

Voluntary Party Gender Quotas as Reputation Building Strategies

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Abstract

Why and when do political parties voluntarily adopt policies that are electorally costly in the short run? Existing explanations of party policy choice generally assume that adoption delivers immediate electoral benefit, yet parties routinely commit to publicly unfavorable policies whose payoff materializes only if voter preferences shift in their favor years later. Using voluntary gender quota adoption, I develop a theory of unpopular policy adoption as a long-run reputation-building strategy. I argue that opposition parties facing electoral threat from a better-resourced incumbent can use costly, semi-permanent commitments to signal credibility to voters, accruing a reputational premium when voter preferences shift. I combine a two-period signaling model with descriptive evidence from cross-national analyses of 73 voluntary party gender quota adoptions shows that adopters are disproportionately opposition and left-leaning parties, that they incur short-run vote-share losses, and that the losses can reverse over subsequent election cycles. Qualitative case studies of two Indian regional parties, the Biju Janata Dal and the All India Trinamool Congress, complement the model and descriptive analyses by tracing their 2019 quota adoption and electoral outcomes over two cycles. The framework offers a unifying account of party behavior that integrates strategic electoral incentives with ideological commitments, and can generalize to other contexts of costly policy adoption.

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1 Introduction

Why and when do political parties adopt policies that are electorally costly in the short run, with long-term payoffs only realized if voter preferences eventually shift in favor of such policies? Existing explanations of policy adoption generally assume that parties adopt policies which deliver immediate electoral benefit (Downs 1957; Strøm 1990). Yet parties routinely commit to publicly unfavorable policies whose short-run effect may reduce their vote shares. For instance, the Australian Labor Party suffered large electoral losses in Queensland in 2019 for proposing pro-climate policy in a coal-dependent region (Sakzewski and Healy 2019). Or in Germany, against the backdrop of rising anti-immigration sentiment, SPD and Green Party proposals for immigration reform have been cited as one of the reasons for electoral losses among their usual voters during the 2025 election (Ranft and Schwickert 2025).

In this paper, I develop a theory that explains unpopular policy adoption by political parties as a long-term reputation-building strategy. In doing so, I reframe the time horizon of electoral and ideological payoffs to party behavior from the short-run to long-run. To illustrate the argument, I use the case of voluntary internal party gender quotas. Voluntary party quotas, wherein parties assign a proportion of party lists to women, are often adopted in the absence of legal mandate.¹ Their adoption poses both an internal cost to the party and an electoral cost. They impose a visible and partially irreversible internal cost to the party as incumbent male politicians are required to surrender their seats. Electorally, voters' appetite for quotas shifts slowly over time and is often contested as they wrestle representational fairness with meritocracy (Krook, Lovenduski and Squires 2009). Yet, voluntary gender quotas have been widely adopted by parties across the globe—India, the United Kingdom, Canada, Malaysia, Guatemala, New Zealand, and

¹There are various different types of quotas in place for women in politics around the world. Quotas can be categorized into four types: reserved seats, party quotas, legislative quotas, and soft quotas (see Krook, Lovenduski and Squires (2009) for details). The type of quotas my model considers are soft quotas - they are adopted voluntarily by political parties, in the absence of legislation mandating them, they change party composition for candidate selection, and do not have sanctions for non-compliance. It is up to the political party to adopt and implement the quota and there is no oversight over whether the party implements a quota it announces.

Turkey are but a handful of countries.² Existing scholarship on explaining quota adoption offers two broad sets of arguments. The first focuses on purely electoral incentives—capturing a new electorate, overcoming long periods in opposition, responding to other parties adopting quotas, and appearing ideologically committed to equality (Allie 2026; Black 2004; Caul 2001; Dancygier 2017; Kolinsky 1991; Murray, Krook and Opello 2012; Panandiker and Mehra 1996; Perrigo 1996; Weeks, Meguid, Kittilson and Coffé 2022). The second focuses on top-down and bottom-up rights-based mobilization, driven by women voters or women within parties and a broader trend towards equality (Baldez 2004; Bruhn 2003; Caul 2001; Davidson-Schmich 2006; Kittilson 2006; Krook 2004,0; Murray, Krook and Opello 2012; Schmidt 2003). Both sets of arguments presume immediate electoral benefits to the party. Indeed, political parties are strategic actors attempting to maximize their electoral success. However, these arguments have limited explanatory power when quota adoption is unlikely to deliver benefits in the short-term and may, in fact, cause electoral losses.

Offering an alternative explanation for quota adoption that shifts focus from short-term to long-term gains, I argue that voluntary party quotas can be a long-run reputation-building strategy. Opposition parties facing electoral threat from a better-resourced incumbent and unable to compete with the incumbent’s policy advantage can use quota adoption to signal credible commitment to gender equality. Because nominating women under a quota requires sitting male representatives to give up safe seats, the signal is costly and at least semi-permanent for the duration of the elected term—more credible than a welfare program for women that can be revoked or not implemented once a party wins an election. If voter preferences subsequently shift toward favoring quotas, the early adopter accrues a reputational premium that later opportunistic adopters cannot claim. This account complements Izzo (2023), who shows that ideological parties may strategically lose elections by adopting unpopular policies to *teach* voters about the policy’s true value through experience. In my framework, by contrast, the shift in voter preferences is exogenous to the party’s action. Adoption does not inform voters about a policy’s merits,

²<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database>

but credibly signals the party’s *type*—whether it is genuinely committed to gender equality. When preferences move, the early adopter captures the reputational premium, rather than later opportunists, who are either trying to shift voter preferences or bandwagoning to take credit from preferences shifting. The theory relies on two main scope conditions: adopters should be opposition (typically regional) parties under electoral threat and should be early movers before the policy is widespread.

A two-period signaling model formalizes the argument and shows that unpopular policy adoption occurs in equilibrium under three conditions: the party intrinsically values the policy at least weakly, the reputational benefit from signaling is sufficient, and the probability that voter preferences shift in the next period is high enough that the expected reputational gain exceeds the period-one electoral loss. I provide two pieces of descriptive evidence. First, using cross-national data on 73 voluntary party gender quota adoptions, I present results showing that over 60 percent of adopters are opposition parties and 72 percent are left or Green parties, that they experience electoral losses in the period of adoption but recover modestly over time to pre-adoption levels, and that over time, attitudes towards women’s political inclusion—a proxy for attitudes towards quota adoption—have become more favorable. I supplement this descriptive evidence with qualitative case studies of two political parties in India, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), that publicly adopted voluntary quotas during the 2019 national election. The BJD implemented a 33% quota, while TMC nominated 40% women during the election. No Indian party had previously implemented a national-election quota. Both parties made public proclamations highlighting their commitment to gender equality within their parties. When results were announced, though both parties had higher shares of elected women representatives, their seat share in parliament declined relative to their 2014 shares—the predicted outcome from the model during period one. During the 2024 national election, both BJD and TMC once again nominated over 33 percent women. Against this backdrop, parties’ and voter sentiments on reservation for women in politics shifted. In September 2023, India enacted the Women’s Reservation Bill (106th Constitutional Amendment Act), reserving 33 percent seats in state and national

legislatures for women. Both parties claimed reputational credit as first movers on the policy. The period one electoral losses, likely compounded by a broader electoral sweep by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), were partially offset for the TMC in period two. TMC gained simultaneously in seat- and vote-share. BJD, on the other hand, lost all seats it contested, driven in large part by an anti-incumbency wave in the state and shifts in regional politics.

The paper makes three key contributions. First, it offers a theory of voluntary policy adoption under short-run electoral cost, extending work on signaling and unpopular policy choice (Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts 2001; Izzo 2023) to a representation outcome in a non-Western party system. Second, it shifts the question in the gender-quotas literature from *whether* parties gatekeep (Krook 2018; Spary 2020) to *when* they strategically open the gate, identifying the structural conditions under which costly inclusion becomes rational. Third, the model yields observable implications testable both within the Indian case and comparatively, providing a portable framework for explaining costly policy adoption. It provides a unifying theoretical framework that integrates strategic electoral incentives with ideological commitments to explain party behavior over multiple time periods.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Explaining Adoption of Unpopular Policies: The Case of Gender Quotas

Political parties are the central gatekeepers of women's electoral representation (Kittilson 2006; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Murray, Krook and Opello 2012; Spary 2020). Advancing women's representation, especially in patriarchal societies where men are overrepresented in politics, necessitates rupturing men's political dominance. Often when women are nominated as candidates, their candidacy comes at the expense of a male incumbent or aspirant. This internal cost can result in disgruntled party members and defections from the party. Parties also perceive an electoral cost to fielding women candidates, of-

ten (erroneously) believing that male candidates are more likely to succeed in elections than women (Sanbonmatsu 2006). To avoid reshaping the entrenched political power of male politicians or losing an electoral advantage, party elites will routinely nominate women candidates to losing seats—as “sacrificial lambs” in non-stronghold constituencies, relegating their nomination to a token status (Bernstein 1986; Canon 1993; Krook 2018; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Martínez i Coma and Lago 2022; Valdini 2012). If political parties perceive women’s candidacy as costly, why do they ever voluntarily adopt gender quotas that limit their ability to preserve men’s political power?

Existing work offers two sets of explanations, centering electoral incentives and rights-based mobilization. Political parties are driven primarily by electoral considerations. Their goal is to maximize their vote- and seat-share so they can control the levers of policy-making in elected office or extract rents while in office. Candidate selection, therefore, is central to the process of consolidating political power. In this vein, parties adopt gender quotas to capture women’s votes and bring a previously excluded demographic group into a winning coalition (Black 2004; Dancygier, Lindgren, Nyman and Vernby 2021; Kolinsky 1991; Murray, Krook and Opello 2012; Weeks et al. 2022). If peer parties adopt quotas, it often becomes strategically imperative for a party to adopt quotas as well, commonly known as the “contagion” effect (Caul 2001; Meier 2004). Yet, it remains puzzling why a party adopts gender quotas when quotas themselves do not enjoy popular support among voters or why it becomes the first-mover on quota adoption in the absence of a legal mandate or a contagion effect. Often, the assumption underlying these explanations is that the electoral payoff from quota adoption is immediate or in the short-term.

The second set of explanations emphasizes bottom-up and top-down rights-based mobilization for gender quotas within parties. Quota adoption arises as a product of pressure from women’s movements, women elites within the party, and broader international and domestic normative shifts towards gender parity in politics (Baldez 2004; Bruhn 2003; Caul 2001; Davidson-Schmich 2006; Kittilson 2006; Krook 2004,0; Schmidt 2003). While these explanations highlight the sources of pressure for quota adoption from within and outside the parties, they do not account for the strategic calculus parties undertake to

decide *when* the internal and electoral costs of quota adoption are worth bearing.

Drawing from both these existing sets of scholarship, I present a unifying framework for first-mover behavior that integrates strategic electoral incentives with ideological commitments to explain why parties adopt gender quotas in the absence of legal mandates, contagion effects, and short-term electoral payoffs. I argue that voluntary internal party gender quotas can be a long-run reputation-building strategy adopted by opposition parties facing electoral threat from a better-resourced incumbent. When competitors are vying for women's votes, they face a choice between two policy levers: welfare programs that target women voters or semi-permanent quotas that increase women's electoral candidacy. I argue that the incumbent party is more likely to utilize the welfare lever; it has the fiscal and bureaucratic capacity to introduce and implement welfare reforms that appeal to women voters. It can outspend and outbid any welfare appeals the opposition party might promise to voters. This makes quota adoption a viable alternative for opposition parties.

An opposition party's willingness to introduce voluntary quotas depends on its level of ideological commitment to gender equality in politics, as well as its anticipated shift in voter preferences for quotas. The ideological commitment of the party matters because quota adoption is at minimum semi-permanent and internally costly. Once nominated as candidates under quotas, women politicians (contingent on being elected) will serve their full term in elected office. The act of nominating a woman typically displaces a male politician from his seat. Welfare policies, on the other hand, can be withdrawn and do not come at the expense of men's political power. Moreover, introducing quotas may also prove electorally costly. If voters do not support or value quotas as the means to achieve gender equality, they may punish the party by not voting for its candidates during elections. Voter preferences on policy issues may evolve favorably over a long time horizon, resulting in a short-term electoral cost.

These dual short-run costs, however, are integral to the argument proposed here. Precisely because they are willing to incur the electoral losses and potential defections by male elites in the immediate term, opposition parties are able to signal a credible

commitment to gender equality that late adopters cannot. This confers a reputational premium upon opposition parties that they can claim when voter preferences shift in favor of quotas. Therefore, I offer this long-term reputational benefit as an explanation for why a party may choose to adopt an unpopular policy that incurs a short-term electoral cost.

An opposition party's decision to adopt quotas also relies on the anticipated likelihood of voter preferences shifting towards favoring quotas in some later time period. If voters come to value quotas down the line, I argue they are likely to reward the first movers who credibly committed to the policy even when it was unfavorable and costly. Late adopters are less likely to reap benefits as they may be viewed as uncommitted to gender equality in politics or as opportunists capitalizing on a shift in voter sentiment towards quotas. As a result, if a political party believes that voter preferences will shift favorably towards supporting quotas, it is more likely to implement the quota within its candidacy decisions. This framework treats the shift in voter preferences towards quotas as exogenous and parties as strategic actors motivated primarily by their desire to win electoral office. This is a departure from existing work that suggests parties act in the public interest and implement unpopular policy in an attempt to shift voter preferences to their preferred ideal point (Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts 2001; Izzo 2023). The two perspectives are complementary. While existing scholarship describes when parties adopt unpopular policies to influence voter preferences, this paper describes how parties claim credit when voter preferences shift exogenously.

2.2 Formal model

I formalize the argument in two stages. A two-period consistency model, presented first, isolates the reputational logic without strategic uncertainty about party type as being committed or uncommitted. A two-period signaling model then introduces uncertainty about type and shows that the same logic operates in addition to comparative statics on signaling intensity. Throughout, the model rests on two substantive assumptions: parties believe that nominating more women is electorally costly in period one, and voters do not want quotas in period one. Full derivations and the pooling-equilibrium proofs are

in Appendices B, C, and D.

The model has two periods, $t \in \{1, 2\}$, with an election in each. In each period, the party chooses $p_t \in \{0, 1\}$, where $p_t = 1$ denotes adopting a quota. Voter preferences are $v_1 = 0$ (voters do not want quotas in period 1) and

$$v_2 = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{with probability } s \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

The probability s captures an exogenous shift in voter preferences toward favoring quotas in period 2. It is common knowledge that voters do not want quotas in period 1. Voters reveal v_2 before period-2 play. Let $m_t \in \{0, 1\}$ indicate whether the party's choice matches voter preferences such that $m_t = 1$ when $p_t = v_t$ and 0 otherwise. Let $\pi_t(m_t)$ denote expected period- t seat share in each election, with $\pi_t(1) > \pi_t(0)$.

In the simplest version of the model, voters only care about the quota choice of the party in each period such that v_1 does not affect v_2 . The party's utility function is:

$$U = \pi_1(m_1) + \pi_2(m_2)$$

In equilibrium, if the voter preferences shift towards wanting quotas in period 2, the party chooses to implement a quota and if voter preferences don't shift, the party chooses not to implement a quota. This implies that parties always do what voters want in period 2 and win with a higher probability than they would if they deviated from voter preferences. Since period 2 quota choice does not affect outcomes in period 1, the party never implements a quota in period 1. Therefore, the party's equilibrium quota choice is $(0, 1)$ with probability 's' and $(0, 0)$ with probability $(1 - s)$.

2.2.1 Two-Period Consistency Model

In the consistency model, voters in period 2 reward parties whose period-1 choice matched their period-2 preference. In other words, they reward policy consistency that aligns with the now-realized preference shift. I redefine $m_2 = (\mathbb{I}_{v_2=p_1}, \mathbb{I}_{v_2=p_2})$ to capture alignment

between voters and the party across time periods. Here, the first indicator function represents whether the voters' period 2 choice matches the party's period 1 choice. The second indicator function represents whether the voters' period 2 choice matches the party's period 2 choice.

As in the simple model, the party's actions match voter preferences in period 2. If $v_2 = 1$ (which happens with probability s), then the party chooses $p_2 = 1$. If $v_2 = 0$ (which happens with probability $1 - s$), the party chooses $p_2 = 0$. The party's utility in period 2 is a function of whether the party matched in period 2 and whether the party's period 1 choice matched with the voters' preference in period 2. Since the party always matches voters in period 2, the utility is different based on whether the period 1 quota choice, p_1 , matched the voters' period 2 preference, v_2 . Thus, if $p_1 = v_2$, $\pi_2(m_2) = \pi_2(1, 1)$ and if $p_1 \neq v_2$, $\pi_2(m_2) = \pi_2(0, 1)$.

In period 1, we assumed voters don't want quotas. So, the party's expected utility from $p_1 = 0$ is $EU(0) = \pi_1(1) + s\pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(1, 1)$ and the expected utility from $p_1 = 1$ is $EU(1) = \pi_1(0) + s\pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(0, 1)$. Thus, a party chooses to implement a quota in period $t = 1$ if and only if $EU(1) \geq EU(0)$. Solving this yields (full solution in Appendix B),

$$(2s - 1)(\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)) \geq \pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0) \quad (1)$$

The party adopts in period 1 if and only if (1) holds. Two implications follow this result:

1. $s \geq \frac{1}{2}$: the probability of a preference shift must exceed one-half. Below that threshold, the expected reputational gain from being a consistent early adopter is dominated by the period 2 cost of having moved when preferences ultimately did not.
2. The period 2 reputational gain $\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)$ must exceed the period 1 electoral loss $\pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0)$ resulting from implementing the unpopular policy choice.

As an extension to this model, I add an ideological benefit parameter b . Let b represent the ideological benefit to the party from implementing quotas. This parameter suggests

that there are cases in which parties implement quotas even when voter preferences do not shift in period 2. In such cases, the ideological benefit must itself exceed the period 2 electoral losses when voters do not change their preferences around quotas.

First, I work through the case holding constant whether the party's period one policy matches voters' period two preferences. In this case, the party implements a quota even if voters don't want it, if and only if $\pi_2(\mathbb{I}_{v_2=p_1}, 1) \leq \pi_2(\mathbb{I}_{v_2=p_1}, 0) + b$ or if $b \geq \pi_2(\mathbb{I}_{v_2=p_1}, 1) - \pi_2(\mathbb{I}_{v_2=p_1}, 0)$. Next, I work through the case where whether the party's period one policy matches the voter's period two preferences is no longer constant. So, voter preferences do not shift towards wanting a quota in period two and in period one they didn't want a quota either. There are two cases to work through here: one where the party implemented a quota in period one and one where the party did not implement a quota in period one.

Case I: Party implemented a quota in period one If the party does not implement a quota in period two, they get a payoff of $\pi_2(0, 1)$ and if the party does implement a quota in period two, they get a payoff of $\pi_2(0, 0) + b$.

Case II: Party did not implement a quota in period one If the party does not implement a quota in period two, they get a payoff of $\pi_2(1, 1)$ and if the party does implement a quota in period two, they get a payoff of $\pi_2(1, 0) + b$.

Given these two cases, a party will implement a quota even if the voters don't want it if $b \geq \pi_2(0, 1) - \pi_2(1, 1)$ and $b \geq \pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(1, 0)$. Therefore, the two cases result in two thresholds for the ideological benefit b . I assume that this benefit is the same across both time periods. I solve the equilibrium conditions in the same manner as the two-period consistency model (detailed solutions can be found in Appendix C). Working through the equilibrium solution, I find that for a party to implement a quota:

1. The probability of voter preferences shifting towards wanting a quota must be sufficiently high.
2. The period two gains from reputation building (consistency) must be higher than the loss from choosing quotas when voters don't want them.

3. The ideological benefit, b , must be higher than the loss from choosing quotas when voters don't want them.

In other words, the findings from the two-period consistency model with and without ideological benefits are similar. In order for a party to implement a quota, a) the probability of voter preferences shifting towards wanting quotas must be high and b) the reputational gains and the ideological benefit must be higher than the loss in expected seat share when voters don't want quotas. As I show in the next subsection, these findings are replicated in the signaling model as well.

2.2.2 Signaling Model

The signaling model introduces uncertainty about the party's type. There are two parties, A and B . Party A has type $\theta \in \{0, 1\}$ with $\Pr(\theta = 1) = q$, where $\theta = 1$ denotes a committed type. Party A picks a policy of quota or no quota in each time period, so $p_t \in \{0, 1\}$ for $t \in \{1, 2\}$. Party A 's utility function is

$$U_A = \pi_1(p_1, \cdot) + \pi_2(p_1, p_2, b_{v;2}) + b_\theta p_1 + b_\theta p_2$$

where b_θ is the exogenous benefit from implementing quotas for type θ and π is the expected seat share as a function of other parameters defined above. The committed type's intrinsic benefit from quotas exceeds the uncommitted type's, resulting in $b_1 > b_0$. The voter's utility function from voting for party A is

$$U_v(A) = \underbrace{b_{v;t}p_t}_{\text{Direct utility to voter from quota}} + \underbrace{b_{v;t}r\Pr(\theta = 1|\cdot)}_{\text{Indirect utility to voter from quota}}$$

where $b_{v,t}$ is the exogenous benefit to the voter from whether the policy is implemented. Let $b_{v,t} \in \{b_L, b_H\}$ and $b_L < 0 < b_H$. Assume that $b_{v,1} = b_L$, which means in period 1 the voter does not like quotas, and $b_{v,2} = b_H$, which means in period 2 the voter likes quotas with probability s . The term r is the indirect utility from the committed type implementing other gender equality policies when in office. The r term either increases

the loss for the committed type if the voter preferences do not shift in favor of quotas in period 2 or increases the gains for the committed type if the voter preferences do shift in favor of quotas in period 2. The voter's utility function from voting for party B is $U_v(B) = U_B$, where U_B is drawn from a distribution with CDF F , distributed uniformly.

Now, let's assume in $t = 2$, for both types of party A, $p_2(\theta) = 1$ if $b_{v,2} = b_H$ and 0 otherwise. First, I solve for the separating equilibrium, where $p_1 = \theta$. Given that this is a separating equilibrium, voters learn about the type of the party from the policy chosen, which is $Pr(\theta = 1|p_1) = p_1$. In $t = 1$, voter votes for party A if and only if $b_L(p_1 + rp_1) \geq U_B$, where the LHS is the utility to the voter from voting for party A. Because $U_B \sim F$, the probability that $b_L(p_1 + rp_1) \geq U_B$ is $\pi_1(1) = F(b_L(1 + r))$ and $\pi_1(0) = F(0)$. Because $b_L < 0 < b_H$, it must be that $F(0) > F(b_L(1 + r))$. This is the endogenous penalty for implementing a quota in period 1.

In $t = 2$, if $b_{v,2} = b_H$ (which happens with probability s), $p_2 = 1$ for both types of party A. The voter votes A if and only if $U_B \leq b_H(1 + rp_1)$, which happens with probability $F(b_H(1 + rp_1))$. If $b_{v,2} = b_L$, $p_2 = 0$ for both types of party A. The voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_L(rp_1)$, which happens with probability $F(b_L(rp_1))$. For type θ , this happens if

$$\begin{aligned} & F(b_L(1 + r)) + b_\theta + (s)(F(b_H(1 + r)) + b_\theta) + (1 - s)(F(b_Lr)) \\ & \geq \\ & F(0) + (s)(F(b_H) + b_\theta) + (1 - s)(F(0)) \end{aligned}$$

Rearranging terms, we get $b_1 \geq D_S \geq b_0$, where

$$\begin{aligned} D_S &\equiv F(0) - F(b_L(1 + r)) && \text{Quota penalty in } t = 1 \\ &+ s[F(b_H) - F(b_H(1 + r))] && \text{Gain in } t = 2 \text{ if } b_{v,2} = b_H \\ &+ (1 - s)[F(0) - F(b_Lr)] && \text{Loss in } t = 2 \text{ if } b_{v,2} = b_L \end{aligned}$$

We can interpret D_S as the electoral effect of implementing a quota in a separating

equilibrium.

Next I solve the pooling equilibrium, first pooling on $p_1 = 1$. Given a pooling equilibrium, I define the probability that the party is the committed type given that they implement a quota in period 1 as $Pr(\theta = 1|p_1 = 1) = q$. Assume that if the voter observes no quota being implemented, they think the party is the uncommitted type. By similar logic as the separating equilibrium,

$$\begin{aligned} b_\theta \geq D_1 &\equiv F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L(1 + r q)) \\ &+ s[F(b_H(1 + r \hat{q}_0)) - F(b_H(1 + r q))] \\ &+ (1 - s)(F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L r q)) \end{aligned}$$

where the binding constraint is for b_0 (full solution in Appendix D.1).

Similarly, for pooling on $p_1 = 0$, I get

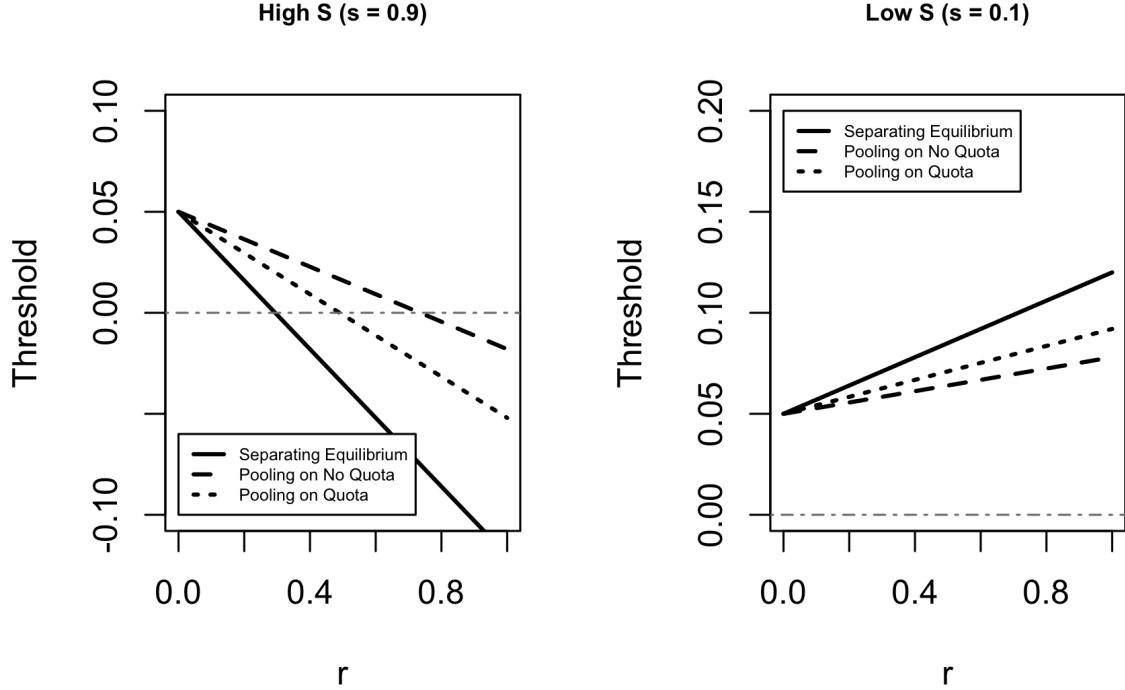
$$\begin{aligned} b_\theta \leq D_0 &\equiv F(b_L r q) - F(b_L(1 + r)) \\ &+ s[F(b_H(1 + r q)) - F(b_H(1 + r))] \\ &+ (1 - s)(F(b_L r q) - F(b_L r)) \end{aligned}$$

where the binding constraint is on b_1 (full solution in Appendix D.2).

Three intuitions follow from comparing the electoral effect of implementing a quota in the separating and pooling equilibria (D_S , D_1 , and D_0). First, the period 1 penalty is largest in the separating equilibrium: when types are distinguishable, the uncommitted type has the strongest reason not to mimic the committed type. Second, the period 2 reputational gain (when preferences shift) is also largest in the separating equilibrium: the committed type captures the full reputational premium of correctly anticipating a shift in voter preferences. Third, the period 2 loss (when preferences do not shift) is largest in the separating equilibrium for the same reason. When $r = 0$, all three thresholds collapse to a common value $D = F(0) - F(b_L) > 0$. The electoral effect of adoption is unambiguously negative. The voter makes no inference about the party type when no

signaling occurs. Absent reputational concerns, only parties whose intrinsic benefit b_θ exceeds D adopt.

Figure 1: Electoral Effect of Quota Implementation



Note: How the electoral effect varies with the reputational benefit r and the probability s that voter preferences shift toward quotas in period 2. Other parameters fixed at $b_L = -0.1$, $b_H = 0.5$, $q = 0.6$. Left panel: $s = 0.9$. Right panel: $s = 0.1$. A positive threshold corresponds to a negative electoral effect.

Figure 1 summarizes the comparative statics. When the probability of a preference shift is high (left panel), increasing the reputational benefit r pushes the electoral effect of adoption from negative to positive: even uncommitted parties find adoption attractive once r is large enough. When the probability of a preference shift is low (right panel), no value of r delivers a positive electoral effect; even committed parties decline to adopt unless their intrinsic benefit alone justifies the cost. The model thus identifies a narrow window—high s and sufficient r —within which voluntary adoption is rational for an opposition party absent unusually high intrinsic commitment, which is consistent with the observed empirical rarity of voluntary party quota adoption.

The proposed argument and model yield several observable implications that the

following descriptive analyses and qualitative case studies illustrate. As described previously, political parties that adopt quotas are more likely to be opposition parties facing a better-resourced incumbent. In period 1, parties adopting quotas are likely to face an electoral cost (loss in seat- or vote-share) when voters do not support quota adoption. For period 2 quota adoption, parties anticipate shifts in voter preferences towards quotas. Thus, in test cases voter sentiment should become more positive towards gender quota adoption over time (or alternative proxies for egalitarian gender attitudes related to politics). Parties that are ideologically committed to gender equality in politics should be more likely to implement quotas in future time periods, even without shifts in voter preferences. Lastly, parties that adopted quotas early should accrue greater reputational premiums, relative to those who adopt after voter preferences have already shifted in favor of quotas.

3 Empirical Evidence

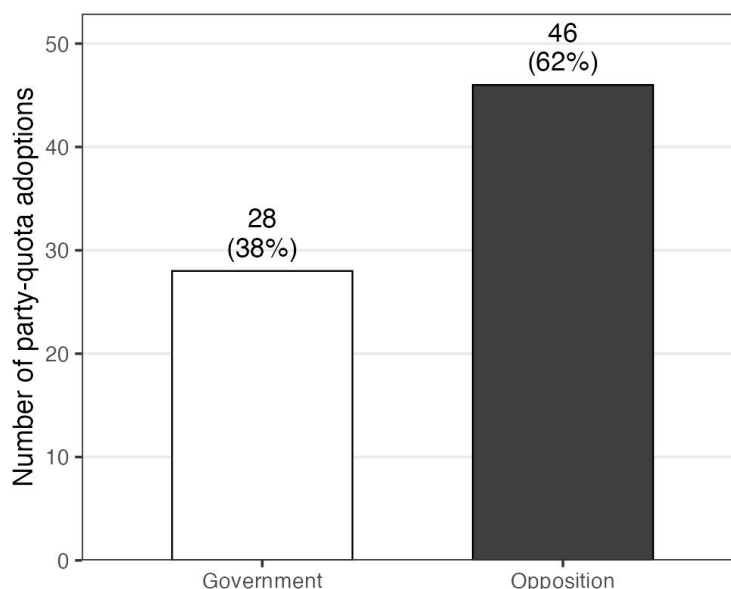
Using cross-national voluntary party quota adoption data drawn from International IDEA’s Quota Database (2026), Caul (2001), and Krook (2009), I provide descriptive evidence that voluntary quotas are more likely to be adopted by opposition and left parties, that they impose an electoral penalty upon adoption, and that the penalty is reversed with time. Then, I use qualitative case studies of two political parties in India—the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the Trinamool Congress (TMC)—to illustrate the argument in detail.

3.1 Cross-national descriptive evidence

To test the model’s predictions across the sample of political parties that have adopted voluntary gender quotas, I use a cross-national dataset that draws from cases listed in International IDEA’s Quota Database (2026) as well as Krook (2009) and Caul (2001). The full table and details on the construction of the dataset can be found in Appendix A. For each party that adopted voluntary gender quotas, I included the year of quota adoption,

electoral status of party in the year of adoption (in opposition or government), vote-shares from an election prior to implementation and two elections post-implementation, and the party type classification. Where there was ambiguity surrounding the year of adoption or the status of the party in the year of adoption, I chose the most conservative coding for the argument. For instance, if the exact month of quota adoption is ambiguous and could change whether the party was in opposition or in government, I coded it as in government. The resulting dataset has 73 verified instances of political parties adopting quotas.

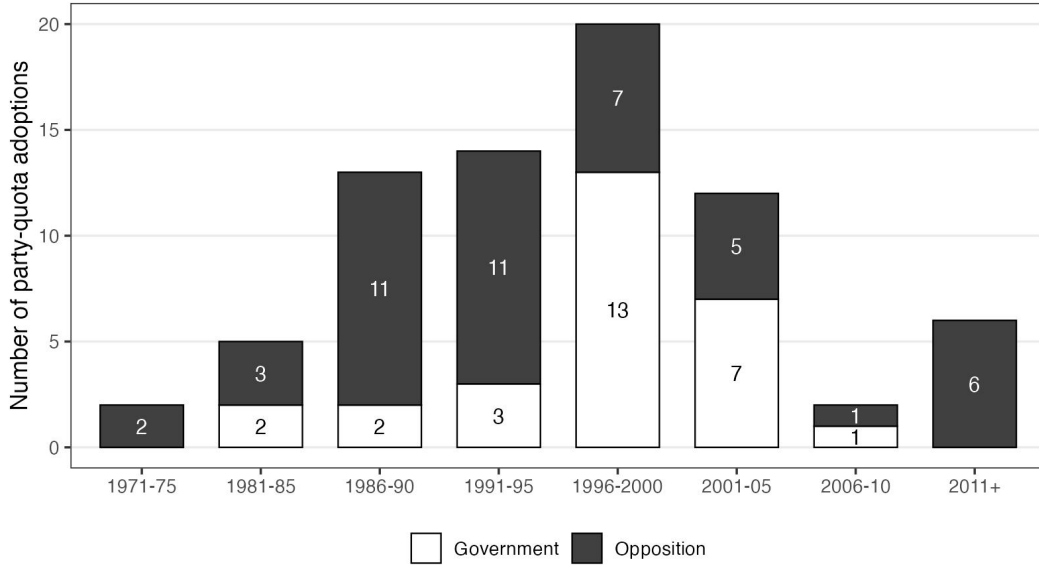
Figure 2: Voluntary Party Gender Quota Adoptions by Government Status at Adoption



The model's first observable implication is that voluntary quotas are more likely to be adopted by opposition parties facing a better-resourced incumbent. Of the 73 parties in the dataset, 62.2% were in opposition in their countries at the time of adoption, while the remaining 37.8% were in government (Figure 2). Macro-level trends follow a similar pattern (Figure 3). Between the early 1970s and late 1990s, nearly 80 percent of the political parties that adopted voluntary quotas were opposition parties. As quotas became more popular, adoption became more diffuse and quotas were mainly introduced by parties in government. Only in the last two decades has the trend begun to reverse again, with all cases of quota adoption emerging from opposition parties.

The model predicts a short-run electoral penalty but a long-term electoral gain for

Figure 3: Voluntary Quota Adoptions Over Time, by Government Status

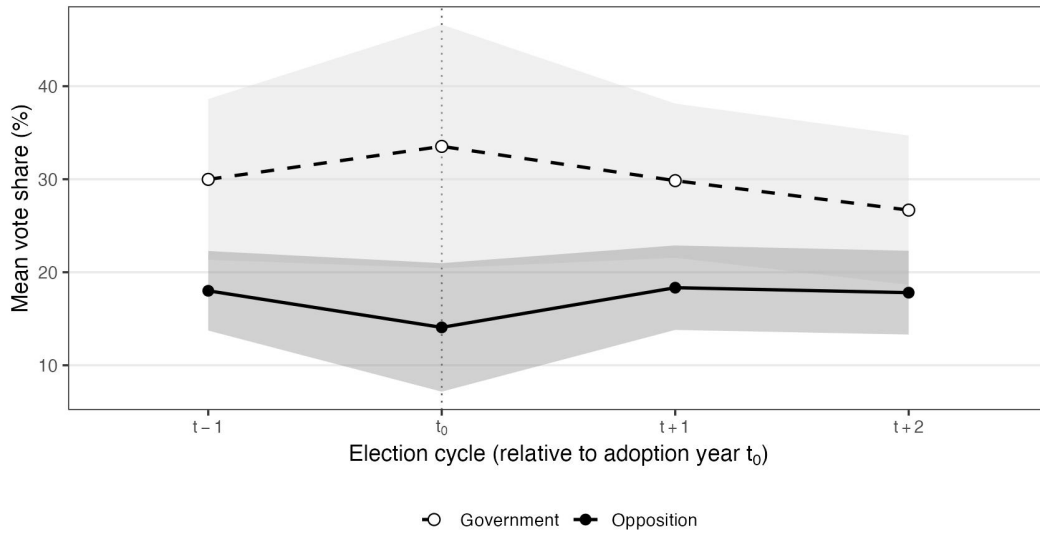


early adopters of voluntary gender quotas. Figure 4 provides descriptive evidence for these two predictions. I compare the average vote-shares of opposition and incumbent parties that implemented voluntary quotas. The figure shows that incumbents adopting quotas may experience a slight increase in the adoption year but in the two periods after adoption, they experience declines in vote-shares (dashed line on top). On the other hand, opposition parties experience declines during the electoral cycle they adopt quotas but rebound in the two periods after quota adoption (solid line on bottom). Though the sample size is small and the patterns shown are descriptive, they support the model's core intuitions: opposition parties that adopt quotas tend to face a short-run electoral penalty but are able to recover in future periods.

The model also predicts that parties committed to gender equality in politics are more likely to implement voluntary quotas because of the intrinsic ideological benefit they derive from quota adoption. This prediction is consistent with the broader literature on quota adoption (Caul 2001; Davidson-Schmich 2006; Schmidt 2003). Figure 5 supports this intuition. Nearly 72 percent of parties in the dataset are either Left or Green parties, while the rest are Center or Right parties. Among Left and Green parties, most are in opposition.

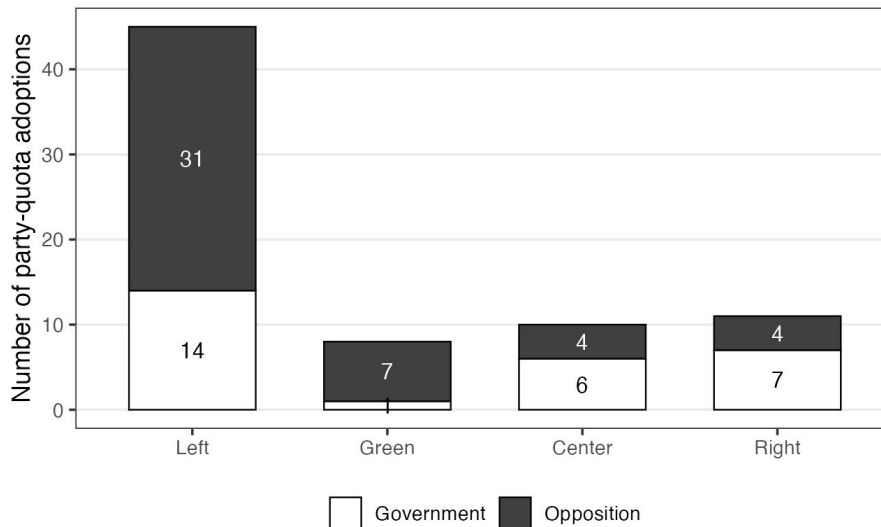
In the backdrop of increased quota adoption is a gradual shift in public opinion on

Figure 4: Mean Vote Share of Voluntary Quota Adopters by Party Status



Note: Pooled mean vote share by election cycle relative to the year of voluntary quota adoption, with 95% confidence intervals (shaded). The vertical dotted line marks the year of adoption (t_0).

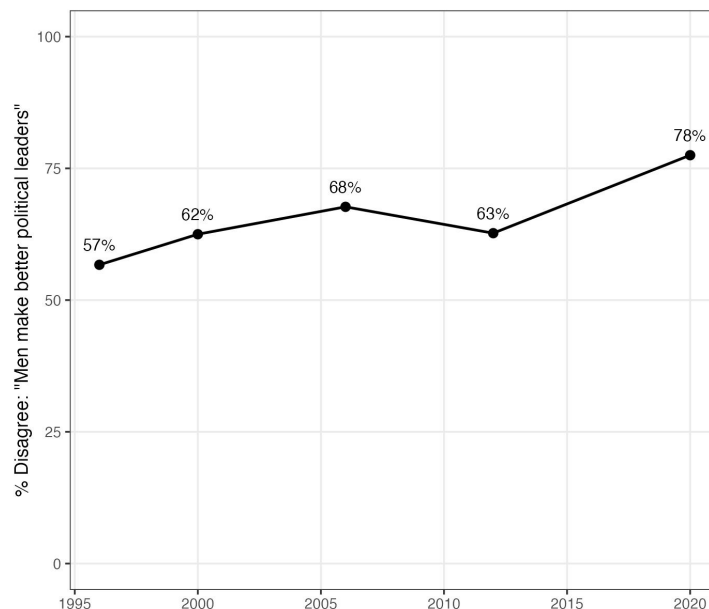
Figure 5: Voluntary Quota Adoptions by Party Type and Government Status



women's inclusion in politics. Though it does not measure public opinion on gender quotas directly, the World Values Survey measures attitudes towards women's presence in politics. Over several waves of data collection, the survey asks respondents whether they agree or disagree that men make better political leaders. Figure 6 shows the average proportion of respondents who disagree with the statement, indicating more gender egalitarian attitudes. Since 1995, the percentage of respondents disagreeing has increased steadily, with the last wave recording a high of 78 percent of respondents disagreeing with

the statement. The data is restricted to countries where the political parties adopting voluntary gender quotas come from. This provides a clean theoretical mapping from the shift in public opinion to the electoral gains and losses associated with quota adoption.

Figure 6: Attitudes Towards Women’s Inclusion in Politics



Note: Data used in the figure is drawn from the World Values Survey database. The countries used to create the global average map to the countries that adopted voluntary quotas.

3.2 Case Study: Biju Janata Dal and Trinamool Congress in India

During the 2019 national election, two opposition political parties announced that they were establishing internal party quotas to nominate at least 33 percent women as candidates. The Biju Janata Dal (BJD), a regional party from Odisha, and the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), a regional party from West Bengal, nominated 33 and 40 percent women as candidates, respectively. These announcements came during a highly-competitive electoral landscape in which all political parties, including the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, were vying for women’s votes. At the time, there was no legal mandate requiring parties to nominate a certain percentage of women as candidates or a law reserving seats for women in the national legislature. No other party had made such an announcement, let alone followed through on increasing women’s political candidacy.

Why then did the BJD and TMC choose to implement quotas, at the risk of electoral loss incurred through unseating male politicians from their strongholds?

In line with the formal model, I argue that the two parties implemented quotas in a bid to establish themselves as credibly committed to the cause of political equality among men and women. They sought to draw long-term reputational gains, at the risk of immediate electoral loss, as voter sentiment continued to grow in favor of gender quotas.

Women have become an increasingly sought-after vote bank in Indian politics. In 2019, the BJP won its highest ever share of women voters in the national election; in 2022, its astounding victory in the state of Uttar Pradesh was widely credited to support from women voters ([Bansal 2019](#); [Ghosh 2022](#)). Typically, to win women's votes, parties introduce policies that focus on the education, healthcare, safety, or material lives of women. For instance, in the past decade, the BJP has launched several schemes targeting women's welfare—Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (providing gas connections to women below the poverty line), and Lakhpati Didi Yojana (scheme to aid rural women in Self-Help Groups earn an annual income of Rs. 1 lakh), among others. These schemes have proven electorally successful for the incumbent government ([Roy and Sopariwala 2019](#)). Given that they are out-resourced financially and bureaucratically, opposition parties in India typically cannot compete for women's votes at the national level using welfare schemes. Because of this constraint, I argue that they turned to a more visible and semi-permanent alternative to draw women voters: gender quotas.

At a time when reserving seats for women was not being adopted widely by parties, leaders from the BJD and TMC made public proclamations that they were implementing quotas in their candidate lists in the name of women's empowerment. Mamata Banerjee, leader of the TMC, stated, "We believe in women's empowerment. In 2014, 35 per cent of our MPs were women. I am happy to share that this time 41 per cent of our Lok Sabha candidates are women" ([Bhattacharya and Ghosh 2019](#)). Naveen Patnaik, leader of the BJD, proclaimed, "I would like to announce here at Kendrapara...that Odisha will send 33 per cent women to Parliament in the coming elections...The women of Odisha

will lead the way in women empowerment in India. If India is to lead the world, if India is to be an advanced nation like America and China, then women empowerment is the only answer” ([International 2019](#)). Doing so allowed them to claim they were dedicated to the political empowerment of women and demonstrate it in the most credible possible manner: nominating women where they could have nominated existing incumbent male politicians.

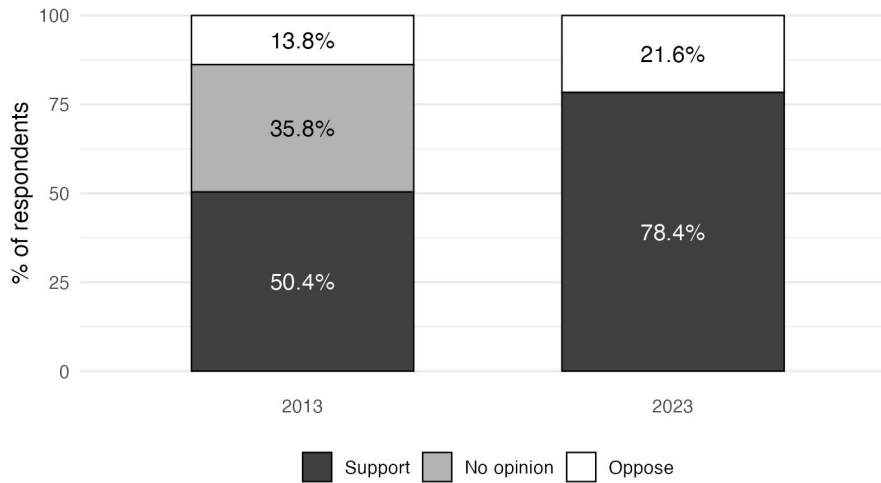
This political move did not buoy their electoral prospects. Both parties experienced a decrease in vote- and seat-share during the 2019 national election (as shown subsequently in [Figure 8](#)). Of the seats they competed in, the percentage of seats won by BJD decreased from 95 percent in 2014 to 57 percent in 2019. Similarly, for TMC, the percent of seats won decreased from 81 percent in 2014 to 52 percent in 2019. Meanwhile, the percentage of seats won by BJP increased from 66 percent to 69 percent. Causally attributing these changes in the share of seats won by each party to whether or not they implemented a quota is impossible. However, given the significance of women’s votes in determining the winning party in the 2019 election ([Bansal 2019](#)), it is clear that implementing a quota did not sway voters—women in particular—towards voting for the BJD and TMC. This is especially salient because as regional parties, they were incumbents in their respective states at the time. Yet, they failed to capture enough voters during the election so as not to lose seats to the BJP, which did not implement a quota.

Meanwhile, between the 2019 and 2024 national elections, public opinion on gender quotas began to shift. In September 2023, the BJP passed the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, or the Women’s Reservation Bill, that mandated a 33 percent reservation of seats in state and national legislatures for women.³ Whether the party anticipated the shift in voter preferences or drove it (as predicted by [Izzo 2023](#)), public sentiment around reservations for women in state and national level politics shifted.

In 2013, a nationally representative survey asked respondents about their support for the passage of the Women’s Reservation Bill ([Lokniti-CSDS 2013](#)). 50.4 percent of

³The bill was first introduced in 1996 and unsuccessfully proposed by several successive governments for three decades ([Spary 2020](#)). With its parliamentary majority, BJP was able to unanimously pass the bill in 2023.

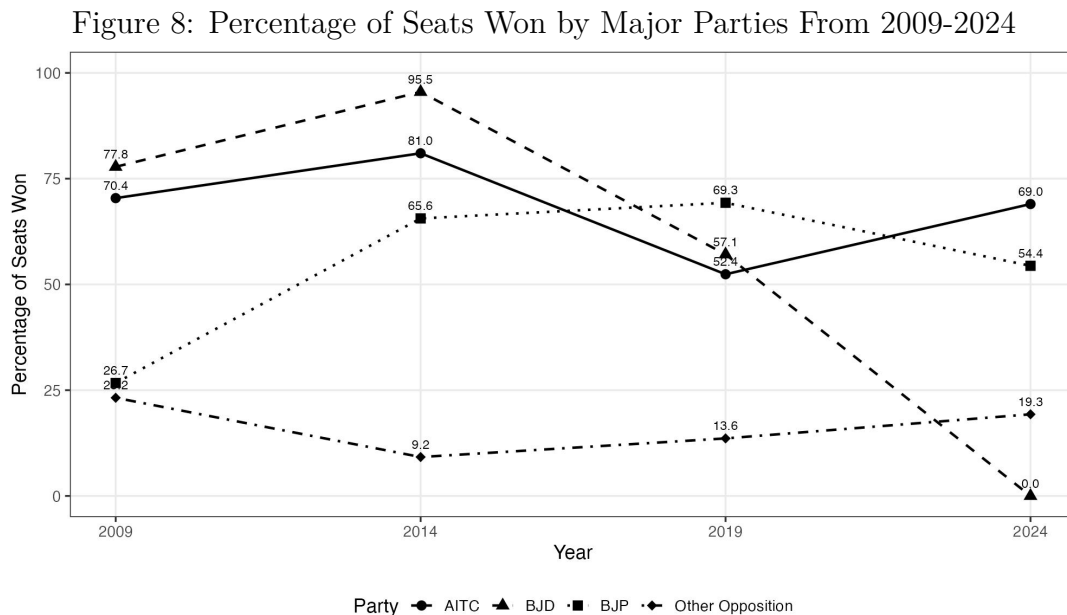
Figure 7: Voter Attitudes on the Women’s Reservation Bill, 2013 vs. 2023



Note: 2013 figures are drawn from the National Election Study post-poll conducted by Lokniti-CSDS $N = 19,062$. The survey asked: “Parliament should finally pass the women’s reservation bill this year so that one third of MPs in the next Lok Sabha are women.” “Support” combines fully and somewhat agree; “Oppose” combines fully and somewhat disagree. 2023 figures are drawn from the YouGov-Mint-CPR Round 11 survey $N = 12,545$. The survey asked respondents, “People have different opinions about the women’s reservation bill. Which statement most closely reflects your view?” “Support” combines the responses “Women reservation bill is an important first step to achieving gender equality” (41.4%) and “Women reservation bill is okay, but if not implemented properly, many proxy candidates will enter into the system” (37.0%). “Oppose” is “Any type of identity-based reservation system such as women’s bill is against the idea of equality.” The 2023 instrument did not offer a “no opinion” option.

respondents supported the passage of the bill (32.3 percent fully supported while 18.1 percent somewhat supported), while 13.8 percent opposed it and 35.8 percent had no opinion on the passage of the bill. A critical mass of respondents either opposed the bill or had not formed stable preferences around it. In December 2023, a separate nationally representative survey asked respondents about their opinions on the bill ([YouGov-Mint-CPR 2023](#)). This is in the immediate aftermath of the bill’s passage in the national parliament. This time, 41.4 percent respondents supported the bill as “an important first step to achieving gender equality” and 37 percent supported it conditional upon it being implemented properly. 21.6 percent opposed the bill and suggested it was “against the idea of equality.” Though the two surveys have different samples and instruments, they demonstrate a key component of the proposed model and argument: for early quota adoption to pay off, there must be a shift in public sentiment in favor of quotas. By

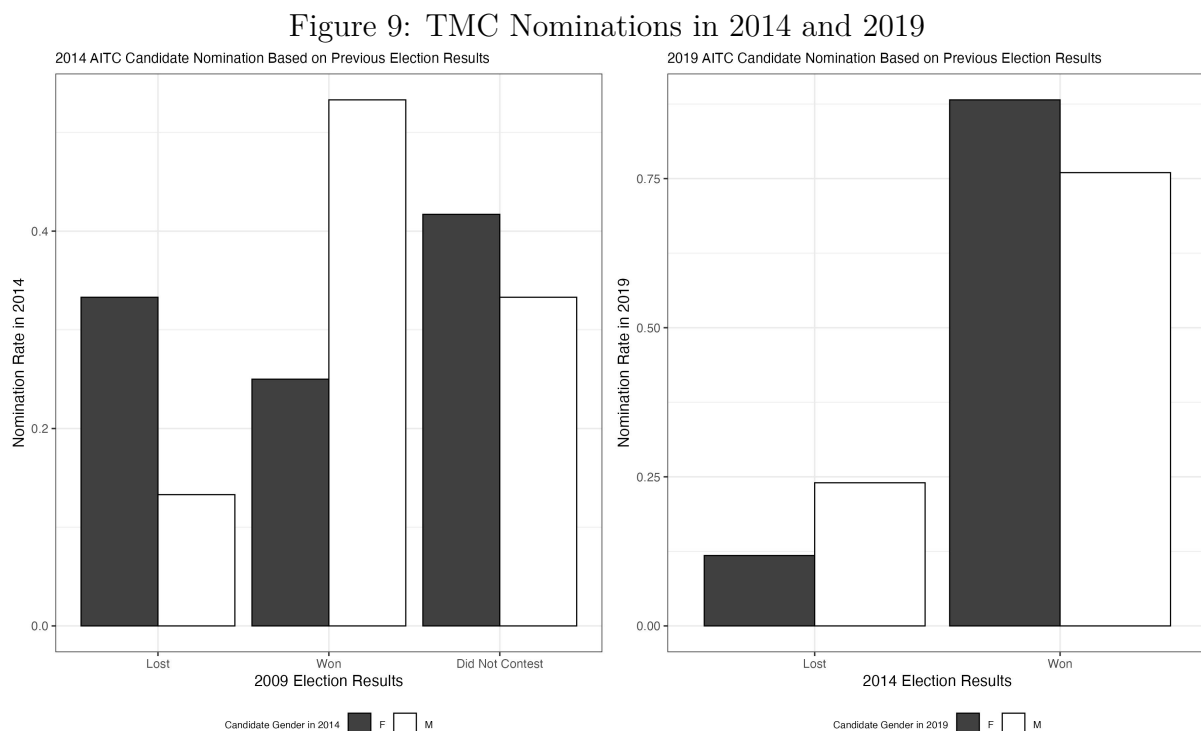
the time the 2024 national election was held, public opinion on gender quotas had firmly shifted in a positive direction. Figure 11 in Appendix E drawn from the World Values Survey data also shows a positive trend towards accepting more women in politics in India.



Note: AITC = All India Trinamool Congress (TMC). BJD = Biju Janata Dal. BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party. Other opposition parties include 11 parties with the highest vote shares aside from TMC, BJD, and BJP.

During the 2024 national election, BJD and TMC maintained their commitments and nominated 33 and 29 percent women candidates, respectively. Despite leading the charge on the reservation bill, BJP only nominated 16 percent women candidates across all the seats it contested. The model predicts that as public sentiment towards gender quotas becomes favorable, early adopters of the quota are rewarded favorably in future elections because they are seen as credibly committed to the cause. In the case of TMC, results from the 2024 election provide some suggestive evidence in favor of the prediction. The percentage of seats won by the party bounced back from 57 percent in 2019 to 69 percent in 2024. Driven largely by an anti-incumbency sentiment (Kumar Rout 2024), BJD did not win a single seat during the 2024 election. The BJP's percentage of winning seats, meanwhile, decreased from 69 percent in 2019 to 54 percent in 2024. Figure 8 shows trends across multiple elections for the parties in question.

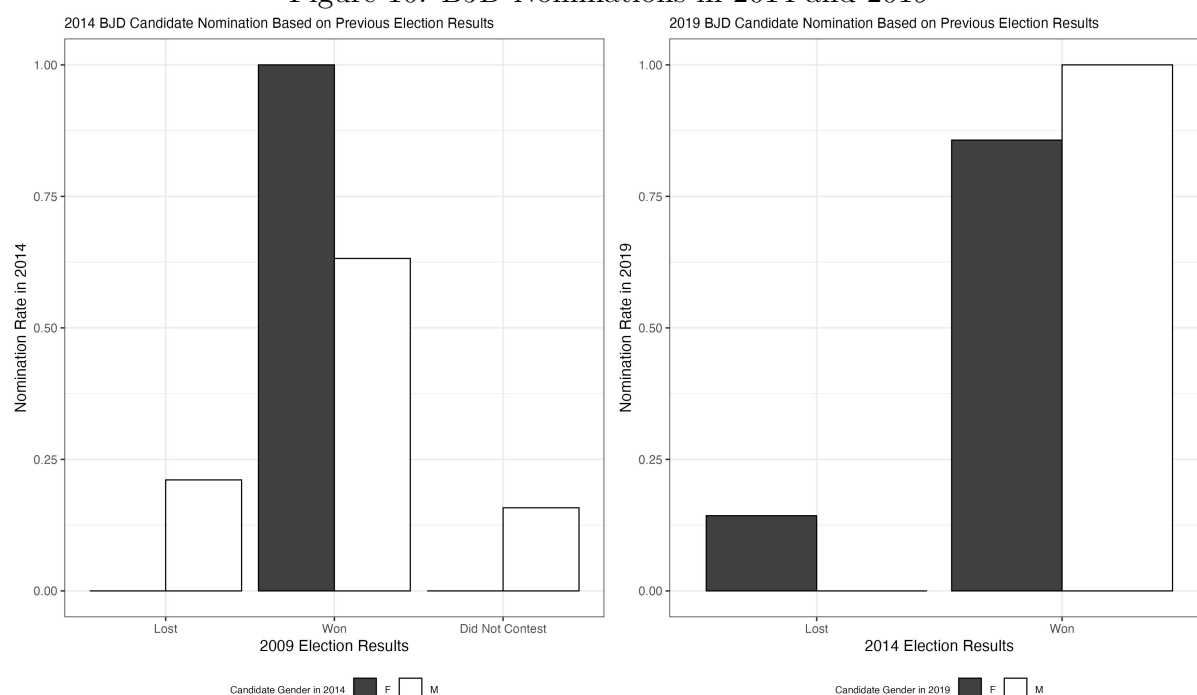
An alternative explanation for the adoption of quotas by the BJD and TMC is that, rather than signaling a credible commitment to gender equality, the policy functions as a performative gesture. If true, one would expect parties to project a progressive image while strategically nominating women to less winnable constituencies. This was not the case for either BJD or TMC in 2019 when they first implemented quotas. Both parties chose to nominate women to their electoral strongholds, based on the 2014 national election results. Figures 9 and 10 corroborate this claim and rule out the nomination of women as “sacrificial lambs” (Martínez i Coma and Lago 2022). This is in contrast to other parties, such as the Indian National Congress and Shiv Sena, that appear to have nominated their women candidates to less winnable constituencies (Spary 2020).



Note: TMC (AITC) nominations by candidate gender in 2014 (left) and 2019 (right), broken down by whether the party won the constituency in the previous election. In 2019 TMC nominated women disproportionately to constituencies it had won in 2014.

While it is nearly impossible to evaluate the precise electoral losses and gains associated with early quota adoption by BJD and TMC, the qualitative account presented in this section provides suggestive descriptive evidence for the predictions arising from the model. First, only opposition parties have adopted internal party gender quotas in India. This is further supported by the difference in party behavior between national

Figure 10: BJD Nominations in 2014 and 2019



Note: BJD nominations by candidate gender in 2014 (left) and 2019 (right). Although the 2019 panel appears to show women being nominated to losing seats, BJD had won only one of those seats in 2014; the remaining women candidates were placed in seats BJD had won.

and state elections. In 2019, BJD and TMC were both incumbents in their respective state legislatures in Odisha and West Bengal. Odisha had a state election at the same time as the national election in 2019. And yet, BJD only announced and implemented a gender quota at the national level, not at the state level. Second, both political parties faced electoral losses during the 2019 national election. While this could be attributed to a broader national wave in favor of the BJP, adopting gender quotas did not mitigate these electoral losses in any way. Third, in the run up to the 2024 national election, as the Women’s Reservation Bill was passed and public sentiment shifted in favor of gender quotas, BJD and TMC both claimed public credit for being early adopters and champions of gender quotas. Leaders from the BJD and TMC made public statements and speeches in the parliament stating that their parties had “walked the talk” and actually committed to nominating and sending substantial shares of women to the national parliament (TOI 2023a,2). Fourth, both parties continued to nominate high shares of women in the 2024 national election. Though BJD lost all seats it contested in the midst of an

anti-incumbency wave, TMC regained its seat share—a possible indication of period two payoffs from early quota adoption. Given that cross-national data suggests the long-term gains appear over longer time horizons, it is possible that BJD and TMC will be able to accrue electoral gains in subsequent election cycles.

4 Conclusion

The theory developed in this paper argues that voluntary internal party gender quotas can be a long-run reputation-building strategy adopted by opposition parties facing electoral threat from a better-resourced incumbent. The cross-national descriptive evidence and the Indian case both support the model’s central predictions. The cross-national evidence shows that roughly 60 percent of voluntary adopters in the verified database were in opposition at the time of adoption and mean vote share for parties adopting quotas decreased after adoption and rebounded thereafter. In the Indian case, BJD and TMC were both regional opposition parties that adopted voluntary party quotas for the 2019 national election but not their respective state elections. They both experienced decreases in seat-share after adoption, but TMC rebounded in the 2024 national election. For both types of evidence presented, shifts in party policy were accompanied by public opinion trending towards supporting quotas or towards more gender egalitarian attitudes in politics.

The main theoretical contribution of the signaling model proposed in this paper is that it offers a framework to understand credit-claiming behavior by parties when voter preferences on a policy shift exogenously. The model complements existing mechanisms identified in the literature in which parties shift voter preferences ([Canes-Wrone, Heron and Shotts 2001](#); [Izzo 2023](#)). Together, these two frameworks explain related but different sets of cases. One maps onto the party behavior that aims to move voters towards its preferred policies, while the other maps onto party behavior that aims to claim credit when voters exogenously move towards its preferred policies. These theoretical predictions should generalize beyond the case of voluntary gender quota adoption. They

extend to cases wherein the party is an early adopter of a policy that is electorally costly in the short-run when voter preferences have not yet shifted in favor of the policy, but the party can expect that they will in a future period. For instance, the model's predictions could travel to parties that adopt pro-climate, pro-immigration, or pro-LGBTQ policies when voters do not prefer those policies at the time of adoption but their preferences are expected to shift over time.

It also offers pathways to understand the substantive consequences of voluntary quota adoption by some parties and not others. If quota adoption generates a contagion effect and spurs other parties to also adopt quotas, the model suggests that first-movers should accrue greater reputational premiums than late-movers. Alternatively, as is happening in the Indian case, if early adoption is followed by national legal mandates for reserved seats in legislatures, it may blunt the reputational benefits for first-movers on the policy. If strategically driven parties can no longer claim credit for adopting quotas before they were electorally favorable, it may change their incentives to commit to gender-equal policies.

The paper offers a lens into party behavior that treats parties as both strategically and ideologically motivated, unifying existing explanations for quota adoption into a cohesive framework. Though the model offers insight into party decision-making surrounding quotas as a reputation-building strategy, the evidence presented in this paper is descriptive, not causal. Future work can empirically test the model's predictions using exogenous variation in quota implementation by parties and shifts in public opinion to assess the causal impact of early adoption on electoral outcomes. The analysis can be augmented further through in-depth case studies of voluntary quota adoption by parties outside the Indian context or through mapping the first-mover advantage gained through implementation of alternative policy instruments, such as pro-immigration or pro-climate policies.

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Appendix for
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A Voluntary Party Quota Adoptions List

To construct the dataset of voluntary party quota adoption, I drew cases from International IDEA’s Gender Quota Database (2026), Caul (2001), and Krook (2009). I then used Google Gemini 3 and Claude Opus 4.7 to cross reference the years of adoption, the status of the party in year of adoption, and vote-shares in elections one cycle prior to and multiple cycles post quota adoption. Vote-share data was drawn from a variety of sources, including ParlGov (2024), MARPOR (Lehmann, Burst, Matthieß, Regel, Volkens, Weßels, Zehnter and Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin Für Sozialforschung (WZB) 2022), and several national election commissions. I then manually checked the election results for all observations in the dataset.

Table 1: Voluntary Internal Party Gender Quota Adoptions, 1972–2022

Country	Party	Year	Quota	Status
Sweden	Liberal People’s Party (FP)	1972	40%	Opposition
Norway	Socialist Left (SV)	1975	40%	Opposition
Sweden	Green Party (MP)	1981	50%	Opposition
Norway	Labour Party (DNA)	1983	50%	Opposition
Austria	Social Democratic Party (SPO)	1985	40%	Government
Belgium	Flemish Liberal (PVV)	1985	20%	Government
Denmark	Left Socialists	1985	50%	Opposition
Austria	Greens (GA)	1986	50%	Opposition
Belgium	French Christian Democrats (PSC)	1986	33%	Government
Brazil	Workers Party (PT)	1986	30%	Opposition
Germany	Alliance 90/Greens	1986	50%	Opposition
Netherlands	Labour Party (PvdA)	1987	50%	Opposition

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Table 1 continued

Country	Party	Year	Quota	Status
Sweden	Left Party (V)	1987	50%	Opposition
Sweden	Christian Democrats (KD)	1987	40%	Opposition
Denmark	Socialist People's Party	1988	40%	Opposition
Denmark	Social Democrats	1988	40%	Opposition
Germany	Social Democratic Party (SPD)	1988	40%	Opposition
Italy	Democrats of the Left (DS)	1989	40%	Opposition
Norway	Centre Party (SP)	1989	40%	Government
Germany	Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)	1990	50%	Opposition
Belgium	Flemish Greens (Agalev)	1991	50%	Opposition
Ireland	Workers Party	1991	40%	Opposition
Ireland	Labour Party	1991	25%	Opposition
Italy	Green Federation	1991	50%	Opposition
Belgium	Flemish Social Democrats (SP)	1992	25%	Government
Canada	New Democratic Party (NDP)	1992	50%	Opposition
Ireland	Green Party	1992	40%	Opposition
Mexico	Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)	1993	20%	Opposition
Norway	Christian People's Party (KrF)	1993	40%	Opposition
Sweden	Social Democrats (SAP)	1993	50%	Opposition
United Kingdom	Labour Party	1993	50%	Opposition
Dominican Republic	Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD)	1994	25%	Opposition
South Africa	African National Congress (ANC)	1994	30%	Government
Austria	People's Party (OVP)	1995	33%	Government

Continued on next page

Table 1 continued

Country	Party	Year	Quota	Status
Chile	Socialist Party	1996	40%	Government
Chile	Christian Democratic Party (PDC)	1996	20%	Government
Costa Rica	National Liberation Party (PLN)	1996	40%	Government
Czech Republic	Social Democratic Party (CSSD)	1996	25%	Government
France	Socialist Party (PS)	1996	30%	Opposition
Germany	Christian Democratic Union (CDU)	1996	33%	Government
Mexico	Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)	1996	30%	Government
Senegal	Senegalese Socialist Party (PS)	1996	25%	Government
Spain	Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)	1996	40%	Opposition
Israel	Israel Labour Party	1997	20%	Opposition
Namibia	SWAPO	1997	50%	Government
Spain	United Left (IU)	1997	40%	Opposition
Chile	Party for Democracy (PPD)	1999	40%	Government
Hungary	Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)	1999	20%	Opposition
Iceland	Left-Green Movement	1999	50%	Opposition
Mozambique	FRELIMO	1999	30%	Government
Belgium	French Greens (Ecolo)	2000	50%	Government
Belgium	French Social Democrats (PS)	2000	50%	Government
Croatia	Social Democratic Party	2000	40%	Government
Albania	Social Democratic Party	2001	30%	Opposition
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Social Democratic Party	2001	30%	Government

Continued on next page

Table 1 continued

Country	Party	Year	Quota	Status
Italy	Democracy is Freedom (DL/Margherita)	2001	30%	Government
Australia	Australian Labor Party (ALP)	2002	35%	Opposition
Costa Rica	Christian Social Unity Party (PUSC)	2002	50%	Government
Costa Rica	Citizen Action Party (PAC)	2002	50%	Opposition
Luxembourg	Christian Social People's Party (CSV)	2002	40%	Government
Albania	Democratic Party	2003	25%	Opposition
Georgia	Citizens Union	2003	30%	Government
Portugal	Socialist Party (PS)	2004	33%	Opposition
Tunisia	Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)	2004	25%	Government
Iceland	Progressive Party	2005	40%	Government
Iceland	Social Democratic Alliance	2007	40%	Government
Italy	Democratic Party (PD)	2008	50%	Opposition
New Zealand	Greens	2015	50%	Opposition
UK	Liberal Democrats	2018	40%	Opposition
India	Biju Janata Dal (BJD)	2019	33%	Opposition
India	All India Trinamool Congress (TMC)	2019	40%	Opposition
Paraguay	Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA)	2022	50%	Opposition
Slovakia	Progressive Slovakia	2022	40%	Opposition

B Two-Period Consistency Model Derivation

Below I provide the full derivation of the inequality 1 for the two-period consistency model. Recall that in the consistency model the party's expected utility from $p_1 = 0$ is

$$EU(0) = \pi_1(1) + s \pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s) \pi_2(1, 1),$$

and from $p_1 = 1$ is

$$EU(1) = \pi_1(0) + s \pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s) \pi_2(0, 1).$$

A party adopts a quota in period 1 if and only if $EU(1) \geq EU(0)$. Substituting and rearranging:

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_1(0) + s \pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s) \pi_2(0, 1) &\geq \pi_1(1) + s \pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s) \pi_2(1, 1) \\ s \pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s) \pi_2(0, 1) - s \pi_2(0, 1) - (1 - s) \pi_2(1, 1) &\geq \pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0) \\ s (\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)) - (1 - s) (\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)) &\geq \pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0) \\ (2s - 1) (\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)) &\geq \pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0). \end{aligned}$$

This results in inequality 1. Two implications follow this result. First, the left-hand side is non-negative only if $s \geq \frac{1}{2}$, because the period-2 reputational gain $\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)$ is non-negative by assumption. Second, conditional on $s \geq \frac{1}{2}$, for the party to implement a quota in period 1, the period-2 reputational gain must exceed the period-1 electoral loss.

C Two-Period Consistency Model with Ideological Benefit

The party's utility function in this model is

$$U = \pi_1(m_1) + \pi_2(m_2) + b(p_1 + p_2)$$

In $t = 2$, $U = \pi_2(m_2) + bp_2$. If $v_2 = 1$, then the party chooses to implement a quota and gets the ideological bump. If their $t = 1$ choice matches the voter's $t = 2$ preference, then $U = \pi_2(1, 1) + b$ and if it doesn't, then $U = \pi_2(0, 1) + b$. If $v_2 = 0$, there are the two cases mentioned previously. Either the party doesn't implement the quota and doesn't get the ideological benefit. In this case, the utility is $U = \pi_2(1, 1)$ for matching in both periods and $U = \pi_2(0, 1)$ for matching only in period two. However, the party could also implement a quota even when voters don't want it if the ideological benefit 'b' is high enough. In this case, if the party had matched in period one for period two voter preferences, $U = \pi_2(1, 0) + b$ and if they don't, then $U = \pi_2(0, 0) + b$.

In $t = 1$, if $p_1 = 0$,

$$\begin{aligned} EU(0) &= \pi_1(1) + s(\pi_2(0, 1) + b) + (1 - s)(\pi_2(1, 1) + \pi_2(1, 0) + b) \\ &= \pi_1(1) + s\pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(1, 0) + b \end{aligned}$$

If party chooses $p_1 = 1$,

$$\begin{aligned} EU(1) &= \pi_1(0) + b + s(\pi_2(1, 1) + b) + (1 - s)(\pi_2(0, 1) + \pi_2(0, 0) + b) \\ &= \pi_1(0) + s\pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(0, 0) + 2b \end{aligned}$$

Thus, a party chooses to implement a quota in period $t = 1$ if and only if $EU(1) \geq EU(0)$.

Solving this,

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_1(0) + s\pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(0, 0) + 2b &\geq \\ \pi_1(1) + s\pi_2(0, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(1, 1) + (1 - s)\pi_2(1, 0) + b & \\ (2s - 1)(\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)) + (1 - s)(\pi_2(0, 0) - \pi_2(1, 0)) + b &\geq \pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0) \\ (2s - 1)(\pi_2(1, 1) - \pi_2(0, 1)) + b &\geq \pi_1(1) - \pi_1(0) - (1 - s)(\pi_2(0, 0) - \pi_2(1, 0)) \end{aligned}$$

D Pooling Equilibrium Proof

D.1 Pooling on $p_1 = 1$

In $t = 1$, the voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_L(1 + rq)$. Party A's period 1 vote share is $F(b_L(1 + rq))$. In $t = 2$, if $b_{v,2} = b_H$ (which happens with probability s), the voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_H(1 + rq)$ and so party A's vote share in the second period is $F(b_H(1 + rq))$. If $b_{v,2} = b_L$ (which happens with probability $1 - s$), the voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_L(rq)$ and so party A's vote share in the second period is $F(b_L(rq))$. Party A's utility, then, is as follows:

$$U_A(\theta, p_1 = 1) = F(b_L(1 + rq)) + b_\theta + s[F(b_H(1 + rq)) + b_\theta] + (1 - s)(F(b_L(rq)))$$

If party A chooses to deviate to $p_1 = 0$ (where we call the off-the-path beliefs $\hat{q}_0$), then it's utility is as follows:

$$U_A(\theta, p_1 = 0) = F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) + s[F(b_H(1 + r \hat{q}_0)) + b_\theta] + (1 - s)(F(b_L r \hat{q}_0))$$

In order to not deviate, $U_A(\theta, p_1 = 1) \geq U_A(\theta, p_1 = 0)$. This results in the following inequality:

$$\begin{aligned} b_\theta &\geq F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L(1 + rq)) + \\ &\quad s[F(b_H(1 + r \hat{q}_0)) - F(b_H(1 + rq))] + \\ &\quad (1 - s)(F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L(rq))) \end{aligned}$$

For the committed type ($\theta = 1$),

$$\begin{aligned} b_1 &\geq F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L(1 + rq)) + \\ &\quad s[F(b_H(1 + r \hat{q}_0)) - F(b_H(1 + rq))] + \\ &\quad (1 - s)(F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L(rq))) \end{aligned}$$

and for the uncommitted type ($\theta = 0$),

$$\begin{aligned} b_0 \geq & F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L(1 + rq)) + \\ & s[F(b_H(1 + r\hat{q}_0)) - F(b_H(1 + rq))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(b_L r \hat{q}_0) - F(b_L r q)) \end{aligned}$$

Let's say only the uncommitted type would deviate and so, $\hat{q}_0 = 0$. This results in the following two inequalities:

$$\begin{aligned} b_1 \geq & F(0) - F(b_L(1 + rq)) + \\ & s[F(b_H) - F(b_H(1 + rq))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(0) - F(b_L r q)) \end{aligned}$$

and,

$$\begin{aligned} b_0 \geq & F(0) - F(b_L(1 + rq)) + \\ & s[F(b_H) - F(b_H(1 + rq))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(0) - F(b_L r q)) \end{aligned}$$

D.2 Pooling on $p_1 = 0$

In $t = 1$, the voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_L(rq)$. Party A's period 1 vote share is $F(b_L r q)$. In $t = 2$, if $b_{v,2} = b_H$ (which happens with probability s), the voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_H(1 + rq)$ and so party A's vote share in the second period is $F(b_H(1 + rq))$. If $b_{v,2} = b_L$ (which happens with probability $1 - s$), the voter votes for party A if and only if $U_B \leq b_L(rq)$ and so party A's vote share in the second period is $F(b_L(rq))$. Party A's utility, then, is as follows:

$$U_A(\theta, p_1 = 0) = F(b_L r q) + s[F(b_H(1 + rq)) + b_\theta] + (1 - s)(F(b_L r q))$$

If party A chooses to deviate to $p_1 = 1$ (where we call the off-the-path beliefs $\hat{q}_1$), then it's utility is as follows:

$$U_A(\theta, p_1 = 1) = F(b_L(1 + r\hat{q}_1)) + b_\theta + s[F(b_H(1 + r\hat{q}_1)) + b_\theta] + (1 - s)(F(b_L r\hat{q}_1))$$

In order to not deviate, $U_A(\theta, p_1 = 0) \geq U_A(\theta, p_1 = 1)$. This results in the following inequality:

$$\begin{aligned} b_\theta \leq & F(b_L r q) - F(b_L(1 + r\hat{q}_1)) + \\ & s[F(b_H(1 + r q)) - F(b_H(1 + r\hat{q}_1))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(b_L r q) - F(b_L r\hat{q}_1)) \end{aligned}$$

For the committed type ($\theta = 1$),

$$\begin{aligned} b_1 \leq & F(b_L r q) - F(b_L(1 + r\hat{q}_1)) + \\ & s[F(b_H(1 + r q)) - F(b_H(1 + r\hat{q}_1))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(b_L r q) - F(b_L r\hat{q}_1)) \end{aligned}$$

and for the uncommitted type ($\theta = 0$),

$$\begin{aligned} b_0 \leq & F(b_L r q) - F(b_L(1 + r\hat{q}_1)) + \\ & s[F(b_H(1 + r q)) - F(b_H(1 + r\hat{q}_1))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(b_L r q) - F(b_L r\hat{q}_1)) \end{aligned}$$

Let's say only the committed type would deviate and so, $\hat{q}_1 = 1$. This results in the following two inequalities:

$$\begin{aligned} b_1 \leq & F(b_L r q) - F(b_L(1 + r)) + \\ & s[F(b_H(1 + r q)) - F(b_H(1 + r))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(b_L r q) - F(b_L r)) \end{aligned}$$

and,

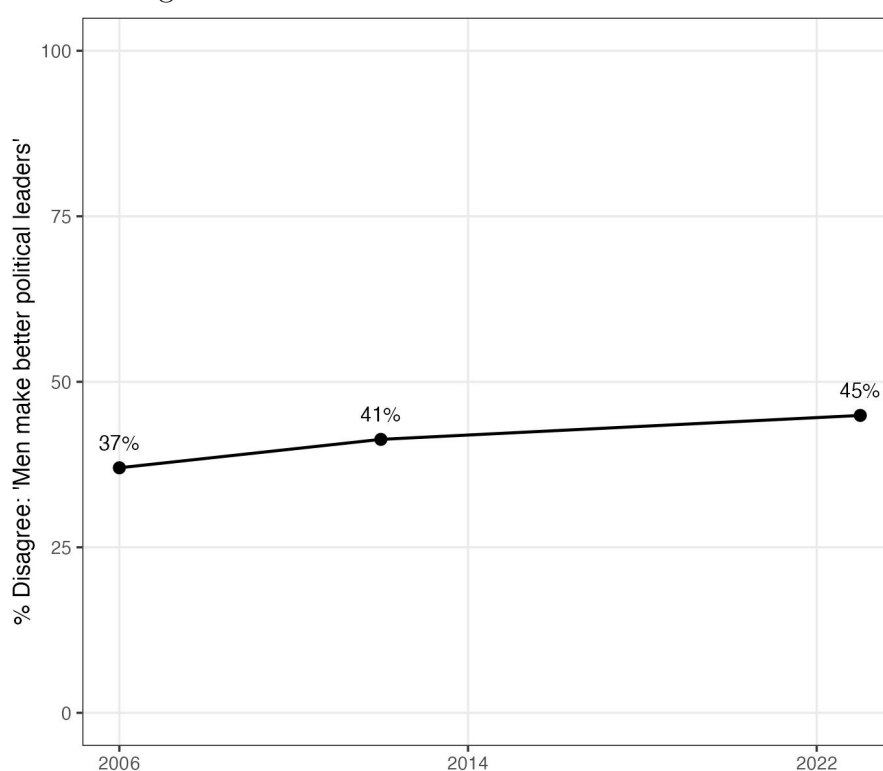
$$\begin{aligned} b_0 \leq & F(b_L r q) - F(b_L(1 + r)) + \\ & s[F(b_H(1 + r q)) - F(b_H(1 + r))] + \\ & (1 - s)(F(b_L r q) - F(b_L r)) \end{aligned}$$

E Trends in Gender-Political Egalitarianism

The model's reputational logic depends on adopters being able to anticipate that voter preferences will shift toward favoring quotas in a future period. The body presents 2013 vs. 2023 evidence specific to support for the Women's Reservation Bill in India (Figure 7). This appendix complements that evidence with broader gender-political egalitarianism trends from the World Values Survey, using item D059: "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do." Higher percentages indicate stronger disagreement with the statement and thus more egalitarian attitudes.

Figure 11 shows the trend in India from 2006 (the first wave for which the WVS sample was nationally representative) through 2023. Indian respondents' rejection of the statement rises modestly from 37 percent in 2006 to 41 percent in 2014 and 45 percent in 2023. The general egalitarianism trend is shallower than the WRB-specific support trend in the body but moves in the same direction across the BJD/TMC adoption-decision window.

Figure 11: India: Disagreement that “Men Make Better Political Leaders” (WVS D059)



Note: Weighted percentage of Indian WVS respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with item D059, Waves 5–7. Earlier waves (1995, 2001) are excluded because the WVS Wave 3 India sample is documented as urban-skewed.