

Campaign Finance Quotas and Descriptive Representation: Evidence from Brazil, 2002-2022

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Abstract :

Can the public funding of parties and campaigns be used to increase descriptive representation in elected office? Despite the adoption of gender quotas across over 130 countries since 1995 aiming to raise the share of women in parliament to 30 percent, its global average remains at 26 percent. Beyond quotas, earmarking public campaign funds for minority candidates is another policy tool that countries have experimented with to level the playing field in access to campaign resources, and remains understudied. We study the efficiency of a novel 2021 reform in Brazil that goes further than earmarking in tying the allocation of public funds to the performance of female and racial minority candidates. Using a triple-diff strategy and exploiting a unique feature in the institutional setting that induces financial incentives in federal but not in state legislative elections, we causally identify the impact of the reform on candidate performance in the 2022 general election. We find that the reform improved the performance of white women and black men but not that of black women, suggesting an intersectionality penalty. We conduct a voter survey experiment to discard demand-driven effects and qualitative interviews with party officials to explore different potential mechanisms driving the effect.