

**Workshop title:** The causes and consequences of male over-representation

**Workshop directors:**

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**Topic outline**

Nearly every legislature in the world has a majority of male members (Rwanda is an isolated exception). This well-known fact has generated significant research on women's descriptive and substantive under-representation in politics. While male over-representation might be explicitly acknowledged, it is usually problematised in terms of its impact on women, and is seldom the central focus of study. The purpose of this workshop is to open up a new research agenda focusing explicitly on male over-representation, studying the causes and consequences of having male majorities (as opposed to female minorities) within legislatures. Although male over-representation is, in a sense, only the other side of women's underrepresentation, this simple rephrasing invokes a number of new questions - and thus opens up new answers and research areas within the field of gender and politics. There are numerous important research questions pertaining to male over-representation that have yet to be fully answered. How have men managed to maintain their privileged position in politics? What is the role of male networks, both for accessing and for wielding political power? Do clientelism, nepotism, sexism and other mechanisms that give men an unfair advantage all contribute to the selection of inferior men, resulting in a lower quality of representation for all? Are factors facilitating and constraining legislative careers different for men and women? How have men reacted to attempts to level the playing field, and to the presence of greater levels of women? Do men modify and tone down their behaviour in the presence of women, or do they feel even greater pressure to perform certain types of masculinity? Is the effect of having more women in parliament liberating for men, or do men find themselves threatened by female "space invaders" (Puwar, 2004) and therefore compelled to close ranks against the new arrivals? Do men feel empowered or constrained by the cultures of masculinity that thrive within male-dominated institutions? What are men's interests, and how well are they met by male representatives? Are any men excluded from the representative process, and are some men's interests overlooked by masculinised legislatures? Could it be the case that male over-representation is damaging for men as well as for women? Might male citizens benefit from having a better gender balance in

parliaments? The many questions raised when shifting the focus away from female under-representation and towards male over-representation indicates that this is a fertile terrain for research that requires much greater exploration.

### **Relation to existing research**

Many studies exist which explore female under-representation. These include studies of barriers to women's access to politics (Lawless and Fox 2010; Norris and Lovenduski 1995), gendered institutions such as electoral systems (Matland 2002; Paxton et al 2010; Rule 1987), and the effectiveness of mechanisms such as gender quotas for boosting women's descriptive representation (Dahlerup 2006; Krook 2009). Research has also focused increasingly on the substantive representation of women, from debates about women's interests (Diamond and Hartsock 1981; Mansbridge 1999; Sapiro 1981) to studies exploring whether there is a link between descriptive and substantive representation (Celis 2006; Reingold 2006; Swers 2005). Most recently, this work has also incorporated the notion of women's symbolic representation (Beaman et al 2012; Franceschet et al 2012).

Work on male over-representation is much more sparse. Some studies have examined the quality of male and female representatives to test whether a surplus of male representatives has had a detrimental effect on the quality of representation (Baltrunaite et al 2012; Besley et al 2012; Júlio and Tavares 2010). Murray (2014) explores this theme further, examining how male over-representation may negatively affect the quality of representation for both men and women. She also raises the question of men's interests, a neglected theme within the political science literature that has only briefly been touched upon by Bob Pease (2002). The ability to represent men effectively is linked to institutional cultures, a topic where male dominance has received greater attention, albeit in research by sociologists, gender studies scholars, economists and scholars of business and management. These studies have also pointed to the importance of homosociality and networking for maintaining power and for reproducing male dominance in a number of spheres – but not in the political sphere (e.g. Cockburn 1991; Collinson and Hearn 2005; Holgersson 2013; Ibarra 1992, 1997; Kanter 1977; Kvande and Rasmussen; Lipman-Blumen 1976). Meanwhile, Bjarnegård (2013) offers a rare study looking at the causes of male dominance in politics, with a particular focus on how clientelist networks help to maintain male rule in developing democracies such as Thailand. Bjarnegård's work contributes to earlier studies by scholars such as Robin LeBlanc (2009) which illustrate the pressures on men to conform and perform certain types of masculinity within heavily male-dominated environments.

While new research focusing on male over-representation is likely to attract the attention and contribution of scholars who usually work on female under-representation, this work will also make a valuable contribution to the broad literature on representation and political institutions. This is therefore an innovative research agenda that seeks to fill a wide hole in the literature with work likely to appeal to a broad audience.

### **Participants and type of papers**

The workshop aims to bring together scholars currently working on men and masculinity within politics from a gendered and/or feminist perspective (as opposed to those who study men incidentally rather than explicitly, given that most major political actors are men). While research with a focus on men, rather than women, is relatively rare, we hope to inspire the many scholars working on women and gender to embrace this new research agenda by reconceptualising their research questions and producing new research in this area. We also invite the participation of scholars working in related areas but outside the discipline of political science.

We invite both theoretical and empirical papers that explore and develop the workshop's theme of male over-representation. Papers exploring male power networks, masculinist cultures within parliaments, men's interests, and the substantive representation of men are particularly welcome. We do not have a regional or methodological preference, and papers exploring single country case studies are welcome, as are more comparative pieces. We ask paper proposals to ensure that the primary focus of the research is men, masculinity and/or male over-representation, rather than women.

### **Biographical note**

Rainbow Murray is Reader in Politics at Queen Mary, University of London. Her research focuses on representation, gender and political institutions, with a comparative lens but particular expertise on France and the UK. Her books include *Parties, Gender Quotas and Candidate Selection in France* (Palgrave, 2010). She publishes widely in journals including the *American Political Science Review*, *Politics & Gender*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Party Politics* and *West European Politics*. She co-edits the *European Journal for Political Research Political Data Yearbook*.

Elin Bjarnegård is Assistant Professor at the Department of Government, Uppsala University. Her research interests are within the field of comparative politics and include political recruitment, gender and masculinities, and informal institutions. Her research has focused on dynamics in developing democracies, Thailand in particular. She recently published the book *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment: Explaining Male Dominance in Parliamentary Representation* (Palgrave 2013) and her research has appeared in journals such as *Representation*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *International Interactions* and *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*.

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