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**To Report Or Not To Report: The Effect of Female State Political
Representation on Reported Domestic Violence in India**

By Ananiya Neeck



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Preceptor: Jack Wippell

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the impact of female state political representation in India on reported domestic violence to assess whether female politicians in high-level positions change if women report domestic violence. While existing literature examines the effects of various levels of female political representation on development and policy outcomes, this paper uses a mixed-methods approach to assess whether female state political representation changes reporting behaviors of domestic violence survivors. Data on reported crimes against women and state legislative assembly elections in India between 1986 and 1998 are used to conduct ordinary least squares regressions to examine the causal effect of increasing female state political representation. Interviews with three researchers and a non-profit provide a broader understanding of the mechanisms behind the potential relationship between female state political representation and reported domestic violence. Overall, this paper finds no evidence that female state politicians affect reported domestic violence against women. Rather female-led grassroots efforts may be more effective in improving reported domestic violence. It concludes that the Indian national government must address its poor data collection on domestic violence and the inaccessibility of support for domestic violence survivors. Moreover, state governments must facilitate women's community groups to tackle barriers hindering successful collective action against domestic violence.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, countries across the globe have made rapid progress regarding female representation within their elected bodies. Increased political representation, specifically of marginalized populations, has a wide variety of implications for policy and social issues that relate to their representative group. Increasing evidence demonstrates the positive effect of female political leaders on national social and economic progress (Beaman et al. 2012; Burchi and Singh 2020; Iyer et al. 2012). India is an interesting country to study in this context due to its reservation system that mandates one-third of village council leader seats for women and its limited progress towards gender equality. With the currently pending Women's Reservation Bill for state legislative assemblies and the lower house of India's Parliament rising to prominence in public discourse, the issue of female political representation at higher levels of government has become increasingly important.

Throughout its rich history as the largest and oldest democracy globally, India has seen the establishment of equal rights within its Constitution, an influential feminist movement, and prominent female politicians, such as Indira Gandhi, hold power. The Indian government follows a three-layer governance structure with a central government, state government, and village government. Its Constitution allocates significant power to states governments, with gender-equitable legislation, policies, and programs falling under the purview of state legislative assemblies (Shanker 2014). Each Indian state is organized into districts, which are divided into smaller political subunits and further broken down into community development blocks (Shanker 2014).

A significant body of literature evaluates the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 that mandated the creation of a three-tier elected local self-government

alongside the reservation of one-third of seat positions for women within each tier. The mandate increased the number of women elected in village constitutional bodies, but it also accounted for the rise in female candidates who contested seats in state and national legislatures since the mid-1990s (Duflo 2005; Beaman 2009; O’Connell 2020). The increase in female political representation resulting from the mandate has led to different policy choices surrounding the provision of public investments and improved social outcomes for women (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Beaman et al. 2007; Clots-Figueras 2011). However, despite this increase in female political representation and evidence of positive outcomes for India’s development, Indian women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of government. Apart from cultural and social factors, this relationship may dictate the wide disparity that Indian women continue to experience.

One stark area of disparity is the widespread gender violence against women, which was globally recognized following the horrific gang rape and murder of a female physiotherapy student in New Delhi in 2012. Among reported cases of different crimes against women in India, domestic violence ranks the highest, where data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) show that 31% of married Indian women between the ages of 15 and 59 experienced spousal violence from 2015 to 2016 (Krishnakumar and Verma 2021). In India, domestic violence is defined by the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 as “physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse against women by a partner or family member residing in a joint family” (Kalokhe et al. 2017). Exact statistics on the extent of the occurrence of these crimes hide a harsher reality, as many cases go unreported due to the social shame and family dishonoring associated with reporting (Das and Mohanty 2020).

This thesis examines how increasing female political representation in state legislative assemblies impacts reported domestic violence against women in India. A substantial amount of

literature explores how female political representation in India affects education and health outcomes at the district and state levels (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Beaman et al. 2012; Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras 2014; Burchi and Singh 2020). Despite these efforts, little is known about how increased female political representation specifically impacts reported domestic violence against women at the state level. Furthermore, although existing studies document how increasing female political participation leads to an increase in reported crimes against women (Iyer et al. 2012), a reduction in violence against women (Delaporte and Pino 2021), and the passing of policies targeting gender violence (Adieu et al. 2016), these works fail to fully conceptualize and isolate the mechanisms surrounding the impacts of female political representation due to only using quantitative analysis. Therefore, this thesis is important for understanding whether female state political representation is enough to change reporting among domestic violence survivors in India, potentially altering policies and societal norms around this type of violence.

This analysis is salient as it has policy implications on a crucial area to enact progress towards a safe and equitable society for women in India. Regarding its direct applicability, this thesis examines whether increasing female political representation in state legislative assemblies in India changes the reporting habits of domestic violence survivors. On a more theoretical level, this thesis examines whether high-level female political leaders have the unique ability to remove deeply ingrained patriarchal norms within society. Therefore, this research seeks to extend female political representation as a method to increase reported domestic violence against women.

To investigate the potential impact of female state political representation on reported domestic violence against women, this thesis uses two types of analysis. Firstly, I turn to quantitative analysis to determine if a causal relationship exists, using an Ordinary Least Squares

analysis to regress female state political representation on proxies for reported domestic violence against women. Following this analysis, I include a brief qualitative analysis through interviews with researchers and a non-profit to further understand the quantitative results. The thesis argues that there is no evidence that female state political representation substantially alters reported domestic violence against women. While female state politicians are drawn to women's issues and are more approachable to domestic violence survivors, they face unique barriers that prevent them from prioritizing domestic violence. Moreover, domestic violence survivors can often only access informal reporting methods, thus limiting changes in their reporting behavior. While faced with backlash and fragmentation, grassroots movements among women can serve as another method to alter the dynamics around domestic violence in India.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

A large body of literature has shown that female politicians have a distinct impact on the development outcomes of countries, particularly those related to women's needs and rights. Such research is predicated on cognitive psychology and political economy theories linking increasing female political representation to economic, political, and social progress. While many mechanisms could explain why this relationship exists, in this thesis, the citizen-candidate model and the theory of planned behavior are most revealing of how increasing female state political representation can lead to changes in reported domestic violence against women.

One possible mechanism is the policy preferences of female politicians and, consequently, the policies they implement while in office. Female politicians might differ in their preferences from male politicians regarding the importance of improving reported domestic violence against women. This hypothesis is grounded in the citizen-candidate model that states

that legislator preferences and, conjointly, their identity influences policy choices (Besley and Coates 1995; Osborne and Slivinski 1996). Besley and Coates first detailed the notion of the citizen-candidate model, seeking to study democratic policymaking through an electoral framework. In their model, policymakers are selected from a community of citizens through an election. Besley and Coates describe how “[citizens] care about policy outcomes and are motivated to run by their desire to affect these outcomes and hold the post of policymakers” (Besley and Coates 1997). As a result, the candidate who wins the election gains the right to choose the policy outcome and will therefore select their preferred alternative (Besley and Coates 1997).

Martin J. Osborne and Al Silvinski developed a similar model to explain the variation in the number of candidates who choose to run in elections and the dispersion in these candidates’ policy positions. According to Osborne and Silvinski, while running in an election is costly, the candidate who wins can implement their most preferred policy. Thus, policy outcomes will differ based on who wins the election (Osborne and Slivinski 1996). Empirically, in the United States, significant policy divergence has been found among different political parties, where policies deviate depending on whether Republicans or Democrats win the election (Besley and Coates 1995). However, policy differences across politicians are not solely a result of their ideology: gender plays an important role. If men and women have different policy priorities, including domestic violence, increasing female political participation should shift policy outcomes towards issues favored by female politicians.

Another possible mechanism through which increasing female state political representation can cause shifts in reported domestic violence against women relates to the ability of female leaders to impact social norms surrounding crime reporting. Due to their visibility in public office, female politicians may alter women's attitudes, empowering them to seek justice

by reporting domestic violence (Delaporte and Pino 2021). The gap between the number of domestic violence crimes against women and the number of reports victims file with police can be explained by the theoretical framework of planned behavior (Keller and Miller 2015). In a seminal piece of literature, Ajzen (1991) first proposed this notion, theorizing that “behavior is predicted by the individual’s intent to perform [...] when other constraints on behavior are taken into account” (Ajzen 1991). While not described in the context of reporting a crime, Ajzen defines the three factors that predict the intention of behavior as attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen 1991). This notion is relevant to victim reporting, especially for domestic violence against women, where a woman’s decision to report these crimes to the police is based on similar factors: confidence in the criminal justice system, social stigma and gender discrimination, and economic and psychological dependence (Felson and Paré 2005).

Relying on the theory of planned behavior, Keller and Miller (2015) relate attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioral control to a person’s intention to report a crime. Attitude concerns how a person regards a particular behavior (Ajzen 1991). Thus, the more positive a person’s attitude is towards crime reporting, the higher their intention to report a crime (Keller and Miller 2015). With perceived social pressure to act a certain way, the more a person believes that reporting a crime is expected, the more likely they will intend to register one (Keller and Miller 2015). Finally, perceived behavioral control concerns a person’s belief to follow through with an action based on past experiences and perceived obstacles (Ajzen 1991). As a result, having better control over one’s behavior makes one more likely to intend to report a crime (Keller and Miller 2015). Keller and Miller find that the model effectively predicts a person’s intention to report a crime, with social norms most strongly related (Keller and Miller 2015). These results hint that shifting social norms can influence crime reporting, increasing a victim’s intention to report a crime with the emergence of supportive norms. This framework underlines

the assumption in the second mechanism that female politicians can shift norms around reporting domestic violence.

Past Research: Female Political Representation

The share of women in politics worldwide has increased steadily over the past few decades, with significant research being conducted to understand the impact of this increase on countries. Much of the recent literature has emerged from India following the passage of its village council reservation policy in 1993. A group of studies analyzed the policy outcomes in village governments in the years after the reservation system was implemented, comparing policy outcomes between villages with reserved council headship and villages without reserved council headship (Duflo and Chattopadhyay 2004; Beaman et al. 2007). Given that these studies were conducted in quasi-experimental settings where there was a random assignment of female political representation, it is possible to attribute differences in policy outcomes across villages to the presence of a female village head.

Villages assigned a female leader provide more public investment reflecting women's preferences than unreserved villages, resulting in improved health indicators for children and girls' education (Duflo and Chattopadhyay 2004; Beaman et al. 2007). Examining data on 265 Village Councils, Duflo and Chattopadhyay (2004) find evidence that female leaders invest more in public goods more closely associated with issues that women have expressed more concern about: drinking water and roads. As an extension to the research of Duflo and Chattopadhyay, Beaman et al. (2007) analyze the causal impact of female policymakers on policy activism, child welfare, political participation, and gender discrimination. They also discovered that the composition of public investment in villages is related to the gender of the leader, with female leaders being more likely to invest in drinking water and roads (Beaman et al. 2007). These

forms of public spending reflect how female politicians have policy priorities closely aligned with women's needs (Beaman et al. 2007).

Indian state politics, unaffected by the reservation system, have also seen similar policy outcomes among female politicians, with researchers exploiting close elections between male and female candidates to isolate the causal effect of female politicians in state assemblies. Clots-Figueras (2011) finds that both the gender of legislators and their socio-economic background determine the allocation of public expenditure. Female legislators invest more in health and education than male legislators, though differences exist between female legislators from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Clots-Figueras 2011). Moreover, while Clots-Figueras (2012) discovers that constituencies that elect women receive higher investments in education, Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras (2014) find that an increase in women's political representation results in a reduction in neonatal mortality. Female politicians are more likely to invest in public health facilities and expand health services, while male counterparts are more likely to invest in financial infrastructure (Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras 2014). These last two papers do not explore the socio-economic identities of female politicians, thus potentially limiting the generalization of these policy decisions across all female politicians. Nonetheless, evidence shows that increasing female political representation in local and state governments results in greater responsiveness to women's concerns, especially health and education.

However, the influence of female politicians may be over-or under-estimated if one analyzes their impact solely based on the size or composition of public spending. Baskaran and Hessami (2019) use information from council meetings alongside a regression discontinuity regression on mixed-gender races in Bavaria to show that "an additional woman in the council leads to more frequent discussions on childcare and induces all-female councils to speak up more

often.” Focusing on the actions of individual politicians, Lippman (2019) analyzes amendments put forth by legislators in the French Upper and Lower House, demonstrating that female legislators are more likely to author amendments on women’s issues than male legislators. These findings illustrate the importance of looking more closely at the behavior of female politicians in policy implementation to understand the full extent of their impact. Baskaran and Hessami’s research hints at the benefit of supplementing statistical analysis with qualitative data to get a more accurate interpretation of how female politicians can generate change, as I will do in this thesis.

Background: Domestic Violence in India

Violence against women and girls is a widespread problem where, globally, one in three women will face violence in their lifetime (Joseph et al. 2017). The phenomenon of violence against women within the family in India is a highly complex issue, with domestic violence existing as a generational problem over the past thousands of years (Joseph et al. 2017). According to recent data from the NCRB, domestic violence against women surpasses all other categories of crimes against women in India (Kalokhe et al. 2017). The multitude of factors leading to this high incidence of domestic violence includes the deeply rooted male patriarchal roles and long-standing cultural norms “that propagate the view of women as subordinates throughout their lifespan” (Kalokhe et al. 2017). During childhood, families give less importance to girls' education, and many are married off early, heightening their susceptibility to domestic violence (Kalokhe et al. 2017). Moreover, mothers, especially those with only female children, become more vulnerable to abuse and financial, medical, and nutritional neglect (Kalokhe et al. 2017).

Despite regional differences in female autonomy and access to opportunities, there is generally limited variation in rates of domestic violence across India (Joseph et al. 2017).

Moreover, these high rates underestimate the violent reality women face within their families due to the considerable under-reporting of domestic violence cases (Joseph et al. 2017). This under-reporting echoes trends across many developing countries, with recent global estimates suggesting that among women who seek help after experiencing violence, fewer than 10 percent report such cases to the police (Joseph et al. 2017). Women may choose not to report domestic violence due to the fear of retaliation by their partner and a lack of confidence in the resources available (Joseph et al. 2017). Moreover, conventional survey questions, such as those in India's NFHSs, exacerbate this problem, as the accuracy of prevalence data depends on "the content of questions asked, the extent of privacy, protection from retaliatory behavior by others, and the cooperation of the respondents" (Joseph et al. 2017). With many respondents failing to cooperate, the reliability of prevalence data tends to be poor and is thus likely to yield an underestimation of the incidence of domestic violence (Joseph et al. 2017).

High levels of domestic violence are a public health concern, having adverse effects on women's physical and mental health. Among the many negative repercussions on both women and their children, domestic violence has been linked to increased tobacco use, lack of contraceptive and condom use, diminished utilization of health care, and depression (Kalokhe et al. 2017). It also has high economic costs for women and their families and the economies of entire countries. The negative impact on women's participation in education, employment, and civic life detracts from efforts to reduce poverty, with lost productivity and the draining of resources from social services, the justice system, and health-care agencies (Puri 2016). For example, in India, women can lose an average of at least five paid workdays for each incident of intimate partner violence, cutting their salary by 25 percent each time an incident occurs (Puri 2016). The prevalence of domestic violence in India and its serious toll on women and entire countries exacerbate the importance of research into potential solutions.

Past Research: Female Political Representation and Domestic Violence Against Women

Studies have shown promising evidence of how a shift in women's political representation can dramatically affect reporting behaviors among women for domestic violence crimes. Iyer et al. (2012) examine the impact of increasing female representation in local government on documented crimes against women outcomes and policies targeted towards the empowerment of minority groups. They posit that politicians that belong to minority groups are likely to have different preferences for policy formulation and implementation, given that their experiences are shaped by their unique identities (Iyer et al. 2012). This could influence law enforcement agencies, who may become more responsive to the concerns of underprivileged groups (Iyer et al. 2012). In addition, the presence of minority politicians could also change the attitudes and self-confidence of the disadvantaged groups (Iyer et al. 2012). Iyer et al. find that the introduction of mandated political representation for women leads to a significant increase in reported crimes against women (Iyer et al. 2012). They also find evidence of greater police responsiveness to crimes against women, likely to encourage more reporting (Iyer et al. 2012).

However, unlike Iyer et al.'s quasi-experiment that leverages India's reservation policy, Asiedu et al. (2016) conduct a large-scale observational study to explore whether countries with a higher share of women in parliament are more likely to pass laws targeting violence against women. They discover that developing countries with a higher percentage of women in parliament are more likely to pass comprehensive laws on sexual harassment, rape, divorce, and domestic violence (Asiedu et al. 2016). However, this research cannot isolate a causal link between female politicians and policymaking due to no randomization method within the data. As a result, unobserved country characteristics could have influenced the policy decisions attributed to the gender of the politician. As an extension to Iyer et al.'s and Asiedu et al.'s research, Delaporte and Pino (2021) explore the effect of female political representation in

mayoral positions on violence against women in Brazil. They analyze shifts in gender violence, finding that electing female mayors reduces the incidence of gender violence (Delaporte and Pino 2021). In line with the theoretical grounding of previous researchers, they conclude that female mayors might implement different policies from male mayors that specifically target gender violence (Delaporte and Pino 2021).

This thesis seeks to follow up on the works of Iyer et al., Delaporte and Pino, and other researchers who use close elections between male and female political candidates to explore trends in violence against women following the election of female politicians. However, there is a scarcity of research on the relationship between female political representation and reported domestic violence against women. For example, both Iyer et al. and Delaporte and Pino generalize the effect of female politicians across all types of violence against women. In addition, past research does little to single out the mechanisms involved, either through further research into the behavior or policies of female politicians. For example, Delaporte and Pino conclude their paper by noting three potential mechanisms but do not support them with further analysis (Delaporte and Pino 2021). Therefore, this thesis extends and improves upon past research by diving deeply into a form of violence against women that is difficult to investigate to understand better how female state political representation impacts its reporting.

Methods

This thesis seeks to understand how increasing female political participation in state legislative assemblies impacts the reporting of domestic violence against women. This thesis utilizes a mixed-methods approach of a quantitative and qualitative section to examine this causal relationship thoroughly. While mixing research methods serves different purposes and has other designs, within this thesis, this approach serves an explanatory purpose where qualitative

data is used to help clarify quantitative results. The quantitative analysis aims to understand the relationship between female state political representation and reported domestic violence against women within the context of this research. Thus, the purpose of the qualitative analysis is to understand the mechanisms behind the outcome of this data. This thesis subsequently combines these two sections to conclude the nature of the relationship between female state political representation and reported domestic violence against women in India. This mixed-methods approach allows me to compare findings from quantitative and qualitative sources to form a more robust analysis of the potential relationship and overcome the limitations of using a single method.

Quantitative Methods

Overview

This thesis uses regression techniques commonly seen in development economics and other social sciences to identify if a causal relationship between female state political representation and reported domestic violence against women exists. The two datasets used were compiled from two published papers and can be identified as the Elections Dataset and Crimes Dataset. The Election Dataset was constructed by Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras and originated from the Election Commission of India. It contains observations (number of votes) for every state and district level election between 1967 and 2001. I merged this data with the Crimes Dataset, constructed by Iyer et al. and originating from the "Crime in India" publications from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). This dataset contains observations from 1985 to 2007 from the first stage of the criminal justice system, primarily the filings of the "First Information Report " with the police. Given data availability, the years 1986 to 1998 will be used in this study; roughly 4,100 observations were recorded.

Observations were aggregated at the district-year level. The district is the best unit of analysis, as it enables “the estimation of the effect of the gender of the politicians in the smallest possible area that contains their electoral constituency” (Clots-Figueras 2012). As noted earlier, districts are smaller than states and are made up of multiple constituencies. Given that significant differences in reported domestic violence exist within states due to urban-rural variation in reporting norms and incidences of domestic violence, analysis at a smaller level of aggregation is most useful (Iyer et al. 2012). The data was cleaned and analyzed using Stata with table formatting in Microsoft Word.

Both datasets are being analyzed for multiple reasons. Firstly, the datasets have been analyzed extensively in studies examining how increased female political representation impacts different development outcomes in India, including documented crimes against women. As a result, complex statistical models have already been constructed for them. Furthermore, the original data within the datasets are publicly available to use, thus eliminating the cost of handling large quantities of data. Finally, both the Crimes Dataset and the Elections Dataset are generally broad and comprehensible, containing nationally representative observations for various categories of annual reported crimes against women and election years. The only other source containing district-level data on domestic violence in India is the NFHS, a large-scale, multi-round survey administered to a representative sample of Indian households. However, the survey only began collecting data on domestic violence in 1998 and is conducted every five years. Thus, it does not provide adequate data to align with the state election years within the Crimes Dataset.

Data Limitations and Mitigation Techniques

The Crimes Dataset has numerous limitations which threaten the validity and generalizability of the results if not adequately mitigated. Due to restraints to the scope of this

thesis, this section only focuses on what I believe to be the key limitations: missing data and reporting discrepancies.

One significant drawback is that the Crimes Dataset does not contain a unique variable for reported domestic violence against women. With this missing variable, it is impossible to directly measure the impact of female state political representation on reported domestic violence. To circumvent this missing variable, two other forms of crimes against women were selected from the Crimes Dataset to serve as proxy variables for domestic violence. The available proxy variables included kidnappings of women and girls, rapes of women, murders for love affairs or dowry reasons, and murders of women. While marital rape is not officially recognized as a crime in India, Indian women face high rates of sexual violence from their husbands, comparable to the rates of rape against Indian women (Frayer 2022). Indian women who are raped by their husbands can still file domestic violence charges rather than rape charges, thus, I have selected the proportion of rapes of women as a crime category that is representative of reported domestic violence (Frayer 2022). In addition, the deaths of women associated with dowry demands are legally recognized within India's formal definition of domestic violence and are widespread in India (UN Women). As a result, the share of murders for love affairs or dowry reasons out of total murders also indicates reported domestic violence.

A closely related limitation is the lack of reporting by domestic violence survivors. As previously noted, domestic violence is known to be systematically underreported in India, producing a significant discrepancy between the actual incidence of and reported domestic violence. Given that the Crimes Dataset obtains data on crimes against women from complaints filed by the police, the data reflects the reporting behaviors of women, including domestic violence survivors. As a result, this discrepancy prevents me from considering reported domestic violence as an equivalent measure of the incidence of domestic violence. To overcome this

drawback, I have placed limitations on the interpretation of the quantitative results. This thesis explores the potential changes in the reporting of domestic violence as a result of increasing female state political representation rather than the incidence of domestic violence. Thus, the regression models reveal specific estimates of the potential effects of female state politicians on reported domestic violence.

Despite the inability of the data available to capture domestic violence against women perfectly, this dataset and the two variables serving as proxies for reported domestic violence are the best possible alternative for investigating the potential relationship between female state political representation and domestic violence. By establishing a clear context for interpretation, this thesis is still valid in understanding possible changes caused by female state politicians.

Ordinary Least Squares: Analysis and Validity

The Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model is the primary statistical technique used to explore the data. Regression analysis is used for this study as it allows for identifying the independent effect of the predictor variable on the outcome variable. I specifically employ an OLS model, as it is frequently used in economic analysis, including Iyer et al.. Analysis through the OLS model will estimate the impact of female state political representation on reported domestic violence against women by running regressions of the proportion of rapes of women and the share of murders for love affairs or dowry reasons on the measure of female state political representation. The causal effect will be isolated after accounting for fixed effects and controlling for district characteristics and linear time trends. My two models are the following:

(1)

(2)

The current models are loosely based on past work by Iyer et al. who use an OLS regression model to analyze the impact of local female political representation on reported

crimes against women. To identify the causal effect of female state politicians, I also leverage Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras's (2014)'s definition of a close election for the state legislative assembly. Members of a state legislative assembly are elected by single-member districts meaning each district within a state elects a single representative to the assembly. Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras establish a close election as one in which the difference of the votes between the winner and the runner-up is less than 3.5% of the total votes in a particular election (Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras 2014). Women winning close elections counter issues of endogeneity that may arise with selection effects for a female leader (Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras 2014). For example, a more progressive district may be more likely to both elect a woman and have better reporting norms around domestic violence (Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras 2014).

The variables within the models are as follows:

Term	Interpretation
	Reported rapes per 1,000 women in district d in year t
	Number of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons in district d in year t
	Total reported murders in district d in year t
	District-level fixed effects
	Coefficient of interest. Interpreted as the effect of female state political representation on the proportion of reported rapes of women.
	Coefficient of interest. Interpreted as the effect of female state political representation on the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons.
	Error term
	District-level time fixed effects

In other words, in model (1), the outcome variable is the proportion of reported rapes of women for a given district. Iyer et al. already generated rapes per 1,000 women by dividing the total reported rapes of women per district for a given year by the female population of the district and multiplying by 1,000. In model (2), the outcome variable is the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons out of total murders for a given district. Iyer et al. also already generated this variable by dividing the total number of murders for love affairs or dowry reasons by the total number of murders per district for a given year. Since electoral data only pertain to the years in which elections take place, which occur every five years, the close election information was carried forward in subsequent years until the next election. Given that the dataset is zero-inflated for the number of female politicians elected through close elections, a dummy variable is used as the predictor variable for female state political representation (see *Model Limitations* for more). This dummy variable takes on the value of 1 if a female representative is elected to the state legislative assembly via a close election and takes on the value of 0 in the absence of this occurrence.

The models control for a wide range of factors that may affect reported domestic violence against women at a given time and place and will be derived from the Crimes Dataset. These controls include district-level female literacy rates, which could impact female victims' awareness of their legal rights and, therefore, influence reporting of domestic violence across districts (Iyer et al. 2012). Furthermore, the reporting of domestic violence is typically lower in rural areas relative to urban areas, a potential trend that could emerge across the different districts (Peek-Asa et al. 2011). As a result, the proportion of people who live in rural areas in each district is established as a control. Edlund et al. (2007) documented that high male-female ratios result in increased reported rates of crime, as a result, the proportion of the district population that is female has been established as another control.

Model Limitations and Mitigation Techniques

The main challenge in assembling these models is the ability to control for unobservable factors and therefore isolate the potential effect of female state politicians. I am unable to account for unobservable characteristics among politicians beyond gender. Another variable that is difficult to control is the implementation of state policies targeting the reporting decisions of domestic violence, as no such dataset exists. However, the inclusion of district-level fixed effects removes systematic differences in the attributes of districts not accounted for by the existing controls. Moreover, the inclusion of district-level time-varying controls eliminates omitted variable bias caused by unobservable variables that are constant across entities but change over time.

Another challenge is that my preliminary examination of the data reveals few close elections between female and male candidates and even fewer close elections where female candidates won. These low occurrences could increase the difficulty of picking up a relationship within the models. Including a dummy variable for female state political representation reduces the possibility of the data being zero-loaded within the independent variable without biasing my regression results.

Qualitative Methods

In addition to the quantitative section, this thesis includes an extensive qualitative section. This portion is dedicated to building a practical understanding of the quantitative results obtained in the OLS models. Together, these two results are used to construct a theoretical model to understand how female state political representation may impact reported domestic violence against women.

Qualitative data for this study are drawn from a series of 30-minute semi-structured interviews with two branches of individuals, non-profit organizations, and researchers. The semi-

structured methodology was selected due to background research, the existence of the quantitative findings, and the established knowledge among interviews within the topic area. This type of interview enables a systematic and focused approach while still allowing for new ideas to be brought by the interviewee. In total, I interviewed four individuals, including one person working at a nonprofit and three researchers:

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Interview Arm
Tara Smith	Researcher
Raj Van	Researcher
Lucy Kumar	Researcher
Alan Lane	Non-Profit

Interviewees were gathered through cold emailing a random sample of individuals and organizations. Non-profit organizations were selected based on their missions and programs related to female political representation and domestic violence in India. I selected researchers in academia based on their proximity to this field of research and through recommendations from interviewees. Unfortunately, individuals from both arms were highly unresponsive to emails, with a response rate of 16 percent. Interviews were conducted over Zoom and typically lasted thirty to forty minutes. These interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. To protect participants' identities, I only identified them with pseudonyms, and I redacted any other identifying information.

The conversations were guided by a set of open-ended questions with further probes. While the questions changed slightly depending on the participant's background, researchers and non-profits were asked about the level of engagement between female citizens and politicians at different levels of government. I also asked about their perspective on domestic violence policy

priorities of male and female state politicians and, if relevant, for examples of policies or initiatives that they have seen be implemented by female state politicians. Finally, researchers and non-profit organizations were also asked about the barriers to reporting domestic violence against women and the reasons for potential shifts in reporting behavior. The interview protocol is included in the appendix (Appendix A).

After completing the interviews, I transcribed them using the Otter.ai application. I used an inductive approach to coding, a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data in which themes and findings are derived from the interpretations of detailed readings of the raw data (Thomas 2006). As a result, I first read through all the data before noting significant themes from the interviews. The codebook was based on my initial scan of the readings, which enabled me to identify thematic categories to examine. Interviews were re-read and analyzed in accordance with the codebook. Given the uncertainty surrounding the quantitative results and existing mechanisms, inductive coding was the best approach for this research, as prior assumptions and preconceived themes did not act as restraints. As a result, the possibility of the obstruction or reframing of critical ideas within the qualitative data is eliminated.

Ultimately, responses were examined to determine what role, if any, female state political representation has on reported domestic violence against women and the mechanisms in place that establish any existing relationship. The qualitative results are combined with the quantitative results to build a theoretical understanding of how increased female state political representation in India has impacted reported domestic violence against women. The qualitative section is essential to investigate this topic, as it provides a real-world translation of the trends and significance established in the quantitative analysis. Although quantitative analysis provides us with helpful information on what is occurring within the relationship between female state political representation and reported domestic violence against women, it remains challenging to

identify any mechanisms without further exploration. Thus, the interviews were an essential component of exploring what is occurring at the district level and why the outcomes have materialized.

Limitations of Qualitative Research

However, there are some limitations to this methodology. A primary limitation is the possibility of generalizability. Given that I only interviewed four people, the interview data represents a selection of opinions across a diverse academic field and network of non-profit organizations in India. As a result, although the interviews help form a basic understanding of the field, they are insufficient to build a robust knowledge of the wide range of perspectives. However, the variety of backgrounds, demographic characteristics, and work of the interviewees help to mitigate this risk. In addition, there may be selection bias. It is possible that only a specific type of individual would have felt compelled to respond to my interview request, perhaps those with stronger feelings about female political representation or domestic violence. The use of recommendations may also have contributed to selection bias; researchers often suggested their colleagues who may have similar backgrounds and viewpoints.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

To best analyze the data, I ran numerous ordinary least squares regression models to detect the causal impact of female state political representation on reported domestic violence against women. The set of models each involved a dummy variable for female state political representation regressed on a proxy variable for reported domestic violence and multiple control variables. As previously noted, the two measures of reported domestic violence against women are the proportion of reported rapes and the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry

reasons out of total murders. Given that these two outcome variables were fixed as proportions within the original dataset, I did not log transform them for clarity in interpreting the percent changes within the results.

Reported Proportion of Rapes of Women

TABLE 1
REGRESSION RESULTS. DEPENDENT VARIABLE: PROPORTION OF REPORTED RAPES OF WOMEN

Regressor	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female State Political Representation	0.0042	0.0001	0.0002
Urban Population rate		-0.0064	-0.0152
Female Literacy rate		0.1839	0.1125
Female Population		-0.4762	-0.5510
District Fixed Effects?	No	No	Yes
Time Fixed Effects?	No	No	Yes
Observations	4,226	3,482	3,482
R-Squared	0.0021	0.9475	0.5007
Adjusted R-Squared	0.0019	0.9432	0.4622

*Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$*

The models presented in Table 1 reveal a consistent insignificant effect of female state politicians on the proportion of reported rapes of women. Model (1) illustrates that districts with the election of a female state politician saw a small and insignificant increase in the proportion of reported rapes of women without the inclusion of control variables and fixed effects. The introduction of the district-level controls for urban population, female literacy, and female population in model (2) makes no significant difference, although slightly lowering the magnitude of the coefficient for the effect of female state political representation. After including both the district-level controls and fixed effects in model (3), the reported proportion of rapes among women trends slightly upwards in districts that elected a female state politician, with a 0.02% increase in reported rape, but this effect remains statistically insignificant.

Share of Reported Murders for Love Affairs or Dowry Reasons

TABLE 2
REGRESSION RESULTS. DEPENDENT VARIABLE: SHARE OF REPORTED MURDERS FOR LOVE AFFAIRS OR DOWRY REASONS

Regressor	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female State Political Representation	0.0083	0.0013	0.0013
Urban Population rate		-0.0968	-0.0968
Female Literacy rate		0.4648	0.4648
Female Population		-0.2582	-0.2582
District Fixed Effects?	No	No	Yes
Time Fixed Effects?	No	No	Yes
Observations	3,895	3,203	3,203
R-Squared	0.0017	0.6135	0.3691
Adjusted R-Squared	0.0015	0.5791	0.3658

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

The models presented in Table 2 reveal a consistent insignificant effect of female state politicians on the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons. Model (1) illustrates that districts with the election of a female state politician saw a small and insignificant increase in the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons, without including control variables and fixed effects. The introduction of the district-level controls of the urban population rate, female literacy rate, and female population rate in model (2) lowers the magnitude of the coefficient for the effect of female state politicians, decreasing the estimate while remaining statistically insignificant. After including both the district-level controls and fixed effects in model (3), the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons follows an identical upward trend of a 0.13% increase in districts that elected a female state politician, but this effect is still not statistically significant.

Conclusion of Quantitative Findings

I include two models to provide a representative analysis of changes in reported domestic violence against women. The first model (Table 1) reveals that, when looking at the proportion

of reported rapes of women, there is not a statistically significant difference in reporting with increasing female state political representation. Similarly, the second model (Table 2) reveals that when looking at the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons, the correlation between this proxy variable and female state political representation is not statistically significant. Taken together, neither of the models indicates statistically significant percentage changes in the proxy variables. Therefore, with this lack of evidence, it is impossible to conclude that women's election to state legislative assemblies changed reported domestic violence against women.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings cover four major themes: reporting domestic violence, the role of female state politicians, barriers for female state politicians while in office, and grassroots efforts around domestic violence. These explored topics hint at the factors driving domestic violence reporting against women and the role of female state politicians. By synthesizing these various elements, it is possible to understand why female state political representation in India does not necessarily shift the reporting of domestic violence among Indian women.

Reporting Domestic Violence

As this paper focuses on the potential impact of female state politicians on reported domestic violence against women, I begin with a discussion of how the reporting of domestic violence in India was discussed in interviews. According to my interviews, there are two distinct ways women in India report domestic violence, which varies significantly between rural and urban areas. One way is through an informal setting where women in rural areas bring domestic issues to their local politicians within their immediate proximity. The second way is reporting to the local police, which includes filing a police report and potentially pursuing legal action

against the abuser. The different ways female domestic violence survivors report domestic violence can produce different outcomes.

Formal Reporting of Domestic Violence

The conventional way women report domestic violence in India is via the police. This formal reporting process is isolated to a small population of high-income women due to the high barriers to reporting for low-income women and the generally low reporting levels of domestic violence in India. Tara Smith, a researcher and former volunteer with domestic violence victims in a large city in India, grimly explains the perceptions around the formal reporting process: “This is the last recourse for women. Less than 1% will actually take the step to report or hardly any like even in the West, you don't do it.” This statement surrounding reporting habits focuses on the rareness of reporting domestic violence in India, recognizing that the lack of formal reporting of domestic violence is a deeply ingrained issue.

A natural question that arises when discussing formally reporting domestic violence against women is the barriers to doing so. Interviewees cited three main factors inhibiting women's ability to report domestic violence. First, interviewees referenced the lack of trust among women in serving justice against their abusers within the judicial system. According to Raj Van, a researcher who surveyed domestic violence victims on their reporting decisions in Chile, “what women typically say is that they did not report because they thought that this would have no real consequences.” Similarly, Smith notes the lack of responsiveness of Indian police to domestic violence victims and the slow-moving nature of the legal system: “You always run into problems, it's always difficult to get the things reported. You might need someone to call up the police or have [...] connections.” While a thorough examination of the discouragement within

the legal system in India is outside the scope of this study, it is still relevant to note the negative perceptions domestic violence survivors have of the formal reporting process as a result.

The second commonly mentioned barrier to formal reporting is the lack of accessibility to and education surrounding the available resources and public institutions. This inaccessibility is a significant problem for Indian women living in rural areas. Lucy Kumar, a researcher who interviewed domestic violence survivors in rural villages in India, spoke about how police stations outside of village boundaries are unreachable to these survivors: “For the vast majority of women in these rural communities, the village is their entire existence.” As a result, not only is there limited knowledge about the formal process of reporting domestic violence, but the action of reporting itself becomes a challenging task.

A third barrier defined by interviewees is the fear of retaliation by abusers and the social shaming of survivors who report domestic violence to the police. Van notes that the possibilities of physical attacks and social rejection concern the well-being of domestic violence survivors, but “[they] also fear that there's going to be repercussions to their family, their children.” The severe consequences of formally reporting domestic violence heighten the stakes that domestic violence survivors must consider in deciding whether or not to report, ultimately diminishing their desires to do so. The negative reflections of these interviewees on the ability of domestic violence survivors to file a police report echo deterrence factors mentioned within the literature on intent to report crimes as well as reporting domestic violence (Joseph et al. 2017; Keller and Miller 2015). However, some interviewees hint at barriers unique to India, particularly at the village level. In the following subsection, I will therefore show how the majority of Indian domestic violence survivors report through alternative avenues.

Informal Reporting of Domestic Violence

These barriers to reporting domestic violence ultimately influence how Indian women navigate documenting their experiences. In rural villages in India, the primary way that women report domestic violence is by contacting local representatives that hold judicial power. Judicial responsibilities are legally designated to local representatives who oversee the resolving of domestic and social disputes in the villages. Rather than focusing explicitly on tackling development issues, they often serve as the adjudicators of social problems. Interviewees brought up these judicial actors in the context of their responsibility in mediating and resolving domestic violence issues within households, placing importance on their role. Alan Lane, who works at a non-profit in India that empowers female political representation and participation, describes the purpose of turning to these local authorities: “When the local communities are very bound by patriarchal mindset, the elders in the family [...] as well as the community would prefer that this issue gets resolved in an amicable way without going through the legal route.” The focus on compromise within this description illustrates how this informal process operates within traditional societal expectations around domestic violence that continue to exist in rural areas and reinforce gender-aggressive norms. Furthermore, Lane suggests a lack of agency among domestic violence survivors, as the preferences of the entire community, including their families, impact their reporting decisions.

As a result, in these instances of informal reporting, many interviewees emphasize how women are often deterred from pursuing legal action against their abusers. Kumar describes the active discouragement of a local male representative in an Indian village that she visited:

Women were frustrated by how one of the members of their women's group had experienced substantial violence from her husband at home. They were planning to go together to file a formal legal complaint against the husband. They decided to approach their local leader, a man, and ask him to get her protection and maybe talk to the husband first [...] He essentially acted as a mediator in the relationship between the husband and

the wife, but ultimately [...] made it very clear that it would be problematic if they actually went and filed a legal claim.

This example illustrates how these judicial leaders reinforce patriarchal mindsets around avoiding the formal reporting of domestic violence, resulting in less legal action by domestic violence survivors and increasing their frustration with their inability to seek justice. The mere existence of this informal method of handling domestic violence is enough to counter efforts for real measures. Compared to Kumar, Smith describes this mediation as having less explicit discouragement, where “[they] might suggest outcomes that seem reasonable. But they are really discouraging women from taking more formal actions.” Both Kumar and Smith highlight the troubling nature of using these local judicial representatives for navigating domestic violence. By seeking guidance from these authority figures, domestic violence victims become less likely to access public resources. These existing problems with current methods of reporting domestic violence naturally lead to the following section to understand whether female state politicians can play a role in shifting the reporting behavior of domestic violence survivors.

Role of Female State Politicians

Given the substantial literature on the impact of female political representation on development outcomes, particularly violence against women, it is informative to investigate the narrative surrounding the involvement of female state politicians with female citizens and whether it relates to the issue of reported domestic violence against women. Generally, interviewees describe first-hand experiences where they have seen differences in how female and male politicians engage with female citizens and domestic violence.

Approachability

When women are elected to state legislative assemblies, they bring more attention to domestic violence due to their desire to tackle the issue and the engagement of domestic violence survivors with them. Some interviewees discussed how having a female leader at the state level in India makes some domestic violence survivors more inclined to seek their help. Recounting the experience of a female state politician in a big city in India, Smith notes how domestic violence survivors actively reach out to female state politicians in urban areas due to their perception that their power is effective yet approachable in resolving domestic violence:

She often gets women from slums who will come to her with issues of domestic violence abuse [...] So that's where the woman politician actually plays a role. It's usually state-level politicians because the national level is too far removed and local politicians who are in municipal politics are not that powerful.

Interviewees generalized the approachability of female politicians for female citizens to local government. Smith goes on to explain the everyday situations in which female citizens reach out to female politicians, noting the types of issues that inspire them to reach out: “They will often reach out to [female politicians] in times of distress, and you see this mechanism much more strongly when women are reaching out to other women. They wouldn't do it if there were a male politician, for instance.” The reflections of Smith highlight the existing connection between domestic violence and the engagement of domestic violence survivors with female politicians. These quotations demonstrate how the gender of a politician influences whether women engage with them and how they identify female politicians as necessary resources when dealing with domestic violence.

However, interviewees note that there are still limitations to the engagement of female state politicians with female citizens, particularly with those living in rural areas. Kumar explains how the unique structure of the Indian government makes state politicians more challenging to access by the women they serve: “There are three tiers of government before you even get to the

state [...] If you overlay that, there's this substantial distance between women and state representatives." As a result, women find it easier to seek out and interact more frequently with local politicians, especially when they are women.

Even in local politics, where women can access local female representatives more easily, some interviewees emphasize how they still engage with them at lower rates than men. Kumar notes that the election of a female politician is not enough to increase the political engagement of female citizens drastically:

When you look at even these local representatives who live in these communities, to whom they should have the most access, women have far fewer ties to those elected officials than men do. That even holds for women politicians, that male citizens are better connected to the local female politicians than women citizens are.

Ultimately, women at the local level continue to struggle to receive support from politicians, regardless of the politician's gender. This low engagement hints at the limitations of female politicians to impact reported domestic violence against women.

Prioritizing Domestic Violence

In tandem with the comfort that female citizens associate with state and local female politicians, female leaders also identify more with issues related to women, including helping domestic violence survivors. For instance, Smith reflects on interviews with local political leaders in India during her research: "I think only women have mentioned the type of work they've done for women in terms of domestic violence [...] Men don't even highlight those issues. It's very remarkable." This contrasting perspective shows distinct differences between the issues that male and female politicians choose to focus on. The concern of female politicians with domestic violence influences the types of interactions they prioritize with their constituents, resulting in more interactions with domestic violence survivors.

Similar to Smith's emphasis on the gendered interest in domestic violence, Lane describes how female leaders have a strong inclination to address issues specific to women, using an example of a municipal councilor who focused on violence against women:

She became very approachable to women in her constituency, which wasn't the case earlier. She insisted that women be part of any meetings that happened around this particular issue. In that sense, [female politicians] become more approachable and issues of violence against women came into the limelight.

This statement surrounding the support that a female politician provides to female constituents speaks to the responsiveness of female politicians to the needs of domestic violence survivors. While not described within the context of policy outcomes, the perspectives of Smith and Lane amplify how the involvement of state and local politicians with women's issues increases when they are women, as female politicians better address the needs of women. This narrative echoes Besley and Coates' citizen-candidate model within the field of political science that attributes policy differences across politicians to the policy preferences of the elected politician (Besley and Coates 1997). This model emphasizes that gender plays a vital role in explaining policy differences across politicians, with policy outcomes converging to issues favored by female politicians when they are in power (Besley and Coates 1997). In the next section, I will show how the limited outcomes for reported domestic violence with the election of female state politicians in India indicate the political and social barriers confronting them.

Barriers for Female State Politicians

Policy Implementation

Despite evidence of a desire among female politicians to focus on the issue of domestic violence, there are limitations to their ability to respond to the needs of survivors and implement related policies. One reason noted by interviewees is the top-down and impersonal approach taken by the Indian government when determining policy priorities. According to Lane,

“[because] of the centralization, policy priorities are often defined by the central command in the party or in the government rather than at the state level.” As a result, even if female state leaders have strong desires to address domestic violence in state legislative assemblies, the implementation of concrete measures is restricted by consensus required within their political party, who is less likely to favor this issue. Contrasting policy priorities at the state level with that at the local level in Brazil, Van also addresses the difficulty of implementing state policies that will have distinct impacts at the local level:

I think what is interesting about mayors is that you can do so much more in terms of local things that directly impact people. Things we're talking about, like, especially in India, if you think like improving roads, eliminating road cetera, cleaning roads, that may have a direct impact, and that's the local government.

With Lane hinting at the increased effectiveness of targeting domestic violence at the local level due to the ability to grasp specific contexts and tailor policies to fit them, it appears that female state politicians have limited success tackling domestic violence through a policy approach.

Gender Discrimination

However, even in instances where female state leaders can advocate for domestic violence as a policy priority, they face significant backlash from many of their supporters due to the conservative values that remain in India. Smith describes the controversial nature of advocating for women's issues as a state politician in India, highlighting the difficulty of having to balance public opinion with their personal beliefs:

We have this whole literature saying that women do this, women do that, but it's mostly public goods, which there's no fight about. If you build infrastructure for water, everyone benefits from it. But the moment you say that women should not be beaten up [...] that's where it's not okay for people.

This critical perspective reflects how female state politicians have only succeeded in passing policies on widely accepted and supported issues such as infrastructure and sanitation. These patriarchal values also encompass the increased scrutiny female state politicians face due to the visibility of their gender and dependence on vast networks of support. Interviewees note how female state politicians typically ascend to power through building-up grassroots support at the local level, unlike male state politicians who enter directly into state politics through personal connections. As Lane explains, “As opposed to male politicians, there is no sort of direct entry at the state level. [...] It is very important that [female state politicians] build that solidarity and network across these villages, who would advocate for [them] as a leader.” To preserve this support, they must perform exceptionally well as politicians, including remaining within the strict boundaries of acceptable policy priorities.

Lane goes on to describe how the controversy surrounding women’s issues and grassroots support culminates into a complex balancing situation for female politicians that forces them to tread carefully in their political actions:

There is an intrinsic expectation that if a woman is in charge, she'll probably do better things for women in the region. At the same time, there is pressure on women leaders to not sound very biased and only focus on women's issues. On the other hand, if someone has risen from the bottom [...] to the state level [...] then there is also some sort of pressure on her to perform.

This narrative reflects the unique circumstances that female state politicians must navigate in their position of power, having to balance the expectations of women with maintaining support from the remainder of the male-dominated voting population. Pressure to perform well for high-level female politicians also stems from their recognition of their visible role that establishes them as role models for young women. The lack of female state politicians in India places significant pressure on those elected to take this responsibility of being role

models seriously. Lane discusses different perceptions of Indian female politicians around being role models for young women:

[A female politician] might also want to become a role model for other young women to aspire for politics as a career. There is that performance pressure on them. One MLA [...] basically said she feels that there is a responsibility for her to perform and inspire other young women to look up to her. There was a similar opinion by a Bhutanese Health Minister we interviewed a few weeks ago. She said being the only woman in the national cabinet, she feels an extra burden of proving her worth and becoming an inspiration.

These examples demonstrate how female politicians hold themselves and their work to the highest standard due to their awareness of how young women look up to them, resulting in a strong desire to inspire them. Given that the issue of domestic violence is considered controversial and difficult to tackle through policy, female politicians are dispelled from prioritizing it at the state level. Van agrees with this sentiment, explaining how women have a deep appreciation and respect for female politicians in high-level positions through his memory of women celebrating the election of the first female president in Chile: “I saw women there were using the Presidential band, [...] a band with the colors of the flag of Chile. The women were [...] saying we are president, they were so empowered.” This positive perception from women around the election of female leaders reinforces the pressure that female state politicians place on themselves due to their recognition that their actions are being watched closely. Fearing criticism, female leaders ultimately focus fewer efforts on women’s issues, including reported domestic violence. In the following section, I examine how women in local communities advocate against and tackle domestic violence, extending beyond the scope of female state politicians.

Solutions via Grassroots Efforts

Faced with frustration with the responses of local judicial representatives to their experiences of domestic violence and the general lack of advocacy by politicians on behalf of their interests, women increase their political engagement and implement solutions at the local level. Multiple interviewees noted that a common way to bring about change to experiences of domestic violence against women is through the joining of women's political groups and grassroots movements. Smith provides a good overview of why these local efforts emerge among women in India:

Well, when is it that women are going to feel compelled to incur all of those costs and that backlash and the challenges of collective action to engage with this state? Well, they'll only do so if they feel that they're not getting something from the state and the current system is not representing their interests correctly [...] Women will act when [their] interests aren't represented.

Smith's emphasis on the repercussions for women who increase their political activism reflects the high stakes they face when fighting for change around domestic violence. Despite the harsh consequences, mobilization decisions illustrate the substantial agreement among Indian women that their interests are not adequately addressed by existing political and legal structures, including female state politicians. Smith goes into further detail on how violence against women is often the issue that sparks political activism: "Not that all women's groups lead to women mobilizing around violence, but of women's groups that do mobilize, violence ends up being a very common motivator for what brings them into the political space [...] So in some ways, women are bonded over this awful experience." As a result, the everyday experience of violence brings women together and leads to decisive action to effect change via campaigns against this issue.

Once women enter the political space via women's groups within political parties, they can fight more easily against domestic violence and the poor practices for supporting survivors. While explained outside of the context of explicitly addressing the reporting of domestic violence, Smith notes the importance of this increase in participation of women in political parties, as an increasing number of women can place pressure on politicians and inspire other women to join their efforts:

When women gather together as large groups and mobilize, they're able to challenge men, they're able to demand more parity from parties [...] Once you have women who are recruiting these women, they're establishing women's party wings, so you have like this massive increase in women inside parties at the grassroots level [...] One example is that there was some politician who made a very disparaging remark about a female politician and harassed some of the party workers. What happened the next year was that all these women gathered together, and they staged a protest [...] So you're seeing women increasingly using this sort of grassroots infrastructure to challenge norms. They're also using this kind of grassroots force to pressurize bureaucrats to get things done.

Smith attributes the ability of women to challenge social norms and bring attention to overlooked issues through their participation in political parties at the local level. Smith's example of a time when pressure was placed on a male politician by a women's party wing illustrates the potential for targeting domestic violence via these women's branches of political parties by bringing attention to domestic violence and changing social norms. Van also describes the role of women's party wings in political parties in India but acknowledges how they specifically help bring attention to violence against women:

[These women's party wings] are very effective in terms of raising issues of violence against women. In every case, where rape is reported, domestic violence is reported, these women and these wings within political parties are on the ground first in order to respond to the issue and raise this issue of concern with police authorities and government officials to ensure that justice is delivered.

While the success of their efforts to bring attention to violence against women remains unclear, women's party wings directly interact with domestic violence survivors, connecting them with formal reporting and legal procedures. As Van described, the responsiveness of women's party wings to the issue of violence against women can lead to better outcomes in reporting for domestic violence survivors.

In addition to joining women's wings within political parties, women mobilize together to form women's movements targeting domestic violence. Kumar describes how these grassroots activities among women can put pressure on politicians to address domestic violence as well as produce creative solutions to reduce its incidence:

They [show] up in public spaces and [make] clear that this is something they don't think is acceptable. They [organize] small-scale protests to make demands on these things. They do so through even informal mechanisms. One of the communities I visited, the women had decided to create their own police force. They are not an actual state-sanctioned police force, but they got themselves uniforms, and they have a series of systems where if a woman was about to experience violence, [...] they'll come and they'll try and stamp down on what the husband is doing.

This example of an informal police force run by women demonstrates how groups of women attempt to protect women from domestic violence from outside the policymaking space, illustrating their lack of trust in formal reporting that Lane discussed in the earlier sub-section on reporting domestic violence. However, there are challenges to the widespread impact of these grassroots efforts, with one interviewee hinting that to be effective, they must operate efficiently: "We know that these [women's movements] work when they get big enough, and when they push long enough at a national level to change policy, but at a micro-level [...] it's a balancing act of how well [the movement] works and the challenge of backlash." These female-led grassroots movements against domestic violence are met with pushback, sometimes even violence, from their communities, thus diminishing their success and discouraging women from

further activism. Acknowledging the growing importance of grassroots activism against domestic violence, Smith adds:

My sense would be that in the coming future, there will be much more challenges and resolutions of women's complaints through this density of grassroots activists, at least in urban areas. In the rural areas, things are more dispersed [...] women are subjected to much more punishment when they take action, so it's difficult.

To produce a definite change in the responsiveness of politicians to the demands of domestic violence survivors, it is essential for local women's efforts to unify women together more tightly. In rural areas, women find less community support and face harsher consequences for their activism. Thus, coordinated efforts are essential to ensuring solidarity among women within these areas.

Discussion of Findings

By combining the quantitative and qualitative data, conclusions emerge concerning the potential impact of female state politicians on reported domestic violence against women in India. As a result, this section harnesses trends established in the two sections, forming an answer to the primary question posed in this thesis while advancing findings that had not initially been considered within scope.

While sympathetic to domestic violence and approachable to women, there is no evidence that female state politicians impact reported domestic violence against women

The most important finding from this thesis is that there is no evidence indicating that female state political representation impacts reported domestic violence against women in India. In other words, the presence of women in state legislative assemblies is not enough to change women's reporting behaviors around domestic violence in their respective districts. Surprisingly, this was evident because both regression models with proxies for reported domestic violence

showed no causal effect of female state political representation on either variable. This finding goes against my initial expectation that the election of female state politicians would increase the reported domestic violence against women. This expected outcome was hypothesized through two potential mechanisms: the preferences of female politicians for policies helping domestic violence survivors access formal resources or their increased visibility subconsciously shifting social norms around reporting (Osborne and Slivinski 1996; Besley and Coates 1997; Keller and Miller 2015). With results indicating that female state politicians do not affect the reporting of domestic violence against women, this thesis proceeds in an unexpected direction that is difficult to explain with these hypothesized mechanisms.

Nonetheless, placing these results in the context of the past literature and interviews offers some clarity. Firstly, both Iyer et al. (2012) and Delaporte and Pino (2021) only identified that female politicians impact violence against women when looking at their role at a more local level rather than the state level. These results would align with the conclusion that reported domestic violence did not increase substantially with female representation in state legislative assemblies. This conclusion hints at the potential differences in the impacts of female politicians at the local level versus the state and national level mentioned by Lane in the qualitative findings section. Although Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras (2014) identified casual effects of female state political representation on policy issues related to women, these effects are restricted to the provision of public goods for infrastructure and education, which Smith asserted are widely supported issues within the policymaking space, unlike domestic violence.

Interviewee responses provide context as to why reported domestic violence against women does not appear to change in the data. Many interviewees indicated that female politicians in higher levels of government draw more attention to domestic violence due to their

concern for prioritizing women's issues. Other interviewees emphasized that engagement with politicians, including those in state legislative assemblies, increases for women when the politician is a female, particularly in urban areas where higher-level politicians are generally more accessible.

However, female state politicians may not have caused a significant change in reported domestic violence due to the many barriers that uniquely exist for them within politics and society. Given centralization within the Indian government, it is difficult for female state politicians to stray from preset policy agendas where their personal opinions and preferences have little input, as mentioned by Lane. As explained by Smith, there is also significant backlash around topics related to women's issues within the policymaking space, with male state politicians and constituents seeing domestic violence as a controversial policy issue. As a result, despite evidence of preferences for targeting domestic violence, female state politicians are limited in their ability to affect change in this area.

In addition, interviewees also indicated that female state politicians uniquely suffer from pressure to not focus on domestic violence due to existing gender biases and their popularity among female citizens. If they focus too much on issues related to women, female state politicians face criticism for only prioritizing women's needs. Both Lane and Van also mention how women in higher political positions in countries without many prominent female leaders naturally become role models for female citizens. Female state politicians are aware of the implications of their actions and feel pressure to perform well, thus forcing them to avoid topics that are either heavily scrutinized or challenging to tackle. As a result, they cannot focus on domestic violence as a policy priority, limiting their impact on reported domestic violence against women.

Local authorities exist as an informal system of reporting for domestic violence survivors, especially in India's rural areas

While the quantitative results firmly demonstrate that the increasing representation of females in state legislative assemblies did not change reported domestic violence against women, qualitative results bring in further complexities that add to the potential explanations for this surprising deviation. While the literature surrounding these additional findings remains outside this study's scope, these findings are still relevant to consider within the context of female state political representation and the reporting of domestic violence in India.

To begin with, a secondary finding of this thesis is that Indian women use informal reporting procedures as alternatives to the formal reporting process when navigating domestic violence. While this reporting trend is indicated by the discrepancy between the low reported domestic violence cases and high incidents of domestic violence in India, the interviewees provided a more profound understanding of the expected behavior of Indian women when faced with domestic violence. Multiple interviewees highlighted how domestic violence survivors in rural villages often seek judicial representatives who act as mediators between them and their abusive husbands, resolving the issue through conversation. However, as Smith stimulates, it is often the case that these judicial representatives reinforce the lack of involvement of the police in domestic violence and the consequent lack of repercussions for abusers. As a result, formal support structures, which are already difficult to access due to their physical distance from rural areas, are pushed further out of reach for domestic violence survivors, as asserted by Kumar. It, therefore, makes sense that reported domestic violence remains low in India and signals the difficulty of encouraging proper reporting behavior alongside the influence of these judicial actors within rural communities.

Engagement in political parties and grassroots efforts among women can result in desired changes around reported domestic violence

Much of the literature analyzing the impacts of female political representation in India does not account for women's potential role in local activism, especially in statistical analysis, where the strength of their actions is difficult to quantify. With increasing female state political representation seeming insufficient to produce desired changes in reported domestic violence, interviewees hinted at the existence of alternative and perhaps more effective methods developed by female citizens. Different forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, are powerful motivators for women to increase their political engagement and activism at the local level. When survivors struggle to achieve justice and politicians do not focus on the issue of domestic violence, female citizens are incentivized to join women's wings within political parties. In these wings, women demand further attention and mobilize more easily against domestic violence, as noted by Van and Smith.

In addition, interviewees also mentioned that women enact change around domestic violence in their local communities by organizing protests and creating resources that replace the existing untrustworthy formal systems. In some districts, women have organized public demonstrations that advocate for more legal protection for domestic violence survivors. Both Smith and Van emphasize the effectiveness of the mobilization of groups of women, as, collectively, they can assert pressure on politicians who, in turn, become more receptive to their interests. In other districts, more creative solutions that improve the reporting of domestic violence have been pursued, like one interviewee's example of creating an all-women police force. However, the success of these women-led measures against domestic violence is threatened by heavy backlash and the fragmentation of their efforts within their communities.

When these women's movements are organized effectively and able to grow in density, they are more likely to attract national awareness and responsiveness to their demands around domestic violence, as indicated by Kumar and Smith.

Conclusion of Findings

Based on these surprising findings, it is worth restating that this study had some limitations that I dealt with to the best of my ability with the existing resources and time. Firstly, given the nature of data collection on domestic violence in India, the focus of this study concerns reported domestic violence rather than the incidence of domestic violence. To mitigate this constraint, I restricted the interpretation of the outcomes from the quantitative analysis to the potential effect of female state political representation on the reporting behavior around domestic violence. Secondly, the variable of reported domestic violence did not exist within the available data. Thus, the crime categories of the proportion of the reported rapes of women and the share of reported murders for love affairs or dowry reasons served as proxies for reported domestic violence against women. I carefully selected these two variables due to their close association with abuse documented as domestic violence against women. Nonetheless, these limitations inspire some of the following policy recommendations and future research considerations.

Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, there are multiple avenues through which reported domestic violence against women can be better addressed, specifically around data collection, the accessibility of formal reporting, and the success of collective action among women. However, the generalizability and applicability of these recommendations are at present limited to India, as they are tailored to its unique political structure and social context. As a result, further testing is required before their implementation in other countries.

Recommendation 1: The Indian national government should improve its ability to determine the actual incidence of domestic violence

As reported within the methodology section, there are currently two official methods for documenting domestic violence at the state and district level in India: the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and the NFHS. However, due to the struggles faced by domestic violence survivors while navigating their experiences, both methods do not adequately capture the incidence of domestic violence in India. The NCRB's first information reports indicate the number of domestic violence cases filed with police. Domestic violence survivors in India tend not to register their experiences with police, leading reporting data from legal authorities to reflect a significant under-reporting of incidents. The NFHS collects self-responses from Indian women on domestic violence, indicating domestic violence incidents within a random sample of households. Self-responses from domestic violence survivors in the NFHS are also susceptible to under-reporting due to having to complete the survey within their home, where their abuser is likely to be present. Given these existing limitations, the Indian government needs to rethink how it can accurately capture the incidence of domestic violence.

By creating a documentation method that removes the dependency on reporting decisions of domestic violence survivors, a more realistic depiction of domestic violence in India can be formed. India can look to Brazil as a model for tackling this issue of under-reporting within government data. In 2003, Brazil implemented law 10,778 that established the compulsory reporting of all gender-based violence cases within public and private health institutions to the Ministry of Health. Keeping patients' identities anonymous and irrespective of their consent, health officials must fill out a form for any suspected cases of violence against women, including domestic violence. By implementing a similar law that targets alleged domestic violence at

healthcare institutions, India could reduce the gap between the actual prevalence of and reported domestic violence, thus allowing for a more accurate understanding of domestic violence. By maintaining patient anonymity and autonomy within the decision-making process for reporting their experience, domestic violence survivors can still be empowered to make informed decisions for themselves.

One potential risk to the successful implementation of this policy is that it might increase the withholding of information about injuries from medical professionals and even decrease domestic violence survivors' likelihood of seeking medical attention. Survivors may still fear potential identification that could produce repercussions from their abusers and unwelcomed police involvement. As a result, they may become wary of health officials preserving their privacy when they are being examined. To maintain trust between healthcare institutions and domestic violence survivors with the implementation of this policy, the Indian government must encourage healthcare institutions to discuss doctor-patient confidentiality with those seeking care before doing an assessment for domestic violence. Given the sensitive nature of this issue, health care providers can follow a script that assures their patients that the reporting of suspected domestic violence will remain confidential and limited to the Ministry of Health.

Recommendation 2: The Indian national government should increase the ease of accessing formal support for domestic violence survivors

One striking finding from the qualitative data was that domestic violence survivors seek help from local judicial representatives within rural areas due to their physical distance and lack of awareness of the formal reporting process. As these representatives prefer to conduct a mediation process among household members, they only succeed in pushing domestic violence survivors away from legal resources and crucial information. As a result, there need to be efforts

to alleviate some of the barriers to formal reporting and thus reduce the dependency on this harmful method of informal reporting. Describing India's existing legal reporting structures for domestic violence survivors, Kumar emphasizes, "I think instead of reinventing, there is also a world in which we try to make things more accessible." Similarly, according to Luz, more policies that ease women's reporting of domestic violence are necessary, especially ones concerning hotlines. Thinking about hotlines as an avenue for navigating domestic violence could help alleviate the physical inaccessibility and information gaps associated with reporting for domestic violence survivors.

In July 2021, the National Commission for Women, the statutory body of the Government of India responsible for advising the government on all policy matters affecting women, launched a 24/7 hotline for women facing violence during the lockdown. Women can access this hotline by calling the designated phone number. This hotline links domestic violence survivors with the appropriate authority, such as the police and women's centers, and provides helpful information about related government programs. The National Commission for Women only launched this number during the pandemic's peak until normal operations resumed. While establishing a hotline is a step in the right direction to help increase accessibility to formal reporting for domestic violence survivors, it does not go far enough to address the fear of safely seeking help mentioned by interviewees. Furthermore, while the hotline is currently still operating, there is no indication that it will remain a permanent initiative in the future.

As a result, efforts should be made to expand the services of this hotline and improve safety surrounding its accessibility for domestic violence survivors. Firstly, I propose that the National Commission for Women's hotline becomes a permanent resource offered and operated by the Indian government. Secondly, to ensure that domestic violence survivors across India feel

comfortable accessing the hotline, I propose that the National Commission for Women establish a WhatsApp number that can be used for texting the hotline. Texting offers an easy, safe, and more discreet option for survivors to reach out for help in times of need, especially for those unable to call. WhatsApp is a common messaging platform used in India, thus further reducing the burden of accessing the hotline through an unfamiliar avenue.

To aid the expansion of the hotline and its texting component, the National Commission for Women should hire more staff to support its daily operations and have a designated team respond to the WhatsApp messages. This will avoid the issue of overburdening the staff and producing an unresponsive hotline in the case of a high influx of notifications. However, safety may still pose a significant barrier to this policy, as abusers may have access to domestic violence survivors' phones and find texts that have been saved. In light of this risk, staff at the National Commission for Women should send an automatic text message at the end of communication with domestic violence survivors that reminds them to delete the conversation or make it safe within WhatsApp.

Recommendation 3: State governments should facilitate and protect local collective action around domestic violence against women

Lastly, it is clear that community action around domestic violence against women may affect outcomes around reported domestic violence by exerting public pressure on politicians. By gathering in women's wings within political parties, women become empowered to raise their concerns and are more likely to mobilize around domestic violence. However, as interviewees emphasized, female citizens have low engagement with political parties, especially in rural areas. The efforts of those who participate in these political entities may be limited by the prescribed policy agenda of the political party that often fails to adequately accommodate women's voices

and interests, including domestic violence. Moreover, the growth of local movements against domestic violence is hindered by vicious backlash from community members and the dispersion of women across the state.

As such, I propose that Indian states create women's community groups where women can elevate issues that matter most to them, adjacent to the political sphere. The formation of these women's community groups will provide a physical space solely for women to deliberate freely and safely, thus reducing the risk of attempts to harm their activism against domestic violence. By occupying spaces within local communities, these groups may be more likely to foster female engagement and feelings of unity among domestic violence survivors compared to women's wings in political parties. To ensure the success of this policy, a women's community group should consist of multiple districts, as this wide coverage would help reduce the physical separation between women across states. Moreover, gathering across multiple districts can also help initiate larger protests among women, thus increasing the likelihood of movements against domestic violence gaining momentum and raising awareness at the national level.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are pertinent in the context of the pending Women's Reservation Bill in the Parliament of India, alongside the large discrepancy between the incidence of and reported domestic violence against women in India. Most importantly, while Indian female state politicians tend to interact more with domestic violence survivors than their male counterparts, this paper finds no evidence that female state political representation impacts domestic violence against Indian women. The OLS regression models revealed no significant changes in reported domestic violence following the election of female state politicians. These results likely reflect this study's qualitative findings that female state politicians face self-

imposed pressure and heightened public scrutiny, hindering their desire to focus on women's issues. Moreover, in state legislative assemblies, domestic violence is a controversial policy priority, especially for female state politicians, thus further diminishing their ability to influence any area of this issue.

Since my findings are inconclusive on the relationship between female state political representation and reported domestic violence and only address one potential impact female state politicians may have, they do not suggest whether or not the Women's Reservation Bill should be implemented. Nevertheless, considering the secondary findings of this paper, we can look beyond the role of female state politicians in affecting reported domestic violence and instead focus on understanding the needs of other promising actors of change. Most notably, while women's grassroots efforts against domestic violence may be promising in calling attention to domestic violence, they struggle to organize safely and effectively. Through focusing on improvements in the safety and quality of formal reporting techniques and strengthening community-based collective action among women, India has the potential to enact change around reported domestic violence against women.

Future research areas should include studies regarding incidences of domestic violence, the perspectives of domestic violence survivors and female politicians, and collective action among women against domestic violence. Because the data in this study is limited to reported domestic violence, more work should be done to investigate whether female state politicians in India are explicitly linked to the incidence of domestic violence. Moreover, research should further explore the experiences of domestic violence survivors via interviews to understand their decision-making process behind reporting decisions. In a similar vein, I call on researchers to interview female state politicians in India to understand if there are any situations in which they

have been able to target domestic violence significantly. Given that more evidence is needed to justify the implementation of policy recommendations outside the scope of this study, research should be done to understand whether grassroots efforts among women against domestic violence are effective.

Domestic violence and the under-reporting of such a crime are serious challenges that mirror decades of systematic mistreatment of women and patriarchy within Indian society. This study addresses gaps in the existing literature by understanding how female state politicians struggle to shift reported domestic violence against women through a mixed-methods approach. Previous explanations of the impact of female state politicians were primarily based on quantitative analysis and did not focus specifically on reported domestic violence against women. Unraveling the dynamics around the reporting of domestic violence is a complex process, and much remains to be done before India can achieve this goal.

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Appendix

A. *Interview Protocol for Researchers and Non-Profits*

1. Do you mind telling me a bit about your background?
2. What do you think is the general level of engagement between the Indian population and state politicians?
 - a. Is the Indian population generally aware of whom they are represented by?
 - b. How high do you think this awareness is?
 - c. Do you think this awareness differs across different genders or at the local level?
3. What do you think are the policy priorities of female politicians and male politicians at the state level? Do differences exist?
 - a. If so, what are examples of areas in which they differ?
 - b. Why do you think these differences exist?
4. Have you seen female politicians implement policies targeting domestic violence?
 - a. How does this compare to the number of domestic violence policies passed by men?
 - b. If so, would it be possible to describe some examples of policies that you have seen passed?
5. What are the most pressing problems related to women reporting domestic violence?
 - a. What would you say are different factors that affect a woman's decision to report domestic violence to the police?