Female Leaders and Women's Labor Market Dynamics

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Abstract

Female labor force participation remains low in many low- and middle-income country contexts. I estimate the impact of electing female politicians to state legislative assemblies in India on women's work using a close-election regression discontinuity design. I find that female political representation expands women's employment and business ownership at both the extensive and intensive margins. The employment gains arise in social services and in trade and hospitality, so they extend beyond sectors in which women are already concentrated, while the increase in female-owned firms comes from own-account enterprises operating from the home. These benefits for women do not come at the expense of men, whose employment rises by a similar proportion, pointing to an expansion in local economic activity rather than redistribution between the sexes. I find suggestive evidence that by investing more on public facilities, female politicians also expand public sector employment of women. These findings highlight that political representation can widen women's access to paid work through overall economic growth.

Keywords: Female political representation, Women's labor force participation, Gender and politics, India, Political economy

JEL Codes: J16, O15, D72, J21, O17

1 Introduction

Women's labor supply has important implications for women's empowerment and human capital investment. It is a key policy concern not only for fostering economic growth, but also for improving women's own well-being and that of the next generation (Atkin, 2009; Majlesi, 2016; Molina and Tanaka, 2023; Heath and Mushfiq Mobarak, 2015). Yet, female labor force participation (FLFP) remains low across many developing countries, especially in South Asia. India presents the sharpest version of the puzzle. The country has experienced rapid economic growth, rising female educational attainment, and falling fertility. Yet, its female employment rate decreased sharply from 35 percent in 2005 to 27 percent in 2012 to 26 percent in 2020 before going up to 32 percent in 2024 (Bank, 2026). However, the decline is not fully explained by women's preferences. Survey evidence indicates that a substantial share of women outside the labor force would work if given the opportunity (Fletcher, Pande and Troyer Moore, 2018). This puzzling trend raises a question about which constraints prevent women from accessing economic opportunities, and whether having more women represented in the government would relax them.

In this paper, I study the role of female representation in formal institutions in improving women's economic conditions, and the mechanisms through which it operates. In particular, I examine the effect of electing female politicians to India's state legislative assemblies on women's work, measured from the labor demand side where employers decide whom to hire. India is well-suited to answer this question for two reasons. First, state assembly seats are contested in open elections, so close races between a female and a male candidate provide quasi-random variation in representation. This is distinct from the quota system, in which a third of seats in the village councils are constitutionally reserved. Second, India conducts a complete enumeration of non-farm establishments, which makes the demand side observable at the firm level.

I identify this effect using a regression discontinuity design with close elections. I compare villages in constituencies where a female candidate narrowly defeated a male opponent to those where she narrowly lost. Outcomes come from the Economic Census, which records every non-farm establishment regardless of size or formality, together with the number of male and female

workers, whether each worker is hired, and the sex of the owner. This allows me to measure firm-level hiring of women, the industries in which that hiring occurs, and female business ownership, all at the village level, with treatment assigned at the assembly constituency level.

I document four main findings. First, electing a female politician substantially increases labor demand for women in wage work. Villages represented by a female politician are 4.9 percentage points more likely to have any non-farm firms employing women. Among villages with at least one such firm, the number of these firms rises by 64.4 percent, or 16.5 percent of all firms in the village. At the same time, the number of female workers expands by 69 percent, or 17 percent of total workers. There is some evidence that these gains appear in paid work as much as in unpaid family work. They concentrate in social services and in trade and hospitality, where female employment rises by 43.9 and 31.4 percent respectively. Women are a minority of workers in trade and hospitality, so the expansion extends beyond the sectors in which women are already concentrated.

Second, female political representation leads to an improvement in female business ownership as well. Treated villages are 15.4 percentage points more likely to have any female-owned firms. The number of those firms rises by 64.8 percent, equivalent to nearly four additional businesses or 6.9 percent of average total firms in comparison villages. The effect is largest for home-based (56.2 percent), own-account (57.2 percent), and self-financed (51.3 percent) enterprises, which are the forms of business women already operate. There is also modest expansion into commercial premises and institutional finance. Since women make up the large majority of the workforce in female-owned enterprises, more such businesses is itself a source of employment for women.

Third, these employment gains for women do not come at the expense of men. In fact, male employment rises by a similar proportion at 87.2 percent, as do firms employment men at 88 percent and male-owned firms at 72.3 percent. There is suggestive evidence that the economic benefits for both women and men reflect local economic growth. Imputed consumption per capita is 14.1 percent higher in treated villages and the imputed poverty rate is 11.2 percentage points lower. Together these point to a larger local non-farm economy rather than a reallocation of work

between the sexes.

Fourth, I find evidence for public provision as a plausible mechanism through which female politicians generate women's employment gains. In treated villages, the number of female workers goes up by 31.4 percent in public sector and by 27.6 percent in private firms delivering public services such as education, health and social work. In contrast, there is no detectable effect on female employment in firms that depend on government contracts. n the infrastructure side, treated villages have more schools and health facilities in place. They also have more sanctioned health staff, suggesting a higher allocation of resources to expand the spots in public sector. They also have more financial institutions and are more likely to have completed new roads during the female politician's term. Lastly, I find no support for change in norms as an influencing channel. I proxy for norms using two predetermined moderators, including whether the constituency had previously elected a female politician, and the baseline ratio of girls to boys. I find negative but marginally significant effects in places with more restrictive norms, suggesting the gains may have been driven by places already have less restrictive norms.

This paper contributes to the broad literature on the determinants of female labor force participation. Most existing evidence is largely concentrated on the labor supply side related to women's decision to work (see Heath et al. (2025) for detailed review). The smaller body of studies on the firm side documents gender discrimination in hiring decisions through job advertisements that explicitly targeting men (Kuhn and Shen, 2013; Chowdhury et al., 2018; Ningrum, Pansombut and Ueranantasun, 2020) and differential call-back rates in correspondence studies (Zhou, Zhang and Song, 2013; Nas Ozen et al., 2020). Far less has been studied from a political economy perspective. This paper highlights the role of formal institutions, specifically represented by women in increasing labor demand for female workers. The results show that demand for female labor is responsive to a change in political representation, raising both the number of firms employing women and the number of female workers in wage work. My contemporaneous findings are consistent with Priyanka (2020), who also uses close mixed-gender state assembly races and finds that exposure to a female politician during ages 18 to 20 raises the later-life probability of wage employment by

42 percent. Equally important, the effect found in my paper does not stem from crowding out jobs for men but possibly through local economic growth that benefits both women and men, which is an extension of Baskaran and Hessami (2025). They find that constituencies electing women experience faster expansion in nighttime lights. The results here say what that aggregate consists of, namely the entry and expansion of non-farm establishments.

This paper also contributes to the literature on the influence of female leaders on socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Existing studies show that female leaders increase public investment in family-oriented issues such as drinking water (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004), child health and education (Beaman, 2007; Clots-Figueras, 2012; Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras, 2014), and more recently environmental quality (Mahadevan and Jagnani, 2024). This literature treats public goods as an outcome in themselves, and where it examines employment, it does so through participation in public works programs (Deininger, Nagarajan and Singh, 2020). I extend the evidence in two ways. First, I show that female leaders also improve women's economic standing, through non-farm employment and female entrepreneurship. This is also consistent with Ghani, Kerr and O'Connell (2014), who find that women-owned establishments increased in unorganized manufacturing under village council reservations, concentrated in household-based operations and in industries where women entrepreneurs were already present. Second, I observe public provision and employment jointly. Schools and health staffing expand, and so does employment inside the establishments delivering those services, for public and private providers alike.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides background on female political representation in Indian state legislatures and the institutional setting. Section 3 describes the data and sample construction. Section 4 presents the identification strategy and its validity. Section 5 presents the main results and examines the mechanisms underlying them. Section 6 concludes.

2 Background

India's electoral system for state legislatures is organized around Assembly Constituencies (ACs). Each constituency elects one Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) to represent it in the state legislature through first-past-the-post elections held every five years. Each state has its own election schedule, with all constituencies within a state sharing the same schedule unless an assembly is dissolved and by-elections are called. State legislators have substantial policymaking authority. They control state budgets, pass legislation on education, health, agriculture, and infrastructure, and influence the allocation of resources across constituencies. In this paper, assembly constituencies are the unit of treatment assignment, while villages, which are nested within constituencies, are the unit at which outcomes are measured.

Women's representation in India's state legislatures is achieved entirely through competitive elections, with no constitutional reservation of seats at the state level for the time of the study in 2013. This stands in contrast to gram panchayats, where the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993) mandates that one-third of all seats be reserved for women, rotating across constituencies over election cycles. At the state MLA level, women account for approximately 8 to 10 percent of legislators on average, with considerable variation across states and election cycles. Because women compete for unreserved seats against male candidates, close elections between male and female candidates provide the identifying variation used in this paper.

Constituency boundaries are subject to periodic delimitation, the process of redrawing electoral districts to maintain roughly equal population across constituencies. The most recent delimitation was approved in 2008 following the 2001 Census, creating 4,126 Assembly Constituencies across 640 districts, the constituency boundaries under which all elections from 2008 onward are conducted. Because the paper's sample spans elections both before and after the 2008 delimitation, the analysis accounts for this boundary change in the construction of the village-to-constituency crosswalk, as described in Section 3.

3 Data

3.1 Election Data

The election data come from a harmonization of the Socioeconomic High-resolution Rural-Urban Geographic dataset (SHRUG) with the Trivedi Centre for Political Data (Jensenius and Verniers, 2017; Asher et al., 2021; Prakash, Rockmore and Uppal, 2019). Both sources draw on the Election Commission of India (ECI) records but contain some discrepancies in candidate characteristics that require further reconciliation. The harmonized dataset covers state assembly elections from 1990 to 2022 and provides information on vote shares, party affiliation, voter turnout, reservation status of the constituency, and the total number of contestants. Candidate affidavits are also available, containing information on assets, liabilities, education, criminal record, age, and gender. The analysis sample restricts to elections involving at least one female and one male candidate in the top two, enabling the close-election regression discontinuity design described in Section 4.

The key variables for this paper are the vote-share margin between the female and male top-two candidates, which is the running variable in the RD design, and the gender of the winning candidate. On average, each constituency has approximately 260,000 registered voters with a turnout rate of 73 percent. The average number of contestants is 11, with approximately one female candidate per constituency on average. Roughly 10 percent of elections in the sample are won by a female candidate.

3.2 Employment Data

I draw on two complementary sources to measure women's labor market outcomes: the Economic Census and the Population Census, both accessed through the SHRUG dataset (of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2011; Central Statistics Organisation and Programme Implementation, 2013; Asher et al., 2021).

The Economic Census is a complete enumeration of all non-farm establishments in India, conducted in 1990, 1998, 2005, and 2013. Unlike the Population Census, the Economic Cen-

sus records employment at the establishment level rather than at the individual level. It counts all workers present at non-farm establishments regardless of whether non-farm work is their primary activity. Critically, the Economic Census imposes no minimum firm size and covers both formal and informal establishments, capturing own-account workers, hired wage employees, and unpaid family workers across all non-farm sectors (**?**). The key variables for this paper are the number of non-farm establishments hiring female workers, the number of female workers in non-farm establishments, the decomposition of female workers into hired and unhired categories, and the breakdown of establishments by ownership type, including private, public, male-owned, and female-owned. The Economic Census data is also at the village or town level.

The Population Census is a decennial complete enumeration of India's population, conducted in 1991, 2001 and 2011. It classifies each individual worker according to their predominant activity during the period they worked. Workers who were economically active for six months or more are classified as *main workers*, labeled as long-term workers in this paper; those active for fewer than six months are classified as *marginal workers*, labeled as short-term workers. Within each category, workers are assigned to one of four mutually exclusive sectors, including cultivators (those farming their own or leased land), agricultural laborers (those working on others' land for wages), household industry workers, and other workers (covering manufacturing, trade, and services). The agricultural and non-agricultural breakdown used in the analysis corresponds to cultivators and agricultural laborers on one side and household industry and other workers on the other. The Population Census data is at the village level in rural areas and at the town level in urban areas.

The critical distinction between the two sources is the unit and concept of measurement. The Population Census captures each worker's primary occupation over the survey reference year, so a woman who spends most of her time in agriculture will be classified as an agricultural worker even if she participates in non-farm activity. The Economic Census captures establishment-level hiring, so the same woman would be recorded as a non-farm worker in any establishment where she is employed, regardless of how much of her time non-farm work represents. The SHRUG

linkage between geographic units and assembly constituencies across census rounds enables the village-to-constituency assignment that underlies the analysis.

I restrict the analysis to the Economic Census 2013 as main outcomes and triangulate the employment results with the Population Census 2011 using the overlapping elections between the two datasets.

3.3 Other data

To examine the public resource channel I draw on three additional sources. First, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), India's national rural roads program, provides administrative records on road sanctioning, contract award, stipulated and actual completion dates, and costs. I distinguish new connectivity from upgrades of existing roads, since new connectivity is allocated by habitation population thresholds and leaves legislators little discretion, whereas upgrades are discretionary. It is noted that SHRUG records only the earliest completed road in each village, so a village that received roads both before and during the electoral term appears only with the earlier one. Road outcomes are therefore measured with error that biases toward zero. Second, the Population Census Village and Town Directory records local public facilities and infrastructure, including schools, health facilities and road surface for both rural and urban areas.

4 Empirical Strategy

In this section, I describe the research design for estimating the causal impact of electing female state legislators on women's labor market outcomes. A natural starting point is to compare villages in treated ACs, i.e. those that elected female politicians, with villages in control ACs that elected male politicians in the same election year.

However, this simple comparison is likely biased for two reasons. First, unobserved characteristics may systematically differ across treated and control ACs. For instance, treated ACs may have higher education levels or less restrictive gender norms, making them more likely to elect female

politicians. Second, given the gap between outcome measurement years, specifically every ten years for Population Census data and every eight years for Economic Census data, a constituency may elect female candidates multiple times between rounds of outcomes. Moreover, the likelihood of electing a female politician may be correlated with previous election results. To address these concerns, I lay out the identification strategy below and test its validity.

4.1 Identification from Close Elections

To address the concern about unobservables, I employ a regression discontinuity design (RDD) exploiting close electoral races between male and female candidates. Let $Margin_{cse}$ denote the difference in vote share between the top-two female and male candidates in constituency c in state s in election term e. Treatment is defined as $FemaleWinner_{cse} \equiv \mathbb{1}(Margin_{cse} > 0)$. The probability of electing a female candidate jumps continuously at the cutoff of zero. If unobserved characteristics are continuous around this threshold, constituencies that narrowly elected a male candidate serve as a valid counterfactual for those that narrowly elected a female candidate, allowing identification of the causal effect.

I restrict the analysis to constituencies where the top two candidates are of opposite genders and the margin of victory is narrow, and to election terms immediately preceding the outcome measurement. The narrow margin of victory ensures quasi-random assignment of legislator gender. The RD specification takes the following form:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{vcse} = \alpha + \beta FemaleWinner_{cse} + \lambda f(Margin_{cse}) + \gamma_{se} + \mu_{vcse} \\ \forall\, Margin_{cse} \in (c-h, c+h) \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{vcse} is the female employment outcome for village v in constituency c in state s in election term e. $FemaleWinner_{cse}$ is an indicator equal to one if the female candidate narrowly defeated her male counterpart. $Margin_{cse}$ is the running variable indicating the vote margin, and h is the bandwidth around the cut-off $c = 0$. The function $f(Margin_{cse})$ is a polynomial of order n in the running variable, estimated separately on each side of the cut-off. I estimate equation (1) using

a local linear regression (Cattaneo, Jansson and Ma, 2020; Imbens and Lemieux, 2008; Hahn, Todd and Van der Klaauw, 2001) with the optimal bandwidth h selected by the robust data-driven approach proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014). The term γ_{se} denotes state-by-election-term fixed effects, absorbing time-varying state-level characteristics, and μ_{vcse} indicates village-level error term. Standard errors are clustered at the constituency level, the unit of treatment assignment (Abadie et al., 2022). The coefficient β captures the effect of elected female politicians within a given state election term.

4.2 Controlling for Past Election Results

Since state elections typically occur every five years, a constituency may elect a female politician multiple times between rounds of outcome measurement. Both treated and control constituencies may therefore have been treated in prior terms or become treated in subsequent ones. As a result, β in equation 1 conflates the effect of the most recent election with those of past elections, the results of which may themselves be serially correlated.

To isolate the effect of the most recent election from past election results, I augment equation 1 to include (i) the treatment status from the three elections preceding the most recent one, (ii) their vote margins, and (iii) binary indicators for whether a woman appeared among the top three candidates. I use three lags because the maximum gap between outcome years is ten years (for the Population Census), which accommodates at most three intervening elections in states with shorter electoral cycles. The augmented version is specified below.

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{vcse} =& \alpha + \beta FemaleWinner_{cse} + \lambda f(Margin_{cse}) + \\ & \sum_{k=1}^{3} [\phi_k FemaleWinner_{cse-k} + \lambda_k f(Margin_{cse-k}) + \sigma_k TopThree_{cse-k}] + \\ & \gamma_{se} + \mu_{vcse} \quad \forall\, Margin_{cse} \in (c-h, c+h) \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where $TopThree_{cse-k}$ equals one if the constituency had a woman among the top three candidates in election k periods prior to the most recent one. The presence of a female candidate on the

ballot is common, but a top-three finish signals that the party fielded her as a serious contender. Conditioning on these three sets of lagged controls ensures that β captures the treatment effect among constituencies with comparable electoral histories.

I test robustness with two additional specifications. First, I add baseline demographic characteristics. Second, I add the same controls to equation 2. Results are broadly similar across all four specifications.

4.3 Validity of The Research Design

The validity of the RDD estimation strategy requires election outcomes in constituencies with close elections are as good as random, making constituencies where female politicians narrowly lost good counterfactuals for those where they narrowly won. To verify this assumption, I conduct two tests.

First, I implement the McCrary (2008) density test around the vote share margin cutoff. If candidates or voters manipulated election outcomes to favor female candidates, we would observe a discontinuous jump in the density of female victories just above the threshold, indicating endogenous sorting. To test for such manipulation, Appendix Figure 1 plots the density of the running variable, the margin of vote share, on either side of the cutoff. The estimated discontinuity in log density is -0.090 (SE = 0.097), statistically indistinguishable from zero. This indicates no evidence of manipulation at the threshold, supporting the validity of the identifying assumption.

Second, I test whether villages in constituencies just below and above the cutoff are comparable on observable characteristics. I conduct balance tests on pre-election village characteristics for the Economic Census 2013. Table I panel A reports the effect of female politicians on village baseline demographic characteristics, including share of Schedule Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population and share of literate population. Panel B presents analogous estimates for village infrastructure characteristics, including number of primary schools, number of middle schools, and whether village has any paved roads. I also examine balance in pre-election outcomes between treated and comparison groups around the cutoff, as shown panel C. Overall I find no evidence of

TABLE I: Covariate Balance: Constituency Characteristics

	(1) Female-winner constituencies	(2) Male-winner constituencies	(3) p-value on difference	(4) RD estimate	(5) p-value on RD estimate
General constituency	0.603	0.710	0.000	−0.137	0.411
	(0.490)	(0.454)		(0.166)	
SC-reserved	0.251	0.161	0.003	0.267	0.070
	(0.434)	(0.367)		(0.147)	
ST-reserved	0.146	0.127	0.012	−0.134	0.297
	(0.354)	(0.333)		(0.129)	
Electors	194,205.9	184,835.2	0.809	4,488.7	0.604
	(65,873.0)	(74,593.1)		(8,648.3)	
Number of candidates	11.685	10.864	0.657	−1.318	0.021
	(5.207)	(5.270)		(0.573)	
Female MLA, $t-1$	0.128	0.068	0.003	0.022	0.731
	(0.267)	(0.194)		(0.065)	
Female MLA, $t-2$	0.117	0.065	0.005	−0.108	0.197
	(0.261)	(0.192)		(0.084)	
Female MLA, $t-3$	0.057	0.043	0.223	0.121	0.067
	(0.190)	(0.160)		(0.066)	
Constituency-elections	267	2,899			
Joint F test			0.981		

Notes: This table reports balance on predetermined constituency characteristics. Columns 1 and 2 report means with standard deviations in parentheses for constituency-elections within the estimation bandwidth in which a female and a male candidate respectively won a mixed-sex top-two race. Column 3 reports the p-value from a regression of each characteristic on the female-winner indicator, including state × election-term fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level. Column 4 reports the bias-corrected regression discontinuity estimate at the same fixed bandwidth, using a linear polynomial and a triangular kernel, with robust bias-corrected standard errors in parentheses following Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014); column 5 reports the corresponding robust bias-corrected p-value. Reservation status is set at delimitation, the electoral roll is finalized before polling, and candidate counts are determined at nomination, so all characteristics are predetermined with respect to the election outcome.

TABLE II: Covariate Balance: Village Characteristics

	(1) Female-winner constituencies	(2) Male-winner constituencies	(3) p-value on difference	(4) RD estimate	(5) p-value on RD estimate
Panel A. Demographics (Population Census 2001)					
Total population	1,589.1	1,546.5	0.672	846.2	0.004
	(3,980.1)	(4,857.0)		(296.6)	
Scheduled Caste population	289.9	267.8	0.458	238.3	0.003
	(637.1)	(739.6)		(81.5)	
Scheduled Tribe population	152.3	133.7	0.089	−40.2	0.603
	(427.9)	(399.7)		(77.2)	
Literate population	773.5	797.9	0.890	558.6	0.001
	(2,546.1)	(3,285.1)		(175.1)	
Panel B. Lagged economic outcomes (Economic Census 2005)					
Number of establishments	33.049	34.042	0.655	10.002	0.246
	(88.258)	(109.250)		(15.054)	
Mean firm size	2.182	2.134	0.315	0.303	0.264
	(4.892)	(7.041)		(0.272)	
Firms employing women	8.546	8.732	0.705	14.754	0.121
	(30.066)	(39.102)		(9.502)	
Female workers	17.974	19.668	0.646	24.323	0.099
	(101.097)	(138.927)		(14.748)	
Female-owned firms	1.889	2.267	0.966	8.107	0.276
	(15.019)	(22.423)		(7.445)	
Panel C. Lagged infrastructure (Population Census 2001)					
Any power supply	0.789	0.801	0.454	0.013	0.755
	(0.408)	(0.399)		(0.042)	
Primary schools	1.291	1.295	0.915	0.763	0.318
	(1.885)	(2.264)		(0.323)	
Hospitals	0.040	0.043	0.874	0.032	0.102
	(0.345)	(0.422)		(0.010)	
Banks	0.118	0.137	0.391	0.109	0.209
	(0.635)	(0.739)		(0.042)	
Any paved road	0.541	0.571	0.439	0.271	0.027
	(0.498)	(0.495)		(0.122)	
Villages	39,733	405,741			
Joint F test			0.221		

Notes: This table reports balance on village characteristics measured before the election. Columns 1 and 2 report means with standard deviations in parentheses for villages within the estimation bandwidth in constituencies where a female and a male candidate respectively won a mixed-sex top-two race. Column 3 reports the p-value from a regression of each characteristic on the female-winner indicator, including state $\times$ election-term fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level. Column 4 reports the bias-corrected regression discontinuity estimate using a linear polynomial and a triangular kernel, with robust bias-corrected standard errors in parentheses following Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014); column 5 reports the corresponding robust bias-corrected p-value.

systematic differences between the treated and control groups at the cutoff at pre-election period. Taken together, these results indicate that villages in constituencies just below the cutoff serve as credible counterfactuals for those just above it.

5 Effects of Female Politicians on Women's Labor Market

This section presents evidence that electing female politicians leads to significantly higher female employment and female entrepreneurship. I then highlight plausible mechanisms through which female politicians could impact women's economic opportunities.

5.1 Local Average Impacts on Women's Economic Conditions

I begin with the effect of electing a female politician on the hiring of female workers at the village level, with treatment assigned at the assembly constituency level using data from the Economic Census 2013. I focus on firms and female employment in non-farm sectors in table III. Column 1 shows that villages narrowly electing a female politician are 4.9 percentage points more likely to have any firms employing women, significant at the 10 percent level. The comparison mean is 0.884, so almost nine in ten villages already have such a firm. Thus, the room for expansion on this margin is limited. The estimate closes roughly two-fifths of the remaining gap.

The remaining columns show effects at the intensive margins. Column (2) shows that the number of firms employing women rises by 0.497 log points, which translates into an increase of 64.4 percent (using formula $e^{\hat{\beta}} - 1$), significant at the 5 percent level. Against a comparison mean of 14 establishments within the bandwidth, this amounts to roughly nine additional firms, or 16.5 percent of all firms in the village. Column (3) shows that the number of women employed in the non-farm sector rises by 69 percent, significant at the 5 percent level, against a comparison mean of 31 female workers. The additional number of female workers accounts for 17 percent of total workers. Columns (4) and (5) break down female workers into hired and unhired. Hired workers are paid employees receiving a wage or salary. Unhired workers receive no wage and comprise

TABLE III: Effects on Firms Employing Women and Female Employment

	(1) Any firms employing women	(2) Log firms employing women	(3) Log employed women	(4) Log hired women	(5) Log unhired women
Female winner	0.049*	0.497**	0.525**	0.429**	0.329
	(0.026)	(0.238)	(0.240)	(0.176)	(0.271)
Bandwidth	13.216	17.842	12.989	16.145	12.181
Effective observations	20,856	20,744	18,522	18,500	13,326
Clusters	145	155	133	153	124
Comparison mean	0.884	14.198	30.694	13.855	17.458
Proportional effect	0.056	0.644	0.690	0.535	0.390
Additional firms or workers		9.146	21.173	7.419	6.808
Share of total firms or workers		0.165	0.170	0.057	0.055

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation (2) of the effect of electing a female politician on the set of establishments employing women. Outcomes are from the Economic Census 2013. Column 1 is an indicator for whether the village contains any establishment employing at least one woman; column 2 is the log count of such establishments; columns 3–5 report log counts of female workers in total, and separately those hired and not hired. Non-hired workers comprise working proprietors and unpaid family members. The running variable is the vote-share margin between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history over the previous three elections, including whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote-share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing control values are set to zero and missingness indicators included. Control coefficients are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors, clustered at the constituency level, in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

working proprietors and unpaid family members assisting the business. Hired female workers rise by 53.5 percent and statistically significant at the 5 percent level, while unhired female workers go up by 39 percent but are imprecisely estimated. The two effects are not statistically distinguishable from each other, and as a share of the total workforce they are similar in size at 5.7 and 5.5 percent.

I next examine which industries absorb the expansion in female employment. Table IV breaks down the employment effects by industry type. Using industry codes harmonized by SHRUG, I group industries by own-account activities typically feasible at household scale, social services delivered publicly or institutionally, trade and hospitality, male-dominated capital-intensive activities, and factory manufacturing. Female workers increase by 43.9 percent in social services, which comprise education, health, social work, community organizations, and libraries, and by 31.4 percent in trade and hospitality. Both coefficients are statistically significant at the 5 and 10 percent level respectively. Meanwhile, the estimate for own-account activities is 40.8 percent but imprecise. Male-dominated industries, including mining, utilities, construction, transport, vehicle repair, and factory manufacturing show effects closer to zero and statistically insignificant.

The two industry groups that gain significantly differ sharply in their baseline gender com-

TABLE IV: Effects on Female Employment by Industry

	Log female workers				
	(1) Own-account	(2) Social services	(3) Trade and hospitality	(4) Male-dominated	(5) Manufacturing
Female winner	0.342	0.364**	0.273*	0.093	0.026
	(0.349)	(0.144)	(0.142)	(0.145)	(0.216)
Bandwidth	15.187	15.986	16.608	16.354	14.824
Effective observations	8,579	16,749	12,646	3,911	4,848
Clusters	146	147	151	149	141
Comparison mean	6.225	7.328	5.941	0.908	2.501
Proportional effect	0.408	0.439	0.314	0.098	0.026
Additional workers	2.537	3.219	1.866	0.089	0.065
Share of total workers	0.020	0.025	0.014	0.001	0.001

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation (2) of the effect of electing a female politician, separately by industry cluster. Outcomes are from the Economic Census 2013. Industries are grouped by own-account activities feasible at household scale (food processing, tobacco, textiles, apparel, leather, personal services); social services delivered publicly or institutionally (education, health, social work, community organizations, libraries); trade and hospitality; male-dominated capital- or premises-intensive activities (mining, utilities, construction, transport, vehicle repair); and factory-type manufacturing. Panel A reports log counts of establishments; Panel B reports log counts of female workers within each cluster. The running variable is the vote-share margin between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state $\times$ election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history over the previous three elections, including whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote-share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing control values are set to zero and missingness indicators included. Control coefficients are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors, clustered at the constituency level, in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

position. Social services are among the most female-intensive activities in the rural non-farm economy, so an expansion there is consistent with women entering sectors where they are already concentrated. Trade and hospitality are not since Women are a minority of workers in both. The employment expansion therefore extends beyond activities already dominated by women, which implies that some constraints on women's work are being relaxed.

Next, I turn to female-owned enterprises, reported in Table V. Outcomes refer to private proprietary firms with recorded owner sex in the Economic Census. Panel A, column (1) shows that villages narrowly electing a female legislator are 15.4 percentage points more likely to have any female-owned firm, significant at the 5 percent, against a comparison mean of 0.554. This is a 27.7 percent increase relative to the base rate. Conditional on having at least one, the number of female-owned firms increases by 64.8 percent, significant at the 5 percent level. Given that the comparison villages within the optimal bandwidth have 6 female-owned firms on average, the effect implies four additional female-owned businesses, or equivalent to 6.9 percent of all firms in the village.

Columns (3) and (4) separate firms by premises. Home-based female-owned firms go up by 56.2 percent. Meanwhile, those operating from commercial premises rise by 28.4 percent. Both coefficients are significant at the 10 percent level. The point estimate is larger for home-based enterprises. The same ordering appears in level terms. The increase in home-based firms accounts for 4.5 percent of all firms in the village, against 0.8 percent for firms operating from commercial premises.

Panel B separates female-owned establishments by size and by source of finance. In columns (1) and (2), single-worker or own-account firms marginally increase by 57.2 percent, while firms with more than one worker go up by 25.7 percent, but statistically insignificant. Since female-owned enterprises are predominantly own-account, the expansion is largest in the category where women are already most represented. Turning to finance, self-financed firms rise by 51.3 percent and institutionally financed firms by 23.9 percent, significant at the 10 and 5 percent levels respectively.

Taken together, these results show a sizable expansion of female-owned enterprise, concentrated in the forms of business women already tend to operate, namely home-based, own-account,

TABLE V: Effects on Female-owned Enterprises

Panel A. Extensive margin and location

	(1) Any female-owned firms	(2) Log female-owned firms	(3) Log female-owned home-based firms	(4) Log female-owned firms with commercial premises
Female winner	0.154**	0.499**	0.446*	0.250*
	(0.066)	(0.234)	(0.270)	(0.142)
Bandwidth	19.203	18.189	18.599	18.237
Effective observations	24,256	13,594	10,751	9,139
Clusters	168	158	163	158
Comparison mean	0.554	5.952	4.435	1.518
Proportional effect	0.277	0.648	0.562	0.284
Additional firms		3.856	2.493	0.431
Share of total firms		0.069	0.045	0.008

Panel B. Size and financing of female-owned enterprise

	(1) Log single-worker firms	(2) Log firms with more than one worker	(3) Log self-financed firms	(4) Log institutionally financed firms
Female winner	0.452*	0.229	0.414*	0.214**
	(0.245)	(0.155)	(0.245)	(0.094)
Bandwidth	20.126	16.921	17.887	16.922
Effective observations	11,675	7,762	10,719	832
Clusters	168	152	155	136
Comparison mean	4.638	1.314	4.139	0.069
Proportional effect	0.572	0.257	0.513	0.239
Additional firms	2.651	0.338	2.124	0.017
Share of total firms	0.047	0.006	0.038	0.000

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation (2) of the effect of electing a female politician on female business ownership. Outcomes are from the Economic Census 2013, and refer to private proprietary establishments. Panel A, column 1 is an indicator for whether the village contains any female-owned establishment; columns 2–4 report log counts in total and separately for establishments operating from residential and from commercial premises. Panel B reports log counts of female-owned establishments by number of workers, where the count includes the working proprietor. The running variable is the vote-share margin between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history over the previous three elections, including whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote-share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing control values are set to zero and missingness indicators included. Control coefficients are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors, clustered at the constituency level, in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE VI: Effect of Electing a Female Politician on Men's Employment and Business Ownership

	(1) Any firms employing men	(2) Log firms employing men	(3) Log employed men	(4) Any male-owned firms	(5) Log male-owned firms
Female winner	0.023***	0.631**	0.602**	0.046*	0.544**
	(0.008)	(0.247)	(0.270)	(0.025)	(0.228)
Bandwidth	18.976	22.833	17.443	16.354	23.481
Effective observations	25,188	26,234	23,229	22,704	25,149
Clusters	174	179	155	164	183
Comparison mean	0.971	42.227	98.423	0.907	35.704
Proportional effect	0.023	0.880	0.827	0.051	0.723
Additional firms or workers		37.148	81.364		25.797
Share of total firms or workers		0.656	0.622		0.455

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation 2 of the effect of electing a female politician on men's employment and business ownership, the male counterparts to Tables III and V. Outcomes are from the Economic Census 2013 and are measured at the village level. The running variable is the margin in vote shares between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history from the previous three elections, namely whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing values in control variables are replaced with zero and missingness indicators are included; coefficients on control variables are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, a triangular kernel, and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

and self-financed firms. There is modest evidence of extension beyond that, into commercial premises and institutional finance.

To assess whether the expansion in women's employment reflects a redistribution of local jobs toward women, I estimate the same specifications for male employment. As shown in Table VI, villages represented by female politicians also experience an expansion in male employment of similar proportion. Although 97.1 percent of control villages already have firms employing men, leaving little room on the extensive margin, treated villages are 2.3 percentage points more likely to contain one, closing almost all the remaining gap. At the intensive margin, the number of such firms increases further by 88 percent, nearly doubling the comparison mean. The same pattern occurs for the number of employed men as well. Both coefficients are statistically significant at the 5 percent level. Similarly, male-owned enterprises expand at both margins. Treated villages are 4.6 percentage points more likely to have any male-owned firms compared to the control mean of 90.7 percent. The number of male-owned firms also significantly rises by 72.3 percent. The gains in female employment therefore do not come at the expense of men. What the results show is not a redistribution of employment between the sexes, but an expansion in jobs for both women and

men.

All together, the findings are comparable with existing studies on the effect of female politicians. The closest is Priyanka (2020), who finds that exposure to a female MLA during ages 18 to 20 raises the later-life probability of wage employment by 42 percent for affected cohorts. My estimates are of a similar or larger order, despite using counts of establishments and workers at the village level within a single electoral term, rather than an individual's employment probability accumulated over several years of exposure. Ghani, Kerr and O'Connell (2014) document entry of women-owned establishments in unorganized manufacturing under panchayat reservations with no corresponding effect on female employment. The ownership results here are consistent with theirs, including the concentration in home-based and own-account firms, while the employment results are not, which may reflect the higher tier of government at which representation operates. However, a close-election design identifies a local average treatment effect at the threshold. Plus, constituencies decided by narrow margins are unusually competitive. If political effort responds to electoral pressure, these estimates will likely exceed the average effect of electing a woman across all constituencies.

5.2 Mechanisms

To understand the channels through which female politicians influence female employment at the village level, I examine three mechanisms, including an expansion in local economic activity, the distribution of public resources, and changes in gender norms.

5.2.1 Local Economic Growth

The results so far show that employment rises for women and for men in similar proportion, which points to an expansion in the size of the local economy rather than a reallocation of work between the sexes. I test this directly using household consumption measures.

I use the imputed consumption measure constructed from the SECC 2012 and IDHS 2011-2012 by Asher et al. (2021). In Table VII, I find that annual consumption per capita is 14.1 percent

higher in villages that narrowly elect a female politician, significant at the 5 percent level. With the poverty line defined at 31 rupees per day of the consumption per capita, the poverty rate falls by 11.2 percentage points, or 29.6 percent of the comparison mean. These magnitudes are large and should be interpreted with caution given that both outcomes are predicted rather than measured, and that the poverty rate is derived from the same underlying consumption estimate instead of measured independently.

The direction is nonetheless consistent with a shift in local economic conditions that raises income broadly, which benefits women as participants in a larger local economy. If female representation reallocated existing work from men to women, aggregate household consumption would be largely unchanged, since the same jobs would simply be held by different people. Instead employment and consumption both rise, and they rise together with male employment

This is consistent with what is documented in Baskaran et al. (2024) in which constituencies electing female legislators experience better economic growth as measured by nighttime luminosity to capture aggregate activities. But it does not carry information about who contributes to this economic growth. The establishment-level results here expand the aggregate measures to shed light on the entry and expansion of non-farm establishments.

5.2.2 Public Provision

As the employment results point to the largest expansion in social services, I extend further to examine the public provision channel to understand what female politicians deliver to their constituencies to explain this pattern.

Table **??** reports the effects on local public infrastructure, measured in the Population Census 2011 Village and Town Directories. Villages represented by female politicians have 35.1 percent more schools and 16.5 percent more health facilities. In addition, female politicians also secure a larger allocation of health personnel. Sanctioned health staff increases by 21.8 percent, significant at the 1 percent level. Health staff in position rises by 10.9 percent, though imprecisely estimated.

In addition, treated villages also have 12 percent more financial institutions, comprising com-

TABLE VII: Effect of Electing a Female Politician on Household Living Standards

	(1) Log estimated annual per capita consumption	(2) Estimated poverty rate
Female winner	0.141**	−0.112**
	(0.065)	(0.051)
Bandwidth	17.282	17.256
Effective observations	22,821	22,821
Clusters		
Comparison mean	16,706.68	0.379

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation 2 of the effect of electing a female politician on village-level living standards. Outcomes are small-area estimates of annual per capita consumption and of the headcount poverty rate, constructed from the Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011–12 and distributed through SHRUG. The running variable is the margin in vote shares between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history from the previous three elections, namely whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing values in control variables are replaced with zero and missingness indicators are included; coefficients on control variables are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, a triangular kernel, and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

mercial bank branches, cooperative banks and ATMs, significant at 1 percent level. This may explain the modest expansion of institutionally financed female enterprises documented earlier, if access to formal credit improves for women in constituencies represented by female legislators.

Columns (6) and (7) examine delivery under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Treated villages are 10.6 percentage points more likely to have a new road completed during the term, significant at the 10 percent level, while the estimate for upgraded roads is small, negative and statistically indistinguishable from zero. Taken together, these documented patterns are consistent with the delivery of public services and public resources as the instrument in which female politicians increase female employment.

These patterns are consistent with existing evidence that female legislators direct more investment toward public goods. Clots-Figueras (2012) finds that women in Indian state assemblies invest more in primary education, and Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras (2014) document corresponding effects on health at the same tier of government. The results here echo both these studies and add further evidence that the expansion reaches health staffing and facilities.

Next, I test whether these public goods investment translate into employment for women. Table **??** reports female employment in the establishments that deliver these social services, separated by ownership. In panel A, the number of publicly owned establishments employing women rises by 18.5 percent, significant at 10 percent level. The number of women employed in those establishments rises by 31.4 percent, significant at the 5 percent level.

Panel B covers privately owned establishments in government-contract dependent industries, including construction, utilities, stone and cement, railways and sanitation, and in public provision industries, including education, health, social work, community organizations and libraries. The number of firms in government-contract dependent industries decreases by 17.3 percent with female workers falling by 15.3 percent, though neither coefficient is statistically insignificant. In contrast, the number of private firms in public provision industries increases by 10.8 percent with female workers going up by 27.6 percent, significant at the 5 percent level.

These patterns show that what villages receive is social services delivery, mainly education, health and social work, supplied by both state-owned and private establishments. Since education and health are among the most female-intensive activities in the rural non-farm economy, an expansion in these facilities maps directly onto the industry pattern in the main employment results. Thus, as a plausible mechanism, the instrument through which female legislators raise female employment is service delivery.

5.2.3 Norms

The second channel of interest is whether the gains in female employment reflect change in gender norms. While the direct measure of norms is beyond the scope of this paper, I proxy for it in two ways. The first is electoral history. If the results operate through changing norms, then in villages electing a female politician for the first time, women would update their beliefs about what is attainable after observing a woman hold office. Thus, the effect should be larger in villages where no female politicians has previously been elected. The second is the baseline child sex ratio. If norms change where they were most restrictive, measured by a lower baseline ratio of girls to boys,

TABLE VIII: Public Infrastructure and Service Provision

	(1) Log schools	(2) Log health facilities	(3) Log sanctioned health staff	(4) Log health staff in position	(5) Log financial institutions	(6) Any new road completed	(7) Any upgraded road completed
Female winner	0.301**	0.153***	0.197***	0.103	0.113***	0.106*	−0.025
	(0.132)	(0.040)	(0.074)	(0.071)	(0.035)	(0.056)	(0.087)
Bandwidth	16.331	13.338	10.803	12.634	13.677	22.867	16.531
Effective observations	16,349	6,018	4,834	4,828	12,808	3,687	1,533
Clusters	122	107	93	101	109		
Comparison mean	3.318	0.742	2.029	1.789	1.072	0.420	0.204
Proportional effect	0.351	0.165	0.218	0.109	0.120	0.143	−0.034
Additional facilities	1.163	0.123	0.442	0.195	0.128		

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation 2 of the effect of electing a female politician on local public infrastructure and service provision. Columns 1 to 5 use the Population Census 2011 Village and Town Directories, combining rural and urban facility counts. Schools comprise government and private institutions at all levels; health facilities comprise community health centers, primary health centers and sub-centers, maternity and child welfare centers, dispensaries and hospitals; health staff are doctors and paramedical personnel, reported separately as posts sanctioned and posts filled. Financial institutions comprise commercial bank branches, cooperative banks and ATMs. Columns 6 and 7 use the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana administrative records, and record whether a road of each type was completed between the election and the outcome year. The running variable is the margin in vote shares between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history from the previous three elections, namely whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing values in control variables are replaced with zero and missingness indicators are included; coefficients on control variables are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, a triangular kernel, and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

the effect should be larger in those villages.

Table **??**, columns (1) to (3) interacts treatment with an indicator for no prior female politician elected in the previous three elections. There is no significant difference between villages that had no prior female politicians and those that had done so repeatedly, for the log number of firms employing women, the log number of female workers, or the log number of female-owned firms. All three interaction coefficients are all negative and imprecise, pointing if anything in the direction opposite to the hypothesis. Columns (4) to (6) split constituencies at the median baseline child sex ratio. These interactions are also negative and marginally significant, ranging from -0.135 to -0.144 in magnitudes. I therefore find no support for a norms channel. Some indicate that the effects are concentrated in places with less restrictive norms to begin with.

TABLE IX: Female Employment by Public and Private Sector

Panel A. Publicly owned establishments

	(1) Log public firms employing women	(2) Log women employed in public firms
Female winner	0.185*	0.273**
	(0.101)	(0.125)
Bandwidth	19.876	17.223
Effective observations	16,333	15,268
Clusters	167	152
Comparison mean	1.942	5.041
Proportional effect	0.204	0.314
Additional firms or workers	0.396	1.582

Panel B. Privately owned establishments, by industry type

	(1) Log firms in contract-dependent industries	(2) Log women employed in contract-dependent industries	(3) Log firms in public provision industries	(4) Log women employed in public provision industries
Female winner	−0.190	−0.166	0.103	0.244**
	(0.165)	(0.215)	(0.078)	(0.123)
Bandwidth	18.330	12.241	15.483	12.960
Effective observations	1,173	2,264	4,283	6,641
Clusters	144	120	145	104
Comparison mean	0.134	1.143	0.405	2.693
Proportional effect	−0.173	−0.153	0.108	0.276
Additional firms or workers	−0.023	−0.175	0.044	0.745

Notes: This table reports regression discontinuity estimates from equation 2 distinguishing public provision from patronage as channels for the employment effects in Table **??**. Outcomes are from the Economic Census 2013 and are measured at the village level. Panel A covers establishments recorded as publicly owned. Panel B covers privately owned establishments only, split between industries whose revenue depends substantially on government contracts, principally construction and civil engineering, and industries that deliver publicly provided services, namely education, health, social work, membership organizations and libraries (SHRIC 80, 81, 83, 85 and 88). Note that Section O of the National Industrial Classification, public administration and defense, is excluded from the Economic Census extract, so public employment here refers to state-owned establishments in other sectors rather than to government administration. The running variable is the margin in vote shares between the female and male top-two candidates. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history from the previous three elections, namely whether the constituency elected a female MLA, the vote share margin, and whether a female candidate placed in the top three. Missing values in control variables are replaced with zero and missingness indicators are included; coefficients on control variables are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, a triangular kernel, and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2024). Robust bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE X: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects by Baseline Proxies for Social Norms

	(1) Log firms employing women	(2) Log female workers	(3) Log female-owned firms	(4) Log firms employing women	(5) Log female workers	(6) Log female-owned firms
Female winner	0.722	0.660	0.625	0.572**	0.631**	0.535**
	(0.475)	(0.521)	(0.409)	(0.234)	(0.273)	(0.219)
Female winner ×	−0.330	−0.142	−0.249			
No prior female MLA	(0.472)	(0.516)	(0.415)			
Female winner ×				−0.135**	−0.139	−0.144*
Below-median child sex ratio				(0.059)	(0.087)	(0.075)
Bandwidth	17.842	12.989	18.189	17.842	12.989	18.189
Effective observations	20,744	18,522	13,594	20,744	18,522	13,594
Clusters	155	133	158	155	133	158
Comparison mean	14.198	30.694	5.952	14.198	30.694	5.952

Notes: This table tests whether the effects in Tables III and V differ with local gender norms, using two predetermined proxies. Columns 1 to 3 interact the female-winner indicator with whether the constituency had not previously elected a female MLA, which proxies for first exposure to female political representation. Columns 4 to 6 interact it with an indicator for a child sex ratio below the sample median at baseline, where a lower ratio indicates more restrictive norms. Outcomes are from the Economic Census 2013 and are measured at the village level. The running variable is the margin in vote shares between the female and male top-two candidates, and the interaction specifications include the moderator and its interaction with the running variable on each side of the cutoff. All specifications include state × election-term fixed effects and control for electoral history from the previous three elections. Missing values in control variables are replaced with zero and missingness indicators are included; coefficients on control variables are not shown. All specifications use a linear polynomial, a triangular kernel, and the MSE-optimal bandwidth from the corresponding main specification. Robust bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the assembly constituency level are in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

This paper examines whether electing female politicians to India's state legislative assemblies affects women's labor market outcomes. I answer it from the labor demand side by examining non-farm firms and their hiring practices. Using a close-election regression discontinuity design that compares villages in constituencies where a female candidate narrowly won against those where she narrowly lost, I find that employers hire more women when a female leader holds office. Villages narrowly electing a female politician have more firms employing women. Those firms also hire more women. The gains in female employment are concentrated in paid rather than unpaid work. They are also concentrated in social services, trade and hospitality sectors instead of in home-based or own-account activity. In addition, I also document that female-owned enterprises expand as well, mainly driven by those operating in commercial premises rather than from the home.

These gains in women's work do not come at the expense of men's work. Male employment rises by a similar proportion, so the gender composition of local economic activity is unchanged. What the data show is not a reallocation of employment between women and men but an expansion of employment for both. Women participate in that expansion in proportion to the position they already occupied. I find suggestive evidence that the expansion in employment may run through local economic growth, with higher predicted consumption and lower predicted poverty.

The mechanism evidence points to the delivery of public services rather than to the allocation of government contracts. Female employment rises in publicly owned establishments and in private firms in public-provision industries such as education and health, and shows no corresponding increase in industries dependent on government procurement, which is where political capture of resources in this setting has been documented. The infrastructure results follow the same pattern, in which treated villages are no more likely to receive a new road under a program that allocates new connectivity by population thresholds, but are substantially more likely to receive a road upgrade, which is the discretionary margin. These results are highly relevant to India's 106th Constitutional Amendment, which reserves one third of state legislative seats for women. My results suggest

that such a reform can raise women's employment and improve local economic conditions, and that it will do so through broad local economic expansion rather than through channels targeted at women.

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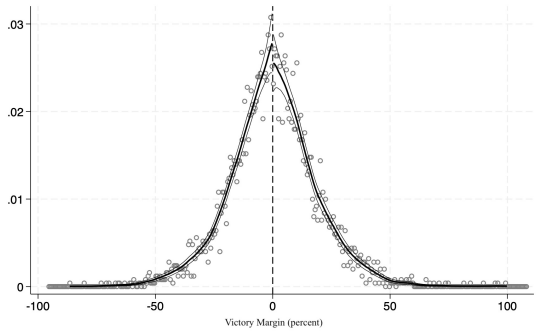
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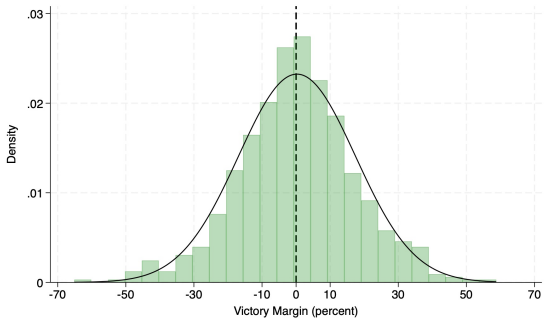
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FIGURE A1: Continuity of the Running Variables



(A) McCrary Density Test



(B) Density of the Running Variable

Notes: The figures shows the continuity of the running variable, which is the difference in the vote share of the female candidate and her male opponent. The estimated size of the discontinuity in the running variable (log difference in height) is -.090 (SE = .097)