

# The Parliament as a Gendered Workplace: How to Research Legislators' (UN)Equal Opportunities to Represent

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In this article, we introduce a *Gendered Workplace Approach* for studying the gendered nature of parliaments. This approach, which is informed by a feminist institutionalist perspective, addresses the potentially gendered character of both formal and informal institutions that regulate the inner workings of parliament, taking into consideration the obstacles and opportunities facing MPs of different genders. From a gender perspective, our framework focuses on five dimensions of paramount importance for MPs' working conditions. These are (i) the organisation of work, (ii) tasks and assignments, (iii) leadership, (iv) infrastructure and (v) interaction between MPs.

**Keywords:** Feminist Institutionalism, Gender, Informal Rules, Parliaments, Workplace Perspective

## 1. Introduction

In spite of the increasing share of women MPs worldwide in recent decades, parliaments have often been described as gendered organisations (Crawford and Pini, 2011), gendered institutions (Rai and Spary, 2019) and male-dominated institutional settings permeated by a culture of masculinity (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 48). This masculine culture originates from the time when politics was an all-male business, and it underpins both formal rules created by men to suit men and informal norms regarding how a politician should behave (cf. Acker, 1990). Women entering politics are confronted by this pre-existing culture, regarded as 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004), and constrained in various ways by rules, norms and practices that obstruct their political work (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 47). Numerous empirical studies have found that women MPs are negatively

influenced by such obstacles in their parliamentary work (e.g. Rosenthal, 1998; Swers, 2005; Crawford and Pini, 2011; Wängnerud, 2015; Rai and Spary, 2019; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustin, 2019). Evaluations conducted by the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) reveal, however, a broad variation between parliaments. While some have significantly improved the ‘gender sensitivity’ of their inner workings, others still display many remaining gender inequalities (Palmieri, 2011). How and to what degree a given parliament’s inner workings are gendered—marked as masculine or feminine—is thus an empirical question. In this article, we conceptualise parliaments as gendered workplaces in order to cast light on the complex ways in which parliamentary work can be gendered. More specifically, we ask what are the gendered underpinnings of parliamentary work?

On the one hand, MPs’ parliamentary work is regulated by formal rules, such as the constitution, rules of procedure, and standing orders. On the other, a myriad of informal rules shape and guide parliamentary work, such as practices concerning how to behave in the chamber, norms prescribing political leadership roles and norms associated with political competence. These rules are gendered to varying degrees, and together they constitute the parliamentary workplace. The relationship between the formal and the informal is multifaceted, and it can work in differing ways to either reinforce or subvert gender-power hierarchies (Waylen, 2017, p. 11; Lowndes, 2019). We argue in this article that issues pertaining to the work environment in parliament are of essential importance. A truly gender-equal parliament is one in which all MPs are able to perform their tasks as legislators on equal terms, regardless of their gender, social background or identity. While equal working conditions are important for women’s descriptive and substantive representation, they are also important in themselves (Dahlerup, 2006). Stated otherwise, all elected legislators should enjoy equal opportunities to represent.

With the aim of facilitating and promoting a comparative research agenda, this article introduces a *Gendered Workplace Approach* that addresses legislators’ working conditions and how they are gendered. While the parliament is similar to other workplaces in certain regards, it is also distinct. One example is the fact that MPs are elected and not employed, which has implications for relationships at the workplace and labour law coverage. In order to identify the specific formal and informal rules that guide and shape parliamentary work, we propose five interconnected and overlapping dimensions of the parliamentary workplace that can be examined through a variety of methods and data sources: (i) the organisation of work, (ii) tasks and assignments, (iii) leadership, (iv) infrastructure and (v) interaction between MPs.

While a workplace approach to studying parliaments could certainly include all the various categories of people that work in the legislature, the approach we develop in this article is primarily concerned with working conditions for

legislators seated in parliament. As such, MPs' relationships with other categories of employees in parliament are not of interest, unless they relate to legislators' working conditions.

## 2. Parliaments as gendered organisations

In her path-breaking work on gendered organisations, Joan Acker (1990, p. 146) established that defining an organisation as gendered entails 'that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine'. In organisations with a history of male dominance, such as parliaments, a masculine culture is deeply embedded within the organisation's functioning and manifested in practices that 'reward traditional forms of masculinity and disallow traditional forms of femininity' (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 48). Women who enter parliament are thus confronted with this culture, and their very presence challenges the somatic norm of a male body (Puwar 2004). As outsiders, women and other minorities have to struggle to be both included and accepted as legitimate parliamentarians. While there are numerous competing masculinities and femininities, the 'institutional masculinity' present in male-dominated spaces underpins a particular hegemonic masculinity 'empowering and advantaging certain men over all (or almost all) women and some men'. This gendered logic implies and manifests an 'institutional sexism' that disfavors women in various regards (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 52).

Masculine parliaments have implications beyond their organisation. In addition to hosting representatives, they are also 'performing representation' in that they reproduce and sometimes challenge inequalities in society (Rai and Spary, 2019). Nevertheless, masculinity is not a permanent and static characteristic of organisations. Gender is an analytical and relational category, constructed in ongoing, fluid, and multiple processes (Scott, 1986). Acker (1990) specifies four dimensions through which gender differences and hierarchies are constantly produced and reproduced in organisations: (i) gendered divisions of labour, (ii) gendered symbols and images, (iii) gendered interaction and (iv) gendered identity constructions.

Empirical research concerning parliaments as gendered organisations has found evidence that many parliaments' inner workings are still highly masculinised in respect to several of Acker's dimensions. Crawford and Pini (2011, p. 93) find remnants of hegemonic masculinity in the Australian Parliament, exemplified by the lack of child-care facilities, long periods of time away from family, and times and patterns of parliamentary sittings that require excessively long working days. Masculine norms also dominate in the European Parliament, despite its image as a champion of gender equality. Gendered identity constructions are

manifested in expectations concerning what women and men MEPs can do and achieve, although these norms coexist with ‘contested and conflicting norms and practices related to gender equality’ (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019, p. 783). Collier and Raney’s (2018) study of Westminster parliaments finds that institutional norms and rules perpetuate and reinforce sexism and sexual harassments (see also Krook, 2018).

Institutional constraints are detrimental to women’s and other minorities’ possibilities to represent their political interests. In order to understand the character of such constraints, Dahlerup (2006) posits that we must go beyond the substantive representation of women MPs, that is, women’s impact upon policy content and output. Greater attention should instead be directed to the possibilities women MPs have to act as elected representatives on equal terms with their male colleagues (Dahlerup, 2006). Several empirical studies and reports have connected organisational and representative perspectives in order to assess how opportunities to represent are gendered. The self-assessment framework developed by the IPU concerning gender-sensitive parliaments accounts for how well national parliaments respond to ‘the needs and interests of both men and women’ in respect to their structures, operations, methods, and work (Palmieri, 2011, p. 6). Inspired by the IPU’s framework, Childs (2016) develops a *Diversity Sensitive Parliaments* (DSP) approach to assess how well the British Parliament have included the interests of various underrepresented groups. In Wängnerud’s (2015, p. 134) work on ‘gender-sensitive principles’ of the Swedish parliament, she discerns a positive trend regarding the situation of women in internal parliamentary working procedures, but there is evidently a ‘standstill’ concerning the inclusion of women’s interests and concerns and in the production of gender-sensitive legislation. Combining an organisational perspective with a performative perspective, Rai and Spary (2019, p. 336) find that institutional constraints in the Indian parliament obstruct women MPs’ attempts to pursue a women-friendly politics.

Previous research, taken together, has thus established that parliaments can be perceived as gendered organisations, and that their inner workings are gendered in ways that have negative implications for women MPs (and other minorities). We take this as our starting point in elaborating the Gendered Workplace Approach, thereby making possible a more comprehensive and fine-grained analysis of the gendered underpinnings of parliamentary work.

### 3. Studying parliaments as gendered workplaces

Drawing upon new institutionalist work, particularly feminist institutionalism (Krook and Mackay, 2011), we view parliament as a workplace consisting of different ‘action arenas’ (Ostrom, 2005) constituted by a complex web of formal and informal rules, everyday practices and norms associated with being a politician.

*Formal institutions* are codified and officially sanctioned, such as through regulations and policies, while *informal institutions* may be described as enduring rules, norms, and practices that have a collective effect, shape collective behaviour and are enforced through informal sanctions and rewards (Chappell and Mackay, 2017, p. 27).

In accordance with feminist institutionalism, we posit that constructions of masculinity and femininity are integral elements of institutions (Krook and Mackay, 2011). Stated differently, practices of inequality that advantage men and disadvantage women are 'embedded in organisational rules, routines, and policies' (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 147). A gendered workplace approach should thus strive to unveil how the 'rules of the game' in the legislature are gendered. This implies that we have to move beyond a focus solely on women's interests and actions and account for the processes in which masculinity and femininity are constructed. We must also be sensitive to how gender intersects with other social positions (McCall, 2005) in shaping 'inequality regimes' that influence legislators' working conditions (Acker, 2006). From this perspective, the meaning of gender is fluid and changes across time and contexts. While an individual rule or practice can be gendered in itself, either in its construction or by its consequences, a combination of institutional features can also together produce gendered outcomes (Lowndes, 2019).

In approaching the parliament as a gendered workplace, we must take into consideration the characteristics that legislatures share with other male-dominated organisations and workplaces. These include norms of masculinity embedded in organisational culture, devaluation of women's work, gender-marking of tasks and positions, sexual harassment and difficulties in balancing work and family (see e.g. Acker, 1990; Wahl *et al.*, 2018). However, we must also keep in mind the distinct characteristics of parliaments, a prime example being that members are elected and regarded as self-employed in many contexts (see e.g. Krook, 2018). MPs' work is thus not viewed as a 'job' in the usual sense and not regulated as such, which leads to the high level of uncertainty inherent in the parliamentary workplace. At the individual level, MPs have an unstable position and not a steady job. At the organisational level, the regular replacement of people entails recurrent processes of socialising newcomers, whereby new members are expected to unquestioningly conform to the behaviour of their seniors in order to gain political influence (Fenno, 1962).

Regardless of this regular turnover, parliaments have been remarkably successful in co-opting new members into following established parliamentary practices (Mughan *et al.*, 1997). While rule change within legislatures has been understudied (Müller and Sieberer, 2014, p. 326), strong socialisation processes and legislators' vested interests in following the rules to gain influence reveal substantial obstacles that inhibit gender-equitable institutional change. In respect to

more specific tasks and assignments, the parliament is composed of multiple venues regulated by different sets of institutions with varying levels of formalisation (Strom 1995, p. 64). But although the discretion of individual MPs regarding tasks varies between parliaments and across parties, much of the work taken on by parliamentarians is formally unregulated, with informal spaces, rules and networks forming fundamental elements of the parliamentary working environment (Franceschet, 2011; Bjarnegård, 2013). Moreover, legislative work—politics—is inherently about conflict and power, and legislatures are essentially political institutions that regulate the competitive struggle for power (Best and Vogel, 2014). Hyper-masculine characteristics are rewarded in such situations, which creates ‘a context ripe for sex-based harassment’ (Krook, 2018, p. 68). Leadership is also highly contested and particularly challenging insofar as power hierarchies and power struggles are prominent features of everyday parliamentary activity.

In-depth knowledge of the institutional context and culture of a given parliament is necessary for acquiring a full understanding of the operation and reproduction of its gendered terms and conditions. Each parliament is unique regardless of similarities among parliaments, and qualitative knowledge of its specific character is needed to grasp the meanings ascribed to various positions and tasks. While identifying formal institutions is rather straightforward since they appear by definition in written or codified form, informal institutions are more difficult to identify given their implicit nature. The fact that actors are not always able to describe them as ‘rules’ on a conscious level, even when affected by them, renders them even more elusive (Chappell and Mackay 2017). While informal rules may fill a void left by an absence of formal rules, they can also reinforce or subvert formal regulations (Waylen 2017). For such reasons, we posit that a pluralist methodological approach, in which researchers draw upon a broad array of empirical data, is a fruitful strategy for unveiling the gendered inner workings of a specific parliament.

#### 4. Five dimensions of gendered workplaces

How may we empirically study the parliament as a gendered workplace? On the basis of the specific features of parliaments discussed above, as well as building on previous research findings concerning gendered institutional constraints in parliamentary work, we identify five dimensions that altogether comprise the legislative workplace for MPs. These dimensions are inspired by Acker’s dimensions of a gendered organisation, which we have specifically adapted to capture the character of parliamentary workplace. We detail what each means within the parliamentary context, and include relevant questions that researchers interested in the gendered nature of parliaments as workplaces may pose as they explore them. [Table 1](#) summarises these dimensions, which partially overlap.

**Table 1** The parliament as a gendered workplace

<b>Workplace aspect</b>	<b>Formal rules</b>	<b>Informal rules</b>	<b>Gendering processes</b>
<b>Organization of work:</b> How 'employment' as an MP and the organization of work are regulated (working hours, right to sick and parental leave, etc.)	Parliamentary policies and regulations (standing orders or rules of procedure), party groups' statutes and policies, labour laws	(Gendered) politician norm, parenting norms	Hegemonic masculinity, lack of work-life balance
<b>Tasks and assignments:</b> How the meaning and content of assignments and tasks are determined; how tasks and assignments are allocated	Parliamentary policies and regulations (standing orders or rules of procedure), party groups' statutes and policies	(Gendered) norms for merits, practices for appointments	Gender segregation of labour, gender marking
<b>Leadership:</b> How leadership is appointed and performed	Parliamentary policies and regulations (standing orders or rules of procedure), party groups' statutes and policies	(Gendered) politician norm, (gendered) leadership norms	Lack of congruity between women and leadership or politician norms, male homosocial practices, gender discrimination
<b>Hard infrastructure:</b> Location, architecture, office spaces, physical facilities (including those facilitating parenting) <b>Soft infrastructure:</b> Human support functions	Parliament's physical location and facilities, parliamentary policies and regulations (standing orders or rules of procedure), party groups' statutes and policies	Symbols, (gendered) parenting norms, practices for use of support functions	Hegemonic masculinity, lack of work-life balance
<b>Interaction between MPs:</b> How MPs treat each other and interact in different venues	Parliament's code of conduct, parliamentary party groups' codes of conduct	Norms ascribing (gendered) 'logics of appropriateness', practices for tone, taking turns, etc.	Gender segregation, sexism, sexual harassment

### *Organisation of work*

A gendered workplace approach should first identify and describe the institutional context that establishes the terms and conditions for how work in parliament is organised on a general level. In such traditionally male-dominated workplaces as parliaments, men's interests and ideals associated with a hegemonic masculinity tend to constitute the 'organizational logic' that distributes advantage and disadvantage within ordinary institutional functioning (Acker, 1990, p. 147). Gendered logics of appropriateness thereby 'prescribe 'acceptable' masculine and feminine forms of behaviour within institutional arenas' (Chappell and Mackay, 2017, p. 29).

We must take into consideration the specific features of parliaments, discussed above, in addition to the characteristics typically found in all gendered organisations. A feature of particular importance is the fact that MPs are elected and not employed. Consequently, national labour laws that regulate working hours and parental leave while sanctioning workplace discrimination and harassment normally do not apply to parliaments. The IPU's evaluations from 2011 display great differences between parliaments regarding the organisation of work. In respect to working hours, for instance, sitting times may be adapted to school calendars and late night sessions avoided in certain instances, but in others they are not (IPU 2011, p. 92). One example of the latter is the British House of Commons's long working hours (Childs, 2016, p. 33).

MPs' right to parental leave also varies widely across countries. While MPs in some parliaments enjoy the same formal right to parental leave as other government officials, no such rights are prescribed in others and MPs are forced to informally negotiate leave entitlements with their political parties (IPU 2011, p. 92f.). In addition, even if rules regulating working hours and parental leave are not gendered in and of themselves, they can reflect masculine norms surrounding expectations placed upon legislators. When combined with gendered norms for care work in society, such rules can give rise to greater obstacles, particularly for women in general and mothers (but also fathers) in particular, who are expected to care for children and the elderly. Other examples of problems associated with the organisation of work involve the lack of accountability and immunity from prosecution for MPs committing sexual harassment (Ross 2002; Krook 2018) as well as large variations between frameworks for handling sexual harassment (see Verge, in this special issue).

Researchers need to map and analyse general regulations and policies in order to explore how the organisation of parliamentary work is gendered. These include the rules of procedure, standing orders, codes of conduct, parliamentary policies concerning discrimination and harassment and policies for sick leave and parental leave. The procedural rules, or standing orders, that regulate daily work in

parliament, such as sitting hours, proxy voting in the Chamber, the working hours of legislative committees, and the policies and statutes of parliamentary party groups, must also be examined from a gender perspective. While all formal rules regulating the organisation of work potentially influence men and women in different ways, informal norms and practices also have a significant impact upon how legislative work is organised. Examples include the practice of holding late-night meetings in which important decisions are taken and a ‘full-time dedication norm’ that requires work outside of official working hours (Verge and De la Fuente, 2014). Researchers must use such other sources as interviews with men and women MPs to reveal gendered informal rules and the potentially gendered consequences of gender-neutral formal rules.

### *Tasks and assignments*

The second dimension of importance for investigating parliamentary working conditions regards the rules, norms and practices that regulate more specific assignments and tasks within the many venues in parliament. The parliamentary organisation is characterised by several overlapping arenas or ‘internal subdivisions’. While these differ between countries, the most significant are the Chamber, legislative committees, parliamentary party groups and leadership bodies, including the speaker (Strøm, 1995, p. 64). The tasks associated with these subdivisions—such as writing bill proposals, committee deliberations, and plenary debate interventions—differ between parliaments and are formalised to varying degrees in parliamentary regulations (Strøm, 1995, p. 64). Parliamentary party groups also have their own rules regulating legislative tasks, and the discretion of individual MPs may vary. In Argentina, for instance, party leaders decide whether an MP receives ‘speaking rights’ in the Chamber (Piscopo, 2011), while opportunities to speak are controlled by both parliamentary and party gatekeepers in the Indian Parliament (Rai and Spary, 2019, p. 179). In most parliaments, the allocation of committee membership is decided primarily through party processes, even if it is ‘ratified’ at a plenary session (Palmieri, 2011, p. 24). Although formal differences in parliamentary organisation have implications for all MPs since they define ‘a set of privileged groups’ and ‘a set of procedures that specifies the powers of these groups’ (Strøm, 1995, p. 62), informal rules, norms, and practices also contribute to shaping the tasks and assignments in gendered ways.

Existing research has found gendered patterns in different areas of parliamentary work, indicating that tasks and assignments are ‘gender marked’—coded as masculine or feminine. Such gender marking results in a gendered division of labour (Acker 1990), whereby ‘feminine’ tasks tend to be devalued and men more often occupy higher and more prestigious positions (Kanter 1977). Researchers have documented gender segregation regarding ‘women’s’ and ‘men’s’ issue

topics and committees within a wide variety of parliaments (see e.g. Dahlerup, 1989; Crawford and Pini, 2010; Wängnerud, 2015). Patterns of gender segregation are found in bill sponsorship, with women initiating and sponsoring more bills on feminine-coded issues (Swers, 2005; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006). Taken together, such gendered patterns reveal ‘gendered stereotypes in terms of expertise and prestige of specific policy areas’ (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019, p. 783).

It is also important to account for how certain positions or assignments in parliament are appointed and how merits are evaluated in such processes. Heath *et al.* (2005) note that committee seats are limited in number and, as such, they manifest power, status and influence. The same is true for other positions as well. Institutional power positions are thus crucial for legislators to be able to influence policy and they are potentially gendered (Swers, 2005, see also Smrek, this special issue). Findings indicate that women legislators are marginalised and isolated in less prestigious ‘women’s issues’ committees due to institutional gender bias (Heath *et al.*, 2005; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006). In addition to formal requirements for a given position, informal (party) rules and norms may favour certain competences, traits, or experiences (Bjarnegård and Kenny, 2016). Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín (2019, p. 780) point out that while a ‘full-time dedication norm’ (Verge and De la Fuente, 2014) ‘is vital to gaining positions of power, such as committee coordinator’, it can be difficult to combine it with family life.

In order to study the tasks and assignments in a given parliament, researchers must carefully map out its various subdivisions or action arenas and the tasks and assignments associated with each. The focus should be both on the formal rules expressed in parliamentary regulations and party statutes that shape tasks and assignments, and on how they relate to the informal rules, norms and practices at play. Capturing ‘gender-marking’ and the implications it has for power hierarchies requires researchers to account for the status and expectations associated with tasks and positions that are embedded in informal institutions. Such questions require carefully studying MPs’ attitudes and perceptions as revealed through surveys and interviews, together with analyses of written regulations. While gender marking and the gender segregation are good indicators of remaining gendered norms, research must also seek to account for how gender is constructed and reproduced.

### *Leadership*

The third dimension of relevance for the Gendered Workplace Approach involves questions pertaining to leadership. On the one hand, how leadership positions are appointed has implications for gendered power hierarchies in parliament. On the other hand, how leadership is performed can have a great impact upon

working conditions, contributing either to creating an inclusive and tolerant environment, or to permitting gender discrimination and harassment.

Male homosocial practices favour men as leaders in many male-dominated professions and workplaces (Kanter, 1977). Women leaders working in such domains are often subject to discrimination due to a lack of ‘role congruity’ between their gender and the gendered norms associated with a given profession or position (Burgess and Borgida, 1999; Eagly and Karau, 2002). These women face a double risk regarding work place discrimination—either because ‘women are perceived in terms of a “lack of fit” for traditionally male occupations’ or because they violate shared beliefs concerning how women should behave when they try to adapt to a male-dominated occupation (Burgess and Borgida, 1999, pp. 666–667).

Rai and Spary (2019, p. 283) note that ‘the multiplicity of audiences, spaces, and scales of the political lives of MPs’ that comprise the parliamentary workplace entail great challenges for studying leadership in parliaments’. The function, actual influence, and regulation of parliamentary leaders also vary widely between parliaments, although the most important leadership position is typically the speaker or president of parliament (Strøm, 1995). Other important leadership posts are committee chairs and party group leaders.

Gender norms and the institutional context have been emphasised as important for understanding how political leaders ‘do leadership’ (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 5). Reingold (1996, p. 464) found that men and women in U.S. state legislatures were equally likely to endorse ‘feminine or feminist leadership styles’ due to strong institutional norms. In contrast, other studies have found that men and women legislators lead in distinct ways, with women having a more integrative and collaborative leadership style (Kathlene, 1994, p. 560; Rosenthal, 1998).

Several empirical studies have identified gender bias regarding appointments to political leadership positions (see e.g. O’Brien, 2015). Across parliaments, gendered patterns in leadership positions prevail insofar as women are more likely to head committees on women’s/gender issues or social policy (Palmieri, 2011, p. 20). Nevertheless, one of the few studies that explicitly focuses on the gender dimension of legislative leadership appointments found that women MPs enjoyed an advantage in intraparty selection to committee chair positions in the British House of Commons (O’Brien, 2012). In contrast, MPs in the Indian parliament did not even perceive themselves as leaders, in part due to institutional and social gender biases (Rai and Spary, 2019, p. 297). The IPU states that a number of factors determine selection to committee chairs, and that certain parliaments have adopted special measures or informal ‘policies’ to ensure women’s presence in leadership (Palmieri, 2011, p. 20). The range of such findings points to the need for a greater number of leadership studies.

Researchers must map the proportions of men and women in various leadership positions, and describe the formal rules that regulate such appointments, in order to investigate the potentially gendered aspects of leadership appointments. Given the prevalence of informal norms and practices that ascribe certain characteristics and expectations to specific leadership positions, this must be complemented by interviews with gatekeepers, nomination committees and leadership candidates in order to explore how formal rules interact with informal rules, norms and practices to describe why certain MPs are more likely to be leaders than others.

Researchers also need to examine how legislative leaders perform their roles and what implications this has for the working environment in different parliamentary action arenas. Apart from pointing to the gendered effects of different leadership styles, such studies can also contribute to identifying specific types of leadership that serve to foster a more inclusive environment. Interviews with leaders and other legislators, as well as direct observations of how leadership is performed, can be useful for this purpose.

### *Infrastructure*

The fourth dimension of the parliamentary workplace concerns the hard and soft infrastructure that surrounds and supports MPs in their parliamentary work. The IPU's work on gender-sensitive parliaments emphasises the need to include infrastructure in the assessment of the gendered underpinnings of a parliament's inner workings. While their framework includes several elements that relate to the organisation of work more generally, we divide infrastructure into two main categories: hard and soft infrastructure.

Hard infrastructure pertains to the physical features of the parliament building, such as its location, architecture, office spaces, art and physical facilities. Such features, which vary widely between different parliaments, have been recognised by researchers as important aspects of the workplace from a gender perspective (Puwar, 2004; Palmieri, 2011; Childs, 2016). A number of studies have revealed how a masculine norm is enshrined in the physical arrangement of parliaments (Ross, 2002; Puwar, 2004; Lovenduski, 2005) and in the symbols intimately connected with the legislative workplace (Crawford and Pini, 2010). For example, the size and location of men's and women's lavatories not only indicate which gender is viewed as the norm, they also create a tangible obstacle for women when their lavatories are placed far from the Chamber (Ross, 2002).

A particularly important and potentially gendered element of the hard infrastructure concerns the possibilities for combining care work and the legislative role. The long-distance commuting often associated with an MP's job creates a pressing need for infrastructure that facilitates work-life coordination (Allen

*et al.*, 2016). Studies have displayed the importance of caring facilities, including childcare facilities, breast-feeding rooms, and family apartments, in making it possible for legislators to combine care work with the role of legislator (Palmieri, 2011).

Soft infrastructure refers to human support functions, such as the research and administrative staff who assist MPs in their daily work. Compared to vast attention paid to the hard infrastructure in the literature, the gendered character of soft infrastructure has received less attention in parliamentary research. The formal regulations surrounding support varies between parliaments, and in some places also between parliamentary party groups. In addition, informal practices and norms affect how support functions are allocated. In many parliaments, MPs have no personal staff and are forced to share or compete for staff with colleagues. In other parliaments, the number of personal staff depends upon the MPs' own resources (see e.g. Leston-Bandeira, 2007; Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017). Potentially systematic gender differences influence the degree of support an individual MP receives in his or her work in both types of cases. For instance, the IPU finds that women MPs more frequently refer to gender discrimination in the allocation of staffing (Palmieri, 2011, p. 89).

Researchers must examine how the physical environment of the parliament shapes working conditions for MPs with different genders, social background or identity, in order to empirically study this dimension. It is also important to study the formal and informal rules that regulate expectations, access to administrative support, the actual usage of such support and how these can be gendered. For instance, do senior and more powerful legislators with extensive personal resources receive higher levels of support in their legislative work at the expense of other groups? Surveys posing questions to MPs about their access to and use of support comprise a good starting point for exploring potential gender differences in this regard.

### *Interaction between MPs*

The fifth and final dimension concerns interaction between MPs in the different aspects of parliamentary work. While this dimension partially overlaps with the other four, it also captures aspects of the parliament's inner workings not covered by the other dimensions. Acker remarks that patterns which enact dominance and submission are constituted through interactions between 'women and men, women and women, men and men' in gendered organisations (Acker, 1990, p. 147). On the one hand, interaction between MPs takes place in more formalised arenas in accordance with formal and informal rules that establish the terms for how to behave, such as taking turns and the tone to be used when speaking in the Chamber and legislative committees. On the other hand, many occasions of daily

interaction in parliament are constituted by informal practices and norms and are less formally regulated. In this regard, gendered ‘logics of appropriateness’ set the terms for appropriate behaviour within an organisation in general and prescribe appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour in particular (Chappell, 2006).

A number of studies have demonstrated that male behaviour is regarded as the norm in parliaments, and that women feel pressured to adapt to the corresponding expectations (e.g. Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, 1995; Rosenthal, 1998). For instance, masculine organisations reproduce gendered patterns of speech, whereby ‘women entering male dominated occupations and institutions most often adopt the style of speaking which is already established in the institutional norm’ (Cameron and Shaw, 2016). Male homosocial practices, whereby men identify with other men and orient themselves in relation to them, also constitute a central aspect of male-dominated organisations. Such practices contribute to maintaining and reinforcing hegemonic masculine norms and other practices that benefit (certain) men and downgrade or exclude women (Bjarnegård, 2013; Verge and De la Fuente, 2014). The uncertainty associated with the unstable job of MP can sharply limit incentives to complain about or break with gendered norms surrounding interaction, which can contribute to reinforcing their ‘stickiness’.

Research has revealed the existence of institutional sexism in parliaments that is manifested in such practices as bullying, silencing, micro-aggression and harassment in a wide variety of settings (e.g. see Lovenduski, 2005; Crawford and Pini, 2011; Krook and Sanín, 2019). Sexual harassment of both staff and MPs is also a widespread problem in parliaments (IPU, 2016; Krook, 2018). The gendered character of the workplace environment is central for gaining an understanding of the conditions under which harassment is more likely to occur. For example, women who have fewer women in their immediate working environment and women who work in a job that is atypical for women are found to be at higher risk of being targeted with sexual harassment (Willness *et al.*, 2007, p. 146). Furthermore, specific institutional rules, procedures, and norms within parliaments, such as a myth of neutrality and a male logic of appropriateness, serve to reinforce violence against women in politics (Collier and Raney, 2018, p. 433). Krook (2018) also notes how several structural features of parliaments, such as MPs’ self-employment, exacerbate problems of responding to sexual harassment since there are few independent mechanisms of accountability. Parliamentary party groups are typically tasked with handling complaints, but they may actively discourage victims from filing them since they are keen to protect their reputations (Krook, 2018, p. 69).

Although research has demonstrated that interaction between MPs is gendered in various respects—and sanctioned by the institutional framework—questions remain concerning how different interactions play out within the legislative

workplace. We thus urge researchers to map gendered interactions and explicitly compare MPs' experiences of sexual harassment, micro-aggression, and domination techniques. Surveys of legislators can provide a good starting point for evaluating the prevalence of such negative treatment. In a second step, interviews and direct observations can yield deeper and more detailed knowledge about the gendered informal rules and norms that guide interaction between MPs.

## 5. Conclusion

Scholars of gender and politics often describe parliaments as 'masculine' organisations. We have argued in this article that whether and to what extent parliaments are masculine (gendered) workplaces are empirical questions that require a careful investigation of parliamentary working conditions. We propose that conceptualising parliaments as gendered workplaces is helpful for producing new empirical and theoretical knowledge of the gendered underpinnings of parliamentary work. In the present article, we have introduced and conceptualised the *Gendered Workplace Approach* for studying the gendered nature of parliaments. This approach, which is inspired by previous research on gender in legislatures, focuses on the everyday realities MPs face in their parliamentary work, concretises the specificities of the parliamentary workplace, and asks whether all MPs enjoy equal opportunities for conducting their legislative tasks, regardless of their gender, social background or identity. As such, it serves as an inspiration and conceptual point of departure for empirical studies concerning the inner workings of parliaments.

Viewing the legislative workplace in this manner constitutes an important contribution in relation to previous research since it provides a more fine-grained and comprehensive analytical framework. Although we recognise that an individual researcher cannot simultaneously study all dimensions in detail, we encourage researchers to think about how their results are affected by other dimensions not explicitly addressed and be more clear about the scope of their research—the questions one can answer and those that must be left for others. Exploring the unique gendered working conditions in a given parliament should be regarded as a cumulative endeavour in which researchers can construct a more comprehensive understanding of a particular legislature by building upon each other's work.

Another important contribution of the Gendered Workplace Approach is that it seeks to avoid a static and deterministic understanding of how a gendered parliament influences MPs in their work insofar as it recognises the multifaceted nature of its gendered inner workings. As such, this approach encourages analyses of how gender intersects with other social backgrounds and identities. Another venue for future research is theoretical development concerning questions

pertaining how gender equality in numbers can translate into actual gender-equal working conditions.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the UPPGAP seminar at the Department of Government, Lenita Freidenvall, Tània Verge and the anonymous reviewers for insightful comments to previous versions of this article.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE), grant number: 2018-01027.

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