

Inequalities Among Political Scientists: Race and Gender Relations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT


This study examines the division of labor among political scientists during different periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article explores the hypothesis that the pandemic increased inequalities, especially by exacerbating the burden of housework and care responsibilities for women. We ground our analysis on the results of two surveys conducted in Brazil: one shortly after the onset of the pandemic in June 2020; and the other, more recently, from March 2022, after the ending of social-distancing measures. Brazil is a relevant case study because it was an epicenter of the virus for many months. This public health crisis occurred while a denialist and authoritarian government was in power. Considering gender and race variables, the data show a transformation of the dynamics of time organization during the period. At the beginning of the pandemic, men—primarily white men—devoted more time to academic work; in 2022, the most substantive difference was one of race. We observed a greater convergence among white people, as opposed to Black people, about household chores, with the latter group more overloaded than the former group. Traditional class and race inequalities concerning the Brazilian population can contribute to the explanation for this. When in-person work returned, white political scientists began to outsource domestic care more than their nonwhite counterparts.

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This article contributes to two aspects of the literature on inequalities in science. The first focuses on academic work in political science; the second concerns the debates on gender and race asymmetries that intensified with the spread of COVID-19. We concentrated our analysis on a crucial factor in creating enduring hierarchies between social groups: the division of labor. How have political scientists recently organized their daily routine? How much time have they dedicated to work and to everyday life tasks? We sought to answer these questions using data from two surveys conducted in the Brazilian academic community during different periods of the pandemic.

The study of political science as an academic field is relatively consolidated in several countries. Existing research provides ample evidence that gender and race inequalities are a global problem in the discipline. The lack of female representation in leadership roles is evident in academic settings across various regions, including North America (American Political Science Association 2004); South America (Carpiuc 2016; Fernández 2006); Europe (Abels and Woods 2015; Bates, Jenkins, and Pflaeger 2012; Kantola 2008, 2015); and Asia and Oceania (Abu-Laban, Sawyer, and St-Laurent 2018; Curtin 2013).¹ There are numerous types of gender asymmetries, such as in the metrics

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of career progressions (Akhtar et al. 2005; American Political Science Association 2004); authorship of articles (Campos and Candido 2022; Teele and Thelen 2017; Williams et al. 2015) and books (Samuels and Teele 2021); citations received (Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018); distribution of thematic areas (Candido, Campos, and Feres Júnior 2021; Key and Sumner 2019); and evaluation of professors (Chávez and Mitchell 2020). Racial diversity indicators are less frequent but tend to demonstrate that disparities between white and Black scholars are even more extreme (Ards and Woodard 1992; Candido, Feres Júnior, and Campos 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has renewed the efforts to analyze disparities in science in general, with the division of labor and usage of time as central issues. COVID-19 containment measures, which prompted a shift to remote work and teaching, were soon shown to be linked with negative outcomes for gender equality. Research at the beginning of the pandemic found that female academics were shouldering a greater workload for domestic and care tasks than male academics. There also was a decrease in scientific productivity, especially among women who had children and Black women (Staniscuaski et al. 2021). Other studies revealed an increase in the gender asymmetry of article and paper submissions in various disciplines, including types of authorship in political science (Campos and Candido 2022; Cui, Ding, and Zhu 2020; Dolan and Lawless 2020; Squazzoni et al. 2021).

Other research investigated political scientists' specific perceptions during the initial period of the pandemic. Breuning et al. (2021) and Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff (2021) consulted academics from several geographic origins that were mostly linked to US institutions. Their studies highlighted the challenges that all academics face when caring for young children. However, excerpts from testimonies emphasized that the more significant difficulties were encountered by women. The 2022 global context is quite distinct. The development of vaccines and the consequent decrease in the disease's lethality made it possible for in-person work to resume in many parts of the world. We are living in a new time of coexistence with the virus and contending with new challenges.

Our research probes the hypothesis that the pandemic exacerbated inequalities among political scientists, significantly increasing the burden of housework and care on women. Like Breuning et al. (2021) and Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff (2021), we

conducted surveys with political scientists. Furthermore, like Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff (2021), we examined time-usage data. In contrast to both of those research teams, however, we focused on a population residing primarily in a country of the Global South: Brazil. We treated race as one of the main variables in our analysis, together with gender. Another distinctive feature of our study is that we addressed how perceptions about the virus have changed in two different periods: first, at the beginning of the crisis and, later, almost two years after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Candido et al. 2023).

The Brazilian case is relevant for several reasons. First, the country has one of the most developed academic communities of political scientists in Latin America, and it is the subject of a series of comparative studies (Bulcourn, Márquez, and Cardozo 2015). As early as the mid-twentieth century, international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) were already mapping the field's development in Brazil (Menezes 1950). Several local political scientists are well-ranked in the discipline's global-impact indices.² Moreover, Brazil was the pandemic's epicenter for many months. This difficult situation occurred amid a denialist government, with then-President Jair Bolsonaro cutting funding for universities and research while mitigating the negative consequences of the virus for the population. Therefore, Brazilian political scientists experienced not only the adversities that arose from the public health crisis but also direct political threats to working conditions and the exercise of the profession.

The next section describes our research methodology and scope. We then present our results and emphasize the urgency of addressing the intersection between racial and gender inequalities in political science. As several Black feminist authors have argued, examining gender issues without considering the role of race can produce a distorted picture of reality (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Collins 2000, 2008; Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1989; Davis 1981; Gonzalez 1983). The case of Brazil provides evidence to support this position.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This article discusses data from two surveys conducted in Brazil by professional associations from different social science fields. The first (Marques et al. 2022) was conducted between June 10 and July 15, 2020, and led by the Brazilian Political Science Association. The second survey (Catelano et al. 2022) circulated between March 2 and 28, 2022, and was driven by the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Social Sciences. For both surveys, the academic community was their target audience, and they had the support of anthropology, international relations, and sociology associations for their dissemination.³

Our study focused on the perceptions of political scientists regarding the division of labor and the usage of time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two surveys had a relatively similar

number of political science respondents (i.e., 274 and 278). Regarding gender balance, there were more women among the participants of the 2020 survey (i.e., 54% versus 46%); conversely, there were more men in the 2022 survey (i.e., 53% versus 47%). The predominance of white people was repeated with 72% and 73%, respectively, versus 28% and 27% of nonwhite people. This

separated the two groups, “white” and “nonwhite,” with the latter term being the total number of self-declared *preto* (Black), *pardo* (Brown), *amarelo* (“Yellow,” applied to East Asian Brazilians), and *indigena* (Indigenous) people. These categories are based on the classifications historically used in Brazilian censuses and by the long tradition of race and racism studies in

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sample represents approximately 6% of the Brazilian political science community, if we include graduate student researchers in 2019 according to our classification of the information provided by the Higher Education Improvement Coordination Agency.

Historically, Brazilian political science has developed from graduate studies programs. Although political science undergraduate courses have been offered recently, it is in the master’s and doctoral programs that the tradition of the field was established and consolidated. Moreover, this is the space in which the majority of research is produced, which allowed us to better analyze the effects of the pandemic on the daily life of the discipline in Brazil.

Two other aspects of the data are significant to our research. First, for the “gender” variable, we used the dichotomy “female” and “male” as a synonym for “women” and “men” because only a few respondents did not define themselves in binary terms. Furthermore, we believe that the specificities of gender identity can be understood through qualitative research and case studies better than through surveys. Second, concerning race, we

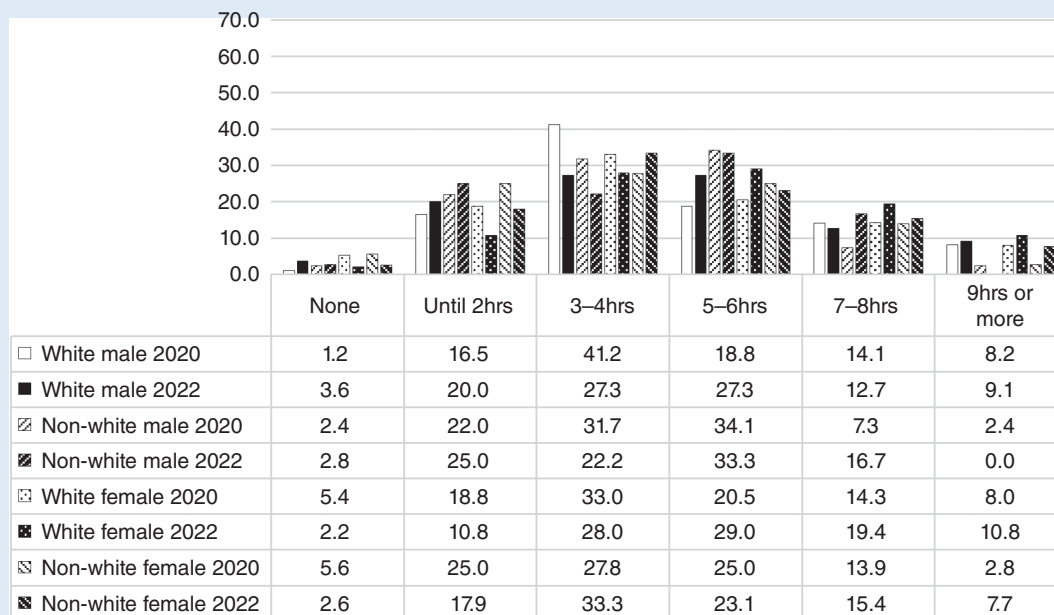
the country (Muniz 2012). In our data, “nonwhite” individuals were predominantly “Brown” or “Black.”⁴

THE DIVISION OF TIME AMONG POLITICAL SCIENTISTS

Our study measured how political scientists organized their usage of time after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We divided labor into the following activities: academic work, administrative work, care work, and domestic work.⁵ Figure 1 indicates political scientists’ perception of daily hours spent on academic work in the two periods observed. The results show a striking difference: in 2020, a greater proportion of women reported not devoting time to academic work compared to men. In 2022, the picture was reversed: more men than women stated that they were not dedicating time to this activity. White respondents declared spending the most time on academic work in both periods. White men and white women stand out as the only group who dedicated more than 9 hours per day to their scholarly pursuits; nonwhite men dedicated the least number of hours. The proportion of nonwhite people spending 9 hours or more on academic work decreased between 2020 and 2022, whereas it increased for all other groups.

Figure 1

Perceptions of Daily Hours Devoted to Academic Work (%) (2020 and 2022)



Source: Authors’ elaboration based on Marques et al. (2022) and Catelano et al. (2022).

Most significantly, the percentage of nonwhite women spending more than 9 hours on academic work increased from 2.7% to 7.7%.

Our findings on the amount of time spent on administrative work by Brazilian political scientists contrast with those indicated by Shalaby, Allam, and Buttorff (2021). Whereas the survey responses in their research demonstrated that these tasks were more burdensome to women, our data signaled the opposite result. In both 2020 and 2022 (figure 2), most researchers declared spending between 0 to 2 hours on administrative tasks every day. Higher proportions of men—both white and nonwhite—reported spending 9 hours or more on administrative tasks compared to women.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused abrupt changes in care work. Parents had to adapt to remote teaching following the closing of schools, and stay-at-home mandates made it difficult for elderly and disabled individuals to access the care they needed. Figure 3 indicates the perceived time devoted to care work during the two observed periods. At the beginning of the pandemic, white men were predominantly those who devoted the least amount of time to care, followed by white women and nonwhite men. In both periods, nonwhite women least frequently stated that they did not devote any time to care work.

The domestic work variable illustrates race and class inequalities in Brazil. If white men at the beginning of the pandemic were evidently those who devoted the least amount of time to household tasks (following pre-pandemic data), white women almost equaled them during the course of the pandemic—figure 4 shows that they are almost overlapping. The data demonstrate that the number of hours devoted by white women to care work decreased

substantially. This likely indicates the effect of the suspension and then the return of paid domestic workers to their routine. However, the variation also points to the fact that in the absence of paid domestic work, white and nonwhite women—rather than men—were primarily responsible for household tasks.

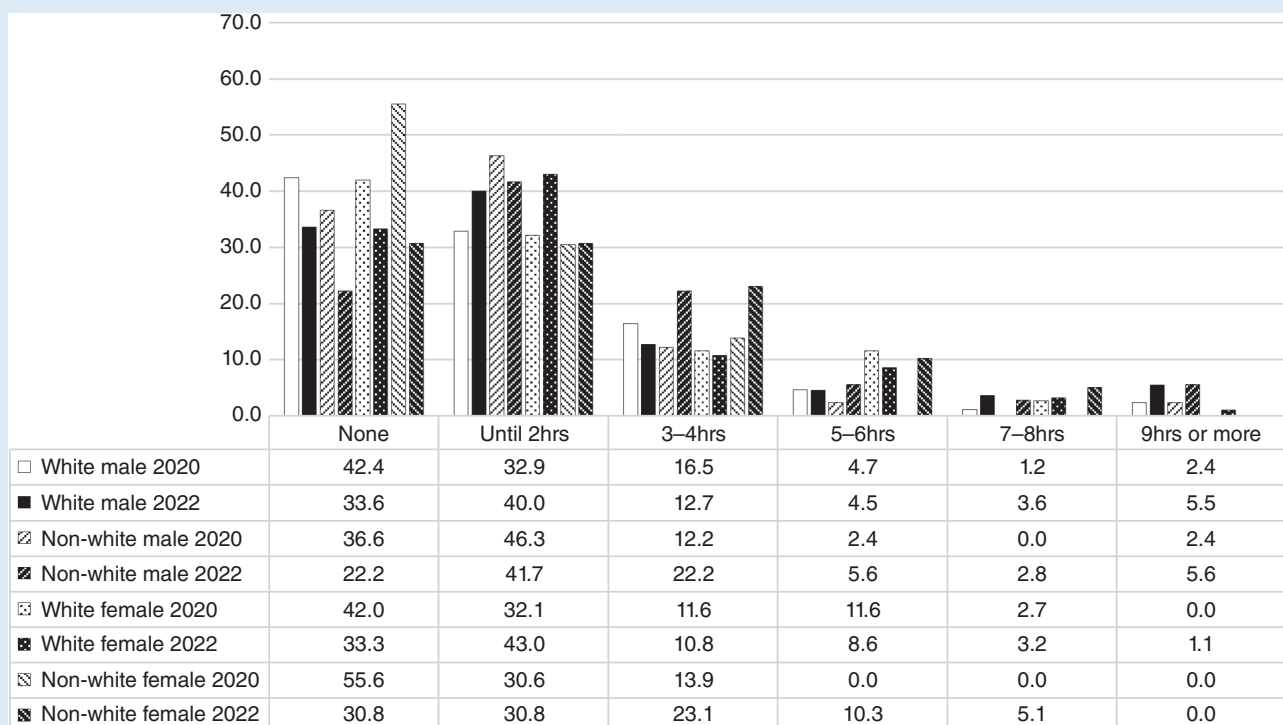
Figure 5 illustrates the perception of academics about the division of domestic-care work. These data helps understand the transformation in time usage among women and white respondents during the pandemic. The figure highlights the increase in respondents who hired domestic workers in 2022. This increase is particularly significant among white men and women with or without children and, to a lesser extent, among nonwhite women. White women decreased the amount of domestic work they shared with their partner between 2020 and 2022, whereas for nonwhite women it increased during the same period. Outsourcing care is still frequent in Brazil and is marked by intense race and class inequalities. Nonwhite women constitute the main group who earn a living through domestic care; they also suffer from the worst socioeconomic indicators in the country (Leão et al. 2017). This reality apparently is reflected in political scientists' relationship to care work. After the end of social distancing, race inequalities gained more relevance than gender inequalities in the perception of time usage among political scientists. Further research on the gendered division of labor is needed to better understand these dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to discuss the inequalities among political scientists using the parameters of the division of labor and usage

Figure 2

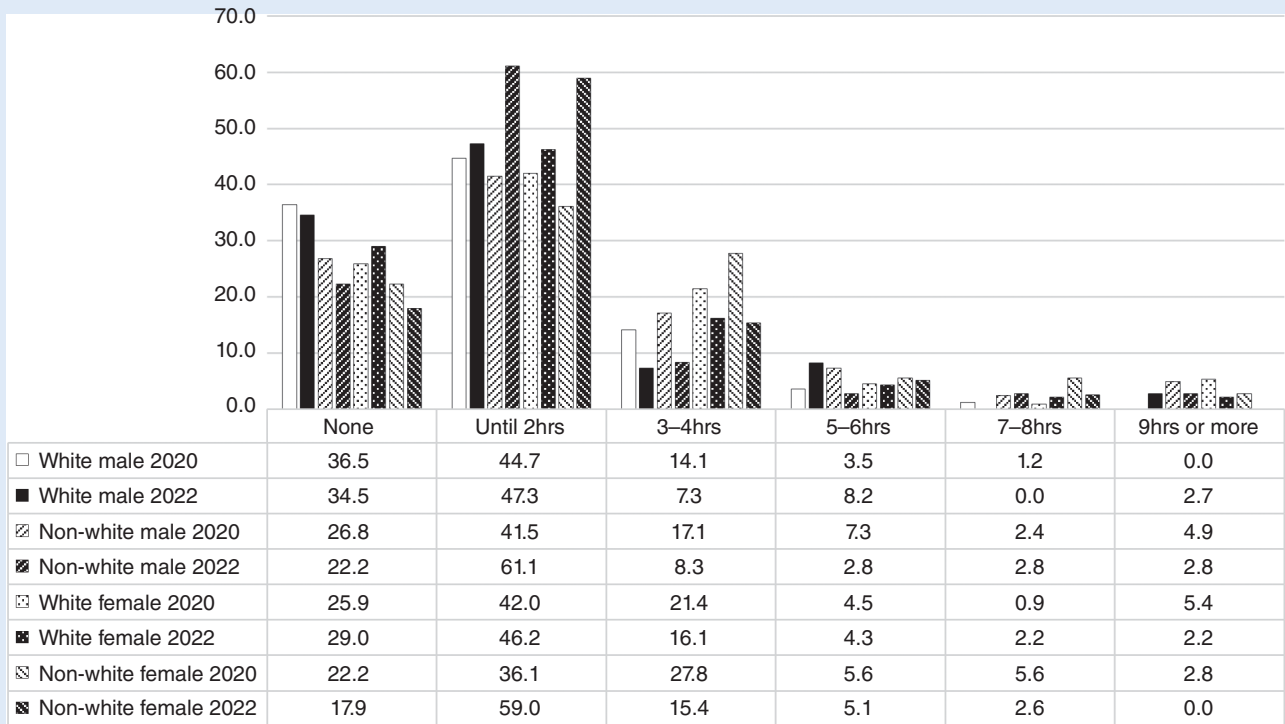
Perceptions of Daily Hours Devoted to Administrative Work (%) (2020 and 2022)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Marques et al. (2022) and Catelano et al. (2022).

Figure 3

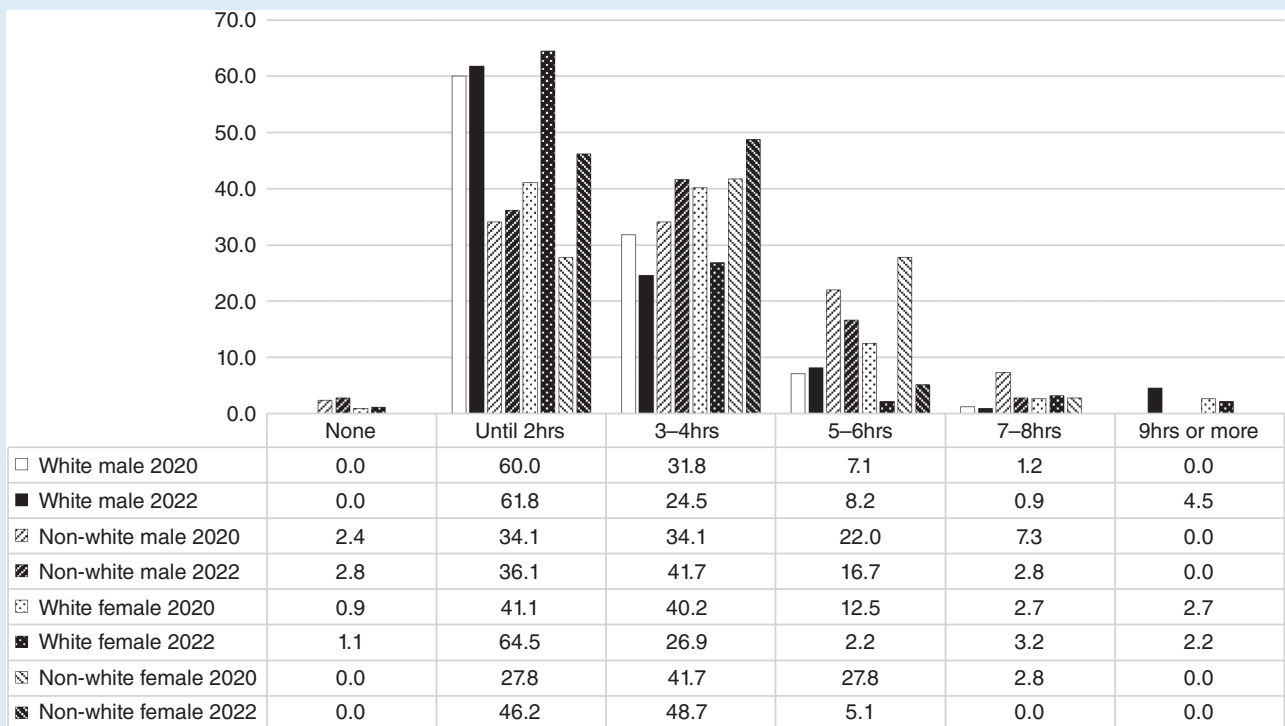
Perceptions of Daily Hours Devoted to Care Work (%) (2020 and 2022)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Marques et al. (2022) and Catelano et al. (2022).

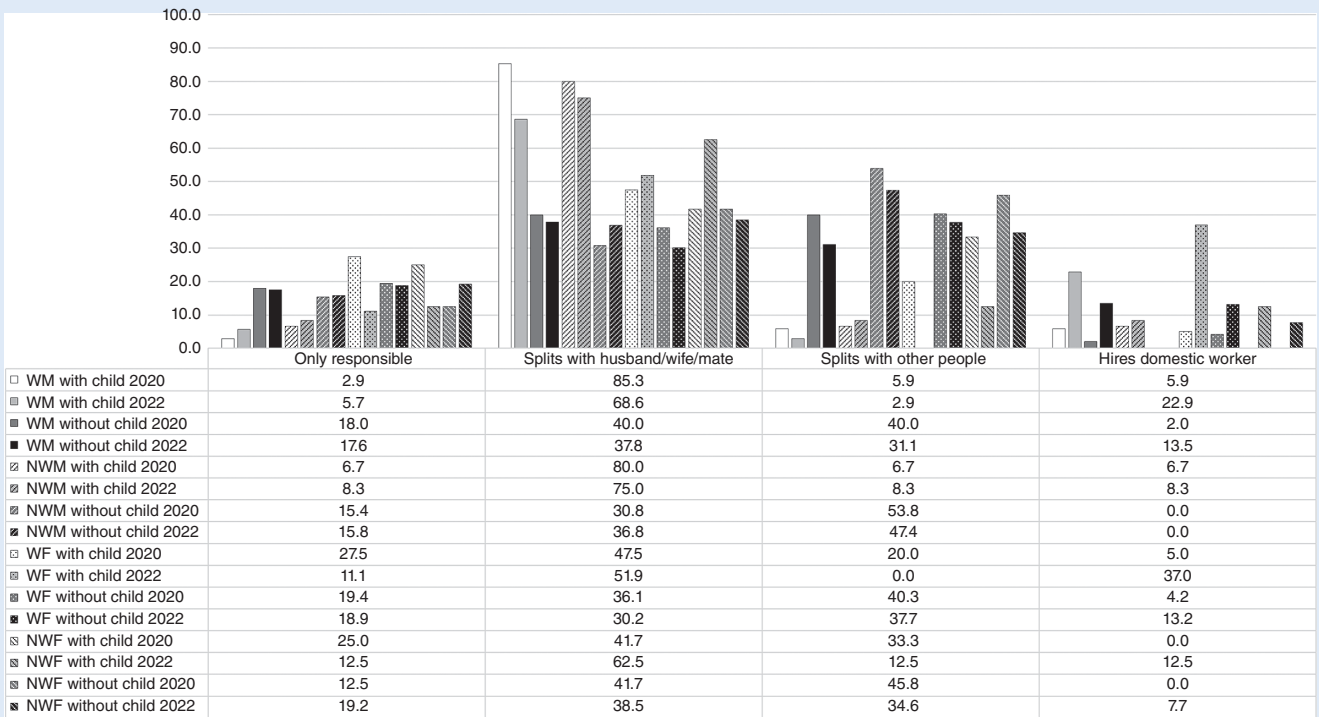
Figure 4

Perceptions of Daily Hours Devoted to Domestic Work (%) (2020 and 2022)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Marques et al. (2022) and Catelano et al. (2022).

Figure 5
Perceptions of the Division of Domestic Care Work (%) (2020 and 2022)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Marques et al. (2022) and Catelano et al. (2022).

of time by Brazilian academics after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We investigated two periods: (1) June 2020, which corresponded to the imposition of social-distancing measures at the beginning of the pandemic; and (2) March 2022, which was marked by the return to in person-work. Using data from surveys conducted during both periods, we sought to understand how these radical changes impacted political scientists.

At the beginning of the pandemic, more significant impacts on women's lives were observed; they were overwhelmed by domestic and care work and had less time to devote to their academic careers. This trend was verified in our study and a series

including Brazil and the United States, male domination in the discipline accompanies the predominance of white people in positions of power. Our data showed that the work routine of women was more affected at the beginning of the pandemic, but the intersection with race demonstrated that this was worse for Black women. More recently, white women with children tended to converge with white men in terms of the frequency of outsourcing care work. This represents long-standing class and race disparities in the Brazilian context, wherein white people tend to occupy more-valued jobs and earn higher wages than members of other groups.

Our data showed that the work routine of women was more affected at the beginning of the pandemic, but the intersection with race demonstrated that this was worse for Black women.

of other research not limited to political science. Women are already affected by the “leaky pipeline” phenomenon, as evidenced by their decreasing representation in the field as they progress in their careers. Without policies being promoted to mitigate the negative consequences of the first period of the COVID-19 pandemic, there likely will be a greater decrease in gender diversity.

However, the analyses that problematize the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic in political science have focused little attention on racial inequalities. In many countries worldwide,

The possibility of having more time to develop an academic career is a differential that favors white people, mainly white men. Care work and domestic responsibilities are part of everyday life and should not be considered less-valuable work. The problem lies in our failure to accommodate paid and unpaid labor so that it does not disadvantage those in charge of domestic and care work. Nevertheless, we face a major challenge in the diversification of the academic community: that is, a lack of willingness to address the imbalance in race and gender representation in evaluating access and retention within the academic workspace.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the PS: *Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/Y6TSIK>.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523000197>.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES

1. We did not find data on the participation of women in political science in African countries. However, research highlights the decrease in gender disparity in the authorship of articles in specialized journals on the continent (Briggs and Weathers 2016).
2. See www.adsscientificindex.com/?con=&tit=Social+Sciences&country_code=&q=political-science Accessed October 25, 2022.
3. See more details in online [appendix A](#).
4. For further explanation of the use of these categories, see online [appendix A](#).
5. Our article refers to domestic labor and unpaid care as “domestic work” and “care work” because we understand that they express unpaid everyday responsibilities. “Academic work” and “administrative work” are related to the professional-career dimension.

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