

# Electoral Eligibility and Minority Candidacy: Evidence from Fertility Limits on Local Politicians in India \*

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February 18, 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. 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. This paper underscores that states' efforts to shape social norms through electoral laws may come at the cost of marginalized groups' political representation.

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

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\*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.

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# 1 Introduction

In many countries, minority groups face marginalization at multiple stages of the political process. A substantial body of literature demonstrates that seemingly "neutral" institutional rules - such as disenfranchisement of those with criminal records and requirements for specific identification documents - significantly contribute to low voter turnout among these groups [Berman, 2015, Keyssar, 2009, Wehner and de Kadt, 2023, White, 2019]. In the United States, for instance, these voting laws are considered a primary factor in the persistently low electoral participation rates among Black and Indigenous voters.

In this study, I investigate whether institutional rules also influence the participation of minorities as candidates 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]. However, 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 among Muslims - the country's largest religious minority and one of its most marginalized socioeconomic groups lacking institutional protections [Basant, 2007].<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>In some states, there are quotas for economically disadvantaged Muslims, but they have to compete with economically disadvantaged non-Muslims in those seats.

models for family planning. [Anukriti and Chakravarty, 2019, Buch, 2005]. The law disqualifies individuals who violate the requirement after its implementation but does not penalize aspirants with large existing families. In other words, it limits political office to citizens with fewer than two children before the law to two. While citizens with more than two children prior to the law's implementation remain eligible for office, any subsequent births 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 marginalized 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 marginalized groups due to their lower likelihood of winning. 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. The data also provides descriptive evidence that these limits alter the age composition of candidates – specifically, the ratio between younger candidates (who are affected by the limits as they may not have reached their desired family size) and older, unaffected candidates. The shift from young to old candidates may suggest two things: 1) the decline in candidacy is driven by young aspirants, and 2) young citizens affected by the fertility limits frequently ask older, unaffected community members to run as proxy candidates. Primary survey data from phone interviews confirms the second pattern, showing that

politically ambitious individuals who are ineligible due to fertility limits often arrange for others to run in their place. While this proxy arrangement allows some degree of continued political participation, it raises concerns about democratic accountability. If elected, these replacement candidates may serve as proxies for the ineligible individuals they represent [Heinze et al., 2024]. 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, 2024]. 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].<sup>2</sup>

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.

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.

<sup>2</sup>Strong 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].



## 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 complaint 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.

## 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,

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<sup>3</sup>The 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.

from official village records.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 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).<sup>6</sup> Finally, the treatment group in our sample consists of the eight states that implemented restrictions on candidates in village councils.

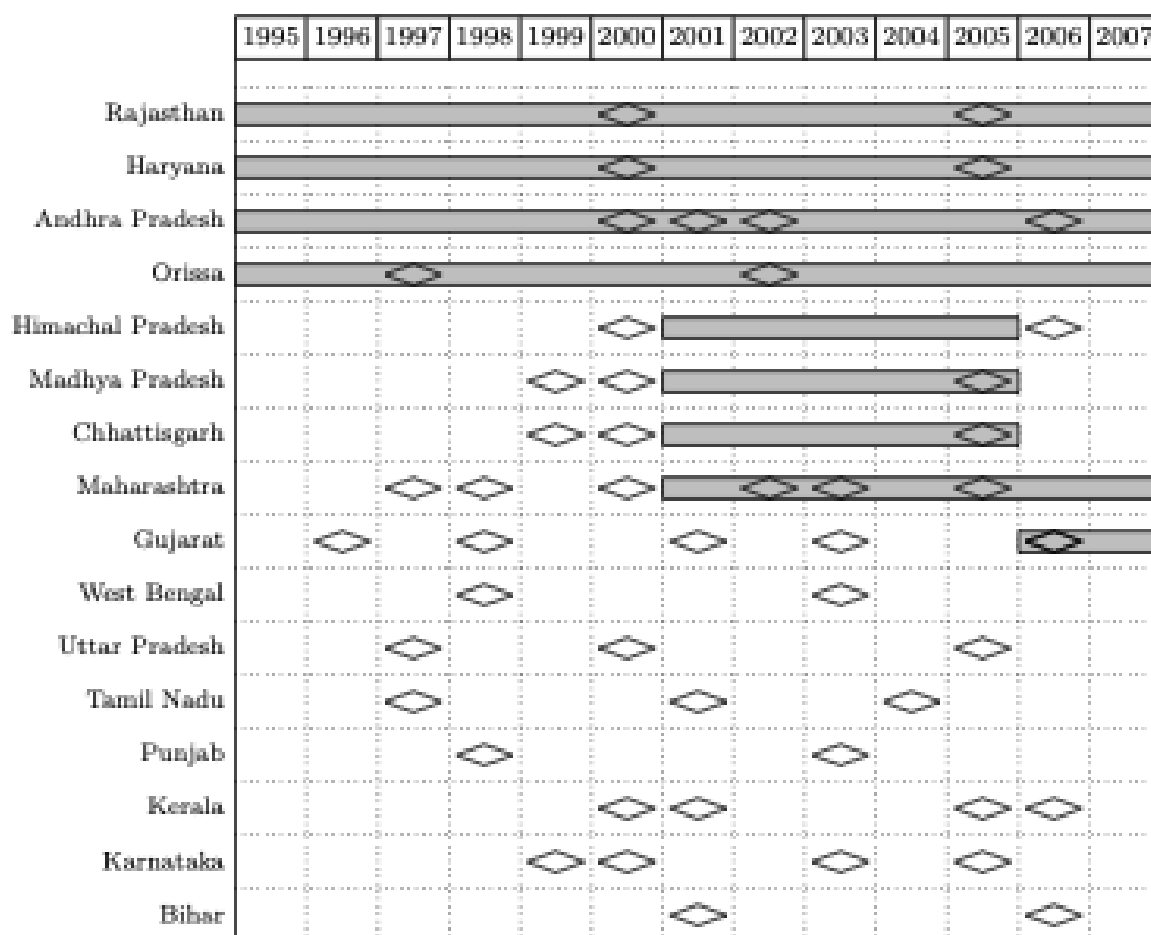
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<sup>4</sup>Information from Jharkhand is not available, thus this state is excluded from my analysis.

<sup>5</sup>I 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.

<sup>6</sup>The 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.

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 targets the head of the household, while the second is directed at other household members. While affirmative responses to the second question confirm candidate presence, they do not specify the number of candidates per household. Therefore, this analysis uses candidate households, rather than individual candidates, as the primary unit of measurement. I use this information to create a village-level framework, with each observation representing a village election. I use three measures of Muslim candidacy: the number of Muslim candidate households, a binary measure indicating the presence of any Muslim candidate households, and the share of Muslim candidate households. Table 5.1 presents the mean and standard deviation of these candidacy measures across different treatment statuses: never treated, always treated, and sometimes treated.<sup>7</sup> Across all treatment categories, Muslim candidate households average fewer than one per village. States with treatment in some periods show consistent declines across all measures of Muslim political participations.

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

	Never Treated	Always Treated	Sometimes Treated	
			Pre	Post
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)
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.

The analysis employs a difference-in-differences design spanning two election periods, exploiting both spatial and temporal variation in treatment adoption. The

<sup>7</sup>Table A.1 provides descriptive statistics on key variables used in the analysis, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for all outcome and control variables in both the village and household frames.

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 ( $\gamma_s$ ), factors specific to a particular election year ( $\theta_t$ ), 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) ( $X_{vst}$ ). The coefficient  $\beta$  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:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_1 \text{Treatment}_s + \sum_{t=T-k}^{t=T-1} \beta_{2t} \text{Fertility Limits}_s \times \text{Term}_t + \beta_3 \text{Year}_t + \epsilon_{st} \quad (2)$$

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  $t$ .  $\text{Fertility Limits}_s$

is an indicator for states that implemented the policy, and  $Term_t$  is a vector of election year fixed effects. The coefficients  $\beta_{2t}$  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 A.1 and A.2 present the plots for estimates and confidence intervals of the coefficient of interest,  $\beta_{2t}$ , 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.<sup>8</sup> The results show that there is no significant difference in pre-trends for both sub-samples across all outcomes.

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.

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<sup>8</sup>Thanks 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.<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup>I 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 marginalized groups with institutional protection, such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Castes (OBC), in panels A through C.<sup>10</sup> Table A.4 presents the results for the number of candidate households of each group in column (1) and the share of candidate households in column (2).<sup>11</sup> Several factors may contribute to the imprecise estimates. 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. Additionally, 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 A.5 and the total number of candidate households in Table A.6. 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 implemented. Consequently, individuals who have already reached their desired family

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<sup>10</sup>SC 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.

<sup>11</sup>The 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.

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 members running for election.<sup>12</sup> Using information on age and election year, I calculate the proportion of contesting Muslim household heads in five age groups (less than 30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, and above 60) at the time of election.<sup>13</sup> 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 implementation. 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.<sup>14</sup>

Table 6.2 shows changes in candidacy across age groups of contesting Muslim household heads. The descriptive analysis suggests that the proportion of younger candidates (below 40 years of age) decreases following the introduction of fertility limits, while the proportion of candidates older than 40—those who should not be affected by the law—shows an increase. This pattern suggests two things: 1) the decline in Muslim representation may be driven by the exit of young Muslim aspirants, and 2) the effects may be temporarily mitigated by young aspirants replacing themselves with older eligible individuals from their community. Similar patterns are observed for STs, OBCs, and general caste-contesting household heads, though not for SCs (see Table A.7). While

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<sup>12</sup>The 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.

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

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

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.

Table 6.2: Fertility Limits and Change in Age Composition of Muslim Candidates

	No limits	Two child limits	Difference
Proportion $\leq$ 30 years	.19 (.4)	.09 (.28)	-0.11 ( 0.07)
Proportion between 30 and 40 years	.4 (.49)	.31 (.47)	-0.09 ( 0.10)
Proportion between 40 and 50 years	.21 (.41)	.29 (.46)	0.07 ( 0.08)
Proportion between 50 and 60 years	.16 (.37)	.17 (.38)	0.01 ( 0.07)
Proportion $\geq$ 60 years	.09 (.29)	.2 (.41)	0.11 ( 0.06)
N	99	35	

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

In summary, the results show that fertility limits have a significant impact on the candidacy of Muslims. However, there is no significant impact on the candidacy of other major groups.

## 7 Discussion

This section explores multiple mechanisms potentially driving the observed decline in Muslim candidacy. 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 discussion draws on primary data from a village politician survey conducted

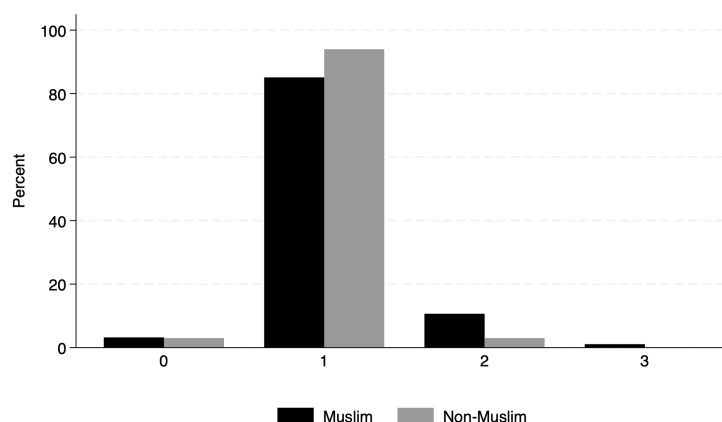
in Maharashtra, the largest state that adopted fertility limits. This survey includes 520 politicians, comprising current village council members and runners-up from 147 village councils across 9 districts in Maharashtra.

## 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?”<sup>15</sup> Figure 7.1 illustrates the differences in son 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.

Figure 7.1: Son preference  
Source: Authors’ own survey in Maharashtra



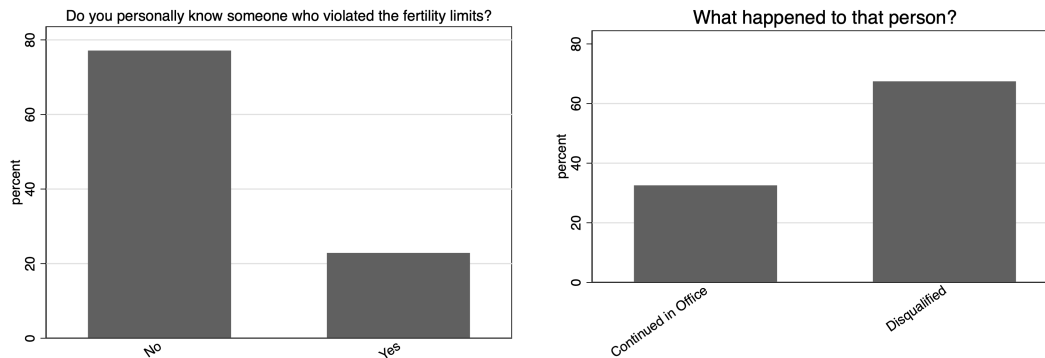
<sup>15</sup>I adopted the methodology used by Jayachandran [2017] to avoid bias from retrospective fertility preferences, which could be problematic given that politicians may have already reached their desired family size.

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

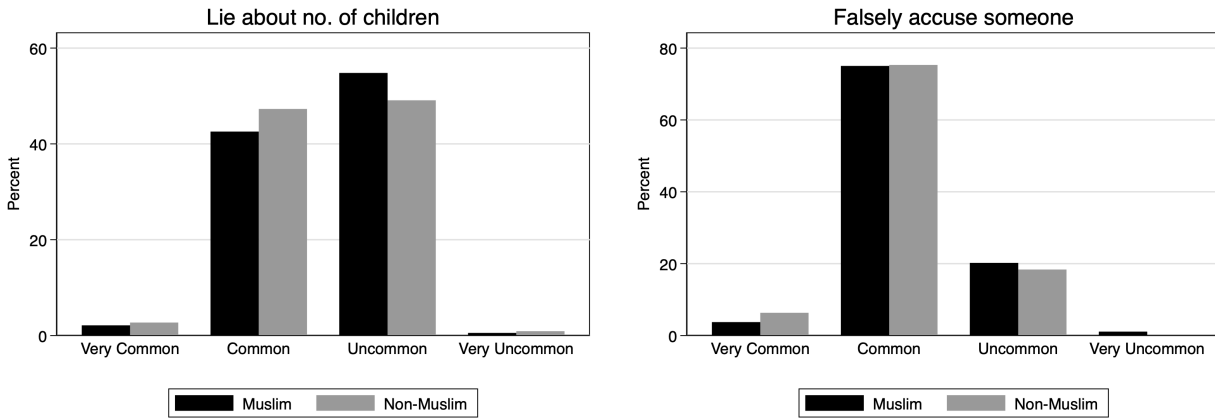
Many studies on ballot access laws in western democracies assume that these rules are perfectly implemented, often focusing on direct costs such as filing fees, which may disproportionately affect poorly funded candidates or parties. However, in developing countries, evidence frequently points to imperfect 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

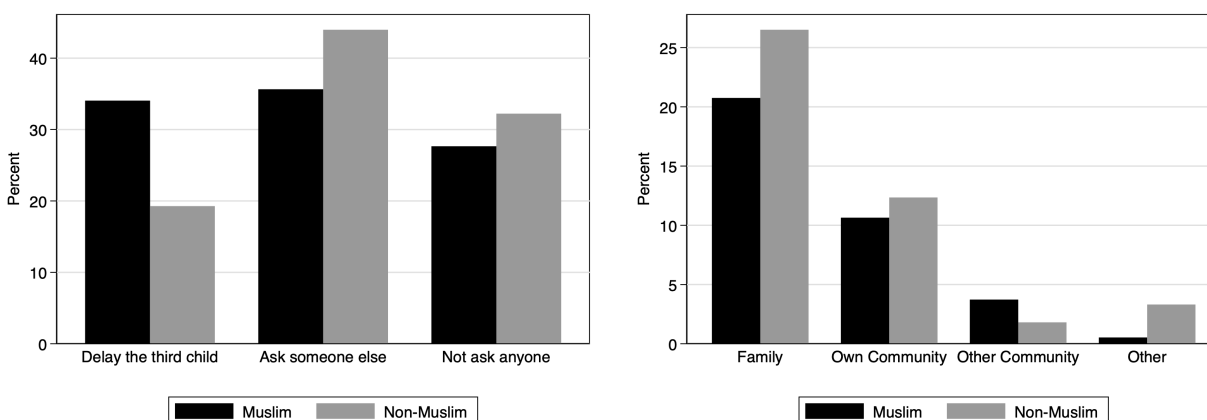
In this section, I discuss what aspiring candidates who desire to run for political office under fertility restrictions but also wish to have more than two children might do. If a critical mass of their community has reached their desired family size and remains eligible, an affected candidate may ask 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., 2024].

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

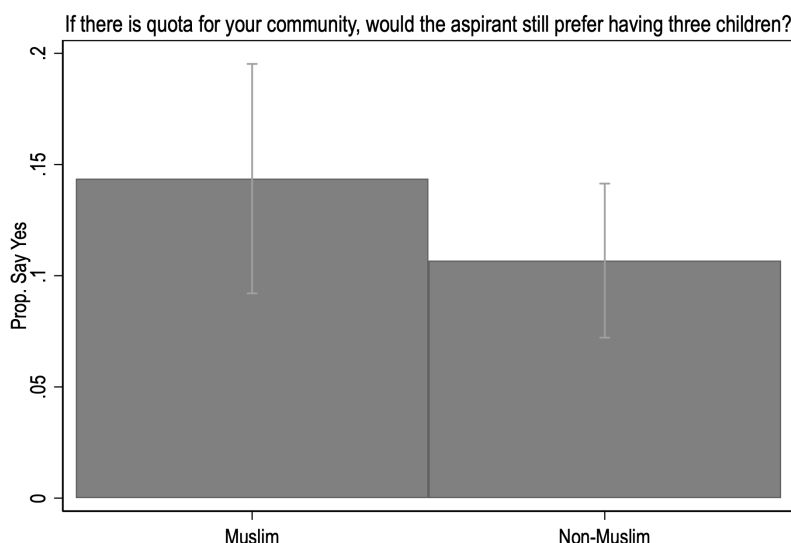


#### 7.4 Electoral quotas for Muslims

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 governing political entry can affect marginalized minority groups' representation in electoral contests. 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. 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 propose a new mechanism that highlights the conditions under which imperfect enforcement may influence political entry.

This research extends existing literature on political entry costs by decomposing and analyzing their constituent components. Accordingly, this research highlights

the 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 probes the trade-offs faced by aspiring Muslim citizens within decentralized governmental structures and examines how seemingly beneficial laws might adversely affect them. It explores 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.

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## A Appendix

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

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

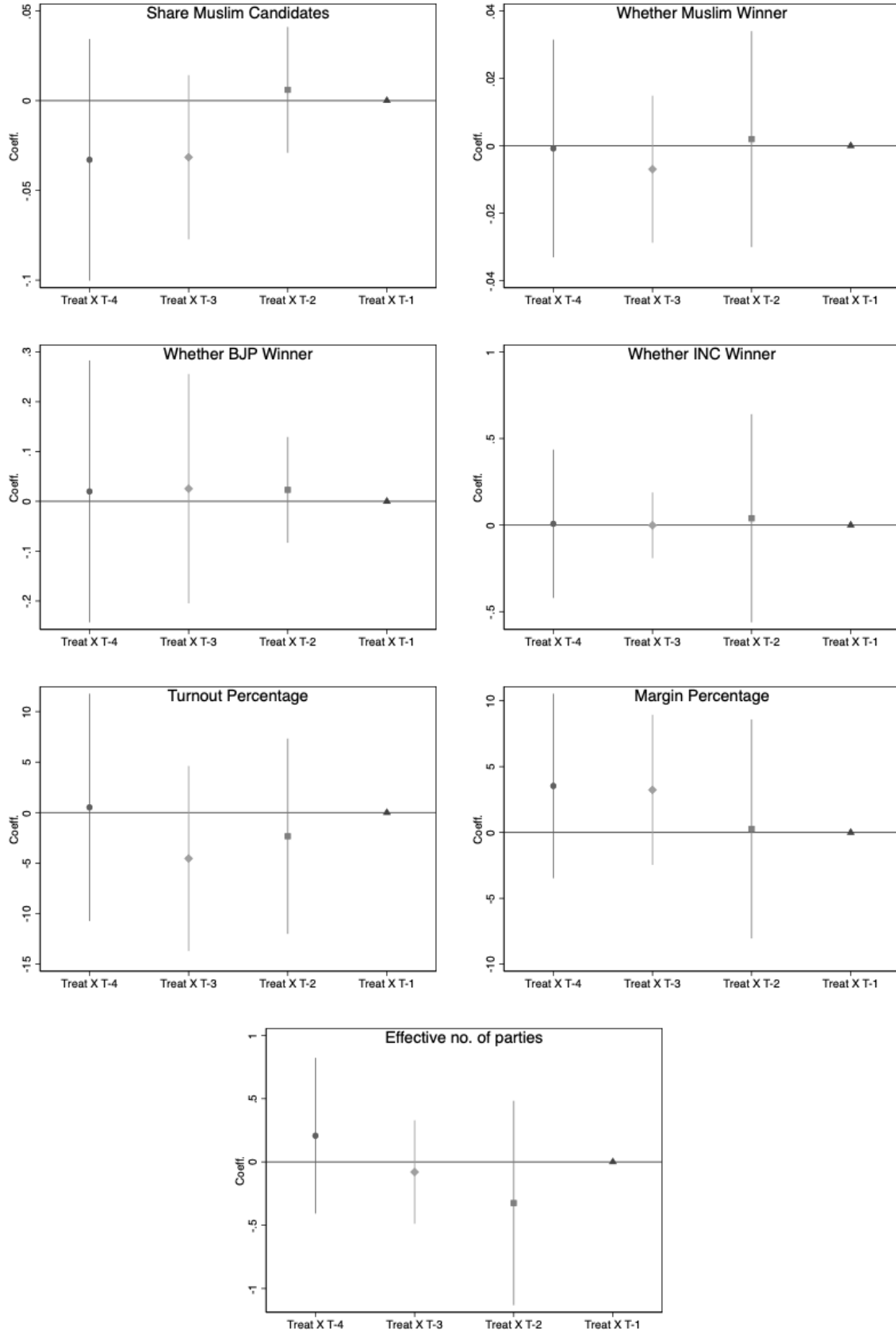


Figure A.2: Pre-trends in Always treated states and Sometimes treated states

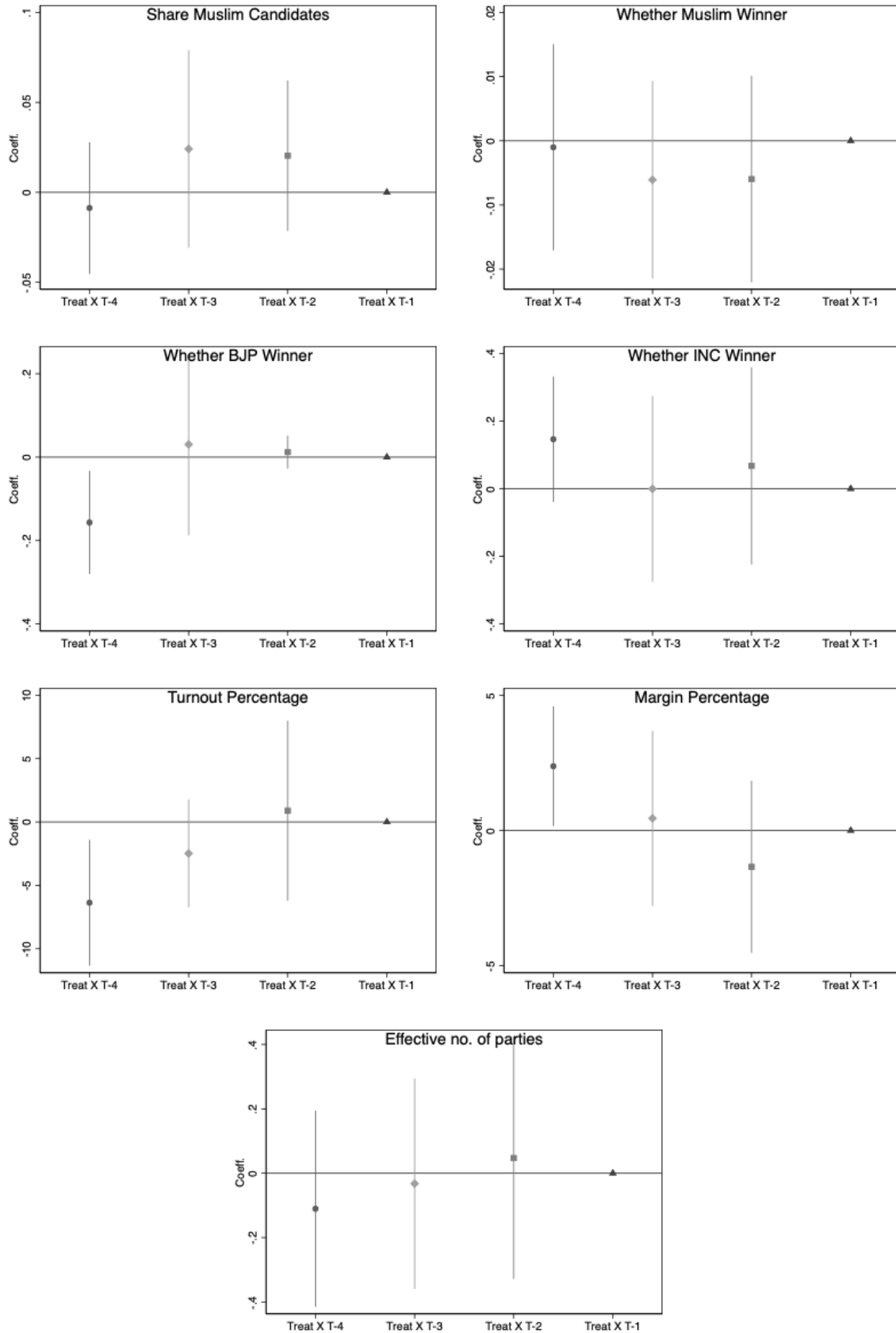
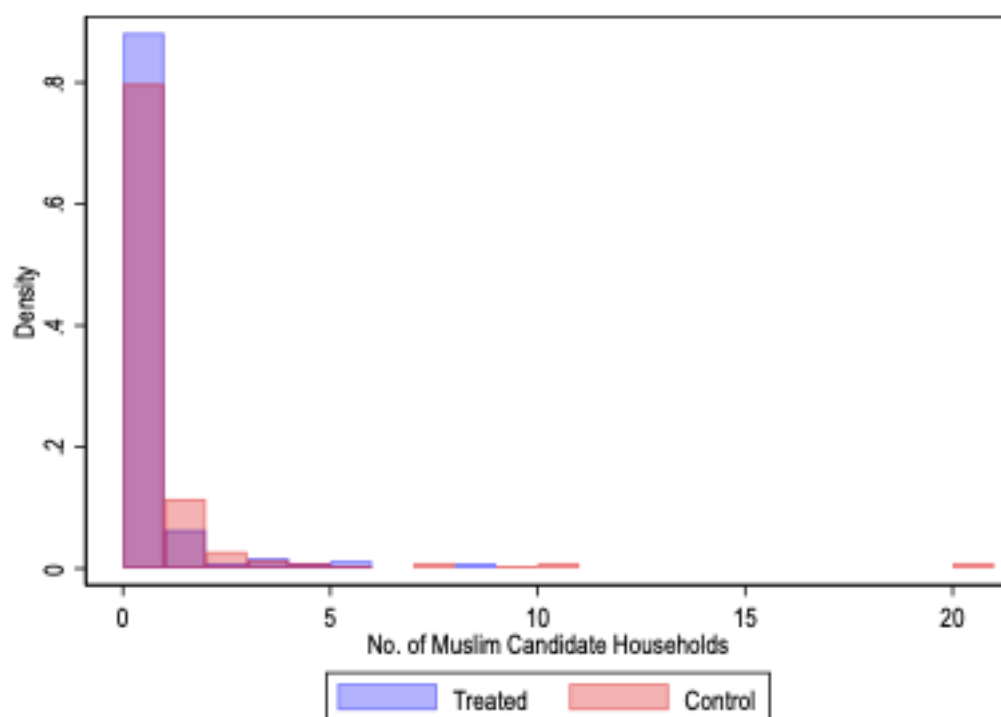


Table A.3: Effect of Fertility Limits on Muslim Candidacy (Alternate Specifications)

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.

Figure A.3: Distribution of Muslim candidate households



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

Table A.4: 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.

Table A.5: Effect of Fertility Limits on General 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 A.6: Effect of Fertility Limits on Total candidacy

Outcome	(1)	(2)	# of Cand. HH		(5)
			(3)	(4)	
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
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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 A.7: Fertility Limits and Change in Age Composition of Other Candidates

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

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