

Why do voters elect less qualified candidates?

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Voters sometimes vote for seemingly less qualified candidates; the winners of elections are sometimes less competent than the losers in light of candidates' observable characteristics such as their past careers. To explain this fact, we develop a political agency model with repeated elections in which a voter elects a policy maker among candidates with different competency (valence) levels. We show that politicians' competency relates negatively with political accountability when the challenger in the future election is likely to be incompetent. When this negative relation exists, voters prefer to elect an incompetent candidate if they emphasize politicians' policy choices over their competency. The negative relation between competency and accountability is possible because voters cannot commit to future voting strategies. Furthermore, voters' private information about how they evaluate candidates' competency generates a complementary mechanism leading to the negative relation between competency and accountability. This mechanism implies that voters' anti-elitism can be rational ex post even if it is groundless in the first place.