Comparison and Integration: A Path toward a Comparative Politics of Gender

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Moving from a "gender and comparative politics" to a "comparative politics of gender" is a challenging proposition. In this essay, I offer two mechanisms for doing this—emphasizing the comparative nature of gender politics research and encouraging greater integration of gender research into the subfield of comparative politics. I illustrate how current research generally uses a "gender and comparative politics" approach that is insufficient for advancing the field and then describe how scholars can work to emphasize greater comparison and integration in the literature. This will help to move the gender and politics literature toward a comparative politics of gender.

Research on gender in comparative politics has come a long way in the past thirty years. From early case studies of women's movements to today's worldwide studies of the adoption and implementation of affirmative action measures, the research area has evolved both methodologically and substantively. Yet it has developed as an isolated, and not always well-respected, research area within comparative politics. It has become a study of "gender *and* comparative politics" that is neither truly comparative nor fully integrated into the subfield of comparative politics. Consequently, it is insufficient for advancing gender research.

Along with the others in this symposium, I argue that we need to move away from a "gender and comparative politics" approach and toward a "comparative politics of gender" approach to studying gender in comparative politics. The previous two essays have done an excellent job defining gender and conceptualizing a comparative politics of gender. Here I hope to complement their visions and prescriptions by emphasizing two important mechanisms for making the transition. One is that we need to improve our efforts at *comparison* aiming for greater cross-regional cooperation among gender scholars. The other is that we need to work toward *integrating* gender research into the broader subfield of comparative politics, stressing that it cross-cuts other research areas in comparative rather than existing only alongside of them. Gender research is not nearly as distinct from other research areas in comparative politics as it appears.

I develop the argument in this essay in two steps. First, I examine the current state of comparative politics literature on gender, showing how it has developed in isolation, both substantively and methodologically, from other research in comparative politics (despite significant overlap). Then, I discuss ways in which we can work to build a comparative politics of gender through greater comparison and integration. I conclude by emphasizing the ways in which attention to comparison and integration strengthens the subfield and its position within comparative politics.

Gender and Comparative Politics

The current state of research on gender in comparative politics sees gender research as just another subset of comparative politics. Those who study gender look at a range of comparative phenomena, such as how gender affects political attitudes and behavior, the role of women's movements in transitions to democracy, the gendered nature of political and economic institutions and how gendered institutions help or hinder the functioning of politics, and gender's effect on political representation. Yet because this

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research emphasizes gender, it is considered gender and politics research rather than research on mass attitudes, regime change, political institutions, comparative political economy, or representation. The emphasis on women and gender makes the research its own subset of comparative politics and separates it from other comparative politics research on these topics. The consequence of this is that gender scholars and non-gender scholars who are studying similar phenomena—mass behavior, regime change, institutions, economics, or representation—rarely speak to one another in their research. This hinders the investigation of important topics and limits the extent to which the research is truly comparative.

An example of this segregation emerges from work on gender, democracy, and institutions in Latin American politics. During the 1970s in Latin America, comparative research focused on causes and consequences of authoritarianism[1] and a particularly large literature developed on social movements' efforts against the authoritarian regime.[2] Scholars tried to understand why these movements emerged, what issues motivated them, what their goals were, and how successful they were at reaching their varied goals. One major dimension around which movements emerged was gender. Women's movements were prominent actors pursuing both practical gender interests—basic needs such as access to clean drinking water, children's education, healthcare—and strategic gender interests—gender equality, anti-discrimination, increasing political participation—as well as working alongside other movements in a common goal to bring down the authoritarian governments.[3] Perhaps because women's movements were focused specifically on women and developed around issues distinct from other types of movements, research on these anti-state movements developed as "social movement research" and "women's movement research." As Georgina Waylen has noted, the two bodies of literature, social movements and women's movements, grew largely in isolation from one another despite the fact that gender issues clearly cut across both areas of work.[4]

In the 1980s, authoritarian governments fell in Latin America and the third wave of democratization brought relatively stable democratic governments to almost all of the countries in the region. Gender research has continued to focus on actors outside of the state, examining what has happened to women's movements since the transition to democracy and how governments attend to women's policy concerns. But new attention has arisen around gender and institutions. One important area of research is trying to explain the emergence of gender-specific institutions such as electoral gender quotas in Latin America.[5] Another is looking at the differential effects of institutions on men and women from the effects of quotas on women's and men's election[6] to how electoral and legislative rules shape gender differences in legislator behavior[7] and how electoral institutions generate varied responses from male and female voters.[8] On one hand, this literature holds together because of its common concern with gender. On the other hand, the literature ties into a broader literature on comparative political institutions. Yet there is often very little crossover between non-gender institutional research and gender-specific institutional research, and where crossover does occur, it is gender scholars drawing off of non-gender institutional theories and empirical findings. The two fields are developing largely independently from one another despite clear overlap in their efforts.

The problems with a "gender and comparative politics" approach are multiple. First, viewing gender research as distinct from other research areas within comparative study allows the rest of the comparative field to ignore, putatively tolerate, or marginalize gender research. When gender research first came on the comparative scene in the 1970s, it was highly marginalized. Gender was simply not considered a worthy topic for research. While today gender research is more mainstream, it continues to be regarded as a distinct area of research. This separateness makes it easy for those who still marginalize it to continue doing so, and it facilitates efforts to ignore gender when it becomes "inconvenient."

Second, the separation of gender research from other research areas in a gender and comparative politics approach hinders the exchange of ideas and methodological developments across research areas. Issues of gender cross-cut almost all research within comparative politics yet few acknowledge this. By ignoring this overlap, it is easy to ignore important theoretical and empirical developments that emerge in gender research and could be useful to institutional or comparative political economy scholars, for example, and it allows those studying gender and politics to ignore theoretical, empirical, and methodological developments in the non-gender-specific literature that could be beneficial to their efforts to study the role of gender in the research area. This phenomenon has meant that gender and politics research has not benefited from recent efforts in comparative politics to emphasize greater use of comparative methods and to breakdown region-specific research by building more general theories. Studies of women's movements in Latin America continue to be isolated from studies of women's movements in Africa just as those emphasizing how gender shapes policymaking continue to emphasize explanations specific to Latin America or Western Europe rather than trying to build more generalizable explanations that are applicable to all democracies.[9] Research on gender and comparative politics remains weak in its comparative nature.

Building a Comparative Politics of Gender

To move from gender *and* comparative politics to a comparative politics of gender, we need to do two things.

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First, we need to strengthen research on gender by making it more comparative. A comparative politics of gender encourages more truly comparative research through the use of comparative methods to study gender politics. This does not mean only doing large-n, worldwide studies and abandoning case study or region-specific research, but instead, thinking about how case study or region-specific research fits together to contribute to a comparative picture. It also does not mean that each individual scholar must study the entire world. Instead, it means that individual gender scholars must think about and illustrate how their research on specific countries or regions fits together with research by scholars in other regions.

Second, we need to integrate our comparative gender and politics research into the broader field of comparative politics, underscoring that gender is a consistent, underlying consideration of all comparative politics research. A comparative politics of gender does not eliminate the need for gender-specific research. We need to continue breaking ground with gender-specific theories and better comparative research on gender while also showing how gender cross-cuts other research areas in comparative politics and contributes to their advancement.

Making Gender Politics More Comparative

Building a comparative politics of gender is going to require greater communication among gender scholars in different regions of the world who are often studying similar topics but in isolation from one another. Scholars must work together to build truly comparative (cross-regional) theories and test these theories with as broad and diverse a set of cases as possible. This may occur with individual scholars tackling large comparative projects or through separate, small projects referencing one another and working to build a bigger comparative literature.

One area of where scholars have done a particularly good job with this is research on descriptive representation of women. This literature asks what explains the election of women to legislatures and has answered the question in a cross-national and cross-regional way,, testing how cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional differences provide leverage for understanding the varying proportions of women elected to office.[10] The result has been generalizable theories of women's descriptive representation based on empirical evidence from a very diverse set of cases.

Of course, while descriptive representation can be analyzed in all countries, some political issues are only relevant in a few areas of the world. For example, while questions related to gender and social movements were dominant in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, the absence of regime change in much of Western Europe made those questions irrelevant. Questions about gender and political participation or political culture have been a key aspect of research on gender in Europe while they have been all but ignored in Latin America, Africa, and Asia due to the small number of comparable democratic experiments and the lack of survey data to answer the questions. That said, there are many areas on which cross-regional research is possible.

One of the most popular new areas of gender research in comparative politics is the study of gender quotas. Quotas have been adopted in multiple countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, making it a truly comparative phenomenon. Yet most of the literature on quotas is country-specific or cross-national within regions. Recent work is trying to bridge this gap by pulling country studies together in edited volumes with introductory and concluding chapters that draw out some generalizable theories and findings from across the cases.[11] A comparative politics of gender needs more research like this,, which tries to develop comparative tests of the array of theories that explain the adoption and implementation of quotas.[12]

Much of the research on gender and women's issue policies has also been region-specific. Numerous studies have examined explanations for and consequences of passage of women's issue policies, but most of these have focused only on countries in Western Europe or OECD countries, Latin America, or Africa.[13] Very few studies have developed general theories to explain policy passage across countries. In part this is because policy salience varies by countries, and even more so by regions, making it difficult, and perhaps less necessary, to compare across regions. Still,, scholars need to develop an understanding of why policy salience differs across countries and what the gendered effects of different policies are.[14]

The lack of communication by scholars across regions is also evident in the growing body of literature on gender and substantive representation. Research on how gender influences the behavior of representatives in the US Congress and state legislatures has dominated American Politics research on gender.[15] Similar studies have emerged in democracies around the world, but while many cite the literature from the US, few studies on the US draw on the very similar research being done in other regions. Consequently, the American Politics and Comparative Politics research on gender often does not influence each other, limiting the power of theories and findings. Even within comparative politics, very little of the literature on women's substantive representation compares cross-regionally.[16]

Integrating Gender into Comparative Politics

The second part of building a comparative politics of gender is to integrate gender research into other, non-gendered areas of comparative politics. Gender research on political institutions, for example, cannot develop a full understanding of how gender and institutions interact without paying attention to theories of the development of institutions more generally.[17] At the same time, comparative political

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institutions research needs gender research to fully explain institutional change and institutional consequences.

One example of how gender research can complement work on institutions is the recent research on the adoption of gender quotas, which could yield important insights for explaining institutional change. When legislatures adopt quotas, they are changing the status quo institutions. Why would rational actors adopt a new institution that threatens their political survival? Research on gender quotas sets out an array of possible reasons that could be conceptualized as explanations for institutional change.[18]

So how can scholars integrate gender research into comparative politics? One way is for gender scholars to present their research in a way that makes it clear to non-gender scholars why the work is important and how they might draw gender into their research.[19] One of the first things scholars do when writing up their research is to decide how to frame ideas. Into which literature should we place our topic? Who should we cite? Who is the audience to which we are writing? Frequently, gender research answers these questions in a very narrow way, focusing only on gender-specific literature and assuming they are writing for gender-savvy readers rather than drawing on the broader literature on a topic and viewing the audience as all scholars in that area. For example, research on gender and legislator behavior could be presented in two ways. It could draw on the American literature on women in the US congress arguing that more comparative gender studies are necessary and then compare findings to the American gender literature. The downside of this is that it sets the question entirely in the gender and politics literature. An alternative would be to situate the question within the broader literature on political representation, thereby drawing a wider range of scholars into a common dialogue about political representation in which gender figures prominently.

Gender researchers also need to place their research in broader publishing outlets. It is true that placing research on gender in gender-specific journals is important for building this literature, because it helps scholars to generate new questions, to build new theories, and to debate complex issues in a supportive environment. But if gender scholars want their work to be adopted by the broader field of comparative politics, they need to explicitly frame their research in that broader context and publish it in outlets that reach a broader audience. This is one of the key reasons why we felt this symposium should be presented in a journal such as *Perspectives on Politics* rather than in one of the excellent journals specific to gender and politics.

While gender scholars can do much to help build a comparative politics of gender, all comparative scholars have a responsibility to recognize the gendered nature of much of what we study in comparative politics. This is perhaps the most difficult task outlined here and the one that gender scholars have little control over. Gender cross-cuts many areas of political science and other disciplines, but it is rarely seen in that way. For years, the field of medicine tested theories about causes of diseases and illnesses and the effects of medications on people without ever acknowledging biological differences between the sexes and how these differences might cause different diseases in men and women or result in different effects from medications. Medical studies increasingly report major gender differences in research on cancer, heart disease, brain diseases, and other illnesses that have been considered gender-neutral. In much the same way, research in political science that has often been considered gender-neutral—on institutions, political economy, behavior—needs at least to consider the extent to which the topic is gendered. There are too many areas of research where the role of gender has been all but ignored by most comparativists despite its clear importance. In this symposium Louise Chappell, for example, provides an excellent discussion of the way in which institutions are gendered. Yet very little of the existing literature on the rules and norms that operate within legislatures and the executive branch recognizes the highly gendered nature of these institutions, and the way in which gender may mediate their theories and findings. This lack of attention to gender needs to change if comparative politics is to be truly comparative.

Conclusion

The current state of research on gender in comparative politics is a "gender *and* comparative politics" perspective. This approach puts gender research in an often-isolated corner of comparative politics and inhibits its ability to grow and influence comparative politics more broadly. To advance research on gender in comparative politics, we need a comparative politics of gender approach that stresses more truly comparative research on gender politics and an integration of gender research into the subfield of comparative politics. These two goals are not incompatible with one another. Gender scholars can work with one another to build and test theories across regions, and they can work with other comparativists to show how gender cuts across other research areas and contributes to a better understanding of non-gender-specific research questions. By doing this, they advance both gender and politics research, as well as the study of comparative politics more broadly, creating a true comparative politics of gender.

Notes

1 Collier 1979; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Linz 1990; Linz and Valenzuela 1994.
2 Boschi 1987; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; McAdam, McCarthy, and Mayer 1996.
3 Molyneux 1985.
4 Waylen 2007.
5 Jones 1996; Bruhn 2003; Baldez 2004.

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6 Jones 1998; Htun and Jones 2002; Jones 2004; Araújo and García 2006.
7 Jones 1997; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008.
8 Morgan, Espinal, and Hartlyn 2006; Desposato and Norrander 2009.
9 See, for example, O'Regan 2000; Schwindt-Bayer 2006, but see Htun and Weldon in Part II of this symposium.
10 Norris 1985; Rule 1987; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Reynolds 1999; Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006; Tremblay 2008.
11 See, for example, Dahlerup 2006; Tremblay 2008; Krook 2009.
12 For examples of work moving in this direction see, Schwindt-Bayer and Palmer 2007 and Tripp and Kang 2008.
13 Stetson and Mazur 1995; O'Regan 2000; Goetz and Hassim 2003; Htun 2003; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Kittilson 2008.
14 Weldon 2002; Htun and Weldon 2010; Kittilson 2010.
15 Dodson and Carroll 1991; Thomas and Welch 1991; Thomas 1994; Rosenthal 1998; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002.
16 See, for example, Wangnerud 2000; Goetz and Hassim 2003; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Schwindt-Bayer 2006.
17 See Louise Chappell's article in this symposium.
18 Schwindt-Bayer and Palmer 2007.
19 For additional ideas, see Tripp 2006.

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