

Female candidates get fewer votes: Study

Female candidates get fewer votes, according to ANU research released today that analysed the performance of nearly 17,000 candidates who ran for the House of Representatives between 1903 and 2004.

The study, conducted by ANU economist Dr Andrew Leigh and Oxford University student Ms Amy King, found that voters were consistently more likely to favour men.

“On average, female candidates receive 0.6 percent fewer votes than male candidates”, said Ms King. In a federal electorate with 100,000 voters, this means that a woman running for office would receive 600 fewer votes than a man representing the same political party.”

For major party candidates, the researchers found, the gender gap rose to around 1½ percent of the vote. “For one in ten races, this is the difference between winning and losing,” Ms King said.

The researchers conducted the study by using candidates’ first names to code whether they were male or female. Their study accounted for party differences, incumbency, and a measure of the likelihood that a given party would win each seat.

Although female candidates received fewer votes than male candidates in the 2004 election, the researchers found that the gap between male and female candidates has shrunk considerably over time.

“In the 1920s, female candidates received 10 percent fewer votes than male candidates of the same party,” said Dr Leigh. “By the 1940s, the gender gap was still very large, around 5 percent. This helps explain why only three women were elected to the House of Representatives between 1901 and 1970.”

“Since then, the gender voting gap has fallen, in line with the gender pay gap. It seems that discrimination in the labour market and at the ballot box move closely together. Both measures are improving, but women are still at a disadvantage.”

Nationally, the researchers found, women benefited from having more female candidates running for office. But within the same electorate, they found that female candidates are harmed, not helped, when they are competing with more women on the ballot.

A copy of the paper, *Bias at the Ballot Box? Testing Whether Candidates’ Gender Affects Their Vote*, is available at: <http://econrssh.anu.edu.au/~leigh/>

Source: Australian National University

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