How Electoral Laws Worsen the Candidacy of Minorities in Rural India[*]

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Abstract

Do laws that restrict eligibility for political office to individuals with specific characteristics hurt political entry of marginalised groups? This study investigates the consequences of India's "two-child limits" for individuals aspiring to local government offices. These limits create a trade-off for citizens between limiting family and running for office. By leveraging variations in law adoption across Indian states and employing a difference-in-differences approach, I find that fertility limits reduce the candidacy of Muslims, the largest religious minority and one of the most marginalized groups in India. Using primary data from phone surveys of more than 500 village politicians in Maharashtra, I argue that the decline in Muslim candidacy is mainly driven by the cost of deviating from family preferences and community norms. This study highlights how electoral rules create complex trade-offs for citizens from marginalized groups.

Keywords: political entry, electoral laws, candidacy, local politics, population control policies, India

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1 Introduction

In many countries, the political participation of specific ethnic groups remains very low. According to a large literature, "neutral" institutional rules, such as the disenfranchisement of those with criminal records and the requirement of difficult-to-obtain identification documents, are the main reasons for the low turnout of specific groups (Berman 2015; Keyssar 2009; Wehner and de Kadt 2023; White 2019,0). For example, such voting laws in the US are argued to be one of the primary reasons for the low participation of Black and Indigenous voters.

In this study, I investigate whether institutional rules also play a role in determining the participation of specific groups as candidates for political office. Similar to voting laws, electoral rules that determine eligibility for political office, such as minimum age, residency, or education requirements, do not explicitly restrict the political entry of any group but can potentially change the social composition of the candidate pool. Proponents argue that such laws enhance the quality of the candidate pool and create role models who can promote desirable choices in society (Shapiro et al. 2010). On the other hand, critics argue that attempts to regulate political entry often have far-reaching consequences, some of which may be unexpected. However, the empirical evidence of the impact of these institutional rules on the political entry of marginalized groups is limited.

To address this gap, I examine the consequences of electoral rules in rural India's local governments on the candidacy of Muslims, who are the largest religious minority and one of the most marginalized socioeconomic groups without institutional protection (Basant 2007).[1] In particular, I examine the impact of laws that impose fertility limits on those who want to contest village elections. These restrictions were implemented with the aim to control population growth by using elected representatives as

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

role models to drive the change (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. If citizens had more than two children before the law, they are still eligible for office, but any subsequent birth will make them ineligible. These limits were among the first amendments to the local governance act that varied entry requirements in some states, leading to spatial and temporal variation in their adoption, making them suitable for a systematic study.

Why would laws limiting office to individual with specific characteristics affect marginalized groups? Existing theories suggest that entry costs play a pivotal role in the decision-making process of running for elections (Gulzar 2021; Tullock 1965). I argue that citizens from marginalized groups face higher costs of deviating from their preferences. These costs could be family-specific economic costs or in the form of backlash from their community. Moreover, if electoral rules are implemented imperfectly, a common problem in developing countries, it may allow elites to exploit marginalized groups.

Using data from a nationally representative survey, I find that fertility limits decrease the likelihood of any Muslim candidate and the share of Muslims on the ballot, suggesting a decline in Muslim candidacy. Additionally, there is descriptive evidence suggesting that these limits lead to a shift in the ratio of young candidates (those affected by the limits as they may not have achieved their desired family size before implementation) to older, unaffected candidates. This suggests that some politically aspirational young citizens, who are affected by the limits, ask an older (unaffected) community member to contest as a coping strategy. Such strategies could be problematic for democratic accountability, as the replacement candidate may act as a proxy for the ineligible individual if elected (Heinze et al. 2024).

To uncover the underlying mechanism, I rely on data collected from a primary

phone survey of current village council members and runner-ups in Maharashtra's village councils, one of the major states that adopted fertility limits. I find that son preference and the prevalence of polygamy, key factors that determine family size, are higher among Muslims than among others. Hence, I argue that the high cost of deviating from the preferences of their family and community is the main reason for the decline in Muslim candidacy. The survey also highlights external factors, such as imperfect enforcement, common occurrences of false accusations, and lying about the number of children. However, I argue that these factors are not the main drivers, as they affect all marginalized families, not just Muslims. Overall, the findings suggest that cost of deviating from social preferences often impose disproportionate burdens on specific groups, hindering their political entry.

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; Stratmann 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

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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). These restrictions increase the costs of entry for candidates, making it more difficult for them to run for office (Kapoor and Magesan 2018; Tullock 1965). These entry costs may be more for unprotected marginalized groups due to the higher cost of deviating from family or community preferences, and there may be additional costs if institutions allow some elite groups to prevent others from contesting (Allie 2024).

Consider a hypothetical electoral law that creates a tradeoff between personal political ambition and family or community preferences. For example, minimum education requirements may force individuals to choose between pursuing an education and running for office. Such restrictions may affect certain groups more, such as low-income groups, who would face a high opportunity cost due to lost income from not working. Now, consider two groups: A and B, both face a cost of deviating from the hypothetical law. However, the cost of deviating from preferences is higher for group A. If deviating from family or community preferences results in backlash, such as losing financial support, then aspiring citizens may choose not to contest. Therefore, an aspiring citizen from group A may be less likely to contest due to the high cost of devi-

ating from preferences, while an aspiring citizen from group B may be more inclined to contest as the costs are lower.

MECHANISM 1 *The cost of deviating from preferences may be higher for specific groups.*

Now, let's consider a scenario where the state is unable to fully enforce the law. In this situation, certain groups with more influence over the bureaucracy can violate the law without facing consequences. Furthermore, these influential groups can manipulate the bureaucracy to falsely accuse other groups or accuse them with limited evidence. Let's assume that group B has more influence in this scenario. As a result, even if a law-abiding citizen from group A decides to go against their preferences and contest, they may be deterred by the potential cost of facing false accusations. On the other hand, a citizen from group B may violate the law and still choose to contest the situation.

MECHANISM 2 *Imperfect enforcement may disproportionately hurt less privileged groups*

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 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 mor-

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tality, 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 for contesting and limiting family. If candidates from Muslim families choose to have the number of children they desire, the law would disproportionately make many from their community ineligible. On the other hand, Muslim households limiting family size to contest may have to face disproportionately higher costs as they are deviating from the preferences of their family or community, which may lead to a backlash from their own. Moreover, Muslims have a lower likelihood of winning because they have to contest against politically dominant upper-caste Hindus without any institutional protection. So, they might face more suspicions and accusations as these tools of supression are mostly used by politically dominant groups (Buch 2005). Hence, it makes sense for more Muslims contest less, regardless of their preferences.

In contrast, the consequences of fertility limits on marginalized groups with institutional protection, 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 face. 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 desire to maintain eligibility to run for political offices reserved for them.

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

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[2]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).

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

Category	Fraction
Muslim	0.67
SC/ST	0.56
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.

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. However, the study also documents cases of false accusations by political competitors and cases wherein no one complained against a violator. The authors' note that typically, these strategies are used by elites from the dominant castes in the village, and hence, imperfect enforcement increases the cost of running for office for political aspirants from marginalized groups.

5   Data and Empirics

The main aim of this paper is to examine the causal effect of fertility limits legislation on candidacy of marginalized minority groups in village council elections. To systematically investigate this, I exploit the spatial and temporal variation in the enactment of the law across states using the 2006/09 round of the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS), a nationally representative sample of rural India.[3] This round collects information from 8569 households from 240 villages across 17 major states of India. In

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[3]Rural Economic and Demographic survey was first conducted in 1971, called Additional Rural Income survey, using stratified random sampling strategy in 252 villages. Later on, the second and third rounds were conducted in 1982 and 1999 respectively. The most recent round was conducted in 2006/09, making it one of the oldest running panel surveys.

addition to a detailed household survey, the listing survey collects demographic data and information on participation in local governance from heads of all households in the surveyed villages.[4] This, coupled with the village survey, collects administrative details such as election year and reservation status of each seat in the council from official records of the village.[5] There are several reasons why this dataset is most suitable for my analysis. First, REDS 2006/09 collects detailed information on participation in local village councils for all major states of India. Second, the survey collects retrospective information on participation in local governance, providing rich data on political outcomes for multiple electoral cycles.

In the REDS sample, the states that implemented the law are Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Bihar. Among them, Bihar and Uttarakhand implemented limits on candidates in municipal councils (urban councils) only. Therefore, I use them as the control states. Table 5.1 presents information on election years by state and variations in the timing of the implementation of these laws across states.[6] Four states revoked the policy, but Himachal Pradesh is the only state in my sample that had elections after the policy was revoked. Therefore, I drop Himachal Pradesh from the analysis as carryover effects, i.e., potential outcomes in the present period, may be affected by previous exposure, violates the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA).[7] Finally, the treatment group in our sample contains 8 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

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[4]The listing survey collects information from 115,429 household heads across 243 villages.

[5]This information is not available for Jharkhand, so my analysis does not include it.

[6]I primarily rely on Anukriti and Chakravarty 2019 for key policy dates, but verify and correct any discrepancies found in the timeline. For example, administrative records indicate the Maharashtra policy was implemented in 2001, not 2003 as mentioned in Anukriti and Chakravarty 2019.

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

Table 5.1: Information on Election Years and Treatment by State

State	In effect	Election Years
Rajasthan	1995 onwards	2000, 2005
Haryana	1995-2006	2000, 2005
Andhra Pradesh	1995 onwards	2000-01, 2006
Orissa	1995 onwards	1997, 2002
Himachal Pradesh	2001-05	2000, 2005
Madhya Pradesh	2001-05	2000, 2005
Chhattisgarh	2001-05	1999-2000, 2005
Maharashtra	2001 onwards	1997-2005
Gujarat	2006 onwards	1996-2006
West Bengal		2001, 2006
Uttar Pradesh		2000, 2005
Tamil Nadu		1996, 2001
Punjab		1998, 2003
Kerala		2000, 2005
Karnataka		2000, 2005
Bihar		2001, 2006

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 village election. For groups without institutional protection, 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

groups with institutional protection, 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 5.2 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.[8]

I use a two-election period difference-in-difference design for the analysis, which leverages variation in treatment adoption across space and time. The main specification used for the analysis is:

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

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. 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) (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).

A key identifying assumption is that the pre-treatment trends are parallel for the treatment and control states. Ideally, I would have used data on the outcome of interest

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[8]Table 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 5.2: Summary statistics of main outcome variables by treatment status

	Never Treated	Always Treated	Sometimes Treated	
			Pre	Post
Total Candidate Households	6.748	8.197	8.914	7.92
	(7.54)	(7.19)	(12.3)	(7.39)
Muslim Candidate Households	.656	.444	.186	.12
	(2.41)	(1.36)	(.8)	(.72)
SC Candidate Households	1.771	1.915	1.171	1.16
	(3.18)	(2.8)	(2.54)	(2.09)
ST Candidate Households	.092	.265	2.314	1.7
	(.4)	(.95)	(7.05)	(2.28)
OBC Candidate Households	2.94	3.402	3.643	4.1
	(4.55)	(3.93)	(5.58)	(5.1)
Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Households	.913	2.12	1.6	.84
	(1.97)	(3.63)	(3.93)	(1.66)
Any Muslim Candidate Household	.202	.179	.071	.04
	(.4)	(.39)	(.26)	(.2)
Any Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Household	.344	.538	.386	.36
	(.48)	(.5)	(.49)	(.48)
Share Muslim Candidate Households	.079	.063	.045	.006
	(.2)	(.19)	(.18)	(.03)
Share SC Candidate Households	.256	.24	.104	.121
	(.27)	(.25)	(.19)	(.18)
Share SC Candidate Households	.037	.033	.274	.281
	(.16)	(.12)	(.37)	(.36)
Share OBC Candidate Households	.382	.4	.356	.431
	(.36)	(.33)	(.34)	(.33)
Share Upper Caste Hindu Candidate Households	.157	.257	.221	.16
	(.27)	(.32)	(.33)	(.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. SC households are those coded as Scheduled Castes and identify as Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist for the purpose of 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 that identify as Other Backward Castes (OBC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the sample, OBC and ST Households imply OBC and ST Hindus. Gen. candidate households are upper caste Hindus.

for at least two previous election terms before 1995, when the policy was first implemented. However, I do not have data on the outcomes of interest for previous terms as village elections did not happen or were not regular before the constitutional amendment in 1992, hence the election records were not documented properly. Therefore, I follow the approach used in Cameron et al. (2021), which deals with a similar challenge, and use data on related outcomes for previous periods. To test for pre-treatment trends, I use the following empirical specification:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_1 Treatment_s + \sum_{t=T-k}^{t=T-1} \beta_{2t} \text{Fertility Limits}_s \times Term_t + \beta_3 Year_t + \epsilon_{st} \tag{2}$$

where Y_{ist} represents the related outcome variables, such as measures of candidacy for Muslims or Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes in state-level elections, for unit i, in state s, in year t. The variable Fertility Limits$_s$ is an indicator variable 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.

Figure 5.1 presents the plots for estimates and confidence intervals of the coefficient of interest, β_{2t}, using data on candidacy and winners in state assembly elections for all states in my sample. 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.[9] The figure shows estimates for the share of Muslim candidates and whether the winner is Muslim for seats without quotas in state assembly constituencies. The results show that there is no significant difference in pre-trends between treatment and control states.

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[9]Thanks to Saloni Bhogale and Giles Verniers for kindly providing access to the data.

Figure 5.1: Pre-trends in Stated with without and Control States in State Elections
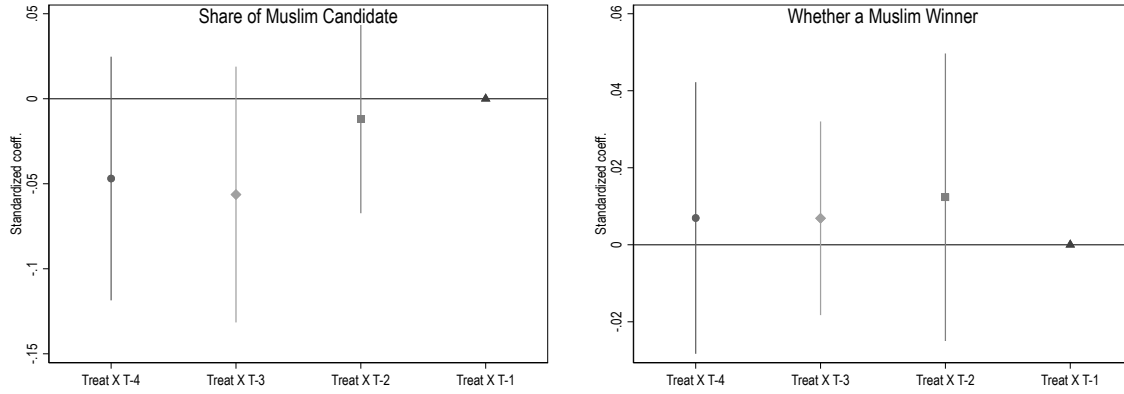
Note: The figure plots coefficients, β_{2t}, from equation 2 for three outcomes. The vertical lines are the 95 percent confidence intervals on the coefficients.

To uncover the mechanism, I collect primary data using phone surveys of politicians from 147 village councils across 9 districts in Maharashtra. Table 5.3 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.

Table 5.3: 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

In this section, I present the results of consequences of fertility limits on candidacy. I began by examining the impact of fertility limits on the candidacy of Muslims, a marginalized minority group without constitutionally mandated institutional protection. Table 6.1 presents the effects on the number of Muslim households fielding 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.[10] In column (1), I find that fertility limits lead to a roughly 23% decrease in Muslim candidate households, but the coefficient is not statistically significant. This imprecise estimate may be because in most village elections, either zero or just a single Muslim candidate household contest, which is not surprising as the average share of the Muslim population in a village is around 6%. On the other hand, in a few Muslim-majority villages in the sample, all candidate households are Muslims. In other words, the dis-

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[10]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.

tribution of Muslim candidates has excess zeroes and a long tail. Therefore, the sample may not be 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. The estimates are statistically significant at a 5% level and robust to different methods of clustering standard errors. The results in column (3) indicate that fertility limits significantly decrease the share of Muslim candidate households. The coefficients are significant at a 1% level for both methods of clustering standard errors.

Table 6.1: Effect of Fertility Limits on Muslim Candidacy

Outcome	# Mus. (1)	Any Mus. (2)	Share Mus. (3)
Fertility Limits	-0.153	-0.0767	-0.0719
	(-0.464,0.158)	(-0.141,-0.0124)**	(-0.118,-0.0259)***
	[-0.461,0.155]	[-0.151,-0.00279]**	[-0.117,-0.0265]***
Control mean	.66	.2	.08
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 different several specifications in Table A.3. The results do not change after including controls to account for the Muslim population in panel A, time-invariant direct-level characteristics (such as historical factors that may influence fertility preferences and bureaucratic culture that may determine enforcement of fertility limits) in panel B, and reservation 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 may bias the results. As the sample comprises two election periods, states with fertility in both election periods may violate the identification assumption if the effects are time-varying, i.e., effects are more signif-

icant in the second election after implementation. To address this concern, I show that the results are robust to excluding states with fertility in both election periods in panel D. Overall, the results provide strong 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.[11] Table 6.2 presents the results for the number of candidate households of a particular group in column (1) and the share of candidate households in column (2).[12] There could be several reasons for these imprecise estimates. Firstly, the cost of deviating from preference may be low due to ethnic quotas for them and lack of competition from politically dominant upper-caste Hindus. Additionally, certain politically aspirational castes within these groups may contest more because they have a higher chance of winning if fertility limits deter some politically less aspirational castes among them from running for office. Several 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 for the upper caste Hindus (a politically dominant group, no institutional protection) in Table A.4 and the total number of candidate households in Table A.5. The results show that fertility is not statistically insignificant across measures and specifications, potentially for the same reason as 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. This means that individuals who have already reached their desired fam-

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[11]I define SC households are those coded as Scheduled Castes and identify as Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist for the purpose of 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 that identify as Other Backward Castes (OBC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the sample, OBC and ST Households imply OBC and ST Hindus.

[12]I do not use the binary measure for groups with institutional protection, 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 6.2: Effect of Fertility Limits on Other Marginalized Groups

Outcome	# Cand. HH (1)	Share . (2)
Panel A: SC Candidacy (only Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs)		
Fertility Limits	0.0521	0.00725
	(-0.531,0.635)	(-0.0630,0.0775)
	[-.44,.54]	[-.065,.08]
Control mean	1.77	.26
N	455	409
Panel B: ST Candidacy (only Hindus)		
Fertility Limits	-0.0427	-0.0131
	(-0.807,0.722)	(-0.0542,0.0279)
	[-.51,.42]	[-.054,.028]
Control mean	.09	.04
N	455	409
Panel C: OBC Candidacy (only Hindus)		
Fertility Limits	0.492	0.0890
	(-0.648,1.632)	(-0.0674,0.245)
	[-.66,1.6]	[-.082,.26]
Control mean	2.94	.38
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. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

ily size before the implementation of the fertility limits can still run for election even if they have more than two children. Hence, 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.[13] 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

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[13]The data significantly limits the statistical power to detect an effect on age composition, as around 33 to 50% of seats in each are reserved for women, and it's very rare for women to be household heads. Hence, the analysis highlights broad descriptive patterns for speculative discussion.

of election.[14] In states where fertility limits were adopted fertility limits early, the analysis examines candidacy in two elections after the implementation for early adopters, where the second may happen anytime between six to ten years after implementation. This gap will be less than five years for states with one election since the implementation. Hence, one can reasonably assume that those in their 50s or 60s at the time of the election would have reached their desired family size at the time of the implementation in the states that adopted fertility limits.[15]

Table 6.3 shows the effect on candidacy for various age groups of contesting Muslim household heads. The descriptive analysis suggests a pattern wherein the proportion of younger candidates (below 40 years of age) reduces as a result of fertility limits, but the proportion of candidates older than 40 increases, those who should not be affected by the law. This provides additional evidence suggesting that fertility limits affect Muslim candidacy. There is a similar pattern for STs, OBCs, and general caste-contesting household heads, except SCs (see Table A.6). This suggests that fertility limits affect those who have yet to reach their desired family size in other major groups, too, but not as much to decrease their overall candidacy, potentially because of the replacement of affected young candidates with unaffected older candidates from the same community.

If there is a critical mass of the affected community who reached the desired family size and are still alive, then an affected candidate can request someone else to contest instead of them. In the village politician survey, I asked respondents what would an aspiring citizens belonging to their community do if they preferred more than two children. Around 40% of all respondents said that they would ask someone else to contest, and among those who would ask others, more than 80% say that they would ask someone either from the family or from the same community as the aspirant (See Fig-

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

[15]I do not explicitly use the age at the time of implementation for this analysis as one cannot compute it for the states without fertility limits.
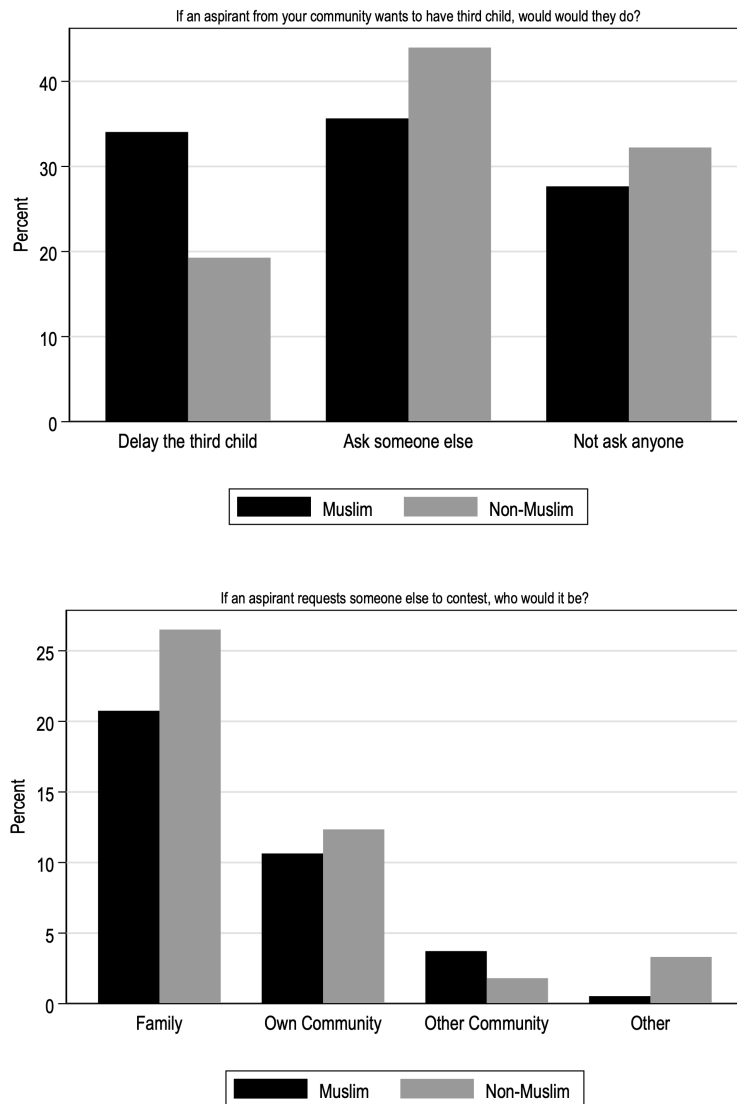
Table 6.3: Fertility Limits and Change in Age Composition of Muslim Candidates

	No limits	Two child limits	Difference
Proportion ≤ 30 years	.19	.09	-0.11
	(.4)	(.28)	(0.07)
Proportion between 30 and 40 years	.4	.31	-0.09
	(.49)	(.47)	(0.10)
Proportion between 40 and 50 years	.21	.29	0.07
	(.41)	(.46)	(0.08)
Proportion between 50 and 60 years	.16	.17	0.01
	(.37)	(.38)	(0.07)
Proportion ≥ 60 years	.09	.2	0.11
	(.29)	(.41)	(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.

ure 6.1).The shifting ratio of young Muslims to older Muslims on the ballot, coupled with a decline in their candidacy, may imply that young aspiring citizens who are affected may not always replaced by older, unaffected community member. In other words, the decline in candidacy might be due to young potential candidates dropping out without being replaced while older unaffected candidates continue to run. In support of this story, I find suggestive evidence that Muslims are relatively less likely to ask someone to contest if they do not want to contest, and if they do ask, they are relatively more likely to ask someone from other communities in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Fertility Limits and Replacement
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra

If an aspirant from your community wants to have third child, would would they do?

Categories: Delay the third child, Ask someone else, Not ask anyone
Legend: Muslim, Non-Muslim

If an aspirant requests someone else to contest, who would it be?

Categories: Family, Own Community, Other Community, Other
Legend: Muslim, Non-Muslim

In summary, the results show that fertility limits have a significant impact on the candidacy of Muslims, who are an unprotected and marginalized minority group. However, there is no significant impact on the candidacy of other major groups. There are, nonetheless, changes in the age composition across many groups, indicating that the law reduces the proportion of those affected by fertility limit laws. This suggests a norm of asking someone else to run for office, which might lead to the replacement of affected

young candidates with those unaffected. This potentially offsets the impact of fertility limits for some groups but not for unprotected, marginalized groups.

7 Discussion

In this section, I will explore potential reasons for the decline in Muslim candidacy and the lack of replacement between affected young citizens who drop out and unaffected older citizens among Muslims. First, I examine the role of internal costs that can arise from individual, family, and community preferences. Then, I consider external costs, such as cost of imperfect enforcement. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion on how hypothetical quotas may alter the tradeoffs. The discussion in this section relies entirely 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. The aim is to unpack the tradeoff that citizens face between contesting and limiting family size.

7.1 Internal costs

Recall that Muslims have the strong preference for large family size (refer to Table 3.1). These preferences imply that a typical Muslim citizen who did not reach their desired family size before the implementation of the fertility limits might not contest if the preference for a larger family is stronger than the preference to run for political office. Having said that, families that run for political office may have different preferences than the general population. Do these fertility preferences extend to politically aspirational citizens among Muslims? To understand this, the surveyed asked politicians, "Suppose your son or daughter plans to have children. How many sons and daughters would you want for them?"[16] Figure 7.1 shows the differences in son preference among Muslims and Non-Muslims. Several fertility studies in India (like Jayachandran (2017)) have

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[16]I followed the approach used by Jayachandran (2017) to ask the question, as asking about retrospective fertility preference could lead to bias. This could be particularly problematic in this case as politicians already had children or reached their desired family size.

shown that son preference determines family size. The responses show that relatively more Muslim politicians want their children to have more than two sons.

To further understand the costs of limiting family size, I also investigate the prevalence of other norms, such as polygamy, that may affect family size. I focus on polygamy because Muslim personal law allows polygamy and some petitioners demanded reversal of these limits on this ground, For instance, in the court case Motiur Rahman vs. The State Of Assam, the petitioner argued that Muslims should be exempt from fertility limit restrictions, as their personal law allows them to have four wives and, hence, Muslim male adults have more children.[17] Figure 7.2 shows that the prevalence of polygamy is more common among Muslims than other groups.

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

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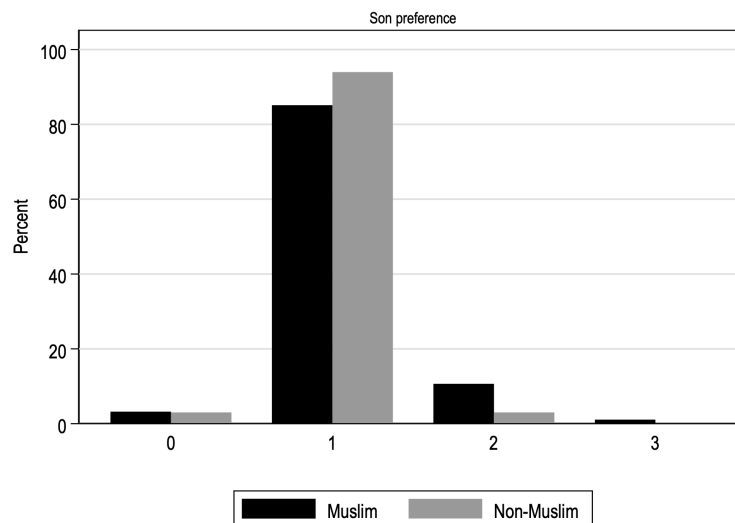
[17]Link to the access details of the case here: https://indiankanoon.org/doc/71466534/

Figure 7.2: Polygamy prevalence
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra

How common is the prevalence of polygamy in your community?
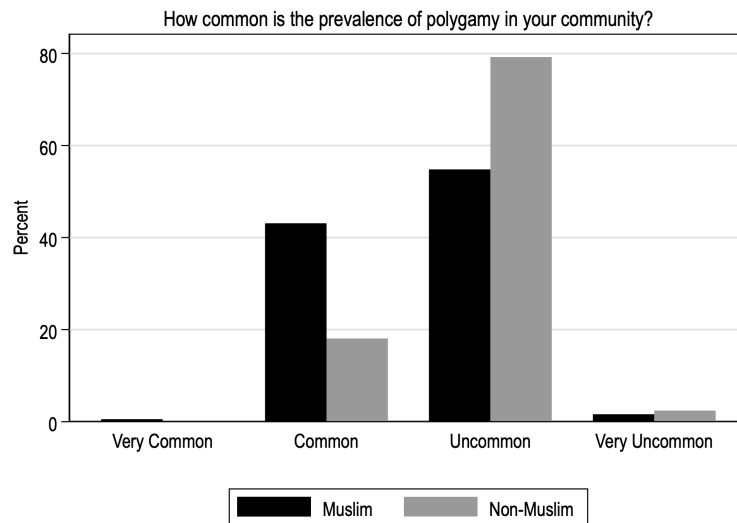
In sum, the findings from the village politician surveys suggest that the cost of deviating from preferences could be higher for Muslims as family preferences and community's norm matter especially for issues like family size and marriage (Desai and Andrist 2010; Munshi and Myaux 2006)

7.2 External costs

Many studies on ballot access laws in western democracies assume that these rules are perfectly implemented. Consequently, these mostly focus on costs that the law directly influences, such as filling fee requirements may affect poorly funded candidates/parties. However, in developing countries, there is plenty of evidence of imperfect implementation of rules, leading to the exploitation of marginalized individuals by elites (Anderson et al. 2015; Neggers 2018). To understand the implementation of fertility limits, politicians were surveyed and asked if they personally knew of anyone in office who violated the limits in Figure 7.3. Follow-up questions were then asked if they were disqualified. The responses suggest that many individuals in office were either ineligible at the time of nomination or violated the limits while in office. Furthermore, it

shows that some ineligible elected representatives continue to hold office. Hence, enforcement of fertility limit restrictions seem to be a challenge in Maharashtra, one of the most developed states with high relative bureaucratic capacity compared to other states in India.
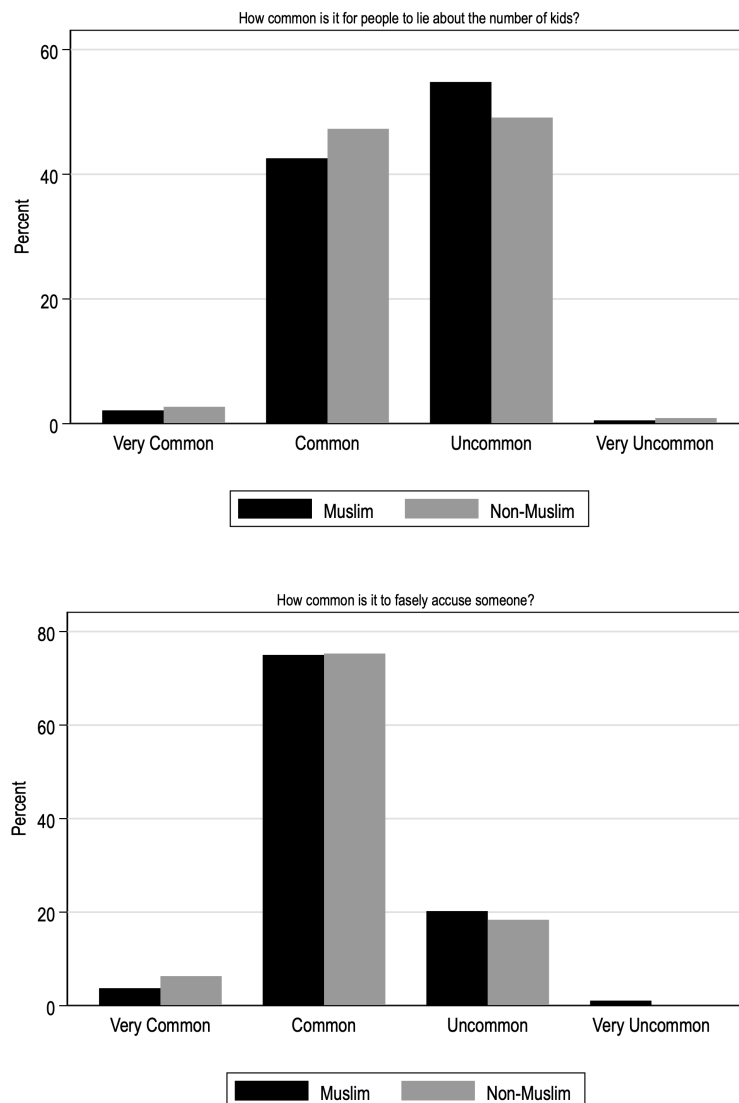
Figure 7.3: Imperfect Enforcement
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra
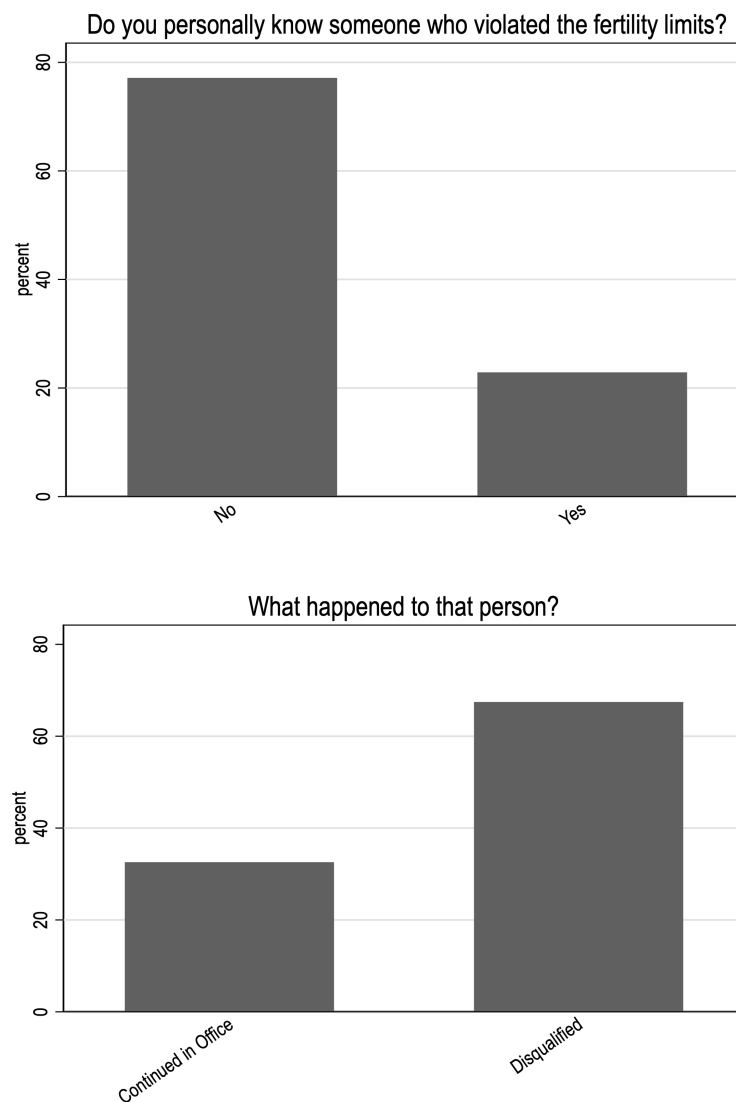
In addition, I examine the prevalence of false information (lying about the number of children and accusations) in Figures 7.4. The responses suggest that lying about

the number of children and false accusations are common. In a related study, (Buch 2005) argues that it is easier for elites to lie or accuse someone. The responses indicate that lying is less common in the Muslim community, hence, support the author's assertion. One can argue that elites, typically upper-caste males, would have relatively less incentive to take advantage of enforcement imperfections in seats where they cannot contest compared to when they can contest themselves. Hence, elites are more likely to target candidates from marginalized groups who compete with them directly. This may lead to disproportionately higher costs for Muslims or those from protected marginalized groups who compete in open seats (seats without ethnic quotas). However, it may also lead to a backlash against non-elites in politically dominant castes, as they may split co-ethnic votes. Hence, while imperfect enforcement and the prevalence of lying affect Muslims, they may affect others as well. In Muslim-dominated villages, these imperfections may also benefit Muslims. Therefore, I expect internal costs to matter more than external costs for Muslims.

Figure 7.4: Prevalence of illicit practices
Source: Authors' own survey in Maharashtra

How common is it for people to lie about the number of kids?

How common is it to fasely accuse someone?

7.3   Electoral quotas for Muslims

Now, let us consider what if electoral quotas are introduced for Muslims. Would the costs discussed above be mitigated? Let us assume that a specified number of council seats, proportional to the population, are permanently reserved for Muslims, similar to the quotas for SCs and STs. Theoretically, electoral quotas may affect the desire to remain eligible as they restrict competition to candidates from a particular community.

Figure 7.5 shows that in responses to hypothetical scenarios about the seat 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 desire to remain eligible is higher among Muslims, potentially because the marginal benefit of the quota would be higher for an unprotected, marginalized group. This is consistent with the argument by Anukriti and Chakravarty (2019) that the desire to remain eligible for political office may explain a more relatively larger decline in fertility rates for SC/STs as compared to other Hindus in states with restrictions. Hence, combining attempts to engineer political entry for societal goals with electoral quotas might help policymakers achieve their goals as a decline in the candidacy of groups whose preferences will not create role models that the policymakers hoped.

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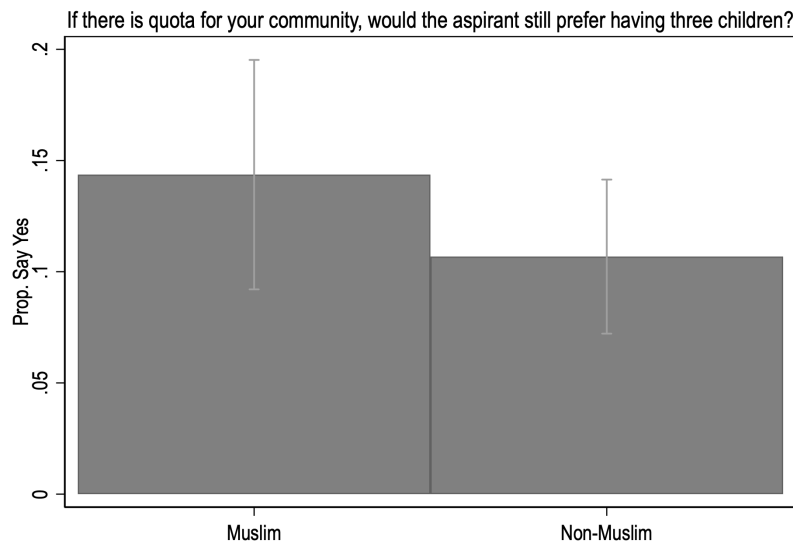
8   Conclusion

This study shows that electoral rules that restrict eligibility for political office to candidates with specific desirable characteristics affect some marginalized groups. Existing

literature on electoral rules highlights the role of entry costs, but there is limited understanding of what constitutes these costs or how institutional factors and elite strategies magnify them. To that end, this study highlights the tradeoffs aspiring citizens face to remain eligible after the introduction of electoral laws.

In doing so, this study enriches our understanding of the barriers to political entry. First, it emphasizes the role of family and community preferences in determining the decision to run for political office. Second, it highlights the challenges and implications of electoral rules in states with low bureaucratic capacity. Third, it brings forward important factors that scholars of representative democracy need to keep in mind to examine the political participation of historically underrepresented groups.

Additionally, it has several implications for Indian politics. First, it examines the tradeoffs faced by aspiring Muslim citizens in decentralized government structures and how laws that may be considered desirable for society may affect them. Second, it discusses the role of electoral quotas for unprotected marginalized groups as a policy tool in achieving desirable social change without any democratic cost. Third, several studies have highlighted that representation in local governments may improve representation in higher office; hence, a decline in Muslim candidacy may affect their chances of getting party ticket for higher offices (Goyal 2023; Karekurve-Ramachandra; O'Connell 2020).

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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	.286	.45	0	1
Total Households	465.771	524.65	54	6299
Muslim Households	40.114	115.41	0	864
SC Households	91.013	96.7	0	438
ST Households	27.204	60.04	0	450
OBC Households	186.721	223.31	0	2125
Upper Caste Hindu Households	96.851	222.02	0	2702
Total Seats	6472.525	10703.36	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 pass	20.12%	7.80 %	9.53 %
6-9th pass	24.85 %	16.31 %	19.05 %
10-11th pass	21.89 %	19.15 %	16.67 %
12th pass	17.16 %	26.95%	28.57 %
Graduation and above	15.98%	29.79%	26.19 %
N	188	152	180

Figure A.1: Distribution of Muslim candidate households
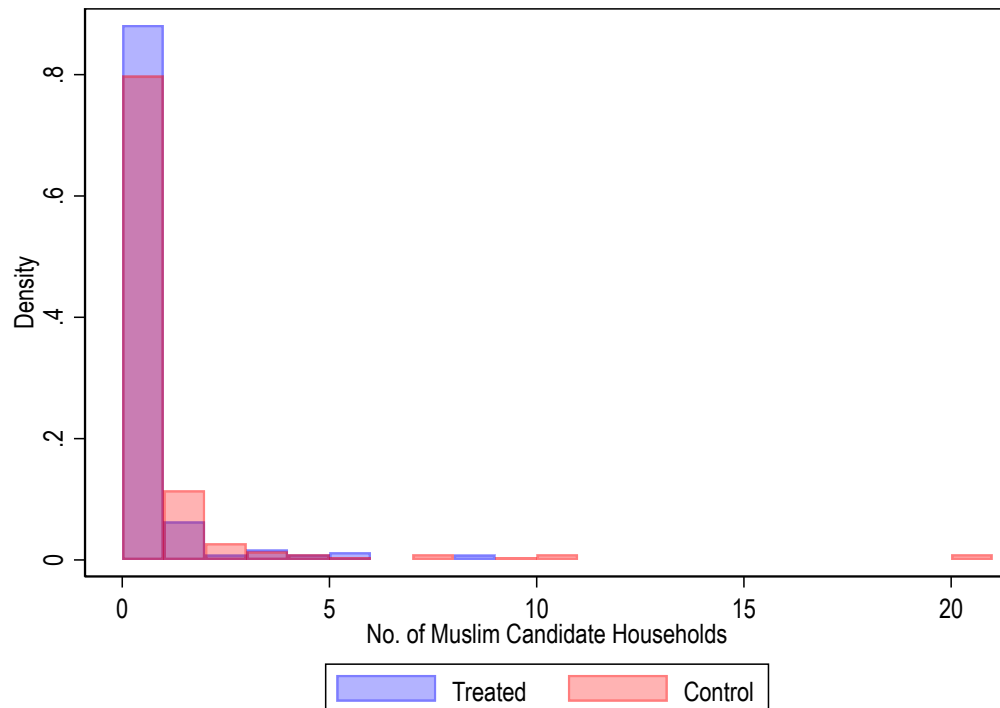
Note: The figure plots the distribution of the number of Muslim candidate households by treatment status.

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	-0.0768	-0.0675	-0.0688
	(-0.402,0.248)	(-0.126,-0.00892)**	(-0.112,-0.0300)***
	[-0.413,0.260]	[-0.131,-0.00375]**	[-0.112,-0.0253]***
Control mean	.66	.2	.08
N	455	455	409
	Panel B - District fixed effects		
Fertility Limits	-0.0437	-0.0517	-0.0575
	(-0.378,0.291)	(-0.119,0.0160)*	(-0.118,0.00284)*
	[-0.351,0.264]	[-0.112,0.00848]*	[-0.117,0.00196]*
Control mean	.66	.2	.08
N	455	455	406
	Panel C - Controls for reservation of village chief seat		
Fertility Limits	-0.152	-0.0740	-0.0705
	(-0.486,0.183)	(-0.139,-0.00855)**	(-0.118,-0.0230)***
	[-0.485,0.182]	[-0.145,-0.00340]**	[-0.121,-0.0203]***
Control mean	.66	.2	.08
N	455	455	409
	Panel D - Exclude always treated states		
Fertility Limits	-0.343	-0.0965	-0.0900
	(-0.756,0.0701)	(-0.178,-0.0149)*	(-0.175,-0.00489)**
	[-0.806,0.120]	[-0.202,0.00868]*	[-0.178,-0.00244]**
Control mean	.66	.2	.08
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.

Table A.4: Effect of Fertility Limits on General caste Hindus

Outcome	# OC. (1)	Whether OC. (2)	Share OC. (3)
Fertility Limits	-0.321	0.0794	-0.0125
	(-1.696,1.054)	(-0.0966,0.255)	(-0.0837,0.0588)
	[-1.851,1.208]	[-0.111,0.269]	[-0.0933,0.0684]
Control mean	.91	.34	.16
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.5: Effect of Fertility Limits on Total candidacy

Outcome			# of Cand. HH		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Fertility Limits	0.0497	0.0417	0.0406	0.130	-0.220
	(-1.685,1.784)	(-1.692,1.842)	(-1.922,2.003)	(-1.458,1.718)	(-2.426,1.986)
	[-9.697,9.797]	[-5.409,5.492]	[-1.727,1.808]	[-1.654,1.914]	[-2.307,1.867]
Control mean	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
N	455	455	455	455	338

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: Fertility Limits and Change in Age Composition of Other Candidates

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

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