Gender and Politics: Global & Comparative Perspectives

Political Science 3V03 (Winter 2018)

Professor: Dr. Karen Bird
Class Meetings: Mon, Wed 8:30-9:20 and Fri 10:30–11:20
Classroom: LRW (Wilson)-1055
Office Hours: Mon, Wed 9:30-10:30, KTH-528
Contact: 905-525-9140 ext. 23124; kbird@mcmaster.ca

Course description and objectives

With the appointment of Canada’s first gender-balanced federal cabinet, Justin Trudeau’s new government earned international media attention and applause from many at home. Trudeau’s succinct “because it’s 2015” justification was intended to emphasize his credibility as a feminist, and a leader more in touch with modern Canadian values of equality and diversity. Yet today, in 2018, with women stalled at just 26% of seats in the House of Commons, and a meagre 18% of Canadian cities led by female mayors, there is reason to wonder how egalitarian-minded minded Canadians really are. Meanwhile, south of the border, Hillary Clinton, the first and only woman (and self-identified feminist) nominated by a major party to run for the office of US president was defeated by a man who once boasted about using his power and fame to grab women’s genitals without their permission. And yet, despite accusations of sexual assault and harassment from over a dozen women, and despite him making degrading comments about the physical attributes of various women during the debates, 45% of white college-educated women still voted for Donald Trump. Further south still, Dilma Rousseff, Brazil’s first female (and decidedly non-feminist) president was impeached and removed from office in 2016 in a campaign that most feminists in that country argue was sexist and discriminatory. These and other recent events have led many to ask what it means to be a woman in politics today.

This course looks at how sex and gender link to politics, political power and legitimacy. As an introduction to the broad topic of gender and politics, the course is divided roughly into three parts. The first part includes some introductory theory. The second part considers whether the gender of our political representatives matters, how we might ensure that political institutions are gender balanced and what the normative arguments about the use of positive action measures are. The third part of the course has a more comparative and international flavour, and includes several case studies that consider the role of gender in specific countries, and in processes of international justice and post-conflict reconstruction. Across these topics, we will draw on scholarly research, selected films, news articles, and case studies to gain deeper insights and inform classroom discussions. Wherever possible, we will be attentive to the ways in which gender intersects with other social identities, such as nation, race/ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation.

By the end of the course, students will:

- be familiar with some of the basic theories and policy questions concerning gender, power and politics;
- be able to critically assess the arguments for and against greater gender equality across various political institutions, and the mechanisms for achieving this;
- have a sound understanding of the role of gender in civil society and political participation;
- understand some of the key issues regarding gender in international and comparative politics, particularly with respect to development, peace and conflict;
• have refined their analytical, research, writing and communication skills, and demonstrated good time management skills including the ability to balance and complete multiple tasks as is expected in professional careers.

Readings and Course Materials

Required course materials


All other readings can be accessed electronically via Mills Library e-Journal Portal. Readings that are not available online (e.g., book chapters) have been posted to the Avenue to Learn course site. **Students are responsible for accessing and reading all assigned materials.**

Websites

Students should also consult the excellent web-based resources that relate to this course. Examples include:

• The Inter-Parliamentary Union [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org) comprises all legislatures in democracies, and provides data on women’s parliamentary representation across countries [http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm). The website includes a links page for individual parliamentary sites, as well as the ‘Parline’ database which includes basic details about all existent parliamentary chambers, a list of publications and other useful links.

• The Quota Project [http://www.quotaproject.org/](http://www.quotaproject.org/) comprises a Global Database of Quotas for Women and provides worldwide information on quota provisions for women in parliament.


• UN Women [http://www.unwomen.org/en](http://www.unwomen.org/en) is the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. It supports Member States in setting standards for achieving gender equality, works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services to guarantee effective implementation of those standards; and coordinates and promotes the UN system’s work to advance gender equality.

• iKNOW Politics [http://iknowpolitics.org/en](http://iknowpolitics.org/en) is a joint project of International IDEA, the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). It focuses on women’s leadership and participation in politics worldwide.
An important note about the material in this course: ‘Politics’ is notoriously controversial, and ‘gender’ is increasingly so. We can expect, therefore, that the topics addressed in this course may at times elicit feelings of discomfort and perhaps frustration or tension. Learning in this class requires a willingness to examine one’s own assumptions about gender and power. Because so many of our assumptions about gender and power are simply taken-for-granted (as ‘natural’ rather than ‘made’), we often resist thinking about them critically. ‘Reflectivity’ is very helpful – this involves paying attention to your emotional and intellectual reactions to the material, and noting especially what prompts ‘resistance’ and exploring why this is so. One key objective of the course is to move beyond simplistic ‘either-or’ positions; whatever your political positioning, it is important to appreciate how complex (and often uncomfortable) analyses of power are – especially when they challenge us to rethink familiar assumptions. Personal experiences and feelings are relevant and welcome in classroom discussions. Personal opinions, however, cannot substitute for thoughtful contributions and evidence of your understanding of the course materials. An important key to lifelong learning and growth is, first, being open to perspectives that may initially seem unusual or uncomfortable; and second, recognizing that growth often requires moving through discomfort to new and deeper understanding. In this course, understanding the material does not mean that you have to agree with it, but it does mean that you must read the material attentively, be aware of its points and argumentation, and be able to discuss it knowledgeably.

Course Requirements and Grading

The course will meet on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. You are expected to come to class prepared (having completed all readings), and to participate actively in class discussions. Some sessions will be dedicated to group work and other activities and will count heavily for the participation component of your grade. Please be aware that this course uses Avenue To Learn (ATL).

You will be evaluated based on the following components, as explained below:

- Female leader assignment (4-5 pp, single spaced) Mon., Feb. 5 25%
- Two response papers (2 pp, single spaced) choice of dates 20%
- Case study reflection paper (2 pp, single spaced) Mon., April 9 10%
- Participation 20%
- Final exam TBA 25%

Female leader assignment (25%). There are numerous biographies of female political leaders around the world. For this assignment, students must choose one such individual and write an account of her path to power and her impact as a leader. Your paper can include a brief summary of the leader's upbringing, personal background and career path. Most important, you are expected to provide an account of the context, including the historical, cultural, economic or political conditions in that country that facilitated her rise to political prominence and power. Just as important, you should reflect on the gendered consequences of her leadership. For example, were there any key strategic or policy decisions she made that you attribute to her gender? How did she engage with gender issues? How did those around her respond to having a woman in this role? After her leadership role and experiences, has it become harder or easier for other women to assume leadership roles? Finally, your paper should demonstrate familiarity with the required readings and broader themes relevant to explaining women's struggle for representation and access to positions of power. In what ways does your leader fit with, or perhaps contradict these themes? Leaders need not be prime ministers or presidents (think prominent mayors, social activists and movement leaders, etc.) While there may be more information available on certain highly visible women (e.g., Margaret Thatcher, Hillary Clinton, Indira Gandhi), credit can be earned for researching a more challenging and lesser known figure. Finally, effective writing and communication skills are a key learning outcome for this course. For this, and all other written assignments, I grade heavily on the quality of your written composition which means good sentence structure, spelling, grammar and overall clarity. Your paper should be approximately 1,500-2,000 words in length (excluding references), and is due Monday, Feb. 5.
Response papers (20%). You will write two short response papers to assigned readings, each worth 10%. Papers must demonstrate comprehension of the main issues covered in a given week’s readings, the ability to apply acquired knowledge to the specified question, and effective writing skills. Each paper is to be approximately 500-800 words in length (about 2 pages, single spaced). You have a choice of 3 topics:

* Response paper #1: due Mon., Jan. 22
  What does ‘the personal is political’ mean and what relevance does it have in the 21st century?

* Response paper #2: due Mon. Feb. 12
  Briefly summarize the ‘gender gap’ in the 2016 US presidential election. Evaluate whether the term 'gender gap' adequately describes men and women's voting preferences.

* Response paper #3: due Mon. March 5
  Is women’s descriptive representation a necessary precursor to their substantive representation?

Case study reflection paper (10%). The final element of classroom engagement involves a case study of gender and women’s rights in the International Criminal Court. The case study approach emphasizes active student learning, and the truism that simply lecturing students about a subject hardly ensures that they will remember anything at all. The medical profession has known this for a long time. They have always used case studies to instruct their interns and residents with "war stories," but the whole process wasn't formalized until thirty years ago, when McMaster University introduced Problem Based Learning (PBL), into their medical school curriculum. The final assignment is to write a short paper reflecting on what you learned in this case study, focusing especially on the challenges of ensuring a gendered perspective in addressing international war crimes. Your paper should be similar in scope to the earlier response papers (approximately 500-800 words in length or about 2 pages, single spaced), and is due Monday, April 9.

Participation (20%). Class attendance is required, and students are encouraged to contribute to class discussion. Participation is the key to a lively class and to effective learning, and class participation provides the opportunity to practice speaking and persuasive skills, as well as the ability to listen. Comments that are vague, repetitive, unrelated to the current topic, disrespectful of others, or without sufficient foundation will be evaluated negatively. The quality of one's contributions matters more than the number of times one speaks.

Final Exam (25%). The final exam will be comprehensive, with questions covering readings, lectures, films and class discussions across the entire course. To be scheduled by the registrar.

Course Policies

This syllabus is tentative and subject to change. Students are responsible for finding out about announced changes if they miss class.

Late Policy on Course Assignments

- All assignments are to be handed in on or before the due date. Late submissions will be penalized 5% per day (i.e., half a point on a 10-point assignment), including weekend days. Students who miss work must follow up with me immediately (normally within 2 working days) to discuss possible consideration. For general information, see: https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/current-students/academic-advising/procedures-forms-policies/student-absence-information
- No assignments will be accepted after Friday, April 13.
- Students are required to keep a copy of all work submitted for evaluation.
- All written submissions should include a title page, with your name clearly indicated. Pages must be numbered and single-spaced, unless otherwise indicated.
General McMaster Policies

Academic Dishonesty:
You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”) and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Statement on Electronic Resources

In this course we will be using Email and/or AvenueToLearn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification Statement

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.
Detailed schedule

**Week 1: Introduction and Course Overview (Jan. 5)**  
Overview of the course expectations and an introduction to studying gender and politics

**Week 2: Pondering Sex, Gender, Patriarchy, Intersectionality (Jan. 8, 10, 12)**  
What is sex, what is gender, what is patriarchy, and what do these terms have to do with the categories men and women? In what aspects of your social environment do you see people ‘doing gender’ – that is, socially constructing and culturally romanticizing the idea of men and women? How do other kinds of (constructed) identities intersect with gender identity?  
- Paxton & Hughes, ch.9  
- Film: I Was a Teenage Feminist: A Documentary About Defining The F-Word

**Week 3: Feminism(s), the State, Political Power (Jan. 15, 17, 19)**  
In political science, a key focus is to understand the state, and to target state actors (whether legislative, bureaucratic, or judicial) to promote rights and advance policy change. How does feminist theory shape our thinking about the state as a mechanism of power, and about state-society interactions? How do states and gendered power relations mutually influence one another, and can feminist strategies serve to interrupt and dismantle state enforced gender hierarchies?  
- Paxton & Hughes, ch. 1.  
- Film: Anita: Speaking Truth to Power

*Response paper #1: due Mon., Jan. 22*  
What does ‘the personal is political’ mean and what relevance does it have in the 21st century?
**Week 4: Gender, Social Movements, Democratic Transition (Jan. 22, 24, 26)**

How do women participate in informal politics? How has women’s mobilization influenced political developments and state structures in the North and in the South? What has been the nature of women’s mobilization in struggles against colonial or authoritarian regimes? Why has women’s participation in liberation movements in some cases lead to greater inclusion of women in formal politics, whereas similar levels of engagement elsewhere have not resulted in such outcomes? What kinds of organizational and discursive strategies are used by various women’s groups across the globe?

Paxton & Hughes, ch.2; ch.12 (pp 292-301); ch 13 (pp 315—320).

Film: Iron Ladies of Liberia

**Week 5: Female Leaders’ Paths to Power (Jan. 29, 31, Feb. 2)**

How do women compete for the manliest jobs on earth? Under what conditions are they successful? How do cultural norms intertwine with and affect female success? What are the consistencies and differences across cultures and distinctive political systems in what happens when women compete for executive leadership roles in politics?

Paxton & Hughes, ch.3.


*Female Leader assignment due Monday, Feb. 5*

**Week 6: The Gender Gap in Politics: Who or What is to Blame? (Feb. 5, 7, 9)**

The ‘gender gap’ in electoral politics can refer to differences in women’s and men’s participation as voters, differences in their party preferences and vote choices, as well as differences in the numbers of men and women who run as candidates and are elected. What are the trends with respect to gender gaps in electoral politics, and what are the underlying causes? Do we find such gaps in all countries? Are the gaps narrowing over time?

Paxton & Hughes, ch. 4, 5.


*Response paper #2: due Mon. Feb. 12*

Briefly summarize the ‘gender gap’ in the 2016 US presidential election. Evaluate whether the term ‘gender gap’ adequately describes men and women’s voting preferences.

**Week 7: The Parliamentary Gender Gap: Political Parties and Electoral Processes (Feb. 12, 14, 16)**

While women effect change in political structures, and participate in politics in large numbers (as we have seen in earlier sections), what factors explain the low rate of women’s participation in formal politics? What explains the parliamentary gender gap?

- Paxton & Hughes, ch. 6.
- CBC. 2016. “50% population, 25% representation. Why the parliamentary gender gap?”

**Reading Week**

**Week 8: Debates on Political Representation (Feb. 26, 28, Mar. 2)**

Does the gender of our political representatives matter? What are the arguments for and against electoral quotas for women (or other groups)? Are quotas a good idea? Should more countries adopt them? Should Canada consider them?

- Paxton & Hughes, ch. 8.

*Response paper #3: due Mon. March 5*

Is women’s descriptive representation a necessary precursor to their substantive representation?

**Week 9: catch up, guest speaker for International Women’s Day (Mar. 5, 7 – no class meeting March 9)**

**Week 10: Case Study 1: France (Mar. 12, 14, 16)**

**Week 11: Case Study 2: India (Mar. 19, 21, 23)**

Paxton & Hughes, ch.14 (331-334).

Stephanie Nolen, 2013. *Out of India* (read entirety)

Film: It's a Girl [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upnpD3ZByM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upnpD3ZByM4)

**Week 12: Case Study 3: Rwanda (Mar. 26, 28)**

Paxton & Hughes, ch.15.


Film: *Ladies First: Rwandan Women Help Heal their Nation*

**Week 13: Case Study 4: Gender and the International Criminal Court (April 2, 4, 6)**


Frey, Barbara A. n.d. “A Fair Representation: Advocating for Women's Rights in the International Criminal Court.” Center of Women, Gender and Public Policy, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. ATL

*Case study reflection paper: due Mon. April 9*

**Mon. April 9: Final meeting & course wrap up**