

A leaky pipeline? Recontest rates and the underrepresentation of women in politics

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We study why women are underrepresented in politics. Using a sample of 114,926 candidates who ran for local council seats across 4 local council elections in a German state, we show that female candidates are 4 to 5 percentage points less likely to recontest in the next election. This recontest gap between men and women can be observed among elected and unelected candidates, across almost all parties, and irrespective of a candidates individual electoral performance. As the recontest gap is an obvious impediment to achieving gender parity in politics, we explore its determinants. We find no evidence that parties discriminate against female candidates who want to recontest. Evidence also suggests that women do not give up more easily than men after a disappointing performance in the election. In contrast, we find that women are more likely to recontest in municipalities where overall political participation of women is larger, suggesting that the degree to which men dominate local politics is important for a given woman's decision to recontest. Among the individual characteristics of candidates, we find that relatively old and retired women exhibit no recontest gap to men, in contrast to young and employed women.