Replies to Chat and Q & A questions from the Nov. 5, 2020 Lecture

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Thanks to everyone who took part in the lively Zoom WGS discussion, “Pandemics, Gender and Elections” held live on Nov. 5. It was just 2 days after the historic US election. We all - students, faculty, alums - were still anxiously watching the hundreds of counters count ballots around the country. As always, as Clarkies, we were trying to track the links between seemingly disparate things, never losing sight of the complexities, always ready to admit there are hard-to-answer questions we’ll need to keep exploring.

Here are two questions posed by participants that we didn’t get to on Nov. 5th. Every one of the questions sent to the Chat Room (yes, Lori Buckley shares all the Chat Room comments and greetings with me!) was stretchy, made me think.

***Question #1*** *came from Joanne: Are there some articles by Polish feminists that you can suggest so that we can explore the current women-led pro-democracy demonstrations going on now in Poland?*

Sure! There are a lot of Polish feminists who write blogs and op eds and articles in English. Here are just a few you might start with:

First, you can get your feminist feet wet by reading two *New York Times* articles that have come out in recent weeks from Warsaw. You’ll notice that the *Times* assigned a Polish woman journalist, Monika Pronczuk, to investigate and write this news article.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/04/world/europe/poland-abortion-law-delay.html](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2020%2F11%2F04%2Fworld%2Feurope%2Fpoland-abortion-law-delay.html&data=04%7C01%7CLBuckley%40clarku.edu%7C48902a2ef66e46738d2408d884c38ab6%7Cb5b2263d68aa453eb972aa1421410f80%7C0%7C0%7C637405322679439050%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=1QTTVIbWyLMuNrit4k6KN8yzxFqUnEmjFw7XAm8OafQ%3D&reserved=0)

[**https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/28/world/europe/poland-women-abortion-strike.html**](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/28/world/europe/poland-women-abortion-strike.html)

Second, there’s an article that I was invited to do along with the Polish feminist scholar, Agnieszka Graff, for the prominent (and transnational) WGS journal *Signs.* Agnieszka, with her *Signs* colleagues from India and the US, asked me to join them in a conversation (this *Signs* series is called “Ask a Feminist” – you can read all of them on the journal’s website!) about the rise of right-wing populist politics in all three of our countries. As you read (or watch – it’s in both video and print forms here), take note of what is different and what similar about these current right wing populist parties’ – Polish, Indian and US. Among the prominent similarities is a shared right-wing movement effort to stitch motherhood tightly into nationalism, and, in the name of that patriarchal nationalist vision, to galvanize hostility to women’s rights, especially women’s reproductive rights:

[http://signsjournal.org/cynthia-enloe/](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fsignsjournal.org%2Fcynthia-enloe%2F&data=04%7C01%7CLBuckley%40clarku.edu%7Cc7301e3c9b5846450e0c08d884c22d13%7Cb5b2263d68aa453eb972aa1421410f80%7C0%7C0%7C637405316797199794%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=w59iAtBEY9QL8rE%2FscCEGCsbKkGqd4FzqmsI5Amgnys%3D&reserved=0)

Oh, and there is an entire journal that publishes (in English) research on all aspects of European women’s lives: the *European Journal Women’s Studies*. A great source! Among the articles they’ve published on Polish gender politics is an excellent piece by Agnieszka Graff:

[https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1350506814546091?journalCode=ejwa](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fjournals.sagepub.com%2Fdoi%2Fabs%2F10.1177%2F1350506814546091%3FjournalCode%3Dejwa&data=04%7C01%7CLBuckley%40clarku.edu%7Cc4dd91e40223458c590408d884dad2c1%7Cb5b2263d68aa453eb972aa1421410f80%7C0%7C0%7C637405422656555759%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=Tc2yGOymaxUhwXAjCjA04izBk35SX1haUVy9GZjxbyM%3D&reserved=0)

**Question #2:** *Hanna, Allison and Joanne each posed really interesting questions about this US election’s gender dynamics – dynamics of turnout, choice and issue concerns.*

The percentage of all voting-age Americans who vote, even in a presidential election year, is among the lowest among the world’s democracies. While Iceland and South Korea, for instance, each have an over 70% turnout, the US in 2016 had a dismally low 55% turnout. Australia requires every adult to vote.

There is early evidence that this year’s historic 2020 election may have drawn a higher proportion of American women and men out to cast their ballots than in any election since 1960 (the Kennedy v. Nixon election). But what scholars tracking turnout patterns now are predicting is that that “high” will still just be about 61% of all Americans eligible to vote. So, one pressing question for us all to think hard about is: why do so many Americans of voting age not register or, even if they register, not vote? Warning: the answer is *not* simply personal attitudes!

Gender seems to matter in effecting election turnout – more in the US than in many other countries. In the 2016 US Presidential and 2018 US Congressional elections, higher percentages of women voted than did men. Doing feminist intersectional analysis, the data so far (keep looking!) suggests that this “turnout gender gap” is not only over all, but inside each major racial/ethic group. That is, more white women vote than do white men; more African American women vote than do African American men; more Latinx women vote than do Latinx men; more Asian American women vote than do Asian American men.

Why? The answers are likely to be complex. For instance, should we explore whether, in today’s US public culture, voting is becoming woven into an attitude of civic caring, and is that civic caring becoming even loosely associated somehow with an imagined “feminized” sort of collective duty?

Perhaps also think of everyone you know - family members, neighbors, classmates, and workmates. Do you know anyone who you are almost sure did not vote this month? Do you have hunches as to why? The dynamics of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, may have played a significant role. Did the pandemic make the election feel more important to some people, motivating them to register, to learn where candidates stood on childcare, health insurance and science, and then to make them find time to vote? By contrast, perhaps for others this same pandemic made the acts of registering, learning about candidates and actually casting a ballot harder to do or just less meaningful to do.

It’s probably going to be several weeks before we have good, carefully collected polling data on who voted and who did not vote in this 2020 US election. So don’t be impatient! Keep your feminist curiosity stoked. Two really reliable sources to keep checking will be, first, The Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University ([www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu) ). The CAWP has become the go-to place for all sorts of reliable gender information on women and US politics: gender and race/ethnicity distribution of elected officials nationally and in every state; gender gaps in turnout, over all and within major racial groups; gender differences (“gaps”) n party and candidate choices, over all and by racial/ethnic identities.

Also keep you eyes on the independent research organization, Pew Research. They’ve been doing nuanced polling that captures gender gaps (or lack of gaps – slim or no gender gap is interesting too!). Pew also has wonderful graphics showing how relatively low Americans’ voter turnout is compared to other industrialized countries. ([www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org) )

For instance, preliminary data suggest that white men voted more heavily for Trump than did white women, especially, it seems, in the suburbs. These early data also suggest that - though *not* as significant for the final election results as the gender gap among white voters – both Black women and Latinx women voted in relatively higher proportions for Biden/Harris than did Black men and Latinx men. Why, why why?

True, there’s no end to the important puzzles we all can turn our feminist curiosities toward!

Take care, everyone.