

Notes from the Editors

Citation Matters

Though hardly a new concern, in recent years, scholars across a wide range of disciplines have called increasing attention to disparities in rates of citation of work by scholars from marginalized groups including (but by no means limited to) women, LGBTQ+ scholars, scholars of color, and scholars from the Global South.¹ Several studies make clear that work in political science is no exception to this problem, demonstrating that, for example, rates of citation of work by members of these and other groups are well below their representation in the discipline.

As part of our effort to address representational issues in the work that is published in this journal, this “Notes from the Editors” summarizes some of what we know about the sources of the citation gaps and outlines some steps that might be taken to begin to address them.

WHY CITATIONAL PRACTICES MATTER

Issues associated with what scholars have come to call “citational bias” or “citational justice” matter for a range of reasons. At a disciplinary level, citational biases can affect the accuracy and utility of our evidence and claims. At the individual level, citational biases can affect professional trajectories and success. At a more general level, not citing scholarship by members of marginalized groups devalues their work and sidelines the important perspectives, theoretical lenses, and empirical findings that they bring to bear on critical political questions.

In the particular case of political science, for example, our discipline’s shared project is to understand the political world. This project is undermined when the perspectives, insights, and knowledge produced by scholars from marginalized groups are sidelined or ignored. This lack of diverse perspectives goes deeper, affecting not only the ways in which we interpret the evidence we collect but also the questions that we ask (see, for instance, Achen 2014; McClain et al. 2016; Medie and Kang 2018; Mershon and Walsh 2016).

For example, information scientist Cassidy Sugimoto argues that “citational justice isn’t only about justice ... It’s about doing robust, rigorous science, where you are

truly exploring all the potential areas of research and what has been conducted before to accelerate the progress of science” (Kwon 2022, 569).

Citational practices also have significant downstream implications for individual scholars and for scholarly communities (Hookway 2010; McClain et al. 2016). For example, the failure to cite and engage the work of scholars from marginalized groups can affect evaluations of them in areas such as hiring, tenure, promotion, salary increases, and awards. These are processes that often take into account not only the number, quality, and ostensible prestige of a scholar’s publications, but also the number of other books and articles that cite their work.² Using network analysis, Maliniak, Powers, and Walter (2013, 907) found that “an article that is cited by many widely cited articles will have a higher authority score than an article cited by many articles that themselves are only rarely cited.” The failure to cite relevant work by underrepresented scholars in general-interest disciplinary journals can further amplify this problem, as articles in this and other general-interest journals attract disproportionately more citations than work that is published in specialized journals.

Citation biases are also reflected, replicated, and reinforced in other venues, with cumulative effects on the influence of scholars’ ideas and their standing in the field. Work by women, for example, is underrepresented not only in primary research publications, but also in review articles that claim to summarize the canon in particular fields and subfields, which is subsequently reflected in course syllabi (Kadera 2013; Hardt et al. 2019; Smith et al. 2020), perpetuating current gaps into future academic generations.³ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that an analysis of gender and Wikipedia entries found that only one in five biographies of political scientists on that site are of women and that half are biographies of American scholars (Baltz 2022).

Philosopher Darcy McCusker (2019) characterizes the cumulative effects of such biases as an instance of what philosopher Miranda Fricker calls “epistemic injustice”: “a wrong [that is] done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (Fricker 2007, 1). Epistemic injustice can silence marginalized scholars, excluding their interpretations of their own experiences from scholarly discourse, even in work that is about those experiences.

¹ There are likely similar citation biases when it comes to work by other groups including scholars with disabilities, scholars from teaching-intensive institutions, and scholars whose work focuses on underrepresented issues or uses certain methodologies. We focus in this essay on biases related to race, region, gender, and, to a lesser degree, sexuality.

² Although some observers have questioned and critiqued such practices, citations are also used in comparisons of departmental and university rankings nationally and globally (Hix 2004).

³ <https://www.duckofminerva.com/2015/08/new-evidence-on-gender-bias-in-ir-syllabi.html>.

CITATION BIAS AND AUTHOR GENDER AND SEXUALITY

References in political science journals to work by women—particularly in generalist and other high-profile journals—are far below the much higher proportion of women in the profession (Djupe, Smith, and Sokhey 2019). In the case of this journal, for example, Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell (2018) have shown that all-male and mixed-gender author teams are more likely to cite work by men. This bias is so entrenched that it extends even to work in subfields such as politics and gender in which women make up the majority of scholars. For example, 75% of the authors referenced in the 20 most-cited articles in the *APSR* over the past 10 years are men, whereas 26 men (68.4%) and 12 women (32.6%) authored these pieces.⁴ In 2020, women constituted about 37% of the American Political Science Association membership (APSA 2022), meaning that some of the discipline's most influential scholarship cites women's research at a rate below what we would expect based on their demographic representation.

Scholars have identified several factors that contribute to the gender gap in citations. First, the discipline's high-profile and generalist journals are less likely to publish work by women (Teele and Thelen 2017), which may mean that their work is less visible to other scholars and therefore less likely to be cited by them. This visibility gap may be exacerbated by gendered networking patterns (Van Helden et al. 2021), in which male scholars are more likely to network with other men in academia. More specifically, if scholars are made aware of colleagues' research through these relatively homogeneous networks, they may also end up being more likely to cite that work in their own scholarship. Similar network effects likely affect work by scholars of color and scholars from the Global South.

Third, scholars have shown that work by women is underrepresented on the syllabi of graduate courses in political science. Such courses are understood by many students to represent the canonical work in their fields, which likely shapes the work they go on to cite in their own research (Hardt et al. 2019). Indeed, as sociologist Victor Ray (2018) argues, racial and gender inequalities in academia are “reflected through a veneration of the classics,” particularly in the social sciences and humanities where “many of these [canonical] works were written during a period when racial and gender exclusion was simply expected and taken for granted.”

Fourth, some research suggests that women cite themselves at lower rates than men across a range of disciplines (Jaschik 2005; Wilson 2014), though recent work on political science does not support this finding

⁴ Sex was identified principally by coding authors' first names and by using Google image searches to identify people whose names were unfamiliar to us. We also limited our measurement to “binary” sex classification, i.e., men and women. As a consequence, this method did not account for self-identified gender or for nonbinary or gender-nonconforming identities.

(Dion, Mitchell, and Sumner 2020). Finally, although not all scholars of gender are women and the majority of women in political science do not focus on gender, the discipline's slowness to recognize the role of gender in politics and public policy likely also contributes to gendered citation biases. This factor also likely affects citations to the work by LGBTQ+ scholars (about which there has yet to be systematic research), as political science has been even slower to acknowledge the role of sexuality in politics (Novkov and Barclay 2010).

CITATION BIAS AND AUTHOR RACE AND ETHNICITY

In its development in the United States, political science has also been slow to recognize the importance of the role of race in politics (McClain et al. 2016). As in the case of gender and sexuality, although not all scholars of color work on the politics of race and ethnicity and not all of this research is authored by scholars of color, nevertheless scholars of color are more likely than are their white peers to conduct research in this area. Thus, the persistent exclusion and underrepresentation of references to work by scholars of color is at least in part a function of the relative lack of attention to the central role of race in politics and public policy (McClain et al. 2016). Rates of (under)representation vary by subfield, but generally, members of the American Political Science Association overwhelmingly identify as white (Reid and Curry 2019), and in most departments racial and ethnic diversity lags behind rates of inclusion for women (Hesli Claypool and Mershon 2016, Table 1).

Although there is less work that examines citation biases by race than there is when it comes to gender, such biases are evident in other fields such as health sciences (Kwon 2022), which suggests that scholars of color are undercited in similar ways and for some of the same reasons as women in the discipline are undercited.

In addition to failing to engage their research, the lack of acknowledgment of work by scholars from marginalized groups can also manifest as the appropriation of their ideas without attribution. Anthropologist Christen Smith, for example, initiated the Cite Black Women collective after attending a conference panel at which a scholar presented work that paraphrased passages from her book without attribution (Kwon 2022). The harms of such theft are exacerbated by power differentials in which scholars of color often put themselves at even more risk if they try to hold those who have stolen from them to account. This particular form of epistemic injustice illustrates some of the ways in which researchers' identities and positions within academic hierarchies can influence not only whether their work is read by other scholars but also whether their contributions are credited or instead appropriated and even erased from scholarly conversations.

CITATION BIAS AND AUTHORS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

“It’s still quite possible,” lamented the late Malawian economist Thandika Mkandawire, “to write a whole book on Nigeria with no reference to Nigerian scholars” (Hendricks 2020, 3). Although it is almost impossible to imagine a Nigerian scholar writing an article about American politics without citing any work by scholars located in the United States, this type of elision, whether conscious or unconscious, occurs regularly in journal articles about the politics of other countries, particularly in the Global South. This lack of engagement by North American and European scholars with research by scholars in the Global South reflects a broader privileging of Western scholarship, signaling what is valued, whose knowledge matters, and who decides what factors are salient. More specifically, it suggests that these scholars have no role to play in theory building or in expanding knowledge and that they have little to contribute to global dialogues. And because, as Ray (2018) argues, what counts as canonical “is shaped by who had access to existing knowledge and the tools and institutional resources to produce new knowledge,” such exclusions also further reinforce the power disparities in knowledge between the Global North and Global South (Medie and Kang 2018).

STEPS TO ADDRESS CITATION GAPS

Like many other processes that perpetuate inequalities, the citation gap need not be the product of intentional discrimination to be harmful. Scholars who do not engage work by members of underrepresented groups may genuinely believe that they are citing the most relevant and the most important research in their fields or that space constraints preclude paying attention to research by members of underrepresented groups. However, work about implicit bias (McCusker 2019) shows that people often promote people like themselves without being conscious of these patterns. Alongside the tendency for networks to be homogeneous, insights from implicit bias research suggest that scholars might not necessarily cite the most relevant or most important work but rather the important and relevant work *of which they are aware* (Rubin 2022) and that it may take conscious efforts to seek out research by scholars who are less central to their networks.

Happily, there are steps that authors, journal editors, and reviewers can take to mitigate citation gaps. Authors, for example, can reflect on and evaluate their citation practices using helpful tools like the Gender Balance Assessment Tool (Sumner 2018) or the [Gender Citation Balance Index](#), which provide rough, if imperfect, estimates of the gender and racial distribution of citations in a document. Used in conjunction with more extensive and targeted literature searches, tools such as these can help authors find not only the most visible work but also the most relevant. Women Also Know Stuff (Beaulieu et al. 2017) and People of

Color Also Know Stuff (Casarez Lemi, Osorio, and Rush 2020) can help authors identify women and scholars of color across political science whose work might be germane to their research.

Some research also suggests that making work freely available online through Open Access licenses narrows citation gaps (Atchison 2017). Promoting one’s own and others’ work using social media such as Twitter (Dion et al. in Elliott et al. 2022) can likewise help to raise the visibility of and engagement with work that might otherwise be undercited.

Editors can take steps to help achieve better balance in citations by broadening the reviewer pool, which makes it more likely that they will invite more diverse sets of reviewers to evaluate manuscripts. Reviewer invitation letters can request explicitly that reviewers be attuned to citation biases and that they alert authors to relevant research that may be missing from bibliographies. Editors can also select reviewers who they believe will be more attuned to these issues and who will be able to suggest relevant, yet overlooked, research by underrepresented authors. Because few of us are immune to implicit biases, editors and reviewers should also make efforts to be aware of the biases that we bring to our evaluations, particularly those biases that hold work by and about marginalized groups to higher standards (Hengel 2022), which can further limit the aggregate supply of work by diverse authors.

Finally, while including citations to work by underrepresented scholars can go some distance toward addressing citation gaps themselves, on their own they will not address the epistemic issues we have discussed. It is therefore also important that scholars take the time and make the effort to carefully engage with this scholarship, incorporating its often unique insights and consequential findings into our understanding of politics and power.

Valuing, engaging, and being in conversation with the contributions of a broader array of scholars ultimately improves the intellectual rigor of our research, the health of our higher education institutions, the strength of our professional associations and journals, and the creation of a vibrant intellectual community. In these ways, pursuing citational justice benefits not only the women, people of color, LGBTQ+ scholars, and scholars in the Global South whose work will be more robustly engaged but also will benefit knowledge production and the academy more generally.

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