# Political Selection, Representation, Voice & Inclusion

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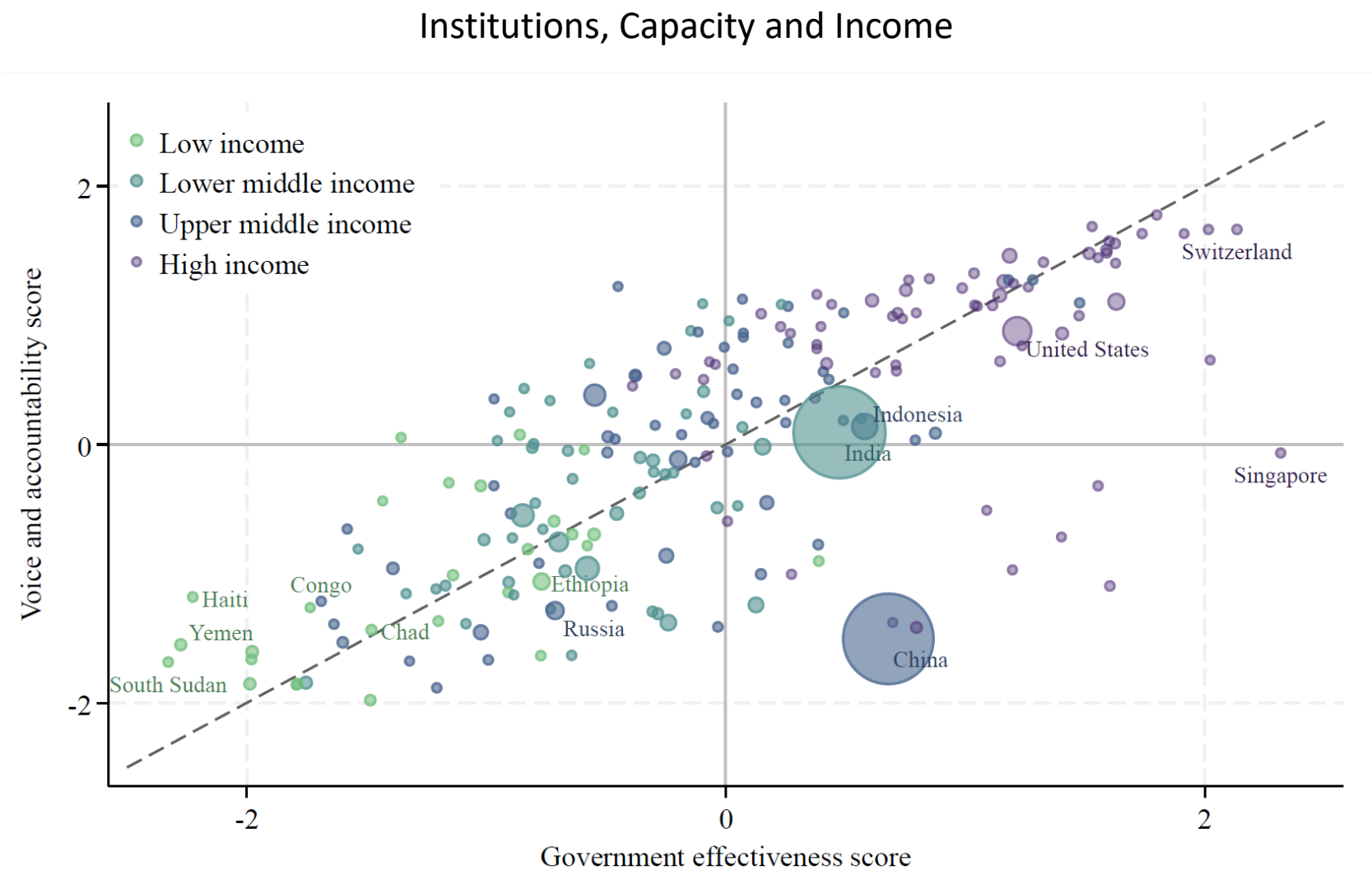
Lecture 7, BREAD-IGC Political Economy Course

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# Motivation

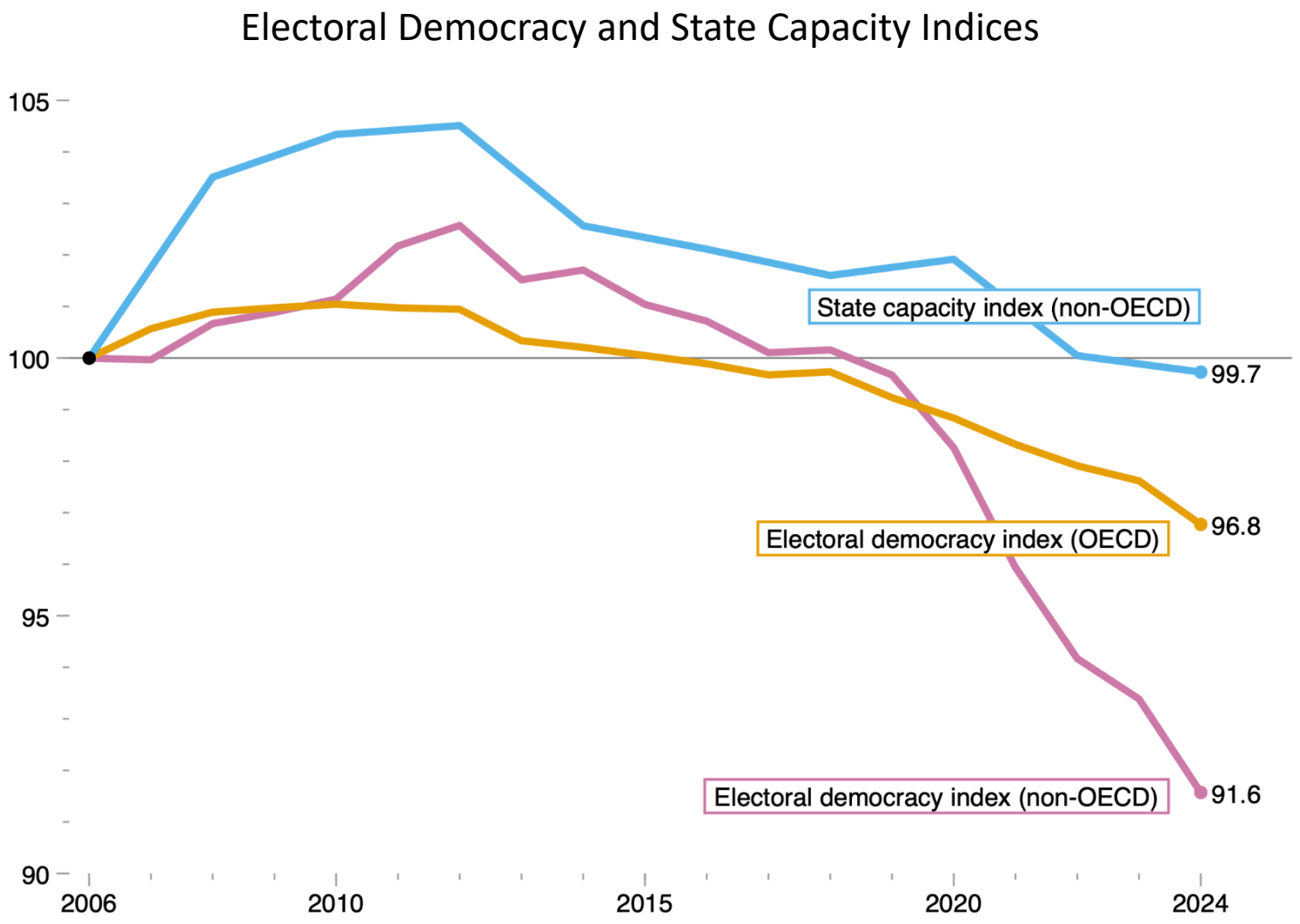
- Political selection is not a new idea: Madison (1788) argued the primary objective of any political constitution ought to be leadership selection, to yield rulers with the wisdom and virtue to best pursue the common good
- And yet, until recently, the modern political economy literature "has not only neglected the problem of political selection, it has been positively hostile to the topic" (Besley, 2005, p. 44)
- Last twenty years of research has made progress correcting that neglect
- Political selection matters for economic development because governments deliver critical functions that undergird market activity and their ability to do so well depends in part on who is in leadership

# Politics and Capacity Matter for Growth




Source: Casey, 2026

# What's the Problem? Democratic Backsliding




Source: Dupas, Goldberg & Pande, 2026

# Widespread Public Dissatisfaction

- In the U.S.: only 16% trust the federal government and a third identify politicians as the "biggest problem with the political system" (Pew, 2023)
- Across Europe: those who lack trust in government outnumber those who have trust by 44 to 39 percent (OECD, 2024)
- Across 30 African countries: 75% believe elections are the best way to choose leaders, but only 37% are satisfied with how democracy is working (Afrobarometer, 2024)
- Challenge: how can we get better people into government?
- Improving political selection involves three stages: who enters politics, who gets picked up by parties, and who wins; which makes potential candidates, gatekeepers and voters important in finding solutions

# Theoretical Context

- Classic models show how elections can serve as both accountability and selection devices (e.g., Fearon, 1999; Banks & Sundaram, 1993)
- Accountability is an agency relationship where the principal (the public) "is empowered by some formal institutional or perhaps informal rules to sanction or reward" the agent (its leader), who is obliged to take actions on the public's behalf (Fearon, 1999, p. 55)
- Selection is about choosing "the type of leader who will act competently and faithfully in the public interest" (p. 60). This matters if different types of skills and characteristics are useful in doing the work of public office
- Citizen candidate models show how the identity of office holders affects policy (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996; Besley & Coate, 1997). This matters if policy preferences vary across groups and/or leaders are more responsive to their own group. Tees up importance of representation and inclusion

# Identifying Selection on Valence, Identity or Both

- Voters appear to have preferences over valence and identity, and both dimensions contribute to policy choices and performance
- In a world with bias, causal inference about selection along these margins is difficult: e.g., voters may have beliefs about how valence varies by group, or barriers to entry or gatekeeping may disadvantage some groups
- In the US: women hold a minority of seats; conditional on running, women win as frequently as men; and once in office, women perform better
  - Bias is a thing of the past!
  - Or, given voter (and party) bias, only the best women can win, thus only the best women will run, and winning women are on average better (Anzia & Berry, 2011)
  - We want to know unconditional probabilities along the whole chain from entry, through gatekeeping, to election
- Parsing accountability from selection also presents challenges

# Leaders Matter for Economic Performance

- Inclusive political and economic institutions matter for long run growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Part of this equation may reflect the contributions of individual leaders alongside slower moving determinants
- Empirical studies show that individual leaders and their characteristics impact aggregate economic measures at the national level
- Cross-country study of national leader deaths from 1945 to 2000 shows that a one sdu change in leader quality leads to a change in GDP growth of 1.5 ppt per year, concentrated in autocracies (Jones & Olken, 2005)
- An expanded dataset shows that one characteristic—education—matters, as the drop in GDP growth post exit is larger for highly educated leaders (0.70 vs 0.05 ppts per year in Besley et al., 2011)

# Competence Matters for Public Sector Performance

- In Indonesia, school expansion increased the education levels of village heads who provided more public goods (Martínez-Bravo, 2017)
- In India, better educated individuals are more likely to be local politicians and are less opportunistic in targeting poverty cards (Besley et al., 2005)
- How to attract better people? If higher skill individuals have higher opportunity costs to public service, them improving politician's compensation might enhance selection
- Leveraging a population discontinuity in mayoral wages in Italy, higher compensation attracts more-educated candidates who improve government budget efficiency (Gagliarducci & Nannicini, 2013)
- A similar approach in Brazil finds higher pay attracts more candidates, better educated ones, and increases legislative productivity (Ferraz & Finan, 2011)

# Is there a quality vs public service motivation tradeoff?

- If performance in government depends on both skills and social preferences, then there could be a tradeoff in attracting competent at the expense of pro-social people

- What does the data say?
  - Not for community workers in Mexico, where higher wages attract higher ability applicants, with no impact on PSM (Dal Bó et al., 2013)
  - Not really for community health in Zambia, where advertising career track hires lower PSM people but their higher competence improves performance (Ashraf et al., 2020)
  - Perhaps for community health in Uganda, where higher expected pay discourages higher PSM applicants and yields lower effort (Deserranno, 2019)
  - In Pakistan, advertising social returns to local government increases entry, election and those elected allocate budgets more in line with local preferences (Gulzar & Khan, 2025)

# Parties Gatekeep for Better and Worse

- Are parties good or bad for selection on quality?
- Party gatekeeping has been shown to limit entry for women and minorities, independent of their qualifications (Cheng & Tavits, 2011; Fujiwara et al., 2025; Karpowitz et al., 2017)
- Two papers on the role of parties in Sweden reach opposing conclusions
  - Dal Bó et al. (2017) point to party leaders' use of merit-based promotions in helping make Sweden an "inclusive meritocracy"
  - Besley et al. (2017) argue that their incentives to do so are tempered by a desire to avoid internal leadership threats
- Aligned with the latter, Mattozzi & Merlo (2007) model party recruitment of candidates as a rent maximization opportunity that leads to "mediocracy"

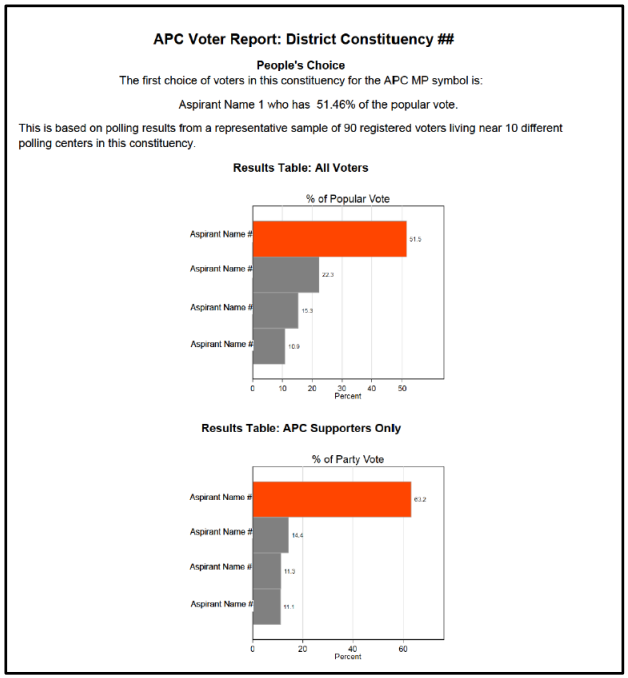
# Role of Primaries: Whose voice matters, voters or parties?

- A way to temper the downsides of party gatekeeping is to bring voters into the candidate selection process, typically in the form of primaries
- Skepticism of party elites drove the US Progressive movement to adopt primaries, to "limit the ability of political and economic elites to manipulate and profit from the nomination process" (Hirano & Snyder, 2019, p. 15)
- Empirically, American primaries seen to promote the selection of competent candidates in safe, open seats (Hirano & Snyder, 2014, 2019)
- Models argue that primaries produce higher quality candidates (Adams & Merrill, 2008), but potentially at the cost of ideological extremity (Serra, 2011)
- However, concerns remain about a potential quality versus representation tradeoff, and if valid, suggest that primaries might be bad for selection

# An Experiment in Candidate Selection

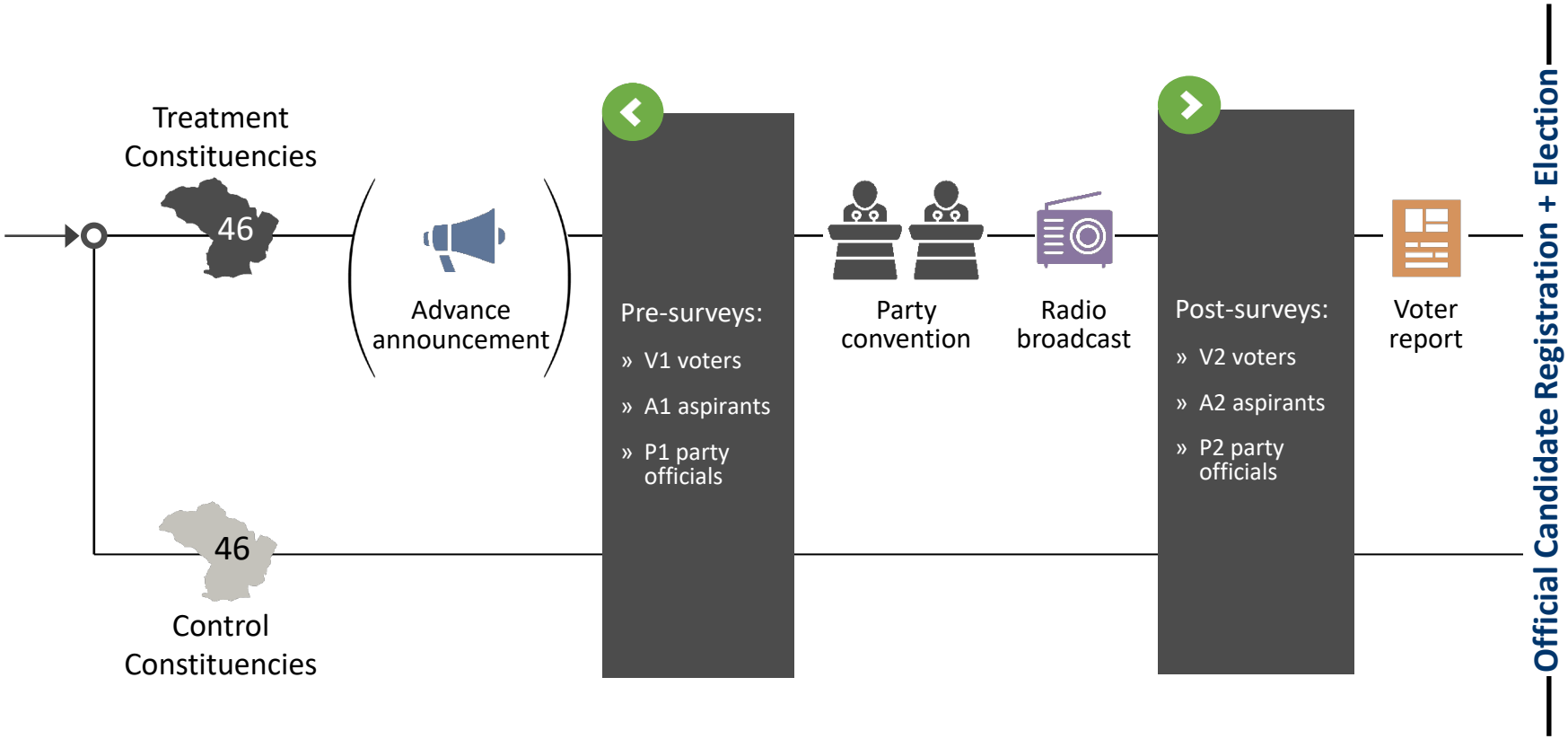
- Field experiment with political parties in Sierra Leone varied how much say voters have in selecting candidates (Casey et al., 2021)

- Treatment had two components:
  - Constituency-level **party conventions** featuring policy debate between aspirants, attended by both leaders and rank-and-file, radio broadcast
  - **Polling registered voters**, representative at the constituency level, aggregated and compiled into a one-page report given to party leaders



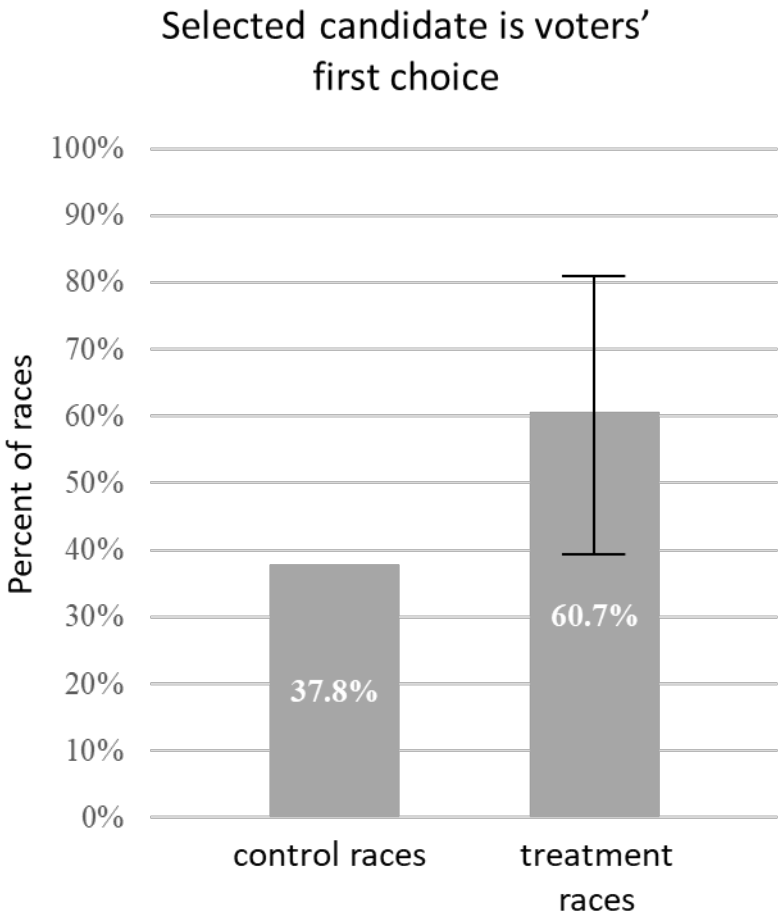

- Neither component is binding on the ultimate choice of candidate and both are best characterized as relieving information constraints

# Experimental Design

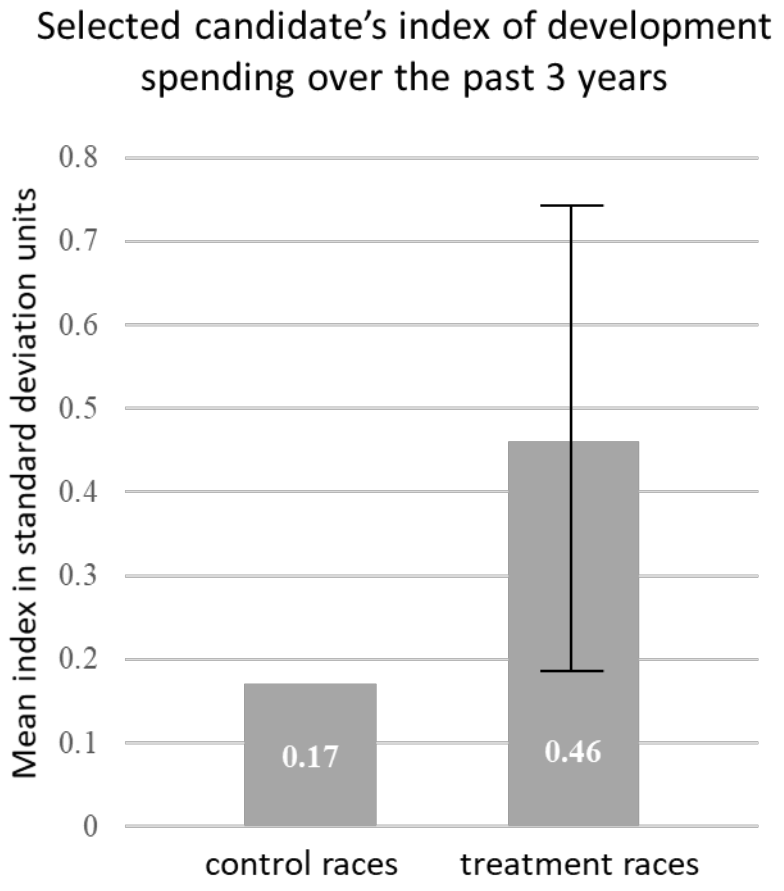


# Main Results

## Positive effect on representation




## Positive effect for selection on quality




- Mechanism: party leaders lack information about voter preferences, but value similar traits, so are willing to accommodate them at no cost to selection

# Why Who Governs Matters

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So far: selection on valence. Now: selection on **identity**.

- **Representation matters** when preferences differ by group… (Alesina et al., 2011; Funk & Gathmann, 2015; Falk et al., 2018)
- … when **leaders respond more** to own group: platforms are cheap talk — identity is the commitment (Pande, 2003; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004)
- **But representation is not automatic:** holding power yields private returns — incumbents gatekeep, rationing entry (Besley et al., 2017)
- **While returns are largely societal:** talent reallocated, beliefs corrected — gains gatekeepers do not internalize ⇒ role for identity-based policies (Pande, 2003; Beaman et al., 2009)

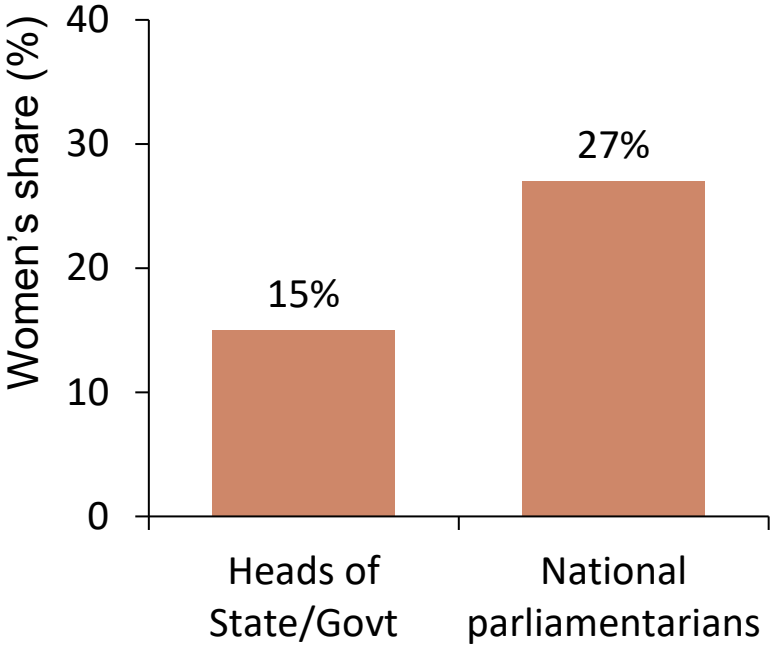
Today's lens: **gender**.

# Returns to Representation: Female Leaders Narrow the Health Care Gender Gap (Dupas & Jain, 2024)

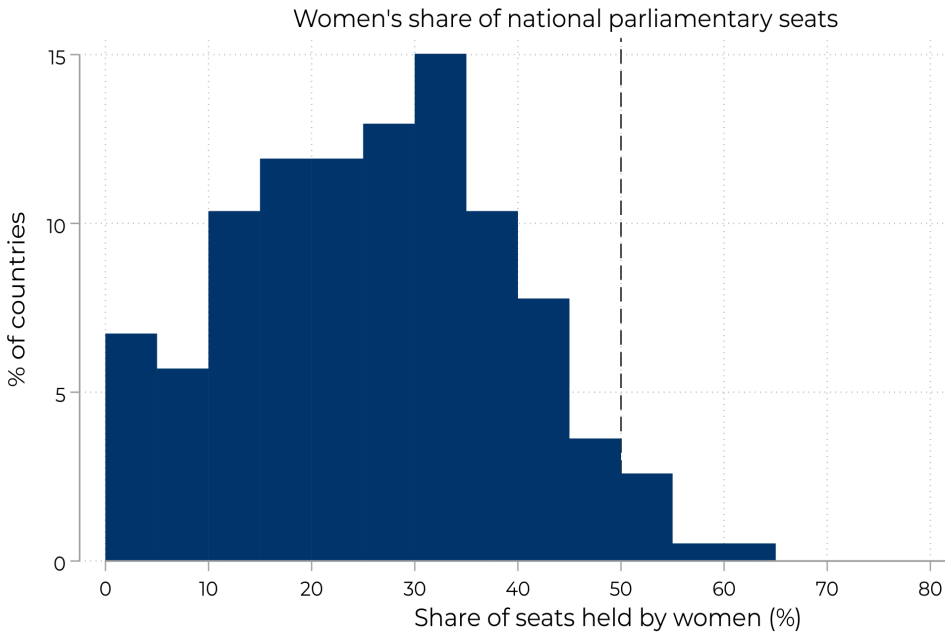
Free hospital care ≠ equal care — 3.2m claims, Rajasthan 2017–19

- As annual visits *doubled* — the female share *fell*, 47% → 44%: **230,000+** missing female visits
- **Cutting costs for all doesn't close the gap:** a new subsidized hospital 20km closer raises female visits +15.5% *but* male visits +19% — the marginal user is as male as the inframarginal
- **Female sarpanch quotas do:** each reserved term (2005/10/15) raises female visit share +1.02pp under-15 and +0.87pp ages 15–45 — but requires **10+ years** of cumulative exposure
- **Channel: female-specific barriers, not common costs —** women's health-worker (ASHA) contact +7.7pp and monthly village meetings +8.4pp per reserved term; no change in facility supply, program awareness or stated gender attitudes

# Yet Political Authority Remains Gatekept — Even Where Women Are Near-*Majority* Voters




Sources: IPU (2025); UN Women (2026: 28 of 193 countries with a woman Head of State or Government).



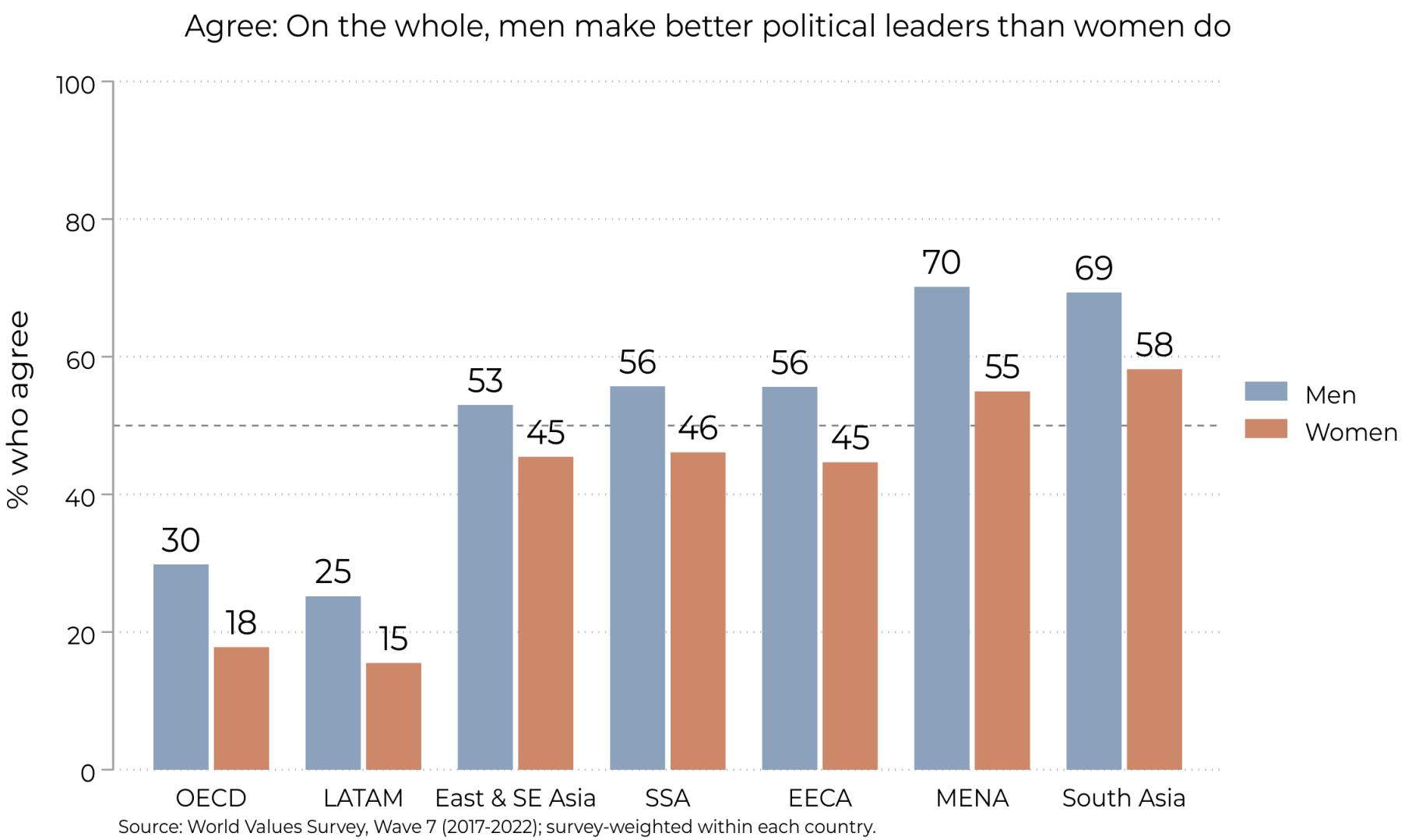

Sources: IPU via World Bank, processed by Our World in Data

# Today: Representation Through the Lens of Gender Quotas



# Why Aren’t Women Elected? Norms and Gatekeepers

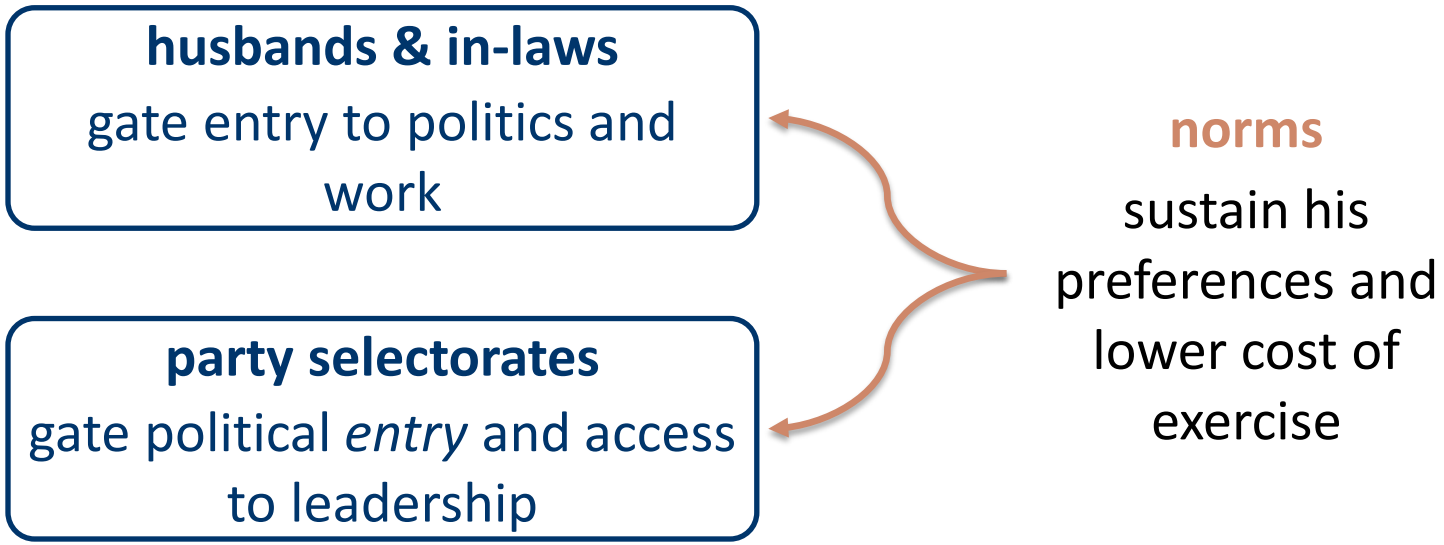
# Many Endorse the Norm That Men Make Better Leaders — Men *More So*




Source: World Values Survey, Wave 7 (2017-2022); survey-weighted within each country.

# Norms Arm the Gatekeepers

- **Gender norms**: gender-specific rules of behavior, e.g. *male breadwinner norm*. A norm holds when people prefer to conform, conditional on beliefs — own attitudes, what they think others approve of, expected sanctions and rewards
- Norms live in beliefs about beliefs — and can bind despite private dissent; expected penalties drive conformity — and enforcement by gatekeepers
- A gatekeeper's consent determines another's access — and he has preferences over that access:



# The Gatekeeper Selects a Woman Only If She Clears a Higher Bar

**Society's benefit from female leader:** $B^S \equiv \Delta_F - \Delta_M + \underbrace{E}_{\text{representation externality}}$

$$\underbrace{B^G}_{\text{Gatekeeper expected benefit}} \equiv \underbrace{(\Delta_F - b - v)}_{\text{his expected return to her}} - \Delta_M - \kappa \geq 0 \iff \Delta_F - \Delta_M \geq \Gamma \equiv b + v + \kappa$$

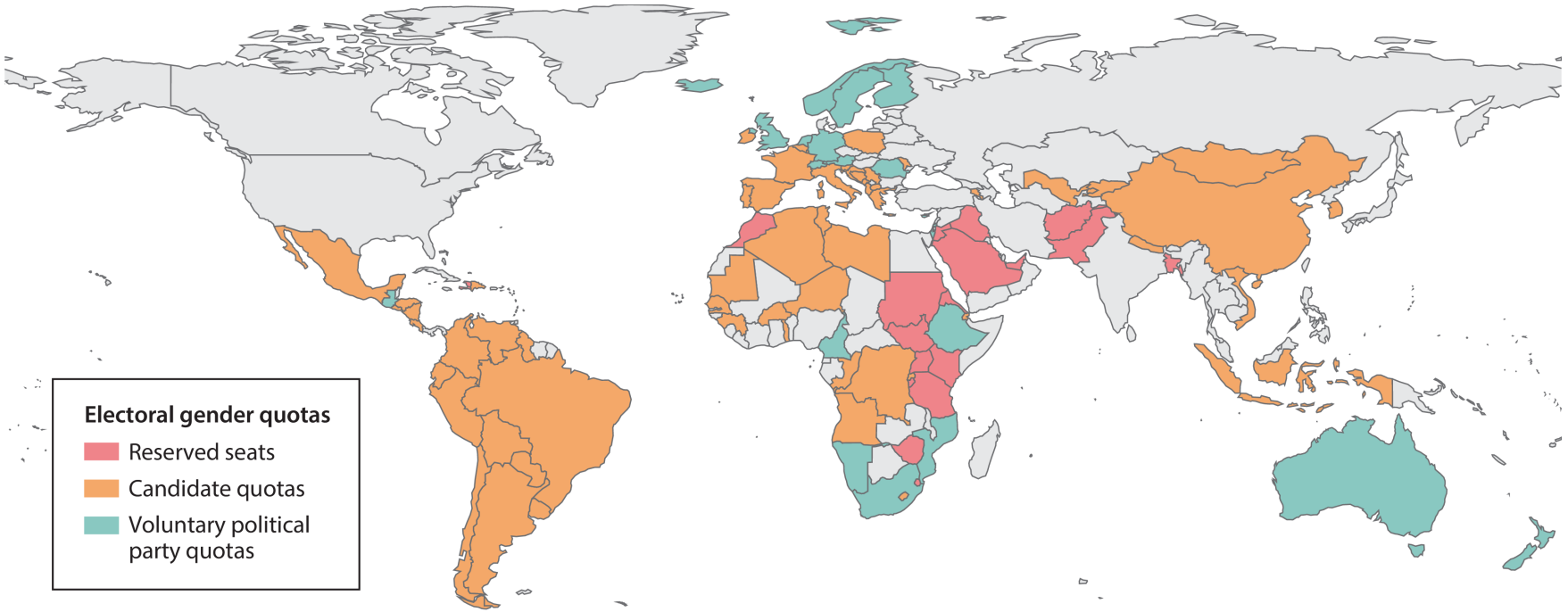
**$\Delta_F - \Delta_M$: return** party: higher $\Pr(\text{win}) \cdot R_{\text{office}}$

$\geq$

- ***b*: belief bias** (distorts his expected return) under-estimates her return — *exposure erodes it*
- ***v*: uncertainty** (distorts his expected return) no track record ⇒ risk premium — *trying her is a public good ⇒ under-experimentation*
- **κ: control** (private cost) her rise erodes his control — *uncompensated ⇒ resists, backlash*

# Quotas: Forcing Entry Past the Gate

# 130+ Countries Have Adopted Political Gender Quotas

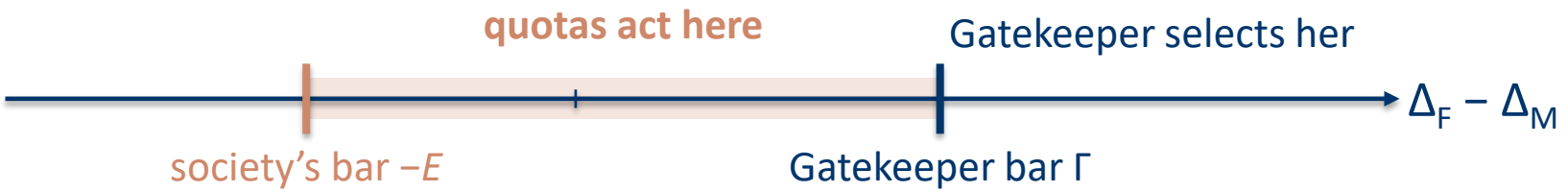



Source: Clayton (2021)

Note: India has gender quotas in local governments

# Quotas Force Entry Past the Gatekeeper's Bar — and Work on Both Margins

Gatekeeper values *private* and own-group returns, not the full societal value of representation $E$:




Entry works on both margins of the gate:

**Learning** ($b\downarrow$): exposure shifts beliefs, and gains **persist** — self-sustaining (Beaman et al., 2009)

**Control** ($\kappa$): threatened rents **resist** — resistance and reversal (Callen et al., 2024)

Returns to quotas depend on the incidence of these distortions

# What Quotas Deliver: Entry, Then Learning

# India's Village Quotas Move What Leaders Do, What Citizens Learn — and Who Gets Selected

- **What leaders do**
  - Public goods spending follows women's complaints (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004)
  - Women's crime reporting and police responsiveness rise (Iyer et al., 2012)
- **What citizens learn**
  - Voters update beliefs about female leaders (Beaman et al., 2009)
  - Girls' aspirations and schooling rise (Beaman et al., 2012)
- **And selection responds**
  - More women party workers (Goyal, 2024)
  - More female leaders (Beaman et al., 2009)

# *Powerful Women*: A Randomized Policy Experiment
(Beaman et al., 2009)

**Setting: West Bengal, India**

- Since 1998, one-third of *pradhan* (chief) seats reserved for women
- Assigned by serial-number rule on randomized lists, redrawn each election
- Exposure varies: **never / once / twice** reserved (1998, 2003)

**Why quotas help causal inference:**

- Places that elect women differ in norms, party organization and voter demand. Random rotation of reserved seats breaks that selection, so differences reflect who governs.

**Data: 495 villages; 165 Gram Panchayats**

- **Goldberg paradigm:** identical speech & vignette; leader gender randomized: holds performance fixed, so any gap is bias, not competence
- **IATs:** gender–occupation; taste

# Exposure Corrects Beliefs About Competence — Not Tastes

| Male respondents evaluate… | Hypothetical leader (Goldberg) | Actual female pradhan |
|---|---|---|
| **Bias** | −0.054 SD (never reserved) | first cohort rated **0.2 SD lower** — despite +0.19 SD more public goods, equal audited quality, fewer bribes |
| **Change with exposure** | +0.091 SD | second cohort rated **at par** with men in never-reserved GPs |

- **Stereotypes shift:** exposed men more likely to associate women with leadership (IAT)
- **Tastes do not:** implicit same-gender preference unchanged (IAT); explicit preference for male leaders — 1.44 points on a 1–10 scale among men in never-reserved villages — rises with exposure: a backlash

# From Beliefs to Ballots: Gains Outlive the Quota

- **2008 election, seats no longer reserved:**

| | Never reserved | Reserved twice |
|---|---|---|
| Female pradhans | 11% | 18.5% |
| Women winning unreserved ward seats | 4.9% | 10.7% |

Electoral gains appear only after **two** cycles — beliefs update first, then entry follows.

# What a Binding Quota Reveals: Misallocated Talent

# The Leadership Cost of Talent Misallocation (Besley et al., 2017)




- **No bias needed — this is $\kappa$:** the leader survives the internal contest only if followers are less competent than him; the gate binds *even at* $b = 0$
- **Citizens bear the cost:** mediocre loyalists imply worse government
- **The test:** does forcing women onto the list *lower* competence — or dislodge the mediocre?

# Sweden: Measuring Competence, Exploiting the Zipper

- **Setting:** 290 municipalities, closed-list PR; local leadership controls the list
- **Data:** all candidates, 10 elections (1982–2014), ≈200,000 politicians, register-linked
- **Competence** = earnings relative to one's peers:

$$y_{it} = f(\text{age}_{it}, \text{educ}_{it}, \text{sector}_{it}) + \alpha_m + \varepsilon_{it}$$

competent if residual > party median; validated against draft cognitive and leadership scores

- **Shock:** 1993, the Social Democrats' central board imposes a zipper quota on all local parties
- **Quota bite:** $\Delta w_m \equiv$ share of women elected in 1994 − 1991

# The Crisis of the Mediocre Man

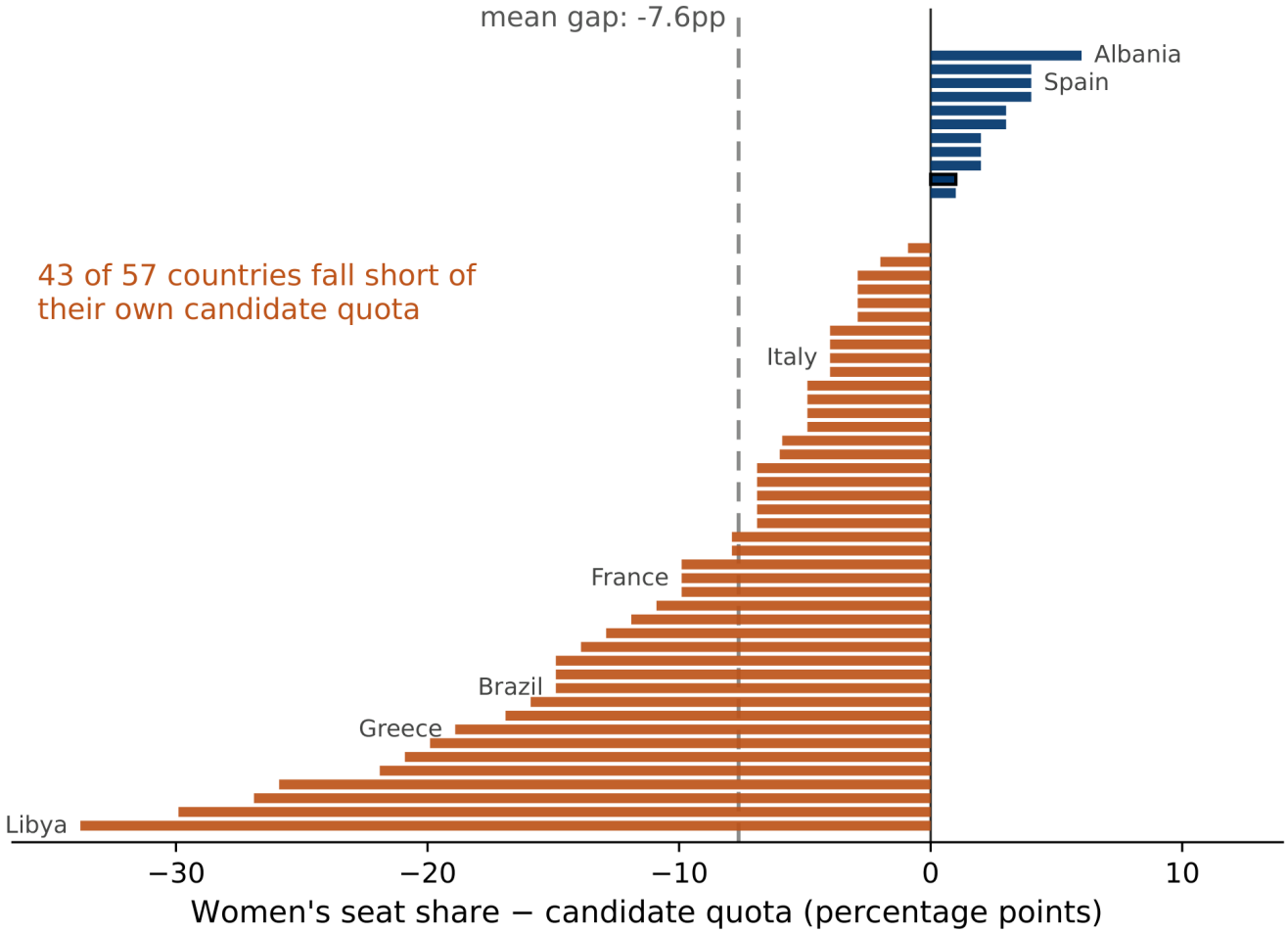
$$r_{mt} = \beta\left(\Delta w_m \times \text{Post}_t\right) + \alpha_m + \lambda_t + \theta_m t + \varepsilon_{mt}$$

| Share competent among elected: | All | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|---|
| $\hat{\beta}$ | 0.29 | 0.44 | 0.07 |
| | (0.12) | (0.18) | (0.21) |

- **Mechanism:** mediocre male leaders' survival **–11pp** vs. competent ones; followers improve over the next two elections; effects fade after 2002
- With gatekeeping, quality and identity can't be separated: a quota on identity raised men's competence. The quality of elected reflects the gate, so we need the whole chain, not outcomes conditional on winning.

# Gatekeeping Beyond the Quota

# Candidate Quotas Under-Deliver Almost Everywhere



# Why: A Quota Fixes the Count — Control Shifts to Other Margins

- **Spain — ballot position**
  where ballot order decides the seat, women get *late-alphabet* surnames and sit lower: ↓ **14-19pp** winning probability (Esteve-Volart & Bagues, 2012)
- **Nepal — coalitions**
  Parties fielding both mayor and deputy mayor had to nominate a woman; in 2022, parties formed coalitions, each filled one post, and nominated men: ↓ **8pp** female representation (Callen et al., 2024)
- **France & Germany — less-winnable districts**
  women are run where the party is weaker (Lippmann, 2021; Fujiwara et al., 2025)
- **Mexico — who keeps the seat**
  elected women *resign* so male alternates take over — 2009 "Juanitas" law now requires same-gender alternates

# Design Implications

- **Mandate Seats Not Candidacy**
  - Candidate quotas fix an input — control migrates to whatever margin the rule leaves: ballot order, districts, coalitions
  - Seat quotas fix the outcome; the residual margin — who *exercises* the office (Mexico's Juanitas; proxy capture) — is narrower, and law can close it (same-gender alternates)
  - The Indian case suggests that learning results run through seat quotas
- **Target the selectorate:** parity in selection committees; scrutiny of *where* women run
- **Design policies to limit avenues of reversal**

# The Research and Policy Frontier

# Questions on the Frontier

- What interventions and policy changes will induce better people to **run for public office?**
- If and how can **better people** successfully pass through **gatekeepers**?
- How do voters trade off **valence, group identity** and **ideology**?
- **Can quota design stay ahead of circumvention?** Control moves to the freest margin — can design foreclose it, not chase it?
- **What dosage, and for how long?** How much exposure before the belief shift outlives the quota that produced it?
- **Which signal updates beliefs, and which perpetuates the status quo?** Seeing a woman hold office, the policies she enacts, or her measured performance?

# Thank you

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