

Competing Inequalities? On the Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity in Candidate Nominations in Indian Elections*

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Abstract

Quotas for women and ethnic minorities are implemented to increase the diversity in political institutions, but, as they target only one group at a time, they may end up increasing the inclusion of one under-represented group at the cost of another. Recent work has emphasized the institutional underpinnings of the variation in such outcomes. In this article I show how the intersectional effects of quotas may also vary within the same institutional context, as changes in the pressure to include excluded groups interact with the informal opportunity structures within political parties. Looking at the nomination of female candidates across India over time, I show that as the efforts to include more women in politics intensified, much of the increase in female candidates occurred in constituencies reserved for ethnic minorities. This pattern may in part be the result of parties resisting changes to existing power hierarchies by nominating women at the cost of the least powerful male politicians, but can also be seen as evidence that minority quotas have created a political space that is more accessible to women.

Keywords: Quotas, Representation, Intersectionality, South Asia, India

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A key insight from the literature on the intersectionality of gender, class, and ethnicity is that each marginalized group contains within it hierarchies and power struggles, and that different forms of discrimination interact with each other (see [Crenshaw, 1989](#); [Young, 1997](#); [McCall, 2005](#)). Quotas for women and ethnic minorities are implemented to increase the diversity in political institutions, but as they usually target only one group at a time they may end up reinforcing within-group inequalities by increasing the numerical presence of one under-represented group at the cost of another.

Work on quotas for both gender and minorities has found that sub-groups that face ‘double barriers’, such as minority-group women, in some cases fall between the cracks and fail to gain representation either as women or as minorities ([Darcy, Hadley and Kirksey, 1993](#); [Hancock, 2007](#); [Huang, 2012](#)). However, under other circumstances minority-group women have been found to be included in higher numbers than minority-group men, as parties can cash in the ‘complementarity bonus’ of being able to count someone as both a woman and a minority ([Celis et al., 2014](#)). Looking at different combinations of quotas, [Hughes \(2011\)](#) found that minority-group women tend to be disadvantaged by single-dimension quotas for women or minorities, but that they are over-represented compared to other women when there are ‘tandem’ quotas for both women and minorities at the national level.

In this article I build on these insights by showing how the intersectional effects of quotas may also vary within the same institutional context, as changes in the pressure to include excluded groups interact with the informal opportunity structures within political parties. I demonstrate this with data from India, by looking at how the minority quotas for Scheduled Castes (SCs, the former ‘untouchables’) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) have interacted with the efforts to bring more female candidates into the elections of India’s state assemblies and federal parliament. Using a complete dataset of the more than 450,000 candidates running in India’s state assembly elections and more than 77,000 candidates running for federal parliamentary elections during the period 1961–2015, I show that women were nominated at somewhat lower rates to seats reserved for SCs and STs than to other seats in the early 1960s, at similar rates in the 1970s and 1980s, and at considerably higher rates in the 1990s and 2000s. In fact, much of the increase in the nomination of female candidates in India in recent years has occurred in reserved constituencies.

These nomination patterns may in part be understood to be a result of parties resisting changes to existing power hierarchies: as the pressure on parties to nominate more women has intensified, they have (whether strategically or not) responded by nominating female candidates at the cost of their least powerful male politicians – SC and ST men. However,

as reserved constituencies tend to be less competitive and less dominated by 'money and muscle' politics, the increase in women in these constituencies can also be seen as evidence that quotas for ethnic minorities have created a political space that is more accessible to women. The findings in this article therefore point to important questions about how the informal practices within parties impede the political empowerment of both women and minority groups in India.

The political inclusion of women and ethnic minorities

Over the last few decades there has been a dramatic increase in the interest in the 'descriptive' representativeness of democratic institutions – the extent to which elected politicians reflect the demographic characteristics of the population electing them (Pitkin, 1972; Krook, 2006). Although the claims for representations by women and minority groups have clear similarities, they have often been discussed separately, both in academic circles and the policy world (Bird, 2014). The failure to coordinate these struggles for inclusion have meant that scholars and activists alike to a limited extent have focused on the intersectional consequences of the efforts to empower one group or another.

An important insight of the intersectional literature is that various dimensions of inequality may interact and reinforce each other (Crenshaw, 1989; Young, 1997; McCall, 2005; Hancock, 2007). 'Groups' such as women and minorities are never homogenous, but rather have several internal conflicts and within-group inequality. Policies meant to benefit a single group may therefore end up benefiting only the most powerful segment of the group. This has been observed across the world, for example, in the case of the US, where efforts to redistrict to improve the political presence of black politicians improved the election of black men more than black women (Darcy, Hadley and Kirksey, 1993). In work on Taiwan, Huang (2012) similarly found that indigenous women have fallen between the cracks of the separate quota systems for women and indigenous groups, as feminists have seen their representation as an indigenous issue and indigenous activists have seen it as a feminist issue.

But the predictions of differently designed quota systems are not so straight forward. Recent work on the effects of gender quotas on the inclusion of minority-group women has shown that under some circumstances they may end up being elected in higher numbers than minority-group men, because they can boost the diversity statistics of political parties by being counted both as women and minorities (Celis et al., 2014). Similarly, in this article I try to explain why minority-group women have been nominated in higher numbers than

majority-group women in India in recent years.

In a study of the political presence of women and minorities across 81 countries, [Hughes \(2011\)](#) was able to explain many of the seemingly contradictory findings from across the world by theorizing about how different combinations of quotas tend to have different intersectional effects. She found that as stand-alone policies, both gender quotas and minority quotas increase the presence of minority women, but to a lesser extent than for majority-group women and minority-group men. ‘Tandem quotas’ (national-level quotas for women and minorities), on the other hand, were found to benefit minority-group women the most, as these women could get to power at the cost of majority-group women or minority-group men, while unseating few majority-group men. The key mechanism in this story is how different institutional configurations of quotas create different incentives for parties in their candidate selection process.

In this article I build on Hughes’ insights about the intersectional effects of different institutional arrangements of quotas by demonstrating how such intersectional effects may take place without altering formal institutions, as changes in the political mobilization around a group identity interact with the existing opportunity structures within political parties.

In most countries, the party leadership plays a key role in selecting candidates ([Bille, 2001](#)), thereby acting as the main gatekeeper to elected office (see [Lovenduski and Norris, 1993](#)). Faced with mandatory electoral quotas, political parties have to field candidates with certain characteristics. In addition, however, parties are faced with a range of other expectations of who to field, and these decisions are the subject of constant scrutiny by party members, activists, media, and voters.

Worried about losing political support, parties will be sensitive to changes in the social expectations of who they should field as candidates. The responsiveness of political parties to such pressures is evident in the gradual introduction of voluntary party quotas in the northern European countries in the 1970s and 1980s ([Skjeie, 1991](#); [Lovenduski and Norris, 1993](#); [Bergqvist, 1999](#)). Facing additional pressures to include candidates with characteristics that mirror the population at large, parties now make efforts to present lists of candidates, and also cabinets, that include not only men and women, but also different age-categories, regions, and minority groups. Reporting from interviews with party officials in Belgium and the Netherlands, [Celis et al. \(2014\)](#) explained how young ethnic-minority women end up being recruited in higher numbers than ethnic-minority men exactly because parties are trying to solve this ‘intersectional puzzle’ of fielding candidates with ‘diverse’ characteristics.

What these findings show is that as the pressure on political parties to include candi-

dates with more ‘diverse’ characteristics increases, they are incentivized to field candidates with multiple such characteristics in order to be able to double-count them. In addition, however, the inclusion of one traditionally marginalized group is likely to affect the inclusion of other groups by altering the opportunity structures within parties. As suggested in the introduction to this special issue, neither formal institutions nor informal practices within parties are neutral, but rather reflect and reinforce power inequalities in society (Kenny and Verge 2016, in this issue). The dynamics surrounding the inclusion of one traditionally marginalized group in political parties will therefore inevitably affect the inclusion of other marginalized groups. In India, the country of focus in this article, I will suggest that we need to look both at the changing incentives for parties created by the mobilization of women, and at the political environment in areas reserved for minorities in order to understand the intersectional patterns of how women and minorities are nominated. Before elaborating further on these arguments, the next section will provide a brief history of the quota debate in India.

The quota debate in India

The low numbers of women in elected office has been a major topic of discussion in India during the last couple of decades. In 1993, a constitutional amendment was passed that reserved one-third of all elected positions in local-level politics for women, and in 1996 another bill was proposed to also reserve positions for women in India’s state assemblies and the federal parliament.¹ Many hoped this ‘Women’s Reservation Bill’ would pave the way for more women in Indian politics. But, although all the main political parties have proclaimed their support for the bill, various obstacles have prevented it from being passed in the lower house of parliament. According to Margaret Alva, a senior female politician in India’s erstwhile dominant party Indian National Congress (henceforth the Congress Party), this is simply a result of male MPs worrying about losing their positions: ‘The greatest fear amongst male MPs is that they will lose their seats. They keep saying, “Do you want to leave your seat? If you vote for this bill your seat will go”’ (quoted in [Nath, 1996](#), 9).

Electoral quotas have played an important role in the political history of India. The discussions about quotas go back to at least 1905, when the British Viceroy of India promised a delegation of Indian Muslims to safeguard their political rights through communal repre-

¹India has five levels of elected government: parliament, state assemblies, and three levels of local government (district, block, and village).

sentation (Minto, 1934, p. 47). Since then, a debate has raged about which groups should be entitled to quotas, how many seats can reasonably be parceled out to quotas, and for how long such policies should be kept in place (Galanter, 1984).

The first official demands for the inclusion of women in Indian politics were made by women's groups in 1917 (Guha, 1974, p. 284). This was in reaction to the ongoing reforms to gradually develop self-governing institutions in India. The first round of reforms in 1909 had made it possible for Indians to be elected to various legislative councils in British India, and discussions were ongoing about who should represent whom and how they were to be elected. Not only Muslims, but also other religious groups, the 'depressed classes' (the SCs), and several economic interest groups (such as merchants) were demanding the right to elect group-wise representatives (Jensenius, 2015b). The women's groups did not demand quotas at that point, but demanded that women should be granted the same political rights as men.

The claim for equal political rights for women found support in the Indian political elite, and already in 1918 the Congress party, the India Home Rule League and the Muslim League approved resolutions supporting women's franchise (Roy, 2005, chapter 4). However, the British rejected the demands on the grounds that the social conditions in India made it 'premature' to give the vote to women (Simon, 1930, p. 29). In the end, the Government of India Act of 1919 made the vote for women a 'domestic' matter, thereby leaving the choice of the female vote to the new elected assemblies (Simon, 1930, p. 29). During the 1920s, a small group of women were subsequently given the right to vote, and also to be nominated for political office, across much of India, based on criteria of education and property ownership.

The discussions about how to ensure the inclusion of various groups in the elected assemblies ran for. The Congress Party and Gandhi were strongly opposed to quotas of any kind, particularly for the SCs, while the British tried to accommodate various demands in order to maintain the control of their increasingly rebellious colony. In the Government of India Act of 1935, the first 'draft constitution' of India, reserved seats were granted to SCs, various other minority groups, and also to women, in both the upper and lower house of the Federal Legislature of British India (GOI, 1942, pp. 190-193). Seats were also reserved for women in the Provincial Legislative Assemblies, with sub-quotas for Sikhs, Muslims, Anglo-Indians and Christians (GOI, 1942, p. 214).

These provisions were supported by British feminists like Eleanor Rathbone, but were opposed by the main Indian women's associations and by the Congress Party on the grounds that women should be able to be elected on an equal footing as men (Htun, 2004, 447). After many rounds of discussions of quotas for minorities, religious groups, and women, the Indian

Constituent Assembly ended up granting electoral quotas only to the former untouchables (SCs) and tribal groups (Scheduled Tribes or STs). These two groups were granted reserved seats in India's parliament and state assemblies in proportion to their share of the population in each state (approximately 16% and 7% on average, respectively).

The quotas for SCs and STs were designed as reserved seats that were to be rotated. India has single-member electoral constituencies, and only people who can document that they are SC or ST can run for election in SC-reserved and ST-reserved constituencies, respectively, while people from all groups can vote. This design of the quota system has meant that SC and ST politicians for the most part have become integrated into mainstream political parties and tend to follow the party-line rather than work for group-specific interests (Jensenius, 2015a). But there are also some differences between reserved areas and others areas: SC and ST constituencies are less competitive than other constituencies, SC and ST politicians are often talked of as 'weaker' than other politicians, and despite holding important positions of power they continue to face subtle form of discrimination (Jensenius, 2013).

Whereas SCs and STs were granted quotas in the Indian Constitution, women were not given any institutional safe-guard to guarantee their political presence. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Congress Party – which was the dominant party during those years – operated with an informal 15 per cent party quota for nominating women candidates in elections (Katzenstein, 1978). Studying the nomination process of Congress in the national election of 1966, Kochanek (1967, p. 293) reported that the Central Election Committee “urged the provincial election committees” to ensure “adequate representation” of women and minorities. Nevertheless, as the data later in this paper will show, this quota was never taken particularly seriously, nor ever achieved.

Other political parties nominated very few female candidates at the time. The few female politicians that were nominated were typically wives, widows, daughters, or protégés of powerful male politicians (Stern, 2003). This dynastic trend may not be *as* strong as before, but it is still prevalent: between 2004 and 2014 two-thirds of all the female MPs had family members who preceded them in politics (in comparison to 25 per cent of the male politicians) (Basu, 2016).

Until the 1970s, the main women's organizations in India remained opposed to the idea of reserved seats for women (John, 2000, p. 3822). However, the discussion about quotas for women re-emerged in 1974, when the government of India formed the Committee on the Status of Women, with the mandate of proposing recommendations for improving the rights and opportunities of women in India (Htun, 2004, 447). The report was meant to be

launched for the International Women's Decade 1974–1985 proclaimed by the UN. Among other topics, the Committee considered the issue of quotas for women in India's legislative assemblies, but rejected the idea on the basis that women are a category, not a community. The Committee did, however, propose to establish all-women elected councils at the village level, that would manage and administer welfare and development programs for women and children. They also recommended that all political parties should adopt internal party quotas for elections to the state assemblies and federal parliament [Guha \(1974, p. 305\)](#).

The party quotas never saw the light of day, but several states initiated reforms that included reserving positions for women in local-level politics. Ramakrishna Hegde's government in the southern state of Karnataka starting drafting a reform bill with 25 per cent of the elected positions reserved for women already in 1983. A similar provision was recommended for the whole country in the National Perspective Plan 1988–2000, and was followed up in 1993, with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments providing for one-third reserved seats for women in all local-level elected bodies. The policy was hardly discussed in Parliament before it was passed ([Lama-Rewal, 2005, p. 192](#)) and met with almost no political opposition ([Kishwar, 1997, 9](#)). This is typically explained by the fact that local-level quotas would not affect the power of national-level politicians. During the 1990s, local-level quotas were gradually implemented across Indian states and have brought hundreds of thousands of women to power in their villages, blocks and districts. In national and state-level politics, women remained under-represented.

The relatively easy passage of the quotas for women at the local level inspired women's groups to press for reservations for women to India's state assemblies and federal parliament ([Krook, 2009, p. 91](#)). In response, all the major political parties made statements supporting reservations for women in their electoral manifestos and it was included in the Common Minimum Programme of the Congress-led government coalition United Front which came to power in 1996.

The Women's Reservation Bill was introduced as the 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill in 1996. Despite wide-spread public support for it, the parliamentary debates over it were ferocious, with 'some MPs almost coming to blows and others rushing to the podium to tear up copies of the text' ([Htun, 2004, 448](#)).

One of the main arguments against the bill was that it would mainly result in the election of women from the most privileged strata of society and that it needed to be changed to include sub-quotas for non-elite groups – the so-called 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs) – an argument about intersectionality. The bill has also been criticized for suggesting a

rotation of reserved seats, as this would undermine the ability of women to build a strong support base (Menon, 2000). However, many have interpreted the on-going discussions as an attempt by male politicians to stop the bill from being passed (Samujh, 2005, p. 265).

The nomination of women in India

Indian politics is both a male-dominated and competitive environment. At the time of every election a large number of candidates try to gain 'a ticket' from the main political parties, and there are intra-party struggles about which factions are given which seats. The fight for tickets are often related to 'money and muscle' (Vaishnav, 2012) and candidates being able to show a strong political following.

In recent years, parties have faced increasing pressure to field more female candidates. Around the time of any election there is a slew of news articles pointing out the low percentages of women being nominated for election. For example, in a Times of India article called 'What empowerment?', examples were given of female politicians who have worked hard but still been denied the right to run for election for their party (Mathur, 2014). Similarly, in the article 'Women get a raw deal from parties in ticket distribution', published shortly before the 2014 parliamentary elections in India, the newspaper Mint listed and discussed the percentage of female candidates fielded by the all main parties fighting the election (Bhandare and Katarki, 2014).

India has a fairly centralized form of candidate nominations, with the party leaderships playing an important role in the selection of candidates (Farooqui and Sridharan, 2014) and there seem to be systematic differences in how male and female potential candidates are treated. In an interview, the female Congress politician Margaret Alva lamented that that the party leadership always ask about the 'winnability' when a woman is suggested as a candidate while they do not ask the same questions of potential male candidates (cited in Nath, 1996, 8). A study of the nomination patterns in the 2009 parliamentary election in India, concluded that parties are risk averse when they field women and that they tend to field mainly experienced female politicians and preferably in party strongholds (Spary, 2014). These findings align well with qualitative accounts of how women tend to be nominated in constituencies that are deemed 'suitable for ladies' (Singer, 2007).

To look more systematically at the nominations patterns for female candidates in India, I leverage a new dataset that covers all of the candidates running in 303 state assembly elections held between 1961 and spring 2015, as well as 13 federal parliamentary elections held

between 1962 and 2014.² The state assembly level dataset includes information about the approximately 450,000 candidates running for election in the more than 4,300 state assembly constituencies (electoral districts) across the country during this period, which includes 21,207 (or about 4.7 per cent) female candidates. The parliamentary election data includes information about the approximately 77,450 candidates running for election in India's 543 parliamentary constituencies between 1962 and 2014, including 3,592 (or 4.6 per cent) female candidates. Both datasets include election data for all of India's 28 states and 2 union territories.³

For each constituency, the data include information about the number of electors, the number of candidates running for election and the vote share of each of those candidates. The data also include information about the name and sex of the candidate, as well as the party the candidate ran for in that election.

Looking at these election data from 1961 to 2015, we can see that there has been a very gradual increase in the percentage of both female candidates and female winners in Indian elections over time. Figure 1 shows the percentage of female Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) and female candidates in India's state assembly elections. Here the data is divided into groups of years: Indian states hold elections approximately every five years, and since 1971 these elections have been stacked so that different states hold elections at different times.⁴ Plotting the data by year would pick up differences in states rather than a time trend, the data have therefore been divided into groups of years that roughly correspond

²These are almost all the state and national level elections that were held in India during this period. I exclude the data for the elections held in Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Orissa in 1970 and 1971, elections held in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam in 1972, as well as the national election in 1971, because the Election Commission of India reports from these years incorrectly report all the candidates as male, although the summary statistics indicate that there were a few female candidates in these elections too. All of the election data from before 2005 is available in PDF format at www.eci.gov.in, but were downloaded from the website, converted to html, scraped of their contents, and finally manually corrected with the help of several research assistants. This is described in more details in ?, and the full dataset will soon be available at www.francesca.no. The reports include elections from before 1961 too, but these reports have the problem that election data from two-member constituencies are reported in the same way as data from single-member constituencies. To avoid confusions arising from this issue, I start the dataset from 1961, when all constituencies were made single-member constituencies. The election data from after 2007 were downloaded in Excel format from www.eci.gov.in and corrected for inconsistencies.

³Three new states (Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand) were created in 2000. The data therefore include 25 states and 2 union territories for the years before 2001.

⁴Elections to both the parliament and the state assemblies were held at the same time between 1950 and 1967, but in 1971 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi delinked the elections by calling for early national elections. During the entire period, states on average held 10 elections, with the new state Uttaranchal only having held 3 elections between 2000 and 2013 and Bihar, UP and West Bengal holding as many as 14 elections between 1961 and 2013.

Figure 1: Percentage of female Members of Legislative Assemblies and female candidates in India's state assembly elections 1961–2015

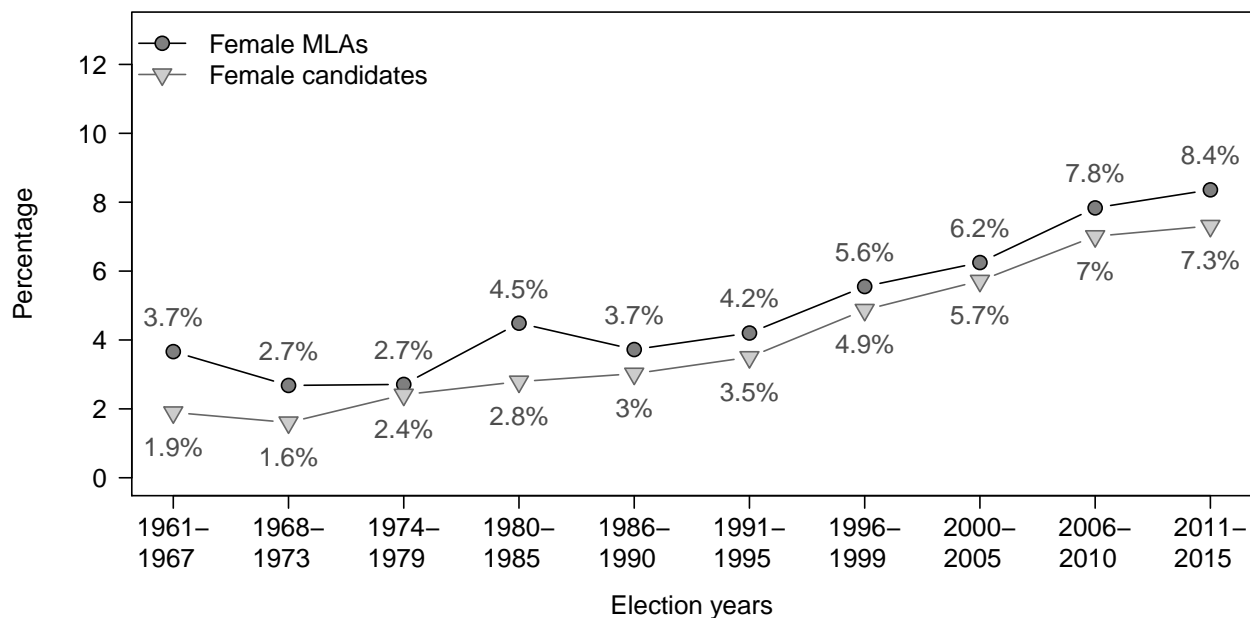
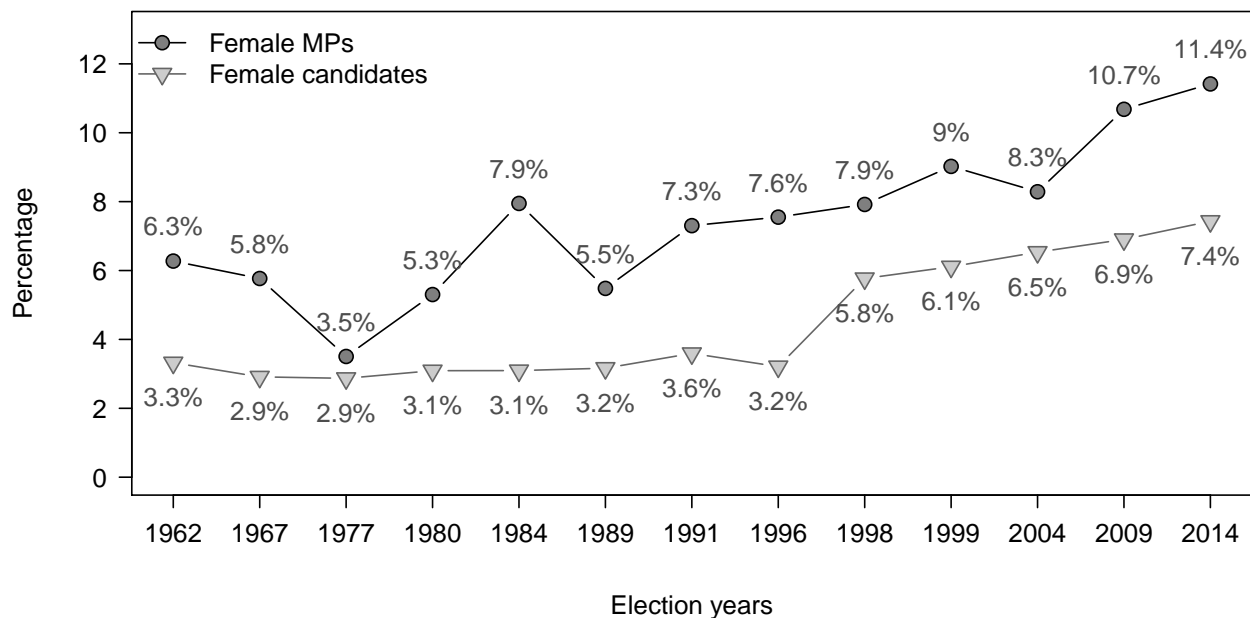


Figure 2: Percentage of female Members of Parliament and female candidates in India's federal parliamentary elections 1962–2014



to when states held elections.

As we can see in Figure 1, less than 2 per cent of the candidates in Indian state assembly elections in the 1960s were women. Those women who ran for election were, however, more successful than male candidates; in the elections held between 1961 and 1967 women constituted 3.7 per cent of the MLAs. This figure fell to an all-time low of 1.6 per cent women among the candidates and 2.7 per cent women among the MLAs between 1968 and 1973, and since then the numbers have been increasing at a low rate. We see a boost in the percentage of elected women in the 1980–1985 period, mostly due to the sympathy wave of voting following the assassination of the female prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. The main increase in the percentage of female candidates, however, occurred from the mid-1990s, when the discussion about including more women in politics intensified. Still, the percentage of female candidates has never been particularly high and even in the last reported period (2011–2015), women constituted only 7.3 per cent of the candidates and 8.4 per cent of elected MLAs. It should be noted, however, that the absolute numbers of both male and female candidates has increased considerably over this period.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of female MPs and female candidates in India’s parliamentary elections over time. Whereas the percentage of elected female MPs in India’s first parliaments in the 1950s was about 4.5 per cent (not included in Figure 2) and then increased to 6.3 per cent in the 1962 elections, the numbers then dropped to 5.8 per cent in 1967 and to 3.5 per cent in 1977 (data on the 1971 election could not be included, see endnote 2). Subsequently, there has been a very gradual increase in the proportion of female MPs. An exception to the overall trend was again the 1984 election, when an unprecedented number of female candidates from the Congress Party were elected (38 out of their 42 female candidates) following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. In the 2009 election the percentage of women in India’s parliament crossed the 10 per cent mark for the first time, and in the 2014 elections 11.4 per cent of the elected representatives were women.

Looking at the female candidates, however, we see a complete stagnation in the nomination of female candidates at right above 3 per cent from 1962 all the way until the 1998 election. It was soon after the 1996 election that the Women’s Reservation Bill was proposed in parliament, and it was in the 1990s that all the major parties publicly committed to increasing the percentage of elected women in politics. The increase in female candidates in the 1998 elections is therefore likely a result of these discussions. Since the focus of this article is on where and when parties have chosen to field women, I will focus on candidate nominations patterns (not whether or not the candidates won the election) in the rest of the

article.

Minority quotas and women

So are there differences in the nomination patterns for women in non-reserved seats and seats reserved for the minority-groups SC and ST? For each round of elections included in the dataset, the more than 4,300 state assembly constituencies include about 650 SC-reserved constituencies and about 300 ST-reserved constituencies. The 543 parliamentary constituencies include 84 SC-reserved constituencies and 47 ST-reserved constituencies.

Figures 3 and 4 show the percentages of female candidates in India's non-reserved, SC-reserved, and ST-reserved constituencies between 1961 and 2015. The two vertical lines in the Figures marks the time of the formation of the Committee on the Status of Women in the 1970s and the introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill in the 1990s calling for reserved seats for women in the state assemblies and in parliament.

What the Figures show is that the percentage of nominated women was slightly lower in reserved constituencies than in non-reserved ones in the early 1960s, about the same in the 1970s and 1980s, but that more women have been nominated in reserved constituencies than in non-reserved ones in the 1990s and 2000s. By the last round of elections reported in this sample, the percentage of female candidates was 6.6 in non-reserved state assembly constituencies, 10.3 in SC-reserved constituencies and 9.1 in ST-reserved constituencies. In the last parliamentary election, in 2014, the percentages of female candidates were 7.0, 8.7, and 10.4 in non-reserved, SC-reserved, and ST-reserved parliamentary constituencies, respectively.

The Figures reveal that minority-group women have not be disadvantaged compared to other women when it comes to being nominated for office. Rather the opposite: in recent years much of the increase in the nomination of women has occurred in electoral districts reserved for minority-groups.

Are these patterns driven by changes in any particular party? Tables 1 and 2 show the average percentages of female candidates fielded by the Congress Party, India's dominant right-wing party BJP, and other political parties before and after 1996, the year the Women's Reservation Bill became a key part of the political debate.

A first important pattern to note in Tables 1 and 2 is that in both the state assembly and parliamentary elections, the Congress Party had a higher share of female candidates than other parties before 1996. In non-reserved constituencies, the percentage of women fielded by Congress did not increase much over time. Rather, Congress started fielding more women

Figure 3: Percentage of female candidates in non-reserved, SC-reserved, and ST-reserved state assembly constituencies 1961–2015

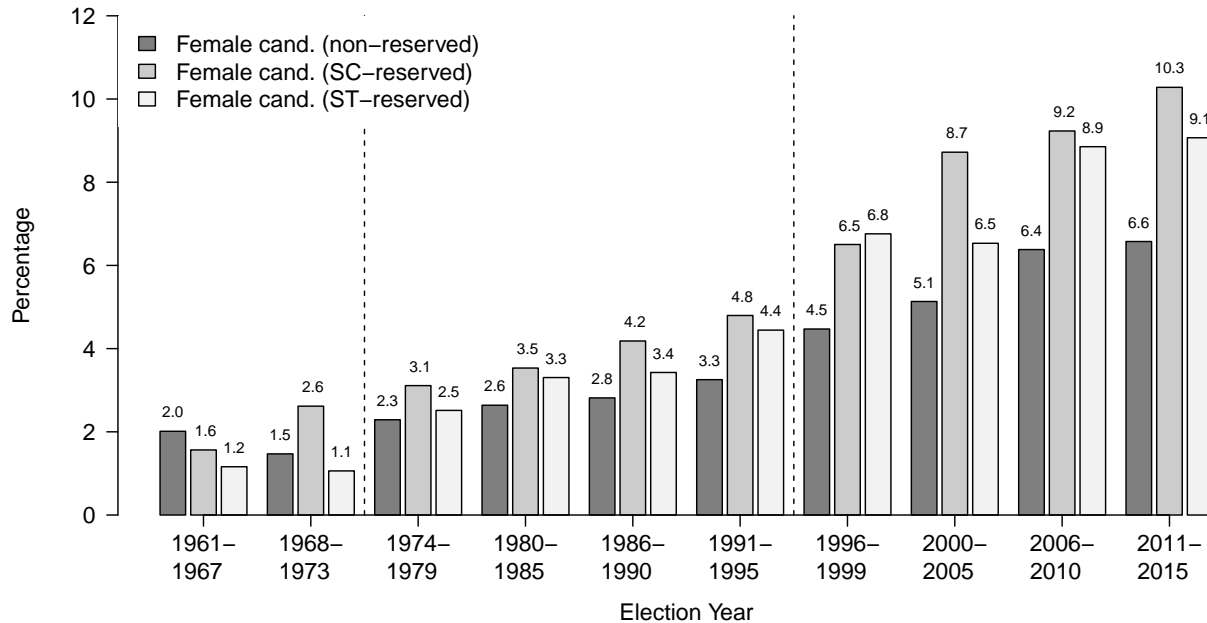
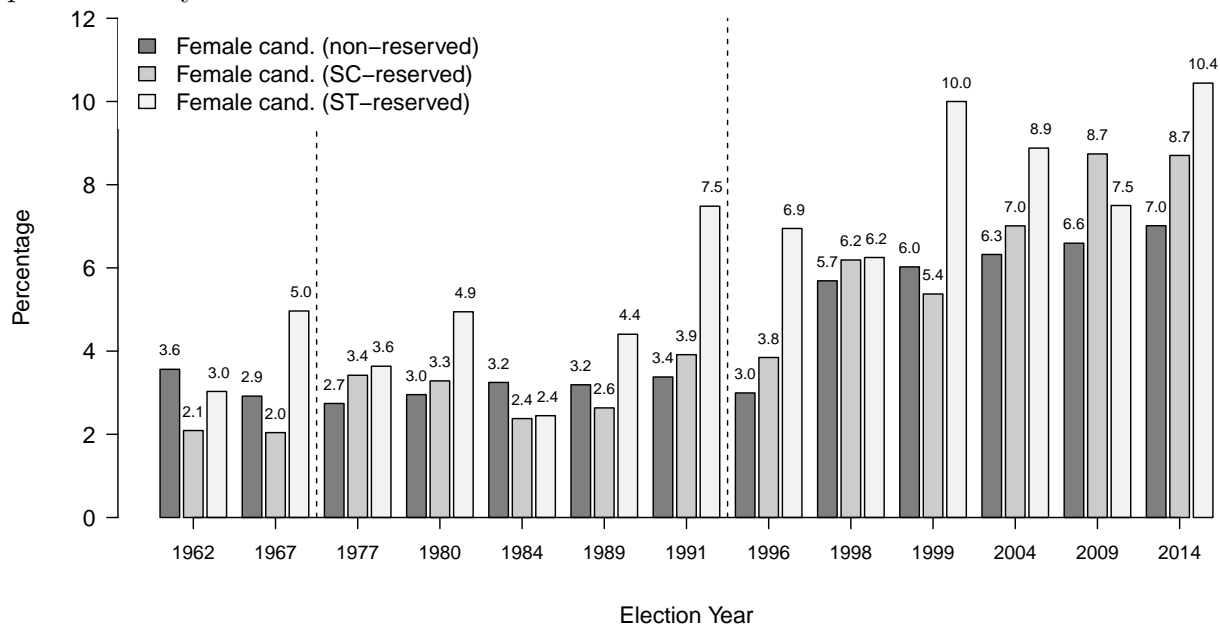


Figure 4: Percentage of female candidates in non-reserved, SC-reserved, and ST-reserved parliamentary constituencies 1962–2014



in both SC- and ST-reserved constituencies in the mid 1980s. Given that the initiatives to increase the representation of women to a large extent have come from the Congress Party, and it was the Congress Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who included the recommendation for local-level quotas for women in the National Perspective Plan in the 1980s, this pattern is consistent with the argument that increased awareness about, and pressure for, women’s political inclusion incentivizes parties to field women in reserved constituencies.

The values for BJP look very different. BJP (founded in 1980) started out fielding very few women, but has gradually caught up with the Congress Party. The clear change in the case of BJP came in the late 1990s, when the party started fielding more women in reserved constituencies than in non-reserved ones. Much of the aggregate change in the percentage of women fielded in India in recent years is actually the result of BJP going from fielding very few women to somewhat more women, and particularly increasing their numbers of women fielded in reserved constituencies. A similar pattern is visible for the rest of the parties, including the ethnic party Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which runs on an SC platform. Here too, few women were fielded before the mid 1990s, and the increase over time in nominations in reserved constituencies was greater than the increase in non-reserved constituencies.

The result of these changes in the fielding practices of the political parties is that the percentages of female candidates and elected female politicians have been considerably higher in reserved constituencies than in the rest of the country in recent years. Because of the quotas, SCs and STs are guaranteed a proportional presence in politics. In addition, SCs and STs are entitled to run for election in non-reserved constituencies. Although not common, some SC and ST candidates have run for election in non-reserved constituencies, particularly after the location of reserved seats were moved in 2008 [Jensenius \(forthcoming\)](#).

Table 1: Percentage of female candidates in non-reserved, SC-reserved, and ST-reserved state assembly constituencies before and after 1996

	Before 1996	After 1996	Change
Congress Party, non-reserved	5.0	7.5	2.6
Congress Party, SC-reserved	6.2	11.2	5.0
Congress Party, ST-reserved	3.6	9.1	5.5
BJP, non-reserved	3.0	6.9	3.9
BJP, SC-reserved	1.5	9.2	7.7
BJP, ST-reserved	3.1	9.3	6.2
Other parties, non-reserved	2.0	5.4	3.4
Other parties, SC-reserved	2.9	8.4	5.5
Other parties, ST-reserved	2.4	7.3	4.9

Table 2: Percentage of female candidates in non-reserved, SC-reserved, and ST-reserved parliamentary constituencies before and after 1996

	Before 1996	After 1996	Change
Congress Party, non-reserved	7.7	9.5	1.8
Congress Party, SC-reserved	7.2	12.5	5.3
Congress Party, ST-reserved	9.5	14.8	5.3
BJP, non-reserved	4.8	8.6	3.8
BJP, SC-reserved	0.0	5.9	5.9
BJP, ST-reserved	4.2	6.7	2.6
Other, non-reserved	2.5	5.6	3.1
Other, SC-reserved	2.4	6.4	4.0
Other, ST-reserved	2.9	7.9	5.1

For most election years, we do not have information about the caste identity of the politicians who run for election in non-reserved constituencies. However, starting in 2004, the Election Commission of India started reporting whether candidates were SC, ST, or general category. For the three parliamentary elections and 95 state assembly elections held between 2004 and spring 2015 we can therefore observe how many SC and ST women have run for election in non-reserved constituencies.

Table 3: The percentage of candidates in Indian elections who were from SC, ST or general category 2004–2015

	General cat.		SC		ST	
Female candidates (state elections)	59.8%	(N=7079)	26.3%	(N=3109)	13.9%	(N=1650)
Male candidates (state elections)	67.9%	(N=104734)	21.7%	(N=33513)	10.4%	(N=16043)
Female candidates (parliamentary elections)	66.6%	(N=1039)	24.4%	(N=380)	9%	(N=140)
Male candidates (parliamentary elections)	68.3%	(N=13722)	24.7%	(N=4968)	7%	(N=1409)

Table 3 shows the percentages of general category, SC and ST women and men among all the candidates in the elections held in India between 2004 and 2014 (including both reserved and non-reserved constituencies). Bearing in mind that SCs are about 16 per cent of the population in India and STs about 7 per cent of the population, we can see that these groups have been over-represented among the candidates. However, it is also clear that minority-group women have done better than other women. In the state assembly elections held between 2004 and 2014, SC men constituted 21.7 per cent of all male candidates while SC women constituted 26.3 per cent of all female candidates. This was also reflected in the winning rates, as 23.7 per cent of all elected female MLAs were SCs. Similarly, 10.4 of the male and 13.9 per cent of the female candidates were STs. In the parliamentary elections, SC women made up 24.4 per cent of all female candidates, while ST women constituted 9

per cent of the female candidates.

The most under-represented group was therefore majority-group (general category) women. Although they form 77 per cent of the female population, they were only 59.8 per cent and 66.6 per cent of the female candidates in state assembly and parliamentary elections, respectively. And given that there were few female candidates overall, only 7,079 out 166,128 candidates (4.3 per cent) in the state assembly elections held between 2004 and 2015 and 1,039 of the 22,206 candidates (4.7 per cent) in the parliamentary elections held 2004-2014 were majority-group women. This means that the nomination of general-category women in India has hardly increased over time at all.

1 The political opportunity structure for women in reserved constituencies

In the previous section I showed that over time there has been an increase in the nomination of female candidates in reserved constituencies in India over time. It may be tempting to jump to the conclusion that the observed pattern has been the result of an intentional strategy by the political parties trying to solve their women ‘problem’ by nominating female candidates in reserved constituencies, allowing them to retain as many majority-group men in power as possible. This may have happened and I believe it to be part of the story. However, the patterns may also be an *unintentional* result of the informal practices surrounding the struggle for party nominations within parties, where candidates displaying stereotypically masculine and majority-group traits – such as wealth, confidence, a large network, or a show of force – tend to do well. The fact that both minority-group men and women are less likely to have these characteristics means that reserved seats have a political environment that is more accessible to female candidates than other seats.

Getting nominated by a political party in India is a struggle, and male SC and ST politicians are often talked of as having a weaker position within parties than other male politicians ([Jensenius, 2013](#)) or. Facing pressures to replace some male politicians with female candidates, male SC and ST politicians may therefore have been less able to defend for their positions than their majority-group counterparts. This weakness is partly about political influence. Politicians in reserved constituencies are, for example, less likely to hold cabinet portfolios ([Jensenius, 2013](#)) or important positions in the party leadership ([Shrinivasan, 2015](#)). Facing the pressure of denying some male incumbent politician the chance to run for re-election to make space for female candidates, it may therefore seem easier to the party

leadership to replace the male politicians in reserved constituencies.

Personal wealth may also play a role in explaining these patterns, as it can be costly to run for election in India.

First, getting nominated by a political party in India is a struggle. [Farooqui and Sridharan \(2014\)](#) describe how parties consult with local-level party workers, but that the final decisions about candidates are taken by the party leadership at the state or national level. While loyalty to the party is important in that decision, money may also play an important role. This is partly because of campaigning costs, but also about being nominated by a party at all: according to politicians interviewed in India's largest state Uttar Pradesh in 2010 the cost of a party nomination in that election had been Rs. 2-3 million (\$30,000-45,000).⁵ However, this cost was allegedly lower in reserved constituencies, because those constituencies are less competitive ([Jensenius, 2013](#)) and because the potential candidates are poorer ([Vaishnav, 2012](#)). If male candidates in reserved constituencies are known to pay less to the party for their candidate nomination, it may seem easier to replace such candidates with new female candidates. Conversely, as women are less likely to be independently wealthy than men, it may be easier for them to run as candidates where the cost of running for election is lower.

Criminality also plays an important role in the political opportunity structure in India, and many politicians are tied to criminal networks and rule their areas through intimidation and violence. Such criminal networks tend to be male-dominated and based on homosocial capital (Michelutti 2010, see Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016, in this issue; Johnson 2016, in this issue). [Vaishnav \(2012\)](#) reported that although many politicians in India face criminal charges, this is much less common in reserved constituencies. Politicians in these areas are therefore less associated with the kind of 'money and muscle' power than other politicians. In areas where violence plays an important part in politics there may also be direct threats to people who stand as candidates against the incumbent politician. The hostility of the political environment is often mentioned as a deterrent keeping women from wanting to run for office ([Nath, 1996](#)). If criminality is less important in reserved constituencies than in non-reserved ones it may therefore seem more attractive to women to run for election there.

Seen together, this suggests that reserved constituencies may have male incumbents who are less able to defend their claims for re-nomination by parties than other politicians and also more attractive for women to run for election. Interestingly this means that the same

⁵n some cases, candidate selection in Indian elections has been referred to as financial auctions. Prior to the 2002 state elections in UP, the SC party BSP changed its candidates in some constituencies half a dozen times; party insiders said that these were cases of someone else upping the bid of the existing candidate.

characteristics that make male SC politicians seem 'weak' within the masculine and upper-caste dominated environment of Indian politics may have created a political space that is easier for women to enter into.

Conclusions

This article has looked at the nomination patterns of women, and particularly minority-group women, in India between 1961 and 2015. Using candidate data from India's federal parliamentary elections and state assembly elections over time, I show that as the efforts to include women in positions of power has grown stronger, there has been a gradual overall increase in the nomination of women. And, importantly, there seems to have been an interaction between these efforts and the existing quota system, to the benefit of minority-group women. The result in India is that minority-group women have been nominated at a considerably higher rate than other women in recent years. This increase in nomination of minority-group women means that there has actually been little increase in the nomination of majority-group women, and that the inclusion of more women has mainly happened at the cost of minority-group men, not majority-group men.

Indian politics is without doubt a male-dominated environment, with power inequalities based on both gender and caste shaping most political interactions. It is therefore not hard to imagine that political parties in some instances have actively resisted the inclusion of women in politics by fielding them in areas they perceive as less important. However, it is also important to consider how the entrenched practices within political parties themselves – such as a tendency to field candidates displaying excessive wealth and muscle power – create strong informal barriers for women and minorities vying for political power. The findings in this article point to the need for further study of how the internal workings of political parties re-enforce existing power hierarchies in politics.

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