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Political inclusion and educational investment: Estimates from a national policy experiment in India

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**Abstract**

In this paper, I examine whether the “role model effect” of female politicians on adolescent girls’ school enrollment comes only from female representation in the lowest level of local government. To do this, I exploit variation in the implementation of seat quotas for women applied to a three-tiered local governance structure in India. Enrollment effects were substantially larger than those previously estimated for exposure to female leaders in the lowest tier of local government. The policy response is larger among girls in poorer households and those with less-educated women in the household, and was commensurate with reductions in idle time and employment in household enterprises. There is no evidence of additional school infrastructure, nor a reallocation of schooling resources. Effect magnitudes imply that more than two thirds of the net effect of the policy comes from female politicians serving in reserved positions other than the village council chairperson seat.

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