

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 representational imbalance in politics.

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Over time, with the aid of the policy and tenure, the group ceases to be underrepresented at which point quotas can be withdrawn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 That said, quotas are rarely withdrawn because: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, which is hard to determine ex-ante, for ending these policies may not be sufficient to address historic inequalities and discrimination fully

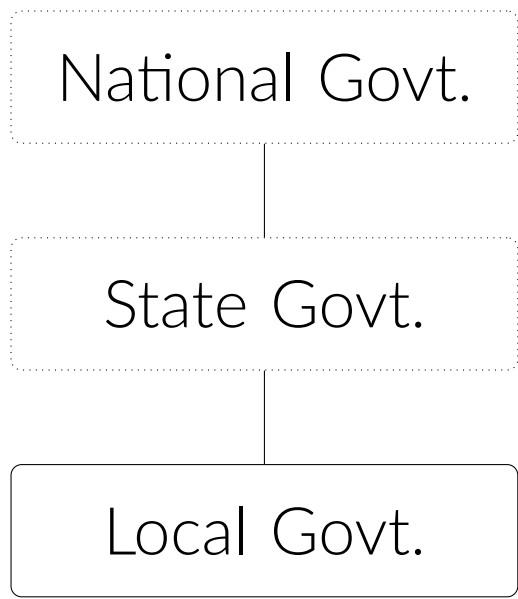
Types of Electoral Quotas

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

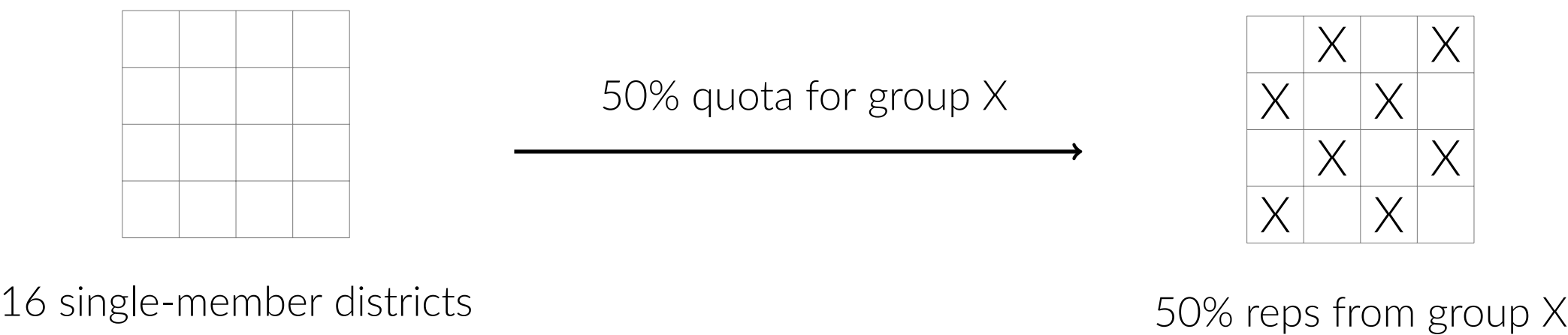
1. *Reserved-seat Quotas*: where a proportion of seats is exclusively set aside for a target group (women, in our case)
2. *Party List Quotas*: where a fixed percentage of candidates belonging to a target group/demographic are fielded by political parties

Gender Quotas in India

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



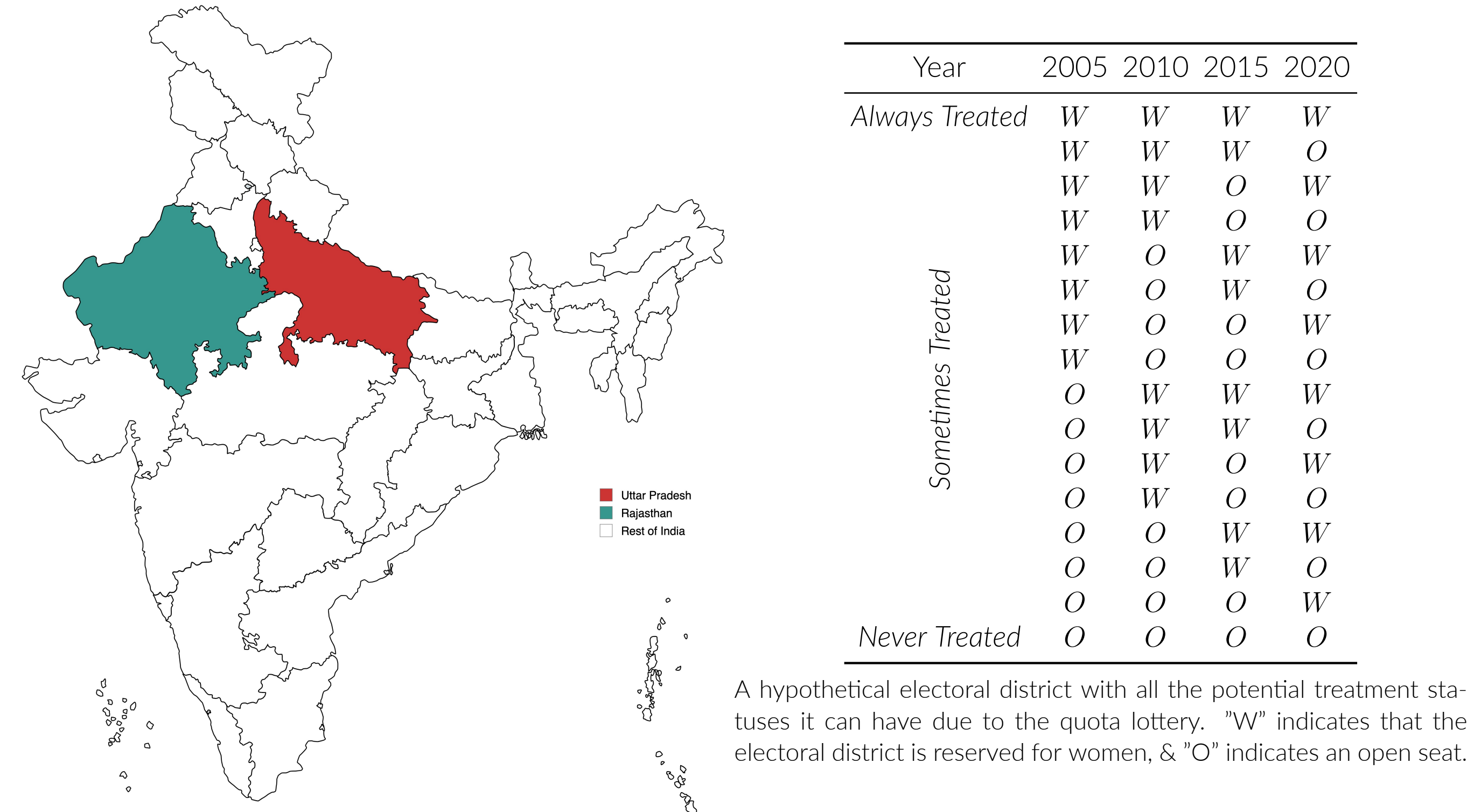
A Constitutional amendment guaranteed *reserved-seat quotas* in India from 1993 in local governments. Reserved-seat quotas **mechanically** improve descriptive representation.



Research Design

We study the impact of quotas on the representation of women in the same electoral bodies when the districts switch from quota to no quota. We focus on rural local governments in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh with a combined population >320M. As a sovereign nation, they would be the world’s 4th largest.

We utilize the variation generated by *randomly* imposed electoral quotas across 4 election cycles (2005, 2010, 2015, and 2020) in Rajasthan & 3 cycles (2005, 2010, and 2015) in Uttar Pradesh.



Short-Term Effects

Quotas **do not** lead to women's victory when a seat status switches from *quota* to *no-quota*.

	Representative is a woman in an open seat				
	Rajasthan			Uttar Pradesh	
	2010	2015	2020	2010	2015
Quota Treatment in 2005	0.1249 (0.2722)			0.0758 (0.0587)	
Quota Treatment in 2010		0.2023 (0.2693)			0.0267 (0.0422)
Quota Treatment in 2015			0.0072*** (1 × 10 ^{−5})		
Observations	3,342	4,308	4,351	10,842	14,197
R ²	0.99022	0.99342	0.98936	0.92152	0.88940
Within R ²	0.02398	0.10164	0.00015	0.01072	0.00125

*Quota Treatment is a dummy variable that is 1, when a district is experiencing quotas, and 0 otherwise. Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis. All models include District, Samiti, & Gram Panchayat fixed effects*

Long-Term Effects

Quotas **do not** dramatically increase the number of women getting elected to the same post when the seat status switches from *quota* to *no-quota* in the long-run.

	Rajasthan			
	Representative is a woman in an open seat in 2020 [i]	[ii]	[iii]	[iv]
Always treated (Quota in 2005, 10, & 15)	-0.0243 (0.0210)			
Never treated (No Quota in 2005, 10, & 15)		0.0090 (0.0152)		
Sometimes treated (Quota in 2005, 10, or 15)			-0.0090 (0.0152)	
Max Contrast (<i>WWW</i> v. <i>OOO</i>)				-0.0581* (0.0323)
Observations	4,351	4,351	4,351	887
R ²	0.08715	0.08703	0.08703	0.25688
Within R ²	0.00023	0.00010	0.00010	0.00394

	Uttar Pradesh			
	Representative is a woman in an open seat in 2015 [i]	[ii]	[iii]	[iv]
Always treated (Quota in 2005, & 10)	0.0184* (0.0109)			
Never treated (No Quota in 2005, & 10)		-0.0077 (0.0061)		
Sometimes treated (Quota in 2005 or 10)			0.0077 (0.0061)	
Max Contrast (<i>WW</i> v. <i>OO</i>)				0.0216* (0.0113)
Observations	14,197	14,197	14,197	6,714
R ²	0.05676	0.05651	0.05651	0.09242
Within R ²	0.00035	8.92 × 10 ^{−5}	8.92 × 10 ^{−5}	0.00075

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1. Clustered standard errors in parenthesis. All models include District, Samiti, & Gram Panchayat fixed effects*

Potential Mechanisms and Contributions

1. **Male Capture**: Male counterparts field their spouses. Original survey evidence
2. **↑ Treatment dose** has no effect. There may be a need for increased dosage, due to longstanding discriminatory attitudes, norms, and practices
3. We are the *first* to examine the long-term impact of reservations in rural local elections in India, utilizing the *largest* dataset assembled for this purpose
4. **Quotas** \implies **↑ Descriptive Representation**. Without quotas, women’s representational gains could be severely impacted
5. **Substantive Representation?** If the underlying causes of under-representation are not addressed, then policies that seek to rectify the imbalance merely papers over the cracks

