

Quotas as Opportunities and Obstacles: Revisiting Gender Quotas in India

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This article addresses the empirical uncertainty regarding whether gender quotas establish a foundation of political representation and experience that encourages female candidates to compete against men. It updates and expands existing empirical research by contributing an analysis of the most recent electoral data across four municipal corporations in India over two election cycles. Critical questions on the theoretical expectation that gender quotas should encourage and enable women politicians to compete in open-gender contests over time are considered. The Indian quota system has not encouraged women to broadly compete outside the quota at the local level but has made some wards more likely to elect women. Parties also continue to resist nominating women outside the quota but are more likely to do so in wards previously represented by a woman. Finally, the unique overlap of gender and community quotas can discourage incumbency by essentially blocking incumbents from running again in their ward due to shifting community requirements.

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Dahlerup and Freidenvall's (2010) examination of key debates within the literature on the effects of gender quotas called for greater empirical analysis to determine which predictions were materializing

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and where. One of their most pressing questions considered whether quota requirements restrict women from competing in and winning elections beyond the quota requirement (415). They cite the Rwandan (Hansson 2007) and Ugandan cases (Tripp, Konate, and Lowe-Morna 2006, 129) in which female representation rose considerably above quota levels as evidence against quotas creating these glass ceilings. However, they also point out that in Morocco parties tended to only nominate the minimum number of women mandated by the gender quota and not beyond (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010). Additional research on the Mumbai city council in India revealed that gender quotas make women overall more competitive in a ward, more likely to receive a party nomination, and more likely to win even after quotas are removed in subsequent elections (Bhavnani 2009). However, qualitative analysis of the Jaipur city council in India suggested that a “stay-in-your-lane” standard had established itself that normatively designated nonquota, open-gender seats for male candidates and encouraged women to not compete outside the gender-reserved seats already set aside for them (Turnbull 2018), with similar observations across India (Kishwar 1996). These cases challenge a fundamental assumption of the gender quota rationale: quotas are a temporary shock that will establish a foundation of political representation and experience for women that in turn will shift normative perceptions to a degree that allows and encourages female candidates to compete against men (Deininger et al. 2011). Here, I provide evidence that this temporary shock shifts norms very slowly and therefore may need to be in place for a significant amount of time.

The empirical uncertainty within the quota discussion is largely a result of how young these institutions are and the sample size of analyzed cases. Most of these cases consist of only one institution that has used quotas through only a few electoral cycles. To further develop this debate and our understanding of gender quota effects at the local level, the well-covered Indian case is considered, and this analysis includes updated data from the most recent elections and expands the sample size considerably to four institutions over two elections. This article adds clarity to three critical theoretical questions that remain outstanding within this discussion: Do quotas encourage women to contest elections outside gender quotas on a significant scale? Do parties nominate women to compete outside gender quotas? Finally, does the unique overlap of community and gender quotas at the local level in India create an obstacle to women incumbents?

The Indian quota system has not encouraged women at the local level on a broad scale to compete outside the gender quotas, but it has made some wards more likely to elect women. Two key institutional obstacles have likely hindered growth in female competition outside quota seats: party nomination practices and blocked incumbents. Parties continue to rarely nominate more than the minimum number of women required by the quota; thus, women are not standing for election in nonquota wards. Additionally, the overlap between community and gender quotas can discourage female incumbency by essentially blocking incumbents from running again in their ward because they do not fit shifting community requirements. Problematically for the expansion of female representation, this lack of incumbency likely means that the quota is not building a strong cohort of women at the local level who can compete outside the quota or at higher levels of government.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that quotas do not inevitably create a foundation that women politicians can build on and expand into open-gender competition. If women are not able to compete outside the gender quota, if parties continue to view women as a nomination “risk” or are otherwise uninterested in nominating women to compete outside the quota, and if a candidate is unlucky in the quota-assignment lottery, then the quota can become both a floor and a ceiling that caps participation. Furthermore, gender quotas overall are expected to alter the perceptions of voters and parties regarding the ability and appropriateness of women competing in politics as well as the establishment of female role models, both of which should, over time, encourage and enable greater female participation (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018). However, this advancement is contingent on the demonstration of electoral success. If women are only seen competing against other women in seats specifically set aside for them, it is likely that voters and parties are not being persuaded that women should be competing in the broader political environment where they are not protected by a quota. This phenomenon likely reinforces existing negative stereotypes depicting women as less qualified than men (Coate and Loury 1993).

These findings challenge theoretical expectations that gender quotas will broadly encourage and enable greater female political participation outside the quota. The goal of a gender quota is not to create two separate electorates: one for electing women, one for electing men. The much older community quota system for marginalized communities in India provides a useful benchmark. The community quota system was

originally designed with the explicit goal of making Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates more electable across the general electorate, not just within SC communities (Jensenius 2017). As this article demonstrates and other literature has shown (Jensenius 2017), considerable progress has been made toward achieving this goal. We see substantial competition by disadvantaged communities outside their quota. However, gender quotas have not had the same success, as women rarely compete for open-gender seats.

This article progresses as follows: First, to provide context, I describe the complex quota system currently used at the local level across India. Then I move into an initial analysis of competition between men and women, which demonstrates a lack of women competing outside the gender quota. The analysis then shifts to party nominations of women to open-gender seats, the lack of which establishes a restriction on the ability of women to compete outside the gender quota. Finally, an analysis of incumbent continuity over two election cycles shows that incumbency is very low and discusses how the assignment of community quotas could discourage incumbents from returning. This analysis includes a critical discussion of the perhaps unintended obstacles created by a quota system designed to support disadvantaged communities while simultaneously impeding growth in their participation.

The data used in these analyses were obtained from four of the largest municipal corporations in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh: Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad,¹ and Varanasi. These corporations are responsible for maintaining the civic infrastructure and essential services of their respective cities, such as roads, sanitation, water, education, and health, as well as carrying out associated administrative functions. Each of these municipalities has had gender quotas in place since 1992, over five election cycles. The state electoral commission provided detailed data on all candidates in the most recent municipal elections in 2017 and detailed data on the winning candidates of the preceding elections in 2012.² Methodological explanations for how these data were used are provided in each section. Additional reference tables are provided in appendices online.

1. Allahabad was officially renamed Prayagraj in 2018.

2. For Uttar Pradesh State Election Commission Statistics, see <http://sec.up.nic.in/>.

QUOTA RULES: INTERSECTION OF COMMUNITY AND GENDER

Quotas in the form of reserved seats for disadvantaged castes and communities in India have existed since the latter end of British rule.³ Recognizing that strong social bias against lower castes, alongside their historic economic and educational deprivation, would make candidates from these communities less politically competitive after independence, the drafters of the Indian constitution implemented quotas for these groups in the national parliament and across state assemblies starting in 1950 (Jensenius 2016). Specifically, this institution designated a set number of reserved seats to members from castes classified either as Scheduled Castes (SCs) or indigenous tribes classified as Scheduled Tribes (STs), which were proportional to their share of total population within each state. For a caste to qualify for SC status (approximately 450 castes today), they generally must have been historically treated as “untouchable” by the rest of Hindu society, thus facing significant prejudice due to their caste origin (Chandra 2000, 27). Qualification for ST status is similar but requires a lineal connection to an indigenous community.

In 1979, the Mandal Commission convened by parliament recommended the expansion of these reservations to a newly established classification, Other Backward Classes (OBCs). In contrast to SC and ST communities, which qualify for reservation based on a history of pervasive societal bias against their particular caste or community, OBC communities qualify for reservation based on social, educational, and economic indicators that lag significantly behind state averages (GOI 1981). Notably, some non-Hindu minorities, such as Muslim communities, qualify for OBC status at the local level. Given the broader qualifications, OBCs have always formed the largest block of reservations and thus are a significant electoral consideration. The specific communities that qualify for reservations and the specific benefits reservation status confers differ across states and can change over time. Generally, however, positions are reserved in elected governance institutions at the state and local levels, as well as for civil service positions in governmental agencies and student slots in public education institutions for individuals from a community who qualify for either

3. The broader term “community” is used throughout the article instead of the more specific term “caste” because “community” more accurately reflects the inclusion of both castes and other noncaste communities within the governmental classification system.

OBC, SC, or ST status (Jensenius 2016). Only individuals from these communities can fill these positions. Numbers differ by state depending on population proportions, but on average the distribution of reservations is approximately 27% for OBCs, 16% for SCs, and 8% for STs. All other communities are generally referred to as “General” (GEN) or “forward castes” and receive no reservation benefits.⁴

In 1992, state governments were significantly decentralized across India. Each state was required to conduct elections at the local level and to devolve considerable powers of expenditure to local governance bodies (Bhavnani 2009). These local bodies are divided across each state into districts or *zila parishads*, under which the municipal bodies govern urban centers, whereas rural India is further subdivided into blocks or *panchayat samitis* and again into village councils or *gram panchayats*. Across these elected bodies, gender quotas were instituted in the form of reserved seats for women from all communities across India; however, gender reservations are not as extensive as the community reservations. Positions for women are only reserved in elected governance institutions at the local level. Therefore, at the local level, these gender reservations cut across community reservations. Across all seats, whether designated for reserved communities (i.e., OBCs, SCs, and STs) or open seats that are unreserved (i.e., GEN), 33% must be reserved for a woman from that community (i.e., 33% of all SC seats must be reserved for SC women) (Jensenius 2016), with several states voluntarily going up to 50% gender reserved seats (Kumar and Prakash 2012). When combined with community reservations, this establishes a complex system in which every electoral ward can hold one of eight labels, which determines who is able to run in that seat. Table 1 lists each of these eight labels, their acronym, who qualifies to run in a seat assigned that label, and the proportion of seats assigned that label across the four municipal corporations in the 2017 elections.

To determine the number of seats allocated to each label within an elected body, reservations are essentially layered. The first layer is strictly community reservations (i.e., GEN, OBC, SC, ST), which are allocated based on each community’s proportion of total population across all wards of the elected body. This process establishes the number of labels from each community that will be assigned across wards. This number of community labels is then placed into a lottery and randomly drawn and

4. Reservation proportions for local elections are adjusted every decennial census by each state to closely reflect the proportion of each community in the population.

Table 1. Reservation Qualifications Proportion of Seats Across Municipal Corporations, 2017

<i>Label</i>	<i>Qualified Candidates</i>	<i>Seats</i>
General (GEN)	Candidate from any community, of any gender	46%
General Woman (GENW)	Female candidate from any community	23%
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	Candidate from OBC community, of any gender	14%
Other Backward Classes Women (OBCW)	Female candidate from an OBC community	7%
Scheduled Caste (SC)	Candidate from an SC caste, of any gender	7%
Scheduled Caste Woman (SCW)	Female candidate from an SC caste	4%
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	Candidate from a Scheduled Tribe, any gender	0%
Scheduled Tribe Woman (STW)	Female candidate from a Scheduled Tribe	0%

assigned to a ward,⁵ which will then be assigned that label and the accompanying community reservation for the next election. The second layer then attaches a gender reservation randomly to 33% of all seats allocated to each community, again through a lottery. This layering process ensures that women from each community receive a minimum of 33% representation; however, the siloes created by this process also establish an inflexible system that can deter political development.

To make the process of assigning reservations clearer, I use the empirical case of the Kanpur Municipal Corporation (KMC), the primary governing institution of Kanpur city in Uttar Pradesh, as an example. For the 2017 KMC elections,⁶ the KMC had 110 total seats across 110 single-member wards. Members of these seats are called *parshads* or councilors. Across the 110 *parshad* wards, 21 seats were allocated as reserved for OBCs, 14 for SCs, and none for STs, in proportion to their respective populations in Kanpur.⁷ The remaining 75 GEN seats were open to all candidates. Of each community grouping of seats (i.e., GEN, OBC, and SC), 33% were then reserved for women from that community (i.e., 25 of the 75

5. Although this lottery is largely random (Bhavnani 2009), a process does weigh the reserved-community seats more heavily in wards with larger populations of that respective community, which increases the probability an OBC reservation will be assigned to a ward with a large OBC population, etc.

6. See Appendix Table 1 online: Process of Assigning Reservations in the KMC for 2017. This table illustrates the step-by-step process that started with 110 total seats in the KMC, the assignment of community reservations, and then the assignment of gender reservations within each community.

7. Some states, such as Uttar Pradesh, have very few ST reservations due to very small ST populations.

GEN seats were reserved for GEN women, or any woman from any community). These eight community- and gender-reservation labels were then assigned across all 110 wards.

STAY IN YOUR LANE: LACK OF COMPETITION OUTSIDE RESERVED SEATS

Using electoral data from the four municipal corporations for the 2017 elections only, this first analysis examines all candidates across 390 wards. In this electoral year, 3,784 candidates competed across all communities.⁸ Overall, men and women from these communities competed in the 2017 elections, and a large proportion of candidates (30%) competed outside their reservation against candidates from different communities and different genders.⁹ Candidates competing outside their reservation could have been either men or women from a reserved-community (i.e., OBC, SC, or ST candidates) competing for a GEN seat, women from a reserved community competing for an open-community or gender-reserved GEN women's seat, or any woman competing for any reserved-community or open-gender seat (i.e., OBC, SC, and ST seats). Notably, no GEN men could compete outside a reservation because they have no reservation. Each of these candidates were competing in a much more unrestricted field; thus, they faced more competition than if they had only competed in the reserved seats for which they were qualified.

Promisingly, we do not see an electoral environment in which candidates from reserved communities and women are blatantly discouraged from competing outside their specific community reservation. As discussed, the community quota system was designed to make candidates from marginalized communities more electable across the general electorate, not just within their communities (Jensenius

8. See Appendix Table 2 online: Municipal Corporation Elections Candidate Demographics.

9. See Appendix Table 3 online: Candidates Competing Outside Reservation by Community. In this table, the total number of candidates are listed in the third column corresponding to their community and gender. Finally, the fourth column lists the number and proportion of candidates corresponding to each label who competed outside either their community and/or gender-reservation. Each candidate was categorized in an identical fashion to seat reservations. To consider a "stay-in-your-lane" norm, I examined how often candidates competed outside their specific reservation. For example, following the qualifications listed in Table 1, a woman from an OBC community is qualified to run for an OBC women's seat specifically reserved for her, but she is also qualified to run for the OBC, GEN women's, and GEN seats. Here, I counted her as competing outside her reservation if she went outside the community and gender-reserved seats (OBC women's seat) specifically reserved for her and competed against a larger demographic for a GEN women's, OBC, or GEN seat. She would be competing against both men and women for the OBC and GEN seats but against women only for the GEN women's seat.

2017). Following the description of the reservation assignment lottery previously, the wards with the highest proportions of voters from reserved communities are more likely to be reserved for those specific communities. Therefore, when candidates from reserved communities compete outside their reservation in open wards, they must appeal to a larger number of voters from other communities. Furthermore, women from OBC and SC communities particularly competed outside their community-reserved seats (60% and 46%, respectively), often in greater proportions than men from their communities (49% and 34%, respectively).

When these data were nuanced to analyze how women competed outside their reservation, however, significantly fewer women competed outside the gender reservation. Most women who competed outside a reservation left their community reservations but remained in gender-reserved seats.¹⁰ Overall, compared with the proportion of total women who competed outside their reservation (500 women, 38%), these numbers are notably smaller. Of 1,330 total female candidates, only 183 (14%) competed for open-gender seats; thus, 86% competed exclusively for gender-reserved seats, against women only. Most of the 500 women who competed outside their reservation were from reserved-communities who left their community reservation to compete for the open-community or gender-reserved GEN women's seats, but, again, only against other women. Furthermore, the proportion of candidates who were women in the open-gender races was never higher than 8% and was often much lower. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of competition among male candidates was fellow men, and among female candidates it was fellow women.¹¹

Certainly, low numbers of women competing in open-gender wards are problematic for a gender-reservation system that has been in place since 1992, through five election cycles. Similar to community reservations (Jenseniuss 2017), the literature generally considers the establishment of a foundation of political representation and experience that encourages female candidates to compete against men to be a primary goal of gender quotas (Deiningger et al. 2011). However, the achievement of this

10. See Appendix Table 4 online: Proportion of Women Competing in Open-Gender Seats. This table lists the proportion of all female candidates who competed in an open-gender seat they were eligible for and where they competed.

11. See Appendix Table 5 online: Women Competing Against Men Across Municipal Corporations for reference. This table specifies where these women competed by listing the proportion of each open-gender seat's competition that was female.

goal would entail women competing against men in open-gender elections. As these data show, women in these contests are not moving beyond gender-reserved seats in large numbers. More importantly for quota effectiveness in the long-term, women are not gaining experience competing against men; they are not demonstrating that women can beat men in open elections on a broad scale; and they are not habituating male candidates and voters overall to intergender competition. Notably, Bhavnani's (2009) analysis of Mumbai elections found that, in open-gender seats, higher numbers of female candidates increased the odds that a woman would win. Therefore, the shortage of female candidates in open-gender elections is likely the primary reason why, across these municipal corporations in 2017, only 11 women (4% of all winners), competed for one of the 259 open-gender seats and won.¹²

As discussed, the literature is optimistic that, over time, quotas will enable women to compete in open-gender wards by habituating parties and voters to female candidates (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018; Bhavnani 2009). Ideally, by requiring parties to nominate women and voters to vote for women when a ward is gender reserved, those parties and those voters will be more accepting of female candidates in subsequent elections. Corresponding with Bhavnani's findings in Mumbai, across these municipal corporations in 2017, all women who won in open-gender wards did so in wards that had previous experience with a woman candidate. In 2012, the ward was either gender reserved or a female candidate won there in an open-gender contest. Furthermore, as Table 2 demonstrates, the success of women in open-gender contests in 2017 differed considerably depending on whether that ward had previously been gender reserved in 2012 (column A) or open gender (column B). Wards that were previously gender reserved were more likely to elect a woman in 2017 to a statistically significant degree. The correlation is more pronounced when the comparison is expanded to all wards that had a woman *parshad* in 2012 (column C), whether gender reserved or open, with wards who had a male *parshad* in 2012 (column D).¹³ Both comparisons demonstrate that 2017 open-gender

12. See Appendix Table 6 online: Women Winning Without Gender Reservations Across Municipal Corporations.

13. Because ward identification numbers do not match perfectly across election years, the 390 2017 wards were matched to their corresponding 2012 wards using ward names. Because several wards were split, changed, or removed entirely, 15 wards (4%) from 2017 were removed from these analyses because they could not be matched to 2012 wards. In some cases, the author used discretion to connect wards that had grown in population and were subsequently split into first, second, and third wards.

Table 2. Next-Election Effects on Women Winning Open-Gender Seats, 2012–2017

	A. Gender Res 2012 Open Gender 2017	B. Open Gender 2012 Open Gender 2017	C. Woman Rep 2012 Open Gender 2017	D. Male Rep 2012 Open Gender 2017
Kanpur	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)
Lucknow	3 (8%)	1 (3%)	4 (10%)	0 (0%)
Allahabad	2 (7%)	1 (4%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Varanasi	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Totals	9 (7%)**	1 (2%)**	2 (8%)**	0 (0%)**

Note: *significant at 10%, **significant at 5%, ***significant at 1% using one-sided difference in proportions and means tests.

wards that had elected a woman in the 2012 election were more likely to elect a woman in the 2017 election.

PARTY RESTRICTIONS

The primary movers in restricting or encouraging women to run outside the gender reservation are the political parties. Party nomination is the primary avenue candidates follow to gain office across these municipal corporations because they provide the valuable branding, resources, expertise, and voter blocs that new political entrants lack (Jensensus 2017). For municipal elections, parties generally seek out locals with strong social reputations in their ward and then assist them with the support needed to run a successful campaign (Bhalotra, Clots-Figuera, and Iyer 2018). Only 16% of candidates across these municipal corporations were elected as independents without a party affiliation in 2017, which is similar to trends observed elsewhere in India (Chathukulam and John 2000).¹⁴

In terms of candidates nominated to compete in municipal corporation elections, gender inequalities are stark. Across these municipal corporations, only 36% of nominated candidates were women among the top 10 performing parties.¹⁵ Notably, this trend is common across most parties, whether national or regional. Of the two dominant national parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress (INC), Congress

14. See Appendix Table 7 online: Independent Candidates Winning Without Party Nominations.

15. See Appendix Table 8 online: Nomination by Gender for the Top Ten Parties.

had a slightly better ratio of male to female candidates, with approximately 67% more male candidates, whereas the BJP approached 78% more. The smaller regional parties were generally even more skewed, with some having more than two to three times as many male candidates nominated as women. An interesting exception was the small regional Bahujan Mukti Party (BMP), which actually fielded 36% *more* female candidates than men (albeit only 18 total). Those competing outside a party banner in the independent ranks were primarily men as well, by a nearly two-to-one ratio. These findings demonstrate low numbers of female candidates overall and suggest that few women are being nominated outside the gender-reserved seats. Again, the percentage of women nominated by parties (36%) was not much higher than the percentage of reserved seats (33%).

That number drops further when considering women nominated by parties to compete in open-gender wards, to only 11%. Most women were nominated to compete only in gender-reserved wards. Of the few women competing against men in open-gender elections ($n = 116$), only 56% were nominated by a major party ($n = 65$); 44% did so as an independent candidate.¹⁶ Low nomination numbers for women competing in municipal corporation elections have also been noted in the literature. In Mumbai, Bhavnani (2009) found that only 7% of female candidates received party nominations in open-gender wards, which is comparable to the 11% observed here. Still, the source of bias is likely quite nuanced, and several additional factors must be considered.

Overall, these skewed numbers indicate a probable gender bias within the party hierarchy that controls the candidate selection process. A small number of key party members, usually men, control the nomination process for positions within the parties in India from the national level (Jenselius 2018) to the state level (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018) to the local level (Anitha et al. 2008; Chathukulam and John 2000). Therefore, the perceptions of a small number of people can exert disproportionate influence over the entire process. Nominations are granted based on candidate electability, which is generally focused on ethnicity, community, caste, funding, and “muscle power,” or workers on the ground who can contribute to the campaign (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018; Singh 2003). If a candidate lacks significantly in any of these categories, they are likely to be discounted (Anitha et al.

16. See Appendix Table 9 online: Female Candidates Nominated in Open-Gender Wards for reference.

2008; Chathukulam and John 2000). On these terms, any perception by these gatekeepers within the party that female candidates are electorally weaker than male candidates results in lower numbers of women nominated (Bhalotra, Clots-Figuera, and Iyer 2018). Although women can qualify just as easily as their male counterparts for community-based seats, they are generally much weaker in terms of funding and “muscle power.” Female candidates are usually very reliant on their families and male benefactors for both funding and supporters on the ground (Anitha et al. 2008; Chathukulam and John 2000; Jensenius 2018).

Although parties are nominating very few women to run against men, parties do not appear to be completely ignoring competitive female candidates. Of the 11 women who won against men in open-gender elections in 2017, eight were nominated by a party. As discussed previously, gender reservations should encourage both party leaders and voters to learn about the ability of female candidates to win elections and make communities both more comfortable nominating and voting for women, even when they are competing against men (Bhalotra, Clots-Figuera, and Iyer 2018; Bhavnani 2009). Promisingly, Bhavnani found that parties in Mumbai were approximately five times more likely to nominate a woman to run in an open-gender ward if that ward had been previously reserved for a woman. However, as Table 3 illustrates, the analysis of these four municipal corporations in Uttar Pradesh did not show a comparable effect from gender reservations alone. Of the 67 women nominated by a party to compete against men in an open-gender ward in the 2017 elections, 49% were nominated to ward areas that were reserved for a woman in 2012 (column A), whereas 51% were nominated in open-gender wards (column B), a difference that is not statistically significant. Nonetheless, if the analysis is expanded to wards that were represented by a woman in 2012 (column C), whether gender-reserved or not, then a majority of women (57%) who were nominated to run in an open-gender ward in 2017 were nominated in a ward that had a woman *parshad* in 2012, a difference that is statistically significant from the wards that were represented by men in 2012 (column D). However, this difference is not as dramatic as that reported by Bhavnani.

Further reinforcing the likelihood that parties are not shutting out *strong* female candidates is the shortage of women in the independent ranks. If competitive women are snubbed by the party for their ward, they still have the option to run as an independent, but they do not appear to be doing so in considerable numbers. However, winning without party support is very difficult, given the low success rate of independents.

Table 3. Next-Election Effects on Party Nomination of Women in Open-Gender Wards, 2012–2017

	A. Gender Res 2012 Open Gender 2017	B. Open Gender 2012 Open Gender 2017	C. Woman Rep 2012 Open Gender 2017	D. Male Rep 2012 Open Gender 2017
Kampur	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	7 (70%)	3 (30%)
Lucknow	16 (50%)	16 (50%)	19 (59%)	13 (31%)
Allahabad	4 (27%)	11 (73%)	5 (33%)	10 (67%)
Varanasi	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	7 (70%)	3 (30%)
Totals	33 (49%)	34 (51%)	38 (57%)**	29 (43%)**

Note: *significant at 10%, **significant at 5%, ***significant at 1% using one-sided difference in proportions tests.

Notably, the parties themselves are primarily responsible for finding and developing candidates. As discussed, these male-dominated party hierarchies are often resistant to developing strong female candidates who may pose a challenge to themselves in the future (Anitha et al. 2008; Chathukulam and John, 2000) and likely therefore do not prioritize the development of women within the party (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018).

Overall, the analysis shown in Table 3 demonstrates that although gender reservations alone may not encourage parties to nominate women in open-gender contests, parties are approximately one-third more likely to nominate women in open-gender wards that have had previous experience with a women *parshad*. Thus, they are theoretically more likely to vote for a female candidate in the current election. Furthermore, these results also demonstrate that experience with a woman *parshad* does not discourage parties from nominating female candidates in the future.

These findings create concerns regarding the short-term effectiveness of the gender reservation as a foundation for rapid female candidate growth. If female candidates are unable to broadly use the reservation to become considerably more competitive for party nominations in local elections without a gender reservation, then it is difficult to foresee how women will progress into state- and national-level elections in the near future, where no gender reservations exist. Again, despite the implementation of the gender reservation at the local level in 1992, the number of women in the national parliament and across state assemblies has practically

remained stagnant over the past two decades, hovering around 11% at the national level and often lower across state assemblies (Jensenius 2018). Across the 38 combined state assembly seats of the four cities used in this analysis, there were only seven women (18%) in 2018. Even more concerning is the observed decrease in the number of new woman candidates competing for state legislatures across Indian states with entrenched gender biases, despite the establishment of gender reservations at the local level that could serve as feeders (Bhalotra, Clots-Figuera, and Iyer 2018).

The causality dilemma inherent in these findings is present in the political gender-equality discussion across political systems. Parties will not nominate women if they are perceived as weaker than their male counterparts; however, candidates competing in political environments in which the party is strong need party support to become competitive candidates. Therefore, without parties taking political risks on female candidates, it is difficult for women to become politically strong enough to receive a nomination. Gender-quota systems essentially force parties to take this risk on female candidates by requiring them to nominate women. However, in quota reservation systems such as India's, parties are only forced to nominate women to gender-reserved seats and are never required to nominate women to compete against men. Proposed solutions to this dilemma in other political systems have been candidate quotas, which require parties to nominate a percentage of women across all seats. This system encourages parties to develop strong female candidates who can win against both male and female candidates, as they could potentially face both. However, this system does not create a minimum level of women in an elected body because potentially every woman nominated could lose to a man, particularly if the party protects its male candidates by shunting all its female candidates into uncompetitive wards where it expects to lose anyway (Schwindt-Bayer 2009).

LACK OF CONTINUITY

In Mumbai, Bhavnani (2009) found that most of the women who won in open-gender wards were incumbents brought into politics through a past gender reservation, possibly demonstrating that quotas can help build a cohort of incumbent women who can develop the political experience to challenge men at the state or national levels. However, an analysis of

these four municipal corporations shows that incumbency is very low for both women and men.¹⁷ Proportionally more male incumbents returned to run again (10%) than did female incumbents (7%). Furthermore, more men returned and won again as an incumbent (5%) than did women (2%). Few men or women *parshads* return as incumbents in general; however, the distinct advantage gender reservations provide does not encourage or enable women to run again at a degree comparable to that of men. These findings align with those of Bhalotra, Clots-Figuera, and Iyer (2018) across state legislatures in India; they also found that women were less likely to run again as incumbents.

Several structural factors likely restrict the ability of the gender reservation to encourage incumbent female *parshads* to return: institutional disincentives, incumbency disadvantages, and reservation disqualification. First, past qualitative work with *parshads* in Jaipur described both men and women who reported not planning to seek re-election due to low pay, too much work, and frustration with intransigent bureaucracy (Turnbull 2018). *Parshads* reported receiving a minimal expense allowance that was far below a middle-class salary, which did not justify complaints of frustrating working conditions and long hours. Reports of corruption opportunities posit that this allowance could be padded, but first-time *parshads*, particularly inexperienced women, likely face difficulties gaining access to these revenue streams.

Incumbency may pose a disadvantage to re-election as well. Only 9% of *parshads* overall sought re-election in a subsequent election, and only 4% were successful. This could indicate that re-election is extremely competitive, which further disincentivizes *parshads* from attempting to return. Across the country, previous research has found that incumbency can actually confer a disadvantage on candidates in India.¹⁸ Bhavnani (2009) found an incumbency disadvantage for both men and women in Mumbai municipal elections, and larger cross-state studies have found

17. See Appendix Table 10 online: Incumbency Across Corporations from the 2012 to 2017 Electoral Cycles. Candidate names were systematically matched from 2012 winner lists to 2017 candidate lists to look for candidates who pursued office again. Seat and candidate reservation categories were also compared across years to look for reservations that could block candidates from running again. Candidate names and ward names do not always match perfectly across election years; thus, the author used discretion in some cases to connect similar names that had shared characteristics (e.g., community, age, father's name, party affiliation, and/or phone number).

18. Chhibber (2001) attributes low rates of incumbency and greater political competition in India to the lack of secondary associations to assist in mobilizing voters. Such associations in the United States, for example, boost incumbency by mobilizing the vote in support of incumbents.

similar disadvantages across national and state elections (Linden 2004; Uppal 2009).

Finally, perhaps the most important consideration for any *parshad* considering running again in the next election is disqualification by the reservation lottery. If the reservation for a *parshad's* ward changes in the next election to one they do not qualify for, they are unable to run again in that ward and are displaced. Of the 390 *parshads* who won in the 2012 elections, around 77% faced a reservation change in their ward for the next election. Notably, 45% of *parshads* overall faced a displacing ward change that essentially blocked them from running again in that ward because their ward was assigned a reservation in the lottery that they did not qualify for. Unsurprisingly, more men (59%) than women (21%) were displaced.¹⁹ Men faced the dual possibility of a community and/or a gender reservation blocking them from running again. However, community reservation lines are rigid, regardless of gender reservations. Just as men cannot compete across community-reservation lines, neither can women. All of the women who were blocked from running again in their ward did not fit the community-reservation criteria for the newly designated ward reservation because they were either GEN women who could not run in a reserved-community ward, or OBC, SC, or ST women whose wards had been reserved for a community other than their own. This is a notable downside to gender-reservations cutting across community reservations: 28% of GEN women, 18% of OBC women, and 20% of SC women were unable to run again in their respective wards due to reservation displacement.

Delving deeper into the various reservation possibilities, the probability of being displaced by a reservation differs significantly across groups. At proportions based on the 2011 census (until they are adjusted with the 2020 census), Table 4 lists how many seats were available and how many seats were blocked for each category of candidate across these municipal corporations. If a candidate's ward was reserved for any of the reservations off-limits to them, they could not compete in that ward. Given that 54% of all seats are reserved for someone, several communities and genders were blocked from competing in a majority of seats.

As expected, GEN men face the highest number of blocked seats at 54% because they qualify for no reservations. Notably, men from the SCs, the

19. See Online Appendix Table 11: *Parshads* Displaced by Subsequent Reservation. Across each municipal corporation, this table lists the proportion of *parshads* elected in 2012 from each reservation category that received a new ward reservation for the 2017 elections that prevented them from running again in that ward.

Table 4. Blocked by Reservation

Parshad Category	Open	Blocked	Can Compete In	Cannot Compete In
General	46%	54%	GEN	Any Reserved Seat
Gen(W)	68%	32%	GEN, GEN(W)	OBC, OBC(W), SC, SC(W), ST, ST(W)
OBC	59%	41%	GEN, OBC	GEN(W), OBC(W), SC, SC(W), ST, ST(W)
OBC(W)	89%	11%	GEN, GEN(W), OBC, OBC(W)	SC, SC(W), ST, ST(W)
SC	53%	47%	GEN, SC	GEN(W), OBC, OBC(W), SC(W), ST, ST(W)
SC(W)	79%	21%	GEN, GEN(W), SC, SC(W)	OBC, OBC(W), ST, ST(W)
ST	46%	54%	GEN, ST	GEN(W), OBC, OBC(W), SC, SC(W), ST(W)
ST(W)	68%	32%	GEN, GEN(W), ST, ST(W)	OBC, OBC(W), SC, SC(W)

disadvantaged communities specifically for whom reservations were initially designed to increase political representation, are close at 47% off-limits. The candidates with the most options by far are OBC women. OBC candidates overall have the largest block of reserved seats, of which a one-third are reserved for OBC women. In addition, OBC women can compete for both GEN women's and GEN seats. Due to a smaller number of seats reserved for SC candidates, SC women can compete for a supermajority of seats, but not as many as OBC women. This comparison illustrates a problematic side effect of community-exclusive reservations established in proportion to the population. The less populous communities (i.e., SC) are blocked from the large number of seats reserved for the more populous communities (i.e., OBC). Although GEN men face the greatest chance of being blocked, the reservation system is still likely to block the disadvantaged communities it was designed to support. The SC communities tend to be significantly more economically and socially disadvantaged compared to OBC communities, but under this system they have fewer electoral options. Although reservations create a foundation of representation, to a degree they can also create an artificial ceiling that favors the more populous, more advantaged communities and constrains the smaller ones. This is particularly problematic given the likelihood that small minorities are

already more likely to be excluded from key decision-making and resource-allocation processes.

For female *parshads* specifically, the reservation system institutes an additional consideration: not only do community reservations change, but gender reservations do as well. In fact, in contrast to community reservations, which can be maintained over subsequent elections,²⁰ many states mandate that a ward cannot be reserved for a woman in consecutive elections (Chathukulam and John 2000; Ghosh 2001), likely to ensure that men from these wards are not permanently excluded from office (Bhavnani 2009). This is the case in Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, across these four municipal corporations, gender reservations were randomly assigned in 2017, but only to wards that were not gender reserved for the previous election in 2012.²¹ Electoral rules did allow candidates to compete outside the ward they reside in, so even with a reservation change in their home ward a candidate could run on the ballot of another ward open to them. However, other literature has described voter resistance to candidates who “parachute” in from outside wards (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018; Turnbull 2018). This situation presents a significant challenge to *parshads* displaced by a new reservation. As Table 5 illustrates, *parshads* who were displaced were less likely to run again or win again than those not displaced, a statistically significant difference. Of all the candidates displaced, only 6% ran again, and none won, whereas 19% of the candidates not displaced ran again and 8% won.

If the analysis is narrowed down to women specifically, the effect is less noticeable (Table 5, bottom two rows). Of the women displaced by a reservation change, 13% went on to run again in the next election; of the women not displaced by a reservation change, only 18% went on to run again in the next election. The difference is not statistically significant. Still, the likelihood that an incumbent woman *parshad* would win again was, to a degree, statistically different if she was not displaced. Seven women (6%) who were not displaced won, whereas no

20. The reservation lottery encourages the maintenance of community reservations over consecutive elections by composing a list of the wards with the highest proportionate populations of OBC, SC, or ST communities and granting those wards the relevant reservation first each election. Some rotation of community reservations is encouraged by progressing each election down this list to ensure that wards with smaller populations also eventually receive a reservation (Chauchard 2014).

21. It is difficult to definitively determine the effect of losing a gender reservation on the likelihood that a woman will run for office again because there is no control group composed of women who kept the gender reservation. All gender-reserved wards in Uttar Pradesh must be open gender in the next election.

Table 5. Effect of Displacement Likelihood to Run Again and Win Again, 2012–2017

<i>Displacement</i>	<i>Ran Again</i>	<i>Won Again</i>
Displaced by Reservation	8 (6%) ^{***}	0 (0%) ^{***}
Not Displaced	46 (19%) ^{***}	20 (8%) ^{***}
Woman Displaced	4 (13%)	0 (0%) [*]
Woman Not Displaced	20 (18%)	7 (6%) [*]

Note: ^{*}significant at 10%, ^{**}significant at 5%, ^{***}significant at 1% using one-sided difference in proportions tests.

displaced women won again. These findings also demonstrate that it is more difficult for a woman *parshad* displaced by a reservation change to engage competitively in the next election than it is for men.

General men are undeniably the most numerically constrained by the reservation system, with over half of all seats off limits to them. Female *parshads* are subject to the reservation lottery as well but have more options in subsequent elections than their male counterparts; they can still run in the gender-reserved wards that are off limits to men. Still, if women rarely compete for open-gender seats, either because they choose not to or are unable to, then nearly two-thirds of all seats are normatively off limits to them. The overlap between gender and community reservations constrains this number further because women cannot run in community-reserved seats they do not qualify for. For example, if an SC woman in Kanpur was displaced by a reservation change, but she was only able or willing to compete for a gender-reserved seat in 2017, of 110 seats, only 30 seats were truly open to her (25 GEN women's and 5 SC women's seats). Combined, these institutional constraints and normative practices discourage incumbency for both women and men. However, these institutional side-effects restrict the positive impact the quota institution can deliver to the marginalized groups it was designed to support, such as women. The value of bringing women incumbents back for subsequent terms was demonstrated by Beaman et al. (2009), who in rural India found substantial increases in the constituent perception of how successful their women leaders were after two consecutive terms only; one term was rarely enough. Therefore, if women are brought in by reservation for only one term, the ability of the gender reservation to both alter perceptions of female political ability and the development of experienced women to make inroads at the state and national levels is likely diminished.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender quotas as an institution work both as a set of rules that structure who voters can and cannot select as their representative and as an incentive mechanism that encourages the political participation of women, who are otherwise disinclined by constraining social norms and lack of experience to involve themselves politically, by providing a route into office that excludes male competition. However, this analysis has demonstrated that as an electoral institution, gender reservations cannot force women to compete with men, they cannot force parties to nominate more than the minimum number of women, and reservation design can have significant constraining effects, such as the interaction between gender reservations and community reservations in India that can displace women incumbents. Thus, such quotas do not automatically create a foundation that women politicians can build on. If parties continue to view women as a nomination “risk” or are otherwise uninterested in nominating women to compete outside gender reservations, and if a candidate is unlucky in the reservation lottery, then the quota can become both a floor and a ceiling that decreases participation.

Notably, this analysis does not demonstrate an electoral environment that normatively discourages the participation of candidates from reserved communities in the GEN seats. Although men and women both competed outside their reserved seats, few women challenged men for open-gender seats. As discussed, a successful quota should establish a foundation of representation on which women can build beyond the quota in a push for representational parity. However, across these municipal corporations, when men competed, the overwhelming majority of their competition was fellow men, and for female candidates it was fellow women. Still, wards in which a woman had been elected previously were more likely to elect a woman again, even without a gender reservation, which shows the promising potential of gender quotas in the longer term.

A key contributing factor to the lack of intergender competition was likely party nominations. Significant research in other countries has also shown that male-dominated parties often attempt to subvert gender quotas (Jones 2004; Krook 2010; Schwindt-Bayer 2009). Parties did not nominate women to compete in races outside gender reservations in significant numbers. The party considered women less competitive in wards that had not experienced a woman representative recently, and/or

constituent polls indicated something similar. Past experience with female candidates does make it more likely that parties would nominate a woman to compete in an open-gender ward against men, but quotas have been in place for five electoral cycles. Shifting gender biases within conservative party structures and/or society itself via electoral quotas is a very gradual process, which corroborates similar findings on the incremental effect community-reservation quotas have had on shifting caste biases (Jensenius 2017).

Several structural factors likely discouraged first-time female *parshads* from returning as an incumbent: institutional disincentives, incumbency disadvantages, and reservation displacement. *Parshad* positions pay a low salary and often require long hours. Incumbency may pose a disadvantage to re-election as well. Few *parshads* seek re-election in a subsequent election, and even fewer are successful. Perhaps the most important consideration for any *parshad* considering running again is displacement by the reservation lottery. Gender-reservation changes always happen alongside community-reservation changes, which add additional obstacles to incumbency. Notably, through this process, the reservation system can block the disadvantaged communities it was designed to support. Although reservations create a foundation of representation, to a degree they can also create an artificial ceiling that significantly restricts where a candidate can compete, even for women and reserved communities.

These obstacles compound an already strained rational calculation for women considering entering politics. As described in the literature (Jensenius 2016, 2018), costs for an Indian woman considering entering politics are considerable: societal censure, family censure, family responsibilities, electoral disadvantages, long hours, and low pay. The reservation system adds additional disincentives for incumbency: reservation displacement and disappearing gender reservations. Compared to the minimal benefits a *parshad* position provides, such as reduced political competition in gender-reserved wards, hyperlocal political power, and some opportunities for personal gain, it is not surprising that few women decide to pursue a political career through the gender reservation. Furthermore, problematically for democratic accountability, low *parshad* incumbency can disincentivize *parshad* commitment for both men and women. If there is little likelihood or desire to return for a second term, then there is little need to please the voters. Given the number of obstacles discussed that make winning a second term very difficult, most *parshads* must expect to only serve one

term and thus have little to gain electorally to motivate service to their constituents.

In conclusion, whether the goals of the gender quota are being achieved or not depends on the core goal of the gender-reservation system. If the primary goal is to acclimate voters and parties to female candidates competing alongside men, then the finding that women are more likely to be nominated and to win in open-gender wards that had previous experience with a woman *parshad*, which supports similar findings in the literature (e.g., Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018; Bhavnani 2009), indicates that this goal is likely being achieved incrementally. However, if the goal of the quota is to develop a cohort of women who can gain significant political expertise and support and then use that to make inroads at the state and national levels, then the very low numbers of incumbent women overall, and particularly the low number of women returning to compete against men, is discouraging. Problematically, the likely absence of such a cohort is demonstrated by the lack of female candidates and representatives in higher levels of government (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018).

Still, these conclusions are based on a limited analysis of only four municipal corporations in one state. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the effect reservation institutional design has on electoral outcomes for women requires further analysis of multiple electoral years across different electoral bodies, either within India or more broadly. A promising avenue could be to compare outcomes between states who restrict consecutive gender reservations, such as Uttar Pradesh, and those who have tried mandating consecutive gender reservations over two terms, such as Tamil Nadu (Ghosh 2001). Other work should look into broader regional differences. Past literature has demonstrated the nuances of difference in the prominence of patriarchal norms across states (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2018), particularly between northern India and the south (Agarwal 1994; Dyson and Moore 1983). Possibly, the institutional constraints described here in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh function differently in other states. Single-case studies have found similar gender-restrictive environments in southern states such as Kerala (Anitha et al. 2008; Chathukulam and John 2000), but a cross-regional comparison could tease out differences in intensity.

Given the importance of party nomination to electoral success, future research should also look deeper into the nomination process. A qualitative investigation of nomination practices and the role of party

gatekeepers, such as state legislators, could provide insight into why parties nominate so few women to compete for open-gender seats. Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer (2018) incorporated a similar qualitative aspect on a smaller scale to their cross-state study of women in state legislatures, illustrating the promise of such a project. Finally, a broad data-collection effort in India that tracks the career pathways of successful women in state and national politics to determine how many started in a gender-reserved *parshad* ward is needed to determine whether the gender reservation system is serving as a pipeline to develop female political talent that can ultimately serve at the highest levels.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X19000722>.

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