Preface

When I was first invited to edit this encyclopedia on gender and politics, my immediate reaction was both excitement and hesitation. I asked myself: *What can I contribute?*

I entered political science as a "latecomer" after seven years in the humanities. Following a course on the history of European capitalism, I became fascinated by the interplay between economic (European) integration and democracy, and the resulting inequalities these processes might create among citizens of different member states. I am interested in political equality as a foundation of democracy. As a doctoral researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna, I conducted research on equality legal frameworks and the implementation of EU employment directives related to gender, race/ethnicity, migration background, age, disability, religion, and sexual orientation.

As much as I loved researching gender and intersectional inequalities, I did not think I could afford to focus solely on them. As a woman and early-career scholar from the European South, I needed a broad portfolio and mainstream disciplinary recognition to secure an academic position in the European North. Indeed, it was when I left the protective bubble of the university and entered the academic job market as a young Greek woman seeking an academic job in Austria that I began experiencing bias and discrimination first-hand. These lived experiences pushed me (back) towards gender studies. During my postdoc years, I helped initiate debates on inequalities in political representation, including gender, age, and income (Lefkofridi, Giger and Kissau 2012). Together with Anne-Maria Holli, Nathalie Giger, and Hanna Wass, I worked on the role of context (e.g. district magnitude, ratios of male-to-female candidates or deputies) and on the impact of political gender stereotypes (Giger, Holli, Lefkofridi and Wass 2014; Lefkofridi, Giger and Holli 2019) on voting behaviour in Finland. This line of work landed me a tenure-track professorship in Comparative Politics at the University of Salzburg, with a focus on parties, voters, and representation – areas where gender and politics work was thriving. When I received tenure, gender and intersectional inequalities were a big part of my teaching; I had to create new courses on gender, politics and society, and unequal participation and representation. For these courses, I deeply appreciated existing textbooks and handbooks, integrating them into my syllabi to give students tools I had never received in my own training.

Since 2020, I have held the first professorship at my university explicitly dedicated to gender – a desideratum for over twenty years. This gender studies professorship, which is the result of tireless advocacy by early feminist scholars and gender equality practitioners, was advertised as double denomination across disciplines (as sex and gender analysis is relevant to all disciplines). In the last five years, my research and teaching focus has been on gender and power in the context of anti-gender equality backlash. I currently coordinate one of five sister projects funded by the European Union on "Feminisms for a new age of democracy": CCINDLE, FIERCE, PUSH*BACK*LASH, RESIST, UNTWIST.

Thus, when this encyclopedia project came along, it felt like a natural continuation of my journey. I envisioned it as the resource I wanted my students to have: an expansive, critical, interdisciplinary collection that mapped the complex dynamics and rapidly growing field of gender and politics. It was also a great opportunity to connect scholars not only from my own consortium (PUSH*BACK*LASH) and its sister projects, but also beyond them.

That said, I am aware that the encyclopedia is not exhaustive. It could never be. But it is comprehensive in its intention to reflect the field's diversity – conceptually, thematically, and methodologically. It does not replace pioneer works (readers and handbooks) but builds upon them: it brings together multiple theoretical lenses, voices from different generations of scholarship, and entries that do not always align ideologically. This pluralism is intentional. Gender and politics is not a homogeneous field; it is a space of debates, tensions, and contestations. This encyclopedia mirrors that complexity.

Editing this encyclopedia has been a humbling process. It involved carrying out an extensive literature review to understand the breadth of the field and then conducting

cold calls and network outreach to identify contributors from diverse disciplines, geographies, and identities. The response was deeply moving. Authors brought expertise, commitment, and courage. However, the process also laid bare the structural and embodied challenges faced by scholars in gender and politics today. Many contributors wrote their parts while experiencing the very violences they researched: gendered discrimination, marginalisation, microaggressions, and systemic precarity. Others, despite willingness and expertise, could not complete their contributions because they were overextended, overcommitted, and exhausted. This reality is not an aside – it is a structural feature of our field and academia at large – perhaps intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic and current global polycrisis. For political scientists and gender scholars in particular, the rise of illiberal and authoritarian leaderships, and the resulting conflicts and violence have been additional strains.

Throughout the editing process, I encouraged co-authorship as mentorship, inviting senior scholars to write with early-career researchers and graduate students. This was not only a pragmatic response to workload constraints but also an intentional feminist and decolonial praxis: dismantling hierarchies and fostering collective learning. Seeing these collaborations emerge has been one of the most rewarding aspects of this journey.

My interdisciplinary training in political science, history, economics, and law combined with exposure to intercultural environments like the College of Europe (Bruges), Diplomatic Academy (Vienna), and EUI (Florence) taught me the value of diversity in knowledge production. Editing this work has taught me that knowledge production is never neutral. It is relational, embodied, and shaped by our lived experiences and positionalities. Political science may continue to advocate neutrality and rational distance, but gender and politics demand that we recognise our embeddedness in the structures we study. For me, this project has been a testament to that principle. It is not only a scholarly endeavour but also an act of care, hope, and commitment to transformative knowledge.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all contributors to this encyclopedia and to colleagues who supported this journey with their suggestions of topics and authors. In particular, I thank my team: Nadine Zwiener-Collins, Vera Beloshitzkaya, Matilde Ceron, Lena Ramstetter, and Nikolina Sokic. I am most grateful to Laura Kulterer, without whose dedication, administrative precision, excellent organisation, and communication skills this project would not have been possible. Warm thanks to Rina Alluri for our writing retreats, her intellectual insights, and especially our "Linz conversation", which shaped both this preface and the introduction.

This volume is dedicated to all scholars who continue to research, teach, and live gender and politics – often in environments that fail to recognise their worth – and to the students who will use these pages to forge a more inclusive, critical, and just political science in the years to come.

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Introduction: foundations of gender and politics

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At its core, gender and politics is about power relations. A hallmark of gender and politics is its foundation in, and ongoing engagement with, two separate academic fields: gender studies and political science (Ahrens et al. 2021). Gender studies expose how gendered hierarchies shape access to resources, participation in decision-making, and the structures of political institutions. It is paradoxical that political science – a discipline fundamentally concerned with power – has resisted gender analysis, given that gender relations themselves are relations of power. This encyclopedia re-centres gender within political analysis, reflecting its status not merely as an add-on but as a core analytical category that reshapes our understanding of politics itself.

Gender and politics is a relatively young but profoundly transformative field. Despite its recent emergence as a subfield of political science – especially when compared to areas such as comparative politics or international relations – it has achieved remarkable academic success. This success is astonishing given the marginalisation opposition, and backlash that the subfield has faced and is still facing – just like feminism and the broader interdisciplinary field of women's and gender studies. Given wonderful accounts by pioneer and seasoned gender and politics scholars (e.g., Piscopo 2025; Ahrens et al. 2021; Dahlerup 2010; Ritter and Mellow 2000), here it will suffice to only re-state that gender and politics is drawing on gender studies and political science. Gender and Politics is a field that fosters intra-disciplinary dialogue, e.g. between political scientists using a gender lens to study very different political phenomena (from parties and elections to conflict and violence) and inter-disciplinary dialogue at the same time.

Historical development

Historically, political science has been slower than disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, or psychology in integrating gender as an analytical lens for understanding political phenomena, mirroring the broader challenges encountered by gender studies and feminism as intellectual movements and groundbreaking research paradigms (Ritter and Mellow 2000). In the 1950s and 1960s, political science remained largely gender-blind (Dahlerup 2010), with few female political scientists and theories that overlooked or misrepresented women's political agency, effectively reducing and erasing women's formative political experiences as autonomous individuals – a phenomenon some critical feminist peace scholars have termed "wifesization" (Lyytikäinen et al. 2020), referring to the reduction of women's political agency to their roles as wives. For a long time, articles on gender, women, and politics appeared rarely in top political science journals, while early-career scholars and female graduate students faced "active discouragement when pursuing gender-related research" (American Political Science Association 2005, as cited in Piscopo, 2025).

Women's studies as an interdisciplinary academic field emerged in the 1970s and consolidated throughout the 1980s, later relabelled gender studies to become more inclusive (encompassing masculinity studies, lesbian and gay studies, queer studies, and intersectional research) (see Davis et al. 2006). This was also when feminist European political science started organizing. Dahlerup (2010) narrates that the very first workshop with a gender perspective at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) – Women in Politics – was held in Berlin in 1977. This meeting catalysed the emergence of a dynamic and expansive subfield, with dedicated textbooks (Krook and Childs 2010) and handbooks (Waylen et al. 2013), and journals (e.g., *European Journal of Politics and Gender; International Feminist Journal of Politics; Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*; *Politics and Gender*). Thanks to these pioneer efforts, now thousands of political scientists worldwide conduct research on the gender-politics nexus.

Contemporary relevance

As the field continues to expand, its complexity and breadth necessitate a resource like this encyclopedia. Encyclopedias differ from other scientific writing genres due to their magnitude, taking stock of vast bodies of knowledge and including contributions from numerous authors. This encyclopedia offers a resource that enables readers to approach gender and politics from multiple angles – through

distinct theoretical lenses, varied methodologies, and diverse types of data. This openness fosters both intra- and interdisciplinary dialogue, making the encyclopedia invaluable for students, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike. In sum, this encyclopedia is not merely a reference work but also a mirror of contemporary struggles, debates, and innovations in gender and politics scholarship. It is not a dictionary offering single-word definitions but a conceptual and thematic resource reflecting the current zeitgeist – from gender-based violence and digitalization to anti-gender backlash worldwide.

We are living through a time of significant and shifting realities. Gender equality has gained unprecedented attention on political agendas worldwide, with institutions such as the United Nations and regional organizations prioritizing it as a critical issue. While feminists have made considerable progress over the decades, the past few years have seen a troubling rise in anti-feminist and anti-gender rhetoric across many regions. These developments highlight the fragility of hard-won gains for women's rights and the persistent challenges to achieving true gender equality. At the same time, the rapid digitalization of daily life has created new risks, including the proliferation of online gender-based violence and the spread of misogynistic narratives. Yet, these challenges also present opportunities for transformative change. Gender equality is not only essential for building just, inclusive, and resilient societies but is also a fundamental prerequisite for democracy itself – a theme explored in many of the entries in this volume. The contributions in this volume advance our understanding of gender equality as a cornerstone of democratic politics, offering both theoretical insights and actionable policy recommendations to address these global challenges.

Scope and themes

While this encyclopedia is comprehensive, it is not exhaustive. The final selection of 86 entries reflects both editorial vision and the realities of academic labour, with authors balancing multiple commitments. The result is a rich tapestry capturing conceptual and contemporary themes relevant to gender and politics today. This encyclopedia is thematically organized into nine categories; each includes entries that reflect the diversity of the field, offering both breadth and depth into topics that matter now:

1. **Feminisms and Foundational Theories**: Covering topics such as African feminism, Black feminism, ecofeminism, feminist state theory, feminist political thought, feminist governance, feminist disability studies, feminist democratic representation, and queer theory.
2. **Intersectionality and Multiple Inequalities**: Addressing issues like the coloniality of gender, intersectionality in migration studies, gender and class, gender and religion, gender and nationalism, trans* politics, queer activism, and the political behavior of LGBTQIA+ individuals.
3. **Anti-Feminist and Anti-Gender Backlash**: Exploring phenomena such as anti-gender campaigns, antifeminist backlash, right-wing populism, gender and illiberalism, conservative movements and motherhood, populism and feminist politics, and the manosphere's role in anti-gender backlash on social media.
4. **Gender and Public Policy**: Examining topics like abortion discourses and policies, gender budgeting, gender equality indices, gender impact assessments, gender mainstreaming in the EU, gender-responsive public procurement, and gendered policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. **Gender, Leadership, and Institutions**: Investigating women's pathways to power, gender quotas, gendered political institutions, gendered party organizational structures, women and leadership in the executive, women in local and state politics, inclusive leadership, and the role of political parties in women's parliamentary representation.
6. **Gendered Attitudes and Political Behavior**: Analyzing gender gaps in political participation (both institutional and non-institutional), political ambition, political interest, political efficacy, and voting behavior, as well as topics like feminism and public opinion, gender and climate change activism, gender and polarization, gender and the radical right, and gender role attitudes.

7. **Gender, Economy, and Society**: Exploring care work, reproductive labour, gender and capitalism, gender and economic inequality, gendered career paths, and the intersections of gender, autocracy, and democracy in post-communist states.
8. **Gender, Conflict, and Violence**: Addressing gendered violence, peace and conflict, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, gender and displacement, gendered violence against politicians, and attitudes toward reconciliation in post-conflict settings.
9. **Gender, Political Communication, and Media**: Examining the role of media and communication in shaping gendered political narratives, including topics such as electoral campaigns and gender, gender and media, media coverage of politicians, gender stereotypes in political communication, online spaces for feminist actors, online violence against women, and the role of media in cases of gender-based violence.

Methodology

The methodology underlying this encyclopedia combined multiple strategies to identify contributors, reflecting a commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and interdisciplinarity. It began with mapping leading scholars and emerging voices working at the intersection of gender and politics, including early-career researchers and PhD students. The editorial process further utilized snowballing techniques, whereby identified authors were invited to recommend additional contributors, ensuring inclusion of scholars from diverse networks, geographical contexts, and epistemological traditions. This method helped expand disciplinary and regional diversity, capturing perspectives that might remain outside traditional political science citation circles. Many of the authors reflect an international and intersectional scope, with their origin countries, positionalities, migration histories, geographical areas of research, and current locations representing a multiplicity of perspectives.

The contributors were invited to reflect on their specific topics and themes through a connection to three guiding questions:

1. What do we know about this topic?
2. What are the gaps and shortcomings in the literature?
3. Where is the debate going?

Within this framework, authors had agency to define their analytical focus, critique prevailing theories, and suggest directions for future research and policy. This approach embodies an editorial commitment to promoting diversity, inclusivity, and authorial autonomy, and represents a feminist and decolonial praxis of knowledge production, fostering capacity building and facilitating meaningful academic growth. Ultimately, this encyclopedia offers both breadth and depth into topics that matter now, documenting gender as both an analytical tool and a lived reality shaping politics worldwide. It is a resource grounded in diversity, inclusivity, agency, and power, seeking not only to inform but also to inspire continued debates and scholarship in gender and politics.

Conclusion

By offering a global and multi-perspective understanding, the contributions not only map the current state of research but also provoke new questions, encouraging readers to engage critically and constructively with the material. This first Edward Elgar Encyclopedia of Gender and Politics stands as a testament to the resilience and creativity of scholars navigating a contested field marked by backlash, underfunding, and ideological resistance, yet steadfast in their commitment to advancing justice, equity, and transformative knowledge in political science and beyond. More than a reference work, this encyclopedia serves as a call to action, urging readers—including scholars, educators, and policymakers—to examine the role of gender in politics and to integrate these insights into their teaching, research, practice, and policymaking, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable political science and political landscape.

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