

Gender diversity and decision-making in teams

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Abstract

We study how the gender composition of teams shapes both the nature and quality of decisions. We focus on collegial rulings from Italian criminal courts, where judges and cases are quasi-randomly assigned to three-judge panels and appellate review provides a measure of decision accuracy. Observing both conviction rates and accuracy lets us distinguish between two channels through which gender may matter: differences in preferences (leniency) and differences in diagnostic skills. All-women panels convict more often than all-men panels and, at the same time, produce more accurate rulings. Mixed-gender panels resemble all-men panels in conviction rates but nearly match all-women panels in accuracy. These patterns are inconsistent with differences in leniency and instead point to differences in diagnostic skills, alongside coordination frictions in mixed teams. Evidence from written opinions, decision-making times, and judges' entry exam scores is consistent with these differences in diagnostic skills reflecting effort rather than innate ability. We formalize the mechanism in a structural model where judges' leniency and diligence shape accuracy through endogenous effort. Counterfactuals show that equalizing diligence across genders would close the accuracy gap, while removing frictions would close the conviction gap. As the judiciary continues to feminize, our results imply a trade-off between decision accuracy and trial duration.