Speaking Up, Speaking More? Female Participation in Congressional Committees
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Introduction
• Studies of descriptive representative often examine the gender composition of political institutions, finding that as legislators, women may behave differently than men.
• Previous experimental research show that women are less likely to participate in group settings when there are fewer women present and the group is making majority decisions.
• We examine how the gender distribution on a committee affects the participation rates and styles of women in congressional hearings.
• Method and data: generalized difference-in-differences design, transcripts of committee hearings, and various text-based outcomes from speech.
• Women’s participation rates and styles in committee hearings are not affected by the gender distribution on the committee.
• Suggests that gender imbalance in Congress does not hinder female participation during the committee process.

Female Representation on Congressional Committees
The average percent of women on congressional committees ranges from 0 to a little over 40 percent, with no committee ever reaching equal representation. There is substantial variation in the proportion of women who are members.

Committee Hearings
We measure our text-based outcomes of interest from transcripts of congressional committee hearings. Data on committee hearings comes from Ban (2018) and includes all House standing committee hearing transcripts during the period 1999-2008. These House committee hearing transcripts made available by the U.S. Government Publishing Office.

Outcome variables
Participation: frequencies and length of speech
- Percent of hearings attended
- Percent times a member speaks during a hearing
- Percent words a member speaks in a hearing

Sentiment: dictionary of positive and negative words
- Percent of positive words
- Percent of negative words

Aggression: dictionary of aggressive words, number of interruptions
- Percent of angry words
- Percent of yields
- Percent of allowing time

Specification
\[ Y_{it} = \beta_1 \text{Percent of Women on Committee} + \gamma Z_{it} + \alpha_i + \mu_t + \epsilon_{it} \]
- All standard errors are clustered at the member-committee level.
- \( Z_{it} \) represents the time-varying legislator controls, including majority party status, committee chairmanship and sub-committee status, DW-NOMINATE score, previous vote percentage, and membership on key committees.
- \( \alpha_i \) represents member-committee fixed effects.
- \( \mu_t \) represents Congress fixed effects.
- \( \epsilon_{it} \) is the error term.

Conclusions
• Women in Congress do not appear to be affected by decision rules in the same way as women in the general population.
• We find no significant effects for female legislators across any of our outcomes.
• We next investigate whether there is a selection effect occurring. Women who are elected to Congress may be undeterred by gender composition as they have already likely faced substantial gender-based adversity to be elected.