

FAMILIAR THEORIES FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE: THE IMPLICATIONS OF A LONGITUDINAL APPROACH TO WOMEN IN POLITICS RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Although it is important to emphasize the continuing underrepresentation of women in politics, a contemporary focus on inequality belies the remarkable changes that have occurred in women's political representation, participation, and impact over time. Thus, scholars are increasingly calling for longitudinal theory and research that focuses on change, growth and decline, as well as stasis, across time. In this essay, we argue that moving to a longitudinal approach has four broad implications for theories on women and politics. First, in shifting from a static to a longitudinal perspective, we may find greater support for existing theories that have to date only generated weak or mixed empirical evidence. In contrast, we may also identify limitations of documented findings, which may not generalize broadly across time. Other theories imply over-time processes, but they have never been modeled as such. A longitudinal approach promises new, and potentially more rigorous, hypothesis testing of existing theories. Finally, thinking over time may generate new explanations for stasis or change in women's political representation that have not, to date, been considered.