Exploring the Operationalization of Intersectionality in Political Science – A Scoping Review Protocol

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Abstract: Intersectionality has become an increasingly salient analytical framework in political science, offering a critical lens to examine the interwoven nature of social categorizations and their implications for political representation and policymaking. Despite its widespread theoretical adoption, the discipline lacks a unified methodological approach to its empirical application. This scoping review protocol presents a systematic strategy to map the existing literature, critically assess prevailing definitions, methodologies, and measurement strategies, and identify conceptual and empirical gaps.

Background

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), has gained significant footing in political science as a framework for analyzing how overlapping systems of oppression shape individuals' political experiences (Crenshaw 1989). While its theoretical foundations are well-articulated, its operationalization in empirical research remains inconsistent, raising concerns about methodological precision and conceptual clarity. The application of intersectionality within political science varies considerably across studies, leading to fragmentation in its use and interpretative scope. A systematic evaluation of how intersectionality has been defined, operationalized, and measured is necessary to advance the discipline's methodological rigor and ensure that intersectional research produces meaningful, comparable, and theoretically coherent findings.

Objectives

This scoping review seeks to systematically examine the incorporation of intersectionality in political science research. The study aims to:

1. Analyze the conceptual variations of intersectionality in empirical political science research.
2. Identify dominant and emerging methodological approaches used to operationalize intersectionality empirically.
3. Assess how intersectionality has been measured and whether these measurements align with its theoretical origins.
4. Highlight existing limitations and propose pathways for enhancing methodological coherence and empirical robustness in future intersectional research.
5. Propose a typology, if appropriate, to categorize the varying applications of intersectionality in political science research, distinguishing between different levels of analysis, methodological strategies, and theoretical commitments.

Methods

Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR), this study employs a comprehensive and systematic search strategy across major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and ProQuest. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1989 and 2024 that explicitly apply intersectionality as an analytical tool will be included. The review process consists of three key stages: (1) an initial screening of titles and abstracts, (2) a full-text review based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (3) a structured data extraction and thematic synthesis to identify prevailing conceptual and methodological patterns (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). The findings will be analyzed to determine how intersectionality has been mobilized in empirical studies and whether existing approaches align with its theoretical underpinnings.

Conclusion

By systematically mapping the scholarly landscape of intersectionality within political science, this review aims to refine and advance the methodological and empirical applications of the framework in studies of political science. The findings will contribute to a more cohesive and analytically rigorous approach to measuring intersectionality, facilitating greater theoretical clarity and methodological precision. In doing so, this study seeks to inform future research paths, ensuring that intersectional analyses remain substantively meaningful and methodologically robust in political science scholarship.

References

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