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Gender Bias and Selection Bias in House Elections

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Abstract

We demonstrate that female incumbents are of higher average candidate quality than male incumbents. This quality difference is the result of barriers to entry faced by potential female candidates, although the observed effects of this quality differential on vote share are partially masked by the fact that female incumbents are also more likely to be opposed or to be opposed by high quality challengers. Using data from House elections for 1984–1992, we estimate that the gender-based differential in candidate quality yields an extra six percentage points of vote share for female incumbents.

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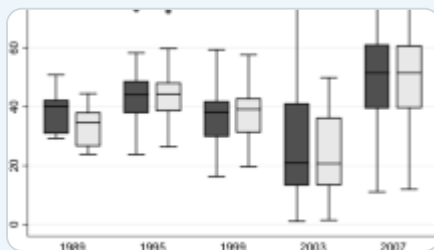
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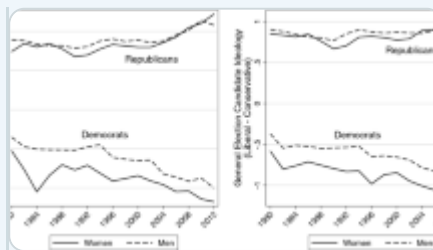
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| Favorability rating among the public | 70% | 54% |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Position on immigrants | Favors giving citizenship or guest worker status to undocumented immigrants | Opposes giving citizenship or guest worker status to undocumented immigrants |
| Party affiliation | Republican Party | Democratic Party |
| Position on abortion | Abortion is not a private matter (pro-life) | Abortion is a private matter (pro-choice) |
| Position on government deficit | Wants to reduce the deficit through tax increases | Wants to reduce the deficit through tax decreases |
| Salient personal characteristics | Really cares about people like you | Really cares about people like you |
| Position on national security | Wants to cut military budget and keep the U.S. out of war | Wants to maintain strong defenses and increase U.S. influence |
| Gender | Female | Female |
| Policy area of expertise | Education | Foreign policy |
| Family | Single (divorced) | Married (no child) |

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