

Measuring Discrimination Against Non-Binary Individuals in Career-Related Help Requests

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Background

Efforts to improve gender diversity have largely focused on cisgender women, overlooking non-binary individuals, who report facing distinct barriers and forms of discrimination that are not well-captured by studies that focus on the gender binary^a.

We investigate whether non-binary people face discrimination when seeking career-related help and explore the role of political ideology in shaping responses.

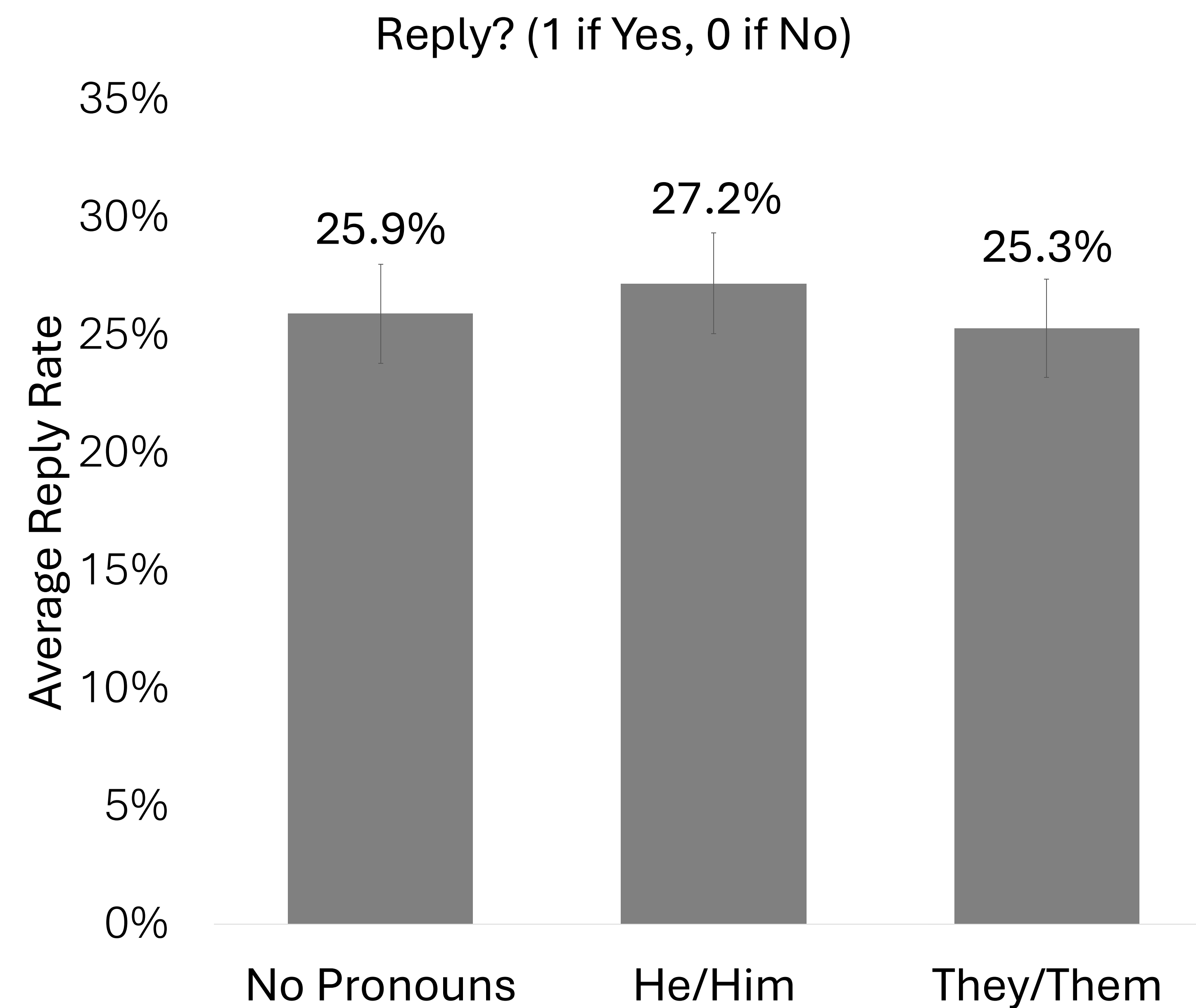
Method

Participants: 6,646 U.S. city councilors contacted in 2023.

Design: Between-subjects with three pronoun conditions: (1) no pronouns (control), (2) he/him (control), (3) they/them (non-binary).

Procedure: City councilors received emails from fictitious students requesting career advice. Pronouns were used to signal gender identity, with they/them to indicate non-binary identity. Responses within 7 days were recorded.

RQ 1. Do non-binary pronouns affect response rates in career help requests?



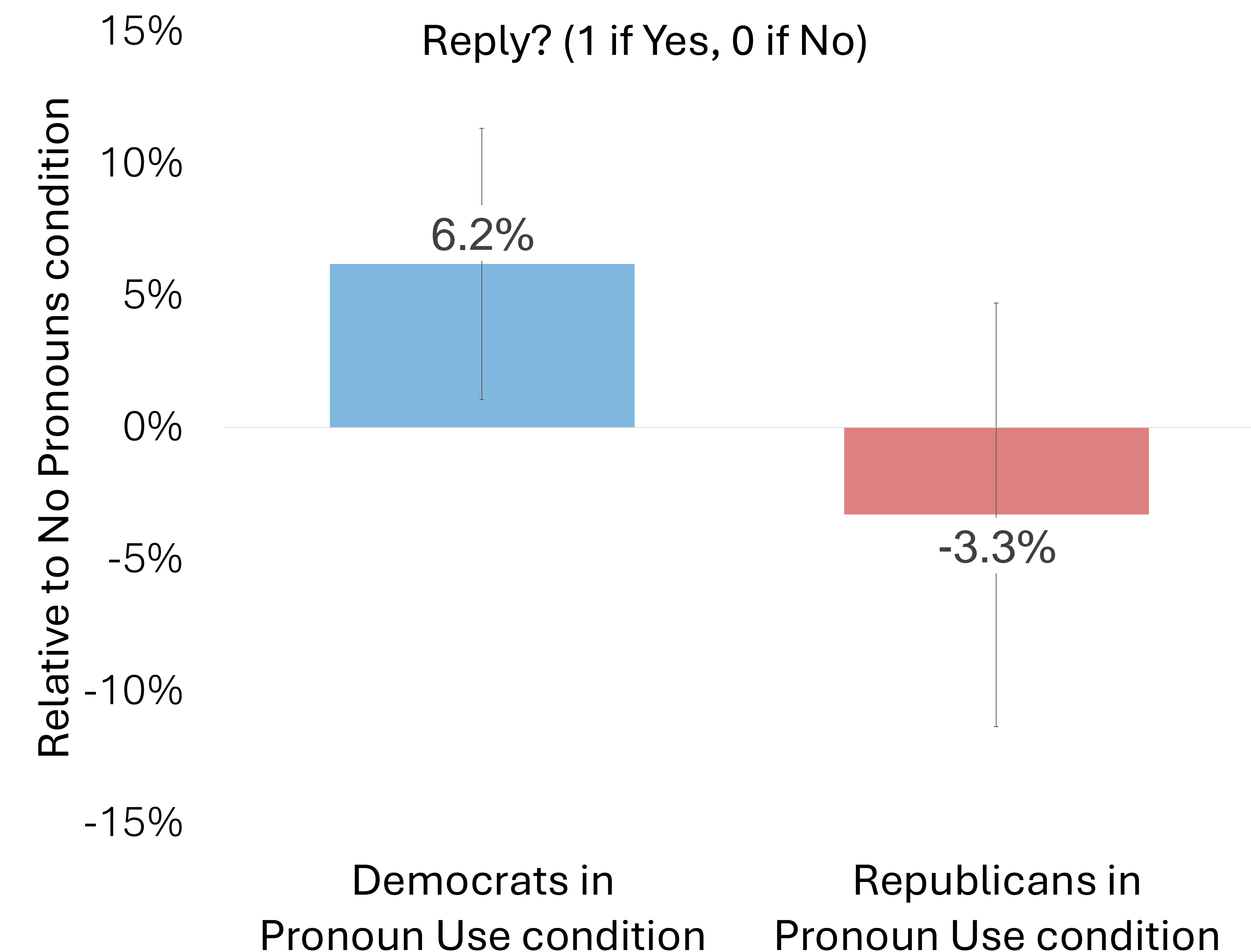
Response rates *did not differ* across no pronouns, they/them, and he/him conditions (all p's > 0.187)

Discussion

We found that non-binary individuals may face less discrimination than expected in career-related emails. In fact, in a prediction study with social scientists, they anticipated that non-binary people would face significant discrimination in response rates—an expectation aligned with prior research on bias against marginalized groups by local politicians^b and on discrimination against non-binary people on the labor market^c.

We also found that Democratic councilors are more likely to respond to help-seekers who shared any pronouns, while Republican councilors were not, suggesting that sharing pronouns may be a signal of political in-group alignment.

RQ 2. Does political party affect responses to help-seekers who share pronouns?



Republicans *were less likely* than Democrats to reply to help-seekers who shared any pronouns compared to those who shared none ($b = -0.095$, $p = 0.044$, 95% CI: [-0.188, -0.003])

References: [a] James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Durso, L. E., & Heng-Lehtinen, R. (2024). Early insights: A Report of the 2022 U.S. transgender survey. National Center for Transgender Equality. [b] Butler, D. M., & Crabtree, C. (2017). Moving beyond measurement: Adapting audit studies to test bias-reducing interventions. Journal of Experimental Political Science, 4(1), 57–67. [c] Coffman, K. B., Coffman, L. C., & Ericson, K. M. (2024). Non-binary gender economics (32222; NBER Working Paper Series). National Bureau of Economic Research.