

## Reclaiming Party Politics Research

*Response to Anika Gauja and Karina Kosiara-Pedersen. 2021. Decline, adaptation and relevance: political parties and their researchers in the twentieth century. European Political Science. 20(1): 123-38.*

### Abstract

In a 2021 Special Issue in *European Political Science*, Anika Gauja and Karina Kosiara-Pedersen review the sub-field of party politics research. In doing so, they argue party politics scholarship reflects the broader development of the political science discipline, illustrating the evolving relationship between politics researchers and the organisations they study. In this reply, we argue that the party politics sub-field reflects the wider discipline in another crucial respect – it continues to marginalise gender politics scholarship. We demonstrate that a gendered lens fundamentally transforms key questions in the field around *what* party politics scholars study, and *how* and *why* they conduct their research, with relevant consequences for whose work is included. In failing to engage with this scholarship, “mainstream” party politics scholars are (re)producing unequal power relations and hierarchies within the discipline, whilst also depriving themselves of the capacity to address fully key questions of representation, democracy, continuity and change.

**Keywords:** Political parties; gender politics; feminist institutionalism; political science; power; representation

## Introduction

In a 2021 Special Issue in *European Political Science*, Anika Gauja and Karina Kosiara-Pedersen review the main trends in the sub-field of political party research over the last twenty years<sup>1</sup>. In doing so, they map the ways in which the sub-field has evolved in relation to the organisations that its researchers study - political parties – trends which they argue are reflective of the wider discipline of political science.

In this reply, we argue that the party politics sub-field reflects the broader political science discipline in another crucial respect – it continues to marginalise gender politics scholarship. Despite the increasing growth and consolidation of the wider gender politics sub-field in recent decades, the “mainstreaming” of gender in the discipline has fluctuated, and even stagnated, over time, whilst also facing increasing external opposition and resistance in some contexts (Engeli 2020; Ahrens et al. 2021). Similarly, gender party research has flourished in recent decades – reflected, for example, in recent special issues on gender and internal party regulation (van Biezen and Rashkova 2013); party politics (Celis et al. 2016); candidate selection (Kenny and Verge 2015, 2016); political ambition (Piscopo and Kenny 2020); conservative parties (Celis and Childs 2018); women’s parties (Cowell-Meyers et al. 2020); and populist parties (Kantola and Lombardo 2020), amongst others. Yet, this research continues to be “sidelined” rather than mainstreamed in party politics scholarship more generally, if included at all - and Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen’s review in *European Political Science* is no exception to this.

In this reply, we use the Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen (2021) review as a point of departure to evaluate the sub-field of party politics research from a gendered perspective. We argue that the party politics sub-field continues to treat “mainstream” political party research and gender party research as belonging to two separate sub-fields, hindering the conceptualisation and empirical analysis of parties. We use the term “mainstream” here to refer to research without a gender perspective, but emphasise that this division is a constructed one: gender research on political parties *is* party politics research. That it is often not considered as such is, indeed, the critical misinterpretation that we seek to question and challenge. Drawing on the rich body of work on gender and political parties, we show that a gendered lens fundamentally changes and transforms key questions in the field around *what* party politics scholars study, *how* and *why* they conduct their research, with relevant consequences for whose work is included. Gender and party politics scholarship is not simply about “adding women in”

(although that is an essential first step), but rather it reclaims and challenges the fundamental concepts of political party scholarship and provides important insights into key questions about power, representation, democracy, continuity and change. The failure of mainstream party politics scholars to include or engage with gender party scholars and their research therefore misrepresents the field, (re)producing unequal power relations and hierarchies around which topics, methods, and cases are “worth” studying, as well as who is given recognition for their contributions. It also limits the ability of the sub-field to address pressing concerns around contemporary challenges to political parties.

### **Party politics: whose sub-field is it anyway?**

Our critique of the gender-blindness of the party politics sub-field builds on the main trends identified by Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen’s (2021) review of the “European tradition” in party research: an increase in specialisations within the sub-field; a burgeoning use of large datasets that enable the application of quantitative methods; and the shift to comparative, team-based methodologies. We see these trends as largely corresponding to questions about *what* party research is and *how* parties are studied. Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen also address the *why* question of relevance and “real-world impact”, highlighting the increasing provision by party scholars of specialist expertise and advice to governments, international organisations and parties themselves. Taking into account feminist scholarship on political parties fundamentally changes and enhances the *what*, *how* and *why* questions of this sub-field.

#### *What do party politics scholars study?*

Any discussion of the “what” of party politics scholarship looks very different when gender and party scholarship are accounted for. When left out, the picture is distorted in at least two different ways. First, important trends pertaining to women or gender (in)equality are simply not included among the specialised topics on which the sub-field focuses. Second, the big questions and issues that form the core of gender and politics research are fundamentally ignored.

As Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen identify, there has been a rapid expansion in specialised topics within the sub-field of party politics. One illustrative example is research into different types of political parties, such as digital parties, populist parties, green parties, and women’s parties. Despite the latter being neither a new phenomenon nor a rare one, there has been little

theoretical or empirical interest in studying women's parties in mainstream party politics research, despite their relevance to core preoccupations in the field, for example their position as a unique "party family" (Cowell-Meyers et al. 2020). Yet, women's parties often emerge as a response to the marginalisation of women and gender equality concerns in political decision-making and established parties, and, therefore, speak to wider debates around party competition and organisation, and the ways in which social movements work with, through and against parties to effect change (Evans and Kenny 2019). Women's parties also have the potential to play an important role in contesting and resisting the threats posed by democratic backsliding, in particular through pioneering innovative ways of organising, competing and campaigning (Cowell-Meyers et al. 2020).

Similarly, mainstream party politics scholarship on dynamics of adaptation, survival and transformation has often failed to engage with two major developments: the feminisation of party politics and the adoption and implementation of electoral gender quotas. While parties overall remain dominated by men, women now occupy a quarter of the world's parliamentary seats, compared to 12% in 1998 (IPU 2021). The increase in women's descriptive representation has been supported by, and is largely due to, the most far-reaching electoral reform of our times: the introduction of different forms of political gender quotas in more than 130 countries (Hughes et al. 2017). Quotas, although they come in many shapes and forms, are ultimately introduced in order to reform the recruitment practices and change the priorities of political parties (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2011). Literature on party adaptation to quotas has burgeoned over the past two decades, in Europe (e.g. Davidson-Schmich 2006; Murray 2010; Verge and de la Fuente 2014; Vandeleene 2014; Besley et al. 2017) and beyond (e.g. Caul 2001; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Krook 2009; Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013).

Yet these major trends are often ignored – or relegated to the sidelines – of mainstream party research. The SAGE *Handbook of Party Politics* (Katz and Crotty 2006), for example, billed as the first major work to comprehensively map the "state-of-the-art" of contemporary party politics scholarship, includes only limited discussion or integration of issues related to women and/or gender. The majority of references to gender party research appear in Pippa Norris and Vicky Randall's chapters on recruitment, and political parties and social structure in the developing world, respectively, which bring in scholarship on women's representation and gender quotas. Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen's (2021) review, meanwhile, highlights the

continuing under-representation of women researchers in the party politics sub-field, but at the same time, cites little to no feminist party politics scholarship, including both classic works (see for example Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Lovenduski 2005; Kittilson 2006) and more recent special issues already highlighted in this reply.

Party politics scholarship used to be preoccupied with democratic biases of class, region, and religion in Western party systems (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolino and Mair 1990; Ware 1995), but even when it was, it consistently overlooked gender effects. Today, research teams examining intra-party power through comparative data analysis that prioritise big data and combinations of different datasets may or may not include gender variables. When they do, variables are largely limited to measurements of binary sex differences or to background variables. It is clear that gender party scholarship has not fundamentally influenced the design and construction of party databases.

The platform Party Facts links already available datasets with reliable and relevant information on political parties, such as the Manifesto Project, ParlGov, Comparative Candidates Survey and other large surveys like World Values Survey, the Afrobarometer, etc. (see e.g. Döring and Regel 2020). It does not include the Quota Project, which has information on voluntary party quotas (possibly because it is not accessible in an easily convertible format and would have to be added manually). Because Party Facts focuses on the party level, it also leaves out information that is aggregated at the country level. This means that the QAROT-dataset on legislative gender quotas (Hughes et al. 2017), party leadership data from EIGE (EIGE 2021), and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data on the legislative representation of women (IPU 2021) are not included. This reinforces a longstanding data problem for party scholars investigating gender aspects quantitatively: the general lack of accessible and comparative party level data. Candidate selection scholars, for instance, largely rely on either indirect country level data or on project-specific – and highly time consuming – data collection efforts at the party-level. Scattered initiatives by, among others, the IPU and GEPPAL, have collected party-level data on women's representation, but although they have been widely used and recognised as unique and important (e.g. Kunovich and Paxton 2005, Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016b, Funk et al 2017, 2021), they have been discontinued and are now only available with limited geographical and temporal coverage. A comparative global database of women representatives per party is still lacking although it

has been high on the agenda for years – and although it would be possible to accomplish with improved coordination. Other information of interest, such as party stances on gender equality, is also relatively hard to come by. The widely used Manifesto Project, for instance, uses a broader category of equality, rendering it impossible to examine a party's explicit stance on gender issues (Volgens et al 2021). Similarly, in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, gender equality is collapsed into two larger categories of party positions on social life style and on social and cultural values (Jolly et al. forthcoming). In the new expert-survey database V-Party, the only variable that can be used to estimate any gender ideology concerns the extent to which the party supports the equal participation of women in the labor market<sup>2</sup>. It does, however, include a variable estimating the share of women in national-level leadership positions of political parties (Lührmann et al 2020).

Taken together, it means that information needed to forward comparative research on many of the issues that gender party scholars have long struggled with – such as outcomes of nomination procedures, the handling of legislative quotas or the adoption of voluntary ones, the influence of feminist civil society, a party's stance on issues of women's reproductive health or gender-based violence, or party precautions and responses to harassment and violence against politicians – is still hard to come by in many of the existing large party datasets. There are, however, promising developments worth mentioning. V-Party will be continuing into more survey rounds and there may be opportunities for collaborations and expansions. Meanwhile, the Political Party Database Project, for example, is an evolving project that started out by including data from 122 parties in 19 countries and which is expanding to 44 countries. This database does include crucial variables such as quota rules, the share of women in party executive bodies, the existence of women's sections, as well as the share of women candidates and MPs for the national parliament (Poguntke et al. 2016, Poguntke et al. 2020). It would be entirely possible to build on these efforts as they expand, and integrate gender-relevant party information into big data collection efforts. The fact that there is still a lack of comparative party data on gender is both a cause and a consequence of the persistent but superficial division between gender party scholarship and non-gender party scholarship. Without ongoing discussions and interactions, those in charge of the data collection efforts naturally have a hard time identifying what type of data that would be valuable, and what may already be available. The divide also makes it more difficult to identify relevant gender party scholars that could be part of ongoing data collection efforts.

The lack of gender-relevant data in itself exacerbates the existing divide, and contributes to the different directions and foci within the field of party scholarship.

Our goal here, however, is not only to direct attention to the above issues and trends in gender and party politics scholarship that mainstream party politics literature continues to sideline. We are also concerned that the continuing omission of gender party research prevents better knowledge of the core questions of the party politics sub-field. As the field has become more specialised and fragmented, some authors pinpoint that it has lost its previous focus on “bigger picture” questions about the role of parties in representative democracy (Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen 2021; see also van Biezen and Saward 2008). Yet, we argue that feminist research into political parties has never lost sight of these larger political questions about power, representation, democracy and accountability. Its outputs are visible and within reach, since gender and party research is published (and amongst some of the most-cited articles) in both general and specialist sub-field journals, and with well-known publishers. Thus, is it really the case that party research has lost interest in addressing these issues, or is work on gender still seen as irrelevant, even to the point that it cancels out the many insights it brings to the sub-field?

For gender party scholars, party politics is fundamentally a site of power relations. Feminist scholars regard party actors as embodied beings in which sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, culture, religion, region and other structures of power interact to determine who are representatives, which policies they adopt, and so on (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Childs 2013; Celis et al. 2015; Evans 2016; Jensenius 2016; Juvonen 2020; Daddow and Hertner 2021). In seeking to understand these dynamics, many gender party scholars have increasingly drawn upon the insights of “feminist institutionalism”, a variant of new institutional theory which explores “the interplay between gender and the operation and effect of political institutions” (Mackay et al. 2010: 574; see also Kenny and Verge 2016). Founded by men and historically populated by men, party organisations are stratified by gender and productive of power inequalities (Lovenduski 2005). Gender is (re)inscribed in the “rules of the game”, including both the formal (written) rules, such as party constitutions, by-laws, or criteria for candidate selection and the informal (non-written) rules, encompassing norms, practices, conventions or rituals (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015). This includes “gendered” rules that accord different roles and opportunities to women and men, as well as “apparently gender-neutral rules” that, nonetheless, produce gendered effects due to their interaction with

wider social norms (Lowndes 2020: 545, see also Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Verge and Claveria 2018).

This established body of research offers crucial insights into the wider contexts in which parties develop their organisational structures and the reasons why (and how) parties either adapt or change, or remain the same (cf. Katz and Mair 1994). In investigating the “inner lives” of political parties through a gendered lens, gender politics scholarship highlights the ways in which the experiences and behaviour of individual and collective actors are shaped by unequal social and political power relations (Lovenduski 2005; Kenny and Verge 2016). For example, the continuing exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from party politics (as members, candidates, leaders and representatives) is shaped by wider patterns of gender socialisation that make men see other men as more likeable and reliable peers when recruiting candidates for public office (Tremblay and Pelletier 2001; Bjarnegård 2013; Murray 2014; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016). This, in turn, is upheld by organisational arrangements within parties and parliaments that do not take into account the sexual division of waged and household labour in larger society (Campbell and Childs 2014; Franceschet 2005; Verge and de la Fuente 2014). Prevailing “ideal” types of good party leaders or public officers are still biased toward stereotypically masculine traits – for example, high levels of competitiveness, forceful assertiveness, or adversarial styles of debate (Lovenduski 2005: 53) – and participation modes reflect the needs of individuals with fewer caring responsibilities. Examples include continuation of discussions after party meetings that end in informal arenas such as bars and restaurants (Bjarnegård 2013; Verge 2015).

Simultaneously, “parties make gender” (Kenny and Verge 2016: 359) in routine ways that (re)produce gender power relations. This is shown by the overrepresentation of men from majority groups in party decision-making bodies (Kittilson 2006), the horizontal gendered segregation in the distribution of roles, mandates or functions (Bashevkin 1993; Roza, Llanos and Garzón de la Roza 2011; Verge and de la Fuente 2014; Smrek 2022), and the slow response to adopting effective anti-harassment measures within party organisations or parliaments (IPU 2016; Collier and Raney 2018; Krook 2018; Verge 2022). This raises important questions about who parties actually represent, and about responsiveness and accountability.

Core questions in the party politics sub-field around party “resilience, adaptation and transformation” (Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen 2021: 126) are, therefore, enriched by the



integration of a gendered lens. As the study of quotas shows, gender has been an important source of party change that has transformed the social and political context in which parties and legislatures operate. Quota reforms challenge the fundamental core of the relationship between voters, parties, and representatives; force parties to adapt and change the ways in which they organise; and challenge how power within parties is distributed and agreed upon – all fundamental issues of concern for party politics scholars. The study of quota adoption also draws attention to the relationship between parties and their members, prospective voters and civil society actors, highlighting the importance of both bottom-up pressures for change led by women within and outwith parties, as well as elite-led reforms from the top-down in introducing quota measures (Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Kittilson 2006).

While providing important insights into the ways in which parties respond to both internal and external pressures for change, research on gender and candidate selection also points to the ways in which parties have “stayed the same” despite these progressive reforms, contributing to understanding the political status quo. Across electoral systems, political parties find creative ways to discriminate against women candidates in the nomination of candidates and the allocation of safe positions in party lists and competitive races (Stambough and O’Regan 2007; Murray 2010; Verge and Troupe 2011; Luhiste 2015; Gatto and Wylie 2021). Party change is difficult because the “stickiness” of informal rules often facilitates the redeployment of “old ways of doing things” by party actors (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016: 387). Here again, how parties organise matters. Gender party scholarship, for instance, demonstrates the importance of leadership and representation at different levels of party organisation (Krook 2009; Murray 2010; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Bashevkin 2010; Celis and Lovenduski 2018), party (de)centralisation (Kenny and Verge 2013), and party bureaucratization (Kittilson 2006; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016b, 2019) in facilitating the implementation of reforms aimed at inclusion.

While gender inequality is important in and of itself, gender also serves as a lens through which broad injustices and undemocratic practices are made visible. In doing so, it challenges some of the “self-evident truths” of party politics scholarship (cf. van Biezen and Saward 2008), which tends to make assumptions about how democracy does and should work, rather than acknowledging that these concepts and questions are contested and shaped by power dynamics. Work on gender, political representation and candidate selection, for example, has engaged with broader normative questions concerning intra-party democracy (cf. Childs

2013), asking whether political parties can be judged internally democratic if women continue to be under-represented within them. As Childs (2013: 98) argues, “gendered intra-party democracy requires both that women (as the hitherto dominated group) gain power relative to men, *and* that women gain power within political parties relative to where power lies”. These internal power struggles are important for assessing political parties as trustworthy democratic players. The historic and continuing resistance to delivering equal descriptive (presence) and substantive (policy) representation at both party and system level is worrying from a democratic point of view.

### *How do we study political parties?*

Why do mainstream party politics scholars continue to ignore feminist work? Our previous discussion suggested that one answer to this lies in the fact that mainstream party politics scholars have (at least explicitly) abandoned the “big questions” in the field around power, democracy and representation. There may also be a methodological barrier, with an increasing preference amongst mainstream party politics scholars for data-driven empirical questions over more searching theoretical questions, and a shift towards team-based, comparative and quantitative research that is “taking political science closer to the natural sciences” (Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen 2021: 128).

As Tripp and Hughes (2018: 242) argue, approaches and methods in political science are gendered and political. They are gendered because the question of who uses which approaches and methods reflects wider gendered power relations. Men are over-represented in social and political science sub-fields that emphasise quantitative methodology, and studies suggest that women are less likely than men to publish using quantitative methods – which are disproportionately favoured by many of the top-ranked journals in political science (Teele and Thelen 2017). They are also political because they are about power – in terms of who gets taught what, what gets published, who gets hired and promoted and even celebrated as significant scholars.

Again, we suggest that the depiction of methods used in the field of party politics would look different when gender party scholarship is included. While the trend towards quantitative methods is notable also in scholarship on gender and political parties, it does not constitute either a divide between “quant” and “qual”, nor a cancelling out of the type of insights that qualitative studies offer. Perhaps “long-held feminist prejudices about the value of

quantitative measures for studying institutions” (Chappell and Mackay 2017: 37) can account for some of the reluctance to be overtaken by big-data concerns, but there has also been a noticeable shift, whereby quantitative methods are not just accepted but seen as a valuable complement that brings additional clarity to in-depth institutional analyses (Weldon 2014). In exploring research questions, we do not set out always to find gendered effects; rather, we make sure that our data and methods enable us to ask how gender is implicated in the institutions and processes that we explore. Gender relations underpin formal and informal rules, processes of change and persistence, policy formulation, the relationship to members, voters and civil society – in short, gendered and intersectional power relations affect every dimension of party politics that we have examined.

The feminist challenge to party politics research offers a substantial methodological toolkit of models and approaches. Political parties have been analysed within a feminist institutionalist framework using theorisation (e.g. Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Chappell and Mackay 2017), case study and ethnographic research (e.g. Kenny 2013; Verge and de la Fuente 2014; Smrek 2022), mixed methods research (e.g. Bjarnegård 2013; Folke et al. 2015; Medeiros et al. 2019), as well as larger quantitative studies (e.g. O’Brien, 2015; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016b, 2019; Verge and Claveria 2018; Gatto and Wylie 2021). Feminist institutionalism builds on new institutionalism’s insights, but has been adapted and developed to investigate gendered power in political processes. As such, it uses many concepts familiar to mainstream institutionalist scholars, including an emphasis on the interplay between formal and informal rules; patterns of institutional and organisational change such as layering, conversion and drift; as well as historical cultural dimensions including logics of appropriateness and path dependence.

These new institutionalist insights seem to have been more influential in gender party scholarship than in mainstream party scholarship. Fundamental to understanding power in political parties is acknowledging that political inequalities, including those between women and men, are protected by longstanding tradition and powerful institutions, upheld and maintained by political actors, rooted in experiences pertaining to both public and private life, and taken for granted until challenged. In studying the ways in which these power hierarchies are sustained and reproduced, gender and party politics scholars engage with multiple levels of analysis, ranging from the micro- to the meso- and macro-, and focusing on the co-constitutive relationship between actors and institutions across and within different country

contexts. This requires not just the use of different methods, but also an ongoing intellectual discussion and interaction between the researchers using the different methods.

Although rooted in case studies of particular systems, gender and party politics research has always been alert to the potential of systematic comparison, assisted by scholarly meetings of the ECPR's European Standing Group on Gender and Politics and large-scale projects such as the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS). Intellectually, accounts proceed in two directions: building out from case studies that are conducted according to an agreed model that facilitates comparison, and building down from comparative questions that lead to retheorisation (Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Dahlerup and Leyenaar 2013; Kenny and Verge 2016; Lang et al. forthcoming).

International organisations including IPU, OSCE, IDEA and UN Women have commissioned and otherwise underwritten comparative studies that have expanded the global reach of the feminist study of party politics. These collaborations have sometimes led to comparative databases such as the Gender Quotas Database (IDEA et al. 2021) and QAROT (Hughes et al. 2017), focusing on systematizing and categorizing quota adoption worldwide; GEPPAL (IADB 2021), collecting information on women in Latin American political parties; and Parline (IPU 2021), collecting historical data on women in national parliaments.

The broad regional coverage of gender and politics research has allowed scholars to test the generalizability of analytical frameworks, looking at, for example, how the gendered “rules of the game” are played out by political parties that operate under sectarian (Geha 2019) or caste systems (Jensenius 2016) as well as in electoral authoritarian regimes (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016a) or in countries where corruption is a widespread practice (Bjarnegård 2013), as well as comparing party behaviour across different countries and regime types (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016; Johnson 2017, Madsen 2020)

### *Why do we study political parties?*

We agree with Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen (2021: 129) that one of the key challenges for party politics scholars is to “translate disciplinary concerns into real-world impact” by advising governments and parties, and collaborating with parties. Too often mainstream party politics research continues to omit the crucial role of gender politics scholars as change actors in advocating for women's descriptive and substantive representation and the adoption of gender quotas, gender action plans or anti-harassment policies in parties, including through

consultancy and advisory roles with parties, parliaments and governments; as well as international governmental and non-governmental organisations (see for example Campbell and Childs 2013; Childs and Dahlerup 2018; Verge 2020).

Indeed, for gender and politics scholars it is undesirable, if not impossible, to divorce the academic and the political. Just as the personal is political, so too is academia. Feminist conceptions of (gender) power require both the intellectual recognition of the state(s) of inequality as well as an active commitment to transform those structures and relations (Lovenduski 2005). In other words, the project is driven by a feminist imperative (Campbell and Childs 2013). Guiding our normative approach is a feminist ethics that research should make a social contribution. Historically, this has been understood in everyday terms as research that is by, about and for women. Today, we would conceptualise this as a responsibility to redress gender and other inequalities, framed by a commitment to intersectionality (Hancock 2007) which draws attention to the ways in which interactions between different identity categories shape political behaviour, processes and outcomes. In light of a global pandemic and democratic backsliding (Verloo 2018), which disproportionately affects the rights and welfare of the historically marginalised, this work has never been of more importance.

Traditionally, feminist methodology sought to focus on the most marginalised and disempowered, with more of a focus on grassroots activists than elite-level political actors. However, over the past few decades, feminist political scientists have turned their attention to those marginalised within powerful institutions. If this was motivated in part by the new opportunities that followed women's and minority groups' participation in electoral politics, it was also motivated by a desire to help those disempowered within such spaces – parties, parliaments, governments, and bureaucracies – to bring about change. In these efforts, the researcher/researched relationship was frequently marked by shared commitments, collaborative working and, at times, the co-production of knowledge (Bustelo et al. 2016; Ferguson 2019). “Giving back” (Davis and Craven 2016) might take the form of data collection and analysis; briefings, pamphlets and reports; training; unpaid advice and paid consultancy; and a more diffuse – although not necessarily any less valuable – support networks (Childs and Dahlerup 2018).

To take the most obvious example, gender party scholars have played a key role in the design, adoption, implementation and diffusion of gender quotas, already highlighted in this reply as the most significant reform in electoral politics in recent memory. In numerous cases, there are

documented links between feminist academics, women within parties and quota adoption processes – shaping party rules and organisation, as well as quota design and implementation (see Childs and Dahlerup 2018 for a more detailed review). We therefore think mainstream party politics scholars could learn more from feminist scholars in terms of critically assessing the researcher/researched relationship (Chappell and Mackay 2021), including re-evaluating assumptions that knowledge or expertise is the sole purview of the academic researcher (cf. Geddes et al. 2018), and exploring possibilities for co-production partnerships with government, party, and civil society actors.

### **Conclusion and challenges ahead**

In this reply, we have made the case for what mainstream party scholars can continue to learn from gender party scholars. To the detriment of our understanding of political parties, researchers working with or without a gender perspective are too often seen as belonging to two separate sub-fields. This not only causes mainstream political party research to omit relevant research that clearly contributes to the study of parties, but it also contributes to narrowing the focus and effectively limiting the type of questions that are addressed in the sub-field. We argue that political party scholars have deprived themselves of the capacity to address fully pressing issues of power, democracy, representation and accountability, due to the persistent and unjustifiable exclusion of gender and party scholarship<sup>3</sup>.

The main trends and questions of party politics research over the past several decades – centring around *what* is studied, and *how* it is studied, and *why* research is conducted – look very different once gender is taken into account. This article has shown how feminist research contributes to mainstream political party research, reclaiming and challenging core concepts and questions in the field. Not least, feminist research has investigated how the fact that political parties are organisations made up by and for men predominantly from majority groups has fundamental implications for how they function; the ways in which they organise; what they see as relevant issues and appropriate behaviour; and who they select as candidates and leaders. The unveiling of informal aspects of the inner life of political parties also furthers the understanding of how parties change and/or stay the same, pointing to the importance of changes in formal rules as well as incremental shifts in informal institutions, and the ways in which these interact with each other to open up or limit possibilities for reform and transformation. Furthermore, the critical investigation of intra-party gender power dynamics has raised important normative questions about how and to what extent parties act

as a vehicle for democratic equality and inclusion, thereby addressing issues related to the legitimacy and “health” of political parties as representative organisations.

The “stories” that we tell about our discipline send important messages about who deserves recognition for their scholarly contributions and about which questions, methods, and cases are “worth” studying. The *what*, *how* and *why* of party politics scholarship are therefore inextricably intertwined with questions about the *who*, in terms of which actors (with what expertise) are included and excluded in research communities. The question of who is included in comparative project teams, for example, has significant implications for who publishes with whom, with research demonstrating that most co-authored research published in top political science journals entails men co-authoring with other men (Teele and Thelen 2017; Ghica 2021). Gendered publication patterns are reinforced by citational imbalances, with scholars tending to cite other scholars that they know, and work produced by women less likely to be read and cited than work by men (Maliniak et al 2013), patterns which also shape what scholarship is included in university curricula and reading lists (Mügge et al. 2016).

In order to better integrate gender into party politics research, we need to move beyond sex and towards gender as an aspect worthy of study and as a crucial field of expertise. While it is welcome that sex is increasingly included as a background variable in comparative studies – counting women MPs or party leaders, or maybe gender quotas or women’s organisations within parties – it is far from sufficient. Collaborative teams in party politics research need to ensure not just gender parity amongst their researchers, but also need to include feminist expertise and train all team members on the “what” and “how” of identifying gender in their coding and analyses. Gender and party research now constitutes such a large field that it should not be hard to identify such experts for all specialisations.

This is not the first time that feminist scholars have drawn the attention of political science to the importance of gender to the study of politics, nor we suspect, regretfully, will it be the last. Here we claim that, far from being marginal or separate, gender politics is central to a full understanding of party politics. While we have been making these points, individually and collectively, for decades, it cannot be the sole responsibility of gender scholars to highlight these exclusions and omissions. We have done our part. It is past time for the individuals, groups and associations researching political parties to do theirs.

## Notes

1. While the article title of Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen's (2021) suggests a focus on the twentieth century, the article itself focuses on the past twenty years of political party research.
2. Women or gender equality are also included as response-options in two variables (party support group and mobilisation issues respectively).
3. Here we echo the arguments of van Biezen and Saward (2008: 21), who make a similar argument with regard to the lack of dialogue between political party scholars and normative democratic theorists.

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