

Case Study: Women as Policymakers

Measuring the effects of political reservations
Thinking about measurement and outcomes



This case study is based on “Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India,” by Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo (2004a), *Econometrica* 72(5), 1409-1443.

J-PAL thanks the author for allowing us to use their paper

Key Vocabulary

Hypothesis: a proposed explanation of and for the effects of a given intervention. Hypotheses are intended to be made ex-ante, or prior to the implementation of the intervention.

Indicators: metrics used to quantify and measure specific short-term and long-term effects of a program

Logical Framework: a management tool used to facilitate the design, execution, and evaluation of an intervention. It involves identifying strategic elements (inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact) and their causal relationships, indicators, and the assumptions and risks that may influence success and failure

Theory of Change: describes a strategy or blueprint for achieving a given long-term goal. It identifies the preconditions, pathways and interventions necessary for an initiative's success

Introduction

India amended its federal constitution in 1992, devolving power over local development programs from the states to rural councils, or Gram Panchayats (Village Councils). The Village Councils now choose what development programs to undertake and how much of the budget to invest in them. The states are also required to reserve a third of Village Council seats and Village Council chairperson positions for women. In most states, the schedule on which different villages must reserve seats and positions is determined randomly. This creates the opportunity to rigorously assess the impact of quotas on politics and government: Do the policies differ when there are more women in government? Do the policies chosen by women in power reflect the policy priorities of women? Since randomization was part of the Indian government program itself, the evaluation planning centered on collecting the data needed to measure impact. The researchers' questions were what data to collect and what data collection instruments to use.

Empowering the Panchayati Raj

Village Councils, known locally as Panchayats, have a long tradition in rural India. Originally, panchayats were assemblies (*vat*) of five (*panch*) elders, chosen by the community, convened to mediate disputes between people or villages. In modern times Village Councils have been formalized into institutions of local self-government.

This formalization came about through the constitution. In 1992, India enacted the 73rd amendment, which directed the states to establish a three-tier Panchayati Raj system. The Village Council is the grassroot unit¹ of this system, each council consisting of councilors elected every five years. The councilors elect from among themselves a council chairperson called a Pradhan. Decisions are made by a majority vote and the chairperson has no veto power. But as the only councilor with a full-time appointment, the chairperson wields effective power.

The 73rd amendment aimed to decentralize the delivery of public goods and services essential for development in rural areas. The states were directed to delegate the power to plan and implement local development programs to the Village Councils. Funds still come from the central government but are no longer earmarked for specific uses. Instead, the Village Council decides which programs to implement and how much to invest in them. As of 2005, Village Councils can choose programs from 29 specified areas, including welfare services (for example, public assistance for widows, care for the elderly, maternity care, antenatal care, and child health) and public works (for example, drinking water, roads, housing, community buildings, electricity, irrigation, and education).

¹ Village councils, called Gram Panchayats, form the basic units of the Panchayat Raj. Village council chairs, elected by the members of the village council, serve as members of the block–subdistrict–council (panchayat samiti). At the top of the system is the district council (zilla parishad) made up of the block council chairs.

Empowering women in the Panchayati Raj

The Village Councils are large and diverse. In West Bengal, for example, each council represents up to 12 villages and up to 10,000 people, who can vary by religion, ethnicity, caste, and, of course, gender.

Political voice varies by group identities drawn along these lines. If policy preferences vary by group identity and if the councilors' identities influence policy choices, then groups underrepresented in politics and government could be shut out as Village Councils could ignore those groups' policy priorities. There were fears that the newly empowered Village Councils would undermine the development priorities of traditionally marginalized groups, such as women. To remedy this, the 73rd amendment included two mandates to ensure that investments reflected the needs of everyone in the Village Council.

The first mandate secures community input. If Village Council investments are to reflect a community's priorities, the councilors must first know what those priorities are. Accordingly, Village Councils are required to hold a general assembly every six months or every year to report on activities in the preceding period and to submit the proposed budget to the community for ratification. In addition, the Chairpersons are required to set up regular office hours to allow constituents to formally request services and lodge complaints. Both requirements allow constituents to articulate their policy preferences.

The second mandate secures representation in the council for women. States are required to reserve at least a third of all council seats and Chairperson positions for women. Furthermore, states must ensure that the seats reserved for women are "allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat [Village Council]" and that the chairperson positions reserved for women are "allotted by rotation to different Panchayats [Village Councils]." In other

words, they have to ensure that reserved seats and chairperson positions rotate evenly within and across the Village Councils.

Randomized quotas in India: What can it teach us?

Your evaluation team has been entrusted with the responsibility to estimate the impact of quotas for women in the Village Councils. Your evaluation should address all dimensions in which quotas for women are changing local communities in India. What could these dimensions be? What data will you collect? What instruments will you use?

As a first step you want to understand all you can about the quota policy. What needs did it address? What are the pros and cons of the policy? What can we learn from it?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1

Gender quotas in the Village Councils

1. What were the main goals of the Village Councils?
2. Women are underrepresented in politics and government. Only 10 percent of India's national assembly members are women, compared to 17 percent worldwide. Does it matter that women are underrepresented? Why and why not?
3. What were the framers of the 73rd amendment trying to achieve when they introduced quotas for women?

Gender quotas have usually been followed by dramatic increases in the political representation of women. Rwanda, for example, jumped from 24th place in the “women in parliament” rankings to first place (49 percent) after the introduction of quotas in 1996. Similar changes have been seen in Argentina, Burundi, Costa Rica, Iraq, Mozambique, and South Africa. Indeed, as of 2005, 17 of the top 20 countries in the rankings have quotas.

Imagine that your group is the national parliament of a country deciding whether to adopt quotas for women in the national parliament. Randomly divide your group into two parties, one against and one for quotas.

What data to collect

First, you need to be very clear about the likely impact of the program. It is on those dimensions that you believe will be affected that you will try to collect data. What are the main areas in which the quota policy should be evaluated? In which areas do you expect to see a difference as a result of quotas?

What are all the possible effects of quotas?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2

Using a logical framework to delineate your intermediate and final outcomes of interest

1. Brainstorm the possible effects of quotas, both positive and negative.
2. What evidence would you collect to strengthen the case of those who are for or against quotas? For each potential effect on your list, list also the indicator(s) you would use for that effect. For example, if you say that quotas will affect political participation of women, the indicator could be “number of women attending the General Assembly.”

Multiple outcomes are difficult to interpret, so define a hypothesis

Quotas for women could produce a large number of outcomes in different directions. For example, it may improve the supply of drinking water and worsen the supply of irrigation. Without an *ex-ante* hypothesis on the direction in which these different variables should be affected by the quota policy, it will be very difficult to make sense of any result we find. Think of the following: if you take 500 villages and randomly

assign them in your computer to a “treatment” group and a “control” group, and then run regressions to see whether the villages look different along 100 outcomes, would you expect to see some differences among them? Would it make sense to rationalize those results *ex-post*?

7. Using the outcomes and conditions, draw a possible logical framework, linking the intervention and the final outcomes.

The same applies to this case: if you just present your report in front of the commission who mandated you to evaluate this policy, explaining that the quota for women changed some variables and did not change others, what are they supposed to make of it? How will they know that these differences are not due to pure chance rather than the policy? You need to present them with a clear hypothesis of how quotas are supposed to change policymaking, which will lead you to make predictions about which outcomes are affected.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2 CONTINUED...

3. What might be some examples of key hypotheses you would test? Pick one.
4. Which indicators or combinations of indicators would you use to test your key hypothesis?

Use a logical framework to delineate intermediate and final outcomes

A good way of figuring out the important outcomes is to lay out your theory of change; that is, to draw a logical framework linking the intervention, step by step, to the key final outcomes.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2 CONTINUED...

5. What are the steps or conditions that link quotas (the intervention) to the final outcomes?
6. Which indicators should you try to measure at each step in your logical framework?