

# Gender Stereotypes & Electoral Choices: Evidence from the Finnish open-list PR System

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## **Abstract:**

Evidence from US studies about whether gender stereotypes matter for electoral choices remains inconclusive. This study constitutes the first analysis of how gender stereotypes affect *actual* vote choices in a multi-party environment with an electoral system of proportional representation (PR) and open party lists. Provided that all parties supply female candidates, open party lists enable voters to make a choice between men and women when selecting a candidate without any costs to their partisan preferences. Based on unique data collected by the Finnish national election study (2011) and a survey conducted during the Finnish presidential election (2012), we examine the role of stereotypes on voters' selection of female/male candidates in the context of real-world elections in one of the most gender equal countries globally. Our study solidifies evidence based on American voters and extends knowledge in the field. A key finding is that a pro-men bias systematically assists male candidates, while female candidates benefit when this pro-men bias is *absent*. That said, the impact of political gender stereotypes on candidate choice varies according to *type* of stereotypes and voter *ideology*: left-wing voters' support for female candidates is influenced by pro-women issue competence stereotypes (social and equality policies) and right-wing voters' choices of male candidates is influenced by a pro-men issue competence stereotype (security policy).