Abstract

When do women and men participate equally in the electoral process? Traditional explanations of women's political participation are essentially resource-based, stressing the importance of income, knowledge or education, as well as the significance of aggregate economic development and female labor force participation rates for women's turnout. Yet many developing democracies record high female turnout in the face of low levels of economic development and female employment rates; and despite large gaps in individual-level resources between men and women. Based on an in-depth investigation of India, I argue that there is a second path to women's equal electoral participation that does not rely on individual-level resources, but instead depends on clientelist competition in combination with household preferences over female turnout. Where households are supportive of women's participation, they can bridge the resource gap to enable female turnout even in the most unlikely of contexts, namely where women face a lack of resource endowments and high costs to participation in public life. Household support, in turn, depends on returns to a vote. Clientelism is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for these types of high returns to a vote. Only where clientelist parties share high levels of state resources with supporters are returns to a vote likely to cross the threshold for household support. Where more distinct groups are in direct competition for valuable state resources and, therefore, clientelist mobilization is higher, households will have incentives to support female turnout.

I develop and test this theory in the context of India, a particularly puzzling case of turnout parity, where the gender turnout gap closed in some of the poorest, but not some of the wealthier states, while female labor force participation rates have been dropping. Using two original surveys, I provide evidence consistent with the household theory. First, I show that women turn out at par with men despite substantially large gender gaps in resource endowments in Uttar Pradesh, a less developed, highly clientelist state. Household support for female turnout – but not other forms of women's participation in public life – is high, and households consider votes valuable and expect future access to state resources to be dependent on the family's turnout. By contrast, in Delhi, an urban, better developed and less clientelist setting, gender gaps in resource endowments as well as turnout are negligible. But overall levels of participation are much lower than in Uttar Pradesh, and so is household coordination on turnout decisions, suggesting that votes are not a household asset in Delhi. Finally, I provide evidence consistent with the clientelist mobilization theory, using a novel panel dataset on the number and type of ethnic groups incorporated into state parties from 1977 to 2007. Because ethnicity is politically salient in India and clientelist parties target voters by incorporating co-ethnics into their leadership, the number and type of ethnic groups provides a measure of clientelist competition for valuable but scarce state resources in this context. I find that an increase in the number of ethnic groups incorporated into major parties leads to a decline in the gender turnout gap at the constituency level.

1 | The Enduring Puzzle of Female Political Participation

When do women participate equally in the electoral process? Traditional theories of female political participation are fundamentally resource-based. At the micro level, these theories expect a woman's individual-level resource endowments to predict her turnout (see, for example, Schlozman et al., 1994; Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1997; Burns et al., 2001); while at the macro level, they posit that higher levels of economic development (Inglehart and Norris, 2000, 2003) or female labor force participation rates (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006, 2010) should correlate with higher aggregate female turnout.

Yet empirical evidence on the predictive power of individual-level resources or of a country's level of economic development and female employment for women's political participation is mixed at best. Research has shown that the relationship between individual-level resource endowments and political participation is not as straightforward as previously thought in the context of developing democracies. Unlike in industrialized countries, in developing countries the poor tend to vote at higher rates than the rich (Kasara and Suryanarayan, 2015); and women's participation rate does not always rise with increasing resource endowments the way that men's participation does (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2011; Gottlieb, 2016). Economic development and female labor force participation rates also only insufficiently explain

differences in levels of women's turnout between countries, or change over time, outside of North America and Europe. In an early evaluation of modernization theory, Christy (1987) found no clear evidence in support of the developmental story. The gender turnout gap was almost as high in Switzerland, a wealthy, developed democracy, as it was in Nigeria (both close to 40 percentage points); and virtually non-existent in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, even though the country was struggling economically compared to neighboring Germany, where the difference approached 10 percentage points (p. 56). The author noted that "only in the United States do sex differences diminish uniformly with increased education" (p. 16). Inglehart and Norris (2003)'s own analysis showed that women in many agrarian societies tended to be more politically active than their counterparts in postindustrial societies. The authors analyzed surveys from 19 postindustrial, 22 industrial and 10 agrarian societies, expecting to find the smallest gender gaps in the most developed nations. Their results show that 89 percent of women in agrarian societies reported voting in the most recent elections, but only 74 percent did in postindustrial countries; and that the gender gap in voter turnout was smaller for agrarian societies (4 percentage points) than for postindustrial societies (6 percentage points) (p. 108).

An analysis of the 16 countries for which I was able to gather official turnout data disaggregated by gender (see Figure 1.1) shows that countries reach turnout parity at vastly different levels of GDP per capita.[1] Finland, Iceland and Norway, for example, all had a GDP per capita of around $25,000 in the year they first reached turnout parity. Yet, strikingly, Barbados was one of the first countries to close the gender gap in turnout; in 1981, the first year for which I could verify this with election reports, the country's GDP per capita stood at less $4,400. When Costa Rica closed the gender turnout gap in 1994, it only reported a

[1] To my knowledge, this is the most extensive database of administrative turnout data disaggregated by gender to date; I sourced data directly from election reports or from a country's statistical department, where applicable.

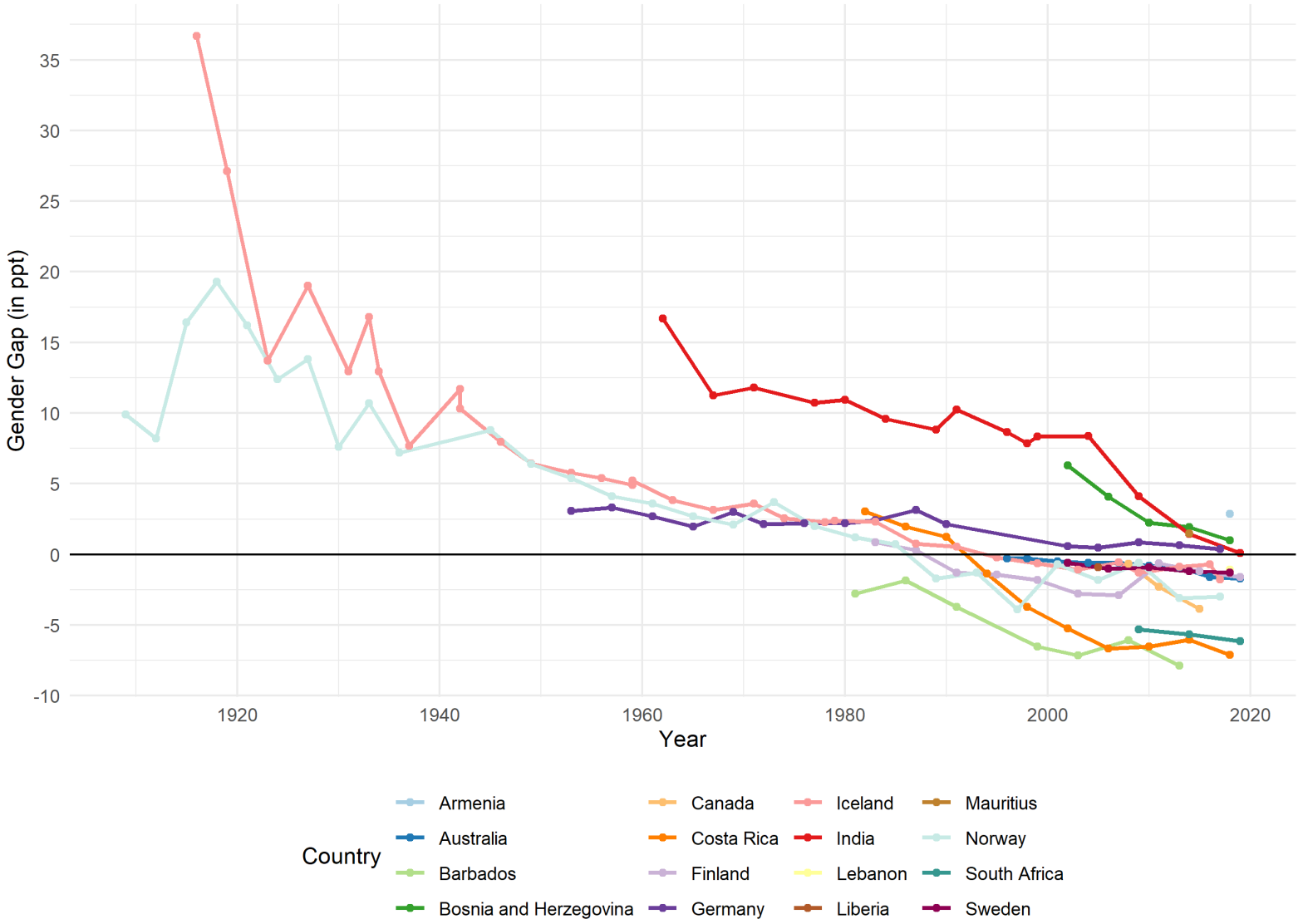
GDP per capita of $2,200. And India, the latest country to close the gap in 2019, had a GDP per capita that year of just $2,100. Germany, by comparison, has produced a GDP similar to that of Finland, Iceland or Norway, without ever closing the gender turnout gap fully.

Similarly, women's employment rates cannot account for the size or change in the gender turnout gap observed in my sample. While not necessarily entirely orthogonal to economic development, FLFP and economic development are not synonymous: women's labor market participation can be borne out of economic distress, and the highest employment rates among women are actually recorded in developing countries, while North America and the European Union lie just above the worldwide average of 47.3 percent, according to ILO estimates.[2] Female employment stood at 69.3 percent in Iceland and 57.7 percent in Finland, respectively, when the countries first reached turnout parity. Yet South Africa recorded a gender turnout gap of -5.31 percentage points – much lower than any European nation – in 2009, at a FLFP rate of only 47.8 percent. And only 20.5 percent of Indian women worked in 2019, when the gender turnout gap first closed. Pakistan's female employment rate in 2018 was 22.4 percent, comparable to Lebanon's at 22.9 percent and higher than India's (21 percent); yet Pakistan reported a gender turnout gap of +11.3 percentage points in the 2018 elections, while Lebanon's was -1.1 percentage points that same year and India's closed the following year.

Why do traditional theories of female political participation only insufficiently explain women's turnout outside of Europe and North America? Two important structural factors might differ between the countries that were used to build these theories and those countries

[2] According to 2019 ILO estimates, the country with the highest FLFP rate is Rwanda at 84 percent, closely followed by Madagascar. The developed nation with the highest FLFP rate is Iceland, which at 70 percent is tied for 22nd place with Zambia and the Bahamas. The average North American FLFP rate is 57 percent, as of 2019; while in Europe, it stands at 51 percent.

Figure 1.1: The Gender Gap in Turnout Over Time, Worldwide



where the theories hold limited explanatory power: the role of the household unit and the nature of political competition. In the absence of well-developed welfare states, families often take on important roles in welfare improvement and risk mitigation for individuals. Consequently, many decisions that have traditionally been modeled as individual-level decisions, including turnout, might be at least partially determined by households in such settings. Secondly, clientelism, while once rampant in Europe and North America, had considerably subsided in scope by the time that women started turning out at equal rates to men in these regions. Yet clientelism is common in many South American, African and Asian democracies today, changing voters' incentives to participate considerably compared to countries with mostly programmatic distributive programs.

Based on these insights, I argue that there is a second, distinct path to women's equal political participation: one that does not rely on female resources, but instead on *household support* for women's turnout. Where households are supportive of female turnout, they can bridge the resource gap for women – by sharing information, transportation or chores, for example – thus enabling participation where individual (or aggregate levels of) resources alone would make it highly unlikely. Two conditions are necessary for this path to women's equal participation. One is an important role for the household unit in individuals' lives, where coresidence, resource pooling and risk mitigation within the family are common. Only where individuals are tightly embedded into households will families be able or willing to consider *everyone's* turnout; where households don't matter and individuals tend to live on their own or disconnected from family, there is no household to provide support. Second, a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for high levels of household support is clientelism: where state resources and services are exchanged directly for support, a vote potentially becomes an asset for the household to bargain with. But household support is not a given under clientelism. At low to medium returns to a vote, households are unlikly to support female turnout, es-

pecially if women's lower individual-level resource endowments and gendered social norms make their participation in public life more costly than men's. Only where returns to a vote are sufficiently high will households be inclined to bridge the resource gap for women and enable their participation. This is most likely the case where clientelist parties rely not on one-off electoral handouts to win over voters, but on a sizeable post-election distribution of state resources in the form of welfare programs, jobs or government contract.

My dissertation zooms in on India, a particularly puzzling case, to show how household support can enable female turnout even in the absence of individual-level resources; and how, in turn, clientelist parties can incentivize households to switch from opposing to supporting women's participation. In India, female turnout has historically lagged behind male participation rates. Over the last two decades, women's turnout started catching up in some of the poorest states, but has stayed remarkably stable in some of the wealthier states. What is more, women's individual-level resources are, on average, much lower than men's in some of the high-participation areas, with female labor force participation rates actually falling since 2000, and the education gap beyond primary education closing only slowly. Yet several waves of political empowerment have brought new groups into the fold of clientelist political parties, with variation in the timing and extent of such inclusions. Where many groups are politically incorporated and therefore are competing for valuable state resources and services, votes are very valuable to households. Consequently, in such settings, households are very likely to support female turnout and bridge the resource gap, even in the face of otherwise high costs for women's participation in public life.

My dissertation makes several important contributions to the literature. First, bringing attention back to the gender turnout gap is normatively important. The gender turnout gap is far from closed in many countries around the world and unequal rates of participation among the electorate pose a normative challenge for democracies, what Lijphart (1997)

termed "democracy's unresolved dilemma" (p. 1). Putting systematic differences in this "most fundamental mechanism for holding public officials accountable" (Burns et al., 2001, p.21) center in the scholarly discourse is therefore imperative.

Second, my work takes into account the importance of the household as a decision-making unit, especially in the context of developing countries – a ground reality already widely acknowledged in development economics and sociology, but only recently incorporated more seriously in work in political science. By developing a framework for female turnout that depends both on the individual woman as well as the household she is embedded in, I both advance our understanding of turnout and contribute to a burgeoning literature that stresses the importance of intra-household gender relations in the study of political behavior (Chhibber, 2002; Mendelberg et al., 2014; Gottlieb, 2016; Khan, 2017; Prillaman, 2018; Cheema et al., 2022; Prillaman, 2021).

Third, my dissertation challenges the traditional view that economic development and economic participation need to *predate* women's political participation. I instead show that under certain conditions, women's voter turnout increases even in low-income and low-employment contexts. By exploring theories that were specifically developed in the context of "the West" in the setting of a new and interesting test case, namely India, I improve upon our understanding of the relationship between economic participation and political participation.

Fourth, I contribute to our understanding of the effects of clientelist party competition. While the distributive effects of clientelist parties, their main strategies and their means of operation have been studied extensively, my dissertation draws attention to a previously overlooked aspect of clientelism, namely its potential to alter the incentive structure to include previously excluded groups into the democratic process.

1.1 The Puzzle of Female Political Participation in India

For almost 60 years after Independence, up until 2004, India witnessed a relatively stable gender turnout gap, with men turning out at between 8 and 11 percentage-points higher rates than women in national parliamentary elections (Figure 1.2).[3] Beginning with the 2009 General Election, the gender gap started narrowing rapidly, effectively closing in the 2019 elections.

Figure 1.2: Turnout by Gender in Indian General Elections

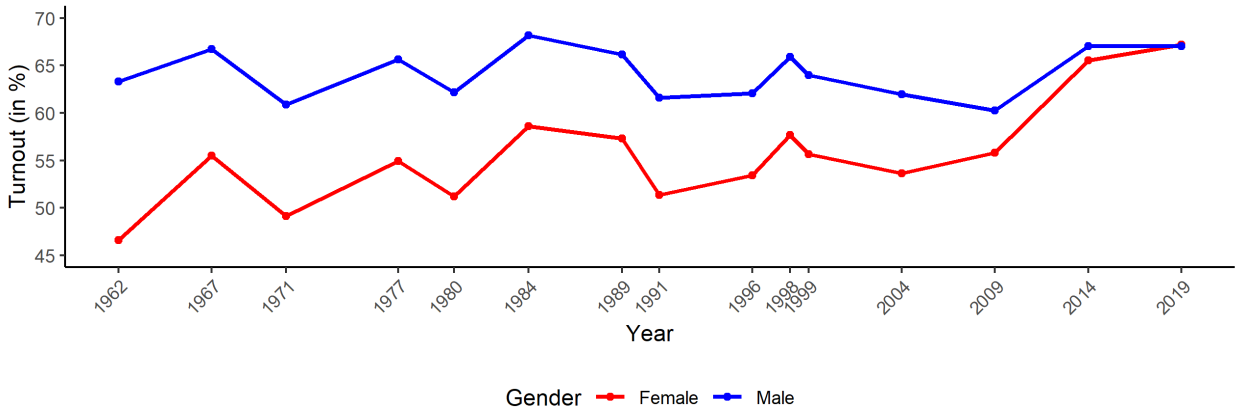


Figure 1.2 shows male (blue) and female (red) turnout in percent for all elections since 1962.[4] Several aspects of the graph are noteworthy: first, male turnout has stayed remarkably stable over the past 60 years, essentially moving around the 64 percent mark. Second, until 2004, male and female turnout moved basically in unison, just at different levels (with women averaging almost 10 percentage-point lower turnout than men). Third, the closing of the

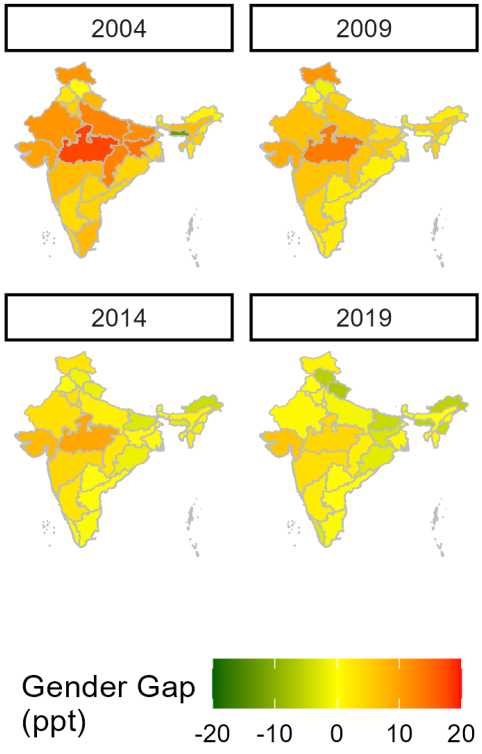
[3] India is a parliamentary democracy, electing its national parliament, called *Lok Sabha*, in a massive election effort every 5 years. National elections are also called *General Elections*, as opposed to state-level *Assembly Elections* for state legislatures (institutions that are called *Legislative Assemblies*).

[4] Data on the gender turnout gap is only available starting in 1962, even though India held elections in the 1950s as well.

gender turnout gap in India is fundamentally driven by women voting at higher rates, not by male turnout shrinking.

However, national aggregates mask considerable variation across space and time within India. While the gender gap closed or even flipped quickly in some states over the past two decades, it stayed remarkably stable in others. Figure 1.3 visualizes the gender turnout gap in General Elections from 2004 through 2019 at the state level, with red signaling a positive gender turnout gap (i.e., men turning out at higher rates than women) and green indicating a negative gender gap (i.e., women turning out at relatively higher rates).

Figure 1.3: Gender Turnout Gap in General Elections by State, 2004-2019

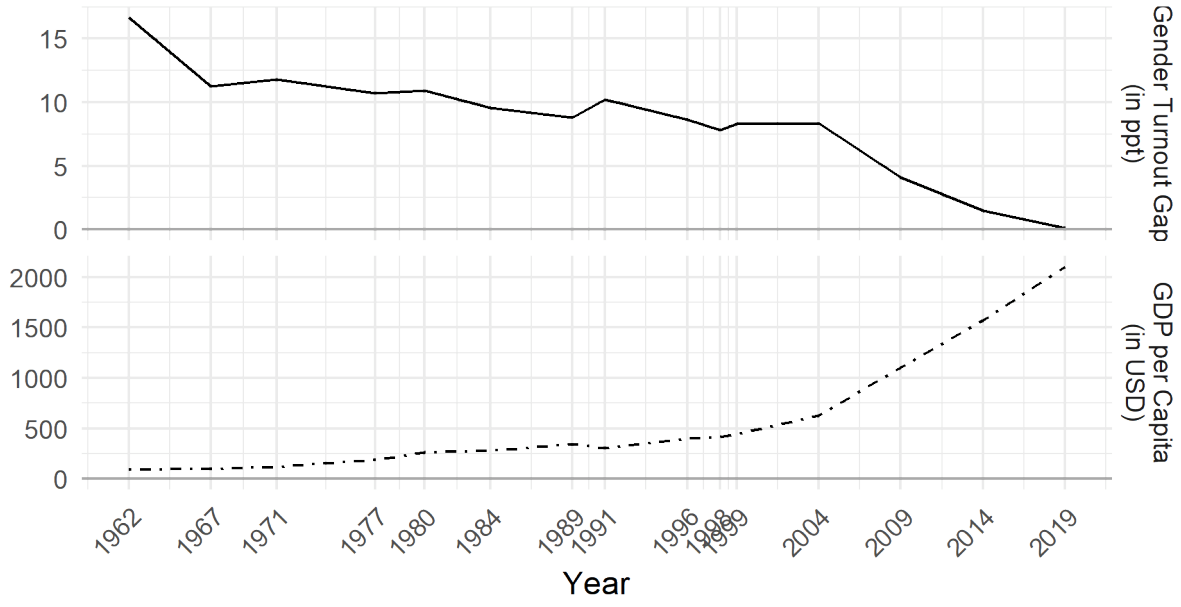


Prominent explanations of female turnout proposed by the literature, including women's work force participation (Schlozman et al., 1994; Brady et al., 1995; Iversen and Rosenbluth,

2006, 2010), female education (Verba et al., 1978; Schlozman et al., 1994; Verba et al., 1997; Inglehart and Norris, 2000, 2003), and levels of overall development (Verba et al., 1978; Christy, 1987; Inglehart and Norris, 2000, 2003), can only insufficiently explain these trends, as I will show below.

At first glance, the closing of the gender turnout gap in India coincides with a period of unprecedented economic growth. Figure 1.4 visualizes one measure of economic development, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in US dollars,[5] and the gender gap in turnout in national elections. After India implemented a series of economic reforms in the 1990s, the country witnessed rapid economic growth, with GDP per capita soaring from $628 in 2004 to $2,104 in 2019 – the same period of time that saw that the gender gap in turnout virtually disappear.

Figure 1.4: GDP per Capita and Gender Turnout Gap in India, 1962-2019



Yet a look at the subnational level casts doubt on economic explanations for female par-

[5] GDP per capita data is based on World Bank national accounts data, and was downloaded from The World Bank development data repository at https://data.worldbank.org/.

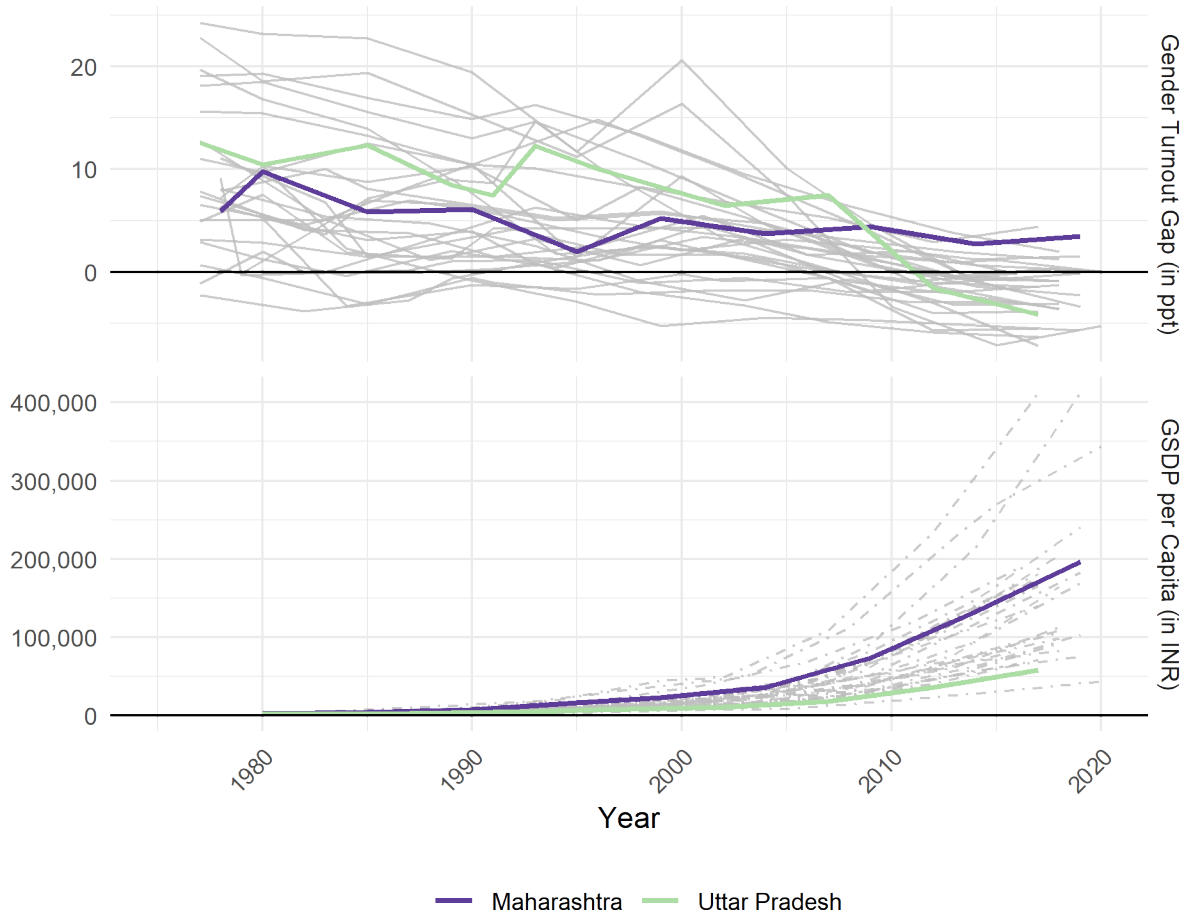
ticipation. Some of the least developed states in India have closed the gender turnout gap rapidly over the past two decades, without commensurate increases in economic development, while some of India's economic powerhouses still see men persistently vote at higher rates than women. Take the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, for example. Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state in India, with a population of around 210 to 220 million people that outnumbers that of Brazil, and one of the least developed ones. A 2021 government report on multi-dimensional poverty, for example, ranked Uttar Pradesh as the state with the third-largest share of multi-dimensionally poor people among all 28 states, with almost 38 percent of the population classified as poor in terms of standard of living, health and education outcomes (NITI Aayog, 2021). Based on gross state domestic product (GSDP) per capita, Uttar Pradesh was the second poorest state in India in 2019, with a GSDP per capita of less than 66,000 INR[6] (approximately $800).[7] Nevertheless, Uttar Pradesh saw one of India's sharpest reductions in the gender turnout gap since the 1990s, and today records one of the lowest gaps across the country. Uttar Pradesh's gender turnout gap (top panel) and GSDP (bottom panel) are shown in green in Figure 1.5.

Contrast that with Maharashtra, one of India's better developed states. Located in the west and home to India's financial capital Mumbai, Maharashtra has an estimated population of about 130 million people. The same government report mentioned above estimated that less than 15 percent of Maharashtra's inhabitants are multidimensionally poor; only 11 of India's 28 states fared better. With a GSDP of almost 200,000 INR in 2019 (approximately $2,400), Maharashtra ranked 12th among all the states. Yet Maharahstra's gender gap in turnout is the second largest in India, with men voting at 3.5 percentage point higher rates than

[6] GSDP per capita is based on data from the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) annual Handbook of Statistics on Indian States and is measured in Indian Rupees (INR) at current prices. These figures, specifically, are based on Table 9 in the 2019 handbook.

[7] Based on conversion rate on February 10, 2023.

Figure 1.5: GSDP per Capita and Gender Turnout Gap in Indian States, 1977-2020



women in the state's most recent election. Maharashtra's gender turnout gap (top panel) and GSDP (bottom panel) are shown in purple in Figure 1.5.

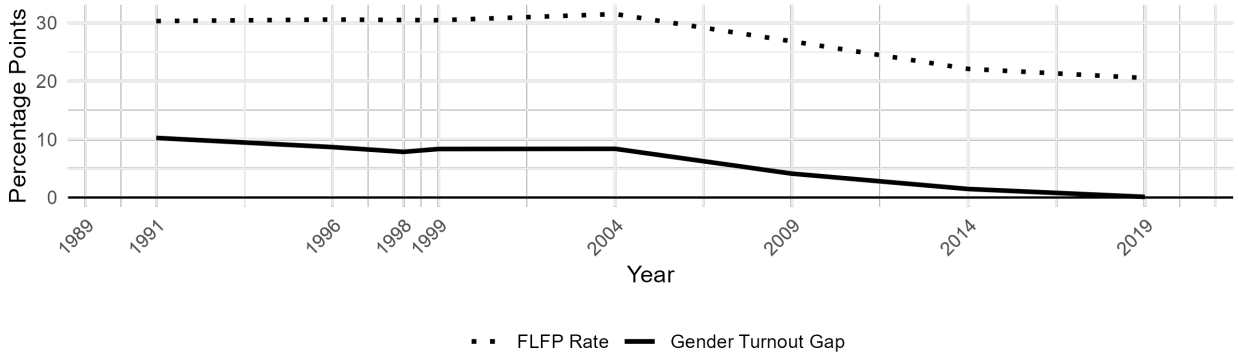
Another popular explanation for women's political participation are female labor force participation (FLFP) rates (Burns et al., 2001; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006, 2010). At the individual level, income has been shown to positively correlate with voter turnout (Brady et al., 1995; Schlozman et al., 1994); if women are excluded from the workforce, therefore, they should be less likely to turn out on election day. In the aggregate, higher rates of female employment have been shown to contribute to women's empowerment, and their overall political participation (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006, 2010).

But in India, the share of women who work has been *falling* at the same time that the gender gap has closed. Figure 1.6 visualizes the gender gap in turnout in national elections (solid line) and women's work force participation at the national level (dotted line).[8] Since the 2004 General Election, the gender turnout gap has been shrinking steadily, while FLFP rates have actually been falling since 2005. If women's labor force participation was driving female turnout, by contrast, we should see female employment rising as the gender turnout gap drops.

Finally, rising levels of education for women have the potential to improve female political participation rates, for several reasons: on the one hand, education can contribute to women's empowerment, by providing opportunities for independent income (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006, 2010) and exposure to new information and values (Inglehart, 1990; Brulé, 2015). On the other hand, a minimal level of education might be required in order to make sense of political information, to develop an interest in elections or to be able to make it through the– sometimes complicated – voting process at all (Schlozman et al., 1994; Brady et al., 1995;

[8] FLFP rates are based on ILO modeled estimates as the share of females aged 15 or older who work. The data was downloaded from The World Bank development data repository at https://data.worldbank.org/.

Figure 1.6: Female Labor Force Participation and the Gender Turnout Gap in India



Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996).[9] Indeed, India has witnessed a remarkable rise in female literacy rates over the past decades, including during the two decades that female turnout has been catching up with male turnout, suggesting improvements in education might be behind the closing of the gender turnout gap (Figure 1.7).[10]

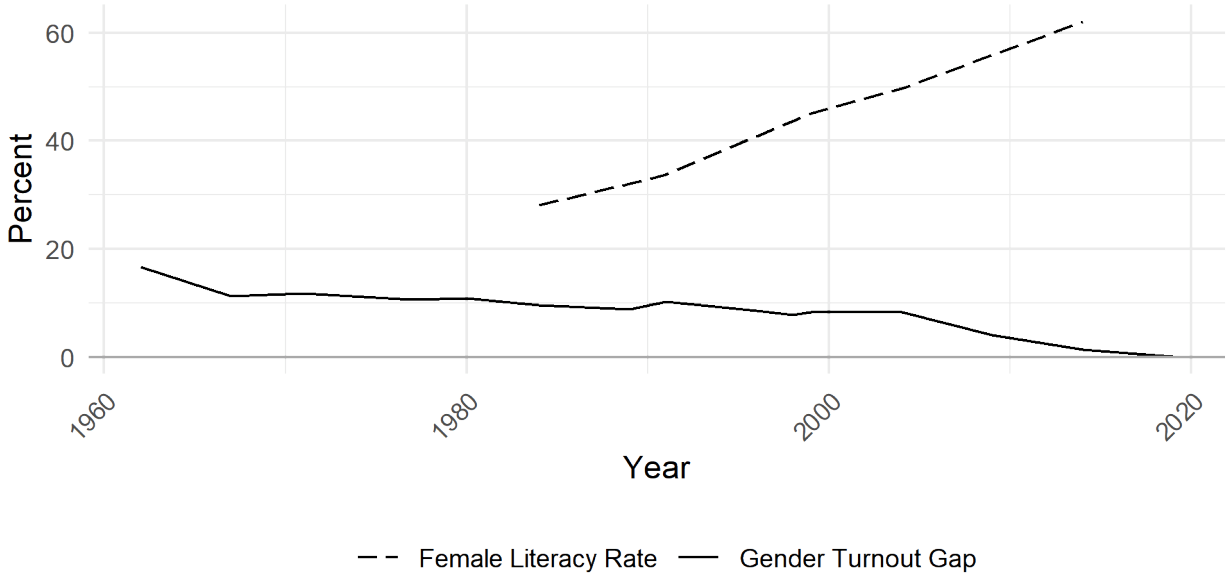
A look at the subnational level, however, reveals that female literacy rates have been rising relatively uniformly across all Indian states; yet the gender turnout gap closed earlier in some states than others, and has remained remarkably stable in a few regions (Figure 1.8).[11] Take the state of Arunachal Pradesh, for example, where women started voting at higher rates as men in 1990 even while female literacy stood at only 21.8 percent. Uttar Pradesh's

[9] Indian elections are meant to be accessible to illiterate voters as well, with parties using symbols and colors together with party names, and candidate photos being printed alongside candidate photos on ballot papers. Before casting a ballot on election day, voters are required to sign their name with an election official; however, those who cannot sign their own name are allowed to substitute a thumb print in ink instead. Not being able to sign their own name could, in theory, be a deterrent for women on election day, and gaining enough literacy to be able to write their name in the list might make women feel empowered enough to turn out in greater numbers.

[10] Literacy rates here are the percentage females aged 15 and older "who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life," based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics data, downloaded from The World Bank development data repository at `https://data.worldbank.org/`.

[11] State-level data on female literacy rates from 1971 through 2011 comes from the decennial Indian census. The Indian census counts as literate anyone aged 7 or older who can read and write in any language, independent of formal education. Data for 2019 comes from the NSS, downloaded from Indiastat. The NSS adopted a procedure to measure literacy that is comparable to the Indian census.

Figure 1.7: Female Literacy and the Gender Turnout Gap in India

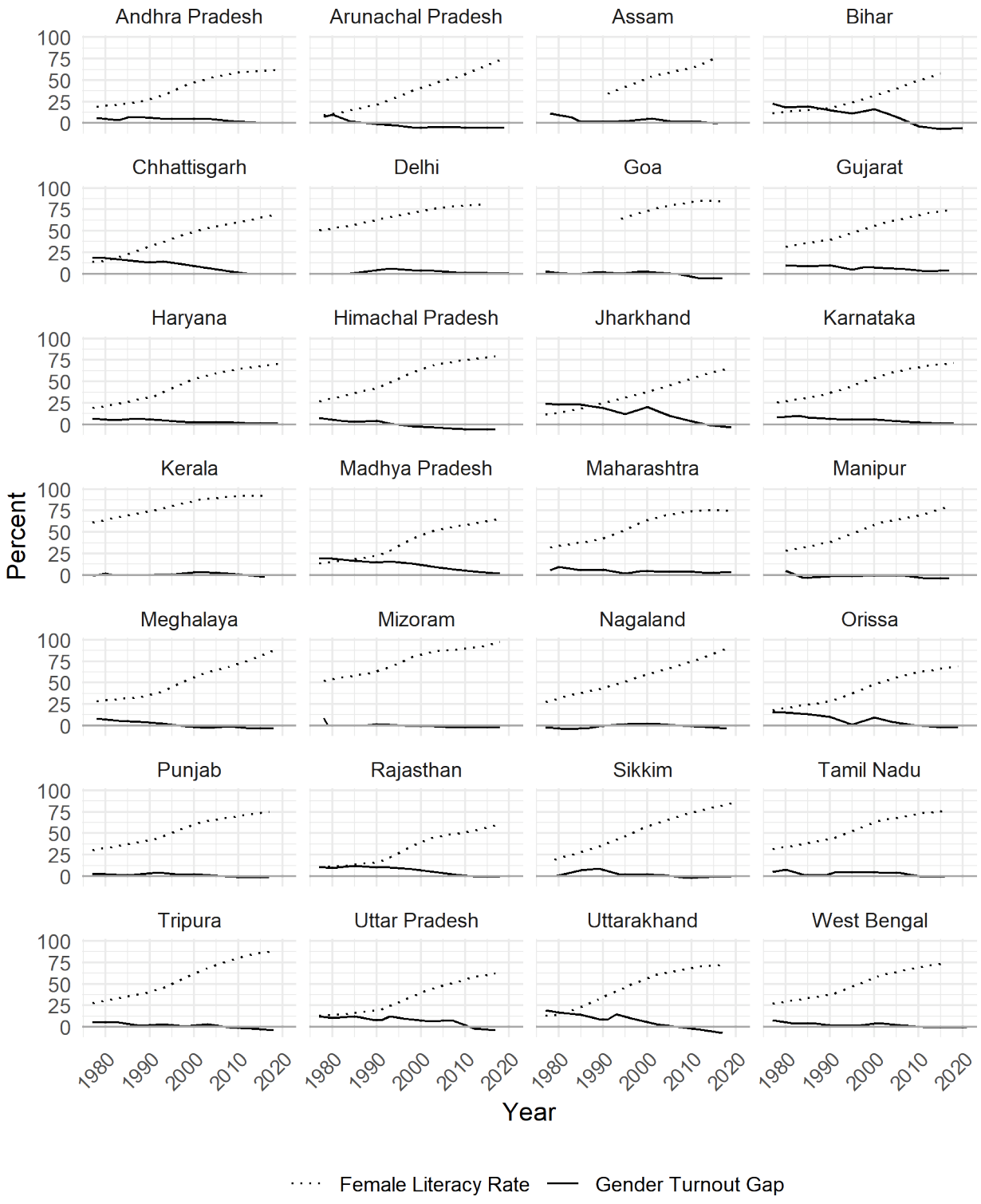


female literacy rate was 58 percent when female turnout first outpaced male turnout in 2012. By contrast, in Maharashtra, almost 75 percent of females could read and write in 2019; yet women turned out at 3.5 percentage point lower rates than men in elections.

Overall, then, traditional theories of female political participation hold limited explanatory power for the Indian case.[12] What, then, explains the remarkable, yet uneven, rise of women's turnout in India? In the next section, I develop the argument that is at the heart of my dissertation, based on more than six months of field research across North India and insights from the literature. I will develop this theory more fully in Chapter 3.

[12] I will review and test these theories in more depth and detail in the next chapter.

Figure 1.8: Female Literacy Rates and the Gender Turnout Gap, by State



1.2 The Argument: How Clientelist Party Competition and Supportive Households Lead to Turnout Parity

I argue that women's political participation in India is determined at least partly by household support, and that household support depends greatly on clientelist party mobilization. In India, households play a large role in individuals' lives, including their turnout decisions. This explains the weak to non-existent relationship between women's individual-level resource endowments and their political participation. Traditional gender norms make participation in public life more costly for women than men, which may lead households to restrict women's political activity, including turnout. But households can also be supportive and bridge the resource gap for women. This, I argue, happens when returns to a vote are high enough to compensate households for the social costs of women's political participation. Clientelism is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for these types of high returns. Only where clientelist parties win support with promises of access to valuable state resources and services – instead of one-off electoral handouts ahead of elections – a vote becomes valuable enough to entice household support. In India, this is the case for ethnic groups who are incorporated into ethnic clientelist parties: where clientelist parties incorporate more ethnic groups, a higher share of the population competes for access to valuable clientelist state benefits. Accordingly, returns to a vote are high enough for incorporated groups to make households belonging to these incorporated sections of society supportive of female turnout. The recent rise in female turnout in India, I argue, is driven by an increase in the number of groups that have been incorporated into political parties and therefore have access to clientelist benefits, making them more supportive of women's turnout as a result.

1.2.1 Why Women Turn out Today: Changing Household Support for Female Turnout

Women's voter participation in India does not follow familiar patterns, as outlined above: female voter turnout correlates little with aggregate levels of female employment or education, for example; and women's voting has outpaced men's in some of the poorest, but not (yet) in some of the best developed states in India. One reason why these traditional theories of female political participation hold limited explanatory power is because they all model turnout as an individual-level decision. By contrast, I argue that turnout is at least partly a household-level decisions, instead of an individual-level decision, in India.

A wide array of research, from sociology and anthropology to economics and political science, has shown that the household plays an important role in individuals' lives in India. Particularly in the absence of state institutions that can take care of the young, the old, the sick, the widowed or the unemployed, extended families are individuals' best bet at improving welfare and safeguarding against risks, by pooling labor and resources, and sharing responsibilities. This, however, means that other family members get a say in decisions that are commonly thought to be individual choices in political science, from how much education a person should get, to whether or not she should work, to whom to vote for on election day. Household control is often particularly stark for women, who are disadvantaged by patrilineal, patri-virilocal rules of kinship and village endogamy in marriage, which puts men in charge of resources and property and disconnects women from their natal family upon marriage (see, for example, Das, 1976; Srinivas, 1977; Dube, 1997; Chhibber, 2002; Bernhardt et al., 2018; Prillaman, 2021).

What has changed in India to enable female turnout, I argue, is not so much women's resource endowments (although education and health outcomes have improved considerably

over the last two decades), but rather household opinions on women's electoral participation. My research suggests that while for many years, households *restricted* women's turnout, depressing it to levels lower than those of men of comparable financial means, education or political interest, most households today *support* female turnout, pushing women's voter participation at par with men's – or, where men are migrating out to find work, even past male turnout.

During more than 80 interviews with female and male voters, across areas as diverse as rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as well as urban Delhi, I time and again heard the same explanation for why Indian women's turnout 10 or 20 years ago used to be so much lower than men's: it was because households, specifically men in the household, did not want women to participate in elections, or public life more broadly. Many women told me that they simply were not allowed to vote in the past. In a group interview with both male and female respondents in Munger district, Bihar, women were frank in their assessment: "The husbands also did not allow us, told us not to go so far. People used to think this way so we did not get to leave," one of the women told me. Another added, "Guardians[13] did not know much; earlier they believed that only the elders could go, the young ones never left. The daughters could never leave." Others agreed: "the people felt the elders would go and that would be enough. 'Stay at home,' we were told."[14] In a group interview with members of a women's self-help group (SHG) in Delhi's Wazirpur area, respondents also were of the opinion that earlier, families used to constrain female participation. "In the past, people would restrict women from progressing and tell them to stay within the confines of their

[13] Women particularly in Bihar often called the head of the household the *guardian* of the house, using the English word for that role. In Uttar Pradesh, by contrast, women would often referred to the head of household as the *mukhiya* of the house, which is a Hindi word also used for the head of other institutions, such as the village council, for example.

[14] Personal interview, Munger district, mixed-gender group interview, Yadavs, February 27, 2020.

homes," one of the women said.[15]

Respondents often contrasted restrictions on women's voter participation *in the past* with acceptance of, or even *active support for*, their turnout today. The following exchange with the women from the same SHG in Wazirpur mentioned earlier illustrates that well:[16]

> I: Does your husband like it when you go out to vote?
>
> R_1: My husband likes it.
>
> R_2: He says, 'Go out of the house, do something. Don't stay at home and waste your time.'
>
> I: And what about others?
>
> R_3: I have permission. They say, 'Go and do it.'
>
> R_2: I have come here with permission.
>
> R_3: This used to happen before, but not anymore. Both men and women are equal now.[17]

Families may be supportive in different ways. Besides verbal encouragement, as described above, this might include sharing household chores to free up women to vote; or providing transportation and chaperoning, where required. Voting may take time in India: the full process of reaching the booth, queuing, signing the ledger, pressing the button on the voting machine and returning home may take anything from 15 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the location and time of day, according to the people I interviewed. Many women with small children said that their mother-in-law or sister-in-law will watch their kids while the mother votes, as taking a toddler to the polling station is often not feasible, particularly if elections are held in summer. Others reported that everyone at home pitches in to finish chores on

[15] Personal interview, Delhi, group of female slum residents, different ethnic groups, January 28, 2020.

[16] In this and all following quotes of exchanges, I denotes interviewer and R_1, R_2, etc. denote first respondent, second respondent, etc.

[17] Personal interview, Delhi, group of female slum residents, different ethnic groups, January 28, 2020.

time to allow every adult in the house to vote. A Muslim woman in her 40s, who lived with her husband, her mother-in-law and two under-aged kids in Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh, told me that on election day, her husband will first take her to the polling station while her mother-in-law stays at home; and afterwards, her husband will take the mother-in-law. She said being accompanied by a male to the polling station makes the women both feel safer and makes their participation more socially acceptable.[18]

Yet, most women were much less likely to receive household support for forms of political participation *other than voting*. Of the female respondents, both young and old, that I interviewed, very few had ever attended a *panchayat*, or village council, meeting in their locality, even though male members of their family often did. The Muslim woman mentioned before said her husband regularly attended the village council meetings. When asked why she did not join him, she said, "In our family, we don't go. Like, we came because you called us, but we don't go out much. Our family doesn't like it." She added: "Even if we want to cast our vote, we go directly to the polling booth to vote."[19] In urban areas, too, women are less likely to participate politically outside of voting. The women from the SHG in Wazirpur, Delhi, for example, who all have their families' support for voting, said they do not participate in any other election-related activities. When asked whether they ever attended election campaign meetings or political rallies in the city, they all answered in the negative:

R_1: No.

R_2: We haven't gone to those meetings yet.

R_3: We don't know how to go there.[20]

[18] Video interview, Meerut district, Muslim woman, poor household, October 10, 2021.
[19] Video interview, Meerut district, Muslim woman, poor household, October 30, 2021.
[20] Personal interview, Delhi, group of female slum residents, different ethnic groups, January 28, 2020.

This is in line with research on India that shows that while women are turning out at par with men in elections today, they participate at substantially lower rates in other political activities, such as canvassing for a party or attending rallies (Kumar and Gupta, 2015; NES Report 2009, 2014; Goyal2020); discussing politics in public or semi-public spaces (Witsoe, 2009, p. 79, footnote 22; Michelutti, 2007, p. 645-646); running for office at the local, state or national level (Chhibber, 2002; Clots-Figueras, 2011; Basu, 2016; Brulé, 2020); attending (and speaking at) village council meetings (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Deininger et al., 2011; Prillaman, 2021); or approaching government officials (Brulé, 2015; Kruks-Wisner, 2018). For example, an ethnographic study of Ahir Para, a town in Uttar Pradesh, and the increasing political empowerment of its resident Yadav community noted that "Yadav women are peripheral to the culture of political participation" (Michelutti, 2004, p. 46, footnote 1) while all the men are heavily involved in politics, from politically motivated strikes (p. 63) to election campaigns (p. 67). Yet in the election to the municipal board, out "[o]f 870 voters, only five persons did not vote, either because they were in bad health or out of town" (p. 67). Clearly, then, women in Ahir Para participate in elections by casting a ballot, but do not partake in any of the other important activities that relate to local politics. Similarly, a study of two villages in Madhya Pradesh found that women were just as likely as men to report to have voted in local elections, but significantly less likely to have participated in inter-election political activities, such as attending a panchayat meeting. More than 90 percent of both men and women indicated that they had cast a ballot in the last village council election. At the same time, 80 percent of men, but less than 40 percent of women said they had attended panchayat meetings (Prillaman, 2021).

There is strong evidence that women are much more likely to participate in non-voting political activities if and when they have their household's support to do so and, consequently, less likely to partake when their households show opposition (Datta et al., 1998; Chhibber,

2002; Goyal, 2020).[21] However, households seem generally much more supportive of women voting than of women participating in any other form in politics (Prillaman, 2021).

1.2.2 When Will Households be Supportive? The Role of Clientelist Mobilization

Why, then, would the average household have switched from opposing to supporting female turnout over the course of less than 20 years? This trend seems especially puzzling given that women's participation in other forms of political participation is still restricted. Many respondents I talked to across North India had a fairly straightforward answer: Votes are more valuable today than they used to be, according to them, and families therefore recognize the value of having women turn out alongside the men of the house. Take this exchange with a group of upper-caste women in Munger district in Bihar that dove into why women's electoral participation has changed over the last few years:

> I: So, husbands didn't want their wives to vote before?
>
> R_1: Initially, husbands didn't want their wives to go out and vote.
>
> I: And why do husbands want you to vote nowadays?
>
> R_2: Voting has become necessary; they ask for it in everything. Now, Aadhaar card[22] is very important, voting is very important.[23]

The sentiment that somehow, voting is required today in order to access state resources in the first place, or to get *more* benefits, was echoed time and again across my interviews. A woman living in a slum in Wazirpur, Delhi, said: "I started voting because the leaders in

[21] Although the literature also has many examples of women who defy family expectations and persevere in their political activity in the face of coercion and even physical violence (see, for example Joshi, 1998; Brulé, 2020).

[22] The *aadhar* card is an Indian ID card that is required for accessing many state benefits.

[23] Personal interview, Munger district, group of upper caste women, February 28, 2020.

our area said that if they win with more votes, we will get more facilities. They need more votes to win. They should get as many votes as possible."[24] And a Yadav woman from rural Bihar told me that it is easier for women to vote today because people "have become aware with each husband comes a wife, and hence a vote is added."[25] Many respondents said that women not voting would mean *wasting* a vote – and thereby foregoing a chance to get valuable state resources. The following reply by a Muslim woman from Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh illustrates that:

> I: Will it also be right for just the head of household to go and cast their vote or is it better for everyone in the house to cast their votes?
>
> R: Yes, it is important for everyone to vote. What is the benefit in keeping a vote. What's the point? It's gone to waste when someone does not vote.[26]

What is more, many respondents expressed not just an expectation of *new* or *more* benefits after an election, but a fear that existing benefits might be cut if they abstained. Speaking about how they convince their friends and neighbors that voting is important, one participant in a focus group of young mothers in Delhi said: "If anyone asks what we will get for casting the vote, why to vote, then we tell them that we'll get this and that through voting. They have the ration card[27] now, it might lead to a withdrawal of their names from the ration card."[28] A woman from a village in Ghaziabad district in Uttar Pradesh told me, "Vote

[24] Personal interview, Wazirpur, Delhi, female group interview, slum residents belonging to different ethnic groups, January 28, 2020.

[25] Personal interview, Munger district, Bihar, mixed-gender group interview, Yadavs, February 27, 2020.

[26] Video interview, Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh, Muslim woman, poor household, October 30, 2021.

[27] A ration card gives people access to subsidized food at Public Distribution System (PDS) stores, or ration stores. They are supposed to be available to every household living below the poverty line, but research has shown that many eligible households do not have access, and that instead many families above the poverty line have a ration card, with considerable variation in coverage across states (Khera, 2011; Drèze and Khera, 2015; Tillin, 2022).

[28] Personal interview, Adarsh Nagar, Delhi, group of young mothers, belonging to different ethnic groups, January 24, 2020.

means that if we have any work or problem, then it won't be there, but if we don't vote, those services will be cut off and our work won't be done, we won't get any *aadhaar* cards, we won't have any identification and that's why casting of votes is important."[29] Members of a women's self-help group in rural Bihar voiced similar concerns during a discussion. Asked if there were any benefits to voting, they replied:

> R_1: There's no benefit – if the vote is not cast, our names will be withdrawn from everywhere.
>
> R_2: Names will be striked out, ration will not be given; we won't be allowed to join the queue [at the subsidized food store], that is exactly why all the women had gone for voting.
>
> R_1: Everything [bank accounts] would be removed from the bank, that is why we had voted with great spirit.[30]

My field research indicates clearly that today, households seem to value each vote highly enough to be supportive of female turnout, even when they do not encourage other forms of women's political participation (or participation in public life more generally). This stands in contrast to households' earlier opposition to women voting. But what would have made votes more valuable, incentivizing families to switch from opposing to supporting women's turnout? After all, clientelism has been part of Indian politics since independence, not just since the 2000s (Chandra, 2004; Wilkinson, 2007). What changed, I argue, is not the fact that votes provide access to valuable state resources and services; but *who* has access to those resources and services through their votes. Political parties are the main way for citizens to access the state in India: Parties who win seats in elections can affect who gets government

[29] Video interview, Ghaziabad District, Uttar Pradesh, female group interview, Muslim and OBC woman, November 13, 2021.

[30] Personal interview, Munger district, Bihar, female group interview, Muslim, members of SHG, February 27, 2020.

jobs, who has access to welfare programs, or who receives police protection, among other things (Chandra, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004; Berenschot, 2016; Bussell, 2019). Even when they do not win a majority, parties might be able to leverage their seats in the legislature to wield influence over the distribution of resources. In India, where ethnicity is very salient, ethnic clientelism is prevalent. Parties will target members of certain ethnic groups with both appeals for votes and with benefits as rewards. The main beneficiaries of parties' largess are usually the groups that are best represented within a party's leadership. While parties may strategically select candidates to match a locality's ethnic make-up, leadership ranks are much harder to change and present a much more enduring commitment to the advancement of certain ethnic groups over others. The ethnic composition of parties' leadership, therefore, sends the much more credible signal to voters about who can expect state resources after an election, and who should not (Chandra, 2004).

There is considerable variation across space and time in the number and types of groups incorporated into political parties in India. After independence, most, though not all, parties were dominated by upper-caste leaders. Over time, previously subaltern groups – Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBCs),[31] Muslims, and other religious minorities – have been incorporated into mainstream political parties, but with considerable variation in timing and extent of their inclusion (Chandra and García-Ponce, 2019). In the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, for example, OBCs and, to some extent, Dalits have been politically empowered early on and have played important roles in political parties in those states, including the Ezhavhas in Kerala's Communist party (Nossiter,

[31] OBCs describes members of groups that are not upper-caste, but still members of the "clean" castes in the traditional Hindu caste system. They rank between the upper castes and middle castes on the one hand, and the Scheduled Castes (or Dalits) on the other. There are no exact numbers, but estimates put their share of the population at around 50 percent. While the official term is Other Backward *Classes*, membership is actually defined for caste groups, not based on income. Accordingly, groups belonging to the OBCs may vary widely on socio-economic indicators and the social status they have traditionally held.

1982) and OBCs in Tamil Nadu's DMK party (Subramanian, 1999). Dalits in Maharashtra benefited from a long history of social justice movements and have been incorporated into both mainstream political parties as well as narrowly focused Dalit parties, most notably the Republican Party of India (RPI) (Zelliot, 1970; Ahuja, 2019). By contrast, Dalits in North India had only been incorporated marginally into mainstream political parties after independence; their political empowerment mostly began with the formation of the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP), widely identified as a Dalit party, in the 1980s (Chandra, 2000, 2004; Ahuja, 2019). Similarly, OBCs in North India saw their representation in party leadership rise considerably since the 1990s, although the type and extent of incorporation varied across states (Jaffrelot, 2003). In some places, narrow parties founded and led by members of the OBCs sprang into existence, such as the *Samajwadi Party* (SP) in Uttar Pradesh, the *Rashtriya Janata Dal* (RJD) in Bihar, or the PRP in Andhra Pradesh. At other times, mainstream parties tried to broaden their support bases by incorporating leaders from formerly subaltern groups. That was the case in Uttar Pradesh's state unit of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), a Hindu-nationalist party with a national presence, which was led by a member of the backward Lodh community as early as 1985. By comparison, the first time that the BJP state unit in neighboring Madhya Pradesh was led by a Lodh was in 2003, almost 20 years later.

I argue that this variation in the incorporation of previously subaltern groups into political parties explains varying levels of household support for women's participation across space and time. Only for groups who are centrally incorporated into mainstream political parties – and who can therefore expect preferential access to state resources and services should "their party" win – will returns to a vote be high enough to justify supporting women's vote even in the face of conservative social gender norms. Where only traditional elites, i.e., only the numerical minority belonging to the upper and dominant castes, are represented

in party leadership, voters belonging to all other groups expect little to no benefits after an election, no matter who wins. Accordingly, votes are not particularly valuable and support for female turnout will be low among the majority of the population. By contrast, where more groups are incorporated into ethnic clientelist parties, returns to a vote are high for a larger share of the population, meaning that a greater proportion of households will support female turnout in order to reap the benefits of a co-ethnic party winning. If only those groups that are incorporated into ethnic clientlist parties have incentives to support female turnout, then an increase in incorporation should lead to higher rates of women's voting.

1.2.3 What Does That Mean for Women's Agency in Vote Choice?

So far, I have argued that women vote at equal rates to men even when they lack individual-level resources as long as they have their family's support, which can bridge the resource gap. I have posited that households will be supportive only when they have reasonable expectations of accessing state benefits after the election, that is, if their ethnic group is incorporated into a mainstream clientelist party that might provide them with preferential access to resources and services in the future. But if women's participation is dependent on men's approval, this raises serious questions about what female turnout means in India. Are women mere pawns used by families to increase their voting power? Or do women, once they reach the polling booth, exercise actual agency over their vote choice, given that their ballot is secret?

There is not much research on women's agency in vote choice in contexts where they might be dependent on the household to vote. The National Election Study and other surveys of Indian voters regularly show that women are more likely than men to take other family

members' opinion into account when deciding whom to vote for (Kumar, 2014; Kumar and Mishra, 2022), although arguably hearing advice from others does not equate to having no say in one's vote choice. A study of two full villages in Madhya Pradesh found that women expressed to have less say in whom they vote for than men. Respondents were asked which family members were part of their decision for whom to vote, and then to indicate who has *the most say* in the decision. Overall, fewer than 50 percent of respondents said they themselves had the most say in their vote choice, underlining the outsized role that household unit plays in individual's lives in rural India. But women's agency was lower, on average, than men's. Among respondent younger than 40 years, fewer than 50 percent of men reported to have the most say in their voting decision, compared to around 45 percent of women. By contrast, more than 80 percent of men aged 40 or older said they had full agency in vote choice, but less than 55 percent of women did (Prillaman, 2021, p. 24-26). In neighboring Pakistan, a study found that women were significantly less likely than men to express their own political preferences, particularly if those deviated from their spouse's. The author surveyed married men and women about their policy preferences and offered to anonymously communicate either the respondent's own preferences or the spouse's preferences to a local representative. Women, on average, expressed distinctly different policy preferences from men, prioritizing health care and drinking water over roads and transportation. But only 25 percent of women compared with nearly 90 percent of men chose to have their own preferences relayed to the representative (p. 28). This gap grew with the perceived difference in spousal policy preferences (p. 33) and closed with women's intra-household agency (p. 37-38).

In my own field research, too, I regularly encountered women who said that the choice for whom to vote is not theirs, but the head of the household's. A middle-aged woman who had served as *pradhan*, the head of the village council, in the past, said her husband takes voting decisions for the entire extended family that includes her in-laws as well: "he tells

everyone that they should vote for a particular candidate, like Modi or Yogi. If there are elections, he will tell us whom to vote for. No one will vote according to their own wishes."[32] When I asked a respondent in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh, what would happen if she wanted to vote for a different candidate than the rest of her family, she replied: "that is not possible, one must listen. Then what is the point of the family discussion [if everyone votes for different candidates]?"[33] A woman from rural Bihar explained to me why her father-in-law decides whom everyone in the family should vote for like this: "other family members, like my father-in-law, interact with them [politicians] as they come and go, so they know who will be good. So, they tell us whom to vote for, and we trust their judgment. That's how we decide whom to vote for."[34]

But just as often, I encountered women who said they themselves decide whom to vote for. Some were the head of their households and as such had control over their own as well as other family members' votes. For example, a widow around 65 years of age told me: "When I am the guardian of the house, you will have to do as I say, or will you vote however you wish to? I am the head of the family, so I will have a discussion with my children, like this person is not good, or if this person will not be of any benefit to us."[35] Others said that while their families strongly advised them whom to vote for, there was no compulsion to follow that advice. In an interview with a group of upper-caste women in Bihar, one participant said that "people say, 'give votes to this person, give votes to that party,'" only for a young woman to interject "but we don't do that. We vote according to our own will."[36]

The fact that the ballot is secret in India and families ultimately cannot effectively check

[32] Video interview, Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh, female interview, Dalit, middle class, October 31, 2021.
[33] Video interview, Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh, Muslim, poor household, October 30, 2021.
[34] Personal interview, Munger district, Bihar, female, Dalit, middle class, February 29, 2020.
[35] Video interview, Jaunpur district, Uttar Pradesh, Muslim, widow, around 65 years old, November 2, 2021.
[36] Personal interview, Munger district, Bihar, female group interview, upper caste, February 28, 2020.

whether females comply with instructions on whom to vote for may open up space for women to exercise agency. Several women told me that they often tell their families they voted as instructed, but once they stand in front of the voting machine, they cast a ballot whichever way they want to. An exchange with young mothers residing in the Adarsh Nagar area of Delhi illustrates this. When I asked whether anyone in their family told them whof to vote for, it generated lively replies:

> R_1: No, we vote through our own choice.
>
> R_2: We are told but we do not listen.
>
> R_3: It is our choice.
>
> R_4: They will tell us who to vote for, so we tell them that we will but then we vote for whoever we wish.
>
> (...)
>
> R_7: Whenever we go to cast our vote, we are told who to give and who to not, we listen to everyone but we do our own.
>
> R_8: Even in the family, each child tells us, 'No mommy, vote for them, they're right.' We question how someone is right for us and tell them no.
>
> R_9: We are asked on our way back who we voted for, and they ask if we voted for the person they thought we would vote for, we just agree with them and give them an affirmative reply.[37]

This is in line with research on Indian elections as well as on clientelism that stresses the agency that the secret ballot affords voters. For example, several explorations of vote buying have found that individuals in India rarely feel compelled to vote for a candidate just because that candidate had given them a pre-election handout, instead exercising their agency inside

[37] Personal interview, Adarsh Nagar, Delhi, group of young mothers, different ethnic groups, January 24, 2020.

the polling booth against the claims of political actors (Björkman, 2014; Chauchard, 2018). Similarly, women who otherwise do not get to make a lot of decisions within the household may take advantage of the secrecy of the ballot to exercise agency over their vote choice. As Banerjee (2019) wrote of her observations of Indian elections: "most of all, it was the secrecy of the ballot that made voting an unusual and desirable activity. Young women reported that the moment of casting their vote was perhaps the only time when they felt their thoughts and emotions were not being controlled by their mother-in-law, husband, or elders" (p. 23). However, at the same time previous research on clientelism in India suggests that many voters think that parties have ways to determine vote choice (Chandra, 2004); and electoral results are available at the polling-station level in India, making it possible for political entrepreneurs to draw fine-groined inferences.

Agency in vote choice may not be constrained just for women, but for junior men within the household as well. As mentioned previously, the study of two villages in Madhya Pradesh found that less than half of all men under the age of 40 reported they had the most say in their own voting decision, indicating that they, too, follow the lead of the head of household. In my interviews, too, heads of household often made it clear that *everyone* in the family should fall in line and pool their votes, not just women. A 65-year old widower, who was the eldest of six siblings in an extended family, said everyone in his household followed his directions when it came to elections: "From the beginning, I told you that I am the elder one. So, I am commanding everyone," including his four adult, married brothers.[38]

How much agency women exercise in household-supported voting, and which women exercise their agency in vote choice, therefore, is still something of an open question. I will investigate this question empirically in Chapter 4.

[38] Video interview, Jaunpur district, Uttar Pradesh, Muslim, widower, upper class, November 10, 2021.

1.3 Methods

In my dissertation, I develop a two-part theory, outlining how households can affect female turnout, and how clientelist party mobilization can shore up household support for women's participation; and investigate this theory using three different datasets.

I developed the first part of the theory, on intra-household dynamics, based on extensive qualitative field work across North India. Between January 2020 and February 2022, I conducted more than 80 interviews with women and men of voting age across three states and union territories in North India, namely Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. During this field research, I put women and their experiences front and center. In interviews, I probed for women's motivations to participate, their past experiences voting, and their families' – as well as society's – attitudes toward female turnout. These interviews were semi-structured, and took different directions as they progressed. They were variously conducted in respondents' homes or on the premises of NGOs. Some were individual interviews while others were held in group settings. They took place in unregulated slums, highly populated working class neighborhoods, or rural villages. While the women I interviewed had different backgrounds and experiences with the electoral process, common themes emerged over the course of my field research: the lack of family support in the past, current household support for female turnout as well as the stark difference between turnout and other forms of women's political participation came up time and again, as the quotes above showed.

Because it quickly became apparent that households would likely play a part in shaping women's participation, I also interviewed men. I wanted to see if men's and women's perceptions of female turnout and the role of the household diverged, and investigate the ideas that men had of women's participation. I used these insights from my field research, combined with a reading of the burgeoning literature on the importance of the household in

women's political behavior, to develop a theory of household-mediated turnout.

This theory of household-mediated turnout produces several testable hypotheses. To test these, I conducted an original survey around the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections.[39] This household-level survey interviewed both a female elector as well as the head of her household in order to be able to investigate the intra-household dynamics, and the gendered differences in the role of resources, that my theory predicts. Uttar Pradesh is a "hard case" for female turnout: the state is among the least developed in India, female labor force participation rates are low and gender differences in individual-level resources are high. In order to circumvent the problem of over-reporting of turnout, the survey was conducted in two rounds: the baseline survey, implemented between 14 and 3 days before the election, collected information on individual-level resources, attitudes toward female turnout as well as a range of measures on policy preferences and female agency in vote choice; a follow-up survey after election day, but before results were announced, verified turnout by checking for the electoral ink with which voters' fingers are marked in India, and asked questions about vote choice.

I also use a second survey to probe the theory further. This survey, implemented around the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections, was conducted in collaboration with Rahul Verma from the Centre for Policy Research in Delhi for different project, and was not directly designed to test the theory of household-mediated turnout.[40] However, because the Delhi survey also interviewed several registered electors per household and collected information on individual-level resources, I was able to use the data after the fact to further investigate the theory.

The second part of my theory outlines an argument for when and why households should be supportive of female turnout. While my qualitative field research provided clues to the fact

[39] The survey was pre-registered on https://osf.io/jyedaOSF and the study protocol was approved by the NYU New York IRB.

[40] The study protocol was approved by the NYU Abu Dhabi IRB.

that households in the past were opposed to women's electoral participation but support it today, the reasons for this change were not immediately clear. As the quotes above outline, many households value their votes highly today, pointing toward clientelism as an important factor. An increase in political mobilization seemed to have happened at some point in the past, but the origins and mechanisms were not obvious from an investigation of present-day politics and participation. To develop the theory of clientelist mobilization of household support, I therefore conducted an in-depth investigation of parties and politics in Uttar Pradesh, the state I knew best.

I read broadly on political parties and their mobilization of and bonds with voters, both across political science and anthropology literatures. Simultaneously, I immersed myself in historical newspaper reports on parties and elections. Thinking that the number of clientelist parties in competition and the number of different groups they represent is likely at the heart of high levels of clientelist competition, I started coding party leaders and their ethnic identities for Uttar Pradesh. Using electoral results, I first compiled lists of all major parties competing in each election year, and then scoured newspaper archives for information on state-level party leaders as well as their respective ethnic identities. Generating this data on leaders and their ethnic identities, as well as additional qualitative insights gleaned from newspaper reports, helped in building and refining the theory.

With broad hypotheses in mind that linked the number of ethnic parties as well as the number of distinct ethnic groups represented to levels of female turnout, I then interrogated this first-cut data from Uttar Pradesh. Plotting the number of parties and salient ethnic groups targeted cemented the idea that clientelist competition increased over time. Exploring the raw data from Uttar Pradesh helped me understand how ethnic incorporation has changed over time, what differentiates different ethnic parties from each other, and what types of ethnic groups where incorporated earlier versus later. It was in dialogue with this first cut of

the data from Uttar Pradesh that I refined the theory of clientelist mobilization. It helped me develop the concept of narrow ethnic parties, which target only a single ethnic group or category, compared with clientelist parties that target broad ethnic coalitions. The insight that some subaltern groups were incorporated into clientelist parties early on while others were kept out of electoral politics until very recently, and that some subaltern groups are part of ethnic coalitions with dominant groups while others are not, also aided me in developing specific arguments about the role of subalternality.

The theory of clientelist mobilization of household support produces several testable hypotheses. I investigate these using a newly assembled panel dataset that combines information on state-level party leaders and their ethnic identities with administrative data on turnout by gender, as well as socio-economic covariates from the census. These analyses are less clear-cut tests of the theory than those for the household theory, since some of the data – namely information on parties in Uttar Pradesh over time – was used during theory building. To perform more convincing tests of the theory, I therefore conduct all analyses twice: once on the full data, and once on the pure out-of-sample data, that is, excluding data from Uttar Pradesh. I find that results hold for the pure out-of-sample data, providing evidence that is compatible with my theory: as the number of distinct ethnic groups incorporated into clientelist parties rose, the gender turnout gap shrank.

The remainder of this dissertation will proceed as follows. Chapter 2 provides background on women's political participation in India, and tests traditional explanations for female turnout using data from India. Chapter 3 develops the argument presented above more formally, grounding it thoroughly in the literatures on India, female political participation and clientelism. In Chapter 4, I test the household dynamics proposed by my theory of household-mediated turnout in clientelist settings, using an original household survey conducted in Uttar Pradesh. Chapter 5 provides supportive evidence for the role of clientelism

in female turnout, by contrasting the Uttar Pradesh survey with a survey conducted in the more urban setting of Delhi. Finally, Chapter 6 investigates the theory of clientelist mobilization for household support using a newly assembled panel dataset on the composition of state-level party leadership across states.

Appendix A: The Enduring Puzzle of Female Political Participation

A.1 Field Research Details

Between January 2020 and February 2022, I conducted several field research trips during which I observed the execution of an Assembly election, and conducted semi-structured interviews with men and women of voting age across several locations in North India, as well as community leaders, politicians and election commission officials. I also conducted remote field research in the fall of 2021, while the Covid-19 pandemic did not present health risks to participants in India any more but still caused travel bans. Here, I provide additional details about this qualitative field research, including how respondents were recruited, the execution of interviews, and the shadowing of election officers throughout the two-day process of conducting an Assembly election.

A.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews with Voters

Overall, I conducted about 60 individual and 25 group interviews with individuals of voting age in Delhi, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The majority of these interviews (65) were conducted

with women, and the rest with men. Only one group interview involved both female and male participants. These interviews were approved by the NYU New York and NYU Abu Dhabi IRB, respectively (IRB #s: HRPP-2019-131, IRB-FY2022-5876, and IRB-FY2022-5863).

Recruitment

I recruited participants through NGOs or local research assistants that I hired for the purpose of conducting these interviews. The goal was to interview individuals of voting age from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds and belonging to different ethnic groups. When using an NGO for recruitment, social workers with the NGOs made the initial introduction with individuals or groups within their network who fit the characteristics that I had laid out. I then conducted the interviews myself. When using RAs for recruitments, RAs would recruit participants through local NGOs, local schools, clinics, or through random walks within vicinities. None of the respondents were related to or personally known to any of the RAs. Introductions always made it clear that participation is entirely voluntary and independent from service provision by NGOs or other service providers. As per the IRB-approved protocol, I noted general information about the socio-economic background and the ethnic group that respondents belonged to, as well as gender and rough age range; but did not collect any identifying information, including name, residence, and so on.

Interview Execution

Interviews were usually conducted in Hindi or, in some cases, local languages or dialects, such as Maithili in Bihar. I conducted all interviews myself, with a translator present who could translate between Hindi and English in case that respondents did not understand my questions or I did not understand respondents' answers. All interviews were recorded (with consent from respondents), transcribed and translated into English.

In-person interviews were often conducted on the premises of NGOs in order to ensure that particularly women have a safe space to talk freely about intra-household dynamics without relatives being present. Sometimes, interviews were conducted in respondents' homes. In these cases, I tried to ensure that no men were present for interviews with women, in order to minimize the possibility for social sanctions. On rare occasions, interviews were conducted in semi-public spaces, such as courtyards, on the respondents' request. In these cases, I tried to ensure that no one else was present within ear-shot of the interviews; and excluded any potentially sensitive questions about voting behavior and intra-household dynamics so to not expose respondents to potential social sanctions, should the interviews be overheard by anyone else.

Remote interviews were conducted via Zoom or WhatsApp. RAs were present on the ground with respondents and used a smartphone to establish a video call connection, so that I could conduct video interviews. Respondents could see me and I could see respondents through video during the interview. RAs followed the same rules about the privacy of interviews as described above, and took notes on the location in which the interview was conducted.

A.1.2 Interviews with Officials

I interviewed several politicians, election officials and bureaucrats as part of my field research around the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections. In order to secure interviews with politicians and party officials, I usually simply showed up at the party office, explained the purpose of my research and asked to speak to someone about women's voter participation. Whoever first took my request then directed me to someone who was authorized to speak to me on the subject. On several occasions, I made appointments with party officials to come back at a later time to conduct the interviews. Interview partners then often invited to observe party functions such as rallies, door-to-door canvassing drives or campaign events with them. In

this fashion, I secured interviews with party workers from the AAP, BJP and Congress; and observed electiono-related functions for each of the three parties.

I also interviewed officials with the Election Commission of India (ECI), including Sunil Arora, then Chief Election Commissioner of India; Umesh Sinha, then Secretary General of the ECI; and Dr. Aarti Aggarwal and Anuj Chandak, both with the voter education division of the ECI.

In order to interview District Magistrates (DMs), the most important bureaucrats within the district and in charge of the election administration within a district during election time, I went to the district headquarters, explained the purpose of my research and asked to make an appointment with the DM. I managed to interview 3 DMs, namely those of South East Delhi, East Delhi East, and South Delhi.

A.1.3 Election Observation

As part of my field research, I observed the conduct of the 2020 Delhi Assembly election, held on February 8, 2020, as an official election observer accredited by the Election Commission of India. I observed the assignment of polling officers to polling stations on February 7. I then shadowed a team of polling officers from the moment they received their assignment and the voting materials on the morning of February 7 to the moment when they handed in the voting materials at the end of their shift on the night of February 8. The team I shadowed staffed polling station (PS) 153, located inside Cosmos Public School, in Sector 16, Assembly Constituency (AC) 53, Badarpur, in the South East of Delhi. As there were three other polling stations located within the same school, and four more within walking distance at SK Payal Public School that I also had access to, I used casual observations from these other booths and conversations with other polling officers to put what I learned inside PS 153 into context.

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