

Party Nominations and Female Electoral Performance: Evidence from Germany

Abstract

What accounts for differences in electoral success between male and female candidates? We use a decomposition strategy to distinguish between voter behavior and differences in party nomination strategies. In doing so, we exploit the unique features of the German mixed electoral system, where voters simultaneously cast votes for a party and for a candidate in their constituency. Using a panel of all electoral districts in eleven federal elections (1983 - 2017), we establish two facts. First, female district candidates nominated by the two largest parties (the center-right CDU and the center-left SPD) perform worse than their male counterparts. Second, the difference in performance is driven by party nomination strategies: the two largest parties, the CDU and SPD, systematically nominate female candidates in districts where their party is less popular, making it harder for women to win those districts. We also find that parties' nomination strategies can explain most of the variation in gender gaps in electoral performance across parties and election years. We do not find evidence that bias among voters systematically contributes to the vote gap.