Men Vote in Mars, Women Vote in Venus: A Survey Experiment in the Field

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Abstract
We investigate the effect of positive vs negative political campaign with a survey experiment in the field. During the 2011 municipal elections in Milan, we randomized a sample of eligible voters into three groups. Two groups were exposed to the same incumbent’s campaign but to different opponent’s campaigns, positive for the first group and negative for the second. The third (control) group received no campaign information. Unlike the existing literature, our treatment consisted of a full bundle of campaign tools (each with a positive vs negative tone): video interview with the opponent; electoral campaign slogan; open letter to voters; video ad endorsed by the opponent. Consistently with most contributions in the literature, we find no average effect of positive vs negative campaign on voters’ turnout. However, we do find substantial evidence that males and females respond to our treatments in completely opposite ways. Being exposed to any campaign information increases males’ turnout but drives females away from the polls, and this is particularly true in the case of negative campaign. Furthermore, the opponent’s positive campaign makes females vote more for him and less for the incumbent, but the same does not hold for males.

Keywords: campaign information, negative advertising, gender studies.

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