

# Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Submissions to *Politics & Gender*

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In the summer of 2019, two of us began our term as co-editors of *Politics & Gender*. We were excited to manage the top journal in the study of women, gender, and politics; help to shape our field; and advance outstanding scholarship. Before our first year ended, the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal routines for many professions, including within the academy. Access to offices, professional networks, and fieldwork was halted or severely limited. Both new and experienced teachers quickly transitioned to online teaching. Scholars became ill or cared for sick family members. Faculty with preschool or school-aged children spent many hours on childcare and homeschooling, leaving them with less time for research and writing. Not all impacts were necessarily negative: those without caretaking responsibilities enjoyed more flexibility and often had more time for research and writing as in-person events were canceled and lengthy commutes disappeared.

The burdens and benefits of the COVID-19 pandemic were not equally shared. In particular, the challenges of parenthood have always created disparities that are experienced unequally by men and women in all careers. Because women continue to bear a disproportionate share of caretaking obligations, their growing numbers in the profession have not led to equality in terms of publishing (Teele and Thelen 2017) and citations (Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018; Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013).

Given these gender inequities, we might have expected *Politics & Gender* to be negatively affected by the pandemic. The study of women, gender, and politics overwhelmingly is conducted by women. Although women comprise less than 40% of the American Political Science Association (APSA) membership, they comprise 92% of the members of APSA's Women, Gender, and Politics Research section (Goodman and Pepinsky 2019). If women faculty members were particularly constrained in their ability to produce research due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we should observe the effects in submission patterns at *Politics & Gender*. This article examines the impact of the pandemic on the gender distribution of submissions and assesses other possible COVID-19 effects, such as a greater reliance on author teams rather than solo submissions. With more than six years of submission data,

including more than two years after the pandemic was declared, we find no evidence of changes in submission patterns at *Politics & Gender* pre- and post-pandemic.

## GENDERED INEQUALITIES IN PUBLISHING AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC EFFECTS

The gender gap in publishing in political science is well documented. Examining 10 journals, Teele and Thelen (2017) found that women authors are underrepresented compared to their presence in the profession. Notably, the gender gap in authorship cannot be explained by the low numbers of women in the profession—the publication gap persists even as the proportion of women in the profession has grown (Teele and Thelen 2017, 434). Gender disparities also appear in patterns of coauthorship. Across the journals examined in their study, 24% of articles were published by all-male teams but only 2.4% by all-women teams; 15.4% of multi-authored articles had mixed-gender teams (Teele and Thelen 2017, 438). These inequities also contribute to citation bias because women authors and mixed-gender teams are more likely to cite research by women compared to all-male teams and solo male authors (Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018, 313).

Given that publishing articles and having them cited by other scholars already is shaped by gender inequalities in caregiving and academic networks, the disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are concerning from a gender-equality perspective. Fears that women were taking on larger shares of caretaking obligations and reducing their time spent on research and writing were confirmed in studies during the early months of the pandemic (Flaherty 2020). Journal editors across several disciplines reported a decline in the number of articles submitted by women authors in those early months (do Mar Pereira 2021, 500). A survey of US-based and international political scientists found that women were spending twice as much time on childcare and dedicating fewer hours to research compared to men (Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff 2021). Another survey of political science and international relations scholars found that men and women experienced a similar decline in research productivity, yet the respondents agreed in similar proportions that women would be negatively affected by the pandemic (Breuning et al. 2021, 430). The survey also reported notable differences between parents and non-parents

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in open-ended responses, leading the study's authors to speculate that "the pandemic may reinforce or widen a productivity gap between those with and those without children" (Breuning et al. 2021, 430). Similar to research on the gender wage gap, it appears that parental status and gender interact to produce unequal outcomes for men and women.

Research using longer time horizons is more mixed, yet several studies report gender gaps. Using longitudinal data from four disciplines in the sciences, Madsen et al. (2022) found that the COVID-19 pandemic further widened the gender gap in scholarly publications. A study of preprints between 2017 and 2020 revealed a decrease in women authors and an increase in men authors after the onset of the pandemic (Uncar, Torre, and Elías 2022). Another study based on two

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waves of surveys of biologists and engineers found that women's research activities were impacted more negatively than men's activities during the pandemic (Caldarulo et al. 2022). Other studies found that women scholars were not more likely than men scholars to experience declining output (Abramo, D'Angelo, and Mele 2022).

#### EXPECTATIONS

Scholarship in the subfield of politics and gender is largely (although not exclusively) conducted by women researchers. Journals that publish in the area, such as *Politics & Gender*, receive more submissions from women than from men. Given what we know about the difficulties confronting scholars in general and women authors in particular, we had the following expectations about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected submissions to the journal.

#### Hypothesis 1: Fewer Overall Submissions to *Politics & Gender* After March 2020

Given that most scholars in this field are women, as well as the particular burdens on women faculty members, we might expect a decline in overall submissions after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Hypothesis 2: Fewer Submissions from Women Authors After March 2020

For the same reasons, we might expect fewer women specifically to submit papers to *Politics & Gender* as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This could occur regardless of whether we observe a decline in overall submissions. It may be, for example, that men—with fewer childcare and other responsibilities—submitted more papers to *Politics & Gender* during the pandemic.

#### Hypothesis 3: Increase in Submissions from Teams, as Opposed to Single Authors, After March 2020

We might expect that those working in teams would be better able to share the burdens and minimize the disruptions to the

team as a whole, leading to more coauthored submissions after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Hypothesis 4: Fewer Submissions from All-Women Teams After March 2020

Although we might expect more submissions from teams, those teams consisting of only women may be hampered by the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to fewer all-women teams, compared to all-men or mixed-gender teams.

#### DATA AND METHODS

Our data included all research papers submitted to *Politics & Gender* from January 1, 2015, through August 11, 2022, for a

total of 1,354 submissions (Franceschet, Schroeder, and Wolbrecht 2023). We are grateful to Cambridge University Press, which publishes the journal, for sharing these data with us.

Our data included the gender of every author for each submission. Gender was assigned using gender-api.com, an application programming interface (API) that analyzes publicly available data, government data, and other sources to estimate the probability that any first name is associated with a woman or a man.<sup>1</sup> The Gender API includes naming data from 191 different countries, allowing for the ability to code a person's gender from first names of both Western and non-Western origin. If the Gender API was less than 90% confident, we conducted Internet searches to determine the appropriate gender assignment.

COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. For the purpose of our analysis, we treated any paper submitted before that date as a pre-pandemic submission and every paper submitted after that date as a pandemic submission.

In addition to regular submissions, in May 2020, the *Politics & Gender* editors launched a call for short papers on "Gender, Politics, and the Global Pandemic"—a call that drew 140 original submissions during a six-week period. Due to their unique character—that is, shorter-than-normal research articles, the small window for submissions, and a quick turnaround without a revise-and-resubmit option—we analyzed these submissions separately from all standard research articles. Our hypotheses for these submissions were generally the same but more severe. Given that this call for papers occurred at the height of pandemic disruption and required scholars to analyze a phenomenon that had not existed six months prior, we expected that women may have been particularly hampered and that teams were particularly advantaged.

#### FINDINGS

Generally, we found virtually no evidence of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting submission patterns at *Politics & Gender*.

Figure 1

### Number of Regular Submissions to *Politics & Gender*, by Month, with a Three-Period Moving Average, 2015–2022

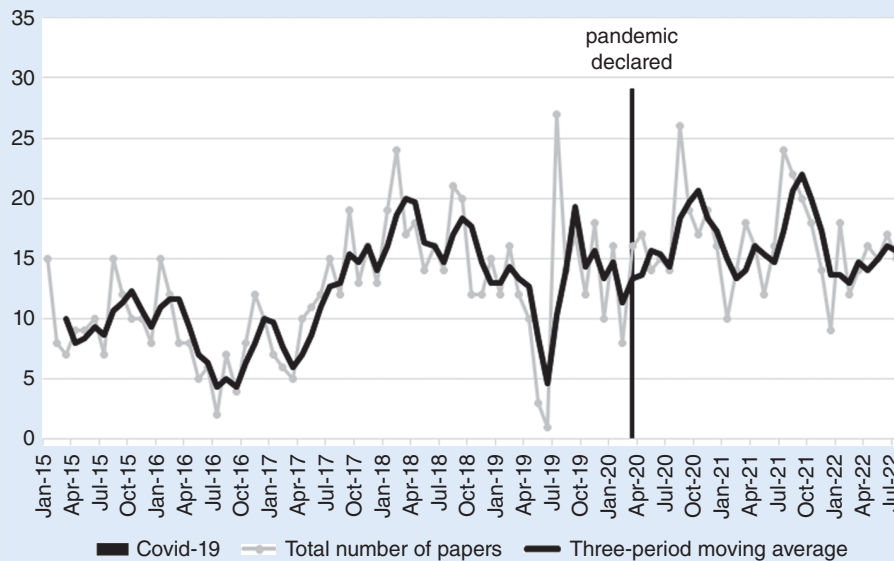


Figure 1 shows the number of submissions per month (with a three-period moving-average smoother), from January 2015 through August 2022. Visually, we observed no evidence of a decline in submissions after the pandemic’s onset, contrary to our first hypothesis. There was considerable variation in the rate of submissions over time but no visual evidence of a change post–COVID-19—if anything, there might have been a slight increase.

Our second hypothesis speculated that the number of women authors submitting papers would decline after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to the main disciplinary journals, *Politics & Gender* receives a substantially larger proportion of submissions from women authors, as either solo authors or as part of an all-woman or mixed-gender team. Indeed, the modal paper submitted to *Politics & Gender* has a solo woman author. In the 10 political science journals that Teele and Thelen (2017) examined, women always comprised less than 35% and, in some cases, as low as 18% of all published authors. In contrast, 67% of all regular submissions to *Politics & Gender* during this same period were from women authors and 72% of the authors of accepted papers were women.

Figure 2 reports the number of women and men who submitted papers to *Politics & Gender* from 2015 through 2022. These data are by author (not manuscript) and include both solo authors and members of author teams. We did not observe a decline in the number of women authors after March 2020, and neither did we observe a visible increase in the

number of men submitting papers after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. A difference-in-difference analysis confirms that women were no less likely to be *Politics & Gender*-submitting authors after compared to before March 2020 (the online appendix provides full details).

Our final two hypotheses concern the distribution of author type by both gender and number of authors. We expected an increase in submissions from teams (Hypothesis 3) and a decrease from all-woman teams (Hypothesis 4). Figure 3 reports on the number of papers submitted to *Politics & Gender* with more than one author and figure 4 lists the number of submissions from all-women teams. In neither case did we observe any significant change after the COVID-19 pandemic began. In both cases, difference-in-differences analysis (see the online appendix) similarly found no effect for the COVID-19 intervention.

Overall, we did not observe the dramatic shifts in regular submissions to *Politics & Gender* that we and other scholars expected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of our hypotheses are unsupported by the available data.

What about papers submitted to our special, short-turnaround series on “Gender, Politics, and the Global Pandemic”? Given the timing of the call—that is, the height of the initial lockdowns when academic scholars were adapting to remote teaching and, in many cases, caring for small children or ill relatives—we expected to observe a smaller proportion of women submitting as solo authors and perhaps a larger proportion from men solo authors and all-male teams.

Figure 2

Number of Women and Men Submitting Papers to *Politics & Gender*, by Month, 2015–2022

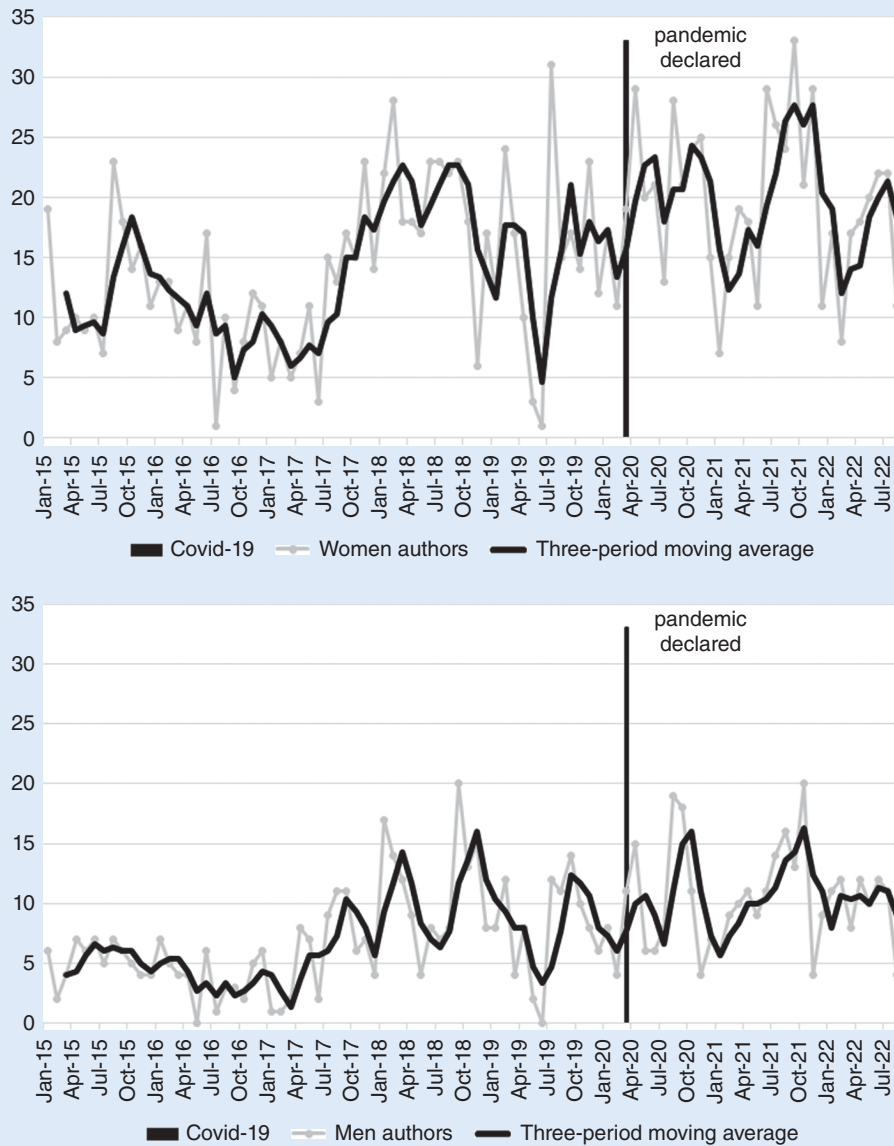


Figure 5 lists the percentages of submitted papers in each of our five author categories for the year before the pandemic (2019), the same year as our COVID-19 series (2020), the following year (2021), and our COVID-19 short-paper series (shown in black on the figure).

The results in figure 5 can be interpreted as suggesting that submissions from women authors remained strong but that the distribution among women submitting as a solo author versus coauthors shifted. The fourth set of columns shows that the percentage of papers from solo women authors was lower for the COVID-19 papers compared to

regular papers in the same year (2020) and the preceding year (2019). However, using a two-proportions z-test, we found that this difference was not statistically significant. The percentage of papers from solo men authors also was lower for the COVID-19 papers but the difference was not statistically significant; neither were the increases in all-women or mixed-gender teams. Although the results are suggestive, we cannot conclude that male authors or teams were better positioned than women or solo authors to produce a paper on “Gender, Politics, and the Global Pandemic” during the height of the pandemic.

Figure 3

Number of Team-Authored Papers Submitted to *Politics & Gender*, by Month, 2015–2022

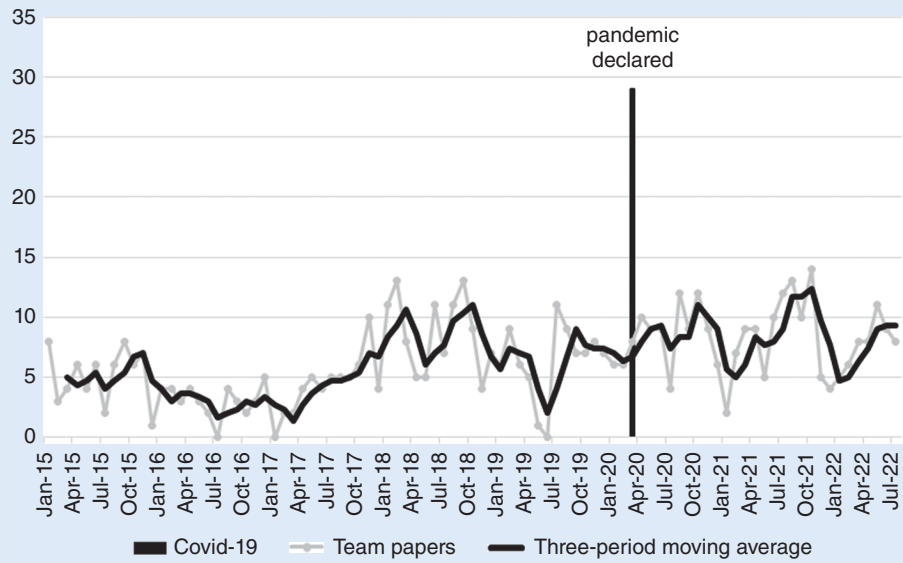


Figure 4

Number of All-Women Team-Authored Papers Submitted to *Politics & Gender*, by Month, 2015–2022

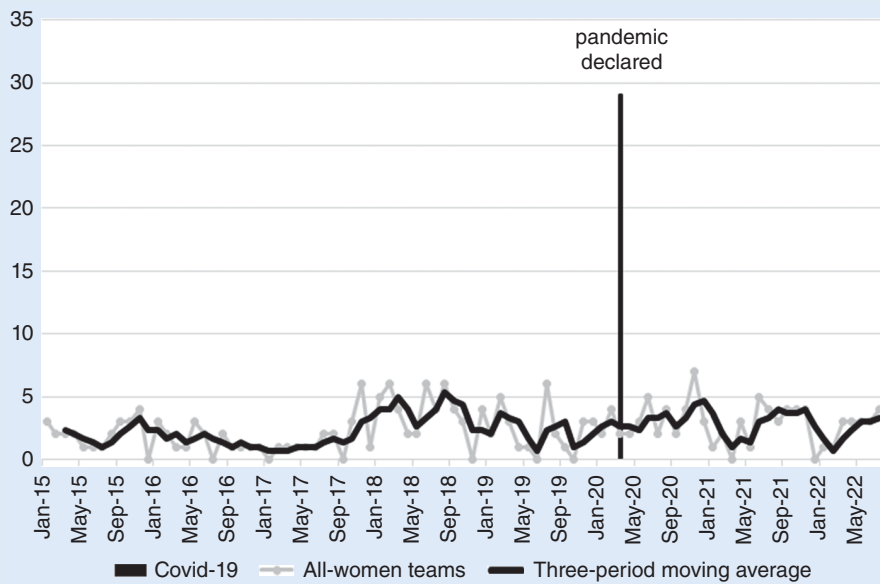
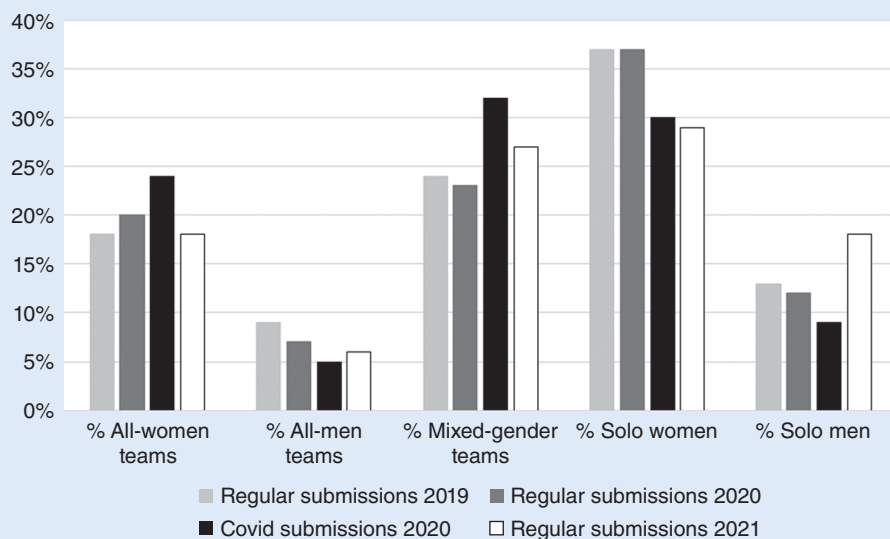




Figure 5

**Distribution of COVID-19 Short Papers and Regular Submissions to *Politics & Gender*, by Author Type and Year, 2019–2021**



**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Our comparison of submission and publishing patterns before and during the COVID-19 pandemic does not indicate a significant impact on women’s ability to submit research in the first three years since the pandemic was declared. *Politics & Gender* continued to receive many submissions with no decline in the proportion of women authors compared to men authors. Our findings should be considered with caution, however, and they certainly are not the final word on the COVID-19 pandemic and women scholars. First, our analysis does not track long-term effects, which may take several years to manifest. For research that was in the early stages, the consequences of interrupting fieldwork and data collection may not be experienced for some time.

Second, our data allowed us to examine submission patterns for women and men but not for other related characteristics. We cannot determine whether seniority, type of institution, and country origin affected scholars’ capacity to submit their research. Most important, our data do not include parental status or whether researchers had caretaking responsibilities that would further reduce their time available for research. Parenthood—and especially parenting young children—rather than gender may be more consequential in explaining who did and did not submit to journals (Gordon and Pesseau 2023). Similarly, other caretaking roles (e.g., for elderly or sick relatives) are more likely to be performed by women. As such, future research should explore how gender and caretaking obligations interact to produce different outcomes for women and men scholars. It is possible, for example, that whereas we observe generally the same numbers of women authors pre- and post-COVID-19, the authors themselves have changed. Perhaps after the pandemic, we are

observing more submissions from women who do not have younger children and fewer submissions from those who have childcare responsibilities.

We encourage scholars to continue monitoring potential COVID-19 pandemic effects on scholarly output and, in particular, to monitor gender and parenthood gaps in whose career may be affected. In the short term, at least, our analysis of *Politics & Gender*—a journal with a large proportion of women authors—leads us to be cautiously optimistic that the COVID-19 pandemic did not exacerbate existing gender inequalities in political science. However, some of the longer-term effects may not manifest for several years, and they clearly warrant future research.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We are grateful to David Mainwaring at Cambridge University Press for his assistance in securing these data.

**DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the *PS: Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/SoYZU3>.

**SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523001105>.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

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## NOTE

1. We recognize that this binary does not represent the full distribution of gender identity in the population. *Politics & Gender* recently began asking submitting authors a series of demographic questions, including gender identity, but this information was not available for the full time series.

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