



School of Government & Public Policy

***Yoshikuni Ono | Professor
Waseda University***

Women Use More Positive Language than Men: Candidates' Strategic Use of Emotive Language in Election Campaigns

Abstract: How do candidates strategically use emotive language during elections? Whereas government candidates and incumbents are incentivized to use positive language to incite support for the status quo, opposition candidates and challengers deploy negative sentiment to foster voter discontent. Women candidates, though, face a double bind, making it less likely they benefit from negative language and limiting the strategies at their disposal. Leveraging approximately 165,000 tweets from 2,662 British candidates, we show women are more positive and less negative than men, regardless of their government/incumbent status. Subsequent sentiment analysis of over a million replies indicates why this may be the case: women are penalized for negative emoting—garnering more negative replies and fewer likes than men. Together, these findings suggest women are not simply socialized to be more positive, but also, they are strategically motivated to behave in gender-typical ways to appeal to voters and avoid backlash on the campaign trail.

Yoshikuni Ono is a professor of Political Science at Waseda University. He completed his Ph.D. in political science at the University of Michigan. Before joining Waseda University, he held academic appointments at Tohoku University and the International University of Japan. His work has appeared in the American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Political Behavior, Political Science Research and Methods, Public Opinion Quarterly, and other journals.

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Social Sciences Building | Room 311