

Campaign Expenditures and Electoral Outcomes in Israeli Legislative Primaries – A Financial Gender Gap?

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Abstract

The last decade has seen an expansion of party primaries as a means of selecting legislative candidates. Since primaries are rarely subsidized, well-resourced candidates have a considerable advantage, which has an impact on equality, diversity and representation. This article focuses on the well-regulated legislative primaries in Israel, examining the gender gap in campaign expenditures, and its implication for the success of women candidates. The analysis is based on data regarding 365 candidates (97 women and 268 men) who competed in seven primary contests in three parties between 2008 and 2015. Our findings show that male candidates spend on average more than female candidates do. However, this difference is pronounced among new candidates only. Moreover, we find that men do better than women in terms of electoral success and that this electoral advantage is explained by the differences in campaign expenses and the share of incumbents between women and men.

Introduction

Scholars have long surveyed the electoral process and politicians' path to power. One aspect of this subject is the role played by financial resources in the electability of candidates, especially the effect of money on the success of incumbents and new candidates (Jacobson, 1990; Scarrow, 2007; Van Biezen, 2008). In recent years, increased attention has been given to other inequalities created by unequal financing, and specifically to the gender gaps it creates (Muriaas et al., 2020). Some scholars

attribute the under-representation of women in politics to the high costs of campaigns. Women candidates, they suggest, find it harder to raise funds for their campaigns, which puts them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their male counterparts and creates major barriers for them entering politics (Lawless and Fox, 2010). Others disagree, claiming that there is no gender disparity in campaign fundraising and expenditure (Hogan, 2007; Anastasopoulos, 2016).

While most research probes the correlation between financial gender gaps and success in general elections, we focus on elections at an earlier stage: legislative primary elections. This inquiry is important in light of the expanded use of primaries. These inclusive selection methods, once associated almost exclusively with the United States, have become common in political parties in many other democracies. The process of intra-party democratization is evident regarding the selection of leaders (Cross and Blais, 2012; Pilet and Cross, 2014) but has also been observed in choosing legislative candidates. One recent study showed that more than 18 parties in 12 countries employed either open or closed primaries to determine their legislative candidates at the national level (Sandri and Seddone, 2015: 10).¹

The expansion of legislative primaries has potential consequences for the representation of various social groups in parliament. As long as legislative candidates were nominated by party leaders or by small committees set up for this purpose, money did not play an important role in the process (Hinojosa, 2012). The adoption of inclusive primaries, however, changed this situation. It forced prospective candidates to appeal to a broad, atomistic, largely passive selectorate of party members or supporters. To do so, they had to invest considerable resources in order to campaign effectively. Since primaries are rarely subsidized by the state, wealthy candidates enjoy an edge in such contests, leaving those such as women, young people and ethnic minorities who have

more limited access to financial sources behind. However, some countries, such as Israel, have adopted campaign finance regulations that impose spending limits on all candidates. Thus, it is not clear whether such regulated primaries have closed the gender gap in campaign fundraising and expenses.

In this study we focus on three main questions:

- 1) Is there a financial gender gap in legislative primaries such that women candidates raise and spend less money on their primary campaigns compared to men?
- 2) What is the impact of incumbency status on the funding gender gap? Does it hold for incumbent candidates, or is it relevant to new candidates only?
- 3) Do gender gaps in the level of campaign expenses in legislative primaries lead to less electoral success among women candidates compared to men?

We are thus looking at spending from two complementary perspectives. In the first, expenses are the dependent variable. We are interested in determining whether women are at disadvantage in these intra-party contests. While some scholars show that women tend to raise less money than men on average (Uhlener and Schlozman, 1986; Wauters et al., 2010), others demonstrate that male and female politicians spend equivalent amounts of money on their campaigns (Burrell, 1985; Hogan, 2007). While we assume that a gender gap exists, we also factor in the incumbency status of the candidates. As previous studies show (e.g., Hogan, 2007; Crespin and Dietz, 2010), female incumbents are often similar to male incumbents when it comes to campaign financing. In contrast, women who are new candidates spend less than the average new male candidate.

In our third question, expenses serve as the independent variable. Here we examine how expenditures affect the electoral success of women candidates compared

to male candidates. In general, previous research has demonstrated that the more a candidate spends on his or her campaign, the more votes (s)he receives (Samuels, 2001; Kenig and Atmor, 2020). However, less is known about the contribution of the funding gender gap to the gender gap in electoral success.

We base our analysis on an original dataset comprising 365 candidates – 97 women and 268 men – who ran in the legislative primaries of the three major parties in Israel – Labor, Likud, and Kadima – between 2008 and 2015.

The results show that, on one hand, male candidates spend more than female candidates do. However, being an incumbent can cancel out the gender disadvantage for women. Thus, new women candidates are doubly disadvantaged both by their gender and by their newcomer status. In addition, we find that men do better than women in terms of electoral success, and that differences in campaign expenses and the share of incumbents between women and men explain this electoral advantage. Lastly, we document variations between parties, such that the most pronounced gender gaps in campaign funding and electoral success occur among candidates of the right-wing party Likud.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section presents the debates on campaign expenditures for women candidates and their electoral implications. The next section outlines the Israeli institutional setting – the features of its electoral system and the methods through which parties select their legislative candidates. We then present our findings and conclusions.

The gender funding gap and its implications for electoral success

Money is as an important factor in winning elections. When it comes to primaries, the candidates' financial resources matter a great deal. Candidates must spend a significant amount of money on advertising, communication, professional staff, campaign events, political polling, and other campaign related components to reach a large and diverse electorate (Sandri and Seddone, 2015).

Although all candidates, regardless of their gender, might face hurdles in fundraising, women face significant additional obstacles (Thomsen and Swers, 2017; Muriaas et al., 2020). Due to women's historical exclusion from various resource networks, when it comes to raising money, "the mother's milk of politics' flows less well for daughters than for sons" (Uhlener and Schlozman, 1986: 31). Women may find it more challenging than men to build name recognition because they are usually less known in political circles (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Consequently, women are less likely than men to receive encouragement and support from elected officials, community leaders, and political activists for running for office (Lawless and Pearson, 2008; Barber et al., 2016; Kitchens and Swers, 2016; Barnes et al., 2017). Indeed, studies show that women devote more time and effort to raising funds than their male counterparts (Kitchens and Swers, 2016).

Do these obstacles translate into gender gaps in actual fundraising and campaign expenses? The empirical results are mixed. In the US, the focus of most studies on this topic, research consistently reports that when women decide and ultimately run for public office, they are not disadvantaged when it comes to campaign funding. The literature has repeatedly shown that male and female candidates in similar types of races

raise similar amounts of money (Burrell, 1985; Hogan, 2007; Lawless and Fox, 2010; Crespín and Deitz, 2010; Anastasopoulos, 2016). However, evidence from other countries shows that in some cases, women do face a fundraising disadvantage in comparison to men. In Belgium, for example, male candidates spend twice as much on their campaign as women. Even when position on the party's list is taken into account, women are still financially disadvantaged compared to men (Wauters et al., 2010). Additional research in Belgium (Smulders et al., 2019), Chile (Piscopo et al., 2021), Ireland (Buckley and Mariani, forthcoming), and Italy (Feo et al., Forthcoming) document similar funding gender gaps. Therefore, more evidence is needed from contexts other than the US to understand when, where and under what conditions women are financially disadvantaged compared to men.

Of course, it is important to note that studies of the gender gap in campaign financing have an inherent selection bias on the women's side. A vast literature has discussed the barriers that women face even before deciding to join the political game (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Paxton et al., 2020). Therefore, focusing on the point at which women candidates raise money for their election campaign already assumes that they have overcome the obstacles that prevent women – more than men – from running for political office. As Burrell (1985: 268) puts it: “We do not know the extent to which women decide not to seek office because of a perception of inability to raise adequate funds.” Thus, any observational study on campaign finance suffers from a selection bias due to its lack of information regarding those who were discouraged from competing beforehand due to financial considerations. Taking this point into account, we still believe it is valuable to learn whether women candidates who have decided to compete suffer from any inferior conditions at their starting point compared to their male counterparts.

An interrelated factor that can explain candidates' fundraising patterns is incumbency (Murray, 2008; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2013). With regard to the gender gap, studies show that incumbency impedes women's representation for newcomers to the game. Since in most national legislatures the majority of incumbents are men, first-time women candidates have to work much harder to challenge and defeat them (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005; Meserve et al., 2018).

However, once women are elected and run again as incumbents, they may do just well as male incumbents in fundraising for several reasons. First, all incumbents, men and women, have already established an electoral base, which they maintain by taking care of their constituents (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005). Second, incumbents are news generators, which in itself grants them media exposure that leads to more name recognition, both for males and females. Third, incumbents have better access to resources, such as office services and administrative staff, and benefit from a workplace that allows a flexible and convenient schedule. Fourth, and perhaps most important of all, incumbents have better access to campaign finances. Potential donors find their way more easily to powerful public figures, seeing it in their best interests to invest in sitting politicians rather than banking on new candidates – males or females (Kitchens and Swers, 2016).

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that any gender gap in campaign fundraising and expenses will be relevant to new candidates, rather than to incumbents. Incumbent women candidates should be equally successful as male candidates in raising funds and spending them in primary campaigns. Recent studies in Chile, for example, show that the gender gap in campaign resources narrows when taking into account candidates' incumbency status (Gamboa and Morales, 2021; Piscopo et al., 2021; see also Smulders et al., 2019 about the case of Belgium). Hence, we expect that

any difference between women and men in campaign expenses should diminish and even disappear when it comes to incumbent candidates.

Lastly, we are interested in the electoral implications of the assumed funding gender gap. If women candidates cannot raise sufficient money to run credible campaigns, they will find it difficult to win elections (Uhlaner and Schlozman, 1986). The Belgian case shows that women are indeed electorally disadvantaged. They spend less money on their personal election campaigns and thus receive fewer votes than men (Wauters et al., 2010). Findings from Brazilian elections demonstrate that not only do women have fewer resources than men, but also the association between campaign finances and political performance is stronger for women than for men (Speck and Mancuso, 2014). We will, therefore, examine the electoral success of women candidates compared to men, and whether expenditures explain any gender-based differences in this area. We are also interested in whether the relationship between the level of campaign expenses and electoral success differs between women and men.

Israel as a case study of legislative primaries and campaign finances

Israel serves as a useful case study for investigating the gender gap in campaign finances in legislative primaries and its effect on electoral success for several reasons. First, Israel uses a proportional representation, closed list system to elect its unicameral parliament, the Knesset. Moreover, all 120 Members of Knesset (MKs) are elected in a single nationwide district. Thus, the institutional setting requires each party to select a single multi-candidate list. Parties that select their lists through an inclusive internal election (primaries) do so in the form of a single nationwide contest, with all candidates ultimately chosen by the same joint electorate. Furthermore, unlike single-member

districts, where there is only one winner, in large multi-member districts like Israel many candidates on the list can eventually win a seat in the Knesset elections.

Second, in the Israeli case, the higher a candidate is positioned on the closed party list, the better his/her chances of getting elected. Therefore, the primary contest is actually even more important for candidates than the general elections. Candidates who achieve a high position on the list are almost certain to be elected to parliament. Thus, primaries are the main arena for candidates to run personal campaigns based on personal, rather than party, resources.

Israeli law does not intervene in the candidate selection methods, leaving each party to determine its own format. As a result, there is considerable variation in these practices. They range from exclusive methods, in which the party leader or a small party elite composes the list, to internal elections in party institutions (e.g., a central committee) and closed primaries (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Cross et al., 2016).

Legislative primary campaigns in Israel are rather short, about four to six weeks at most. Each voter typically selects 8 to 12 candidates and the default rule is that candidates are ranked according to their vote totals. The candidate with the highest number of votes will appear in the second place on the list (right after the party leader, who is elected separately), the candidate who comes second will be in third place, and so on. The only exception to this default rule concerns the quotas used by parties to ensure proper representation for various social groups and sectors, such as women, ethnic minorities, new immigrants, young people, etc. (Rahat, 2009; Cross et al., 2016).

Candidates have three options for financing their primary campaigns. Some rely solely on their own funds, others engage in fundraising from local donors, and yet others turn to foreign donors.² The impact of spending is especially crucial for new

candidates who lack the name recognition and access to resources that incumbents enjoy. Without heavy spending, the chances of such candidates succeeding are slim (Hofnung, 2006).

Israel is exceptional regarding the heavy regulations the state imposes on candidates in intra-party contests, mainly on the selection of candidates and party leaders. The *Party Law* not only includes disclosure requirements and donation limits but also imposes spending limits and penalties for violations. These spending limits are in proportion to the size of the electorate. While financial regulations on legislative primary elections may promote a more equal political competition and act as a moderating factor for women's under-representation, the findings regarding the impact of regulations on the equality of political competition are still mixed (Scarrow, 2018). Hence, the Israeli case is particularly suitable for testing the impact of well-regulated primary elections on women's political position under such conditions. The heavy regulations also allow us to build upon a comprehensive and reliable database of candidates' expenses in legislative primary contests.

Table 1 shows the summary statistics for the spending variable used in the empirical analysis. Incumbent MKs competing in primaries for reselection enjoy an advantage over new candidates and their success rates are high. According to our data, only 12 out of the 101 incumbent MKs who competed in the seven primary contests lost their seats to new candidates. This finding reflects the strong hold of incumbent candidates on their positions.³

Here, we should stress that "success" (re-election) in these contests is not binary as it is in single-member districts and "winner takes all" games. In Israel, if an MK receives a "disappointing" result in the primaries, which translates into the 32nd

position on the party list, s/he can still be reelected as long as the party wins 32 seats or more.

Table 1 about here

The representation of women in the Knesset has increased substantially over the last three decades. From 1949 (Israel's first elections) to 1988, the number of women elected to the legislature hovered between 7 (5.8%) and 12 (10%), with an average of just above 9 (7.5%). Since 1992, there has been a gradual and almost consistent rise in the number of female MKs. In the last five elections, it ranged from 27 (22.5%) to 30 (25%), with an average of 28.6 (23.8%). There are two main reasons for the relatively low female representation in Israeli politics. The first is cultural. The Israeli population includes several traditional, conservative social groups which believe that women should not be active in the political sphere. Some of the political parties that represent these groups exclude the candidacy of women. The second is the prominence of military and security issues in Israeli politics. These issues are often considered male-dominated issues, making it harder for women to gain representation (Shapira et al., 2016).

In order to mitigate the disadvantage of female candidates, parties that use legislative primaries apply the *reserved minimal position* type of voluntary gender quotas. In this method, men and women candidates compete in the same contest and in the same electorate. Only after the votes are counted, if women were not elected to the minimum number of spots specified for them on the list, female candidates are moved up the list to the predetermined positions (Shapira et al., 2016: 118). These mechanisms vary from one case to another. For example, in Likud's 2015 primary contest at least

two places for women candidates were secured up until the 25th place on the list. In Labor's 2015 primary, at least two spots for women were reserved in each group of 10 candidates (1 to 10, 11 to 20, etc.).⁴ These voluntary quotas were quite effective in increasing the number of women in the Knesset.

Data and methods

The research population includes the 365 candidates who competed for a position on the list of candidates in the three parties that held legislative primaries before the three Knesset elections of 2009, 2013, and 2015 (Table 1).⁵ Kadima did not hold primaries before the 2013 elections and was later disbanded. Another party, the Jewish Home, held primaries before the 2013 and 2015 general elections but was excluded from the analysis because the number of its candidates elected to the Knesset was very small.

Our 365 cases are comprised of 283 unique candidates: 215 of them participated once, 54 participated twice and 14 candidates participated three times (all repetitions are within the same party).

The main variable is *candidate expenses*, reflecting the amount of money (in NIS) each candidate spent in the primary campaign. We collected the data from the annual State Comptroller Reports (2009-2015). Candidates are required to submit a detailed report of their fundraising and campaign expenses to this institution, and the State Comptroller may adjust these reports in cases deemed to be incomplete. This method provided us with a systematic and reliable data source.⁶

The range of potential expenses is quite wide – from the minimum entry fee a candidate must pay to participate in a primary contest (typically NIS 7,000-10,000, €2,000-€2,900) and up to the expenditure ceiling.⁷ As expenditure limits vary between

contests (party/year) (see Table 1), we standardized the values by calculating the share of expenses relative to the spending limit (the ceiling) for each candidate. For our regression analyses we normalized the variable using Templeton's two-step approach to normalization (Templeton, 2011; see also Buckley and Mariani, Forthcoming) because the candidates' shares of expenses were positively skewed.

In addition, we used several background indicators at the candidate level: gender (1 = female), previous ministerial position (1 = yes), which make up 15% of the cases (54 out of 365); incumbents (1 = yes), which make up 15% of the cases (55 out of 365); and new candidates familiar to the public (1=yes), which make up 13% of the cases (48 out of 365). This last group includes mainly well-known media figures and high-ranking military officers.

We measured success in the primary based on the number of votes each candidate received. We gathered data from official primary election results published by the parties. Since the voting ballot varies between parties and years, including the number of candidates and ranking options, we standardized the number of votes by calculating the vote-share that each candidate received relative to the number of votes given to those who came in first (i.e., received the highest number of votes) in the same contest, and normalized the variable using Templeton's two-step approach.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the candidates by contest. In all cases the majority of candidates were males. Women accounted for less than 30% of the candidates in six of the seven contests, with the single exception of the 2008 Labor primary. The proportion of women who were eventually elected to the Knesset after these seven contests was even lower – only 23%. Overall, the proportion of women

elected ranged between 23% and 32% in the Labor party, 19% and 20% in the Likud party, and 25% in the single case of the Kadima party.

Table 2 about here

The gender gap in campaign spending

Do women candidates spend less money than men in their primary campaigns? How does incumbency status affect this gap? Table 3 presents the average amount spent out of the expenditure limit, divided by gender, party, year, and incumbency status.

A straightforward comparison shows that male candidates (N=268) spent on average 0.36 of the expenditure limit, while females (N=97) spent on average 0.31 of the expenditure limit ($t=1.241$, n.s). Thus, men candidates spent 134,341 NIS on their campaigns on average compared to 111,237 NIS among female candidates. Therefore, on average, the men spent about €6,300 more than the women.

The table shows that in 2009 and 2013, the men's expenses were higher than the women's, but in 2015 women spent more than men (0.44 and 0.42, respectively; the difference is not statistically significant). The gender gap also varies between parties. Male candidates in the Kadima and Likud parties spent more than female candidates in their parties. The gender gap among Likud candidates is the largest and is also statistically significant. While male candidates spent 0.40 of the expenditure ceiling, women spent only 0.27 ($p < 0.05$). However, in the Labor party, the gender gap is in the opposite direction: the female candidates spent more than the male candidates (0.39 and 0.37, respectively), though this difference is not statistically significant. One explanation for this cross-party variation might be their ideological orientation as left-wing vs. right-wing parties, which will be discussed later in this section.

What about the effect of incumbency? Does the funding gender gap hold for both new candidates and incumbents? Table 3 shows that, on average, among new candidates, women spent less than men did. In contrast, among incumbents the gender gap is in the opposite direction, with women spending more than men did. Even though the directions are opposite, the gender gap in both groups, new candidates and incumbents, is similar in size (0.3 percentage points) and is not statistically significant. Moreover, this gender gap varies between years. Among new candidates, the gender gap is larger in 2009 but almost disappears in 2013 and 2015. For incumbents, the gap is very small in the earlier years but reaches its highest value in 2015 (0.70 for men compared to 0.77 for women). Among both genders, incumbents spend on average much more than new candidates, which is in line with previous findings regarding the financial advantage of incumbents over new candidates in Israeli primaries (Kenig and Atmor, 2021).

The results indicate that incumbency matters for the funding gender gap. Among incumbent candidates, women perform even better than men when it comes to fundraising. On the other hand, new female candidates spend less money than new male candidates in their primary campaigns. Thus, new women candidates are doubly disadvantaged both by their gender and by their newcomer status.

Table 3 about here

A regression analysis estimating the effect of gender on our standardized measure of campaign expenses (Table 4) shows that gender has no significant effect on expenses. This is not surprising considering the lack of statistical significance in almost all gender-based comparisons in Table 3. Nevertheless, we must take into account the

relatively small number of cases in our data. Overall, we can conclude that gender is not the major explanatory factor for campaign expenses. Incumbency and name recognition are better explanations for the variance in the outcome variable. As all models in Table 4 show, for the entire sample (models 1 and 2) as well as by party (models 3-5), incumbent MKs and new candidates familiar to the public spend more than new candidates who are unfamiliar to the public.

To sum up, the results of our analysis do not indicate a consistent pattern of a gender gap in campaign expenses. Rather, this gap depends on the party in which the primaries are held, and on the incumbency status of the candidates. There is a significant gender gap in the Likud party, the largest right-wing party in the Knesset, and the elected ruling party in all three elections (2009, 2013, and 2015). Women in this party raise much less than their male counterparts. For the main left-wing party, Labor, the gap is in the opposite direction, with women spending more money than men do. These results echo previous findings in the US indicating a partisan pattern for the funding gender gap, according to which Democratic females raise more money than their male counterparts in primary elections – unlike among Republican candidates (Kitchens and Swers, 2016). However, no such difference in the gender gap between ideological camps was evident in Chile (Piscopo et al., 2021). As for incumbency status, the results indicate that a funding gender gap exists for new candidates only. Once women are elected and run again for office, they do even better than their male counterparts in terms of campaign fundraising.

Table 4 about here

The gender gaps in spending and their electoral implications

In the last part of our analysis, we examine the impact of expenditures and incumbency on the level of electoral success. Do female candidates succeed less than male candidates? If so, does the difference in campaign expenses explain this pattern? In addition, do campaign expenses affect female and male candidates to the same degree? To answer these questions, we conducted an OLS regression analysis with our standardized vote-share measure as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 5. Model 1 shows that in general, women do worse in the primary elections we examined in this study, controlling for party/year ($p < 0.05$). However, this gender gap in electoral success narrows and is no longer statistically significant when controlling for campaign expenses (model 2). Indeed, the effect of campaign expenses on the vote-share achieved by candidates is substantial in size and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Adding incumbency, ministerial experience, and public familiarity to the analysis (model 3) – all of which contribute to electoral success ($p < 0.001$) – reduces the coefficient on gender even more. Indeed, it remains statistically insignificant, as in model 2. Thus, based on our analysis, women’s disadvantages in terms of expenditures, previous experience, and incumbency status explain the gender gap in their electoral success in primary elections.

Table 5 about here

Does the effect of campaign expenses vary between women and men? Model 4, which includes an interaction term between gender and campaign expenses, shows that this interaction is not statistically significant. Hence, funding is important for electoral

success for men and women to the same degree. However, women, on average, tend to have fewer resources than men, and therefore lack an important tool for getting more votes. In addition, the share of incumbents among women is lower than among men (23% vs. 32%, respectively), which also explains their lower level of electoral success compared to men.

Nevertheless, as we demonstrated above, there are considerable differences between parties in the funding gender gap. How do these different levels of funding gender gaps affect the electoral gender gap in each of the parties? Table 6 presents the results of three models similar to models 1-3 in Table 5, for each of the parties. Models 1, 4, and 7 show that, controlling for year, the effect of gender on electoral success is negative for Likud and Kadima candidates and positive for Labor candidates. In other words, among Labor candidates, women receive higher vote-shares than men, while in the Likud and Kadima parties, the opposite is true. However, the gender gap is statistically significant only for the Likud party ($p < 0.01$). When adding campaign expenses (models 2, 5, and 8), the gender coefficients become smaller, although for Likud candidates it remains statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). When including incumbency, previous ministerial experience and public familiarity (models 3, 6, and 9), the gender coefficient becomes insignificant for Likud candidates as well. These results regarding electoral gender gaps by party echo the descriptive results regarding the funding gender gaps that appear in Table 3. Similar to the lack of a funding gender gap among Labor candidates in Table 3 (and a gap even a bit in favor of women candidates), we see no meaningful gender gap in electoral success for this party. There is also a similar significant funding gender gap in favor of men among Likud candidates that we documented in Table 3. The gap between women and men in campaign

expenses accounts in part for these differences, as does the difference in the share of female incumbents compared to men.

All in all, we see that women were less successful than men in the primary elections we examined. Differences in campaign expenses and incumbency status account for these outcomes. Moreover, this pattern is particularly relevant to the right-wing Likud party and the centrist Kadima party, and less to the left-wing Labor party.

Lastly, given that we had a number of candidates who participated in two or three elections (see the data section), we also ran random-effects models to estimate the effects. The results hold.

Table 6 about here

Conclusion and implications

As part of the larger debate on women's underrepresentation in politics, this article addressed three questions focusing on primary campaigns in Israel. Do female candidates spend less money than their male counterparts in these campaigns? If so, does incumbency account for this gender gap in campaign expenditures, and does it translate into electoral success? The answers to these questions are pertinent because women are often under-represented not only in legislatures, but also in primaries where the pool of candidates who will run for office is determined.

Our findings show that women spend less money than men on their primary campaigns. This gap is particularly prevalent among new candidates and candidates in the right-wing Likud party. Among incumbent candidates, however, women spend a little more than men do. While these observed gaps are not statistically significant, the

results still imply an interaction between gender and incumbency. Being an incumbent can cancel out the gender disadvantages of women. In contrast, new women candidates are doubly disadvantaged by their gender and by their newcomer status. This finding concurs with other findings about this issue in Ireland and Italy (Buckley and Mariani and Feo et al., respectively). Additionally, we establish that, in general, women receive fewer votes in primary elections than men, but this gender gap disappears when campaign expenditures and incumbency are taken into account. Together, these findings may imply that the efforts to increase women's parliamentary representation should be focused on helping women make a start in political life. For instance, the results highlight the need for the voluntary gender quotas implemented by the Israeli parties discussed in this study. While our study examined the original vote-share obtained by the candidates, the final candidate lists show that, in fact, six female candidates, all of whom were new, were elected to the Knesset thanks to the adoption of these quotas and would have been left out otherwise. Seven other women moved up to higher positions on the list but would have been elected anyway. Thus, the quotas help new female candidates gain a foothold in the Knesset. Once elected, our study shows that incumbent women do quite well. Even those in right-wing conservative parties are able to raise and spend as much money as men.

The findings should not obscure the fact that women are still under-represented in the Israeli Knesset. Yet, we reiterate that our research examined the gender gap among those who had already decided to run for office. A broader explanation for women's under-representation may be sought elsewhere, such as at the informal stage of political recruitment. The ratio of about 3:1 in favor of male candidates such as the one documented in the seven primary contests discussed in this article shows that even

before considering the various factors affecting women's prospects of winning elections, they are well outnumbered by men.

We may attribute this lack of female candidates to supply and demand scenarios. Looking at the demand side, military and security issues in Israel are traditionally considered "male territory," with men still perceived as "stronger" and possessing more suitable political skills than women to navigate the stormy waters of the Middle Eastern environment. Furthermore, Israeli society includes several conservative groups, which reject the participation of women in the public sphere. Both of these factors may reduce the "political value" of women by limiting their "demand" by the public. These factors also affect the supply side, possibly undermining women's political ambition and motivation (Lawless and Fox, 2010), causing fewer to even try their luck in the political arena. In this sense, political gender stereotypes (Devroe and Wauters, 2018), though not addressed in this research, may serve as a complementary explanation, especially in the Israeli macho and patriarchal arena (Itzkovitch-Malka and Friedberg, 2018). In light of these obstacles, both on the demand and supply sides, our study suggests that particular effort is needed to increase the number of women who consider running for office and improving the conditions that allow equal competition between women and men.

Notes

¹ Another study cautiously estimated that between a quarter and a third of the more prominent parties in democracies hold primaries to select their legislative candidates (Cross et al., 2016: 47).

² The law was amended in 2018 and today, incumbents' campaigns are subsidized by the state.

³ In this sense, the general turnover level of MKs (on average, about 25% of the legislators selected in each election are new) is somewhat misleading. It is mainly the effect of either new parties gaining representation or an increase in the number of seats won by a party or parties.

⁴ Likud's contest prior to the 2015 elections took place on the last day of 2014. For convenience, we call this Likud's 2015 primary contest.

⁵ All three general elections were held early in the calendar year, so some of the primaries that preceded them took place late in the previous calendar year.

⁶ Admittedly, the State Comptroller might miss certain fundraising and spending violations by candidates. For instance, some candidates may have engaged in under-the-radar fundraising and spending, exploiting loopholes in the law (Hofnung, 2006; Cross et al., 2016: 168-171). Nevertheless, the reports are regarded as high-quality accounts of the financial aspects of primaries.

⁷ Fundraising in Israel is based on the amount that candidates report they spent on primaries, which equals the amount they raised. We therefore refer here only to spending, though it is actually equivalent to the amount raised.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Features of the seven legislative primary contests in Israel

	Eligible voters	Actual (valid) votes	Expenditure ceiling	Exp. min	Exp. max	Mean (SD)	Incumbents (New Candidates)	N
Kadima 2008	79,658	35,125	346,543	10,000	434,632	85,910 (98,464)	23 (51)	74
Labor 2008	59,124	59,025	290,091	9,283	320,731	136,401 (109,713)	11 (7)	18
Labor 2012	60,392	35,000	310,578	10,000	312,703	97,277 (89,395)	8 (71)	79
Labor 2015	48,900	28,742	284,785	10,900	297,187	130,787 (102,096)	11 (25)	36
Likud 2008	98,811	48,469	399,230	10,000	444,450	128,492 (134,256)	13 (50)	63
Likud 2012	123,343	73,073	496,096	10,000	499,293	197,350 (184,991)	26 (31)	57
Likud 2015	96,543	45,000	415,803	7,000	430,640	164,307 (158,882)	17 (21)	38

Note. All values are in NIS. €1= approximately NIS 4.5 (2015 value)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the study's variables

	2008	2012	2015	Total
<i>Labor</i>				
Number of candidates	18	79	36	133
Proportion of women candidates	0.39	0.27	0.28	0.29
Number of elected MKs	13	15	19	47
Proportion of women MKs	0.23	0.27	0.32	0.28
<i>Likud</i>				
Number of candidates	63	57	38	158
Proportion of women candidates	0.29	0.28	0.24	0.27
Number of elected MKs	27	20	30	77
Proportion of women MKs	0.19	0.2	0.2	0.19
<i>Kadima</i>				
Number of candidates	74			74
Proportion of women candidates	0.22			0.22
Number of elected MKs	28			28
Proportion of women MKs	0.25			0.25

Table 3. Candidate expenses by gender, party and incumbency

	2008		2012		2015		<i>Entire sample</i>	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>All</i>	114	41	99	37	55	19	268	97
	0.32	0.25	0.36	0.31	0.42	0.44	0.36	0.31
<i>Labor</i>	11	7	58	21	26	10	95	38
	0.52	0.40	0.32	0.31	0.42	0.56	0.37	0.39
<i>Kadima</i>	58	16					58	16
	0.26	0.22					0.26	0.22
<i>Likud</i>	45	18	41	16	29	9	115	43
	0.36	0.23	0.43	0.30	0.42	0.30	0.40	0.27*
<i>Newcomers</i>	76	32	71	31	34	12	181	75
	0.23	0.18	0.24	0.23	0.25	0.24	0.24	0.21
<i>Incumbents</i>	38	9	28	6	21	7	87	22
	0.51	0.50	0.67	0.68	0.70	0.77	0.61	0.64

Note. Cells present the average share of expenses out of the spending limit (the ceiling). Comparison of means test: * $p < .05$.

Table 4. The effect of gender on campaign expenses

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	All	All	Labor	Likud	Kadima
Female	-0.044 (0.040)	0.010 (0.034)	0.043 (0.054)	0.033 (0.051)	-0.041 (0.077)
Incumbency		0.397*** (0.043)	0.242** (0.080)	0.582*** (0.062)	0.237** (0.088)
Minister		0.033 (0.054)	0.029 (0.107)	0.003 (0.074)	0.115 (0.113)
Public familiarity		0.266*** (0.046)	0.150* (0.075)	0.376*** (0.065)	0.211 (0.118)
Primary year (2012)	-0.045 (0.049)	0.001 (0.042)	-0.024 (0.079)	-0.032 (0.053)	
Primary year (2015)	0.034 (0.055)	0.032 (0.047)	0.055 (0.085)	-0.006 (0.059)	
Likud	-0.074 (0.041)	-0.128*** (0.035)			
Kadima	-0.160* (0.062)	-0.154** (0.053)			
Constant	0.435*** (0.051)	0.267*** (0.045)	0.315*** (0.081)	0.075 (0.047)	0.166*** (0.044)
<i>N</i>	365	365	133	158	74
<i>R</i> ²	0.034	0.331	0.173	0.495	0.229

Note: The dependent variable is the total campaign spending per candidate, measured as a proportion of the top expenditure ceiling in the relevant contest (normalized). Party reference group: Labor. Year reference group: 2008. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5. The effect of gender and campaign expenses on electoral success

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-6.371*	-3.834	-0.342	-1.303
	(3.185)	(2.241)	(1.761)	(2.458)
Primary year (2012)	-6.298	-3.694	-1.966	-2.009
	(3.948)	(2.776)	(2.182)	(2.186)
Primary year (2015)	5.919	3.983	4.309	4.259
	(4.403)	(3.094)	(2.435)	(2.439)
Likud	-0.427	3.833	-2.124	-2.043
	(3.311)	(2.336)	(1.847)	(1.854)
Kadima	7.576	16.769***	12.691***	12.707***
	(5.034)	(3.568)	(2.803)	(2.806)
Expenditures		57.432***	34.119***	33.364***
		(2.987)	(2.774)	(3.085)
Incumbency			27.309***	27.264***
			(2.494)	(2.497)
Minister			9.826***	9.934***
			(2.836)	(2.845)
Public familiarity			14.372***	14.344***
			(2.509)	(2.511)
Female X Expenditures				2.939
				(5.232)
Constant	32.199***	7.244*	5.629*	5.886*
	(4.074)	(3.142)	(2.491)	(2.535)
<i>N</i>	365	365	365	365
<i>R</i> ²	0.057	0.536	0.725	0.725

Note: The dependent variable is the share of votes received by the candidate in the relevant contest (normalized). Party reference group: Labor. Year reference group: 2008. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6. The effect of campaign expenses on electoral success by gender and party

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	Labor	Labor	Labor	Likud	Likud	Likud	Kadima	Kadima	Kadima
Female	1.171 (5.015)	-0.862 (3.654)	1.171 (3.003)	-15.073** (5.145)	-8.801* (3.386)	-3.388 (2.797)	-4.172 (5.401)	-1.502 (4.293)	-0.707 (2.529)
Primary year (2012)	-29.990*** (6.823)	-20.746*** (5.040)	-7.497 (4.376)	5.260 (5.256)	4.072 (3.432)	-0.276 (2.913)			
Primary year (2015)	-14.835 (7.531)	-14.041* (5.482)	-5.634 (4.665)	12.407* (5.911)	10.752** (3.860)	7.654* (3.250)			
Expenditures		62.201*** (5.786)	47.160*** (4.905)		57.929*** (4.013)	29.870*** (4.479)		39.473*** (5.952)	18.721*** (3.970)
Incumbency			28.778*** (4.558)			31.580*** (4.306)			17.406*** (3.049)
Minister			5.407 (5.884)			6.781 (4.062)			20.556*** (3.745)
Public familiarity			19.510*** (4.189)			14.592*** (3.971)			9.613* (3.964)
Constant	49.734*** (6.435)	19.475*** (5.464)	5.419 (4.709)	28.410*** (3.909)	7.830** (2.923)	3.374 (2.618)	39.300*** (2.511)	28.266*** (2.592)	24.346*** (1.605)
<i>N</i>	133	133	133	158	158	158	74	74	74
<i>R</i> ²	0.153	0.555	0.725	0.081	0.611	0.756	0.008	0.388	0.797

Note: The dependent variable is the share of votes received by the candidate in the relevant contest (normalized). Year reference group: 2008.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

