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WOMEN AS POLICY MAKERS: EVIDENCE FROM A RANDOMIZED POLICY EXPERIMENT IN INDIA

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This paper uses political reservations for women in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions. Since the mid-1990's, one third of Village Council head positions in India have been randomly reserved for a woman: In these councils only women could be elected to the position of head. Village Councils are responsible for the provision of many local public goods in rural areas. Using a dataset we collected on 265 Village Councils in West Bengal and Rajasthan, we compare the type of public goods provided in reserved and unreserved Village Councils. We show that the reservation of a council seat affects the types of public goods provided. Specifically, leaders invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to the needs of their own genders.

KEYWORDS: Gender, decentralization, affirmative action, political economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

RELATIVE TO THEIR SHARE IN THE POPULATION, women are under-represented in all political positions. In June 2000, women represented 13.8% of all parliament members in the world, up from 9% in 1987. Compared to economic opportunities, education, and legal rights, political representation is the area in which the gap between men and women has narrowed the least between 1995 and 2000 (Norris and Inglehart (2000)). Political reservations for women are often proposed as a way to rapidly enhance women's ability to participate in policymaking. Quotas for women in assemblies or on parties' candidate lists are in force in the legislation of over 30 countries (World Bank (2001)), and in the internal rules of at least one party in 12 countries of the European Union (Norris (2001)).

Reservation policies clearly have a strong impact on women's representation,² and there is evidence that women and men have different policy preferences (Lott and Kenny (1999) and Ellund and Pande (2001)). This does not

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²See Jones (1999) for a study of the Argentinian case, and Norris (2001) for the impact of reservation in the Labour Party in the United Kingdom. Women's representation fell from 20% to 7% in Eastern Europe when gender quotas were eliminated during the transition from Communism (World Bank (2001)).

Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India

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