

Voting Her Mind or Voting with the Family? Investigating Women's Agency in Vote Choice in India

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Abstract

How much agency do women hold over their vote choice, particularly in developing countries? Where individuals are socially and economically dependent on the household, household members coordinate on a host of behaviors, including political participation and vote choice. This poses the risk that women hurt their own interests by amplifying male preferences instead of voting according to their own policy priorities. But how do we measure agency over vote choice? In many developing countries, policy preferences do not map neatly onto parties or candidates. Instead, parties might offer policy bundles that serve both male and female priorities, or deliver goods and services mainly to co-ethnics. In both cases, voting for the same party despite differing policy preferences is rational. Vote pooling within the household, therefore, is not in and of itself proof of a lack of women's agency. We overcome this problem by using a novel measure of *preference-consistent voting* that checks whether women's vote is internally consistent, i.e., whether women voted in line with their own stated policy preferences. Contrary to expectations based on the literature, we find that women are no less likely than men to vote in accordance with their stated preferences; and that household disagreement on policy priorities does not predict women's preference-consistent voting.

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1 Introduction

A growing literature suggests that women have systematically different political preferences than men. In industrialized democracies, women tend to favor higher government spending, more redistribution, and the provision subsidized child care much more than men do (Lott and Kenny, 1999; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006, 2010). In developing countries, research has consistently found that women prioritize drinking water supply, while men tend to favor spending on infrastructure, such as roads (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Olken, 2010; Khan, 2017; Gottlieb et al., 2018). Where women can make their distinct preferences heard, government spending and the mix of public goods provided change (Lott and Kenny, 1999; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). But scholars have found that where women hold low bargaining power within the household, the preferences of men within the same household might drown out female demands. In such cases, women potentially self-regulate their participation to leave the floor to men (Gottlieb, 2016), possibly falsify their preferences to amplify male voices instead of expressing their own priorities (Khan, 2021), or may be outright coerced to participate only when told to do so and to vote only as instructed (Prillaman, 2023).

If women do not get to express their own political preferences, this poses both normative and substantive problems for democracy. Normatively, expressing one's preferences can have intrinsic value in a democracy (Sen, 1988; Przeworski, 2003). As Przeworski (2003) argued, "even if they cannot affect the outcomes, individuals with different views can assert their agency" by voting their own mind in a democracy; "the mere possibility of being counted gives people more freedom and this extra freedom has value" (p. 275). Half of the population potentially not having genuine choices in an election, therefore, undermines democracy. Substantively, government policy and spending change when women assert their distinct preferences at the ballot box (Lott and Kenny, 1999; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2010). By contrast, where women do not express their own preferences, government is unlikely to reflect their priorities (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004).

However, measuring whether women get to express their own political preferences is not

always straightforward. The most obvious way in which individuals can make their preferences known to elites is through the ballot they cast on election day. Yet it may be hard to determine whether women cast their vote in line with their own preferences, or instead voted along with other household members' preferences. Previous studies usually assume that differing preferences over public goods between men and women should *always* lead to diverging vote choice between the genders (Prillaman, 2023). While women's recorded preference for higher public spending should rationally translate into voting for more left-leaning parties in industrialized countries (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2010), gendered policy priorities in other countries do not always map neatly onto parties: Parties usually offer bundles of policies, party platforms are less stable, and policy priorities usually differ over the type of public goods provided, not the overall size of state budgets. In such contexts, we can therefore not infer whether women falsified their preferences, or were outright coerced, simply by observing whether they voted for the same party as male family members.

We overcome this problem by using a novel measure of *preference-consistent voting* that checks whether women voted in line with their own stated policy preferences, or instead voted against their stated preferences but in line with other household members' priorities. To do so, we ask survey respondents to list their highest policy priority, and separately to report which party is most competent across a range of different policy areas. If a respondent voted for the party she identified as most competent in policy area she cares most about, we count her as voting preference-consistent. We situate our study in India, where female turnout has been rising dramatically over the past 20 years, but where research has raised questions about the meaning of these increases in women's voting against the backdrop of patriarchal norms and individual dependence on the household (Prillaman, 2023). By interviewing multiple respondents per household, we can evaluate not just how preference-consistent women's vote is, but compare their preferences and vote choice to that of family members, including men within the same household. Contrary to expectations based on the literature, we find that

women are just as likely as men to vote in accordance with their stated preferences, and that household disagreement on policy priorities does not predict women's preference-consistent voting.

This article makes several important contributions to the literature. First, by developing the concept of preference-consistent voting to measure whether women's vote is in line with their expressed preferences, we add to the growing body of research on women's political participation (see, for example, Burns et al., 2001; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Gottlieb, 2016; Goyal, 2023). This measure, we argue, is a better proxy for women's agency in vote choice than simply comparing women's vote choice to that of male relatives. Unlike previous studies that assume that different policy preferences must lead to different vote choices, we acknowledge that policy platforms are less informative in the Indian context (and indeed in many developing countries); and stress that women still exercised choice if their vote is internally consistent. Second, we contribute to a growing literature that acknowledges the importance of the household – and of intra-household differences in bargaining power – for women's political participation (Chhibber, 2002; Khan, 2017; Cheema et al., 2022; Prillaman, 2023), using a novel dataset that interviewed multiple respondents per household to not just investigate women's agency, but benchmark it against men's. Finally, by situating our study in urban Delhi, we add to our understanding of the political geography of India, and potentially important differences between rural and urban polities for women's political participation (Auerbach and Kruks-Wisner, 2020).

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. The next section develops the argument in the context of theories on women's political participation. Section 3 provides background on women's political participation in India, the setting of our study. Section 4 describes the data and measurements used, while section 5 showcases results of our empirical investigation. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion.

2 Women’s Agency in Vote Choice

A growing body of research has highlighted that men and women have systematically different policy preferences. These differences are not borne out of any deterministic sex differences, but rather out of gendered life realities: because women have traditionally been tasked with the bulk of child care and household work, their lives – including their time use, income opportunities, economic vulnerability in case of divorce, and, hence, their bargaining power within the family – are fundamentally different from those of men (Agarwal, 1997; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2010). Accordingly, women’s specific demands on the state are often shaped by this gendered division of labor. Women in advanced economies have been shown to prefer more government spending on child care than men (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006; Finseraas et al., 2012), to favor larger public employment sectors (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2010), and to prefer education spending over individual tax breaks (Alvarez, 2003). These gendered preferences have since at least the 1980s led to the emergence of the “modern gender gap” in voting (Inglehart and Norris, 2000, p. 442) across most industrialized countries. Women in these places tend to vote for parties and candidates classified as left-leaning at much higher rates than men (Inglehart and Norris, 2000, 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006, 2010).

In developing economies, too, women’s demands on the state are often distinct from men’s, and shaped by their gendered life realities. Women are more likely than men to prioritize the provision of clean drinking water (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Olken, 2010; Khan, 2017; Gottlieb et al., 2018; Clayton et al., 2019), either because fetching water is a task traditionally performed by women and the provision of clean water close to the home therefore frees up women’s time (Gottlieb et al., 2018), or because women are tasked with child rearing, and unsafe water is a major source of illness in children (Khan, 2017). By contrast, women are often less likely than men to favor infrastructure investment, reflecting their lower levels of labor market participation and generally lower levels mobility outside the home (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Gottlieb et al., 2018; Clayton et al., 2019; Khan, 2021). Similarly, women’s lower prioritization of support for agriculture than men’s is likely

an artifact of both land ownership and farming being a male domain (Khan, 2017; Clayton and Anderson-Nilsson, 2021).

But research has raised questions about whether women in developing countries get to express these distinct preferences publicly (Gottlieb, 2016; Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023). Traditional models have conceived of vote choice as individual decisions, taken by an actor based on their personal cost-benefit analysis (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Aldrich, 1993). A disjuncture between preferences and the actual vote, therefore, only arises where individuals do not have enough information to translate preferences into a vote for the best-fit candidate or party (Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997). However, a large and growing literature has drawn attention to the role that the household plays in an individual's political behavior (see, for example, Chhibber, 2002; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006; Gottlieb, 2016; Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023). Where households are sites of bargaining and family members' preferences differ, those with higher bargaining power might use it to force their own preferences on other family members, potentially distorting the relationship between an individual's preferences and the way she votes (Manser and Brown, 1980; Prillaman, 2023).

Scholars have posited that women need to be economically empowered and relatively independent from the household in order to participate independently in politics as well (Manser and Brown, 1980). Women's political participation in industrialized countries only started picking up after these places saw large-scale structural changes in the second half of the 20th century that made the household unit less permanent and women's exit options more viable, such as declining marriage rates, rising divorce rates, improving female employment, as well as the public provision of child care and elder care services (Edlund and Pande, 2002; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006; Finseraas et al., 2012). That is also when women started voting distinctly different from men (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Most developing countries have not seen similar systemic shifts. Where the state only provides limited public goods, individuals largely depend on families for welfare improvement, risk mitigation, and social status (Cox and Fafchamps, 2007; Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2007). Accordingly, marriage

rates remain high and divorce rates low in many developing countries, compared to most post-industrial countries (see Appendix Figure A.1). At the same time, households were, on average, larger in size in developing countries (see Appendix Figure A.2; Kramer (2020)). Where women are economically and legally dependent on the household, they might abstain from participation if they assume disagreement with men in their households (Gottlieb, 2016), or voice male policy preferences instead of their own when they do participate (Duverger, 1955; Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023).

But how do we evaluate whether women vote in line with their own preferences, or instead amplify male demands at the ballot box? We argue that most existing studies fall short of actually capturing whether women follow through on their own interests or not. While a few studies conducted in developing countries focus on the general preference for redistribution and taxation (Brulé and Gaikwad, 2021), similar to those conducted in industrialized countries, the bulk of scholarly work instead investigates gender-specific investment priorities. That is, most research from developing countries evaluates *what kind* of government spending women or men favor; not *how much* overall spending or taxation respondents prefer. That makes policy preferences traditionally elicited in developing countries harder to match to specific political parties. It is relatively straightforward that those who prefer higher government spending and more redistribution (usually women) should vote for left-leaning parties and those who favor tax reductions (usually men) should vote for right-leaning parties; these are the metrics commonly employed by scholars of gendered policy preferences in industrialized countries (see, for example, Inglehart and Norris, 2000; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2010; Finseraas et al., 2012).

Yet it is less clear how prioritizing the provision of clean water over investments in roads, for example, should map onto political parties, for several reasons. For one, preferences for specific types of government spending do not correspond to voting along a left-right dimension, which in any case is less prevalent and informative in developing countries (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006). Female and male preferences can therefore not be classified as left-leaning

or right-leaning, and cannot be matched to left-leaning or right-leaning parties. Second, parties in developing democracies often lack stable policy platforms and policy ownership, or “party brands” (Lupu, 2013). That means even the bundles of policies that parties offer are likely to change frequently, and/or might be copied by other parties. Consequently, several (or no) parties might run on a platform of providing clean water as well as better roads. Finally, where linkages between citizens and parties are clientelist instead of programmatic in nature, only the patron-party is likely to provide the household with *any* benefits, while other parties are unlikely to provide any goods or services (Stokes, 2005; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Stokes et al., 2014). Because clientelist mobilization often works at the household level instead of the individual level (Corstange, 2016; Prillaman, 2023), both female and male preferences within the same household are best served by the patron-party; while the same preferences should lead households not mobilized by said patron party to vote for a different party.

In many developing countries, then, it is unclear how gendered policy preferences should map onto vote choice during elections. Gendered policy preferences for different types of public or club goods might rationally translate into votes for the same party, if said party offers both these goods in its policy bundle. Thus, we cannot assume that gendered differences in policy preferences should always lead to differences in vote choice. Conversely, women and men voting for the same party despite gendered differences in policy priorities is not always a sign of a lack of female agency in vote choice (cf. Prillaman, 2023).

We highlight this problem in the context of India, where a recent stark rise in female turnout that is possible only with household support has raised questions about women’s agency in vote choice (Prillaman, 2023). We show that patterns of policy priorities and voting within households evident in previous studies are compatible with an alternate explanation as well. Women voting for the same party as men despite differing policy preferences might, of course, be a sign of a lack of female agency. But the same findings are compatible with an explanation in which several policy priorities map to the same party, and/or where men

and women differ in how they evaluate party competencies. We then propose a measure of preference-consistent voting to evaluate whether intra-household voting patterns actually embody a lack of female agency, and demonstrate its usefulness using novel data from a survey conducted in Delhi.

3 Women’s Voting in India

Over the past two decades, India has witnessed a steep rise in female turnout, with women today voting at the same rates as men (see Appendix Figure A.3). This increase in women’s participation is at least in part driven by household support for female turnout: families, including men, are particularly supportive of women’s turnout, and enable female participation even where women lack the resources to participate on their own (Roscher, 2023). However, this household support is often limited to voting alone, since additional votes benefit the household; and does not extend to other political activities between elections (Prillaman, 2023). These findings have raised questions about the meaning of rising female voting rates: After all, if women are just extensions of their households, their increased turnout will merely amplify male voices that already dominate politics (Prillaman, 2023).

Prior research suggests that women in India have distinct policy preferences from men (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Brulé and Gaikwad, 2021). Nevertheless, households often coordinate on vote choice, either through voluntary cooperation or coercion. In rural Madhya Pradesh, Prillaman (2023) found that husbands and wives differed significantly in their rank ordering of ten local government responsibilities.¹ Women were much more likely than men to name drinking water provision and the construction of toilets as the most important issues, while men were significantly more likely to prioritize the construction of schools and health

¹ The ten local government responsibilities were road construction and maintenance, water provision, schools and education, health and health centers, toilet construction, housing construction, the provision of ration cards (BPL cards), reducing alcoholism, fighting violence against women, and providing Anganwadi (nutritional and educational services to young children) and ASHA (prenatal) services. Respondents were asked to rank all ten options from most important to least important, using picture cards representing each of the issues (Prillaman, 2023, p. 105).

centers (p. 105-107). Yet female and male respondents reported remarkably similar voting patterns in the most recent state elections. Among married couples where both spouses disclosed their vote choice, 63 percent said they had voted for the same party, despite the lack of spousal agreement on local government responsibilities. In neighboring Uttar Pradesh, a study found similar patterns of household disagreement on policy priorities but household coordination on vote choice around the 2022 state elections. The study interviewed both a registered female voter as well as the (usually male) head of her household. In only 37 percent of households did both respondents agree on their highest policy priority; only 36 percent of married couples² agreed. And yet, like in Madhya Pradesh, there is strong evidence that households in Uttar Pradesh coordinate on their vote choice: Of those households that disclosed their vote choice, almost 77 percent reported voting the same party. Among married couples, 75 percent indicated they had cast their votes for the same party (Roscher, 2023).

But does this household coordination on vote choice despite widely differing priorities mean that women did not have agency over their own vote, and instead subordinated their own preferences under men's? That is, did women's votes reflect their own preferences, or rather the priorities of men in the family? We argue that while possible, a lack of agency in vote choice is not the only explanation for these findings. Instead, voting for the same party despite differing preferences is rational when different priorities map to the same party.

Both Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have a long history of clientelism, including ethnic clientelism (Singh et al., 2003; Jaffrelot, 2003; Chandra, 2004; Wilkinson, 2007; Jaffrelot, 2009; Wilkinson, 2014; Heath and Tillin, 2018; Roscher, 2023). In a clientelist setting, particularly an ethnically clientelist setting, parties are most likely to mobilize (mono-ethnic) households as opposed to individuals (Chandra, 2004, 2009; Corstange, 2016; Prillaman, 2023). Each household, then, will have one patron-party that is most likely to provide it with the desired private and club goods, independent of what exactly members of the household demand. In contexts where ethnic voting is high, women voting for the same party as

² The head of household was most often the sampled woman's father or husband, but in some cases it was the father-in-law or brother as well.

men despite having different policy priorities is not necessarily a sign of lack of agency, but a rational response to ethnic clientelist mobilization.

Yet, other scholars have made the argument that clientelism, and in particular ethnic clientelism, was less potent in Madhya Pradesh than Uttar Pradesh, and that Madhya Pradesh has seen real programmatic policies benefiting the poor and marginalized groups (Pai, 2004; Manor, 2011). But there is no clear mapping of specific development policies to one of the two main parties operating in the state. For example, the Indian National Congress was associated with a range of different development policies, from education (Manor, 2011) to land redistribution and agricultural subsidies (Pai, 2004), while its rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was credited with improving electricity supply, the conditions of roads, the conditions of government schools as well drinking water supply.³ In a context where several development priorities map to the same party, too, men and women voting for the same party despite differing priorities can be rational, and need not be a sign of lack of female agency.

Instead of focusing on vote alignment between men and women to determine female agency over vote choice, we propose a measure for evaluating whether women's votes line up with their expressed preferences. We term this *preference-consistent voting*. A woman's vote is preference-consistent if she votes for the party she believes is most likely to provide the goods and services she prioritizes. We explain how we conceptualize preference-consistent voting in more detail in the next section.

If vote pooling within households documented in other studies is indeed a sign of a lack of women's agency and instead signifies women falsifying their own preferences, then we should see women, on average, exhibiting lower levels of preference-consistent voting than men. That is, if women either voluntarily subsume their own preferences under men's (Khan, 2021) or, taken to the extreme, are coerced into doing so Prillaman (2023), we should see women voting for the parties that men think best serve men's interests, but not vote for the

³ Data come from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies' (CSDS) pre-election survey ahead of the 2023 Madhya Pradesh state elections.

parties that women believe best serve their own interests. In this case, men's vote choice should be preference-consistent, as they are voting according to their expressed interests; but women's should not, since they (are made to) vote in line with men's expressed interests, not in line with their own.

*Hypothesis 1: Women will be **less likely** to vote preference-consistent than men.*

If men indeed vote in line with their stated preferences, while women vote along with men instead of in line with their own priorities, we should see women's vote be preference consistent only in households where men and women agree on policy preferences. By contrast, where men and women disagree, the literature leads us to believe that women should be more likely to falsify their own preferences. It is precisely when policy preferences diverge, and when different parties are associated with these different policy priorities, that individuals with higher bargaining power within the family have the most incentives to want to coordinate with other household members (Prillaman, 2023). That is, in households where women's and men's policy preferences differ, women should be less likely to exhibit preference-consistent voting than in households where women's and men's priorities are aligned.

*Hypothesis 2: Women in households that disagree on policy preferences will be **less likely** to vote in line with their own policy preferences than women in households that agree on policy preferences.*

4 Data & Measurement

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a survey around the 2020 *Legislative Assembly*⁴ in Delhi that interviewed multiple respondents per household. Delhi is the national capital and India's largest urban agglomeration. In 2018, the UN estimated that about 29 million

⁴ Legislative Assemblies in India are state legislatures, elected every 5 years. State governments are constitutionally entrusted with important policy areas in India, including public order, public health and sanitation, and water supply.

people live in Delhi; the city was projected to overtake Tokyo as the world’s largest by 2028.⁵ Delhi is also one of the strongest regional economies in India, contributing nearly 4 percent of India’s GDP.⁶ Our sample is therefore significantly different from previous studies that looked at women’s vote choice in rural Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, respectively (Prillaman, 2023; Roscher, 2023). We address the ways in which our sample selection might affect findings, and whether results might travel to rural India as well, in the discussion.

4.1 Sample

Our survey was conducted in Delhi between February 9 and February 11, 2020, the days immediately following the February 8, 2020 state elections until just around the time results were officially announced.⁷ Households were selected for interviews based on a stratified random sampling procedure. First, in each of Delhi’s 7 *Parliamentary Constituencies* (PCs), 2 *Assembly Constituencies*⁸ (ACs) were randomly selected (for a total of 14 ACs) (see Figure 1). After checking the sampled ACs for representativeness in terms of demographics (i.e., share of Muslims and other minorities that often live segregated and therefore concentrated in only a few parts of the city), 4 polling stations were randomly selected in each AC (for a total of 56 polling stations). For each polling station, 10 registered voters were picked at random from the electoral roll, irrespective of gender. These randomly sampled voters constitute the “Main Respondents” in our survey: They were chosen to be interviewed at random; and by extension, their households were randomly chosen to be included in the survey.

However, other household members interviewed constitute a convenience sample of sorts:

⁵ See 2018 update to the World Urbanization Report.

⁶ See *The Hindu*, March 1, 2024, “Delhi Govt presents Economic Survey”.

⁷ The survey was conducted by Cicero Associates, New Delhi, under the supervision of Dhananjai Joshi. The study protocol was approved by the NYU Abu Dhabi IRB (IRB #: HRPP-2020-25).

⁸ In India, an *Assembly Constituency* is the electoral constituency from which a state legislator (*Member of Legislative Assembly*, MLA) is elected. ACs are nested into *Parliamentary Constituencies* (PCs), which are the electoral constituencies from which a national legislator (*Member of Parliament*, MP) is elected to the lower house of the Indian parliament, the *Lok Sabha*. Delhi, for example, consists of 7 PCs and 70 ACs; each PC contains 10 ACs.

Figure 1: Assembly Constituencies Included in the Survey



additional respondents within each household were surveyed non-randomly. Enumerators tried to interview at least two other people of voting age who were home at the time of the interview and willing to answer questions. This non-randomized element in the sampling procedure is due to feasibility constraints: Household sizes in Delhi are, on average, smaller than in more rural parts of India, making the universe of household members to sample from smaller for each household. People in Delhi are also more likely to work outside (and sometimes far away from) their home than in other parts of the country. Finally, because Delhi is the capital, many people have been surveyed for opinion polls in the past, leading to survey fatigue. All of these factors make random sampling within households harder and increase the chance of non-response, and given the time constraints⁹ we opted for a convenience sample over a fully randomized sample instead.

⁹ The survey was concluded before the announcement of official election results might distort self-reported vote choice answers.

A total of 560 households were randomly selected through this procedure, with a response rate of just under 88 percent (492 out of 560 households). Within each household, we had aimed for 3 interviews; on average, we completed 2.7 interviews, for a response rate of more than 90 percent within households (1342 out of 1476 interviews). Because we are only interested in family units, we excluded all individuals from our survey whose relationship to the Main Respondent was “not related” (N=47) or “other” (N=76).¹⁰ As we are looking at voting behavior, we excluded all respondents who reported not having voted in the Delhi state elections (N=171). Because we are interested in intra-household dynamics, we also had to exclude all households with only one respondent (after dropping non-related and non-voting respondents).

This leaves us with a final sample of 920 individuals across 355 households. Table 1 provides summary statistics at the household level for this sample. On average, households scored a 4.5 on a 6-point scale of household assets, making the sample quite middle-class.¹¹ Three-quarters of households owned the house they lived in. Around 86 percent of our sample are Hindu, while just under 6 percent are Muslim; the rest are Sikh (6 percent) or Jain (1.7 percent). About 47 percent of our sample self-identified as belonging to the forward castes, approximately 34 as belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and 20 percent self-identified as Dalit. Importantly, all households reported being ethnically homogeneous, allowing us to hold ethnic identity constant at the household level and instead looking at factors that vary between respondents within the same family when investigating voting behavior and preferences.

Of the 920 individuals in our sample, 478 are men and 442 women. At the individual level, men and women differ on certain dimensions, but not on others, as Table 2 shows. Female

¹⁰ That means we kept all those respondents who indicated being a spouse, child, parent, sibling, aunt or uncle to the Main Respondent.

¹¹ We asked respondents whether the household owned any of the following items: a fridge, a television, a washing machine, a computer or laptop, an air conditioner, and access to the internet. We coded each asset as 1 if someone in the family said the asset was available to the household; and as 0 otherwise. We then summed all six indicators into a single asset index that ranges from 0 to 6. Households were most likely to own a TV and least likely to own an air conditioner.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for Households

N Households	355
Share Hindu	0.8648
Share Muslim	0.0592
Share Upper Caste	0.4676
Share OBC	0.3380
Share Dalit	0.1859
Mean N Assets (of 6)	4.47
Share Owning House	0.7534
Avg No Respondents/HH	2.59
Avg No Female Respondents/HH	1.25

and male respondents are similar in age: the average age for female respondents was 42 years, while that for male respondents was 41.3 years; the difference is not statistically significant. Literacy rates in our sample were very high, with 93 percent of men and 89 percent of women having received *any* formal schooling in their lives. The difference is statistically significant ($p=.099$). Looking at the highest level of education achieved, women were slightly more likely to have stopped schooling after 10th grade than men (19.7 percent vs. 16.5 percent), and slightly less likely to have finished high school by passing 12th grade than men (25.1 percent vs. 28 percent), although neither difference is statistically significant.¹² However, men were substantively and significantly more likely to have received education beyond high school, with 34.3 percent having higher education compared to 20.6 percent of women ($p<.001$). At 77 percent, men were also much more likely to be in paid employment than women (44 percent, $p<.001$). By contrast, when they worked, women and men reported comparable incomes, with an average close to 28,000 Indian Rupees (≈ 335 USD) per month.

We found only minor gender differences along most dimensions of political knowledge. More than 94 percent of women and 93 percent of men were able to correctly name their local municipal councilor.¹³ Similarly, 88 percent of female and 86 percent of male respondents

¹² Notably, having finished high school (“12th pass” in India) opens up many more job opportunities compared to having finished only 10 years of schooling (“10th pass” in India), or being a high school drop out.

¹³ However, one area of Delhi where the study was conducted, Delhi Cantonment, did not fall under the

Table 2: Individual-Level Summary Statistics for Full Sample

	Women	Men	Difference	P-Value
N	442	478		
Avg Age	42.05	41.32	0.73	0.4447
Share Literate	0.8937	0.9268	-0.0331	0.0999
Share 10th Pass	0.1968	0.1653	0.0316	0.2469
Share 12th Pass	0.2511	0.2803	-0.0292	0.3542
Share Higher Education	0.2059	0.3431	-0.1372	0.0000
Share Job	0.4367	0.7699	-0.3332	0.0000
Avg Income	28045	28244	-199	0.9712
Share Knows Local Councillor	0.9450	0.9320	0.0130	0.9083
Share Knows MLA	0.8824	0.8619	0.0204	0.4082
Share Knows MP	0.8597	0.9017	-0.0419	0.0622
Share Owns Phone	0.8824	0.9498	-0.0674	0.0003
Share Campaign Contact	1	1	0	
N Distinct Campaign Contacts	1.57	1.62	-0.06	0.3894

correctly identified their state representative (Member of Legislative Assembly, MLA). Neither difference is statistically significant. However, significantly more men (90 percent) than women (86 percent) knew the name of their national representative (Member of Parliament, MP) ($p=.06$). Men were also significantly more likely to own a phone than women, at 95 percent compared to 88 percent ($p<.001$). By contrast, every single respondent recalled at least one canvassing visit from any political party to their house during the election campaign, meaning that 100 percent of our sample was exposed to campaign contact ahead of the elections. Even when we look at the number of distinct campaign contacts that respondents recalled, that is, the number of different parties that canvassed the household, men and women were similarly mobilized: women, on average, recalled 1.57 campaign visits, while men reported 1.62; the difference is substantively small and statistically not significant. This is in line with research that shows that party organization in Delhi includes many women in their rank and file who, in turn, are likely to canvass female voters (Goyal, 2020).

In order to test Hypothesis 2, we need to be able to compare women and men within the

Municipal Corporation of Delhi at the time, and therefore did not elect a local councillor. Respondents living in this area were excluded when calculating the share of correct answers.

same household. To that end, we construct dyads of respondents within the same household for which we have strong behavioral expectations based on the literature. Specifically, we compare a) female-male pairs within the same household, independent of their familial relationship; b) married couples within the same household; c) female-female pairs within the same household; and d) male-male pairs within the same household. First, we identify households where we interviewed at least one male and one female family member, so as to compare **male-female pairs** within a household. In households where more than one woman (man) was interviewed within a single household, we selected the most junior (most senior) woman (man) interviewed for the comparison.¹⁴ By selecting respondents in this way, we are constructing “most-likely cases” to find support for our hypotheses on women’s agency since the literature posits that younger women should have the least agency within the household, while older males should have the most agency (Jacobson and Wadley, 1977; Prillaman, 2023). By comparing the youngest female and oldest male respondent within the same household, we therefore should find the most pronounced gender differences within our sample. Among our total sample of 355 households, 271 households had at least one male and at least one female respondent. Appendix Table A.1b presents summary statistics for the male-female dyads. As expected based on our selection criteria, the average age of men (46 years) is significantly higher than that of women (40 years). Men are also significantly more likely to be employed (79.7 percent) compared to women (46.9 percent, $p < .001$).

Secondly, we look at the subsample of **married couples**. We surveyed a total of 136 couples. We single out married couples as a meaningful unit within the larger household unit because between spouses, the literature suggests that husbands should have more agency over their vote choice, and that wives’ political behavior should be most likely to be influenced by their spouse (Chhibber, 2002; Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023). Appendix Table A.1b presents individual-level summary statistics for husbands and wives separately. Again, husbands in

¹⁴ Note that seniority is relative to other family members of the same gender, not to the respondent of the other gender: we selected the most junior women if there were two or more women interviewed, and the most senior man if there were two or more men interviewed. However, the selected female may still be older than the selected male respondent.

our sample tend to be older on average (48 years) than wives (45 years) ($p=.12$). Husbands also are more likely to have received higher education, with more than 28 percent having studied past 12th grade compared to only a little over 16 percent of wives ($p=.02$). Men in this subsample are also more likely to be employed than wives, at 83 percent compared to 41 percent for women ($p<.001$).

Next, we construct **female-female pairs** within the same household. In households where we interviewed two women, we compare the most junior female respondent with the most senior female respondent. Our sample contains a total of 120 of these dyads. The literature suggests that younger women are less likely to have agency over their own political participation than older women, particularly in India where patri-locality means that newly married (young) women usually move into their husband's family home where they have little say as a newcomer (Jacobson and Wadley, 1977; Dube, 1997; Anukriti et al., 2020). Appendix Table A.1c shows summary statistics for these female dyads. As intended, senior females in the pair are substantively and statistically significantly older (49 years) than junior females (34 years). By contrast, junior women are more likely to have received higher education than more senior women, with 25.8 percent of younger females having studied past 12th grade compared to 25.8 percent of senior women ($p=.08$).

Finally, we construct **male-male pairs** within the same household. In households where we interviewed two men, we compare the most junior and most senior male respondent. Our sample contains 134 such dyads. We expect that men should be more likely than women to exhibit preference-consistent voting, and less likely than women to falsify their own preferences. However, more junior men might have less say over their own voice than more senior men within the same family (Prillaman, 2023). As intended, junior males in these dyads are substantively and statistically significantly younger than older males, at 32 compared to 48 years ($p<.0001$). Younger men in these pairs are more likely to have received higher education: 43 percent completed some form of education past 12th grade, compared to only 31 percent among the more senior males ($p=.058$).

4.2 Measurement

Preference-Consistent Voting

Hypothesis 1 posits that women are less likely to exhibit preference-consistent voting behavior. The concept of preference-consistent voting warrants further explanation. Preference-consistent voting focuses on the *internal consistency* of each individual's vote choice, that is, whether the vote is in alignment with expressed policy priorities. I.e., if a voter says she cares most about clean water, then a preference-consistent vote should go to the party she expects to provide her with clean water. Whether a vote is preference-consistent, therefore, depends on whether it accurately reflects a woman's own preferences, as opposed to, say, reflecting her husband's preferences instead. A woman's vote can be preference-consistent and still go to the same party her husband votes for, as long as she voted for said party *for good reason*, i.e., based on her own stated preferences. One major concern with regard to women's agency in vote choice is that women who (are made to) voice male preferences instead of their own might in effect *hurt* their own interests by making it more likely that the male preferences are heard, while their own demands go unnoticed and, consequently, unserved (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023). Preference-consistent voting, then, precludes such a scenario in which women hurt their own interests: a preference-consistent vote aligns with a woman's own interests.

Preference-consistent voting is also *subjective*: it is based on a voter's own assessment of different parties' platforms and competencies. A woman who prefers clean water votes in a preference-consistent manner if she votes for the party she *believes* is most likely to provide her with the goods and services she desires. This is different from Lau and Redlawsk (1997)'s conception of "correct voting," which evaluates whether an individual votes for the candidate whose actual policy platform (as evaluated by an expert judge panel) lines up with her expressed preferences. We do not claim an objective measure of the "best choice" for a woman, given her preferences. That is, we do not evaluate whether the party she thinks is

best at providing clean water actually has a track record of providing clean water; promises clean water in its policy platform; or otherwise qualifies as the most likely contender to provide clean water. Instead, we rely on the *voter's assessment* of the party's competency, for several reasons. For one, as mentioned before, policy platforms in developing countries are often less stable (Lupu, 2013), and party manifestos are often not informative or reliable (Chandra, 2004), meaning an “objective” measure of a party’s likelihood to provide any one specific public or club good would be difficult to generate ex-ante.¹⁵ Second, in the real world voters’ information about political parties is generally limited, and they take decisions based on the limited information they have, not based on objective facts (Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997; Bleck and Michelitch, 2018). Given that our goal is to evaluate if a woman’s vote choice is internally consistent, what matters most to us is whether her vote choice makes sense given the information she has, rather than whether it was objectively the best choice.

Importantly, the concept of preference-consistent voting is agnostic with regard to whether a woman’s stated priorities are somehow “in her best interest” (see Khan, 2017). Other scholars have argued that the formation of women’s preferences in and of itself might already be a product of patriarchy. Because of women’s bargaining power is, on average, lower than men’s, their choice sets are constrained. That is, women might only consider a limited number of options, issue domains, or goals when forming their preferences because others seem out of their reach. These “adaptive preferences,” however, would change if women were free from patriarchal constraints (Khader, 2011). Yet evaluating whether women’s preferences were formed freely is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, we take women’s distinct preferences – often driven exactly by their gendered life realities – as our starting point, and investigate whether women are able to express these specific priorities during elections.

To construct the variable *preference-consistent voting*, we analyze whether respondents’ self-reported vote choice in the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections lines up with their expressed

¹⁵ That is true even more so where clientelism, rather than programmatism, determines the provision of public and club goods.

preferences. We draw on several different pieces of information from the survey, including a) respondents' policy priorities, that is, which potential government responsibilities they prioritize; b) respondents' evaluation of party competencies, i.e., which party they think would be best at dealing with different types of potential government responsibilities; and c) respondents' vote choice. From this information, we create our variable of interest, *preference-consistent voting*.

First, we looked at respondents' stated policy priorities. Respondents were asked what potential government responsibility they thought should be the incoming government's highest priority, among a list of 7 distinct responsibilities. The exact question wording was: "According to you what should be the priority for the next party that forms the government in Delhi?" The answer options, read out loud to respondents, were: affordable health care, improvement in schools and colleges for better education, provision of public facility such as food subsidy, prevention and regulation of traffic jams on roads, improvement of the law and order situation, bettering public transport, or prevention and control of pollution; respondents could also indicate "no preference."

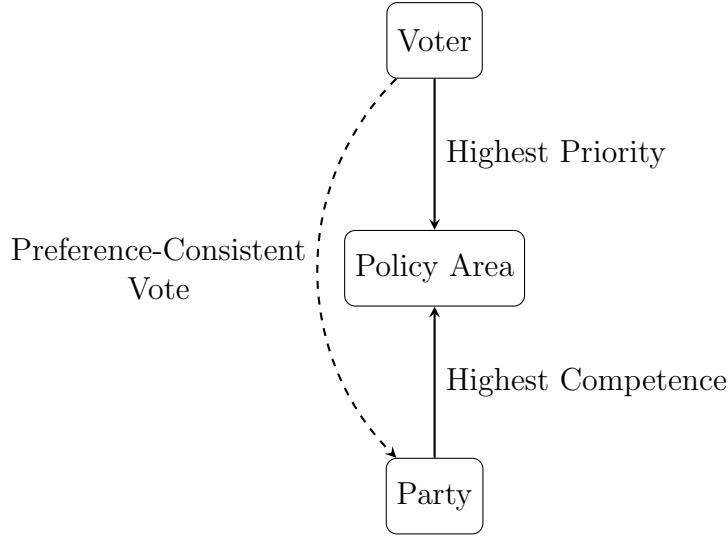
Next, we looked at respondents' beliefs about party competencies. A battery of questions asked participants which party they thought was best at dealing with a range of potential government responsibilities, from improving education to maintaining law and order to providing electricity.¹⁶

Finally, we use respondents' stated vote choice. All respondents who said they had voted in the most recent election were asked which party they had voted for. In order to minimize social desirability bias, and in-keeping with common practice, respondents were asked to indicate their vote choice using a touchscreen tablet. The display showed the exact candidates and parties that had just run for election, and respondents were asked to indicate whom they had voted for by tapping the appropriate icon on the touch screen.¹⁷

¹⁶ Importantly, this question was asked before respondents were asked about their personal policy priorities.

¹⁷ However, despite the option to privately indicate whom they had voted for, about half of all respondents in our sample chose to verbally state their vote choice instead of discretely using the touch screen.

Figure 2: The Logic of Preference-Consistent Voting



A respondent's vote is *preference-consistent* if and only if she votes for the party that she believes to be most competent in the issue area she cares most about (see Figure 2). The variable *preference-consistent voting* takes the value of 1 if a respondent voted for the party that was her logical choice given her stated highest policy priority; and 0 otherwise. We coded all respondents that answered “don't know” to the question about party competencies as 0 as well. The reason is simply that if a respondent does not know which party would be best at dealing with her policy priorities, she cannot have consciously voted in line with her policy priorities.

However, this measure comes with some caveats. We did ask respondents which party they thought was most effective at handling a range of issues; but these do not perfectly match to the policy priorities that respondents could name. Of the 7 distinct priorities that respondents could name as the next government's top priority – namely health care, education, subsidies (such as ration cards), traffic, law and order, public transport, or pollution – we can only match 5 to issues associated with specific parties. Appendix Table A.2 shows how policy priorities and party competencies were matched up. The policy priorities of regulation of traffic and improvement of public transport have no corresponding questions that matches them to party competencies. We coded all those who said the next government's

priority should be traffic management (7.2 percent of respondents) or improvement of public transport (2.6 percent) as not having voted in line with their preferences. However, results do not change if we instead code those respondents as having voted consistently with their preferences.

Political (Dis)Agreement Within Households

To test Hypothesis 2, we conceptualize political agreement within the same household. Recall that we compare four distinct types of respondent pairs from our data to explore political agreement and agency in vote choice within the household: female-male pairs, where we chose the youngest interviewed woman and the oldest interviewed man in a household; married couples; female-female pairs that compare the most junior and the most senior female interviewed within the same household; and male-male pairs that compare the most junior and most senior male interviewed. For each dyad, we code whether the two respondents agreed on their policy priorities. The variable *Agree Priorities* is an indicator variable that takes the value 1 if both respondents named the same issue as their highest priority; and 0 otherwise. We coded all those who did not name *any* policy priority as 0 as well. The reason for this decision is simply that dyads where one person has no opinion on government priorities cannot possibly agree on their priorities. Conversely, if other family members have weak or no policy priorities, they should have no incentives to compel household members to vote along with them.

5 Results

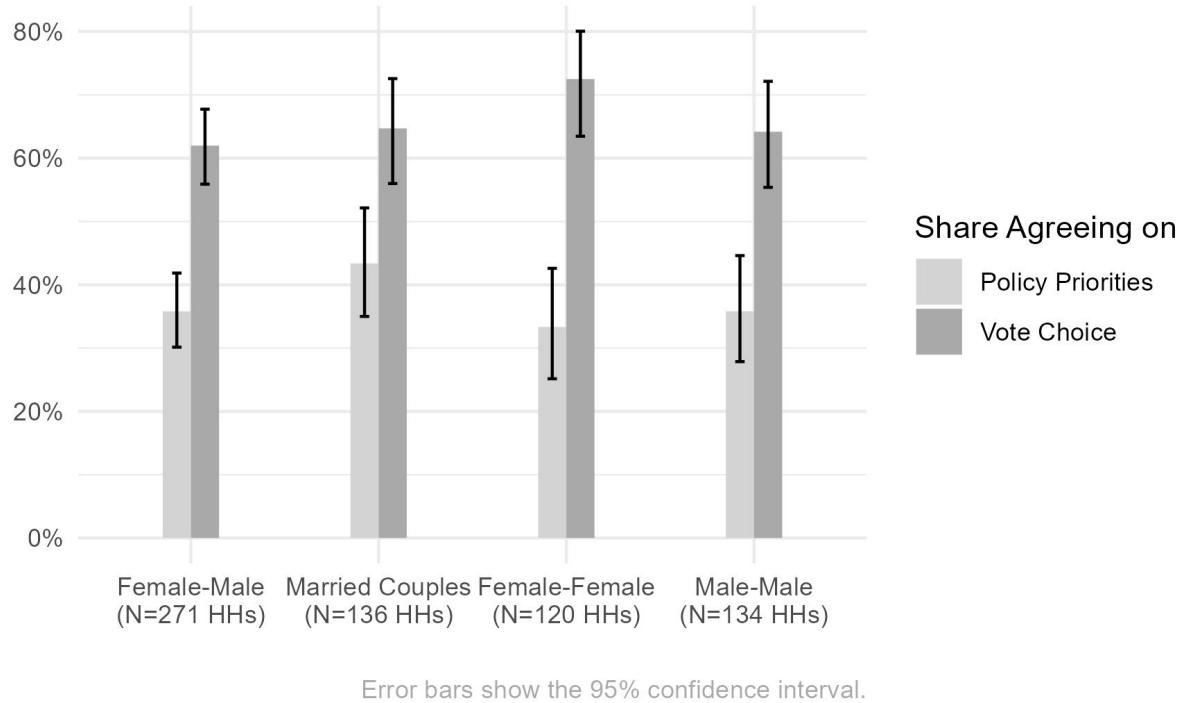
5.1 Descriptives

In line with other studies that look at the household (Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023; Roscher, 2023), we find that members of the same family often differ in their policy priorities. Among the four distinct types of dyads within households that we compare only a minority agrees

on policy priorities. For each dyad, we checked whether both respondents named the same issue as the incoming government's top priority. As the lightgrey bars in Figure 3 show, only about one-third (36 percent) of female-male respondent pairs named the same issue. Among married couples, a little over 43 percent prioritized the same issue. Among the female-female pairs, one-third (33 percent) agreed, while 36 percent concurred among the male-male pairs.

And yet, strikingly, the majority of these dyads voted together. As the darkgrey bars in Figure 3 show, more than 60 percent of pairs voted for the same party across the board, with mostly minor variation across female-male pairs (62 percent), husband-wife pairs (65 percent), female-female pairs (72 percent), and male-male pairs (64 percent). If only one-third of dyads agree on policy priorities, but two-thirds of dyads vote together, this indeed raises the specter that one member of the pair might falsify their preferences. We investigate this further by analyzing preference-consistent voting.

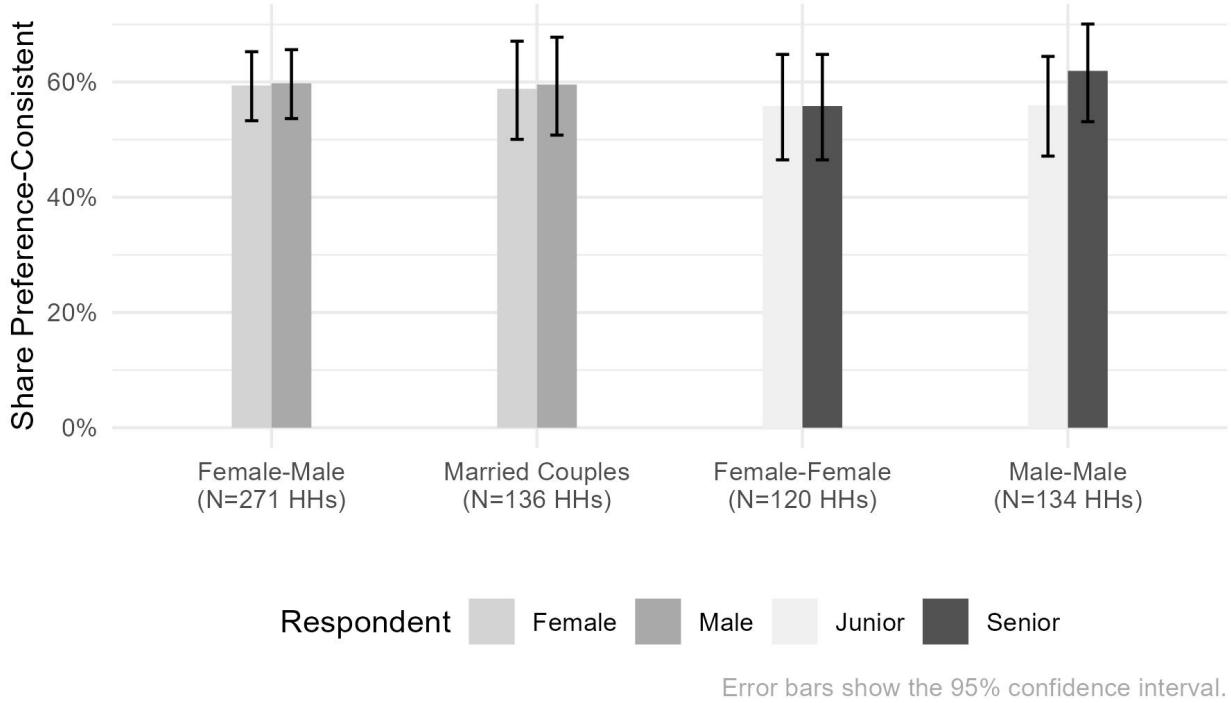
Figure 3: Intra-Household (Dis)Agreement on Highest Policy Priority and Vote Choice



5.2 Analysis

Hypothesis 1 posits that women, on average, will be less likely than men to vote in line with their stated preferences. Figure 4 visualizes the share of respondents, by gender or seniority, who voted preference-consistent across the four distinct subsamples that compare within-household pairs. Overall, close to 60 percent of respondents voted for the party they thought was best at dealing with their highest policy priority. Importantly, women were *no less likely than men* to exhibit preference-consistent voting.

Figure 4: Preference-Consistent Voting Within Households



We test Hypothesis 1 more rigorously using OLS regression, estimating the following model:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta Female_i + \gamma Z_i + \epsilon, \quad (1)$$

where Y_i is the outcome of interest, that is, an indicator for preference-consistent voting that takes the value of 1 if individual i voted consistent with their preferences and 0 otherwise;

$Female_i$ is an indicator for whether the respondent is female or not; and Z_i is a vector of covariates, namely employment, education, political knowledge, and age. Because sampling was clustered at the household level and we interviewed multiple respondents within each household, we calculate robust standard errors clustered at the household level. Here, β is the coefficient of interest.

Table 3 presents results for the full sample, as well as for the dyadic subsamples that include men and women, that is, the male-female pairs and married couples in our sample. The coefficient on $Female$, an indicator for whether the respondent is female or not, is statistically indistinguishable from zero across all specifications. That means that gender does not predict preference-consistent voting in our data: women were just as likely as men to vote in a manner that is consistent with their expressed preferences, even when controlling for factors such as employment, education, political knowledge, or age.

For each of the three samples – the full data, male-female pairs, as well as husband-wife pairs – we present first a simple model that only regresses the outcome variable on gender. The next column then adds control variables to the specification that should reasonably affect whether a respondent votes in line with her stated preferences. *Working*, an indicator variable for whether a respondent is currently working for income or not, is statistically significantly correlated with preference-consistent voting only in the full sample (column 2), but not when we confine ourselves to male-female pairs (column 4) or married couples (column 6). However, the relationship between employment and preference-consistent voting is driven by men, not women: when we run the analysis separately for female and male respondents in the full sample, the coefficient is indistinguishable from zero for women but positive and statistically significant for men (see Appendix Table A.3). That means employed men are more likely to vote in line with their stated preferences, while there is no difference between employed and unemployed women. This result is surprising, given the emphasis in the literature on paid employment as the strongest predictor of women’s intra-household bargaining power and, consequently, their independent vote choice (Iversen and Rosenbluth,

Table 3: OLS Regression Results Preference-Consistent Voting

	Dependent variable:					
	Preference-Consistent Voting (0/1)					
	Full Sample	Male-Female Pairs	Married Couples	(4)	(5)	(6)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female (0/1)	-0.002 (0.030)	0.026 (0.033)	-0.004 (0.037)	0.017 (0.043)	-0.007 (0.060)	-0.015 (0.066)
Working (0/1)		0.080** (0.037)		0.054 (0.049)		-0.018 (0.071)
Edu: 1-4 Yrs		0.132 (0.110)		0.237* (0.127)		-0.017 (0.187)
Edu: 5-7 Yrs		0.158* (0.081)		0.113 (0.107)		-0.135 (0.148)
Edu: 8-9 Yrs		0.174** (0.080)		0.069 (0.096)		-0.095 (0.141)
Edu: 10th Pass		0.100 (0.068)		0.086 (0.087)		-0.196 (0.120)
Edu: 12th Pass		0.170*** (0.065)		0.149* (0.081)		0.008 (0.110)
Edu: Tertiary		0.109 (0.068)		0.116 (0.084)		-0.139 (0.117)
Pol Knowledge Index (0-1)		0.095 (0.070)		0.149* (0.087)		0.024 (0.125)
Age (in yrs)		-0.0001 (0.001)		0.0004 (0.002)		0.001 (0.002)
Observations	920	920	542	542	272	272
Residual Std. Error	0.494	0.491	0.492	0.490	0.493	0.495

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Clustered robust standard errors in parentheses.

2006, 2010). The reason might be that in our sample, paid work correlates statistically significantly with education for women, but not for men: women are much more likely to work when they have at least graduated high school, and even more so if they have tertiary education (see Appendix Figure A.7 and Table A.6). At low levels of education, however, women are unlikely to work. For men, however, education plays a much smaller role in their work status. Education, therefore, might already be capturing a lot of the variation for women, but not for men.

Education, in turn, is positively and statistically significantly associated with preference-consistent voting, at least in some specifications. Compared to the baseline category of having received no formal schooling at all, having different levels formal education means a respondent is considerably more likely have voted in line with their preferences in the full sample. This is intuitively plausible, given that education should ease the information cost associated with not just determining personal policy preferences, but also with evaluating party competencies and matching personal preferences to those. This relationship is weaker when we compare male-female pairs, and disappears when comparing married couples. The effect of education is stronger for women than for men (see Appendix Table A.3). Importantly, we observe the strongest relationship between education and preference-consistent at low levels of education (see Appendix Figure A.8).

Political Knowledge is associated with a higher likelihood of preference-consistent voting, although the coefficient does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance for all specifications. Finally, *Age*, measured in years, is not associated with preference-consistent voting. This result does not change when we use an indicator for whether a respondent is above 40 years of age or below. This stands in contrast to findings from rural India, where older respondents of both genders were more likely to report they had more agency over their vote (Prillaman, 2023).

We next look at whether household disagreement affects preference-consistent voting. Hypothesis 2 posits that women should be less likely to vote in line with their stated preferences when they disagree with a man in their household on policy priorities. We compare the share of respondents voting preference-consistent in pairs that agree on priorities to the share voting preference-consistent in pairs that disagree. Table 4 shows results, including p-values for two-proportion z-tests. As panel 4a shows, in our largest sample, the male-female pairs, women are just as likely to vote in line with their stated preferences when they disagree with the male respondent (59.2 percent) as when they agree (59.79 percent). By contrast, men are *more likely* to vote in line with their expressed priorities when they disagree with the

female respondent (63.79 percent) than when they agree (52.58 percent); the difference is statistically significant ($p < .1$). Wives are less likely to vote in line with their stated preferences when they disagree with their husbands (54.55 percent) than when they agree (64.41), although the difference is not statistically significant (panel 4b). Comparing junior women and senior women within the same household (panel 4c), and junior men and senior men within the same household (panel 4d) produces similar results: junior respondents were just as likely to vote in line with their stated priorities when they disagreed with a senior family member of the same gender as when they agreed. These results hold when we run regressions that control for education, employment, political knowledge, and age (Appendix Table A.5). We therefore find no evidence in support of Hypothesis 2.

Table 4: Preference-Consistent Voting by Household (Dis)Agreement

(a) Female-Male

Share Voting Preference-Consistent Among	In HHs That		Difference	P-Value
	Agree	Disagree		
Females	59.79	59.20	0.60	1.00
Males	52.58	63.79	-11.22	0.09

(b) Married Couples

Share Voting Preference-Consistent Among	In HHs That		Difference	P-Value
	Agree	Disagree		
Females	64.41	54.55	9.86	0.33
Males	59.32	59.74	-0.42	1.00

(c) Female-Female

Share Voting Preference-Consistent Among	In HHs That		Difference	P-Value
	Agree	Disagree		
Junior Females	55.00	56.25	-1.25	1.00
Senior Females	60.00	53.75	6.25	0.65

(d) Male-Male

Share Voting Preference-Consistent Among	In HHs That		Difference	P-Value
	Agree	Disagree		
Junior Males	64.58	51.16	13.42	0.19
Senior Males	62.50	61.63	0.87	1.00

5.3 The Missing Link: Party Evaluations

We started our investigation arguing that researchers should not rely on the assumption that differences in policy priorities should automatically lead to differences in vote choice. Indeed, we posit that rather than a lack of female agency in vote choice, it is differences in party evaluations that explain the patterns of low agreement on policy priorities but high agreement on vote choice evident in Figure 3. Two points are important here: first, several policy competencies map to the same party in our sample; and second, family members disagree on party competencies.

First, on average, respondent only named between 1 and 2 parties as most competent across the 7 policy areas they were asked about. That means that respondents considered the same party most competent across a number of different policy areas (Appendix Figure A.4). If the average respondent believes the same party is best at dealing with a number of different policy priorities, then it is perfectly rational that respondents who prioritize different public goods might still end up voting for the same party.

Second, within households, there is considerable disagreements on which party is most competent in different areas: on average, only about two-thirds of dyads agreed on which party was most competent in any one policy area (see Appendix Figure A.6).¹⁸ This household disagreement on party competencies has implications for how household (dis)agreement on policy priorities should translate into voting patterns at the household level: two family members might agree on policy priorities, but differ in whom they believe most competent at delivering in this policy area, leading to diverging vote choice. Alternatively, they might have different priorities, yet differ on which party should be best at delivering in these areas, leading to votes for the same party albeit for different reasons.

Overall, our data underscores that the relationship between policy priorities and vote choice is more complex in this setting than previously suggested, and that evaluations of

¹⁸ However, in the aggregate, there are no gender differences in party evaluations across our sample, meaning that a comparable share of men and women considered the same party competent in each policy area (Appendix Figure A.5).

women’s agency in vote choice should go beyond checking for vote pooling at the household level.

6 Discussion & Conclusion

Recent research has raised concerns about women’s agency in vote choice in developing countries, suggesting that men might influence women’s vote or outright coerce them to vote along with male family members (Khan, 2021; Prillaman, 2023). Yet we have argued that researchers cannot conclude that women falsified their preferences merely based on the fact that they vote for the same party as men: women might have distinct reasons for voting for said party that still align with their stated preferences. We develop the concept of *preference-consistent voting*, which evaluates whether women vote for the party they believe to be most competent in the policy area they care most about. Our survey, situated in urban India, interviewed several respondents per household, and separately recorded respondents’ policy priorities; their beliefs about party competencies in different policy areas; and their vote choice.

We found no support for expectations that women should be less likely than men to exhibit preference-consistent voting (Hypothesis 1), or more likely to forego their own preferences when households disagree on policy priorities (Hypothesis 2). Instead, we found that women were just as likely as men to vote in line with their own preferences, with about two-thirds of both genders voting consistently. We also showed that in households that disagreed on policy priorities, women were no less likely to vote in line with their own preferences than they were in households that agreed on priorities. We provide evidence that party evaluations explain the discrepancy between low agreement on policy priorities but high agreement on vote choice: on average, respondents consider the same party most competent across a number of different policy areas; at the same time, family members might disagree on party evaluations. Both factors help explain why household members who disagree on government

priorities end up voting for the same party, as each does so for her own reasons.

Would these findings on preference-consistent voting translate to rural India? There are several theoretical reasons to be skeptical. First, resource endowments differ significantly between urban and rural populations in India. Our analysis suggests that, in line with the literature, education and, to an extent, political knowledge correlate positively with preference-consistent voting. Both educational attainment and political knowledge were much higher in our urban sample than they are, on average, among the rural populations in other studies (Prillaman, 2023; Roscher, 2023). In as much as *some* education seems necessary to facilitate preference-consistent voting, overall rising literacy rates and particularly improving educational attainment for girls might make preference-consistent voting more likely in rural areas going forward as well.

A second concern relates to systematic differences between rural and urban polities. Auerbach and Kruks-Wisner (2020) draw attention to differences in the political geography between urban and rural India. Importantly, they note that party organization in rural India is much weaker than in urban India, which means that “local party workers [...] are scarce in villages but abound in urban settings” (p. 11). This is in line with other recent research that has shown that urban party organizations in Delhi have recruited many more women in the wake of mandatory gender quotas in local government (Goyal, 2023), while women are largely underrepresented among the rank-and-file of more rural party organizations (Gulzar et al., 2024). Where women party activists are better able to reach female citizens – because they enter even gender-segregated spaces that male canvassers cannot – they can improve women’s campaign contacts and, consequently, their political knowledge (Goyal, 2023). Political knowledge should improve women’s ability to evaluate party competencies and to vote in line with their own preferences.

Indeed, we observe much higher levels of campaign mobilization in our sample than studies on rural India have. One-hundred percent of all respondents surveyed recalled at

least one canvassing visit by a political party ahead of the election.¹⁹ That means all women in the sample were contacted by at least one party. Even in mobilization intensity, we do not find significant gender differences. On average, women recalled 1.57 distinct campaign contacts, while men recalled 1.62; the difference is not statistically significant (see Table 2).²⁰ By contrast, the studies in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh found generally lower levels of campaign contact, as well as large gender differences in mobilization Prillaman (2023); Roscher (2023). As Appendix Table A.7 shows, campaign contacts indeed are positively associated with preference-consistent voting for women but not for men, at least in some specifications and sub-samples. In a model using the full sample and adding control variables, women were more likely to vote in line with their preferences the more distinct campaign contacts they reported: an increase in campaign contacts meant a higher likelihood of voting in a preference-consistent manner for women, but not for men (column 2). More research is needed to understand the ways in which campaign contacts and party mobilization shape women and men's beliefs about party competencies and, consequently, affect their vote choice.

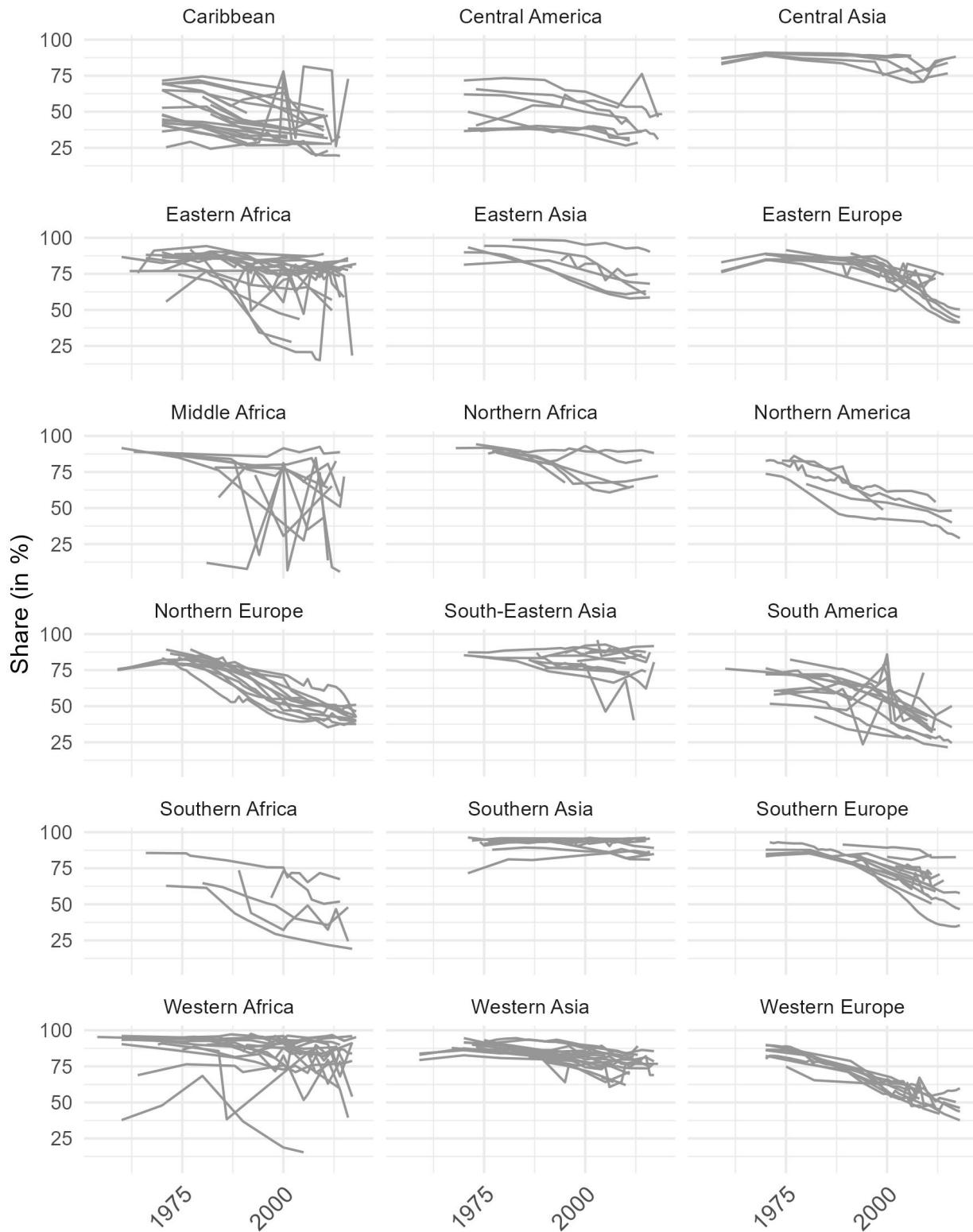
¹⁹ We asked respondents separately whether any party worker from the Congress Party, AAP, BJP, BSP, or any other party had visited their house. The maximum number of distinct party contacts that any one respondent could report, therefore, was 5 (although only 10 respondents reported a visit from any “other” party).

²⁰ Even Goyal (2023), in her study of municipal elections in Delhi, found much lower levels of political mobilization, with just over 65 percent of men and close to 54 percent of women in her sample reporting canvassing visits. The fact that we found much higher levels of party mobilization likely speaks both to the difference that level of government makes as well as to study timing. While Goyal looked at the 2017 municipal elections, we investigated Assembly elections. While local elections are important in India, it is reasonable to assume that parties expend more effort on Assembly elections than on municipal elections because power at the state level comes with access to vast resources (Chandra, 2004; Wilkinson, 2007). Furthermore, the AAP, one of the main contenders in Delhi elections, has its main stronghold in the Delhi Assembly, making performing well in these elections more crucial to the party’s survival. In addition, our survey was conducted between one and three days after the election, while Goyal’s was conducted 18 months after election day, making it more likely that memories of canvassing visits were fresh in our respondents’ minds.

Appendix

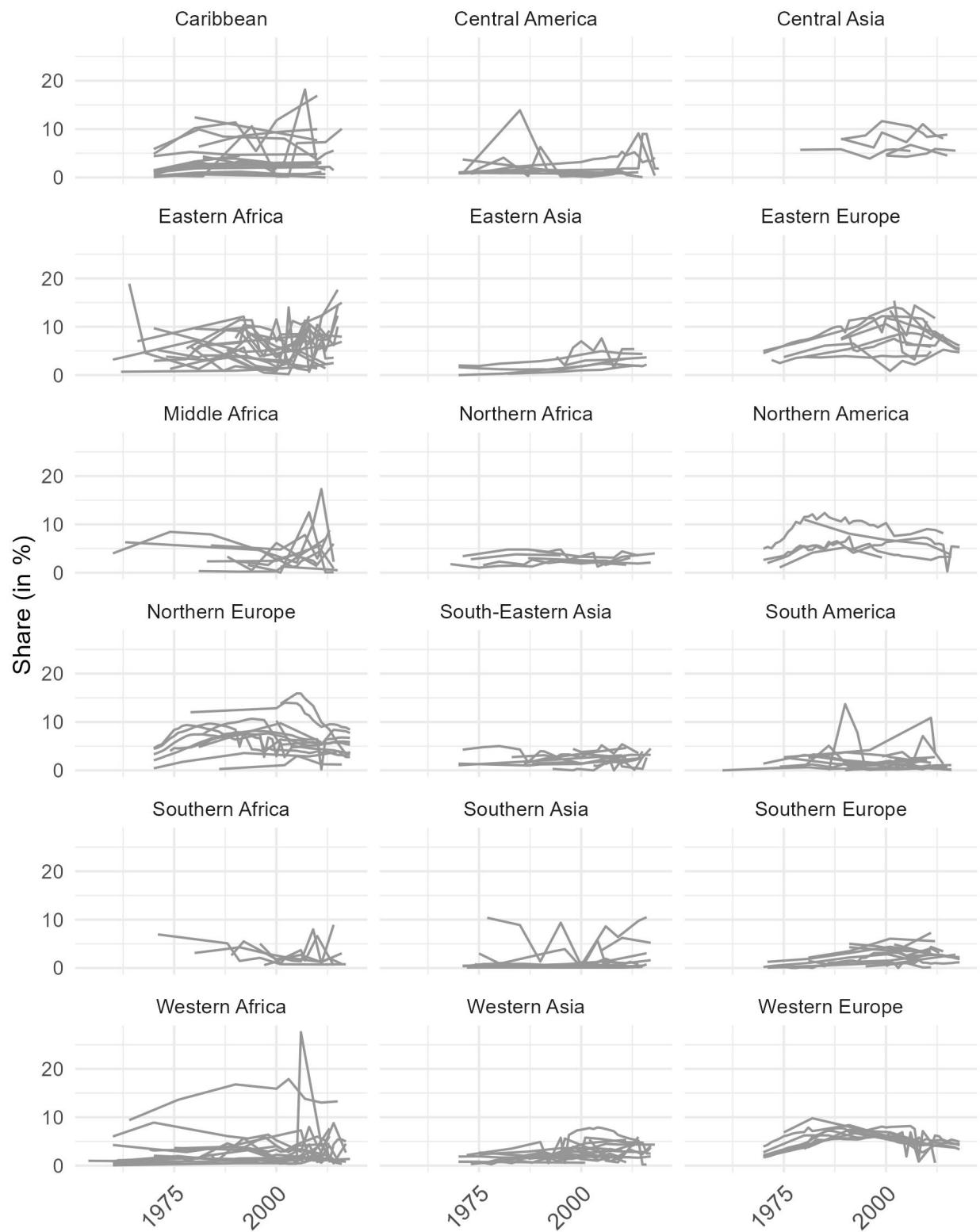
Figure A.1: Marriage and Divorce Rates Worldwide, Women Aged 30 to 34

(a) Share Married



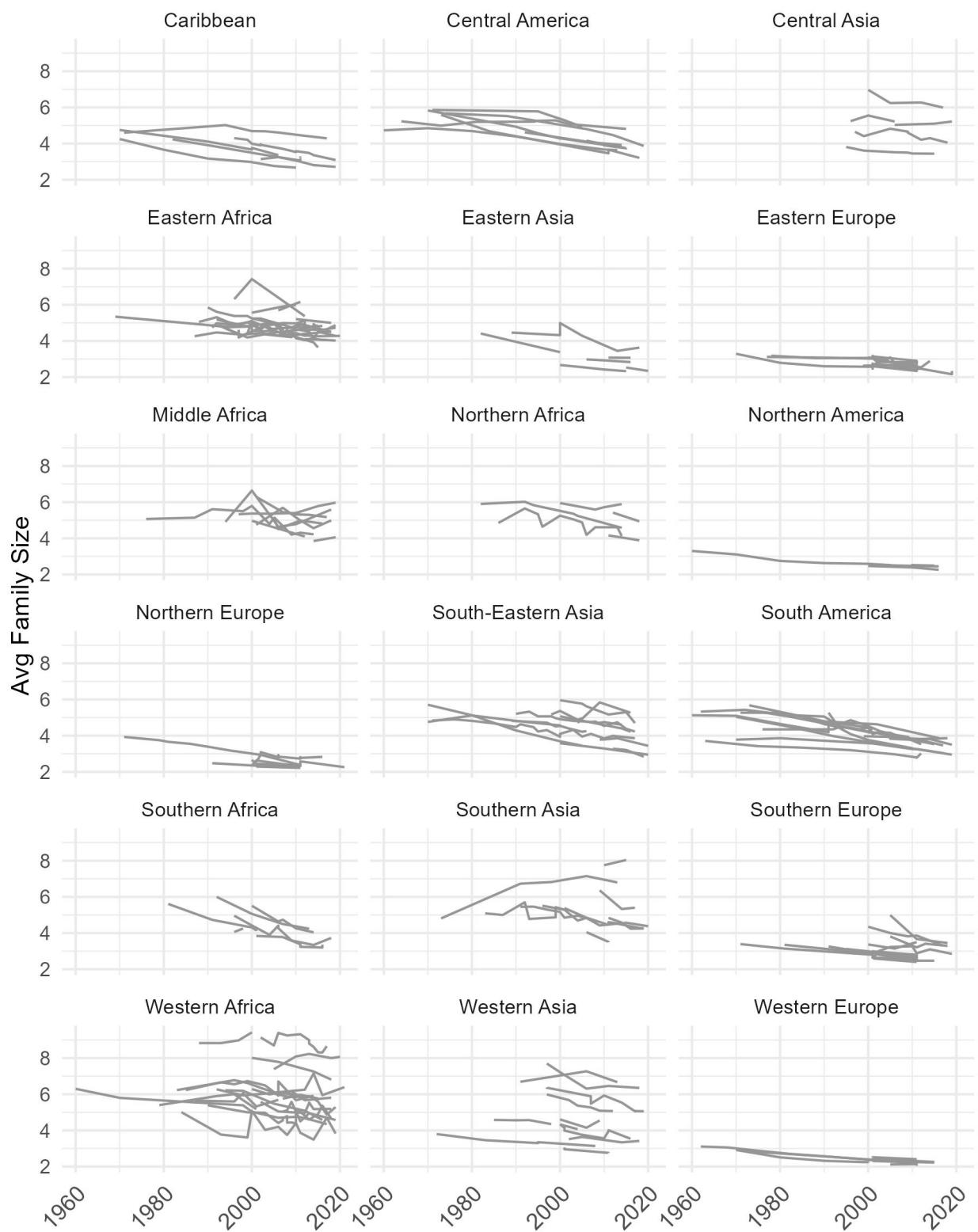
Data Source: World Marriage Data 2019 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

(b) Share Divorced



Data Source: World Marriage Data 2019 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

Figure A.2: Average Household Size Worldwide



Source: Database on Household Size and Composition 2022 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

Figure A.3: Turnout by Gender in National Elections in India

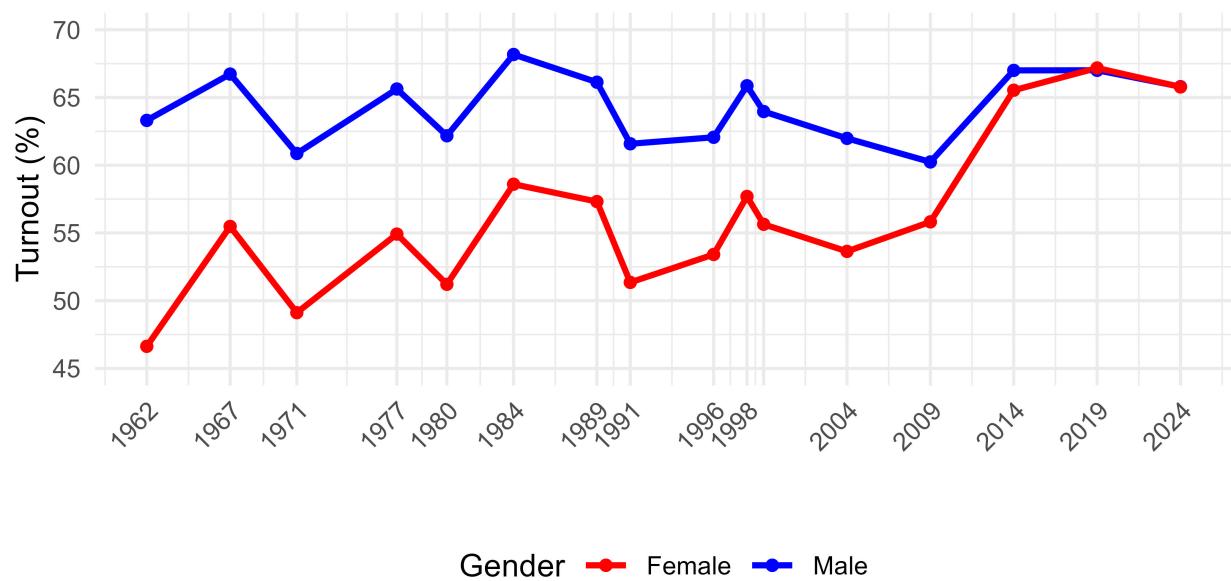


Table A.1: Sample Stats for Distinct Dyads

(a) Male-Female Pairs

	Women	Men	Difference	P-Value
N	271	271		
Avg Age	39.94	45.86	-5.92	0.0000
Share Literate	0.9004	0.9114	-0.0111	0.7686
Share 10th Pass	0.1882	0.1808	0.0074	0.9118
Share 12th Pass	0.2546	0.2804	-0.0258	0.5604
Share Higher Education	0.2251	0.2878	-0.0627	0.1155
Share Job	0.4686	0.7970	-0.3284	0.0000
Avg Income	24970	30717	-5747	0.3015
Share Knows Local Councillor	0.9457	0.9380	0.0078	0.8878
Share Knows MLA	0.8856	0.8598	0.0258	0.4394
Share Knows MP	0.8782	0.9004	-0.0221	0.4937
Share Owns Phone	0.8930	0.9520	-0.0590	0.0160
Share Campaign Contact	1	1	0	
N Distinct Campaing Contacts	1.58	1.59	-0.01	0.9308

(b) Husbands and Wives

	Women	Men	Difference	P-Value
N	136	136		
Avg Age	44.97	47.63	-2.66	0.1180
Share Literate	0.9118	0.9044	0.0074	1.0000
Share 10th Pass	0.1985	0.1838	0.0147	0.8775
Share 12th Pass	0.2794	0.3015	-0.0221	0.7894
Share Higher Education	0.1618	0.2868	-0.1250	0.0200
Share Job	0.4118	0.8309	-0.4191	0.0000
Avg Income	22036	26620	-4584	0.2620
Share Knows Local Councillor	0.9549	0.9323	0.0226	0.6496
Share Knows MLA	0.8971	0.8603	0.0368	0.4576
Share Knows MP	0.9265	0.9338	-0.0074	1.0000
Share Owns Phone	0.9191	0.9632	-0.0441	0.1976
Share Campaign Contact	1	1	0	
N Distinct Campaing Contacts	1.62	1.68	-0.06	0.6366

(c) Female-Female Pairs

	Junior	Senior	Difference	P-Value
N	120	120		
Avg Age	34.08	49.12	-15.03	0.0000
Share Literate	0.8833	0.8583	0.0250	0.7003
Share 10th Pass	0.2000	0.2167	-0.0167	0.8737
Share 12th Pass	0.2667	0.2167	0.0500	0.4509
Share Higher Education	0.2583	0.1583	0.1000	0.0804
Share Job	0.4333	0.3833	0.0500	0.5713
Avg Income	17439	41314	-23875	0.1708
Share Knows Local Councillor	0.9386	0.9561	-0.0175	0.8296
Share Knows MLA	0.9000	0.9083	-0.0083	1.0000
Share Knows MP	0.8583	0.8417	0.0167	0.8565
Share Owns Phone	0.8833	0.8583	0.0250	0.7003
Share Campaign Contact	1	1	0	
N Distinct Campaing Contacts	1.52	1.62	-0.11	0.4043

(d) Male-Male Pairs

	Junior	Senior	Difference	P-Value
N	134	134		
Avg Age	32.62	47.94	-15.32	0.0000
Share Literate	0.9403	0.9254	0.0149	0.8072
Share 10th Pass	0.1493	0.1791	-0.0299	0.6208
Share 12th Pass	0.2910	0.2537	0.0373	0.5831
Share Higher Education	0.4328	0.3134	0.1194	0.0582
Share Job	0.6940	0.8060	-0.1119	0.2116
Avg Income	24180	26192	-2012	0.5411
Share Knows Local Councillor	0.9380	0.9225	0.0155	0.8417
Share Knows MLA	0.8731	0.8284	0.0448	0.3914
Share Knows MP	0.8955	0.9104	-0.0149	0.8365
Share Owns Phone	0.9478	0.9552	-0.0075	1.0000
Share Campaign Contact	1	1	0	
N Distinct Campaing Contacts	1.69	1.60	0.08	0.4947

Table A.2: Matching Policy Priorities to Party Competencies

Policy Priority	Party Competency
better education	improving government schools
affordable health care	improving government hospitals
prevention of pollution	prevention of pollution
law and order	containing corruption, improving women's safety
subsidies	providing electricity, providing water
regulation of traffic	<i>no match</i>
public transport	<i>no match</i>

Table A.3: Regression Results Preference-Consistent Voting, by Gender

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Preference-Consistent Voting (0/1)	
	Women	Men
	(1)	(2)
Working (0/1)	0.063 (0.048)	0.098* (0.054)
Edu: 1-4 Yrs	0.074 (0.140)	0.240 (0.155)
Edu: 5-7 Yrs	0.186* (0.102)	0.123 (0.116)
Edu: 8-9 Yrs	0.211** (0.104)	0.129 (0.123)
Edu: 10th Pass	0.135 (0.090)	0.053 (0.102)
Edu: 12th Pass	0.203** (0.088)	0.127 (0.098)
Edu: Tertiary	0.165* (0.092)	0.056 (0.097)
Pol Knowledge Index (0-1)	0.111 (0.087)	0.076 (0.092)
Age (in yrs)	-0.0003 (0.002)	0.0001 (0.001)
Observations	442	478
Residual Std. Error	0.492	0.494

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Clustered robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table A.4: FE Regression Results Preference-Consistent Voting

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Preference-Consistent Voting (0/1)					
	Full Sample	Male-Female Pairs	Married Couples	(4)	(5)	(6)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female (0/1)	-0.004 (0.032)	0.019 (0.036)	-0.004 (0.037)	0.001 (0.047)	-0.007 (0.052)	-0.003 (0.073)
Working (0/1)		0.094** (0.045)		0.001 (0.065)		-0.047 (0.087)
Edu: 1-4 Yrs		0.006 (0.141)		0.129 (0.203)		0.123 (0.292)
Edu: 5-7 Yrs		0.187* (0.109)		0.075 (0.164)		-0.062 (0.255)
Edu: 8-9 Yrs		0.144 (0.099)		0.154 (0.130)		-0.018 (0.230)
Edu: 10th Pass		0.138* (0.081)		0.112 (0.113)		-0.006 (0.207)
Edu: 12th Pass		0.187** (0.080)		0.149 (0.102)		0.079 (0.177)
Edu: Tertiary		0.044 (0.085)		0.084 (0.106)		-0.017 (0.164)
Pol Knowledge Index (0-1)		-0.097 (0.125)		-0.123 (0.163)		-0.359 (0.239)
Age (in yrs)		-0.002 (0.002)		0.0004 (0.003)		0.007 (0.008)
HH FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	920	920	542	542	272	272

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Clustered robust standard errors in parentheses.

Figure A.4: Number of Policy Competencies by Party

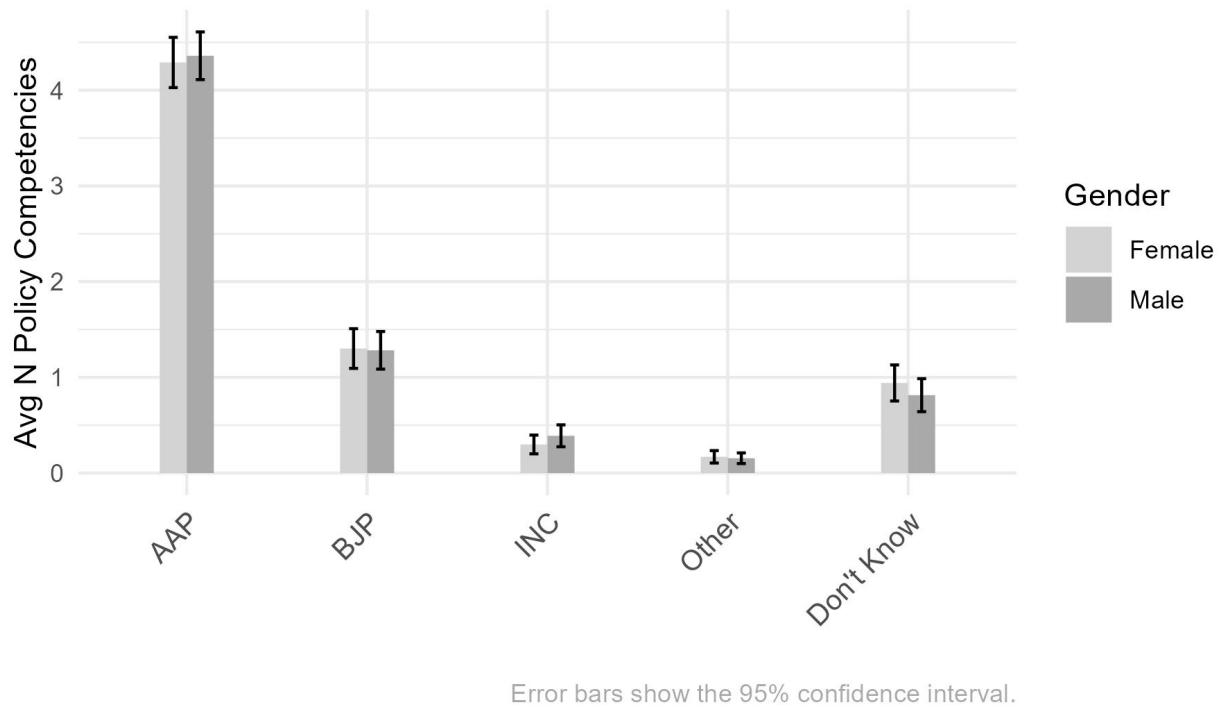


Figure A.5: Evaluations of Party Competencies, by Gender

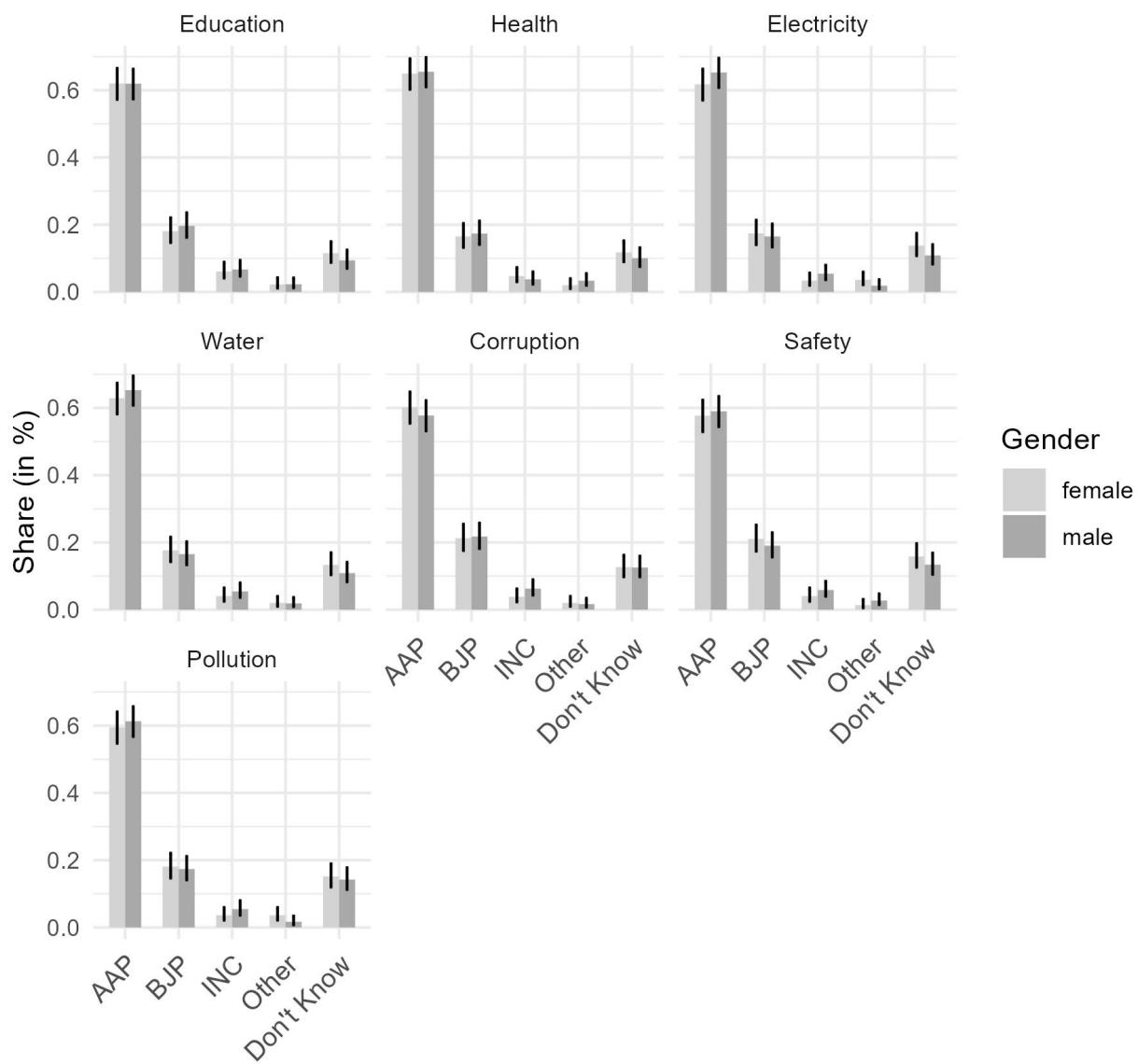
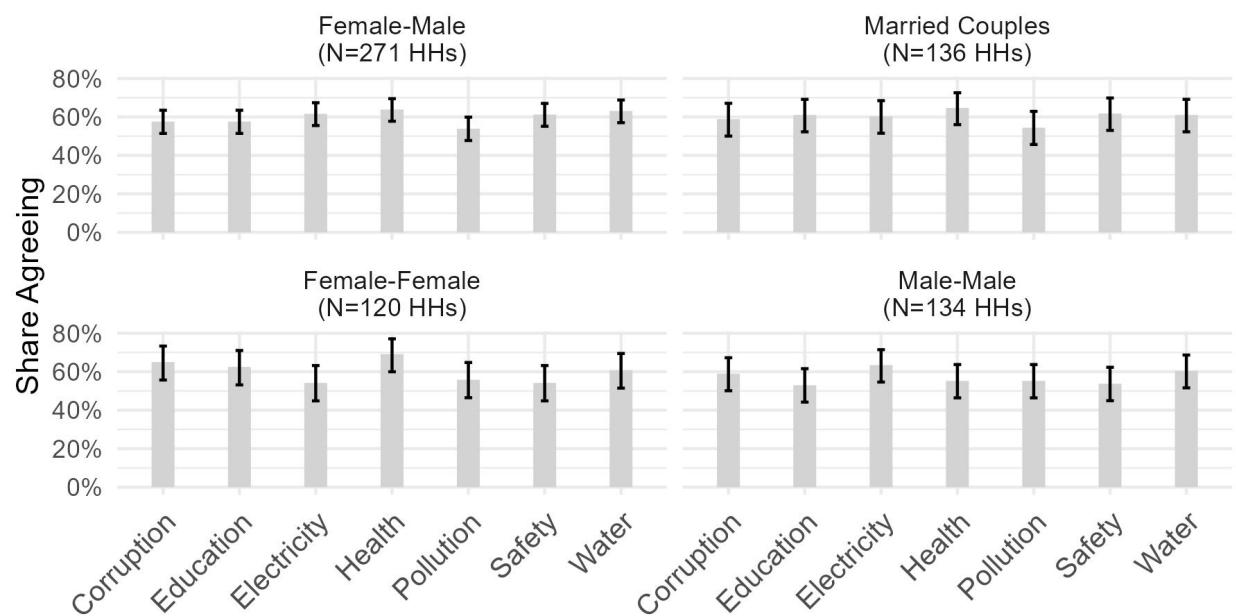


Figure A.6: Household Agreement on Party Competencies



Error bars show the 95% confidence interval.

Table A.5: Regression Results Preference-Consistent Voting and HH Agreement

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Preference-Consistent Voting (0/1)			
	Male-Female	Married Couple	Female-Female	Male-Male
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Agree Priorities (0/1)	−0.093 (0.063)	0.019 (0.087)	0.063 (0.098)	0.031 (0.086)
Female (0/1)	−0.025 (0.055)	−0.063 (0.085)		
Agree Priorities X Female	0.119* (0.072)	0.097 (0.122)		
Junior (0/1)			0.022 (0.092)	−0.105 (0.082)
Agree Priorities X Junior			−0.073 (0.136)	0.094 (0.124)
Working (0/1)	0.053 (0.049)	−0.030 (0.071)	0.078 (0.066)	0.100 (0.071)
Edu: 1-4 Yrs	0.240* (0.126)	0.011 (0.183)	−0.067 (0.182)	0.117 (0.338)
Edu: 5-7 Yrs	0.116 (0.106)	−0.125 (0.147)	0.068 (0.142)	0.358** (0.169)
Edu: 8-9 Yrs	0.074 (0.096)	−0.088 (0.140)	0.211 (0.147)	0.388** (0.168)
Edu: 10th Pass	0.089 (0.086)	−0.197* (0.118)	−0.015 (0.113)	0.413*** (0.130)
Edu: 12th Pass	0.151* (0.080)	0.012 (0.110)	0.124 (0.114)	0.401*** (0.122)
Edu: Tertiary	0.121 (0.083)	−0.140 (0.117)	0.135 (0.119)	0.270** (0.120)
Pol Knowledge Index (0-1)	0.137 (0.086)	0.044 (0.127)	0.199* (0.118)	−0.057 (0.108)
Age (in yrs)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.0003 (0.003)	−0.002 (0.002)
Constant	0.332** (0.137)	0.612*** (0.202)	0.244 (0.194)	0.353* (0.185)
Observations	542	272	240	268

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Clustered robust standard errors in parentheses.

Figure A.7: Education and Working Status

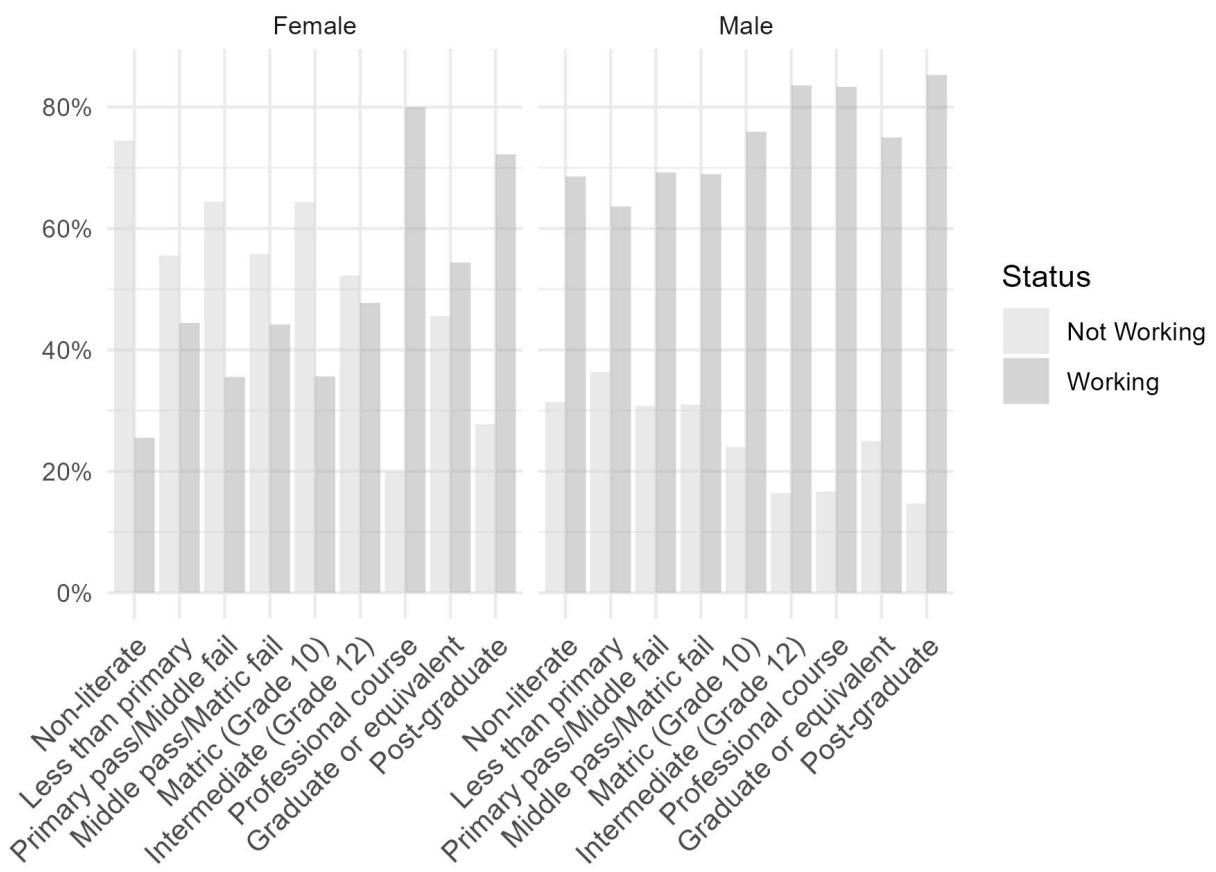


Table A.6: Education and Work Status, by Gender

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Working (0/1)	
	Women	Men
	(1)	(2)
< Primary	0.189 (0.135)	-0.049 (0.145)
4th Pass	0.100 (0.102)	0.007 (0.109)
8th Pass	0.187* (0.103)	0.004 (0.106)
10th Pass	0.101 (0.088)	0.074 (0.085)
12th Pass	0.222*** (0.085)	0.150* (0.080)
Tertiary	0.338*** (0.088)	0.089 (0.078)
Observations	442	478
Residual Std. Error	0.489	0.421

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure A.8: Education and Preference-Consistent Voting

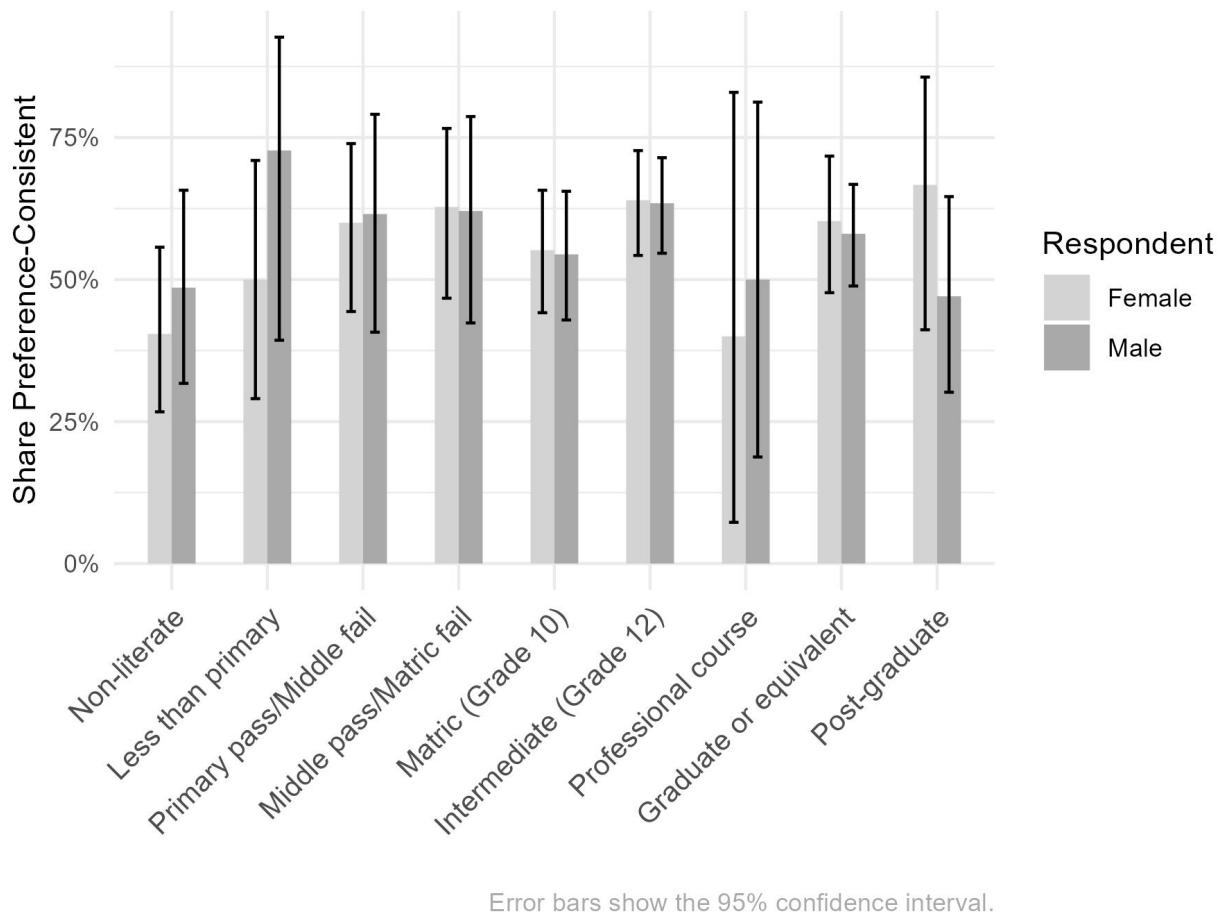


Table A.7: Regression Results Party Mobilization on Preference-Consistent Voting

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Preference-Consistent Voting (0/1)					
	Full Sample	Male-Female Pairs	Married Couples	(4)	(5)	(6)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female (0/1)	-0.080 (0.058)	-0.064 (0.058)	-0.104 (0.070)	-0.114 (0.073)	-0.035 (0.114)	-0.064 (0.117)
N Campaign Contacts (1-5)	-0.009 (0.024)	-0.013 (0.025)	-0.014 (0.031)	-0.029 (0.031)	0.001 (0.041)	-0.006 (0.042)
Female x N Campaign Contacts	0.049 (0.030)	0.059* (0.031)	0.063* (0.037)	0.086** (0.038)	0.017 (0.059)	0.031 (0.059)
Working (0/1)		0.092** (0.037)		0.069 (0.049)		-0.013 (0.072)
Edu: 1-4 Yrs		0.142 (0.111)		0.265** (0.126)		-0.014 (0.186)
Edu: 5-7 Yrs		0.158* (0.081)		0.118 (0.109)		-0.135 (0.150)
Edu: 8-9 Yrs		0.168** (0.080)		0.069 (0.096)		-0.096 (0.142)
Edu: 10th Pass		0.092 (0.068)		0.075 (0.087)		-0.200* (0.121)
Edu: 12th Pass		0.177*** (0.065)		0.172** (0.082)		0.011 (0.110)
Edu: Tertiary		0.107 (0.069)		0.118 (0.085)		-0.138 (0.117)
Age (in yrs)		-0.0002 (0.001)		0.0004 (0.002)		0.001 (0.002)
Observations	920	920	542	542	272	272

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Clustered robust standard errors in parentheses.

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