Women as policy makers: Evidence from the Grassroots
The Indian Experience

- Do reservations for women at the lowest level in India help improve the position of women across the board?
- India provides a very interesting window into this phenomenon:
  - Large scale reservation at the most grassroot level
  - A national debate on expansion of those quotas
  - The way that quotas were implemented allows us to contrast the experience of comparable places with and without quotas.
The Panchayat system, and the quotas

- Since 1993, India has revitalized its system of decentralized government: the Panchayat system.
- Panchayats are in charge of local expenditures and, increasingly, play a key role in the flagship social program, such as the national rural guarantee act.
- The constitutional amendment that established the system also planned for mandated representation of women.
Reservations for women

- In each council, one third of the members must be women.
- Further, one third of each council must have a woman as the head.
- To avoid political manipulation, the selection of councils to be reserved is random in most States.
Our Research: the Immediate effects

- Do the reservation lead more women to be elected?
- Does this lead more women to effectively participate?
- Does this lead to different policy choices, that better reflect women’s need?
- Does this change the style of government?
Our research: The long term impacts

- Does this change the perception that women can lead (positively or negatively?)
- Does this change the chance of women to be elected after reservation?
- Does this durably change policy outcomes, or are any changes immediately reversed after reservation?
- Does this change people’s aspirations for their daughters?
- Do this change in aspiration lead to change in real life outcomes?
Given that randomization, the empirical strategy is straightforward: We want to compare outcomes of interest in reserved vs unreserved constituencies.

Data collection:
- Chattopadhyay and Duflo: Collected data in 2000 in almost all the GP of one district in West Bengal (2 years after election for first cohort of women)
- Banerjee and Duflo: Collected data in 100 villages in Rajasthan in 2002 (2 years after second election).
- Beaman et al. Collected village level and household level data in 2005 (2 years after second cycle of elections)
- Banerjee, Duflo, Imbert, Pande: Ran an experiment and collected household level data in 2010
More women elected?

Number of women elected, first cycle of reservation

- West
- Bengal
- Rajasthan

Reserved

Unreserved
More participation: Record from village meeting

**Did women speak at the village meeting?**

- **Reserved**: 70%
- **Unreserved**: 50%
Different Policies

Public Goods in West Bengal, First Cycle

- **Reserved**
- **Unreserved**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reserved</th>
<th>Unreserved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of wells newly built or repaired (/100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition of roads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of panchayat run education center</td>
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Does this reflect women’s preferences?

**Percent of Issues brought to the GP**

- **Drinking water**: Women 30%, Men 15%
- **Road improvement**: Women 35%, Men 25%
- **Education**: Women 5%, Men 10%
Style of Government: Bribes

Household ever paid a bribe for water?

- Never reserved: 20%
- Reserved twice: 12%
Perceptions: Can women lead?
Reaction after hearing a taped speech

On a scale of one to ten, how effective is the Pradhan?

- Male voice
- Female voice

Never reserved: Male voice: 5.8, Female voice: 5.65
Ever reserved: Male voice: 5.85, Female voice: 5.7
Are women elected after reservation?

2008 Election Outcomes

- Pradhans
- Candidates for Ward Councilor
- Winners of Ward Council Seat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never Reserved</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved 1998 and 2003</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserved Once</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Can the process be accelerated: theater campaigns in Rajasthan

Probability that a woman wins the next GP election

- No reservation: 0.15
- Reserved for women: 0.22
- General campaign: 0.20
- Gender campaign: 0.13
Are the effects durable?

Index of alignment with women's preferences

- Never reserved
- Reserved only in 2003
- Reserved in 1998 and 2003
- Reserved only in 1998
Gap in parents' aspirations: average
Unreserved   Reserved Once   Reserved Twice
Children’s aspiration:

Gap in teens' aspirations: average

Unreserved  Reserved Once  Reserved Twice
Educational Attainment

- Never reserved
- Reserved Once
- Reserved Twice
Crime against women are more likely to be reported

(Reported) Crime Against Women

Pre reservation  Post reservation
Conclusion

- Women leaders are generally disparaged in India. “shadow pradhans”, stooges
- And indeed they are quiet, often their husbands answer questions for them
- Yet, over this more than 10 years-old research program, what we have learnt is that:
  - Women take different decisions that better reflect women’s need
  - They gain acceptance as leaders, in a way that cannot be replicated with campaigns
  - Their quiet presence does lead to a chance in parents’ attitude towards girls which has real impacts.