander, Livia, and Elinor–with her on work trips whenever she could. More than once at a conference, she would plunk them down on the floor in the middle of a crowded hall and change their diaper. Mala loved her kids and her husband, Doug Turner, fiercely. They were always at the center of her vast orbit.

Mala had an outsized impact on the world through her cutting-edge research, committed teaching, and evidence-based policy work. Mala's family has created the Mala Nani Htun Endowed Faculty Chair at the University of New Mexico to honor and extend her legacy of excellence and high standards in scholarly research and her exemplary record of turning research insights into meaningful change.

— Lisa Baldez, Dartmouth College and Kathleen Thelen, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Robert E. Gilbert

It is with great sadness that his colleagues in the Political Science Department at Northeastern University report the passing of Robert E. Gilbert, professor emeritus, who died on May 25, 2025, at The Valley Hospital in Paramus, NJ, following a lengthy illness.

Professor Gilbert, or "Bob," as he was known around the department, was born in the Bronx on October 20, 1939. After earning undergraduate and master's degrees at Fordham University, he received his PhD in political science from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1967. Following an initial appointment on the faculty of Boston College, Bob joined Northeastern's Department of Political Science in 1973. He held this position for 44 years before retiring in 2016.

A productive scholar throughout his career, Bob published several books as well as dozens of articles in respected journals like *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *Political Psychology*, and *Politics and the Life Sciences*. He was an influential early contributor to the field of illness and the presidency. His pathbreaking volume *The Mortal Presidency* (1992) traced the consequences—administrative as well as political—when the nation's Chief Executives have contended, often secretively, with an assortment of serious health problems, among them the aftermath of polio (FDR), cardiovascular disease (Eisenhower), debilitating back pain (JFK), and cancer (Reagan). A follow-up work, *The Tormented President* (2003), focused on mental illness in The Oval Office. Here the spotlight fell on Calvin Coolidge, whom Bob described as a misunderstood figure plagued by morbid bouts of grief and depression after his sixteen-year-old son died during the president's early months in office. Cutting-edge research of this kind drew interest beyond the discipline of political science. As an example, the prestigious Countway Medical Library in Boston invited Bob to deliver a presentation on Calvin Coolidge's ordeal as part of its 2004 lecture program.

Fueled by his concern with presidential illness, Bob also studied the 25th Amendment in depth. In a string of articles appearing in *The Fordham Law Review* and other venues, he questioned the Amendment's adequacy for responding to all the circumstances that might give rise to, or accompany, cases of "inability" or vacancy in the presidency. Significantly, Bob did not confine his work in this area to a narrow scholarly audience. He served as a member of the distinguished Working Group on Presidential Disability, a body formed in 1994 with support from the Charles A. Dana Foundation. Then, in his 2000 edited volume, *Managing Crisis*, Bob assembled his own disparate gathering of experts from academia, government, medicine, law, and journalism to discuss the background and workings of the 25th Amendment. Years later, in April of 2014, Bob capped his tenure as Edward W. Brooke Professor of Political Science at Northeastern by organizing a multi-university conference on campus devoted to presidential disability and succession.

In addition to "The American Presidency," Bob's teaching assignment typically included sections of "American Government," a foundational course for the political science major. A teaching award recipient, he earned his popularity with students through his love of the subject matter and impressive command of it. Bob was a gifted lecturer who appreciated the value of the colorful anecdote, the carefully chosen illustration, when explaining the intricate workings of American democracy. Conscientious in fulfilling his duties as an advisor, he took pleasure from getting to know students on a one-to-one basis. At times a strong connection developed, and some students maintained contact with him for years after they had graduated.

From 1978 to 1990, Bob chaired the Northeastern Department of Political Science. He was very effective in this position, which spanned a period of monumental change as the university set its sights on increased selectivity in admissions and becoming a foremost center of scholarship across the arts and sciences as well as such professional domains as law, engineering, and business. Bob took concrete steps to align our department with this institutional vision, adopting it as a guide in recruitment decisions, graduate program expansion, curriculum planning,

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