

Cours spécialisé, Spring Semester 2025-2026

Women, Power, and Representation

Ange Richard, Sciences Po Grenoble, ange.richard@iepg.fr
Esther Hathaway, Sciences Po Grenoble, esther.hathaway@iepg.fr

Overview

Women around the world have progressively gained access to public-facing roles over the past half-century, but this access has been uneven across countries and sectors. Men continue to outnumber women in many formal and informal instances of power; and even where men and women are equally represented, gendered norms and rules continue to pervade institutional practices.

This interdisciplinary course serves as an introduction to the study of gendered representation as it relates to power and institutions. Specifically, it examines the evolution of women's representation and the dynamic role of gender within two specific institutions: journalism and politics. Mobilizing feminist theory and empirical work issued from media studies and political science, we will unpack the different ways that gender has shaped women's unequal representation and how recent gains in women's representation has challenged our understandings of power and gender, with a focus on Western democracies.

Some of the central questions we will be addressing in this course include:

- When and how do women access institutions of power?
- How have these institutions evolved in light of women's professional integration?
- How are notions of gender represented and reproduced within politics and news media?
- How do institutions of power contribute to the construction of gendered norms, values, and behaviors?

The course will be structured around lectures and group discussions. Students are expected to stay up-to-date with weekly readings and will be required to participate in a final poster session, in which they will apply insights from class to current issues at the intersection of gender and representation.

Course objectives

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of feminist theories of representation in politics and the news media,
 - Analyze patterns and changes in women's representation across influential institutions,
 - Identify (some of) the ways that gender intersects with institutional norms and practices, social processes, and power relations,
 - Reflect on linkages between gender, politics, and information,
 - Critically apply theories and ideas to current issues.
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Format

This course is part lecture, part discussion.

Each week you will be assigned two short texts that will form the basis of our in-class discussions. You should plan to spend an average of 30 minutes per week on readings, and are expected to come to class with your reading notes, comments, and questions! Collective debates and respectful argumentation are welcome.

Course materials

All texts and additional course materials can be accessed via the “documents” rubric in Chamilo.

Academic integrity

Plagiarism: Learning is a collective undertaking that involves engaging with discussions, lectures, theories, and texts. We strongly encourage you to do your weekly readings with your classmates – reading as a social experience is often more fun and more fruitful – and you are of course welcome to expand your reading and learning beyond the assigned texts. (Some suggestions are provided in the attached bibliography.)

That said, you are *not* allowed to copy exact text or ideas without proper reference to the original person or text. This is true for academic articles; it is equally true for a classmate's ideas.

AI: There is a strict “no AI” policy for this course, for three primary reasons:

1. This is a class about ideas and problems, and it is evaluated based on a research assignment where you will need to engage your own ideas in a scholarly conversation with your classmates and with other academic thinkers. This can sometimes be hard and time-consuming, but it can also be exciting – and this hard-but-exciting intellectual space is at the heart of your academic learning! Artificial intelligence doesn't give you that kind of learning experience. For that, you need to mobilize your personal capacity for idea-building and critical reflection.

2. This is a class that is about (among other things) the unequal distribution of power among social groups and, more specifically, the harmful impacts of gender biases. AI, and generative AI in particular, is directly contributing to the exacerbation of social inequalities in terms of its training model, economic model, accessibility, individual usage, and environmental impacts.

3. We spend a lot of time evaluating and providing feedback for each individual project in order to help you develop skills and enhance your learning experience. Evaluating AI work is a waste of our time and useless to you. Plus, we are excited about the unique contributions you are capable of making to this course!

All instances of plagiarism or AI use will be reported to the IEP's disciplinary services office.

Coursework and grading

Weekly classes

You will not be graded on your capacity to keep up with the weekly reading assignments or your participation in class. **This does not mean that they do not matter.** On the contrary, reading and participation are both important components of your in-class experience. Understanding foundational concepts and theories, asking questions, articulating your criticisms, and contributing to discussions are all essential for you and your classmates to get the most out of this course.

Final poster session

The main project for this course consists of an informational poster accompanied by a presentation. Each poster/presentation will analyze a current issue related to representation by mobilizing concepts, theories, and empirical work addressed throughout the semester. Your final grade will be based on the prep work, the poster presentation, the oral presentation, and a brief individual reflection.

Contacts

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the course lecturers*:

- Ange Richard: ange.richard@iepg.fr
- Esther Hathaway: esther.hathaway@iepg.fr

**Please review the syllabus before asking a question that has already been answered. Please respect the lecturers' working hours (weekdays from 9am to 5pm). Any email sent will be responded to in a timely manner, within two days and during the aforementioned working hours.*

Course outline

Week 1. Introduction

Key concepts: News media, Politics, Power

Week 2.

Key concepts: Gender, Sex, Feminist theory

Part 1: The politics of gendered representation

Week 3. Gender and politicization

Key concepts: Public opinion, Ideology, Gender gap, Substantive representation

Week 4. Women in politics

Key concepts: Political access, Equality, Descriptive representation

Week 5. Feminist theories of the state

Key concepts: Feminist institutionalism, Public policy, Symbolic representation

Part 2: Gender and the news media

Week 6. The gendered profession of journalism

Key concepts: Feminization of journalism, Gendered professional hierarchies, Sociology of news production

Week 7. The journalistic production of gender

Key concepts: Gender imbalance, Gendered representations, Media production of gender

Week 8. Representing women in politics

Key concepts: Professional norms, Journalists & sources, Mediation of politics

Week 9. Final poster session

Optional recommended reading

Carter, C., Steiner, L. & Allan, S. (Eds.) (2019). *Journalism, Gender and power*. Routledge. [PDF available on Chamilo]

Duerst-Lahti, G., & Kelly, R. M. (Eds.). (1995). *Gender power, leadership, and governance*. University of Michigan Press. [Book available for check-out at the IEPG library.]

Harding, S. (1992). After the Neutrality Ideal: Science, Politics, and "Strong Objectivity". *Social Research*, 59(3), 567-587. [[Article available via UGA JSTOR access](#)]

Krook, M. L., & Mackay, F. (2011). Introduction: Gender, politics, and institutions. *Gender, politics and institutions: Towards a feminist institutionalism*, 1-20. [[Chapter available via the UGA online library.](#)]

Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent "yes". *The Journal of politics*, 61(3), 628-657. [[Article available as a PDF online.](#)]

Ross, K. Jansen, M., Bürger, T. (2020) The Media World Versus The Real World of Women and Political Representation: Questioning differences and struggling for answers. In *Comparing Gender and Media Equality Across the Globe : A Cross-National Study of the Qualities, Causes, and Consequences of Gender Equality in and through the News Media* (pp. 233–257). [[Chapter available as a PDF online.](#)]

Scott, J. W. (2007). Gender as a useful category of historical analysis. In *Culture, society and sexuality* (pp. 77-97). Routledge. [[Article available as a PDF online.](#)]

West, C., Zimmerman, D.H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-151. [[Article available as a PDF online.](#)]