

Keeping Workers Off the Ballot: Electoral Gatekeepers and the Shortage of Candidates from the Working Class



Monday, February 6, 2017

2:00 - 3:30 pm

W113 Seashore Hall

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Why do so few lower-income and working-class people hold office in the United States? One possibility suggested by research on underrepresented groups is that qualified workers might receive less encouragement from the gatekeepers who recruit new candidates (e.g., party leaders, politicians, and civic organizations). Building on studies of gatekeeping biases against women, this paper analyzes a new national survey of the county-level leaders of the Republican and Democratic parties. On several measures—including a hypothetical candidate evaluation experiment—party leaders exhibit clear and substantial preferences for white-collar professionals (even controlling for other relevant aspects of candidates' backgrounds and party leaders' strategic environments). These findings constitute the first evidence that gatekeepers are less likely to recruit working-class candidates, and they have important implications for research on descriptive representation, the candidate pipeline, and political inequality. One reason so few working-class Americans hold office may simply be that so few are encouraged to.

This talk is part of the **Inequality Seminar** which is a seminar and speaker series that provides a forum on campus for faculty and graduate students who are interested in inequality broadly defined. It is an opportunity for faculty and graduate students to present their research and to hear about other inequality-related work from researchers on the off-campus. These talks are free and open to the public. For more information about the Inequality Seminar, contact Professor Sarah Bruch at sarah-bruch@uiowa.edu.

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