

Politicians' Priorities In A Competitive Landscape: Female Leaders and the Prevalence of Abortions

Abstract:

We document that during 1992-2019, the election of American female state legislators increased the local abortion rate. To establish causality, we adopt a close-elections approach. Specifically, in a methodological contribution, we implement the novel Regression Discontinuity Aggregation method. The documented effect is driven by Democratic women, who mold reproductive regulation. In contrast, Democrat men have no effect. We show the gender divergence within the Democratic party stems not from women viewing abortions differently than men but from them prioritizing reproductive issues. We conclude that in competitive systems, politicians' individual preferences may alter legislative behavior primarily by determining how they allocate political resources.