

Gender, actors and rules: Understanding institutional dynamics in the case of police governance

Francesca Gains (University of Manchester) and Vivien Lowndes (University of Birmingham)

To understand how gender is implicated in institutional design and change, four interlinked elements are important: (a) rules about gender; (b) rules with gendered effects; (c) gendered actors working with rules; and (d) gendered outcomes. This framework has been developed and tested in quantitative research on the new institution of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales (Gains and Lowndes 2014). Those findings enable us to construct a purposive sample of PCCs for in-depth case study investigation. Using interviews and observations, we are able to look at informal as well as formal rules, and at how they interact within specific contexts. Case study analysis also allows us to move from considering policy statements to investigating their implementation on the ground. The paper presents and reflects upon findings about the interaction between gender, institutional actors and institutional rules. First, we look at how rules about gender are shaping workforce development within the police and also the adoption of new services related to violence against women. Second, we analyse two sets of apparently gender-neutral rules that are found to generate gendered effects: direct election and media engagement. When analysing institutional rules, we identify the value of Ostrom's concept of 'rules in use', which does not assume any strict separation of formal and informal elements. Third, we consider how actors' own gender is associated with the way in which they interpret and work with rules, and are perceived as such by themselves and others. We extend our understanding of gendered actors from a male/female binary to a critical investigation of masculinities/femininities within the institution of the PCC. We argue for a dynamic understanding of interactions between gender, actors and rules. We reflect also upon the contribution of a mixed methods approach to researching how institutions are gendered.