Is Knowledge Power?: Civics Training, Womens Political Representation, and Local Governance in India
A Research Design

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Abstract

Given the persistent gender gap in political participation and representation in India despite several decades of targeted policy interventions, I propose to evaluate the use of political information via gender-oriented civics education at increasing women's political representation. The study will further evaluate the impact of female representation, particularly when coupled with an active female citizenry, on the performance of local political institutions and on economic development. Through a gender-oriented civics training implemented by the NGO Pradan, women will receive information about the political system and their rights and entitlements within this system and will be directly exposed to existing political institutions, with the aim of reducing informational barriers to political participation.

1 Introduction

Even after de jure enfranchisement, the barriers to women's political participation and representation seem insurmountable, particularly in places where gender-biased social norms persist. Women are underrepresented in positions of elected office (Fox and Lawless, 2004; Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras and Iyer, 2013), in the bureaucracy (Panizza and Qiang, 2005), women rally at lower rates (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Chhibber, 2002), and make fewer demands on government than men (Kruks-Wisner, 2011; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014). Today, women account for only 22% of members of parliament across the globe, up from 10% in 1995 (Inter-parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments, 2016). In India, this picture looks even bleaker. Only 12% of members of parliament are women and original survey data from a sample of 7,700 men and women in rural Madhya Pradesh shows that men from this sample were 50% points more likely to say that they had attended a local public assembly meeting and 30% points more likely to have contacted the local leader than

women.

Women's low representation in politics may matter not only from the standpoint of inclusion but because it has important policy and welfare consequences. As Wantchekon (2003) poignantly states "rural women might be systematically excluded from the most common forms of clientelist redistribution, and those groups might therefore be more responsive to a platform of public goods. This would imply that initiatives to promote women's participation in the political process at all levels of government are likely to help improve the provision of public goods." We have some evidence that when women are represented in politics, policy changes (John R. Lott and Kenny, 1999; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that when a critical mass of women becomes engaged in local politics, and particularly when they themselves are elected representatives responsive to a political base of other women, government performance improves.

Yet we know little about how to increase women's political participation and electoral representation as well as about the link between women's path to participation/representation and their policy priorities thereafter. This leaves us asking: How do women in developing contexts become active political agents and overcome the high barriers to entry into political decision-making and political action? Once women become active participants in local politics, how do their interactions with the political system differ from those of men? Having been excluded from traditional political networks, how do women organize politically and what does this mean for the execution and performance of local politics and economic development?

In collaboration with the Indian NGO Pradan, I propose a project to begin to fill these gaps in our understanding of women's political participation, women's selection into electoral office, and gender differences with regards to corruption, public goods provision, and economic development. This study will utilize a randomized control trial (RCT) launched in 2016 to collect original data and test the impact of a gender-oriented civics training program implemented by Pradan and targeted towards women's groups. Initial descriptive work has documented the potential for this intervention to increase women's political participation: 58% of women in women's groups that had received the piloted civics training participated in politics outside of voting as compared to 41% of women in women's groups. This is in even starker contrast to the only 25% of women not in women's groups that reported participating in politics outside of voting (Artiz Prillaman, 2016). In evaluating the effect of this training on women's representation, this project will focus on who is participating in politics

and selecting into electoral office and how they mobilize support to achieve these positions.

Additionally, given a positive effect on both women's participation and electoral representation, this study will further utilize this civics training program to identify the consequences of female representation for local governance, clientelism and corruption, and economic development. This will be confirmed using administrative data on randomly assigned gender reservations for local office. The proposed research will therefore ask three primary research questions: 1) Can providing political information and exposure through civics trainings to women's groups increase women's political participation and local electoral representation?; 2) Once women become active participants in local politics, how do their interactions with the political system differ from those of men?; and 3) Does women's representation when coupled with women's active political participation improve the performance of local politics, reduce corruption and clientelism, and increase the provision of local public goods?

2 Background

2.1 The Case of India

The constraints to women's political engagement remain poorly understood across the developing world, but particularly in South Asia (World Bank, 2011). The case of India, and in particular Madhya Pradesh, provides the optimal location to center this analysis as India remains a largely rural country, with over 60% of the population living in rural areas and over 30% of the rural population living below the poverty line (National Sample Survey of India, Planning Commission of India). While it is important to identify the programs and policies that most efficiently elevate incomes and livelihoods in rural areas, the issue of state-building and political participation is of heightened importance in this setting. Women in rural areas of the developing world tend to be much less politically active and therefore are less active in the state (World Bank, 2011). Additionally, India has seen a particularly high surge of NGO expansion and development programs and as a result has been the center of a lot of the existing literature on development. As such, it is the ripe location for exploration of how existing social and economic policies and programs can be designed so as to reduce the barriers to women's political engagement.

The project will take place in the state of Madhya Pradesh, which is geographically the second largest state in India and is located in the central belt of India. With nearly one-third of its

population of 72 million living in poverty, Madhya Pradesh is home to over forty different formally recognized tribes and caste groups, and its 51 districts exhibit significant variation in economic and social conditions related to female empowerment, hence it is not an outlier in India. Of its 230 state representatives, only 27 are women and female voter turnout is lower than average at 57%. Women are substantially economically disadvantaged with an average female labor force participation rate of 25% and average female wages in 2012 of 825 Rs. or $15 per week. As a result, Madhya Pradesh poses a difficult and conservative case in which to find positive effects on women's political empowerment, and any intervention yielding a positive effect bears important implications for settings in which women are already more empowered.

Local Government in India

In 1992, India amended its constitution to create a three tier structure of local governance in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (73rd and 74th Amendments). Within each state there would be governing bodies in the district (the Zilla Parishad), the block (Panchayat Samiti) and the village (Gram Panchayat). These local institutions bear the responsibility of allocating development and public works projects, establishing schools and health centers, and determining who is eligible for particular government schemes and as a result their decisions and policies bear important consequences for their citizens.

The Gram Panchayat is the lowest level of government in India, with each Gram Panchayat representing a population between 1,000 and 25,000. In 2013, there were 238,617 Gram Panchayats throughout India. The Gram Panchayat is governed by a body of between 7 and 17 elected representatives, called Panches. One of these representatives is selected to be the Sarpanch, which is the head of the Gram Panchayat. All Gram Panchayat officials across the state are elected at the same time and serve five year terms of office.

Several times a year, each Gram Panchayat holds the Gram Sabha meeting to make decisions on which development schemes to pursue and the allocation of the local budget. The Gram Sabha meetings were intended to represent self-rule and direct democracy, and as a result every eligible voter is permitted to attend the meetings and participate in their deliberations (Gibson, 2012).

The participatory nature of local institutions in India provide an interesting context in which to study questions of female political participation. Participation in local institutions in this setting bears substantial consequences for local development and for individual livelihoods.

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Not only does this suggest that women have a lot to gain from participation, but also that the lack of female representation in these institutions could importantly affect their long-run development.

2.2 PRADAN

For this field experiment, I will partner with an Indian NGO - PRADAN. Pradan is an ideal partner for this evaluation as they have been providing livelihood training to women in rural India since 1983. Pradan was also one of the NGOs that pioneered the Self-Help Group (SHG) model of development in India. In its 32 years, Pradan has mobilized over 250,000 women to participate in SHGs. SHGs are collectives of 10-20 women that act as informal savings and credit institutions and meet weekly, bi-weekly, or sometimes monthly. Men do not attend the SHG meeting[1], and often these meetings turn into group discussions of personal and community concerns following the formal procedures.

Pradan focuses also on economically empowering the female population through livelihoods training. Livelihoods training is the provision of education and information to rural women about farming and agricultural practices so as to promote micro-enterprises that can generate income. Its aims are to help women enhance productivity in agriculture, diversify into new crops, set up irrigation systems, and institute entirely new ways of managing the natural resource base. Since 1983, Pradan has helped 150,000 people develop community businesses like tasar silk, vegetables, mangoes, and poultry.

Additionally, in 2011 Pradan piloted the Gender Equality Project (GEP) intervention[2], which aimed explicitly to combine their traditional economic interventions with interventions targeting female empowerment in other spheres. This project provided women with explicit instruction and educational materials on issues of gender empowerment in the home, in the community, and in the political process. Most relevant for the proposed project, this program provided female participants with an explanation of the Gram Sabha, including when it convenes, what it does, and how to participate in it. The success of the GEP inspired this evaluation to empirically determine the efficacy of these interventions.

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[1]Except in the case of a hired male accountant for the book-keeping.

[2]This intervention was implemented between 2011 and 2014 in nine districts in four states in India, including in Madhya Pradesh.

3 Experimental Design

This project involves a randomized control trial (RCT) with a treatment aimed at understanding how political information shapes women's political participation.

The RCT randomizes at the village-level a gender-oriented civics training across 225 villages. In the treatment arm , 150 villages will be randomized to receive this intervention for women within their SHGs and 75 villages will form the control group. Treatment will be stratified on the duration of PRADAN's involvement in the village and other demographic and social indicators in order to minimize unexplained variation due to imbalance across treated and untreated villages.

The main civics training treatment will provide women with exposure to the political system through a set of gender-oriented civics trainings lasting between 2 and 4 hours each, which will provide information about the political process, the rights and entitlements of citizenship, and the under-representation of women in politics and will expose women to the state through visits during training to political institutions. This treatment will be randomly assigned at the village-level. The gender-oriented civics training treatment will be given to women who are members of SHGs.

3.0.1 Details of the Gender-oriented Civics Training Treatment

The gender-oriented civics training will include a series of trainings, conducted over several months, on women's political rights and entitlements, modes of political participation, and gender biases in political institutions. The trainings will each be between two and four hours and will be conducted with at least the entire SHG in PRADAN areas. The specific content of these trainings will be designed in collaboration with PRADAN and their partner Jagori. For example, one training might explain the gender reservation system to women, clarifying some common misconceptions heard during qualitative fieldwork such as that women believe they are not allowed to run for elected office unless there is a reservation. The training will also include one to two exposure visits to institutions such as Panchayat and Janpad offices and Gram Sabha meetings. For example, all participant women will compile an application to the Panchayat for government services, such as improved roads or water, and take the application as a group to the Panchayat office.

3.1 Power Calculations

The field experiment will use cluster sampling to sample 3,375 married women from 225 villages (15 women per village). This sampling strategy will allow me to detect a 10% increase in the estimated baseline rate of attendance at Gram Sabha meetings, assuming a standard deviation of 55% and an intraclass correlation within village of 0.04, which I calculate from pilot survey data.

3.2 Identification and Sampling Strategy

As noted, this field experiment will use a clustered randomization strategy, randomizing the gender-oriented civics training treatment at the village-level. This randomization will be done using matched clustered randomization (Imai et al., 2009). Identification and sampling are done in accordance with the following procedure:

1. First, lists of all villages in PRADAN's catchment will be identified.

2. 225 villages will be randomly sampled from the list of villages that have not received the intervention previously.

3. Administrative data will be used to identify SHG members and census data will be used to identify all women within the village.

4. From this database, 30 women over the age of 18 will be randomly sampled from each village. Women must be married or have been married previously to be eligible for the study, since only married women are mobilized into SHGs.

5. For the baseline survey, working from this list of 30 women, surveyors will visit the households to identify which of these women are eligible for the study. They will survey all eligible women and will stop when they have surveyed 15 women.

6. Following the baseline, village-level data on population, number of registered voters, turnout in the most recent election, vote share for the BJP party in the most recent election, gender reservation status at the time of the most recent election, BPL population share, median income, and average education level along with aggregated baseline data on women's political participation will be used to match sets of three villages within Pradan's catchment areas.

7. Two villages from each set will be randomly assigned to receive the training treatment.

8. While surveying will only include 15 women per village, the intervention will be implemented at the village-level.

9. Three months after the training is conducted, 30 respondents per village (the 15 from baseline and an additional 15 randomly sampled women) will be surveyed to identify the short-term treatment effect.

3.3 Mechanisms

3.3.1 Networks Mechanisms

SHG's and political information may affect political participation via several possible channels. This field experiment will try to tease out these channels, so as to better identify *why* it is that social networks may lead women to participate politically.

Several channels through which social networks and political information may affect women's political participation include:

1. **Information Dissemination** - Networks may increase women's political participation simply by bridging some of the informational barriers to participation. More knowledgeable and educated members may share information with group members and this information may increase participation. While interviews suggest that this is not the case, I will test for this channel by including a set of questions in both the baseline and endline that test women's factual knowledge of the political process, including questions related to some of the information provided in the exposure training. I will then be able to test if women that have been mobilized into SHGs but have not received the exposure training have more knowledge about the political process than women who did not receive the exposure treatment. I will similarly include questions about the number of times that women have been exposed to the political system.

2. **Cost of Collective Action** - Women in social networks may be more likely to participate in politics as they can leverage their group to lower the costs of collective action. The SHG may lower the cost of coordination and may organize politics along gender lines rather than across income/caste/religious lines. As a result, this network may be a means of coordinating people with similar political interests. I will identify ways to measure the strength of the SHG network and then leverage any variation in this first-stage effect to test the relative importance of network strength on political participation. I will additionally include questions in the endline survey about *how* women have political participated, and specifically about whether they participated

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alone, with the household, or within their SHG group. I will also include questions about political preferences to compare with-in group similarities.

3. **Confidence** - In interviews, nearly every woman stated that the biggest benefit of being a member of an SHG is that now they are more confident and feel comfortable speaking to strangers or speaking up in group settings or when men are present. This confidence may translate into greater political participation because this female-only social network encourages women's political participation by creating a space to experiment with expression of ideas and opinions and therefore imbuing confidence. Pradan professionals in interviews noted that women have generally been excluded from household conversations of politics and therefore have never vocalized their preferences or beliefs nor experienced "political engagement". They stated that the SHG meetings provide women with a first opportunity to experiment with political voice and learn from others in the group. To test this mechanism, I will include questions in the baseline and endline surveys to estimate women's confidence particularly in speaking up. I will adapt questions from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to gauge respondent's confidence.

4. **Income** - SHGs act as a savings and credit institution that help to provide women with access to capital and finances. Women may be more likely to participate in politics due to greater economic security and potentially due to higher income. First, I will compare a balance test of participant income levels across villages receiving the network treatment and will pair match along this dimension when assigning the exposure treatment. Second, I will include questions for women in SHGs about how they have utilized the group finances and how this has impacted them and their household, including their time commitments.[3]

5. **Household Empowerment** - Others have theorized that household empowerment is a binding constraint to political empowerment (Chhibber, 2002). I will test this through the inclusion of a series of questions about intra-household dynamics but also by evaluating the heterogeneous treatment effects with respect to baseline levels of household empowerment and husband's gender biases.

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[3]In some of these SHGs, women may also have been provided with livelihoods training which would further increase their incomes.

3.4 Checks on Assumptions

3.4.1 SHGs lead to greater network connectivity

To test the assumption that participation in an SHG stimulated social networks and network connectivity, I will include in the baseline survey a set of questions to explicit estimate and draw the respondent's social network structure. I will do so using tools developed in sociology and the social capital assessment tool developed by Krishna and Shrader (1999). This will further allow me to test the assumption that SHGs are the primary social network for participant women, by determining the size and importance of this network within the entire network structure.

To further estimate women's social network connectivity, I will include in a survey of local leaders questions about the village-level network structure and the gender composition of networks. I will also include questions in the survey of husbands to better understand household networks.

Once these network structures have been identified, I will leverage this information to gain a deeper understanding of how the structure of networks matters for political participation. I will block the exposure treatment on the network structure (size and composition) and will further estimate heterogeneous effects based on network structure.

4 Data

4.1 Primary Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Individual-level data will be collected prior to the intervention in the form of a baseline survey. This survey will be extensive to gauge pre-existing behaviors but also to collect observational data that may help to identify other constraints to political participation. The baseline survey is expected to take one hour. I will also survey 50% of the primary female respondent's husbands to assess the differences in political participation and household decision-making roles.

Alongside relatively low levels of female political participation are striking social norms that politics is the man's space. For example, a majority of both men and women in India report that men make better political leaders than women (World Values Survey, 1990-2014). In the baseline survey, I will evaluate both men and women's explicit and implicit attitudes

and gender biases via baseline and endline Implicit Association Tests (IATs) to understand if better informed and better organized women are able to challenge prevailing social and gender norms. The baseline and IAT were field tested and piloted in August 2015.

Following the RCT, I will collect administrative data on attendance at Gram Sabha meetings, application filings with the GP and Janpad officials, voter turnout, and elected office holdings, to assess the impact of the gender and politics training on objective political outcomes. I will additionally conduct an endline survey after the training with all participant women to gauge self-reported changes in political participation, household decision-making, and attitudes towards gender roles. I will again survey the husbands to identify whether the gender and politics training for women had any spillover effect on men's reported attitudes towards women. This will be verified by re-administering the IAT with female respondents and their husbands to compare their implicit attitudes towards women and politics before and after the intervention and across the treated and control villages. The endline survey will be much shorter and is expected to take thirty minutes.

Data will be collected in-person by trained surveyors using android tablets to record responses. I will use the SurveyCTO software for these data collection exercises. All female respondents will be surveyed by female surveyors and male respondents (husbands) will be surveyed by male surveyors. The IAT will be implemented using the OpenSesame software on the tablet and will require tablet interaction by the respondent. Surveyors will be trained to walk the respondent through this process.

Data quality will be insured through four mechanisms: (1) back-checks of 10% of surveys with a focus on non-changing information and questions with difficult response-coding, (2) audio audits of in-field surveys, (3) random field-checks made by the researcher or the research assistant, and (4) daily testing of survey data for abnormalities.

4.2   Secondary Data Collection

I will also collect administrative data from local government offices on the reservation status of Gram Panchayats (local governments) for the passed elections. Gender-based reservations for electoral office are mandated in the Indian constitution and randomly assigned by the state electoral commission. The study team has already been in contact with the Madhya Pradesh electoral commission about the assignment process.

This random assignment of gender reservations will be overlaid with as-if random variation in access to Pradan's SHG program and later with the random variation in access to the civics-training program. I will utilize the positive shock to women's political participation in villages that had received the SHG intervention, which was empirically shown in Artiz Prillaman (2016) . I will then compare administrative data on public goods provision and economic development across four types of villages: (1) villages with no gender reservation and low female political participation, (2) villages with no gender reservation and high female political participation, (3) villages with a gender reservation and low female political participation, and (4) villages with a gender reservation and high female political participation. This administrative data will be used to elucidate the relationship between female political engagement, both as citizens and representatives, and local governance and development.

4.3 Outcome Variables

Individual-Level Outcomes:

- Direct political participation

  1. Plan to vote

  2. Attendance at Gram Sabha meeting

  3. Attend rally or party meeting

  4. Contacted Sarpanch/Janpad

  5. Filed application for government service

  6. Claimed government benefit

  7. Run for election/ held office

- Interest in politics

  1. Stated interest

  2. Frequency of discussion about politics

- Political Efficacy

  1. Comfort speaking up in community

  2. Believe government is responsive to demands

  3. Believe opinion matters

- Policy Preferences

- Trust in government

- Non-political Empowerment

  1. Household decision-making dynamics

  2. Domestic violence

  3. Self-efficacy and well-being

  4. Labor market status

  5. Income

  6. Desires for daughters (marriage, education, children)

Village-Level Outcomes:

1. Attendance at Gram Sabha

2. Gram Sabha meeting minutes (who spoke up)

3. Number/Type of applications filed to Sarpanch/Janpad

4. Voter Turnout

5. Vote Share by Party

6. Elected office and committee composition

7. NREGA registration

8. Number of domestic violence cases filed in court

5 Heterogeneous Effects

Heterogeneous effects will be considered along the following dimensions:

1. Baseline levels of political activity

2. Baseline levels of husband's political activity

3. Baseline tests of information

4. Baseline income and consumption

5. Baseline education level

6. Labor market status

7. Domestic violence and bargaining power

8. Baseline network connectivity

9. Composition of SHG (income, education)

10. Age of SHG

11. Frequency of SHG meetings

12. Gender reservation status of GP

13. Vote share for BJP in most recent election

14. Baseline gender biases of men and women

15. Baseline levels of household empowerment

16. Characteristics of NGO implementer

17. District and NGO team

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