

Family Members or Gatekeepers?

Implications of Household Composition on Female Political Engagement

Rithika Kumar*

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Abstract

Existing studies have established the role of the household in upholding gender biased norms that exacerbate gender inequality in political engagement. However, very little attention has been paid to the role of household members and household composition in limiting female political engagement in service of upholding these norms. I suggest that multiple factors including the implicit hierarchy between household members, salience of multi-generational joint families and male migration in the Global South, have given rise to a range of household structures in these contexts. Therefore, at any given time, a woman can have a combination of household members or *gatekeepers* who exert varying levels of influence in constraining her political engagement. I situate my study within the context of India and my analysis draws on a face-to-face, population based survey experiment of women (n=643) in India. The survey experiment reveals that male gatekeepers restrict female political engagement but it is the husband's presence that is most restrictive. Further, I find that normative concerns drive the constraints imposed on women by household members. The results from this analysis extend our understanding of the household and its role in limiting

*Kellogg Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Notre Dame. Email: rkumar3@nd.edu. This study has ethics approval by IRB at University of Pennsylvania, PROTOCOL No: 843443.

Thank you for reading this draft! Before you go ahead, I wanted to draw your attention to a few notes that might help add context to this working paper:

1. This is the very first draft of this paper and I cannot think of a better audience to help me develop this further. This paper is drawing from a chapter within my dissertation. The goal is to make this a standalone paper that highlights the restrictions facing female political engagement in the presence of other family members
2. At this point I could benefit the most from some thoughts on how I am identifying the contribution of this paper. Have I accurately identified a gap? Am I doing justice to explaining what this paper adds? Am I overselling it?
3. This paper does not have a very strong theory section yet but any thoughts on how to improve it, also if there any citations on the gatekeeping lit in patriarchal contexts – please do share them with me.
4. Is my argument clear? Or am I getting into the weeds too much? And, perhaps trying too much?
5. What are your thoughts on the mechanisms I identify and are you convinced I am doing justice to it? Should it be removed?
6. Once you read the paper and if you have the time, I would also like to draw your attention to [Figure 8](#) – would you think this is a better graph to discuss underlying drivers than the discussion in the paper?
7. Is there a better way to motivate this paper?
8. Finally, is there *really* a paper in here? Or am I being too ambitious? What else can I include here? I have some notes on a national level analysis. Where should I aim to send something like this once I improve it?

Sunita Devi moved into her husband's home in Kharhat village in Bihar, India soon after she got married in 2018. As is common in other societies practicing patrilocality, she resided with her husband and his extended family including his parents and brother's family. It was a quiet Wednesday afternoon and Sunita Devi had just finished her chores and she was sitting on a wooden cot right outside her bedroom. She pointed towards the main entry way to their home and said, "*Didi* [sister] do you see the *dvaar* [doorstep] there? I do not cross that line. Everything outside the household is handled either by my husband (a teacher in the village) or his parents." On asking her if she has ever gone to speak to her village leader about any issues, her mother-in-law (who was sitting right across from us and was within earshot) chipped in, "In a place where women are not allowed to go unaccompanied to the market, talking to an elected leader is not something she will do. My daughter-in-law is the household's honor. When her *garjan* [guardian or caretaker] is around why will she go to do these things?" Multiple interviews with respondents revealed similar patterns suggesting that the most significant barrier to female empowerment comes from *within* the household: her own family members.

Resource based explanations have dominated our understanding of female political engagement. Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) argued that the unequal distribution of socioeconomic resources between men and women perpetuated gender gaps in political participation. Closing these resource gaps through higher education and participation in the labor force was a significant driver of female political participation. Additionally, structural changes through the symbolic and descriptive representation of women in elected positions increases women's political engagement (Barnes and Burchard 2013). These explanations center around overcoming the resource deficit among women in relation to men by increasing their access to wages, income and political networks.

Recent studies within the context of the Global South have highlighted that resource based constraints to female political empowerment are inadequate to explain the persistence of low levels female political engagement (Gottlieb 2016). Overcoming resource gaps between men and women is insufficient to empower women politically when gender biased norms remain

salient (Clayton 2018; Prillaman 2021; Brulé 2020). Stemming from these findings, there has been a revival of the study of the private sphere i.e. the household as significant in upholding patriarchal norms that consequently also shape gender inequality in engagement (Brulé and Gaikwad 2021; Khan 2021) More recently, this strand of the scholarship has demonstrated the need to look at the role of male members in controlling women's presence beyond the household including in the political sphere (Cheema et al. 2021).

However, an important assumption made by these studies is that the composition of households is uniform across contexts. I contend this assumption by arguing that household composition varies significantly due to two factors. One, the most common form of household structure across patriarchal contexts in South Asia and Africa is a joint family where multiple generations co-reside with each other (Kandiyoti 1988). Therefore, a woman resides not only with her husband but also with other family members including her in-laws and her husband's brothers' families in most cases. The practice of patrilocality i.e. where a woman moves into her husband's ancestral home is strongly tied to norms that accord men a higher status within the household (Jayachandran and Pande 2017). Thereby making men (of all ages) women's gatekeepers who must uphold these norms. Moreover, patrilocal norms where sons must care for their parents in old age imply that older women too have incentives to gatekeep women in order to uphold norms. Two, low income countries, even within patriarchal contexts, are characterized by high levels of migration which is usually male dominated. The male dominated nature of migration creates the absence of able bodied family members within the household and changes the composition of households in ways that are consequential for female empowerment (Hadi 2001; Desai and Banerji 2008; Kumar 2023) For these reasons, I argue that any given time a woman can have multiple gatekeepers and the extent of control exerted by the household on female political engagement is likely to be conditioned on the presence of these members.

I posit that gatekeeping is a result of the household's goal to minimize its *reputational risk*. Female gatekeeping is rooted in the household's normative concerns about its reputation. It is in the interest of household members to uphold barriers on women since the presence

of women in the public sphere when other gatekeepers are currently present in the household can prove to be costly to the household's reputation. These concerns are also often echoed in conversations where women are identified as "the honor" of the household and therefore must remain at home. Upholding the honor or *reputation* of the household intuitively implies restricting female interaction beyond the household. Within a patriarchal context, it has implied that gatekeeping is not limited to male family members. Other family members including older women in the family and a woman's son stand to gain from preserving the status quo and have incentives to restrict a woman's presence in the public sphere.

I test this argument within the Indian context where patriarchal norms are similar to many parts of South Asia and Africa. These norms have also made joint families the most dominant household type in India. Multi-generational families are dominant in the Indian context. Following its strong patriarchal and patrilocal tradition, households in India have demonstrated a strong "son preference" (Jayachandran 2015) that perpetuates the dominance of male family members within the households (Sen 1992; Ebenstein 2014). Moreover, other evidence from India also points to the gatekeeping roles played by older women in the household, particularly a woman's mother-in-law (Anukriti et al. 2019). Additionally, national level statistics reveal that while the status of women in the country has improved over time, India still fares poorly on various empowerment indicators including low levels of female labor force participation, fertility, education. Interestingly, female political participation presents interesting contradictions. While female voters outnumbered male voters in the last national level election, they still lag behind men in many other forms of everyday political engagement requiring sustained time, effort and resources. Given these reasons, India is a suitable case to examine the role played by household members in perpetuating gender inequality in the political sphere.

The current analysis relies on in-person fieldwork including over 100 interviews with residents in rural Bihar, India to set my theoretical expectations and design my primary quantitative data collection exercise. Next, I use data from a face-to-face population based survey experiment to examine the salience of different gatekeepers and household structures in con-

straining female political participation. The survey experiment is entirely built upon insights drawn from qualitative fieldwork and presents respondents with a range of political tasks of varying difficulty levels. The *treatment* in the experiment randomly varies the presence of three key gatekeepers: a woman's husband, her in-laws and her son to assess the magnitude of restrictions imposed on female political engagement within a household. I also draw on data from the survey to provide evidence arguing that norm driven concerns are likely to prevail over other concerns of efficiency and efficacy.

The findings from this analysis generate three key results. One, I find that the presence of each gatekeeper is restrictive to female political engagement but to varying degrees. In particular, I find that averaging across all conditions, co-residence with a woman's husband is the most restrictive for a woman's political engagement. Two, I find that the absence of her husband is not enough to propel women into the public sphere when she is in co-residence with her in-laws. Sharing a kitchen i.e. resources with her in-laws in the absence of her husband is more restrictive than having a separate kitchen. Lastly, I find that unlike my prior expectations, the motivations for the restrictions imposed on women can vary by the type of gatekeeper. More specifically, in the presence of her in-laws, norm driven reputational risk concerns are likely to be most salient.

In the future I aim to extend this analysis using data from the Indian Human Development Study (IHDS) which is a nationally representative two wave panel dataset. I will use this data to study the observable implications of household structure in conditioning women's access to the public sphere. Exploiting the exogenous shock to household structure due to the death of family members, I carry out a difference-in-difference analysis studying how the absence of these gatekeepers can ease restrictions and thrust women into the public sphere making it easier for them to engage in politics. *However, I am open to suggestions and would love to know how else I could develop this paper going forward and what sorts of data might best augment this analysis. Also open to thoughts on limiting it to this experiment and sending it*

1 Female Political Engagement Under Patriarchy

Previous studies in gender and politics have highlighted the inequities in resources including education, income, time and skills as an explanation for gender gaps in political participation (Verba and Nie 1972; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). However, in many parts of the Global South resource differences are inadequate to explain the persistence of gender gaps in participation in contexts with stringent social norms (Gottlieb 2016; Isaksson, Kotsadam, and Nerman 2014). Unsurprisingly, policy interventions that have attempted to overcome these resource constraints have yielded mixed results (Galston 2001). Civic education interventions have created a backlash against women in rural Mali (Gottlieb 2016) while other studies show similar civics education programs yielded null results in Ghana (Ichino and Nathan 2017). Given the limited applicability of resource based theories beyond the West, scholars have turned their attention to the relationship between social norms and female political engagement, and particularly the role of the household in upholding gender biased norms.

Recent research within gender and politics focusing on the Global South has argued that there is a need to evaluate the role of the household considering its part in perpetuating gender biased norms and consequently inequality in political participation and leadership. These norms become more salient in the presence of other family member, particularly male members who gatekeep women's mobility beyond the household (Cheema et al. 2021; Jayachandran 2015). In interviews, women respondents in Araria district — my fieldwork location in Bihar province in India — repeatedly noted the implicit restrictions imposed on them in the presence of their husbands and in-laws:

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Respondent 55 [her husband worked at a brick kiln and stayed at home]: “Recently we got a gas cylinder in my mother-in-law's name. I did not go to the block to submit the papers- it was my husband who went. All the official work is done by him. If he's not there I can consider going. Now he is there then why should I do these things? [...]my husband is earning, I have to

listen to him and ask him before taking a decision.”

*

Respondent 56 [lived down the road from Respondent 55 in the same village and her husband has been migrating regularly for the past eight years]: “I do all the work at home, going to market or getting money from the bank. I will do it myself or some ladies go together to do these things.”

Hypothesis 1: In the presence of their primary gatekeeper i.e. their husband, women are less likely to engage in politics.

While the presence of a woman’s husband can prove to be restrictive to her political engagement, I suggest the nature of gatekeeping in patrilocal contexts where a woman moves into their husband’s ancestral home can take multiple forms. In my own sample, I find that over 60% of my respondents reside with older family members. Therefore, a significant number of women are likely to have more than one gatekeeper at any given time.

It must be mentioned that co-residence with a family member can be of two types. One, co-residence could mean that the family resides in the same plot of land *and* shares their kitchen. That is, the family draws from the same pool of financial resources. Two, it could also mean that while they reside in the same plot of land, they have separate kitchens. Having a separate kitchen effectively implies that they have different stoves but in most cases these “kitchens” are right next to each other. In Panel A in [Figure 1](#), the woman lives with her in-laws and her husband’s brother’s family but they cook separately. While each maintained separate income sources, they continued to reside in close proximity with one another and were *one* family by standards of moral obligation and shared ancestral property. Most surveys account categorize each of these families as separate households.

However, matters are complicated if one of the sisters-in-law shared her kitchen with her parents-in-law like in Panel B of [Figure 1](#). In this case, the in-laws are likely to hold more say in the ability of that woman to engage in the public sphere. For instance in an interview with a family where the mother-in-law (respondent) was the head of the household and her son



(a) Women residing with her in-laws but not sharing a 'kitchen' with them



(b) Woman sharing a 'kitchen' with her in-laws and cooking food with her mother-in-law in the picture

Figure 1: Kitchen set-up within families

was a migrant, said to me:

"I hand the money my son sends when he is away and I take care of the farm [the family had not built a toilet and on being asked about why that was the case she said] , "We don't have money, I asked my ward member and sarpanch i.e. elected representatives for money to build it but they said that I need to put in my own money and get reimbursed after. If I do not go then who else will go from my household to get this information? My daughter-in-law is at home but I have to do all this work."

While both types of households have different arrangements in terms of their shared resources, both kinds of households (separate or shared kitchen households) function as one family unit in terms of shared ancestral property and moral obligation. Contact between the physical presence of in-laws within the household, irrespective of kitchen set up is likely to be

limiting for women. In my own survey, I found that using a definition of joint family that only takes into account the physical presence of an older family member irrespective of kitchen set up is likely to reduce the likelihood of a woman to contact the state to make demands by 0.67 units (on an index for claim-making and is significant at $p < 0.01$). Finally, in addition to her in-laws, young sons are more likely to have access to the public sphere than their own mothers. Female respondents confirmed either “taking along their son to talk to a ward memembr” or “sending him” in their stead. Therefore, in patriarchal contexts following patrilocality and male dominance, a woman can have more than one gatekeeper that includes her in-laws and her own son. Therefore, I expect that:

Hypothesis 1B: The physical presence of other family members including a woman’s parents-in-law and her teenage son constrains female political engagement.

However, what drives a household to restrict female political engagement? I suggest that the household functions to maximize its efficiency and the choice of who within the household serves as its interlocutor is a decision that is made in service of this goal. Based on interviews with resident men and women in Bihar, I identify three norm driven channels through which the household and its members maximize their efficiency. One, women, especially younger daughters-in-law, are disproportionately burdened with carrying out unpaid household labor. Multiple time-use studies in India have suggested that women spend 7.2 hours on average per day on unpaid household labor (in comparison to 2.5 hours by men). Moreover, in migrant households, women are entrusted with working on the farm (Choithani 2020). Therefore, women are left with little to no free time. The presence of other family members is akin to having more hands at work. Therefore, the mechanical presence of other available family members, it is more efficient for the household to allocate these tasks to them since they have more time. If the time based efficiency mechanism were at play, we will expect that the presence of other gatekeepers even in the absence of a woman’s primary gatekeeper will have the same effect on female political engagement. Therefore, if this mechanism were at play, the effect of the presence of a woman’s in-laws and her teenage son (even in the absence of a woman’s

husband) on her political engagement will not be significantly different.

The other channel is related to knowledge based efficiency. The household believes that political tasks are not easy and can require more knowledge or skills. And, gender biased norms and particularly the lack of time, has resulted in women having fewer resources to gain this knowledge (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). Therefore, in the absence of able bodied male members, the household can nominate other family members who have more knowledge or capability to carry out these tasks. The household, including women, might believe that they have less knowledge on average and therefore, might not be successful at representing the household in the public sphere. If this mechanism were at play, we will expect that the likelihood of a woman being picked to carry out a task in the presence of other family members will be the lowest for matters that are the hardest in terms of the effort required to get the task done.

Finally, the household is likely to consider that its efficiency is maximized when its reputational risk is lowest when a woman remains at home. That is, the household believes that it risks losing its reputation if women occupy political space when other family members within the household are present to carry out the task. The reputational loss from having a woman carry out a task in the political sphere is high and therefore it is efficiency maximizing for someone other than the woman to serve as the household's interlocutor.

I argue that of the three channels described above, the channel minimizing reputational risk is likely the most salient. I argue that while each channel described above is in service of upholding patriarchal norms, the mobility of women beyond the household is intrinsically tied to a its honor. Therefore, the preference of the household would be to limit reputational loss at all costs and might be deemed an efficiency maximizing strategy. It is in the interest of the household to demonstrate that despite this deviation, it remains committed to engage in norm preserving behavior even in the absence of a woman's primary gatekeeper.

Hypothesis 2: The household's normative concerns about its reputation are the strongest drivers of restrictions imposed on a woman's presence in the public sphere.

2 Setting the Context

Voter turnout among women in India has been on the rise since the mid-2000s. The gender gap in turnout finally closed in the last national election. However, voting is only a one time activity and the gender gap is more pronounced in other forms of non-electoral engagement. Opinion polls conducted at the time of elections reveal that while female turnout remains high, they are less likely than men to participate in other forms of electoral activities (See [Table 1](#)). The National Election Study (2014) reveals that only 15% of women surveyed said they participated election rallies and 11% confirmed participating in door to door canvassing with political parties. In comparison men are almost three times more likely to participate in these activities. The restrictions on female mobility and gendered division of labor have made politics a male arena in the Indian context.

Political Engagement	<i>All India</i>		<i>Bihar</i>		Source
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Voted in previous election	0.89	0.91	0.89	0.91	Lokniti NES (2014)
Ask Spouse whom to Vote for	0.11	0.02	0.14	0.03	Lokniti NES (2014)
Participated in Rallies	0.15	0.33	0.15	0.36	Lokniti NES (2014)
Participate in Door to Door Canvassing	0.21	0.59	0.18	0.61	Lokniti NES (2014)

Table 1: Gender gaps in non-electoral forms of political engagement continue to persist. These calculations do not use sample weights.

The gender gaps in political engagement also extend to non-electoral forms of participation — the focus of my analysis. Recent work on India has highlighted that the state is pervasive in the lives of the rural poor (Auerbach 2015; Auerbach and Kruks-Wisner 2020; Kruks-Wisner 2018). They must routinely engage with local institutions and actors in order to make claims to obtain services. Thus, the relationship between the citizen, state and politics is highly salient in rural areas making it an important context in which to study this phenomenon. Detailed national level data on routine forms of engagement is not widely available. However, multiple studies have corroborated the stark difference in participation rates among men and women on these measures. As per a nationally representative survey (Desai and Vanneman 2012), the

participation rates at public meetings are 29% for men and 8% for women. The gender gap in routine forms of engagement is salient across the country according to smaller studies. In a survey of men and women in rural Madhya Pradesh, (Prillaman 2021) shows that men are 35% more likely than women to contact their elected representatives and 14% more likely to make claims on welfare goods and services from them. The persistence of these gaps, makes it critical to understand that the conditions that enable women to engage in the political sphere as equal citizens.

The practice of patrilocality in northern India has meant that joint family structures with multi-generational families are fairly common. Data from my own survey (conducted in 2022) given in Table 2 reveals that over 60% of the sample resides with an older family member.

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Household Size	5.25	2.54	0.00	13.00	1,911.00
Respondents residing w/Mother-in-Law	0.59	0.49	0.00	1.00	1,911.00
Respondents residing w/ Father-in-Law	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00	1,911.00
Respondents residing w/ any Older Female Member	0.68	0.46	0.00	1.00	1,911.00
Respondents residing w/ any Older Male Member	0.62	0.49	0.00	1.00	1,911.00
No. of Sons	1.63	1.03	0.00	7.00	1,911.00
No. of Daughters	1.67	1.31	0.00	8.00	1,911.00
<i>N</i>	1912				

Table 2: Summary Statistics: Household Structure

2.1 Zooming into Bihar

The fieldwork location for this project is Araria district in Bihar province. Bihar has one of the highest rates of poverty within India and has one of the highest rates of male migration as a consequence. Bihar also performs worse than many other states on gender equity indices. Women in Bihar have consistently performed poorly on social indicators (Table 3) compared to women across India.

Female voter turnout in Bihar regularly exceeds male voter turnout in national and state

Development Index	Bihar	India
Female literacy	49.6%	91%
Underage marriage	42.5%	26.8%
Experience domestic violence	43.2%	31.1%
Have personal bank account	26.4%	53%
Below normal BMI	22.9%	30.4%

Table 3: Social indicators in Bihar and India. Bihar performs much worse than the national average on all social indicators included here. This pattern is interesting given that it is at par with the national average on most political indicators. Source: NFHS (2015-16)

level elections. In the last state level election, female turnout was 59% while male turnout was at 54%. A better representation of the spatial variation in male and female voting is depicted in Figure 6 in the Appendix. Across the northern part of the state, female voters outnumbered male voters. High levels of male migration in the absence of provisions for absentee ballots has made it difficult for migrant men to exercise their right to vote resulting in a gender gap in voting that biases in favor of women.

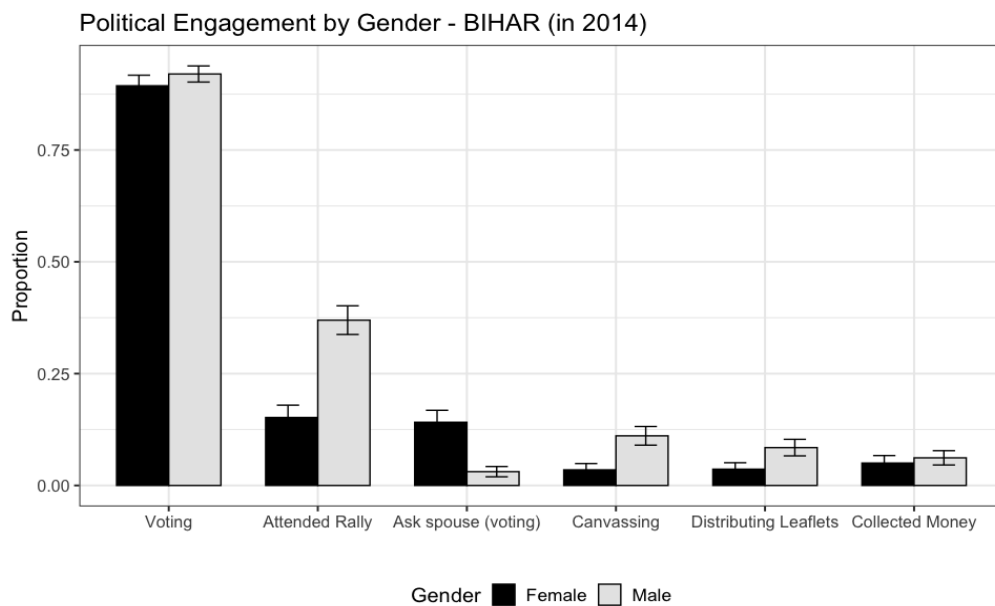


Figure 2: Gender Gap in political engagement in Bihar is similar to the national average despite the poor performance of women on most social gender equity indices. Source: Lokniti CSDS (2014).

Despite the high voter turnout among women during elections, the gender gaps in other forms of electoral and non-electoral participation continue to persist in Bihar. [Table 1](#) demonstrates that men in Bihar are significantly more likely to participate in these activities than women. In this study I build on existing work in South Asia ([Kruks-Wisner 2018](#)) and focus on women's everyday engagement with the state. Everyday forms of engagement with the state to make demands for their rights and services has important implications for public goods delivery and the ability of citizens to hold the state and elected representatives accountability.

3 Research Design

3.1 Design Details

The household is the most important institution that perpetuates gender biased norms. Given the limited applicability of resource-based explanations of gender inequality in political engagement, recent research emerging from the Global South has initiated an examination of the household considering its role in upholding gender biased norms and therefore perpetuating inequality in the political sphere ([Cheema et al. 2021](#); [Jayachandran 2015](#); [Khan 2021](#)). Particularly members with greater household status constrain the ability of women to successfully participate in the public sphere. I use evidence from a survey experiment to establish that the physical presence of certain family members, and particularly a woman's husband, can limit her ability to engage in politics.

The survey was conducted in Araria district in rural Bihar, India and collected data from 643 women. In the survey experiment, each respondent was exposed to a vignette about a woman in her village. Drawing from my fieldwork insights and previous scholarship on gender inequality in South Asia, I identified three key members whose presence is likely to limit female political engagement in the political sphere: *her husband, her parents-in-law and her teenage son*. The vignette experiment randomly modified the presence or absence these three individuals to randomly adjust the extent of restrictions imposed on women. After being exposed to

the vignette, the respondent was asked to rank four individuals based on their likelihood of conducting a random political task (1 being most likely and 4 being least likely and each individual is given a unique rank. No two members can be ranked number 1). The vignettes are based on real life experiences of political engagement described to me during qualitative interviews.

The text of the vignette read out to respondents is given below:

I am going to tell you about a woman in your ward. She has a <HUSBAND STATUS>. Her son is <AGE>. <STATUS OF PARENTS-IN-LAW>. She has a younger sister-in-law who lives with her. Imagine that she has just finished her morning chores of cooking, cleaning, praying and self-care (like bathing). She has a few free hours that afternoon.

Attribute	Levels	Likelihood
Husband	migrant husband who is away in Punjab	0.67
	husband who runs a business within the village	0.33
Age of son	8 years old	0.5
	16 years old	0.5
Status of in-laws	She shares a kitchen with her in-laws	0.33
	Her parents-in-law have separate kitchens in the house	0.33
	Her father and mother in law are no more	0.33

Table 4: Survey Experiment Attribute Levels

The woman I just told you about has to conduct the following <POLITICAL TASK> (randomly shown two):

1. She hasn't made her voter ID for next year's election. There is drive happening that day in the school nearby where she can get it made.
2. Her family was in a land dispute with one of their neighbors. There is a *panchayat* or meeting that afternoon to discuss the matter between the two families.

3. Someone's bike in the household was stolen, there is a court hearing that day at the district court.
4. A domicile certificate from the ward member is required for her son's ration card application.

Once respondents are presented with this information, they are asked the following question: *How will you rank each of the following people in order of their likelihood of doing the political task: a) the woman I just told you about b) her son c) other family members d) acquaintance*

Based on their response there will be a follow up question on the reason for ranking a given person number one:

Why did you rank <chosen option> as number one? The options for this question are:

1. They have more information
2. There is nobody else available
3. It is more appropriate if they do it
4. Other

Enumerators are asked to not read out the option in the first go. In case the respondent is unable to provide an answer, the options will be read out to them. Once the respondent answers this question, the enumerator reminds the respondent about the vignette presented to her earlier and follows is up with another similar ranking question about a second task (from the list above) Therefore, for each respondent I have two responses to the ranking question holding the household structure vignette constant.

3.2 Sample

This survey experiment is the result of extensive fieldwork that helped me first narrow down the constraints imposed on women through different household structures. Insights from multiple

interviews with respondents revealed the nature of women's engagement with the state. Each of the options provided in the political task attribute are based on the real life experiences of my respondents. Finally, through multiple interviews that aimed at understanding the reason for restrictions on women's mobility in joint families, I was able to narrow down the options to those presented in the follow up question. There are multiple responses given by respondents that can be categorized into these three buckets. Based on multiple rounds of interviews we came up with an exhaustive list of possible responses and the associated option to which they belong. This tool was provided to enumerators to aid data collection. In case of any doubt, they were asked to fill the "Other" option. The tool is included in [Table 6](#) in the Appendix. The experiment has been adapted to suit the context under study and these scenarios are likely to be encountered by respondents on a daily basis.

I ran multiple rounds of survey training sessions with the enumerators over zoom. Each interviewer tested the vignette with me during the training sessions. With this exercise, enumerators practiced the experiment multiple times in front of me and then among each other before we launched our pilot. Over the course of the training and pilot we perfected the instrument. We changed everything from minor typos to entire question blocks to make it easy for respondents to comprehend the questions. Finally, during the pilot my coordinators also recorded each enumerator and I listened to these recordings to provide feedback on how things can be improved to aid comprehension.

The sample (n=643) for this analysis was randomly drawn from a pool of 1900 women that I had surveyed in 2022. In the first round, we collected the GPS coordinates of the household and contact numbers of our respondents.¹ Most respondents either change their phone numbers or fail to recharge their mobile phones. Contacting them over the phone proved unsuccessful. However, with the GPS coordinates we were able to accurately get to our respondent to re-survey them. Mobile numbers collected in the previous round were used as a unique identi-

1. This data is stored anonymously and not shared with anybody based on IRB requirements. Moreover, collecting this information is common practice in household surveys since it is hard to re-contact respondents simply based on their names.

	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Age	32.06	5.48	25.00	41.00
<i>Caste and Religion:</i>				
General/Forward	0.10	0.30	0.00	1.00
OBC/BC I	0.49	0.50	0.00	1.00
EBC/BC II	0.16	0.37	0.00	1.00
SC	0.22	0.41	0.00	1.00
ST	0.03	0.17	0.00	1.00
Hindu	0.69	0.46	0.00	1.00
Muslim	0.30	0.46	0.00	1.00
<i>Education:</i>				
Illiterate	0.55	0.50	0.00	1.00
Primary	0.14	0.34	0.00	1.00
Secondary	0.16	0.36	0.00	1.00
High School	0.13	0.34	0.00	1.00
College or higher	0.03	0.16	0.00	1.00
<i>Household Details:</i>				
Husband is a migrant	0.58	0.49	0.00	1.00
Older male members	0.65	0.48	0.00	1.00
Older female members	0.71	0.46	0.00	1.00
Cultivated Land	0.21	0.41	0.00	1.00
Agriculture Land Owned (in acres)	0.90	1.78	0.00	13.50
Observations	643			

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of sample in survey experiment

fiers to link both rounds of data collection. During the survey, enumerators inputted the mobile number which automatically linked to the underlying demographic details of the individual being surveyed. Interviewers confirmed this data again before proceeding. In addition to this, to ensure that they are interviewing the same woman, I also ask them to record information of the names of other women who reside in the courtyard. This information was collected in the previous round in order to randomly pick our respondent as most households have more than one woman within the 24-40 age group.

4 Results

4.1 Gatekeepers matter *but* some matter more than others

The average marginal component effect or AMCE of the vignette is presented in Figure 3. It presents the marginal effect of an attribute averaged over the joint distribution of the other attributes. I follow Hainmueller et al. (2014), who show ordinary least squares (OLS) produce consistent estimators of attribute AMCEs.

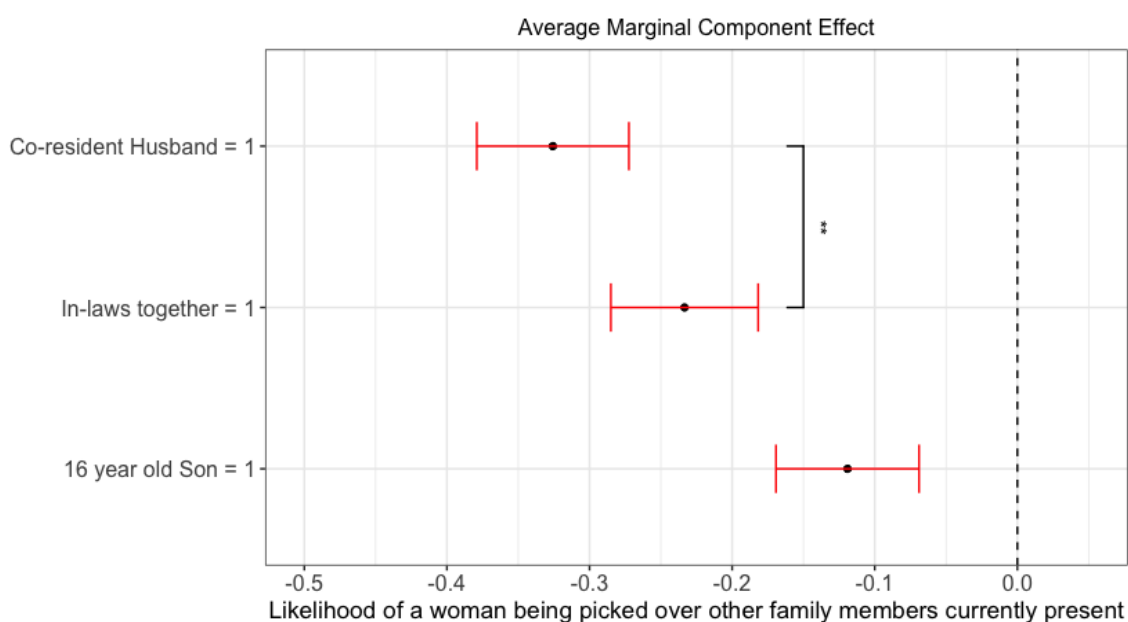


Figure 3: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned household attribute values on the ranking a woman receives in comparison to the reference category for that attribute. Estimates are based on an OLS model; bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The physical presence of male gatekeepers within the household constrains female political engagement. In the presence of her husband, on average, a woman is 33% less likely to be picked to do a political task than in her husband's absence (i.e. he is a migrant). While the presence of each of the three gatekeepers is restrictive, the presence of her husband that imposes the most strongest barrier to her political engagement. NOTE: ** Significance at 0.05 level. Source: Author's own survey (2023)

The dependent variable is the likelihood of the woman being picked (i.e. ranked number 1) to carry out a political task *over* other members who are present in the household. Figure 3

suggests that the presence of all three gatekeepers restricts female political engagement but to varying degrees. In the presence of their husbands, averaging across all treatment conditions and tasks, we find that women are 33% less likely to be picked to carry out a task. While the presence of a woman's parents-in-law is limiting, it is significantly less limiting (likelihood of 24%) than the presence of a woman's husband ($p < 0.05$). It is the presence of the teenage son that is least restrictive. To summarize, [Figure 3](#) confirms that a) in the absence of her male gatekeepers, women are more likely to engage with the state and represent the household in the political sphere and b) the absence of her husband is likely to have the greatest impact on her ability to participate in politics.

4.2 Absence of primary gatekeeper is not always sufficient

How do these results change if we condition on the husband's presence? Does the absence of a woman's primary gatekeeper i.e. her husband make it easier for her to access the political sphere?

[Figure 4](#) presents the results conditional on whether or not the husband is currently present at home. In households where the husband is currently present, the effect of the presence of an older family member is not significantly different from households where older family members are absent. That is, in the presence of a woman's husband, co-residing with other gatekeepers is not any more limiting than not having an additional family member since a woman's husband is her *primary gatekeeper*. On the other hand, in the absence of her husband, a woman's political engagement is likely conditioned by the presence of older family members. When both in-laws share a kitchen with the woman, she is 50% less likely to engage in politics than a woman whose husband and in-laws are absent. The presence of in-laws is significantly less restrictive when they share a courtyard but not a kitchen. This is particularly important since it suggests that the amount of restrictions placed on a woman by her in-laws depends on the resource sharing arrangements within the household. However, in both cases, the presence of in-laws (sharing or separate kitchen) is dis-empowering for women's political engagement.

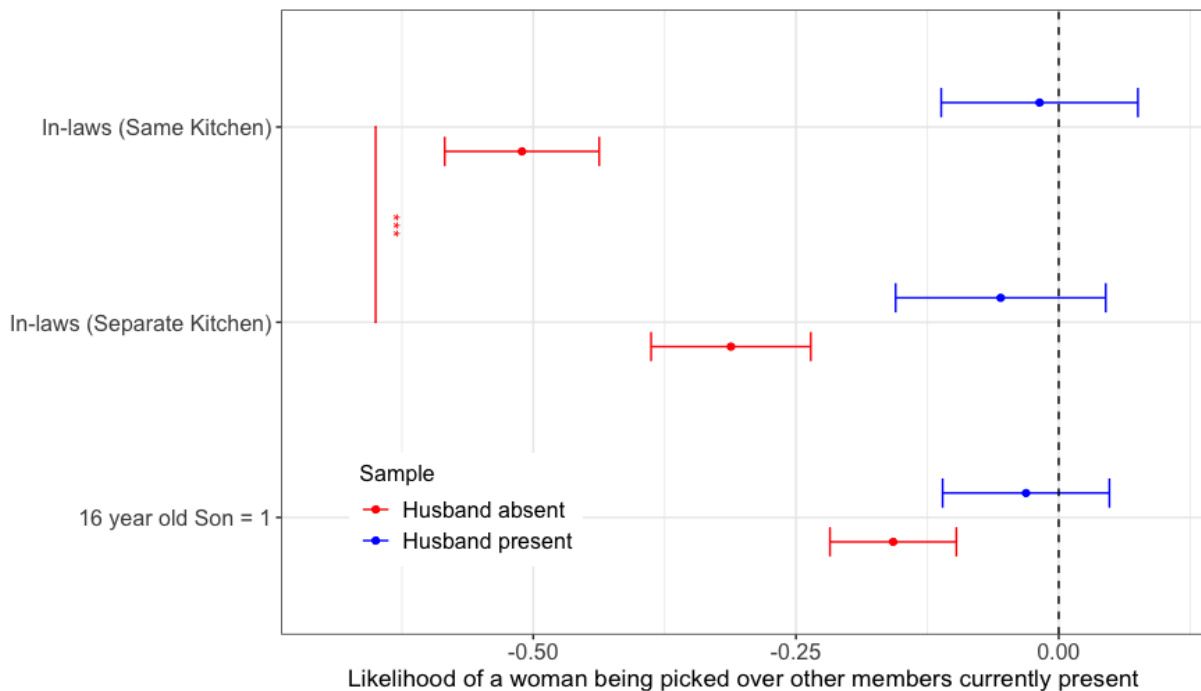


Figure 4: This plot shows the likelihood of a woman being picked *over* other family members conditional on the husband’s status in the vignette. Estimates are based on an OLS model; bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Presence of in-laws (irrespective of kitchen set up) is more restrictive than their absence (reference category for in-law attribute) when a woman’s husband is absent. Particularly, sharing a kitchen with-laws is more restrictive than having separate kitchens even in the absence of a woman’s husband. The difference is significant at 0.01 level. Source: Author’s own survey (2023)

Importantly, [Figure 4](#) also reveals that the presence of a son is not any more limiting for a woman whose husband is absent than a woman whose husband is currently at home. The effect of having a 16 year old son is not statistically significant ($p=0.64$). Taken together with the evidence on the attribute for in-laws presence, these findings some evidence against the possible argument that the mechanical presence of family members is the *always* at play when there are other gatekeepers. These results confirm the hierarchy among household members in their ability to exert restrictions on female political engagement.

4.3 Normative basis for the choice of men over women

The results in the previous section revealed a hierarchy in household structure and that the presence of some members is more restrictive than others. The results helped rule out the possibility that the choice of other family members over a woman is always mechanical. However, the possibility remains that older family members like in-laws are more knowledgeable than others (like a teenager or daughter-in-law) and are more likely to engage in politics. However, it is also likely that concerns about the household's reputation are at play in driving these decisions.

To adjudicate between these mechanisms, I get estimates on the likelihood of a woman being picked over other family members conditioning separately on the presence of in-laws and teenage son. The political tasks in the vignette were of varying difficulty levels. I define difficulty level based on the distance a woman will have to travel to get something done and time it will take her to do a task. Keeping that definition in mind, one would expect that going to a court that is several miles away from home and for which she will need to take multiple hours will be the least likely task that a woman will carry out.

However, in [Figure 5](#) the top panel demonstrates that averaging across all treatment conditions, in the presence of her in-laws a woman is least likely to handle a land dispute in her own village. These results are striking because norm based concerns have driven property rights and women have historically had less say in matters related to this issue (Brulé 2015; Agarwal 1997). Therefore, it is likely that norm based concerns on women's presence in these arenas is costly for the household. The difference in variation by task, and the effect on the land dispute task suggest that there is reason to believe that reputational concerns are likely strong in joint families in the presence of older family members.

The results in the bottom panel, suggest that there might be reasons to expect that restrictions in the presence of her son are less likely to be driven by concerns about reputation. The teenage son is more likely to represent the household in court or get signatures from the ward member since she expects that he will be able to manage these tasks better than her on account of being more educated.

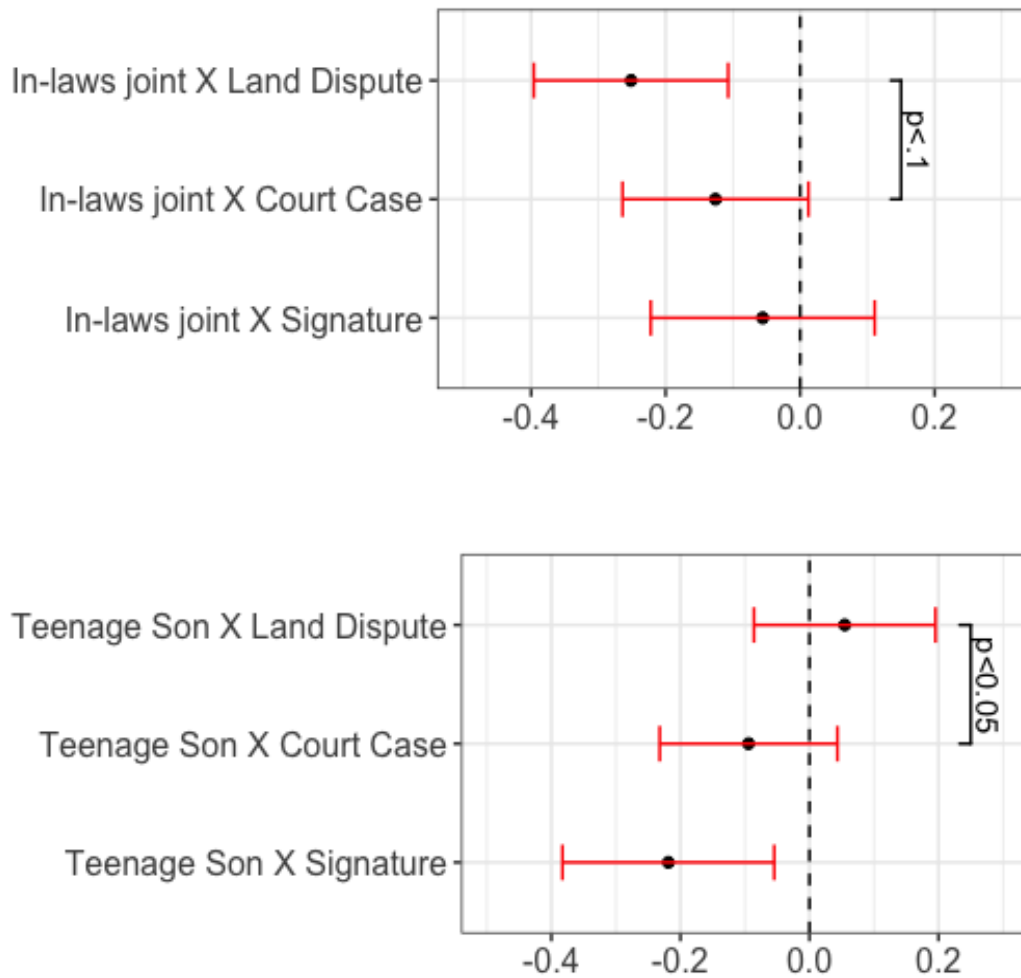


Figure 5: The likelihood of a woman being picked to do a task in the presence of in-laws is less likely to be driven by concerns about efficacy. In the top panel, women are least likely to manage meeting for a land dispute in the same neighborhood than going to a distant town to hear a court case. On the other hand, it is likely that efficacy concerns are at play in the case of the presence of a teenage son.

The results from this analysis suggest that the motivations driving female gatekeeping can vary but they suggest that these arguments are all couched within a norm based framework that is at play.

5 Conclusion

Resource based explanations for gender gaps in political engagement have limited applicability outside Western society. Consequently, recent research on gender and politics is now re-examining the role of the household in perpetuating inequality in female political participation and leadership. An important strand of this scholarship argues that family members, particularly male family members, gatekeep female political engagement. However, these studies fail to account for the dominance of multi-generational families comprising multiple gatekeepers. This paper fills this gap by arguing that household structure, and particularly its composition i.e. through the presence and absence of family members, is one of the most important determinants of female political participation in communities with strict gender biased norms.

In this paper I argue that the presence of multiple gatekeepers within the household restricts female political engagement. However, I show that it is the presence of a woman's husband that is most restrictive making the husband a woman's primary gatekeeper. However the absence of her husband is not enough to empower her politically. Specifically, I find that gains are significantly lower when a woman resides in a multi-generational joint family with a shared kitchen. Empirically I combine extensive fieldwork including qualitative interviews with quantitative data from a population based, in-person survey experiment of 643 women in India in my analysis. This mixed methods approach serves three main purposes. One, I use qualitative evidence to motivate the paper by providing a rich descriptive account of the interaction between family structure and female political engagement in migrant sending communities. Two, interviews aided hypothesis generation on underlying mechanisms. Finally, the knowledge gathered over multiple months of fieldwork informed my survey experiment such that the vignettes presented to respondents closely represent reality.

In this analysis I also explain the normative concerns driving gatekeeper restrictions on women. I discuss three ways in which these normative concerns might come to play: a) efficacy concerns about the woman's ability to carry out these activities since it is assumed women have less knowledge than others b) efficiency concerns since gender biased norms on division on

labor leave women with no time to carry out tasks beyond the household making it more likely for others to go outside instead and c) reputational risk concerns that might be heightened if a woman goes beyond the household in the presence of other family members. The analysis presented here suggests that the household's concerns of reputational risk are heightened in the presence of older family members. However, these concerns might not always be the driving force behind gatekeeping female political engagement. The results from this analysis demonstrate that some of the most significant barriers to women's political engagement are their own family members.

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A Map of Sex Ratio of Voters in Bihar

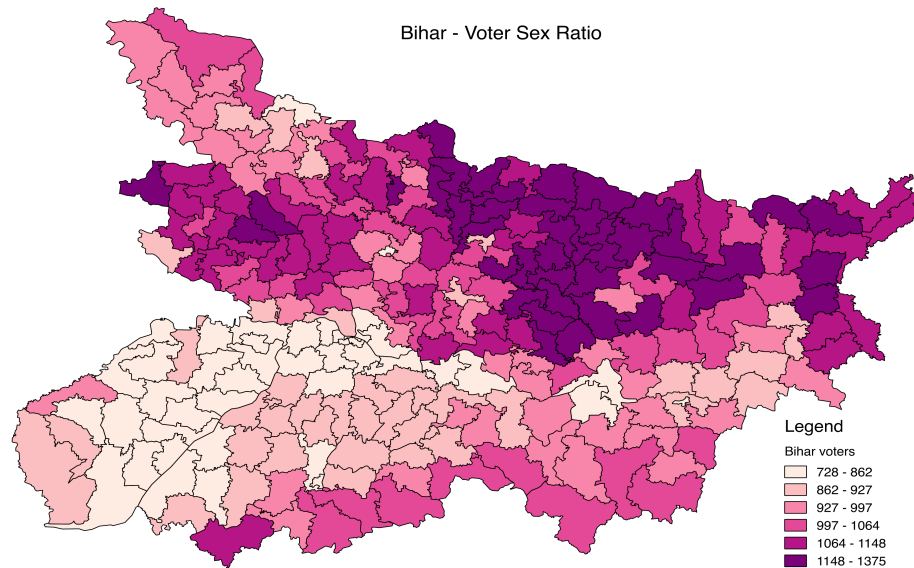


Figure 6: Voter sex ratio in the state elections held in Bihar in 2015. Each cell represents an electoral constituency. Voter sex ratio is defined as the share of women per 1000 men. A darker shade signifies a greater share of women among the voters who cast their vote during the election. Source: Election Commission of India.

B Appendix: Survey Tool

Response Option	Possible Responses
They have more knowledge	They spend time outdoors
	They meet a lot of people
	They do all the paperwork in the household
	Women cannot do these tasks well
	Daughters-in-law have less knowledge
It is more appropriate for them to do it	The parents-in-law are still alive
	They are the family's <i>garjan</i> (household head or guardian)
	They are the elders in the family
	Why will women go when they are around?
	Women do not go out
Nobody else to do it	Because her husband is away
	When her husband is not there the wife will do it
	Since the older family members are no more, the woman will have to do it

Table 6: Survey Tool: Enumerators were given this tool (translated in Hindi) to reference the answers given by respondents and categorize them into the options provided. These options were jointly created with field co-ordinators Rima Kumari and Santosh Kumar based on our experience across multiple interviews.

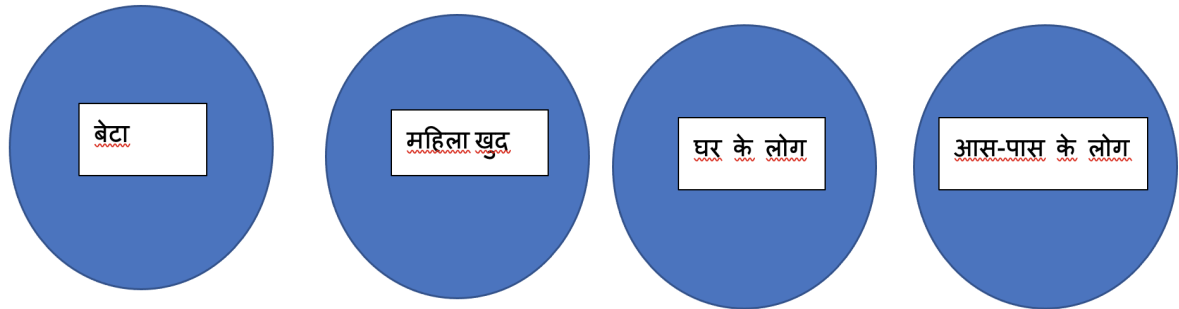


Figure 7: A survey tool was used to aid comprehension of the following question: *Rank the following individuals on the likelihood of carrying out this task (repeat for rank two, three and four)*. The question can be hard to comprehend for some respondents and to make it easier for them to understand, enumerators show respondents this sheet of paper after reading out the question and work with the respondents through the ranking. In order to eliminate enumerator errors, the displayed options for ranking two, three and four filtered out the options picked in the previous questions.

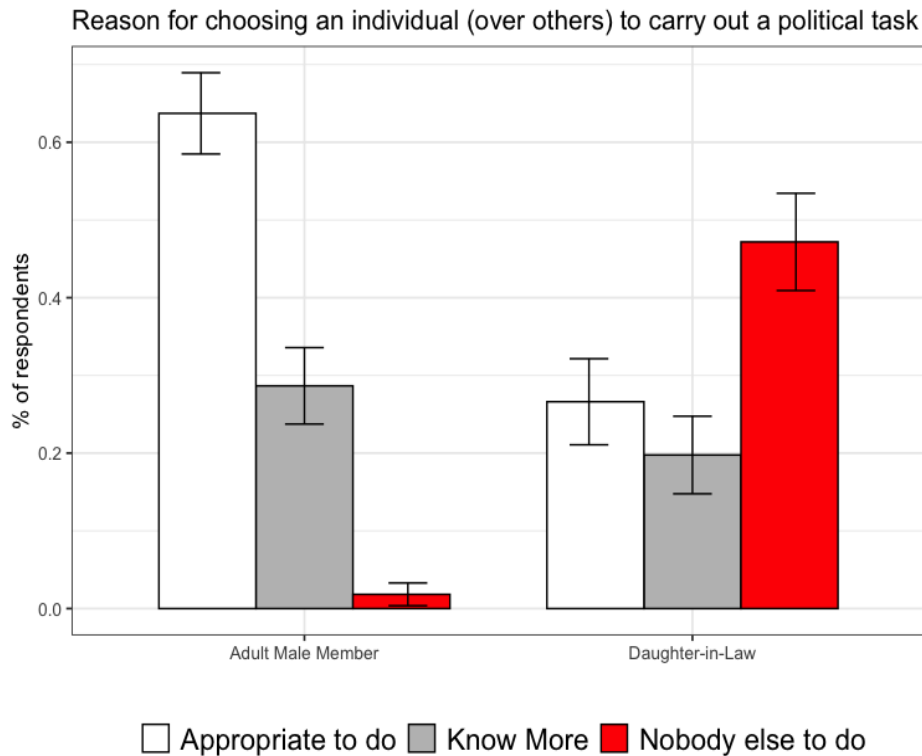


Figure 8: The presence of other family members restricts female political engagement due to norm based considerations about reputation or appropriateness. Over 60% of the respondents said that the reason that a man engages with the state on behalf of the household is because it is more appropriate to do so. On the other hand, women are likely engaging with the state when others who can do so are not present. Source: Author’s own survey

On being asked why they picked an adult man over other choices, over 60% of the time respondents said that it was because it was more appropriate for the man to carry out the political task.² On the other hand, as depicted on the right hand side of Figure 8, the choice of a woman is most likely to be because there “nobody else to do it”. In these cases, the presence of women in the public sphere is often rationalized (within the same norm based framework)

2. The choices for this question were born out of extensive qualitative fieldwork. Specifically, "Appropriate to do so" is an all encompassing statement that is used to capture a range of recurring phrases mentioned during interviews including: “Woman do not do such things”, “When others are in the house, why will women go?”, “They are *garjan*(head of the household)”. If respondents did not explicitly mention "Appropriate to do so" but rather mentioned either of these responses, surveyors were instructed to pick the "Appropriate To Do" response. ?? in the Appendix describes the tool provided to the survey team.

as being driven out of necessity. Moreover, there is no significant difference between the share of respondents choosing the "know more" option for men and women. The normative basis for the constraints on female mobility are strengthened by this result.