

# The Limits of Electoral Gender Quotas: Long-Term Impacts on Women’s Political Representation

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## Research Question

*Beyond the mechanical effect of improving the representation of women through policy design, do electoral quotas improve women's representation within the same electoral body without quotas?*

## Gender Quotas in Politics

The under-representation of women in the political arena is a global phenomenon. Quotas are a commonly used method across the world to address the gender imbalance in political spaces.

1. The stated goal of quotas is to ease the entry of underrepresented groups into politics
2. Over time, with the aid of the policy and tenure, the group ceases to be underrepresented at which point quotas can be withdrawn
3. That said, quotas are rarely withdrawn because:
  - Implemented policies may not actually address the root cause of discrimination
  - The envisioned time horizon for ending these policies may not be sufficient to address historic inequalities and discrimination fully

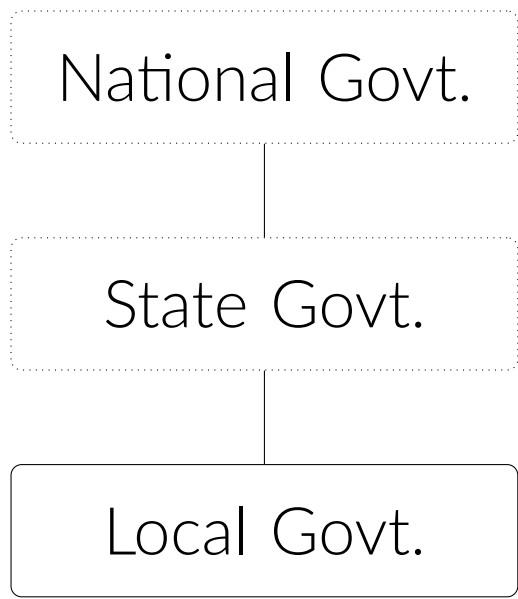
## Types of Electoral Quotas

Electoral quotas are implemented in one of the two ways (Htun, 2004):

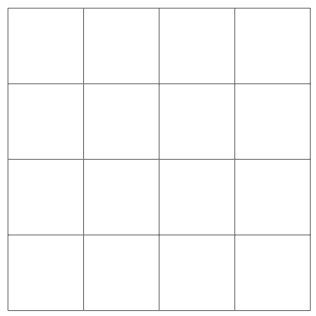
1. *Reserved-seat Quotas*: where a proportion of seats is exclusively set aside for a target group (women, in this case)
2. *Party List Quotas*: where a fixed percentage of candidates belonging to a target group/demographic are fielded by political parties

## Gender Quotas in India

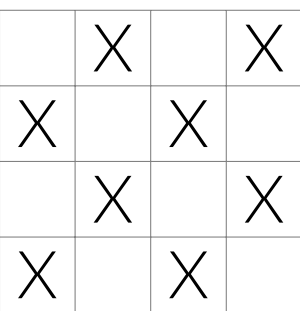
India is has a three-tiered quasi-federal governance structure.



A Constitutional amendment guaranteed *reserved-seat quotas* in India from 1993 in local governments. Reserved-seat quotas **mechanically** improve descriptive representation



16 single-member districts



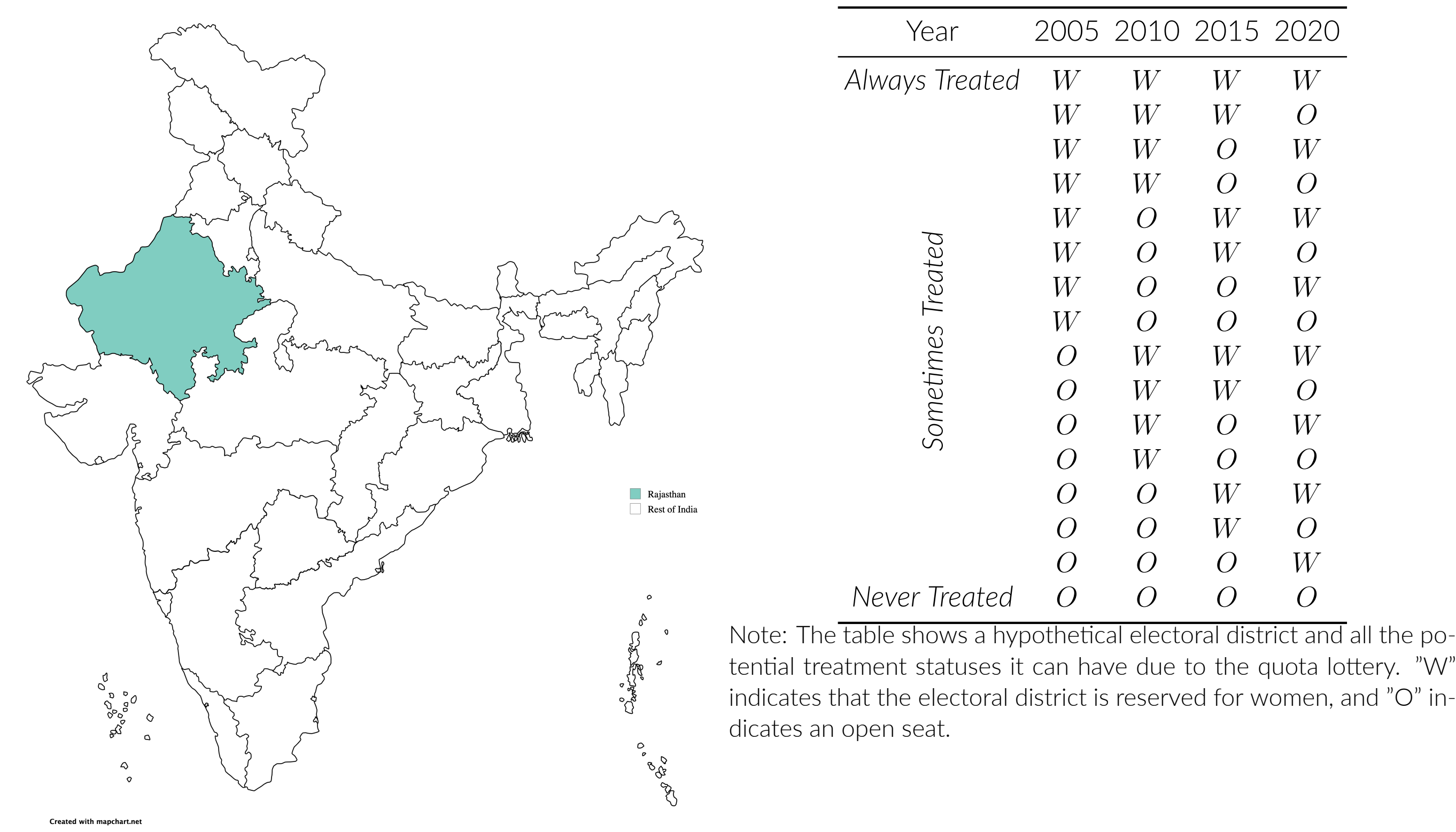
50% quota for Women

We study such quotas in rural local elections in the Indian state of Rajasthan – the *largest* Indian state by area, where over 70% of its 70+ million citizens reside in rural areas. Rajasthan's population is comparable in size to that of sovereign nations such as France, the UK, or Thailand.

## Research Design

We study the impact of quotas on the representation of women in the same electoral bodies when the districts are not reserved while the quota policies are still in place.

We use the variation generated by randomly imposed electoral quotas in rural local elections across 4 election cycles (2005, 2010, 2015, and 2020) in Rajasthan.



## Short-Term Effects

We examine the effect of randomly imposed quotas for women through pairwise comparisons to understand the immediate impact of quotas. We analyze the outcomes for women when a seat's reservation status switches from *quota* to *open*.

Immediate Effects			
2005 ~ 2010			
	2010 rep is a woman in an open seat in Raj [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.0937 (0.0064)		
Quota Treatment in 2005	0.0245 (0.0111)	0.0267 (0.0123)	0.0263 (0.0123)
Observations	3,342	3,342	3,342
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00145	0.04985	0.12117
Within R <sup>2</sup>		0.00181	0.00181
District (2010) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2010) fixed effects			✓

2010 ~ 2005			
	2015 rep is a woman in an open seat in Raj [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.0772*** (0.0056)		
Quota Treatment in 2010	-0.0098 (0.0079)	-0.0135 (0.0087)	-0.0256** (0.0109)
Observations	4,308	4,308	4,308
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00036	0.07667	0.14881
Within R <sup>2</sup>		0.00065	0.00177
District (2015) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2015) fixed effects			✓

2015 ~ 2020			
	2020 rep is a woman in an open seat in Raj [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.1100*** (0.0075)		
Quota Treatment in 2015	-0.0065 (0.0096)	-0.0080 (0.0100)	-0.0083 (0.0105)
Observations	4,351	4,351	4,351
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00011	0.02378	0.08708
Within R <sup>2</sup>		0.00015	0.00016
District (2020) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2020) fixed effects			✓

Signif. Codes: \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1. Standard Errors in Parenthesis

## Long-Term Effects

The long term impact of gender quotas in rural governments: Quotas **do not** lead to a woman's victory in a seat when its status switches from quota to no-quota.

Always Treated			
	2020 rep is a woman in an open seat in Raj [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.1062*** (0.0048)		
Always treated (quota in 2005, 10, & 15)	-0.0062 (0.0241)	-0.0196 (0.0239)	-0.1554** (0.0253)
Observations	4,351	4,351	4,351
R <sup>2</sup>	1.52 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>	0.02378	0.08715
Within R <sup>2</sup>		0.00015	0.00023
District (2020) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2020) fixed effects			✓
Gram Panchayat (2020) fixed effects			✓

Never Treated			
	2020 rep is a woman in an open seat in Raj [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.1046*** (0.0051)		
Never treated (No quota in 2005, 10, & 15)	0.0084 (0.0126)	0.0082 (0.0136)	-0.0751 (0.0148)
Observations	4,351	4,351	4,351
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00010	0.02372	0.08703
Within R <sup>2</sup>		9.41 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>	0.00010
District (2020) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2020) fixed effects			✓
Gram Panchayat (2020) fixed effects			✓

Sometimes Treated			
	2020 rep is a woman in an open seat in Raj [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.1130*** (0.0115)		
Sometimes treated (treat_05 + treat_10 + treat_15 > 0)	-0.0084 (0.0126)	-0.0082 (0.0136)	-0.0090 (0.0148)
Observations	4,351	4,351	4,351
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00010	0.02372	0.08703
Within R <sup>2</sup>		9.41 × 10 <sup>-5</sup>	0.00010
District (2020) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2020) fixed effects			✓
Gram Panchayat (2020) fixed effects			✓

Max Contrast			
	2020 rep is a woman in an open seat [i]	[ii]	[iii]
Constant	0.1000*** (0.0241)		
Max contrast	0.0130 (0.0268)	0.0398* (0.0222)	0.0581* (0.0323)
Observations	887	887	887
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00027	0.06611	0.25688
Within R <sup>2</sup>		0.00226	0.00394
District (2020) fixed effects		✓	✓
Panchayat Samiti (2020) fixed effects			✓

Signif. Codes: \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1. Standard Errors in Parenthesis

Without quotas, the gains made in the description representation of women could be severely impacted.

## Potential Mechanisms

1. **Male Capture**: Male counterparts field their spouses. Preliminary Evidence. Survey in the field for thorough analysis
2. **Increase in Treatment dose (exposure)** has no effect. There may be a need for more dosage for many of the discriminatory attitudes, norms, and practices have been in place for centuries
3. Voter Demand, Party Discrimination, Candidate Decision Calculus: Our data and setting do not allow us to answer these. Companion papers explore these topics, happy to talk more!

## Contributions & Conclusion

1. To our knowledge, we are the *first* to examine the long-term impact of reservations in rural local elections in India. Ours is the *largest dataset* assembled to answer this question
2. Reservations for women, even in the long run, do not dramatically increase the number of women getting elected to the same post when the seat is unreserved
3. Without quotas, the gains made in the description representation of women could be severely impacted. Results consistent across 2 large Indian states
4. If the underlying causes of under-representation are not addressed, then any policy that seeks to rectify the imbalance in representation papers over the cracks “ (...) *Transformation at the institutional level is easier to achieve, but we need effective measures to bring about a similar transformation at the personal level, a concrete attitudinal change in individuals.*” (Nanivadekar, 2006)

