

Do Electoral Eligibility Laws Hurt Political Candidacy of Specific Groups? Evidence from Fertility Limits on Local Politicians in India *

Priyadarshi Amar[†]

August 14, 2025

Abstract

Governments worldwide regulate political candidacy through various means. This paper examines electoral laws in India that disqualify citizens with more than two children from contesting local government offices. These laws were implemented based on the premise that political officeholders, through their significant influence on their communities, could help shape social norms around family size. Using variation in the law's adoption across states, I employ a difference-in-differences framework to analyze its effects on political candidacy among Muslims, who constitute India's largest religious minority and one of its most marginalized groups. I find that fertility limits reduce Muslim candidacy. However, there is no significant effect on the overall number of candidates and candidacy of other major social groups. I argue that this is due to the dilemma potential candidates face between complying with the law or adhering to social norms regarding family size. Drawing on an original survey of 500 village politicians, I find evidence consistent with my theory. Additionally, the survey highlights that many politically aspiring citizens cope with these limits by fielding their family members. This paper underscores that states' efforts to shape social norms through electoral laws may come at the cost of marginalized groups' political candidacy.

Keywords: Political Entry, Electoral Laws, Candidacy, Local Politics, Population Control Policies, India

*I would like to extend my gratitude first and foremost to Rikhil Bhavnani, Laura Schechter, Yoshiko Herrera, Zhenhuan Lei, Simon Chauchard and Priya Mukherjee for their guidance and support for this project. I would also like to thank Andrew Foster for kindly providing access to the REDS data. Additionally, I would like to thank Guatam Nair, Feyaad Allie, Moshi Alam, Soledad Prillaman, Sudhir Singh, Sumitra Badrinathan, Varun Karekurve-Ramachandra, Nikhar Gaikwad, participants of development lab, CPC, MEAD, MPSA, APSA, MWEPS and seminar on political inequality for stimulating discussions that help me improve the paper. Thanks also to Yashashree Belkar, Jignesh Killelkar, and Ruchika Khana for excellent research assistance.

[†]PhD Candidate, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Email: pamar@wisc.edu

1 Introduction

Laws restricting political office eligibility based on personal characteristics have existed since the earliest electoral systems, with common requirements focusing on age, citizenship, residency, and birthplace. These restrictions vary in stringency across different offices. For example, the U.S. presidency demands natural-born citizenship, a minimum age of 35, and 14 years of U.S. residency, while Senate candidates need only be 30 years old, citizens for 9 years, and residents at election time. Some nations impose additional qualifications beyond these usual requirements. For instance, Argentina requires Senators to meet minimum income thresholds, while Pakistan mandates that National Assembly members hold graduate degrees. These electoral eligibility requirements create varying barriers to political participation across different groups.

In this study, I investigate whether such institutional rules also influence the participation of specific groups for political office. While electoral rules establishing eligibility criteria for political office—such as minimum age, residency, or education requirements—appear neutral like voting laws, they may inadvertently alter the candidate pool’s composition by creating varying entry costs for different groups. Proponents contend these laws improve the candidate pool’s quality while creating role models who can promote desired societal behaviors [Shapiro et al., 2010]. Critics, however, argue that regulating political entry often produces unintended and far-reaching consequences [Pande, 2015]. Despite their widespread prevalence, there is limited empirical evidence on how these institutional rules impact the political entry of specific groups.

This study addresses this gap by examining how electoral rules in rural India’s local governments affect political candidacy of major social groups in India. In particular, I focus on upper-caste Hindus—the politically dominant group; Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)—marginalized groups with constitutionally mandated quotas; Other Backward Castes (OBCs)—a large marginalized group without constitutional mandates but with quotas in most states; and Muslims—the country’s largest re-

ligious minority and one of its most marginalized socioeconomic groups, lacking constitutional mandates but with quotas in a few states [Allie, 2023].¹ Specifically, I analyze the impact of laws that restrict political candidacy based on family size in village elections. These restrictions were implemented to limit population growth by positioning elected representatives as role models for family planning [Anukriti and Chakravarty, 2019, Buch, 2005]. The law disqualifies individuals who have additional children after its implementation but does not penalize those who already had large families. In other words, citizens with more than two children prior to the law's implementation remain eligible for office, but any subsequent births will disqualify them. These fertility limits were among the first amendments to vary entry requirements across states in the local governance act. The geographic and temporal variation in their adoption provides an opportunity for systematic analysis.

Why would laws limiting office to individuals with specific characteristics affect specific groups? Existing theories suggest that entry costs play a crucial role in the decision to run for elections [Gulzar, 2021, Tullock, 1965]. I argue that when entry requirements challenge social norms, citizens who deviate from these norms to contest for office may face backlash from both their family and community. These costs are particularly pronounced for groups with lower likelihood of winning and groups higher tradeoff. Moreover, if electoral rules are implemented imperfectly—a common issue in developing countries—they may enable elites to exploit the system for their own benefit [Anderson et al., 2015, Neggers, 2018].

Using data from a nationally representative survey, I find that fertility limits decrease both the likelihood of any Muslim candidate running and the overall share of Muslims on the ballot, suggesting a decline in Muslim political candidacy. However, the results show no significant effect on the candidacy of other major social groups and the

¹In some states, there are quotas for economically disadvantaged Muslims, but they must compete with OBCs for those seats. Typically, these quotas are dominated by OBCs, as economically disadvantaged Muslims are both socially and economically more marginalized [Basant, 2007]. Hence, many Muslim groups and political parties demand exclusive quotas for Muslims.

total candidacy. However, there is descriptive evidence suggesting that these limits alter the age composition of candidates – specifically, the ratio between younger candidates (who are affected by the limits because they may not have reached their desired family size) and older, unaffected candidates. The shift from young to old candidates can occur in two ways: 1) the decline in candidacy among young aspirants creates a void filled by older candidates, and 2) young citizens affected by fertility limits may recruit older, unaffected family members to run in their place. Data from the original survey of local politicians in Maharashtra support the second pattern, revealing that politically ambitious individuals who are ineligible due to fertility limits often arrange for others to run in their place. Although this arrangement allows for some degree of continued political participation, it raises concerns about democratic accountability. If elected, these replacement candidates can serve as proxies for the ineligible individuals they represent [Heinze et al., Forthcoming]. However, the overall decline in Muslim candidacy suggests that this coping strategy only partially mitigates the impact of fertility limits, rather than providing complete replacement.

To uncover the underlying mechanisms, I primarily rely on data from a phone survey of current village council members and runners-up in Maharashtra's village councils, as Maharashtra is one of the major states that adopted fertility limits. The survey reveals suggestive evidence that son preference is relatively higher among Muslim politicians. This preference is particularly significant because Indian law bans fetal sex determination to prevent sex-selective abortions of female fetuses, a practice driven by son preference [Arnold et al., 2002, Jayachandran, 2017]. Consequently, son preference becomes a key driver of family size decisions. Since family size preferences are heavily influenced by community norms, deviating from these preferences can impose substantial social costs.

The survey data also underscores the role of imperfect enforcement. Most politicians report that false accusations and misreporting of children to maintain eligibility

are common in Maharashtra, even after two decades of the law's implementation. While these illicit practices are reported equally across religious groups, their prevalence may be higher in other states, as Maharashtra is known for relatively stronger enforcement [Karnik and Raju, 2015]. In other states, qualitative evidence indicates that local elites frequently weaponize false accusations as tools of suppression [Buch, 2005]. Therefore, imperfect implementation cannot be ruled out as a potential mechanism for the decline in Muslim candidacy. The survey also reveals an important insight about policy design: Muslim respondents, who must compete without the benefit of quotas unlike other marginalized groups, report that political aspirants from their community would be more willing to comply with fertility requirements if exclusive quotas existed for their community. This suggests that the combination of fertility limits and low probability of electoral success may explain the observed decline in Muslim candidacy.

This paper makes the following contributions. First, it examines the consequences of laws that restrict individuals from holding political office based on specific characteristics for unprotected marginalized groups. Despite the wide variety of electoral laws, which can significantly impact the social composition of the candidate pool, existing studies have predominantly concentrated on the consequences of filing fees and signature requirements—types of electoral laws that were designed to reduce the number of political parties and have been argued to contribute to the demise of third parties in the US [Ansolabehere and Gerber, 1996, Burden, 2007, Drometer and Rincke, 2009, Strattmann, 2005, Tamas, 2018, Tullock, 1965, Winger, 2002]. Second, it highlights the factors that influence entry costs. Existing literature on the determinants of political entry focuses on political ambition, the likelihood of winning, and the benefits of running for office, like rents and prominence within the community (see Gulzar [2021] for a detailed literature review). This literature mentions that entry costs are crucial, but does not discuss individual, household, and community-level factors that constitute these costs. Lastly, this paper contributes to the large body of literature on decentralization in India.

These government structures have been extensively studied in recent years, primarily due to the large-scale adoption of constitutionally mandated gender- and caste-based quotas for those running for local government offices [Beaman et al., 2009, Bhavnani, 2009, Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004, Chauchard, 2017]. However, while some laws aim to increase the representation of marginalized groups, several states have introduced laws that restrict office eligibility based on specific characteristics, such as minimum education requirements, toilet requirements, and fertility limits. Understanding the consequences of these laws is essential for assessing the benefits of representational gains from decentralization.

2 Conceptual Framework

How does restricting political office to candidates with specific characteristics affect the decision to run for office? The commonly held view is that barriers to entry through ballot access restrictions result in a decrease in political or electoral competition [Afzal, 2014]. This is because these restrictions increase the costs of entry for candidates, making it more difficult for them to run for office [Tullock, 1965]. These entry costs are an important part of my analysis, as they play a role in determining whether candidates impacted by the restrictions will choose to run for office [Kapoor and Magesan, 2018].

Electoral laws that challenge existing social norms create complex behavioral responses. Existing research has documented intricate relationships between formal laws, social norms, and individual behavior [Benabou and Tirole, 2011, Bénabou and Tirole, 2003, Lane et al., 2023]. Lane et al. [2023], argue that individuals, being inherently pro-social, respond to both rewards for conforming to societal norms and sanctions for deviating from them. In this case, fertility restrictions create a direct tension between maintaining cultural family size preferences and pursuing political aspirations. When family size norms differ substantially across social groups, these restrictions may have disparate impacts on different communities.

However, individuals might choose to deviate from these norms if the payoff for

doing so is sufficiently high [Gulzar, 2021]. The potential benefits of running for office may include the rents from being an elected representative, the gains from public service, or the opportunity to represent one's community [Gulzar and Khan, 2025]. Yet, if the likelihood of winning an election is low, as is often the case for marginalized groups, the cost of deviating from family or community preferences may outweigh these potential benefits. Consequently, aspiring citizens from these groups may opt not to contest elections. I refer to this mechanism as internal costs, as they arise from individual, family, and community preferences.

EXPECTATION 1 *Electoral laws that challenge social norms may reduce political candidacy among groups that face both high costs for norm deviation and low electoral prospects.*

Now, consider a scenario where the state is unable to fully enforce a law. In such cases, groups with greater influence over the bureaucracy might violate the law without facing consequences [Anderson et al., 2015, Neggers, 2018]. Furthermore, these influential groups could exploit limited state capacity to falsely accuse competitors. Consequently, even if a law-abiding citizen from a marginalized group decides to contest elections despite their social preferences, they may be deterred by the potential costs of facing false accusations. I term these external costs, as they arise from imperfect state enforcement rather than individual or group preferences.

EXPECTATION 2 *Electoral laws with imperfect implementation can disproportionately affect marginalized groups, thereby reducing their political candidacy.*

3 Fertility Preferences and Candidacy in Rural India

In many societies, fertility choices are influenced by social, demographic, and economic conditions [Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969]. Additionally, numerous studies on fertility behavior have documented a negative relationship between income and fertility [Doepke et al., 2023]. The pattern looks very similar in India. Marginalized minority

groups (Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Muslims) that are most economically marginalized tend to prefer larger families. Table 3.1 shows the preference for more than two children among socioeconomic groups, as reported by female respondents from three rounds of the nationally-representative National Family Health Survey conducted in 1992-93, 1998-99, and 2005-2006. Compared to 67% of Muslim women, only 48% of upper-caste women desired more than two children. There are several reasons for these preferences, and it is typically a combination of factors, such as high child mortality, low usage of contraceptives, son preference, and lack of access and resources for sex-selective abortion, among others [Anukriti and Chakravarty, 2019, Buch, 2005].²

Let us consider the trade-off that Muslims face between contesting elections and limiting family size. Muslims, as a religious minority and one of the marginalized groups in India, lack the constitutionally mandated institutional protections afforded to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). In a typical constituency, if voters prefer to vote for candidates from their own group, Muslims may struggle to gain support without the backing of other social groups. Given the preference for larger families, candidates who choose to have the number of children they desire might become ineligible under the law, which disproportionately affects their community. On the other hand, if Muslim households limit family size to meet eligibility requirements, they may face high costs due to deviating from community or family preferences, potentially leading to backlash from their own. Additionally, Muslims are less likely to win elections as they compete against politically dominant upper-caste Hindus in seats without quotas. Consequently, they might face more suspicions and accusations, as these tools of suppression are predominantly wielded by dominant groups [Buch, 2005]. Therefore, it is rational for more Muslims to contest less, despite their personal preferences.

In contrast, the consequences of fertility limits on marginalized groups with quota

²Strong son preference is common across all social groups in rural India. However, historically disadvantaged groups are less likely to have the resources to illegally determine the sex and abort female fetuses [Anukriti and Chakravarty, 2019, Buch, 2005].

Table 3.1: Fraction of women whose ideal number of children > 2

Category	Fraction
Muslim	0.67
Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST)	0.56
Other Backward castes (OBC)	0.44
Upper Caste	0.48
Hindu	0.49
Other religions	0.33

Source: This table reports computations done by [Anukriti and Chakravarty 2019](#).

mandates in the Indian constitution, such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), are not obvious despite their preferences for larger families. Electoral quotas significantly affect their likelihood of winning and the backlash they may face from deviating from family size norms. In a related study, [Anukriti and Chakravarty \[2019\]](#) finds that fertility limits for candidates in village councils reduce the likelihood of having a third child among Hindu citizens, with the effects driven by SCs and STs. The authors argue that this could be due to their desire to maintain eligibility to run for political offices reserved for them.

Lastly, the consequences for groups like Upper Castes and Other Backward Castes may not be as significant, since the majority among them prefer families with fewer than two children. That said, family size preference in this context depends on the number of sons [[Arnold et al., 2002](#), [Jayachandran, 2017](#)]. For instance, if a couple has two daughters, they might exceed their preferred family size to have a son. Consequently, whether a family achieves their ideal number of sons may affect their actual family size.

4 Fertility Limit Legislation

In recent years, India has made significant changes to the way local governance is handled through electoral processes. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 directed state governments to conduct regular elections at the local level and gave local councils the authority to oversee and manage expenses. As a result, village councils play a significant role, as they have the responsibility to provide public goods and decide

who will benefit from the central and state government's development programs. These amendments not only strengthened local institutions, but also ensured underrepresented groups were represented by mandating quotas for them in elections. Specifically, one-third of the seats in local government bodies are reserved for women and a certain number of seats are reserved for scheduled castes, tribes, and other backward castes, based on their population. Several studies have been conducted to assess the political and economic impacts of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (Bhavnani 2009, Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004, Dunning and Nilekani 2013).

The constitutional amendment was a significant step forward for local governance in India, but several states made new laws that varied the entry requirements. One such law was the implementation of a two-child limit for candidates in local bodies. In 1992, the National Development Council was established after the results of the 1991 Census were released, with the goal of controlling population growth. Following the recommendations of the 1992 apex committee on family planning, several states imposed a two-child limit for candidates in local government bodies, based on the idea that local leaders could influence the fertility choices of their constituents by setting an example [Waldman, 2022]. Initially, eleven states implemented this legislation starting in 1992, but it is now only in effect in seven states, as four states repealed it between 2005-2006. According to Anukriti and Chakravarty [2019], pressure from societal groups forced the state government reverse the decision, as in some instances, elected representatives and aspiring citizens abandoned their wives or children or selectively aborted female fetuses due to fear of disqualification.

The law prohibits potential candidates who violate the limits from running for or continuing in political office after the policy goes into effect. All states provided a one-year grace period during which individuals could have additional children without affecting their eligibility. Incumbent politicians with two or more children who have another child after the policy takes effect will be disqualified from office, based on a com-

plaint or petition to the district administration. According to administrative data from [Buch \[2005\]](#), several elected representatives were disqualified for violating the two-child limit in the states of Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. The study also documents cases of false accusations by political competitors and cases wherein no one complained against a violator. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews, the authors argue that dominant caste elites frequently employ these strategies as political tools.

In many contexts, seemingly “neutral” institutional rules significantly contribute to low voter turnout among marginalized groups [[Berman, 2015](#), [Keyssar, 2009](#), [Wehner and de Kadt, 2023](#), [White, 2019](#)]. In the United States, policies such as disenfranchisement of those with criminal records and requirements for specific identification documents are considered primary factors in the persistently low electoral participation rates among Black and Indigenous voters. Unlike in other countries where such laws are often implemented by a particular political party with clear intent, in the Indian context, various political parties both implemented and repealed these measures across different states. Anecdotally, when these policies were initially adopted in some states, they may not have explicitly targeted specific communities but were primarily implemented to address general policy concerns of population control, with later adoption following bureaucratic precedence.

Similar rules with potential disproportionate impacts have emerged in recent years. For example, several Indian states have adopted laws barring individuals from contesting local political office if their households lack toilets. These laws, implemented to reduce open defecation practices that particularly affected women, have interestingly been found to disproportionately affect upper-caste Hindus, as having toilets within household premises is ritualistically discouraged among some groups [[Kumar, 2017](#)]. This case further demonstrates how local institutions are often leveraged by policymakers to implement laws ostensibly aimed at changing social norms, yet with disparate

impacts on specific communities.

5 Data and Empirics

This paper aims to identify the causal effect of fertility limit legislation on candidacy patterns in Indian village council elections. The analysis leverages spatial and temporal variation in law implementation across states, using data from the 2006/09 Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS), which provides a nationally representative sample of rural India.³ The household survey data was collected in two stages. First, a comprehensive listing survey gathered demographic data and information on local governance participation from 115,429 household heads across 243 villages. Second, a detailed household survey was administered to a subset of 8,569 households spanning 240 villages in 17 major Indian states. Complementarily, the village survey gathered administrative details, such as election year and reservation status for each seat on the council, from official village records.⁴ The REDS 2006/09 dataset is particularly suitable for my analysis for several reasons. Firstly, the listing survey documents detailed information on participation in local village councils from all major states of India. Secondly, the survey includes retrospective data on local governance participation, providing a rich dataset on political outcomes across multiple electoral cycles.

Figure 5.1 presents information on election years by state and variations in the timing of the implementation of these laws across states.⁵ The light gray shaded area in the figure represents the period during which fertility limits were in effect, while the diamonds mark the election years for the sample villages in each state. The data includes information for two elections per village; however, election timings varied across

³The Rural Economic and Demographic Survey, originally conducted in 1971 as the Additional Rural Income Survey, employs a stratified random sampling strategy across 252 villages. Subsequent rounds were conducted in 1982, 1999, and the most recent in 2006/09, making it one of the oldest running panel surveys.

⁴Information from Jharkhand is not available, thus this state is excluded from my analysis.

⁵I primarily rely on [Anukriti and Chakravarty 2019](#) for key policy dates, while verifying and correcting any discrepancies in the timeline. For instance, while [Anukriti and Chakravarty 2019](#) reports that Maharashtra implemented the policy in 2001, state government records indicate implementation occurred in 2003.

villages in some states, resulting in elections being spread over multiple years. The figure shows that some states had fertility limits throughout the study period, some had them for only one election cycle, and others never had fertility limits during the study period. In the survey data, the states that implemented the law are Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Bihar. Among these, Bihar implemented fertility limits only on candidates in municipal councils (urban councils), so Bihar is used as a control state. Four states revoked the policy, but Himachal Pradesh is the only state in my sample that had elections after the policy was revoked. Consequently, I exclude Himachal Pradesh from the analysis, as carryover effects—where potential outcomes in the present period may be influenced by previous exposure—would violate the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA).⁶ Finally, the treatment group in our sample consists of the eight states that implemented restrictions on candidates in village councils.

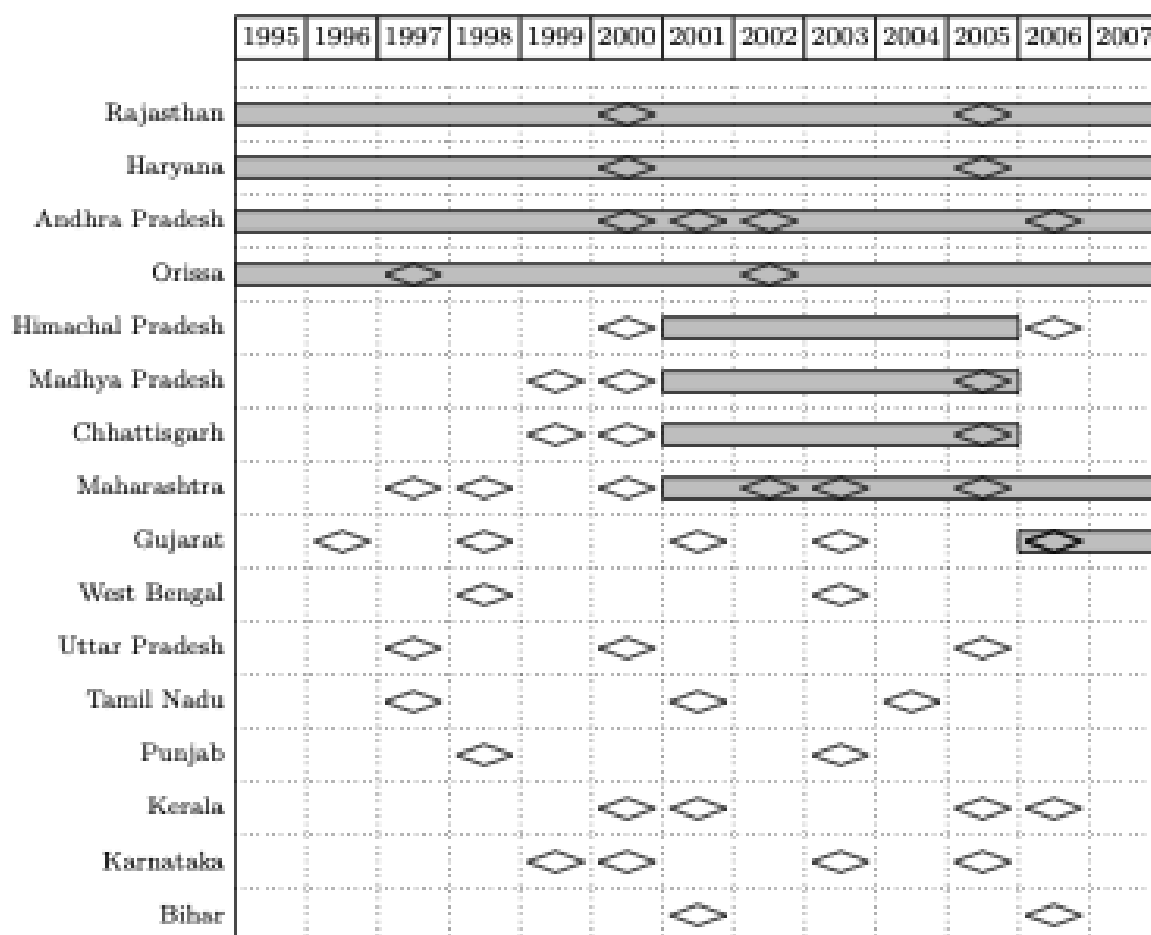
Using the data from the census of household heads from villages, I identify households with candidates who contested village council elections relying on responses to the following questions:

- Were you a candidate for the position of a council member in the current (previous) term?
- Was any member of your family a candidate for the position of council member in the current (previous) term?

The first question is for the head of the household, while the second question is for other members of the household. If the answer is “yes” to the second question, the number of candidates is not specified in the response. Therefore, I define my measures in terms of candidate households rather than individual candidates. I use this information to create a village-level framework, where each observation represents a

⁶The canonical difference-in-differences framework assumes that once a unit switches treatment status, it does not change [Callaway and Sant’Anna, 2021].

Figure 5.1: Information on Election Years and Timing of Treatment by State



Notes: The light gray shaded period in the figure represents the years during which fertility limits were in place, and diamonds indicate the election years for the sample villages of the state.

village election. For Muslims and Upper Caste Hindus, I construct and use three measures: the number of candidate households, a binary measure indicating any candidate households, and the share of candidate households. I do not use the binary measure for OBCs, SCs, and STs, as most villages in the sample have at least one seat reserved for SC, ST, and OBC. Hence, the presence of any candidate from those groups is mechanical due to quotas. Table 5.1 presents the mean and standard deviation across candidacy measures for all major social groups by treatment status: never treated, always treated, and sometimes treated. The never-treated states never implemented fertility limit laws

during the study period, while always-treated states had already implemented the laws in the period of study. Sometimes treated states had elections both before and after implementation.⁷ The descriptive results show a noticeable decrease in total candidate households in sometimes treated states, dropping from 8.91 pre-implementation to 7.92 post-implementation (an 11% decline). Muslim candidacy decreases substantially in treated areas, with the share of Muslim candidate households dropping from 0.05 to 0.01 in sometimes treated states after implementation, representing an 87% decline. Upper Caste Hindu households also experience a notable decrease, with their share falling from 0.22 to 0.16 (a 28% reduction) and their absolute numbers declining from 1.6 to 0.84. ST candidate households show a similar pattern, decreasing from 2.31 to 1.70. In contrast, OBC candidate households increase from 3.64 to 4.10, with their share growing from 0.36 to 0.43. While multiple groups experience declines, the proportional reduction for Muslim candidates is substantially larger than for any other group, suggesting they are particularly affected by the fertility limit policies.

The analysis employs a difference-in-differences design spanning two election periods, exploiting both spatial and temporal variation in treatment adoption. The main specification used for the analysis is:

$$Y_{vst} = \theta_t + \gamma_s + \beta \text{Fertility Limits}_{st} + X'_{vst} \delta + \epsilon_{vst} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{vst} represents the outcome of interest, such as the share of Muslim or SC/ST candidate households, in village v , state s , for the election year t . $\text{Fertility Limits}_{st}$ is equal to one for elections with fertility limits and zero otherwise. The specification includes controls for time-invariant state-specific factors (γ_s), factors specific to a particular election year (θ_t), village demography controls, and time-variant village-specific controls, such as the share of council member seats reserved under each category (SC/ST/OBC/Women)

⁷Table A.1 shows descriptive statistics on key variables used for the analysis. It contains the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values for all outcome and control variables in the village and household frame.

Table 5.1: Summary statistics of main outcome variables by treatment status

	Never Treated	Always Treated	Sometimes Treated	
			Pre	Post
Total Candidate Households	6.748 (7.54)	8.197 (7.19)	8.914 (12.3)	7.92 (7.39)
Muslim Candidate Households	.656 (2.41)	.444 (1.36)	.186 (.8)	.12 (.72)
Any Muslim Candidate Household	.202 (.4)	.179 (.39)	.071 (.26)	.04 (.2)
Share Muslim Candidate Households	.079 (.2)	.063 (.19)	.045 (.18)	.006 (.03)
SC Candidate Households	1.771 (3.18)	1.915 (2.8)	1.171 (2.54)	1.16 (2.09)
Share SC Candidate Households	.256 (.27)	.24 (.25)	.104 (.19)	.121 (.18)
ST Candidate Households	.092 (.4)	.265 (.95)	2.314 (7.05)	1.7 (2.28)
Share SC Candidate Households	.037 (.16)	.033 (.12)	.274 (.37)	.281 (.36)
OBC Candidate Households	2.94 (4.55)	3.402 (3.93)	3.643 (5.58)	4.1 (5.1)
Share OBC Candidate Households	.382 (.36)	.4 (.33)	.356 (.34)	.431 (.33)
Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Households	.913 (1.97)	2.12 (3.63)	1.6 (3.93)	.84 (1.66)
Any Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Household	.344 (.48)	.538 (.5)	.386 (.49)	.36 (.48)
Share Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Households	.157 (.27)	.257 (.32)	.221 (.33)	.16 (.27)
N	218	117	70	50

Notes: Data from the listing questionnaire of Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 229 villages in 15 states of India.

(X_{vst}). The coefficient β captures the average treatment effect. Standard errors are clustered by state and wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. Since the number of clusters is less than 20, the preferred method for calculating standard errors at the state level is the wild bootstrap-t procedure, as described in [Cameron et al. \[2008\]](#).

The analysis relies on the parallel trends assumption between treatment and control states in the pre-treatment period. This requires data on the outcome of interest for at least two previous election terms before the implementation year. However, such data is unavailable because village elections either did not occur or were irregular before the 1992 constitutional amendment. To address this challenge, I follow the approach used by [Cameron et al. \[2021\]](#), who faced a similar issue, and use data on related political outcomes from earlier periods. To do so, I compare pre-trends in state assembly election outcomes, as these policies were implemented by the state legislature, and use the following empirical specification:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_1 Treatment_s + \sum_{t=T-k}^{t=T-1} \beta_{2t} Fertility\ Limits_s \times Term_t + \beta_3 Year_t + \epsilon_{st} \quad (2)$$

where Y_{ist} represents the related outcome variables, such as measures of candidacy, political competition in state-level elections, for unit i , in state s , in year t . $Fertility\ Limits_s$ is an indicator for states that implemented the policy, and $Term_t$ is a vector of election year fixed effects. The coefficients β_{2t} capture differences between states with and without fertility limits for each term. I examine the pre-trends for two sub-samples separately: always treated versus never treated, and always treated versus sometimes treated.

Figure [B.1](#) and [B.2](#) present the plots for estimates and confidence intervals of the coefficient of interest, β_{2t} , for the comparisons between always treated versus never treated, and always treated versus sometimes treated, respectively. The data used in this analysis was obtained from [Agarwal et al. \[2021\]](#) and provides information not only on

election statistics but also on the religion, gender, occupation, and education of candidates and elected representatives in state assembly elections.⁸ The results show that there is no significant difference in pre-trends for both sub-samples across all outcomes. These results also suggest that the fertility limit may not have been adopted in certain types of state. If such a pattern were observed, then it raises the possibility that these laws were introduced to target specific communities.

To uncover the mechanism, I collect primary data using phone surveys of politicians from 147 village councils across 9 districts in Maharashtra. Table 5.2 describes the sample for each group: Muslims, SC/ST (Non-Muslims), and Others (OBC and Gen). The survey oversampled politicians from marginalized minority groups such as Muslims, Scheduled Tribes, and Scheduled Castes, and hence was conducted in districts with a high share of their population. The main aim of the survey was to understand the opinions about fertility limits, trade-offs created by fertility limits, strategies adopted by politicians affected by the limits, challenges in enforcement, and investigate whether quotas can reduce the cost of fertility limits. Table A.2 provides summary statistics of the characteristics of politicians surveyed.

⁸Thanks to Saloni Bhogale and Giles Verniers for kindly providing access to the data.

Table 5.2: Sample details for phone survey in Maharashtra

Sample	Observations
Total Sample	520
I. Muslim Politicians	188
1. Elected leaders	78.19 %
2. Runner-ups	21.81%
II. SC/ST Politicians	152
1. Elected leaders	70.39 %
2. Runner-ups	29.61 %
III. Other Politicians	180
1. Elected leaders	62.78 %
2. Runner-ups	37.22 %

6 Results

This section presents the analysis of fertility limits' impact on candidacy using REDS data. The analysis begins by examining how fertility limits affected Muslim candidacy. Table 6.1 presents the effects on the number of Muslim households with candidates, a binary outcome indicating whether any Muslim household contested the election, and the share of Muslim households on the ballot in columns (1) through (3), respectively.⁹ In column (1), I find that fertility limits lead to a roughly 23% decrease in the number of Muslim candidate households, but this coefficient is not statistically significant. This imprecise estimate may be due to the fact that in most village elections, either zero or just a single Muslim candidate household contests, which is expected given that the average share of the Muslim population in a village is around 6%. In some Muslim-majority villages, however, all candidate households are Muslim. In other words, the distribution of Muslim candidates has excess zeroes and a long tail, which may mean

⁹I report 95% confidence intervals instead of standard errors as I can calculate them for both clustering methods. The distribution of wild-cluster-bootstrapped standard errors is not invertible.

the sample is not sufficiently powered to detect an effect on the intensive margin. In column (2), I find that fertility limits reduce the likelihood of a Muslim candidate household contesting by 0.07 compared to elections without fertility limits. This estimate is statistically significant at the 5% level and robust to different clustering methods for standard errors. The results in column (3) indicate that fertility limits significantly decrease the share of Muslim candidate households. The coefficients are significant at the 1% level for both clustering methods.

Table 6.1: Effect of Fertility Limits on Muslim Candidacy

Outcome	# Mus. (1)	Any Mus. (2)	Share Mus. (3)
Fertility Limits	-0.153 (-0.464,0.158) [-0.463,0.158]	-0.0766 (-0.141,-0.0124)** [-0.150,-0.00279]**	-0.0719 (-0.118,-0.0259)*** [-0.117,-0.0265]***
Control mean	.656	.202	.079
N	455	455	409

Notes: Data from the village questionnaire of the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 15 states in India is used. Treat is equal to one for treated elections in the states that imposed fertility limit laws, and zero otherwise. For control states, Treat is always zero. All specifications include election year and state fixed effects. Additionally, all specifications control for the share of council member seats reserved under each category (SC/ST/OBC/Women) and total number of seats in the village council. Standard errors are clustered by state and wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. 95% CI in parentheses clustered by state, in brackets wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

In addition, I examine the effects using several different specifications, as shown in Table A.3. The results remain consistent after including controls for the Muslim population in panel A, time-invariant district-level characteristics (such as historical factors influencing fertility preferences and bureaucratic culture affecting the enforcement of fertility limits) in panel B, and the reservation status of the village chief seat in panel C. One concern with staggered treatment designs is that trends in outcomes correlated with the year of implementation of fertility limits might bias the results. Since the sample includes two election periods, states with fertility limits in both periods might violate the identification assumption if the effects are time-varying (e.g., more significant in the second election after implementation). To address this concern, I show that the

results are robust to excluding states with fertility limits in both election periods, as presented in panel D. Overall, the results provide robust evidence of a decline in Muslim candidacy.

Next, I investigate the impact of fertility limits on the candidacy of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Castes (OBC) in panels A through C.¹⁰ Table 6.2 presents the results for the number of candidate households of each group in column (1) and the share of candidate households in column (2).¹¹ The results suggest that there is no significant effect of fertility limits but the estimates are imprecise. Several factors may contribute to the inconclusive null findings. Firstly, the cost of deviating from preferences may be lower due to quotas for marginalized castes and the lack of competition from politically dominant upper caste Hindus. Furthermore, certain politically aspirational castes within these groups may be more likely to contest because they have a higher chance of winning if fertility limits discourage less politically aspirational castes from running for office. Existing studies have documented high political and economic inequalities between castes within these broad categories [Ahuja, 2019, Jaffrelot, 2023, Joshi et al., 2018].

Finally, I also examine the effects of fertility limits on upper-caste Hindus (a politically dominant group with no institutional protection) in Table 6.3 and the total number of candidate households in Table 6.4. The results show that fertility limits are statistically insignificant across measures and specifications, potentially due to the same reasons affecting politically aspirational marginalized groups.

Recall that restrictions on the number of children a candidate can have only apply to those who have not yet reached their desired family size at the time the laws are

¹⁰SC households are those coded as Scheduled Castes and identify as Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist for this analysis, as SCs belonging to other religions do not benefit from affirmative action policies. Since there are very few non-Muslim and non-Hindu households identifying as OBC and ST in the sample, OBC and ST households refer to OBC and ST Hindus.

¹¹The binary measure for groups with institutional protection is not used, as most villages in the sample have at least one seat reserved for SC, ST, and OBC. Therefore, the presence of any candidate from these groups is mechanically ensured by quotas.

Table 6.2: Effect of Fertility Limits on Other Marginalized Groups

Outcome	# Cand. HH (1)	Share HH (2)
Panel A: SC Candidacy (only Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs)		
Fertility Limits	0.0522 (-0.531,0.635) [-.44,.54]	0.00724 (-0.0630,0.0775) [-.065,.079]
Control mean	1.771	.256
N	455	409
Panel B: ST Candidacy (only Hindus)		
Fertility Limits	-0.0427 (-0.807,0.722) [-.5,.42]	-0.0132 (-0.0542,0.0279) [-.054,.028]
Control mean	.092	.037
N	455	409
Panel C: OBC Candidacy (only Hindus)		
Fertility Limits	0.493 (-0.647,1.633) [-.66,1.6]	0.0890 (-0.0674,0.245) [-.082,.26]
Control mean	2.94	.382
N	455	409

Notes: Data from the village questionnaire of the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 15 states in India is used. Treat is equal to one for treated elections in the states that imposed fertility limit laws, and zero otherwise. For control states, Treat is always zero. All specifications include election year and state fixed effects. Additionally, all specifications control for the share of council member seats reserved under each category (SC/ST/OBC/Women) and total number of seats in the village council. Standard errors are clustered by state and wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. 95% CI in parentheses clustered by state, in brackets wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

implemented. Consequently, individuals who have already reached their desired family size before the implementation of fertility limits can still run for election, even if they have more than two children. Therefore, I examine whether fertility limits alter the age composition of the candidate pool.

To document the effect on age composition, the sample relies on the age of household heads contesting elections, as the data does not provide the age of all household

Table 6.3: Effect of Fertility Limits on Upper Caste Hindus

Outcome	# Cand. HH (1)	Whether any HH (2)	Share HH (3)
Fertility Limits	-0.321 (-1.696,1.055) [-1.848,1.206]	0.0794 (-0.0965,0.255) [-0.111,0.269]	-0.0125 (-0.0837,0.0588) [-0.0933,0.0684]
Control mean	.913	.344	.157
N	455	455	409

Notes: Data from the listing and village questionnaire of the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 15 states in India is used. Treat is equal to one for treated elections in the states that imposed fertility limit laws, and zero otherwise. For control states, Treat is always zero. All specifications include election year and state fixed effects. Additionally, all specifications control for the share of council member seats reserved under each category (SC/ST/OBC/Women) and total number of seats in the village council. Standard errors are clustered by state and wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. 95% CI in parentheses clustered by state, in brackets wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

Table 6.4: Effect of Fertility Limits on Total candidacy

Outcome	(1)	(2)	# of Cand. HH (3)	(4)	(5)
Fertility Limits	0.0511 (-1.682,1.784) [-6.621,6.723]	0.0760 (-1.690,1.842) [-2.049,2.201]	0.0422 (-1.919,2.003) [-1.795,1.879]	0.127 (-1.461,1.716) [-1.586,1.841]	-0.218 (-2.423,1.986) [-2.293,1.856]
Control mean	6.748	6.748	6.748	6.748	6.748
N	455	455	455	455	338

Specification	Baseline	Dem. Controls	District FE	Control for Sarpanch	Exc. always treated
---------------	----------	---------------	-------------	----------------------	---------------------

Notes: Data from the listing and village questionnaire of the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 15 states in India is used. Treat is equal to one for treated elections in the states that imposed fertility limit laws, and zero otherwise. For control states, Treat is always zero. All specifications include election year and state fixed effects. Additionally, all specifications control for the share of council member seats reserved under each category (SC/ST/OBC/Women) and total number of seats in the village council. Standard errors are clustered by state and wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. 95% CI in parentheses clustered by state, in brackets wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

members running for election.¹² Using information on age and election year, I calculate the proportion of contesting household heads in five age groups (less than 30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, and above 60) at the time of election.¹³ In states that adopted fertility limits early, I examine candidacy in two elections following the implementation. For early adopters, the second election may occur anytime between six to ten years after imple-

¹²The data significantly limits the statistical power to detect an effect on age composition, as around 33 to 50% of seats in each election are reserved for women, and it is very rare for women to be household heads. Therefore, this analysis highlights broad descriptive patterns for speculative discussion.

¹³According to the household survey, the median age of the male parent at the time of the birth of their last child is 30.

mentation. For states with only one election since implementation, this gap will be less than five years. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that those in their 50s or 60s at the time of the election would have reached their desired family size by the time fertility limits were adopted in these states.¹⁴

Table 6.5 shows changes in candidacy across age groups of contesting household heads. The descriptive analysis suggests that the proportion of younger candidates (below 40 years of age) decreases following the introduction of fertility limits, with an overall reduction of 0.06 for those under 30 and 0.07 for those between 30-40 years. Meanwhile, the proportion of candidates older than 40—those who should not be affected by the law—shows an increase, with the most substantial gains in the 50-60 age bracket (0.07 overall). This pattern suggests two things: 1) the decline in Muslim representation may be driven by the exit of young Muslim aspirants, as evidenced by the substantial decreases among Muslims under 40 (-0.11 for under 30, -0.09 for 30-40), and 2) the effects may be temporarily mitigated by young aspirants replacing themselves with older eligible individuals from their community, shown by the corresponding increases in older Muslim candidates (0.07 for 40-50, 0.11 for 50-60, and 0.11 for over 60). Similar patterns are observed for STs, OBCs, and general caste-contesting household heads, though not for SCs who show minimal changes in the under-30 category (-0.01) and more modest shifts across other age brackets (see Table 6.5). While these descriptive patterns indicate that fertility limits may affect those who have yet to reach their desired family size across major groups, the overall impact on candidacy varies. For non-Muslim groups, any potential decrease in younger candidates appears to be offset by increases in older, unaffected candidates from the same community.

In summary, the results demonstrate that fertility limits significantly impact the candidacy of Muslims, a marginalized minority group largely without any protection. However, these limits show no significant effect on the overall candidacy of other major

¹⁴I do not explicitly use the age at the time of implementation for this analysis, as it cannot be computed for states without fertility limits.

Table 6.5: Fertility Limits and Change in Age Composition

Difference	Overall	Muslim	SC	ST	OBC	Gen
Proportion \leq 30 years	-0.06 (0.02)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.17 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.02)	-0.08 (0.04)
Proportion between 30 and 40 years	-0.07 (0.02)	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.10 (0.03)	-0.10 (0.05)
Proportion between 40 and 50 years	0.01 (0.02)	0.07 (0.08)	0.05 (0.05)	0.05 (0.08)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)
Proportion between 50 and 60 years	0.07 (0.02)	0.01 (0.07)	0.12 (0.04)	0.09 (0.06)	0.06 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)
Proportion \geq 60 years	0.03 (0.01)	0.11 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)	0.06 (0.02)	0.06 (0.04)
N	2004	134	456	151	858	346

Notes: Data from the listing questionnaire of Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 15 states in India.

groups or the total number of candidates. The analysis shows fertility limit laws reduce the proportion of young candidates, indicating changes in the age composition across multiple groups. This suggests a norm where affected young candidates (those directly affected by fertility limits as they have yet to reach their ideal family size) are replaced by those unaffected by the laws (individuals who achieved their ideal family size before the laws were introduced). This replacement mechanism potentially offsets the impact of fertility limits for some groups but fails to do so for largely unprotected, marginalized groups such as Muslims.

7 Discussion

In this section, I examine why Muslim candidacy significantly declined while the overall number of candidates and candidacy of other major social groups were not significantly affected. The analysis first considers “internal costs” - those arising from individual, family, and community preferences. I then explore the costs arising from imperfect enforcement, such as false accusations and incorrect reporting in candidate affidavits, which I term external costs. Finally, I consider the strategies used to cope with fertility limits and explore how hypothetical quotas might influence these trade-offs. This dis-

cussion draws on primary data from a village politician survey conducted in Maharashtra, the largest state that adopted fertility limits. This survey includes 520 politicians, comprising current village council members and runners-up from 147 village councils across 9 districts in Maharashtra.

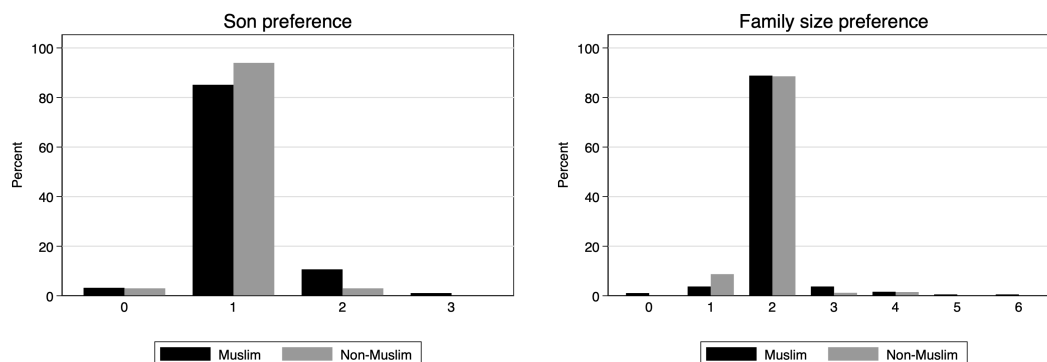
7.1 Internal costs

Recall that Muslims have a strong preference for large family sizes (refer to Table 3.1). These preferences suggest that a typical Muslim citizen who did not reach their desired family size before the implementation of fertility limits might choose not to contest elections if the desire for a larger family outweighs the desire to run for political office. However, it is possible that families running for political office have different preferences compared to the general population. Do these fertility preferences extend to politically aspirational Muslims?

To explore this further, the survey posed the following question to politicians: “Suppose your son or daughter plans to have children. How many sons and daughters would you want for them?”¹⁵ Figure 7.1 illustrates the differences in son preference and family size preference between Muslims and Non-Muslims. The responses indicate that a relatively higher proportion of Muslim politicians desire more than two sons for their children and a family size with more than two children.

¹⁵I adopted the methodology used by Jayachandran [2017] to avoid bias from retrospective fertility preferences, which could be problematic given that politicians may have already reached their desired family size.

Figure 7.1: Son preference and Family size preference
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra



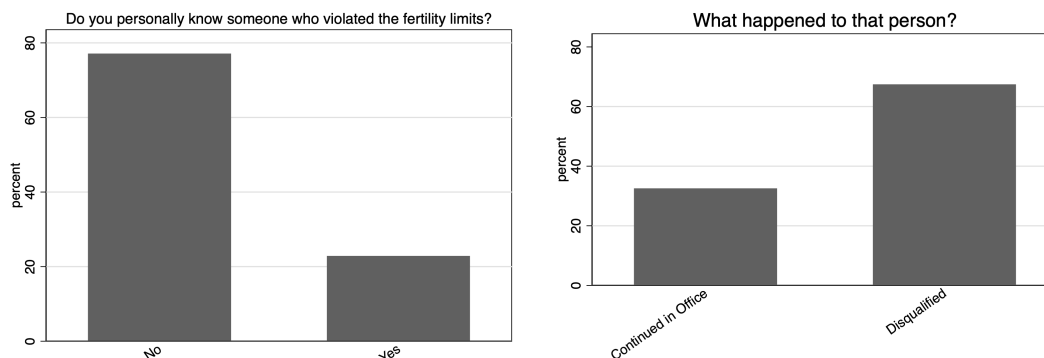
In summary, the findings from the village politician surveys suggest that the cost of deviating from established preferences could be higher for Muslims, as family preferences and community norms, particularly regarding issues like family size and marriage, play significant roles [Desai and Andrist, 2010, Munshi and Myaux, 2006]. This dynamic underscores the importance of social and cultural contexts in shaping political behavior.

7.2 External costs

Many studies on ballot access laws in western democracies assume that these rules are perfectly implemented, often focusing on direct costs such as filing fees, which may disproportionately affect poorly funded candidates or parties. However, in developing countries, evidence frequently points to imperfect implementation of rules, leading to the exploitation of marginalized individuals by elites [Anderson et al., 2015, Neggers, 2018]. To assess policy implementation, the survey asked politicians whether they had direct knowledge of office holders who violated fertility limits, as depicted in Figure 7.2. Follow-up questions inquired whether these individuals were subsequently disqualified. Survey responses indicate widespread violations, with numerous office holders either initially ineligible or becoming ineligible during their tenure. That such enforcement challenges exist even in Maharashtra—a state with relatively high bureaucratic

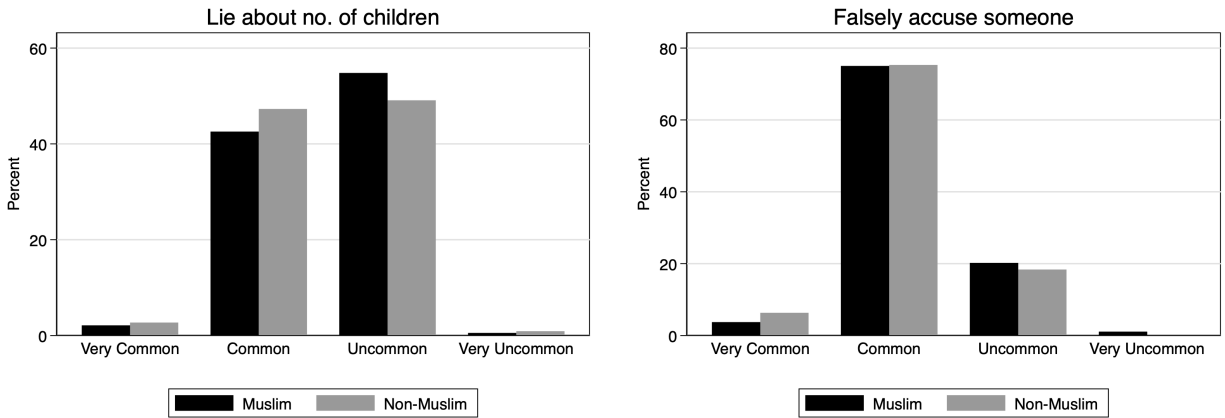
capacity—suggests implementation difficulties may be even more severe elsewhere.

Figure 7.2: Imperfect Enforcement
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra



To explore the consequences of imperfect enforcement, I examine the prevalence of lying about the number of children and making false accusations, as illustrated in Figure 7.3. The responses indicate that such practices are very common, and there are no observable differences by religion. However, a related study on fertility limit restrictions by Buch [2005] conducts a detailed case study and relies on qualitative evidence to argue that it is easier for elites to lie or level accusations against others. The author shows that false accusations serve as tools of suppression, used by politically dominant groups to intimidate political aspirants from marginalized communities in five states (Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Rajasthan). The prevalence of such practices can disproportionately reduce Muslim candidacy, as Muslims predominantly compete with these dominant groups, unlike other marginalized groups in other states. Therefore, imperfect enforcement, especially the fear of false accusations, may discourage some individuals from running for office or, at times, result in coercion by elites.

Figure 7.3: Prevalence of illicit practices
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra



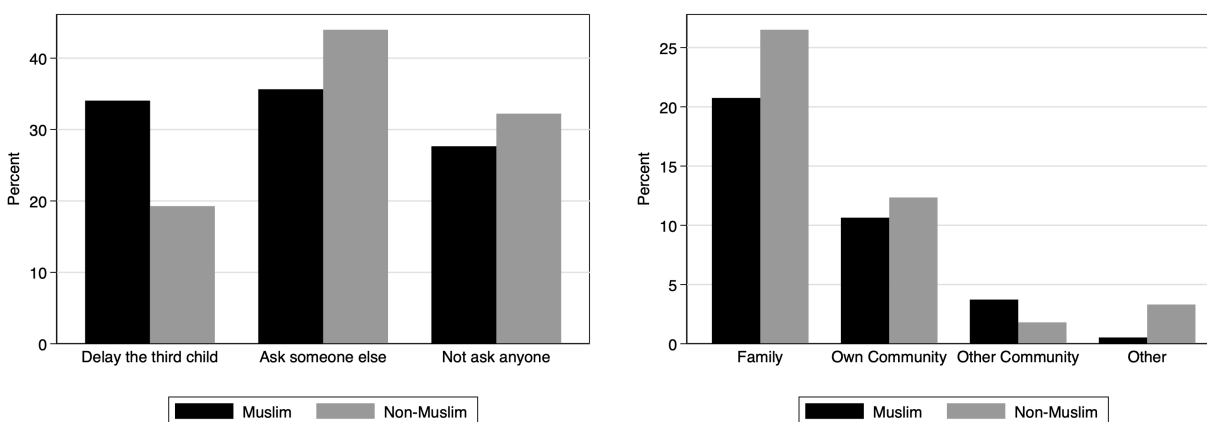
7.3 Coping with fertility restrictions

In this section, I discuss what aspiring candidates who desire to run for political office under fertility restrictions but also wish to have more than two children might do. If a critical mass of their community has reached their desired family size and remains eligible, an affected candidate may ask someone else to run in their place. In the village politician survey, I asked respondents what aspiring citizens from their community would do if they preferred to have more than two children. Approximately 40% indicated they would ask someone else to contest, and of those, more than 80% said they would choose someone either from their own family or from the same community as the aspirant (see Figure 7.4).

The shifting ratio of young Muslims to older Muslims on the ballot, coupled with a decline in candidacy, suggests that young aspiring citizens affected by the restrictions may not always be replaced by older, unaffected community members. In other words, the decline in candidacy could be due to younger potential candidates dropping out without being replaced. Supporting this theory, the findings provide suggestive evidence that Muslims are relatively less likely to ask someone else to run if they choose

not to themselves. Moreover, when they do select a substitute, they are more likely to choose someone from other communities, as shown in Figure 7.4. Often, these family members or relatives serve as mere proxies [Heinze et al., Forthcoming].

Figure 7.4: Fertility Limits and Replacement
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra

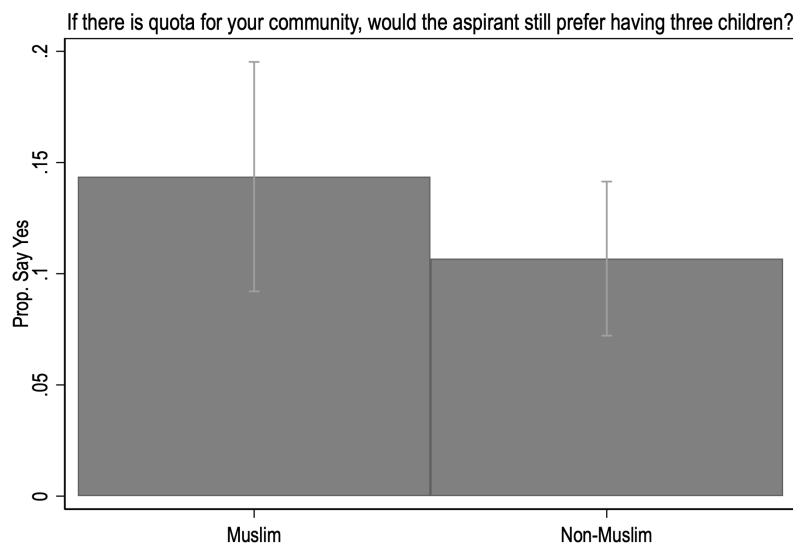


7.4 Electoral quotas for Muslims

Now, let us consider the potential impact of introducing electoral quotas for Muslims. Would the costs discussed earlier be mitigated if a specified number of council seats, proportional to the population, were permanently reserved for Muslims, similar to the existing quotas for SCs and STs? Theoretically, electoral quotas could influence the desire to remain eligible as they limit competition to candidates from a specific community. Figure 7.5 indicates that in response to hypothetical scenarios about seats being reserved for their own community, most politicians—particularly those from marginalized groups—report that aspiring citizens from their community may limit themselves to two children to remain eligible. This observation aligns with the argument by Anukriti and Chakravarty [2019] that the desire to remain eligible for political office may lead to a relatively larger decline in fertility rates among SC/STs compared to other Hindus in states with fertility restrictions. Therefore, combining regulatory attempts to control po-

litical entry with electoral quotas might assist policymakers in achieving societal goals, such as reducing the candidacy of groups whose preferences do not align with creating the role models policymakers envisioned.

Figure 7.5: Hypothetical electoral quotas
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra



8 Conclusion

This research demonstrates how electoral laws govern political entry of specific groups. I find that fertility limit restrictions for village politicians reduce Muslim candidacy, one of the marginalized social groups and the largest religious minority group in India. However, there is no significant effect on the overall number of candidates and candidacy of other major social groups. I argue that these results are driven by the dilemma faced by citizens aspiring for political office, between complying with the law and adhering to social norms about family size. I provide evidence supporting my theory using an original survey of 500 politicians in Maharashtra. Additionally, I find descriptive evidence that aspiring candidates may continue to play a role in electoral practice through coping strategies like asking someone else to run for office. This potentially raises concerns about token or proxy candidates.

This research extends existing literature on political entry costs by decomposing and analyzing their constituent components. Accordingly, this research highlights the role of cost induced as a result of social norms as trade-offs that aspiring citizens must navigate to remain eligible following the introduction of electoral laws. Furthermore, this study deepens our understanding of the barriers to political entry by focusing on several under-explored factors. It underscores the significant influence of family and community preferences on individuals' decisions to run for political office. Additionally, it discusses the challenges and implications of implementing electoral rules in regions with low bureaucratic capacity.

These findings carry significant implications for Indian democratic institutions and political representation. The study highlights how the trade-offs faced by aspiring citizens as a result of electoral eligibility laws may depend on the electoral prospects, which may further depend on the relationship between group size and probability of winning. In addition, it highlights the role of electoral quotas for unprotected marginalized groups as a strategic policy tool aimed at fostering social change without compromising democratic integrity. This observation aligns with the argument by [Anukriti and Chakravarty \[2019\]](#) that the desire to remain eligible for political office may lead to a relatively larger decline in fertility rates among Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) compared to other Hindus in states with fertility restrictions. The findings suggest that combining entry regulations with electoral quotas may help policymakers balance representational and social policy objectives. Research indicates that local government representation often serves as a pathway to higher office, suggesting these effects may have broader implications for Muslim political representation across governmental levels.

Electoral eligibility restrictions similar to India's fertility limits exist in numerous forms across global electoral systems, functioning as significant barriers to political participation for specific groups. Educational qualifications represent one of the forms of

these restrictions, with countries implementing various educational thresholds for candidates. For instance, Pakistan temporarily required graduate degrees for National Assembly members between 2002 and 2008, effectively excluding large segments of the population from political office. Financial barriers constitute another category of restrictions, including minimum income requirements in Argentina and property ownership prerequisites in the British Empire. These economic filters may systematically prevent lower-income citizens from seeking office, regardless of their political capabilities or community support.

Beyond explicit economic and educational filters, many nations impose extensive residency requirements that disadvantage mobile communities. For instance, candidates in the United States face varying residency requirements ranging from 30 days to several years depending on the jurisdiction and office. Criminal record restrictions are well-documented in numerous electoral systems. In the United States, many states restrict candidacy based on criminal history. For instance, Texas law prevents individuals convicted of felonies from holding public office unless they have been pardoned or otherwise released from resulting disabilities. In India, the Representation of the People Act specifically disqualifies candidates convicted of certain offenses and sentenced to imprisonment of two years or more from contesting elections for a defined period after release. Chile's constitution prohibits those sentenced for crimes deserving afflictive punishment from running for Congress. These restrictions often affect marginalized communities due to documented disparities in criminal justice systems. Like India's fertility limits studied in the paper, these seemingly neutral criteria create a complex landscape of varying barriers to political participation, with their impact heavily dependent on existing social and economic stratification within each society. The effects of these restrictions warrant deeper examination regarding how ostensibly universal requirements may impede political representation for specific communities.

References

- Madiha Afzal. Do barriers to candidacy reduce political competition? Evidence from a bachelor's degree requirement for legislators in Pakistan. *Public Choice*, 161(1-2): 51–72, 2014.
- Ananay Agarwal, Neelesh Agrawal, Saloni Bhogale, Sudheendra Hangal, Francesca Refsum Jensenius, Mohit Kumar, Chinmay Narayan, and Basim U Nissa. TCPD Indian elections data v2.0. Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka University, 2021.
- Amit Ahuja. *Mobilizing the marginalized: Ethnic parties without ethnic movements*. Modern South Asia, 2019.
- Feyaad Allie. The representation trap: How and why Muslims struggle to maintain power in India. *Working Paper*, 2023.
- Siwan Anderson, Patrick Francois, and Ashok Kotwal. Clientelism in Indian villages. *American Economic Review*, 105(6):1780–1816, 2015.
- Stephen Ansolabehere and Alan Gerber. The effects of filing fees and petition requirements on US House elections. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, pages 249–264, 1996.
- S Anukriti and Abhishek Chakravarty. Democracy and demography: Societal effects of fertility limits on local leaders. *Journal of Human Resources*, 54(1):79–121, 2019.
- Fred Arnold, Sunita Kishor, and Tarun K Roy. Sex-selective abortions in India. *Population and Development Review*, 28(4):759–785, 2002.
- Rakesh Basant. Social, economic and educational conditions of Indian Muslims. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pages 828–832, 2007.
- Lori Beaman, Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande, and Petia Topalova. Powerful women: Does exposure reduce bias? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124(4):1497–1540, 2009.

- Roland Benabou and Jean Tirole. Laws and norms. Technical report, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011.
- Ari Berman. *Give us the ballot: The modern struggle for voting rights in America*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.
- Rikhil R Bhavnani. Do electoral quotas work after they are withdrawn? Evidence from a natural experiment in India. *American Political Science Review*, 103(1):23–35, 2009.
- Nirmala Buch. Law of two-child norm in panchayats: Implications, consequences and experiences. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pages 2421–2429, 2005.
- Barry C Burden. Ballot regulations and multiparty politics in the states. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 40(4):669–673, 2007.
- Roland Bénabou and Jean Tirole. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 70(3):489–520, 2003.
- Roland Bénabou and Jean Tirole. Incentives and prosocial behavior. *American Economic Review*, 96(5):1652–1678, 2006.
- Brantly Callaway and Pedro HC Sant’Anna. Difference-in-differences with multiple time periods. *Journal of Econometrics*, 225(2):200–230, 2021.
- A Colin Cameron, Jonah B Gelbach, and Douglas L Miller. Bootstrap-based improvements for inference with clustered errors. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 90(3):414–427, 2008.
- Lisa Cameron, Jennifer Seager, and Manisha Shah. Crimes against morality: Unintended consequences of criminalizing sex work. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 136(1):427–469, 2021.

- Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo. Impact of reservation in Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a nationwide randomised experiment. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pages 979–986, 2004.
- Simon Chauchard. *Why representation matters: The meaning of ethnic quotas in rural India*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Sonalde Desai and Lester Andrist. Gender scripts and age at marriage in India. *Demography*, 47(3):667–687, 2010.
- Matthias Doepke, Anne Hannusch, Fabian Kindermann, and Michèle Tertilt. The economics of fertility: A new era. In *Handbook of the Economics of the Family*, volume 1, pages 151–254. Elsevier, 2023.
- Marcus Drometer and Johannes Rincke. The impact of ballot access restrictions on electoral competition: Evidence from a natural experiment. *Public Choice*, 138(3-4):461–474, 2009.
- Thad Dunning and Janhavi Nilekani. Ethnic quotas and political mobilization: Caste, parties, and distribution in Indian village councils. *American Political Science Review*, 107(1):35–56, 2013.
- Calvin Goldscheider and Peter R Uhlenberg. Minority group status and fertility. *American Journal of Sociology*, 74(4):361–372, 1969.
- Saad Gulzar. Who enters politics and why? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24:253–275, 2021.
- Saad Gulzar and Muhammad Yasir Khan. Good politicians: Experimental evidence on motivations for political candidacy and government performance. *Review of Economic Studies*, 92(1):339–364, 2025.

Alyssa Heinze, Rachel Brulé, and Simon Chauchard. Who actually governs? Gender inequality and political representation in rural India. *The Journal of Politics*, Forthcoming.

Christophe Jaffrelot. Do Indians vote their caste-or their jati, or their class, or...? *The Oxford Handbook of Caste*, page 331, 2023.

Seema Jayachandran. Fertility decline and missing women. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 9(1):118–139, 2017.

Shareen Joshi, Nishtha Kochhar, and Vijayendra Rao. Jati inequality in rural Bihar. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, 8512, 2018.

Sacha Kapoor and Arvind Magesan. Independent candidates and political representation in India. *American Political Science Review*, 112(3):678–697, 2018.

Ajit Karnik and Swati Raju. State fiscal capacity and tax effort: Evidence for Indian states. *South Asian Journal of Macroeconomics and Public Finance*, 4(2):141–177, 2015.

Alexander Keyssar. *The right to vote: The contested history of democracy in the United States*. Basic Books, 2009.

Arjun Kumar. Households' toilet facility in rural India: Socio-spatial analysis. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 11(1):89–108, 2017.

Tom Lane, Daniele Nosenzo, and Silvia Sonderegger. Law and norms: Empirical evidence. *American Economic Review*, 113(5):1255–1293, 2023.

Kaivan Munshi and Jacques Myaux. Social norms and the fertility transition. *Journal of Development Economics*, 80(1):1–38, 2006.

Yusuf Neggers. Enfranchising your own? Experimental evidence on bureaucrat diversity and election bias in India. *American Economic Review*, 108(6):1288–1321, 2018.

- Rohini Pande. In Indian villages, the power of a powerful woman. *New York Times*, 2015.
- Ian Shapiro, Susan C Stokes, Elisabeth Jean Wood, and Alexander S Kirshner. *Political representation*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Thomas Stratmann. Ballot access restrictions and candidate entry in elections. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 21(1):59–71, 2005.
- Bernard Tamas. *The demise and rebirth of American third parties: Poised for political revival?* Routledge, 2018.
- Gordon Tullock. Entry barriers in politics. *The American Economic Review*, 55(1/2): 458–466, 1965.
- Amy Waldman. States in India take new steps to limit births. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/07/world/states-in-india-take-new-steps-to-limit-births.html>, 2022.
- Joachim Wehner and Daniel de Kadt. The tools of voter suppression: Racial disenfranchisement in the Cape of Good Hope. *Working Paper*, 2023.
- Ariel White. Misdemeanor disenfranchisement? The demobilizing effects of brief jail spells on potential voters. *American Political Science Review*, 113(2):311–324, 2019.
- Richard Winger. The Supreme Court and the burial of ballot access: A critical review of *Jenness v. Fortson*. *Election Law Journal*, 1(2):235–252, 2002.

Supplementary Information for “Do Electoral Eligibility Laws Hurt Political Candidacy of Specific Groups? Evidence from Fertility Limits on Local Politicians in India”

List of Tables

3.1	Fraction of women whose ideal number of children > 2	9
5.1	Summary statistics of main outcome variables by treatment status	16
5.2	Sample details for phone survey in Maharashtra	19
6.1	Effect of Fertility Limits on Muslim Candidacy	20
6.2	Effect of Fertility Limits on Other Marginalized Groups	22
6.3	Effect of Fertility Limits on Upper Caste Hindus	23
6.4	Effect of Fertility Limits on Total candidacy	23
6.5	Fertility Limits and Change in Age Composition	25
A.1	Descriptive statistics on key variables	A3
A.2	Summary statistics of Maharashtra politician survey respondent, segmented by social group	A4
A.3	Effect of Fertility Limits on Muslim Candidacy (Alternate Specifications)	A5

List of Figures

5.1	Information on Election Years and Timing of Treatment by State	14
7.1	Son preference and Family size preference Source: Authors’ own survey in Maharashtra	27
7.2	Imperfect Enforcement Source: Authors’ own survey in Maharashtra	28
7.3	Prevalence of illicit practices Source: Authors’ own survey in Maharashtra	29
7.4	Fertility Limits and Replacement Source: Authors’ own survey in Maharashtra	30
7.5	Hypothetical electoral quotas Source: Authors’ own survey in Maharashtra	31
B.1	Pre-trends in Always treated states and Never treated states	A7
B.2	Pre-trends in Always treated states and Sometimes treated states	A8

B.3 Distribution of Muslim candidate households A9

A Additional Tables

Table A.1: Descriptive statistics on key variables

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Panel A - Village level Frame				
Total Candidate Households	7.582	8.36	0	91
Muslim Candidate Households	.47	1.86	0	21
SC Candidate Households	1.648	2.9	0	27
ST Candidate Households	.655	3.03	0	56
Any Muslim Candidate Household	.158	.37	0	1
Any Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Household	.402	.49	0	1
Share Muslim Candidate Households	.061	.18	0	1
Share SC Candidate Households	.213	.25	0	1
Share SC Candidate Households	.1	.25	0	1
Share Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Households	.193	.29	0	1
Share OBC Reserved Seats in Council	.205	.2	0	1
Share SC Reserved Seats in Council	.131	.11	0	.67
Share ST Reserved Seats in Council	.069	.14	0	.88
Share Women Reserved Seats in Council	.24	.15	0	1
OBC Reservation for Village Head	.226	.42	0	1
SC Reservation for Village Head	.119	.32	0	1
ST Reservation for Village Head	.086	.28	0	1
Women's Reservation for Village Head	.288	.45	0	1
Total Households	465.701	524.5	54	6299
Muslim Households	40.101	115.39	0	864
SC Households	91.013	96.7	0	438
ST Households	27.2	60.03	0	450
OBC Households	186.668	223.2	0	2125
Upper Caste Hindu Households	96.851	222.02	0	2702
Total Seats	6471.468	10701.44	288	125980

Notes: Data from the listing and village questionnaire of Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 229 villages in 15 states of India.

Table A.2: Summary statistics of Maharashtra politician survey respondent, segmented by social group

	Muslims	SC/ST (Non-Muslim)	Others
Statistic	Mean (SD)/Percent	Mean (SD)/Percent	Mean (SD)/Percent
Age	44.27 (13.36)	40.31 (12.40)	41.98 (11.07)
Gender			
Male	54.26 %	44.74 %	49.44 %
Female	45.74 %	55.26 %	50.56 %
Education level			
Up to 5th grade	20.12%	7.80 %	9.53 %
6-9th grade	24.85 %	16.31 %	19.05 %
10-11th grade	21.89 %	19.15 %	16.67 %
12th grade	17.16 %	26.95%	28.57 %
Graduation and above	15.98%	29.79%	26.19 %
N	188	152	180

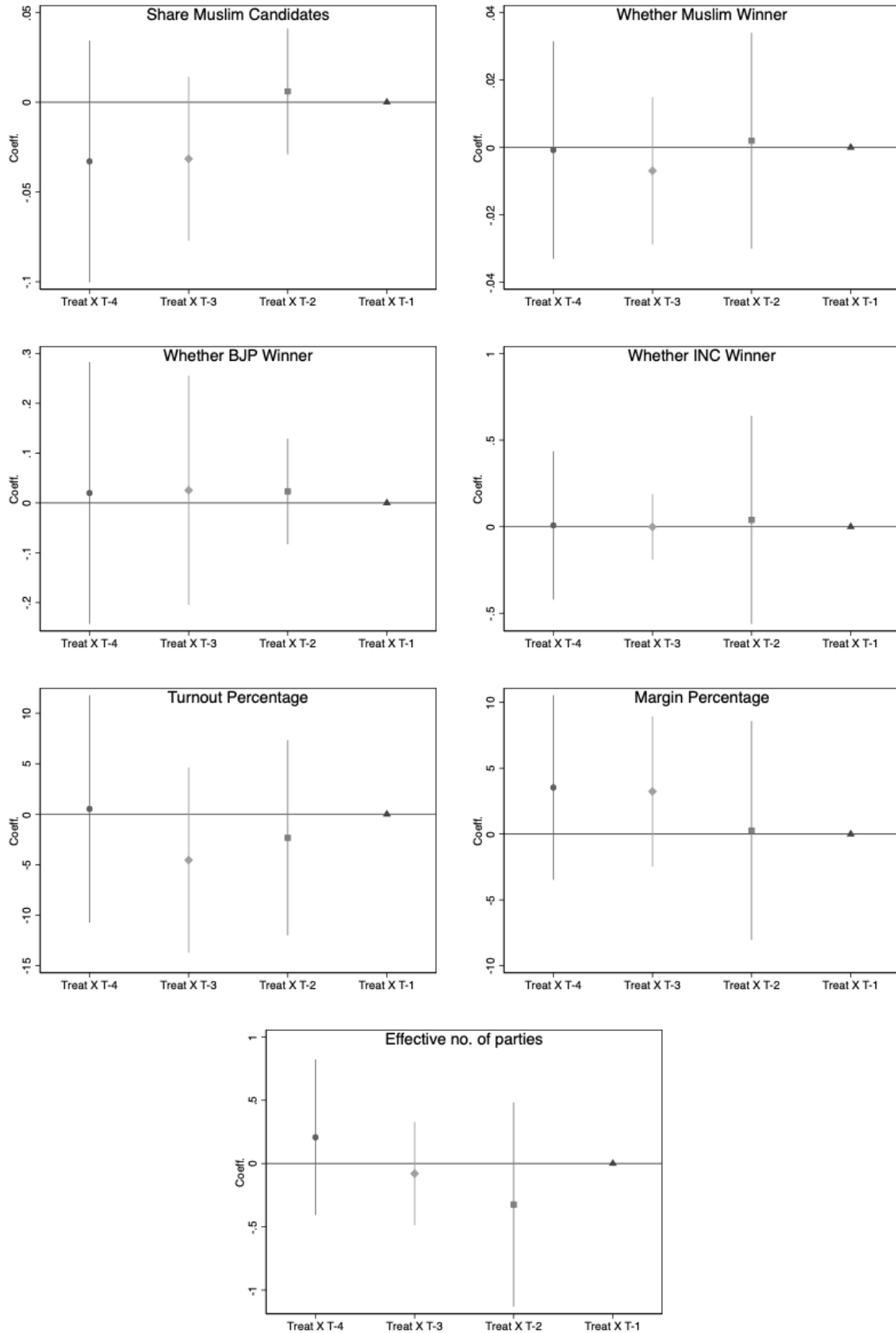
Table A.3: Effect of Fertility Limits on Muslim Candidacy (Alternate Specifications)

Outcome	# Mus. (1)	Whether Mus. (2)	Share Mus. (3)
Panel A - Demography controls			
Fertility Limits	-0.0764 (-0.401,0.249) [-0.413,0.260]	-0.0674 (-0.126,-0.00886)** [-0.131,-0.00375]**	-0.0688 (-0.112,-0.0300)*** [-0.112,-0.0253]***
Control mean	.656	.202	.079
N	455	455	409
Panel B - District fixed effects			
Fertility Limits	-0.0433 (-0.378,0.291) [-0.357,0.270]	-0.0516 (-0.119,0.0160)* [-0.112,0.00847]*	-0.0575 (-0.118,0.00284)* [-0.117,0.00196]*
Control mean	.656	.202	.08
N	455	455	406
Panel C - Controls for reservation of village chief seat			
Fertility Limits	-0.150 (-0.487,0.186) [-0.483,0.182]	-0.0738 (-0.139,-0.00844)** [-0.145,-0.00268]**	-0.0700 (-0.117,-0.0226)*** [-0.122,-0.0184]***
Control mean	.656	.202	.079
N	455	455	409
Panel D - Exclude always treated states			
Fertility Limits	-0.343 (-0.755,0.0700) [-0.805,0.120]	-0.0965 (-0.178,-0.0149)* [-0.202,0.00868]*	-0.0900 (-0.175,-0.00490)** [-0.178,-0.00244]**
Control mean	.656	.202	.079
N	338	338	302

Notes: Data from the listing and village questionnaire of the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) 2006 survey across 15 states in India is used. Treat is equal to one for treated elections in the states that imposed fertility limit laws, and zero otherwise. For control states, Treat is always zero. All specifications include election year and state fixed effects. Additionally, all specifications control for the share of council member seats reserved under each category i.e., SC, ST, OBC, Women and total number of seats in the village council. Standard errors are clustered by state and wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. 95% CI in parentheses clustered by state, in brackets wild-cluster-bootstrapped by state. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

B Additional Figures

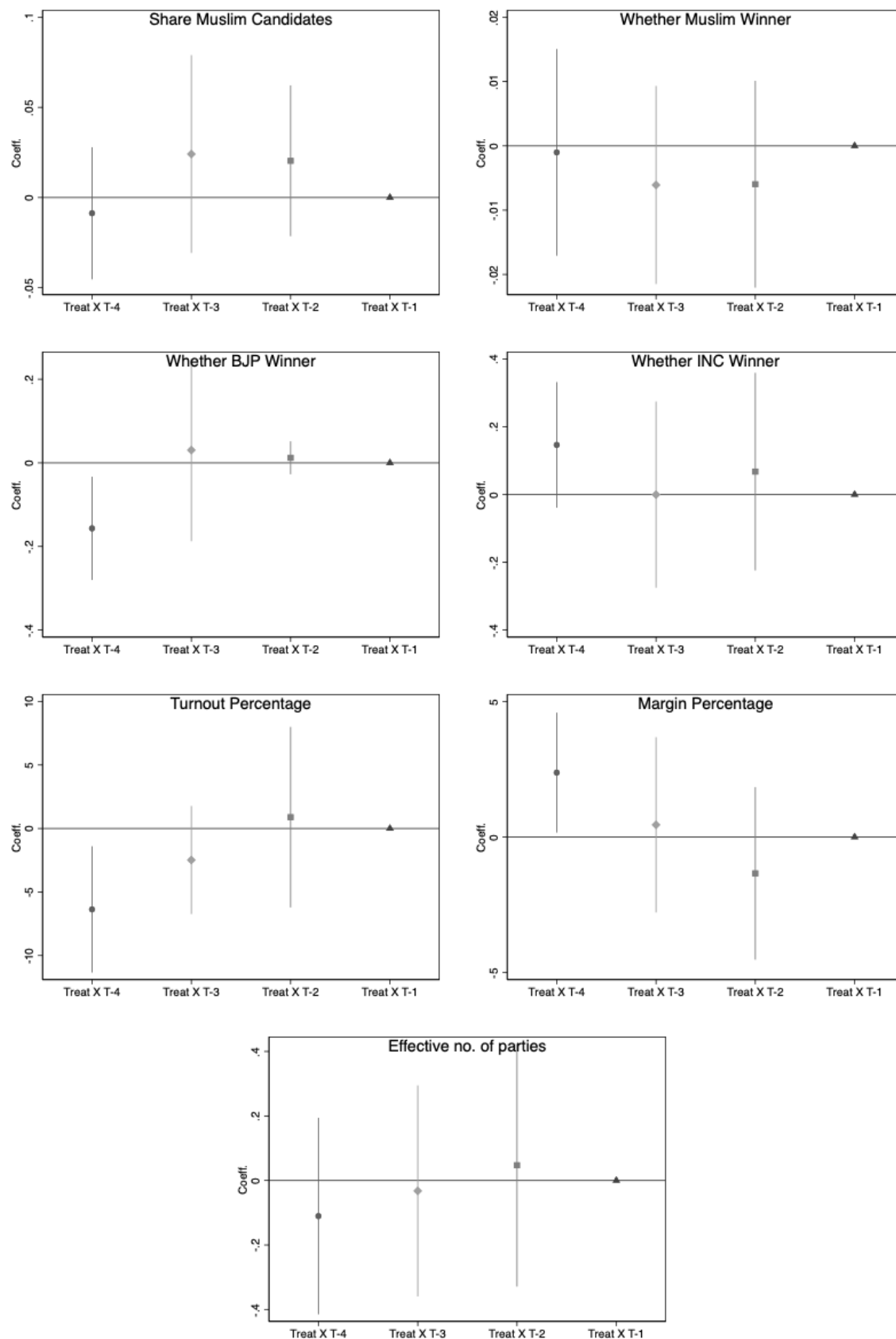
Figure B.1: Pre-trends in Always treated states and Never treated states



A7

Note: The figure plots coefficients, β_{2t} , from equation 2 for three outcomes. The vertical lines are the 95 percent confidence intervals on the coefficients.

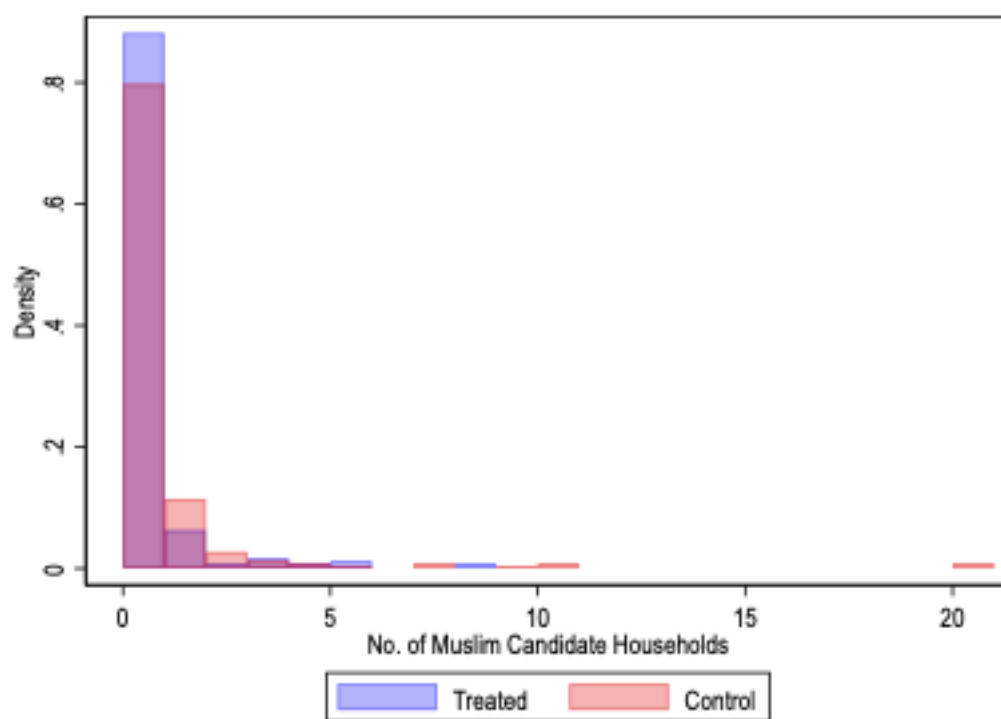
Figure B.2: Pre-trends in Always treated states and Sometimes treated states



A8

Note: The figure plots coefficients, β_{2t} , from equation 2 for three outcomes. The vertical lines are the 95 percent confidence intervals on the coefficients.

Figure B.3: Distribution of Muslim candidate households



Note: The figure plots the distribution of the number of Muslim candidate households by treatment status.