

Men vastly outnumber women in studying legislative politics, study shows

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It's no secret that men outnumber women in the halls of Congress and in other political arenas, but new research from Rice University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has also found that significantly more men than women study the legislative process in the U.S. and abroad.

This has troubling implications for the inner workings of the discipline and the overall study of topics that impact women's political involvement, according to Leslie Schwindt-Bayer, the Thomas Cooke

and Mary Elizabeth Edwards Chair in Government and Democracy and one of the authors of "Women in Legislative Studies: Improving Gender Equality." The article appears in an upcoming issue of *Political Science & Politics*.

For their study, Schwindt-Bayer and fellow authors Eleanor Neff Powell at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and Gisela Sin from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign surveyed 361 women studying political science with a focus in legislative politics to understand why gender representation in the field is so imbalanced and what can be done about it.

Schwindt-Bayer said that while many women study legislatures, they do not always identify as scholars of legislative studies.

"We argue that one big reason for this low representation may be that women are less likely to call themselves legislative scholars and do not perceive the field as inclusive," she said. "When asked what problems they perceive with the section of scholars studying legislative politics, the most common critique was that the field was male-dominated. Nearly 40% raised this concern; another 21% commented on the lack of ethnic and racial diversity."

Other problems cited included an overemphasis on the U.S. Congress (21%) and the subfield being too cliquey/exclusive (28%).

Being underrepresented means that networking opportunities and scholarly resources for women are more scarce, in addition to there being fewer female mentors and letter writers for promotion and tenure. The representation imbalance also reinforces gender bias when it comes to authoring research, graduate training, and publication and citation rates for women in the field.

"It's especially troublesome when you consider that female authors are significantly more likely than male authors to cite studies by women," Schwindt-Bayer said. "This lack of representation puts women at a real disadvantage in this field."

The researchers also looked at articles in *Legislative Studies Quarterly (LSQ)*, a prominent political science journal focused on this political science subfield, between 2016 and August 2018. In the issues published during this time period, 59% of the 73 articles were authored by men, 18% by women and 23% by mixed-gender teams. These percentages are representative of women in the subfield but are small nonetheless.

"It was plain as day—women are just not well-represented in this branch of the American Political Science Association (APSA)," Schwindt-Bayer said.

While the authors have not examined how representation in the discipline affects women in legislative [politics](#) outside of academia, Schwindt-Bayer said it could mean less attention to issues that are important to women involved in the legislative process.

So what can be done? Schwindt-Bayer and her fellow authors said a more expansive definition of legislative studies, embracing the diversity of women in the field, peer mentoring and space for women studying [legislatures](#) to engage in professional development and share research would be a good place to start.

"This could help encourage more [women](#) to join this field," she said.

More information: Eleanor Neff Powell et al, Women in Legislative Studies: Improving Gender Equality, *PS: Political Science & Politics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1017/S1049096523000306](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523000306)

Provided by Rice University

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