Gender, the State, and Development

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What role do states and democracies play in development? Although many scholars have addressed this question, fewer have done so with respect to gender. In this essay, we argue that renewed attention to the relationship between states and gender would powerfully improve existing sociological analyses of development. We begin by defining how states are fundamentally gendered institutions, and how states in turn create and reproduce gender relations in the societies they govern. We then turn to the question of whether states are valid sites of contestation for empowering and emancipating gender minorities. We examine this question across three different categories of states: Western nations, Eastern European nations, and developing nations. We conclude that a feminist perspective of the state would powerfully extend existing theories about whether and how states influence “development.” This is especially true for a new generation of state-centered development research that examines how individuals, through social mobilization and participatory democracy, can influence state development practices (e.g., Lee 2007, Evans 2010, Wolford 2010, Baoicchi, Heller and Silva 2011).

Our chapter is premised on the understanding that gender is always implicated in sociological analyses of development, regardless of how development is formally defined. Our arguments below prioritize a capabilities approach to development, where the importance of gender is relatively straightforward. In this approach, an “ideally” developed society requires that every individual’s rights, resources, and “capabilities” exist wholly
independently of his or her gender or sexuality (Nussbaum 2000). Yet we note that the more traditional, market-based approaches to development are also fundamentally gendered (see Moghadam and Blumberg, this volume). The way a society defines “men” and “women” in turn structures the organization of its families, its labor markets, its wealth transfers, its use of technology, and its knowledge production, among other factors commonly analyzed in development studies. Gender, we argue, mediates states’ influence on these development processes.

**Gender and the State**

To best understand the relationship between states and gender, feminist scholars advocate studying both the *governance of gender*, and the *gender of governance* (Brush 2003). In the former, scholars demonstrate that all states “govern” gender because their institutions, policies, and practices help create, maintain, and reproduce the categories of men and women in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, states use the categories of “men” and “women” to dictate, among other things, who can vote, who can go to school, who can marry whom, who has the right to control their own sexual and reproductive behavior, or who can be drafted into military service. Indirectly, states shape gender in countless additional ways: social welfare programs formally define what can constitute a “family;” taxations systems place differential values on paid and unpaid labor; the presence, absence, or form of parental leave programs shape expectations and opportunities for mothers and fathers; the availability of affordable child care mitigates mothers’ access to paid labor and economic independence; and public health care systems determine who can control their own sexual health and reproduction through the drugs and procedures they provide.
Just as states structure gender, gender systems also structure states—the “gender of governance.” Because of men’s historical dominance in society, men continue to overwhelmingly occupy the most powerful positions within government. For example, men hold 79% of all parliamentary positions around the world, while women make up only 21%. Assumptions of male dominance influence the structuring of state agencies, laws and programs in countless ways. El Salvador provides a relatively straightforward illustration. Like most of the world’s nations, El Salvador signed onto the United Nation’s “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,” or CEDAW, in 1981. To fulfill the expectations of CEDAW, and in response to pressure from local women’s movements after democratization, the Salvadoran state created a national-level “women’s office” in 1996 (Viterna and Fallon 2008), giving it a mandate to police all other state agencies for gender discriminatory practices. Nevertheless, since its founding, each Salvadoran president has appointed his wife, the First Lady, to be the president of the women’s institute. This creates a highly visible gendered division of political power in El Salvador; men are presidents, and their wives run the “women’s institute,” regardless of whether they have any qualification for that position. The idea that a woman might ever be president, or that a male president could ever have a male spouse, is thus negated by the organizational structure of the very institution that was designed to promote gender equity in state governance.¹

Feminist scholars overwhelmingly agree that states are gendered institutions, but they frequently disagree about whether states are valid sites of contestation and change for

¹ Which projects the institute prioritizes have, not surprisingly, varied in accordance with the political ideologies of the party in power. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of “president” as “heterosexual male” remains the same across any one First Lady’s gender ideology.
citizens seeking gender equity (Borchorst 1999; Brush 2003). In the more pessimistic camp, scholars have argued that fighting for women's rights within a masculine state has ultimately been self-defeating as it reifies the category “woman” (Squires 2001), changes women's dependence from private patriarchy to public patriarchy (Eisenstein 1981; Holter 1984), or simply augments state power and control over citizens in ways that reinforce the existing “condition and construction of women” (Brown 1995:173). Others see “the state” as too ambiguous and unwieldy to be a useful category for analysis or a useful target for activists (Allen 1990). The most radical in this camp argue that the state is simply irredeemable; it is too sexist and too masculine to serve as a vehicle for change (Davis 2001; Smart 1989). Therefore, pessimists often suggest that feminist activism is more profitably targeted at other social relations, such as gendered interactions in day-to-day relationships, rather than at “state transformation.”

By contrast, scholars in the more optimistic camp argue that states are “where the power is” (Brush 2003: 3; see also Dahlerup 1994). These scholars agree that state structures, policies, and ideologies generally work to reinforce masculine privilege. However, they maintain that state institutions still provide important sites of contestation and negotiation for women (Chapman 1993; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999; Orloff 1996; Watson 1990). Indeed, scholars have documented how women’s activism has fundamentally altered states’ genders in terms of extending voting rights to women (McCammon 2001; McCammon et al. 2001), expanding welfare benefits to reduce women's dependence on men (Gordon 1994; Koven and Michel 1993, Skocpol 1992), and increasing legal protections against gender discrimination in the workplace, legal system, in the home, and surrounding the body (Gelb and Hart 1999; Rhode 1989). Working within a masculine
state structure certainly limits, and sometimes undermines, women’s victories, they argue, but the state is simply too powerful an arena for leveraging power for feminists to disassociate from it completely (Brush 2003).

In the next section, we review existing arguments about whether states can be sites for gendered change in the so-called “Western” nations, in Eastern Europe, and in developing countries.

**Western Welfare States**

Most early theorizing about states and gender in mainstream sociology focused on wealthy nations.² In the 1980s, MacKinnon (1989), Pateman (1970, 1989) and others opened the conversation by arguing that (Western) states are inherently male institutions, created by men, in male-dominated societies, to maintain a social order that privileges hegemonic masculinity. Feminist scholars supported these contentions by demonstrating, for example, how welfare systems encouraged women’s continued reliance on men (Gordon 1990, 1994), how legal systems were more concerned with regulating—rather than prohibiting—rape (MacKinnon 1989), or how variations in states’ support and organization of child care directly impacted women’s power in labor markets and politics (Ruggie 1984, Siim 1990).

As the field developed, feminist scholars became increasingly interested in gendered variations across welfare states. They sought to document whether some states were more “women friendly” than others (Borchorst 1994; O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999; Orloff 1993, 1996; Sainsbury 1996), and what historical processes (especially women’s

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² There was however a notable literature on women and state-building in developing nations that emerged in the latter part of the 1980s, especially in the Middle East and South Asia. See Moghadam’s contribution to this volume for details.
mobilizations) might account for these variations (Abramovitz 1988; Goodwin 1997; Gordon 1994; Muncy 1991; Sklaar 1993; Skocpol 1992). They concluded that women's movements' successes in creating more women-friendly states depended on a number of factors: how they framed their issues (Ferree and Gamson 2003; Hobson 2003; Stetson 2001), the organizational structure of the movement (Clemens 1993; Staggenborg 1988), the strategies they utilized (McCammon et al. 2001; Taylor 1996; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004), the cohesiveness of the movements (Lovenduski 2005), and whether they had allies within the government (Mazur 2001; Stetson 2001). They also found that historically specific characteristics of the state influenced the outcomes of women's mobilizations, attributing cross-national variations to, for example, “strong” versus “weak” states (Koven and Michel 1993); a history of fascism (Bock and Thane 1991); the balance of power among workers, employers, and the state (Pederson 1993); or the demands placed on feminists by the small realm of available allies (Gordon 1994).

These theories demonstrate that states are complex systems of institutions, strategies, and ideologies; that states tend to reinforce hegemonic masculine privilege in their respective societies; but that they are also vulnerable to change according to historical developments and the influence of (generally women’s) mobilizations. Feminist scholars of Western states have also given us important tools for theorizing from what types of mobilizations, and under what social and political conditions, gendered change might be possible. However, given their focus on rich, relatively stable nations, these studies often conceptualize states' genders as something that crystalized in the past with

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3 Excellent overviews of feminist state theory, focusing on the Western welfare state, include Brush (2003), Haney (2000), Borchorst (2000), and Orloff (1996). Haney (1996) further encourages scholars to conceptualize the state as a network of institutions, and to study gender variation across those institutions within a single state.
the formation of states’ welfare systems. They frequently see states as valid sites for contesting gender inequalities, but the changes they study are often incremental, such as modifications of state policies or personnel—the kind of changes expected from social movements operating under the protections, and limitations, of long-standing democratic systems. Thus, feminist theories of Western states provide an important framework from which to start our analysis, but their ability to answer questions about how women’s movements might target less-democratic states, or how radical state transformations might lead to more justly gendered political systems, is limited.

**Eastern Europe**

The political, social, and economic transformation of Eastern Europe in the 1990s encouraged scholars to ask how states’ genders might change in moments of radical transformation. Feminist scholars were initially highly optimistic about the possibility of women’s empowerment in the transitioning nations of Eastern Europe. Since women were already active within the government and the public sphere under the former Communist regimes, scholars anticipated that this historical female presence in political positions would help create a more feminist oriented state with democratization (Einhorn 1993). Yet contrary to this expectation, the transition did not create more women-friendly states, and many would argue it re-enforced the masculinity of the state apparatus (Einhorn 1993; Watson 1993). With democratization, women’s participation in the state dropped precipitously, and men came to dominate the national government and its agenda. To illustrate, in the first post-transition elections, women’s representation dropped from 29.5% to 6% in the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, from 20.9% to 8.5% in Bulgaria, from approximately 50% to 9.5% in Poland, and from 33% to 3.5% in Romania (Watson
At the same time, maternity leave policies were curtailed, women’s legislative quotas were dismantled, funding for childcare centers decreased significantly, and there were attempts to end women’s rights to abortion (Einhorn 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000; Haney 1994; Pascal and Manning 2000; Watson 1993). After democratization, many of the Eastern European states began to resemble the highly masculine make-up of their Western European neighbors.

How did this “democratic” transformation generate more highly masculine government structures? In hindsight, scholars concluded that the original communist states’ “women-friendliness” was perhaps only an appearance. Women’s representation within the legislative bodies was high due to quotas, but these legislatures were mere window dressings for the Central Committees of the ruling Communist Parties, where the policies and agenda of Eastern European states were determined. Women’s representation in the Central Committee for the Communist Party in the Soviet Union was less than 5%, and thus women’s actual political power in the state was weak. The Communist Party also exalted women as both laborers and reproducers of the nation; thus, they were expected to have children, care for the family, and work regular shift hours (Gal and Kligman 2000; Einhorn 1993; Haney 1994; Pascal and Manning 2000; Watson 1993). Because of these multiple demands, women attempted to subvert the state by using the home as a refuge from the communist state’s agenda (Gal and Kligman 2000; Einhorn 1993; Haney 1994; Watson 1993).

In addition to over-estimating the women-friendliness of the pre-transition states, scholars argued that the former Communist Party’s iron-handed control over political organizing, and the sense that women had in some ways already achieved equality, meant
that women were poorly mobilized as women before the transition, so were not able to act on behalf of women during and after the transition (Einhorn 1993). Although women’s organizations existed, they were generally not unified and tended to focus on educational and economic concerns (Berthusen Gottlick 1999). Women’s organizations in pre-transition Eastern Europe had remained relatively localized, their connections to the international women’s movement limited. Moreover, because the former Communist Party expounded a commitment to gender equality, albeit more in ideology than in practice, women as well as men conflated gender equality and feminism with communism in the post-transition period, and distanced themselves from these terms and representations (Gal and Kligman 2000; Haney 1994).

As years progressed post-transition, women’s political access to and participation within the state appears to be improving. Women’s legislative representation initially dropped dramatically after democratic transitions, but it has recently been improving again in most Eastern European nations. From the initial drop to 2013, women’s representation increased from 6% in the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic to 22% in the Czech Republic and to 18.7% in Slovakia, from 8.5% to 24.6% in Bulgaria, from 9.5% to 23.7% in Poland, and 3.5% to 13.3% in Romania. This increase in representation has occurred despite the fact that Eastern Europe continues to lag behind other regions of the world in the adoption of quotas guaranteeing minimal levels of women’s representation. The initial democratic transition led women to withdraw from, while men usurped, political power. Often, men who held pre-transition political power were the first elected to new political offices with democratization. However, as women became increasingly savvy about how to effectively engage the new democratic systems, post-transition limits on political office eventually
helped force old-guard male politicians out of power, creating space for new players. The lessoning of state coercion, combined with women’s increasing familiarization with and trust of the new democratic system, increased women’s willingness to engage the state on behalf of their gendered rights (Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna 2012). Eastern European women gradually re-entered politics. Whether or how women’s increasing physical presence in state structures will promote gender-equitable development remains an open question for future research.

In sum, although democratization in Eastern Europe initially created more highly masculine states rather than more gender equitable states, scholars have not pessimistically dismissed the state as irredeemable. Rather, the Eastern European case has provided additional evidence that states’ genders are strongly influenced by path-dependent historical processes, and the presence or absence of feminist movements and allies.

**Developing Countries**

Feminist scholars of developing nations lament that much theorizing about gender and the state has been developed in Western contexts (Waylen 1996). Such theories do not easily translate to non-Western nations, where men and women’s patterns of political engagement with the state are strikingly different. Often these gendered political patterns in developing nations are rooted in European colonial histories. Colonizers usurped and restructured existing political institutions to best meet their own needs, often by encouraging women to remain in the domestic realm while encouraging men to become educated or active laborers (Stamp 1986; Bujra 1986). For example, among the Igbo in Nigeria, the *obi*, who traditionally represented the needs of the men within the community,
were appointed to local government positions by the British. However, the *omu*, who represented the needs of the women within the community, were disregarded by colonial institutions. Similarly, among the Kikuyu in Kenya, male elders, who had held positions within their lineage prior to colonization, were appointed as chiefs, sub-chiefs, and judges under new colonial systems. Yet women, who also traditionally held positions of power within their lineages, were not appointed to new colonial positions (Stamp 1986).

When European colonies gained independence, their new post-colonial governments often initially proved weak and unstable. Newly independent states seldom had the resources necessary to run governments, and the state institutions they inherited had been created to serve their colonizers’ needs, rather than the needs of their own populations. Often, the withdrawal of colonial authorities left a power vacuum, and with no institutional process in place for choosing new leaders, many nations experienced political instability. The outcomes of those instabilities varied across nations, with some countries developing formal democratic systems, others coming under control of authoritarian regimes, and still others experiencing years of civil strife.

As a result, most developing nations tend to be weaker in their administrative capacities, and typically have little funding for social welfare or policy enforcement, which influences how states can interact with women. States most often figure in non-Western women’s lives when they transgress some social boundary, and are returned to order by brute state force (Rai 1996:36). Moreover, women in developing nations often have lower levels of literacy and employment and higher levels of income inequality than their Western or Eastern European counterparts, and are more likely to engage the state outside

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4 Strong states in the Middle East and North Africa are notable exceptions. See Moghadam 2013.
of conventional politics. Not surprisingly, then, much research on gender and the state in developing nations has called for a broader definition of the political, and has focused on the rich tradition of women’s mobilizations and participation in civil society as key components of state challenges. However, the result of this focus on women’s mobilizations has been the conversion of the state into a secondary character, which is often treated monolithically as “good” or “bad” in its reactions to women’s organizing.

Over the past several decades, most developing nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America underwent transitions to democracy. Like in Eastern Europe, these transitions fundamentally transformed existing state structures, providing women’s mobilizations with unprecedented opportunities to promote the creation of new “women friendly” political institutions (Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012, Viterna and Fallon 2008). Buttressed by international conventions like CEDAW and the international women’s movement, local women’s movements routinely took advantage of the unprecedented political opening of transition to push newly democratizing states to adopt national quotas, and to create national political institutions specifically tasked with supporting and maintaining gender equity in state policies and practices (Chen 2008; Krook 2006).

Unlike Eastern Europe these developing states had little pre-text of being “women-friendly” prior to their transitions. Whether transitioning from dictatorships or civil strife, undemocratic regimes were highly masculine. Unlike men, women could not gain political

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5 Generally speaking, gender quotas are political policies that mandate a certain percentage of seats be reserved for women in elected or appointed political positions. Many nations have implemented some sort of national or party-level gender quotas, but cross-national variations in quota type, reach, implementation, and effectiveness remain extensive. See Krook 2006, or Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012, for an overview.

6 Some exceptions include Communist countries (e.g., Vietnam, Cuba, and China), and authoritarian governments in the Middle East, like Tunisia (which instituted women-friendly laws under a staunchly secular regime) and Algeria (which prioritized some political guarantees of gender equity as an outgrowth of its revolutionary movement, even while maintaining an Islamic state). See Moghadam 2013.
positions through coups, bribes, or appointments by other men (Tripp 1994). Women who did gain political positions often did so through family members, or they held positions with little influence on government policy (Geisler 1995).

Women’s absence from formal political structures in authoritarian states contrasted sharply with women’s central role in the civil society mobilizations that forced these authoritarian states into democratic transitions. Feminist research documents extensive and powerful mobilizations of women’s organizations against authoritarian states, (and especially against their human rights abuses), at precisely the moment when more typically masculine forms of doing politics (political parties; labor unions) were effectively silenced by state repression (Alvarez 1990; Fisher 1990; Noonan 1995). Women also constituted an estimated 30% of the guerrilla armies that quite literally fought to dismantle authoritarian regimes in nations like Nicaragua and El Salvador (Viterna 2006, 2013). Given scholars’ previous findings that feminist changes in state structures occur most readily when women are mobilized, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars anticipated similar feminist outcomes in transitioning states. Women had proven themselves fearless fighters for political transformation under repressive authoritarian regimes; how could they not continue the political fight for gender equity under new democratic institutions?

Despite the initial optimism about organized women’s potential to transform states’ gender with democratization, early studies often reported disappointing outcomes.7

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7 Some scholarship did highlight positive outcomes. For example, in South Africa, the Women’s National Coalition worked to improve women’s representation within the constitution and formal political structures. Yet even in these more positive cases, scholars expressed strong concerns about the durability of feminist advances. Continuing with the South Africa example, the Women’s National Coalition was dismantled after the transition to democracy was completed. Similarly, scholars have noted a disconnect between relatively “feminist” laws passed with democratization in the more positive cases, and the continuing patriarchal practices within those states’ legislative, executive, and judicial systems. And scholars expressed concern about whether women who gained political power
Numerous case studies found that, with democratization, women’s gains during pre-transition mobilizations were overturned (Cagan 2000; Chinchilla 1994), there was a widespread reassertion of traditional gender expectations (Jaquette 1994; Rai 1996), women’s mobilizations waned (Craske 1998), and in some nations, women’s electoral representation in parliament actually declined (Fisher 1993; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998; Jelin 1990). Democratic transitions may have eliminated authoritarian barriers to women’s political participation, but studies consistently found that women’s political power increased little, if any, with initial democratization (Bystydzienski and Sekhon 1999; Friedman 2000; Geisler 1995; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998; Kelly et al 2001; Walby 1992), and some argued that women were likely worse off after democratization – politically, socially, and economically—than they were under previous regimes (Hawkesworth 2001). 8

Like in Eastern Europe, scholars of developing countries generated a number of explanations for women’s disappointing gains with democratization. First, several scholars argued that the countries’ historical and political context shaped the manner in which women mobilized under authoritarian regimes, and this choice of strategies limited women’s ability to gain political power after democratization. By closing down political options typically considered “masculine” (such as political parties and labor unions), repressive authoritarian regimes inadvertently promoted women’s “feminine” mobilizations through community-based, family-oriented protests. Women protestors

8 Although the majority of this literature examines cases in Latin America (Friedman 2000) Jaquette and Wolchik (1998) extend the comparison to Eastern Europe, Sheldon (1994) and Scott (1994) find similar trends in Africa, and Moghadam (2013) explores the complexity of politics and women’s rights in the Middle East. Quantitative cross-sectional studies similarly found that levels of democracy had no statistical impact, or a significant but negative impact, on women’s legislative representation (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Paxton 1997; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Reynolds 1999).
shrewdly incorporated the authoritarian regimes’ own gendered discourse of women as pious, self-sacrificing mothers into the framing of their claims against the state. Authoritarian regimes thus found themselves in the uncomfortable position of trying to justify the repression of women who had mobilized around feminine themes that the regime itself had earlier exalted (Alvarez 1990; Chuchryk 1989; Friedman 2000; Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet 2002; Ray and Kortweg 1999; Sternbach et al 1992). With democratization, however, new political players on both the left and the right utilized women’s own discourse of motherhood, and of innate gender differences, to encourage women’s return to the household (Chinchilla 1994; Fisher 1993; Friedman 1998; Schild 1994).

Second, many argue that democratization marginalizes women because, under democratization, political parties, and not social movements, control access to the state (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Given that political parties are typically patriarchal and resistant to women’s participation, women have historically found their strongest political voice within social movements. Paradoxically, then, authoritarian states may have opened space for women’s mobilizations that was in turn closed by democratization and the institutionalization of conventional political channels (Friedman 2000; Jelin 1990; Nelson

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9 Examples of activism that promote traditional feminine images include motherhood-based human rights groups, where women marched to condemn authoritarian governments for kidnapping and killing their family members (Fisher 1990; Stephen 1997), and movements for social welfare, where women organized as housewives to protest rising prices, shrinking social services, and their increasing difficulty at feeding and caring for their families (Jelin 1990; Neuhouser 1998). Opposition groups also used traditional narratives of “mother” to justify their increasing use of political violence (Viterna 2013). While certainly strategic, the “mother” identity was also heartfelt (Bayard de Volo 2001); women strongly believed that their status as women made them particularly qualified to talk about suffering and human rights.

10 Although these movements did little to challenge the traditional patriarchal society, some scholars argue that “feminine” movements can and do overlap and develop into “feminist” ideologies (Molyneux 1985; Stephen 1997), but little is written about which movements evolve, which languish, and whether this broadening of movement goals results in gendered changes within the state apparatus.
A third proposed explanation is that pre-transition women’s mobilizations were co-opted or institutionalized by the state and by political parties after democratization (Alvarez 1999; Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet 2002; Richards 2004; Vargas 2002). For example, women associated with political parties prior to the transition often found their gender-specific goals subsumed to the party’s “mainstream” goals (Luciak 2001). Likewise, states sometimes instituted a new women’s office within the state machinery after democratization, but they constrained the effectiveness of these new institutions with laws, bureaucracy, and funding shortages. Leaders of women’s movements were often the first to transition to the leadership positions within new women’s offices of the state or women’s branches of parties, or even new gender-specific NGOs, thus crippling women’s social movements by removing many movement leaders at the precise moment of democratic opening (Hassim 2006, Viterina and Fallon 2008). Moreover, women who find themselves in paid positions often tend to be of a higher class, and better educated, than women who remain in community-based social movements, leading to a problem of cohesion and collaboration within the movements themselves (Waylen 1994). This concern about cooptation has led many women’s movements in developing nations to declare autonomy from states and political parties, thus giving them freedom to pursue their own agendas and collaborate with a wide range of political interests, even though it may limit their access to the state and their funding options (Alvarez 1999; Beckwith 2000; Jaquette 1994; Waylen 1994; Tripp 2000).  

The final argument explaining democracy’s disappointing outcomes for women is

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11 Franceschet 2003 provides an excellent overview of this literature, and counters that Chile’s state agency for women, the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, has actually strengthened women’s mobilizing.
the one most familiar to development scholars: the neo-liberal economic policy changes that typically accompany democratization diminished women's ability to participate in politics by increasing women's already unfair workload (Cagan 2000; Jelin 1998). Privatization and structural adjustment made basic necessities like food, health care, and education increasingly difficult to access, thus increasing women's time spent in care-giving roles, while liberalization of the economy reduced wages and opportunities for organizing on the job, especially in export-oriented production work often dominated by women's labor. Because of neo-liberal policies accompanying democratization, then, women's free time was restricted, and their associations with individuals and organizations outside the home were limited, resulting in women having little time, resources, or networks to facilitate any sort of political involvement.12

Amidst the many pessimistic prognostications for women's gains with democratization is a small, optimistic literature focusing on gender and revolution. In an initial theoretical investigation of gender and revolution, Moghadam (1997) argues that some revolutions, like those in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and South Yemen are modernizing, egalitarian, and focus on women's emancipation, while others, like revolutions in Iran and Poland, stress family, gender differences, and reinforce patriarchy. In Latin America, Kampwirth (2004) uses case studies to argue that revolutionary movements inadvertently engendered feminist movements by providing women with new ideologies of equality, new political skills, and new networks with other women activists, both locally and internationally. Both conclude that revolutions may not have transformed the gender of the state, but they did transform the lives of the women activists within the revolution,

12 Others have shown how neoliberalism may have generated women’s mobilization as well (e.g., Almeida and Delgado 2008, Moghadam 2009, Di Marco 2011)
such that these women have launched strong, vibrant, autonomous feminist movements that are qualitatively different from feminist movements in the West.

More recent studies provide additional reasons to believe that, with time, democratic transitions may improve women's legislative representation, potentially transforming the gender of governance. Similar to Eastern Europe, democratization had a curvilinear effect on women's national political representation in developing states (Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna 2012). With the initial transition to democracy, nations often experienced a precipitous drop in representation. However, with each additional year, women's representation improved. Countries that had longer histories with nominally competitive (albeit undemocratic) elections prior to their transitions saw relatively faster increases in women's legislative representation after their transitions, suggesting that women's representation improved as their familiarity with the electoral system increased (Fallon, Swiss, and Viterna 2012). Although all countries gained from democratization, those that transitioned from civil strife appear to have gained the most (Hughes 2009), in part because they were the most likely to initiate working gender quotas with their transitions (Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012). In short, the implementation of quotas, plus women's increasing trust of, and adaptation to, the new political systems, seems to account for these gradual improvements in women's political representation (Adams and Becker 2007; Bjarnegard and Melander 2011; Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012; Tripp and Kang 2007).

Although it remains to be seen how women's increasing legislative presence may affect gender-equitable development, we point to four additional reasons for optimism in state-gender relations among developing nations. First, women's movements in
developing nations often connected to the international women’s movement prior to democratization, and these transnational resources proved useful for successfully pressuring democratizing states to implement gender-equitable laws and institutions during the transition (Viterna and Fallon 2008). These transnational connections seem to have given many women’s movements in the global south an ally that Eastern European women’s organizations were slower to expropriate, and we anticipate that transnational allies will continue to be influential. Second, the new global trend of implementing gender quotas has spread even to nations with low levels of democracy and less powerful women’s movements (Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012). Given quotas proven potential for powerfully increasing women’s formal political representation, we suggest that quotas may help build women’s political power from the top down, even in contexts where bottom-up mobilizations may struggle. Third, as women gain increased access to state resources and representation, and continued to be connected to international mobilization, they also successfully worked to implement laws to protect women. Weldon and Htun (2012), for example, demonstrate that domestic violence laws and resources to support survivors of domestic violence are more successful in countries where women’s local and international movements are active. And fourth, many developing states are experimenting with their own novel practices for equalizing political power, such as the implementation of participatory direct democracy in nations like Brazil and India (Baiocchi, Heller and Silva 2011). These new options for political participation have already increased women’s participation at the local level in at least some instances (Gibson 2012; Agarwala 2013). Given findings that women’s formal representation increases as their familiarity with electoral politics improves, we anticipate that the long term impacts of such local-level
participation on state structures may ultimately be very positive.

In sum, although scholars initially reached a largely pessimistic consensus about democracy’s ability to create more justly gendered states and societies in developing nations, later studies demonstrate that as democracy progresses, it does provide new space for women to increase their political power and participation. Women have become more involved with national politics through democratic political structures, and they have lobbied for changes in policies affecting women. Of note, despite the striking differences in national contexts, studies engaging gender and the state within developing countries concur with scholars of Western states that women’s activism in social movements—albeit constrained by the path-dependent governance structures and historical political cultures already in place—are the primary vehicles for achieving more gender-equitable states.

Conclusion

Existing studies sometimes suggest that developing state governments, by virtue of their relative institutional weakness, instability, and lack of resources, are not well positioned to shape development outcomes. Yet this review demonstrates how developing nations’ relative institutional instability can also open new opportunities for state-led improvements in human capabilities. Women’s movements in stable democracies may often benefit from institutionalized state protection and broader social acceptance of feminist ideals, but they seldom achieve more than incremental gender changes when targeting state institutions— institutions that have been stable centers of political power across centuries. In contrast, women’s movements in newly emerging democracies have often successfully capitalized on moments of instability and transition to demand that women’s rights and needs be integrated into new state offices, policies, and procedures.
Indeed, by some measures—particularly the measure of women’s political representation in national legislatures—many poor nations have surpassed their rich counterparts in promoting gender equity in state governance. We certainly do not aim to downplay the difficulties that women in developing nations suffer when their national governments provide inadequate and gender-biased legal, judicial, educational, or welfare systems. Rather, we draw attention to how, despite the gutting of state power with neoliberal policies, all states’ policies and practices continue to shape the different opportunities and identities available to men and women, making states valid sites for studying and supporting a gender-sensitive, capabilities-driven development.

There is still much research needed on the relationship between gender, states, and development. To begin, scholars still struggle to identify what factors or outcomes would constitute a “woman friendly” or “gender equitable” state. For example, Western nations that adopt more “family friendly” policies successfully increase rates of women’s labor force participation, but these same family policies may simultaneously make it harder for women to achieve positions of power in the work place, effectively lowering and hardening the proverbial glass ceiling (Mandel and Semyonov 2005). In Cuba, authoritarian states crack down on some political and social freedoms—like the freedom to organize or the freedom to engage in a homosexual relationship—but the same authoritarian state guarantees broad access to high quality reproductive health services for heterosexual women. Rwanda has progressive gender-sensitive laws, more girls than boys in primary school, and the world’s highest percentage of women in parliament. Yet most Rwandan women continue to have difficulty accessing their new rights given entrenched social norms about the necessity of marriage (Berry forthcoming). Given that advances in one
arena may come with—or even generate—setbacks in another, and given the masculine bias of all national governments despite level of economic development, what might a gender-equitable state look like?

Second, we need to improve our existing understandings of how states influence and are influenced by civil society, both at the national and transnational level. World polity theorists argue that transnational networks of INGOs and IGOS are creating a new “global culture” that celebrates gender equality (Berkovitch 1999; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997)—a process underlying our above discussion of the diffusion of gender quotas and laws against gendered violence. Yet the theories and methods used by world polity scholars often ignore other powerful agents of global governance—like transnational religious institutions—that are much more likely to retrench, rather than support, women’s political, economic, and social rights. The intensifying criminalization of abortion in Latin America (Viterna 2012), and homosexuality in Africa (Currier 2012, Kaoma 2012), demonstrates how states may powerfully institutionalize gender discrimination just as easily as they might legislate gender equality in the present transnational world.

Finally, although the presentation of the current literature on gendered theory of the state is presented according to geographical locations, this is not meant to indicate a homogenization of a region nor a state. There are of course striking variations across countries within all of our categorizations. For example, Romania’s access to abortions differs greatly from most other Eastern European nations (Benson, Anderson, Samandari 2011). States’ genders are shaped by their path-dependent histories. While researchers may find it useful to group states by certain shared historical events, like colonialism, more research investigating why even similarly-situated states sometimes have different gender
outcomes is needed.

Variation is not just found across states, but also within states. The way in which state policies influence gender differs across individuals, often according to intersecting characteristics such as age, race, minority status, religion, ability, etc. Although some states may appear more women friendly, benefits may accrue primarily to privileged women (Currier 2012; Hughes 2011). Individuals who fall outside the gender binary may face some of the greatest restrictions to state resources. Some scholars have begun to explore these variations (Cabral and Viturro 2006; Canaday 2009; Connell 2012; Smith 2008; Solymár and Takács 2007), however, more research is needed.

Over the last decade, development practitioners have reached an overwhelming consensus that “empowering women” is a—and perhaps the—fundamental condition necessary for achieving any form of development. Meanwhile, politicians are increasingly and emphatically using gender—and states’ policing of gender roles—to demarcate battle lines in the global “war on terror” (Charrad 2011). Yet despite this clear real-world relevance, scholars of development have paid too little attention to the relationship between states and gender, especially compared to the vast, wide and varied theories of gendered states that have been developed by political scientists and political sociologists. As development scholars rethink the parameters of a “new” sociology of development—one that takes states seriously, that investigates issues of development in Western nations

13 Feminist literature on citizenship delves into these differences. See Dietz 2003 for an overview.
14 To illustrate: the United Nations Development Program focuses “…on gender equality and women’s empowerment not only as human rights, but also because they are a pathway to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development” (http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/womenempowerment/overview.html). CARE, a large international nongovernmental organization, places a “…special focus on working alongside poor women because, equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to help whole families and entire communities escape poverty” (http://www.care.org/about/index.asp). Oxfam, International simply states, “Human development is driven by empowered women” (http://www.oxfam.org/en/about/how-oxfam-fights-poverty).
as well as developing nations, and that is relevant to policy decisions (see Hooks and Cohn, this volume)—they would be wise to investigate how gendered states affect development outcomes in the societies they study, as well as how citizen mobilizations can sometimes powerfully shape those development outcomes by promoting gendered transformations in state policies, practices, and institutions.
References:


Berry, Marie E. Forthcoming. "When 'Bright Futures' Fade: Paradoxes of Women's Empowerment in Rwanda." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.


