

# BROOKINGS INDIA

QUALITY, INDEPENDENCE, IMPACT

## Women and Electoral Politics: The Good, Bad and Ugly

**Dr. Shamika Ravi**

**Brookings Institution India**

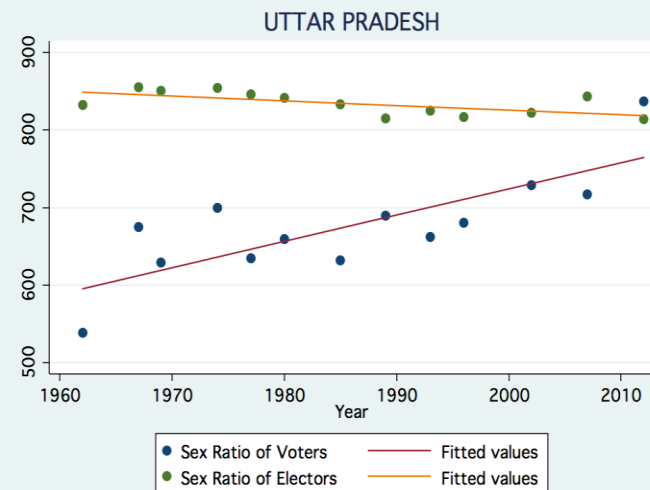
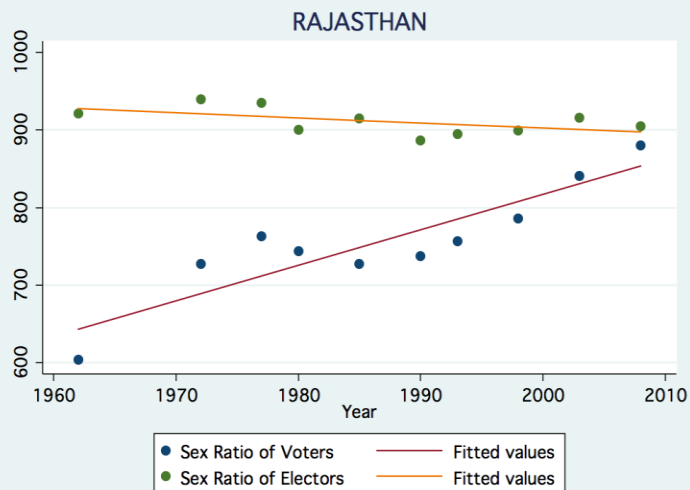
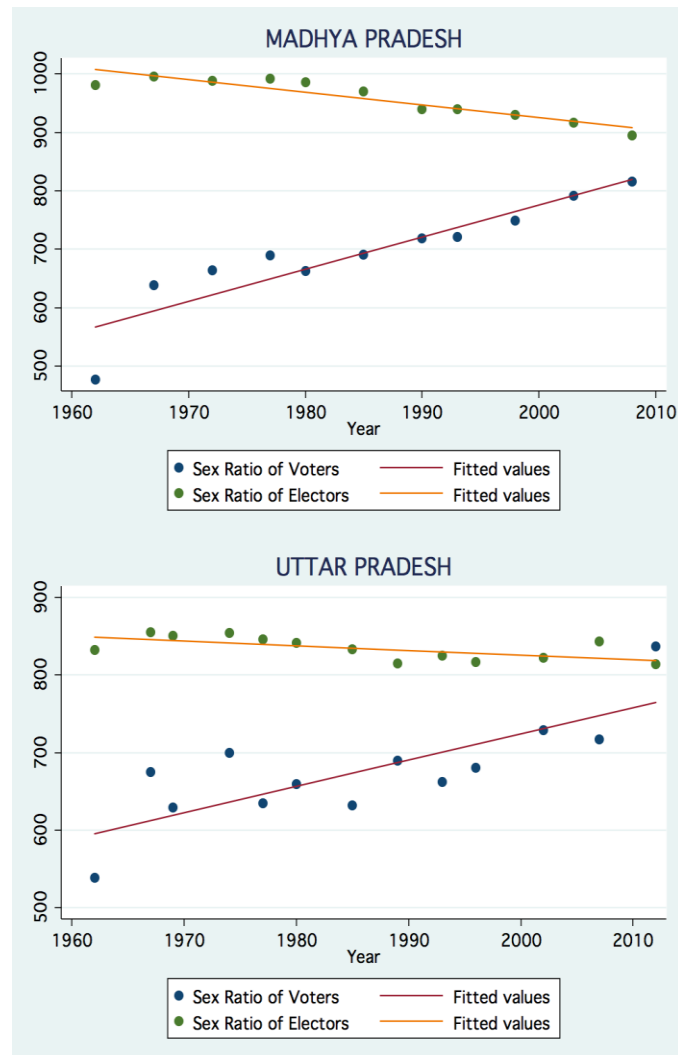
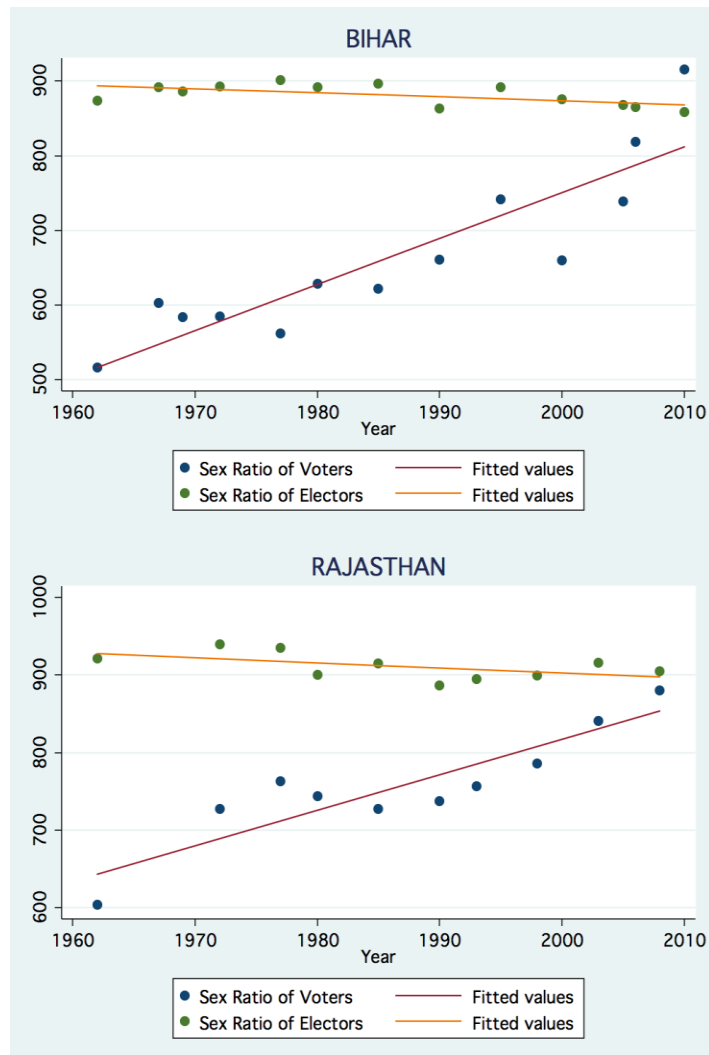
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

New Delhi, 23 March 2017

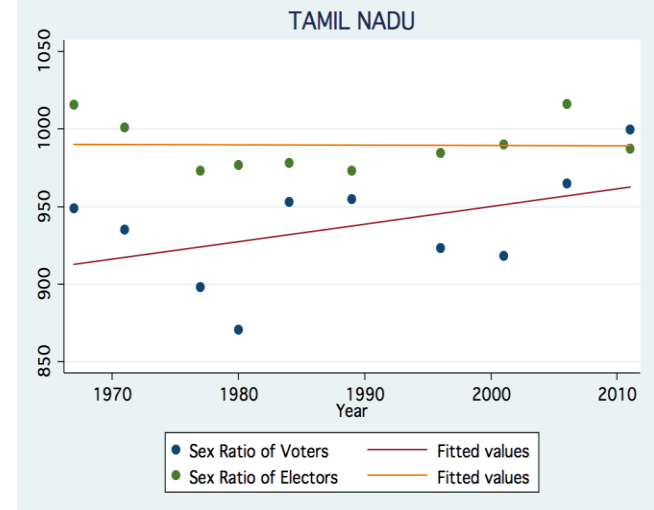
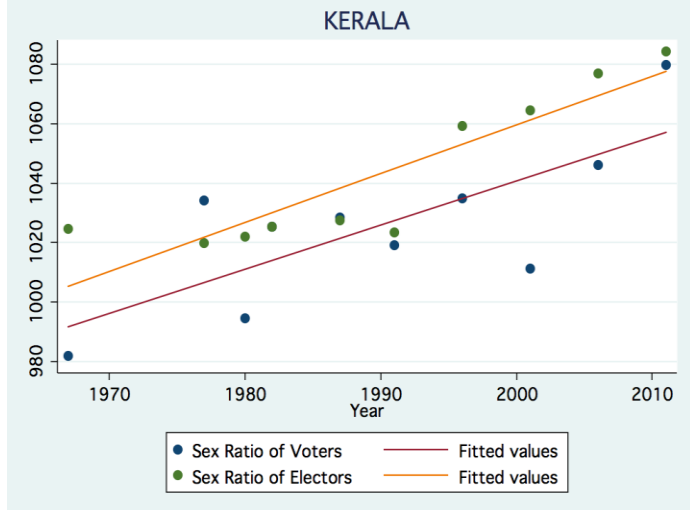
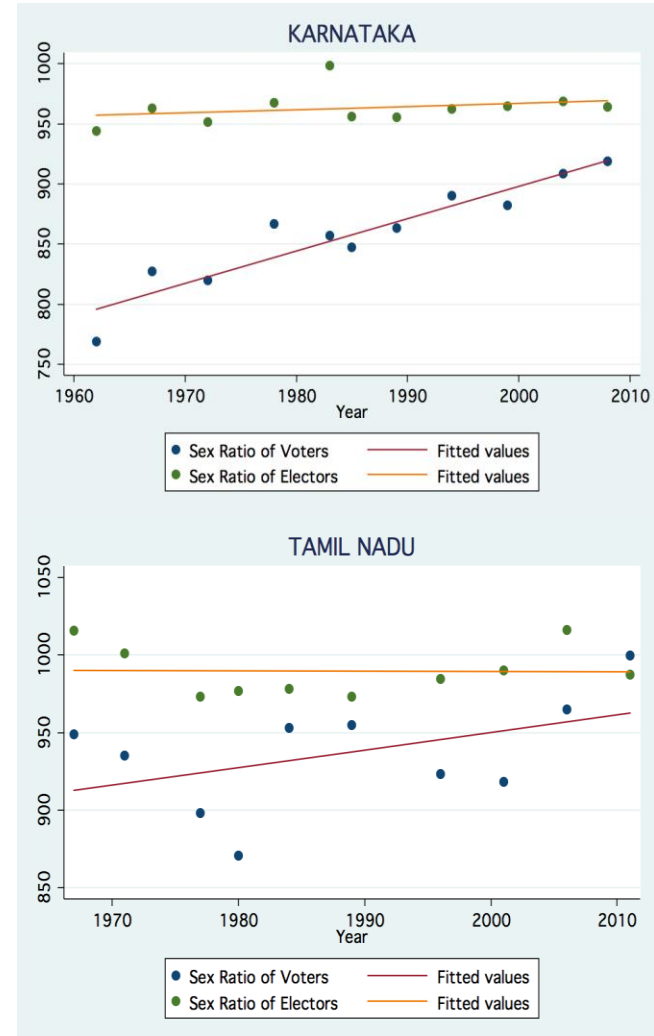
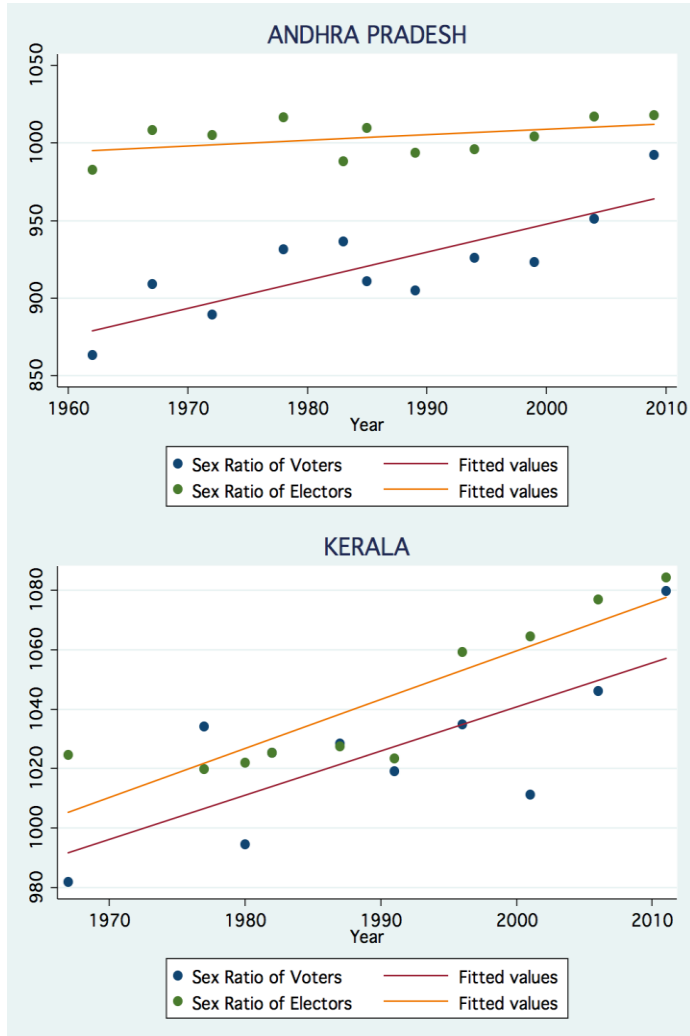
# 1. First – silver lining (the Good)

- Dramatic improvement in turnout of women voters compared to men in all the state elections from 1962 till 2012
- 1. There is a steady and a sharp decline in the gender bias in voting over time.
- 2. The sex ratio of voters (number of women voters to every 1000 men voters) increased impressively from 715 in the 1960s to 883 in the 2000s.
- 3. This phenomenon of declining gender bias in voting is for all the states, including the “BIMARU” states.
- 4. Declining gender bias is solely driven by increase in women voter participation, while men voter participation has remained unchanged over time.

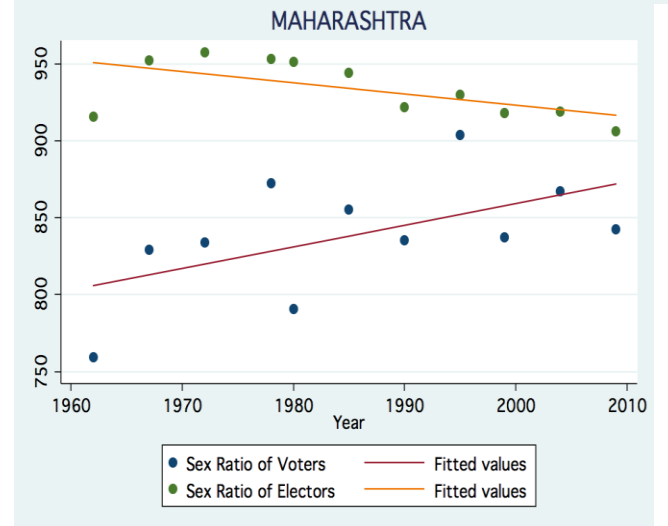
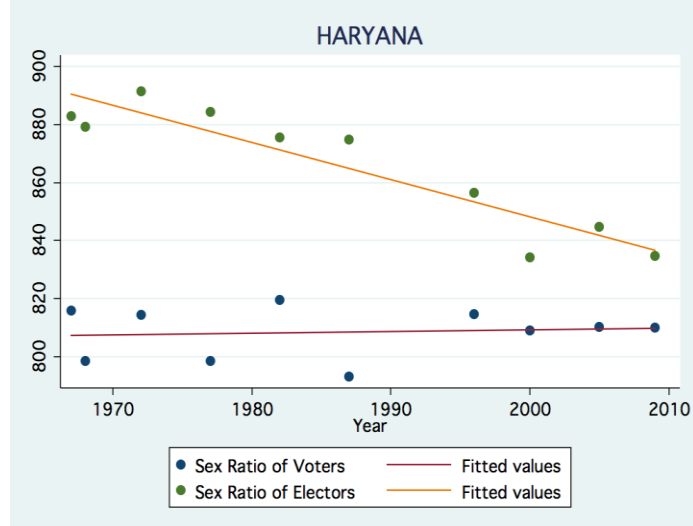
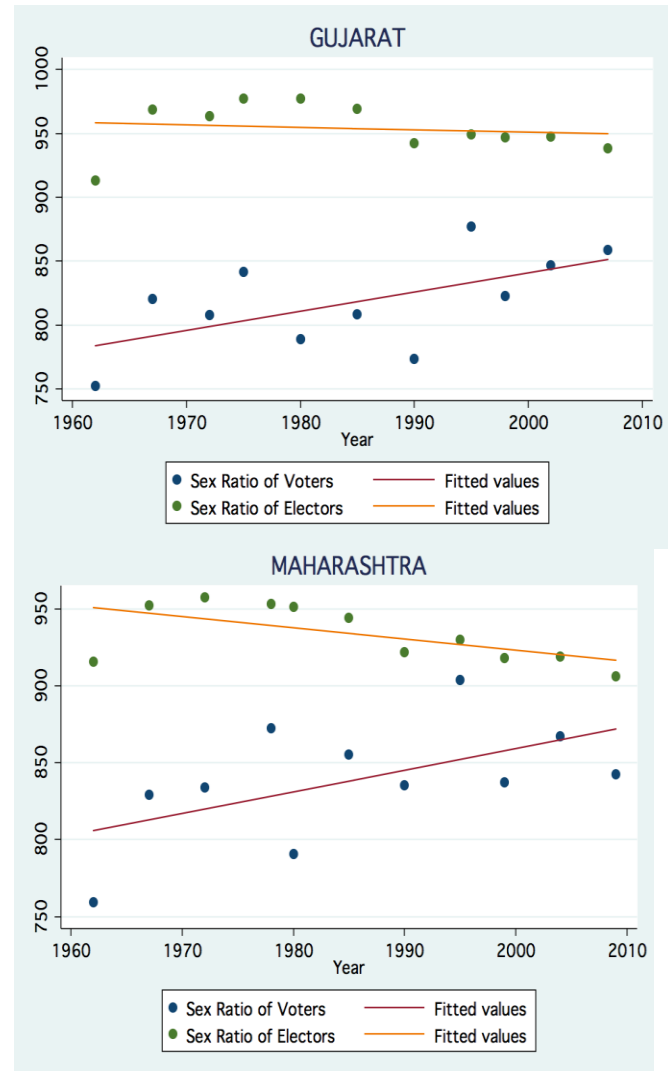
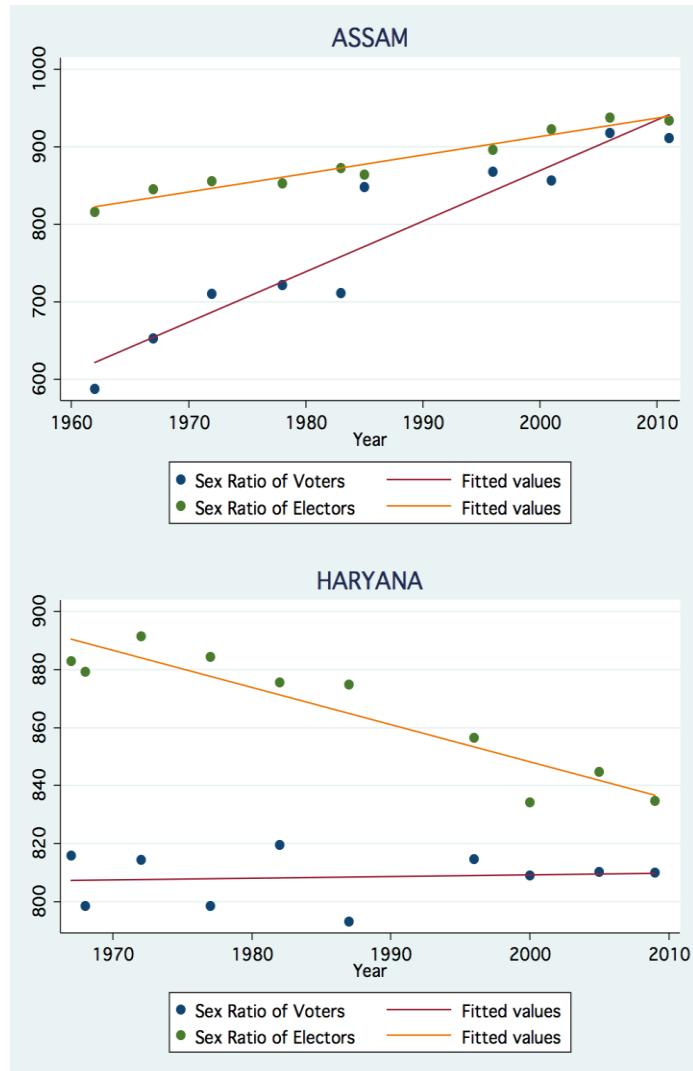
# Traditionally Backward States



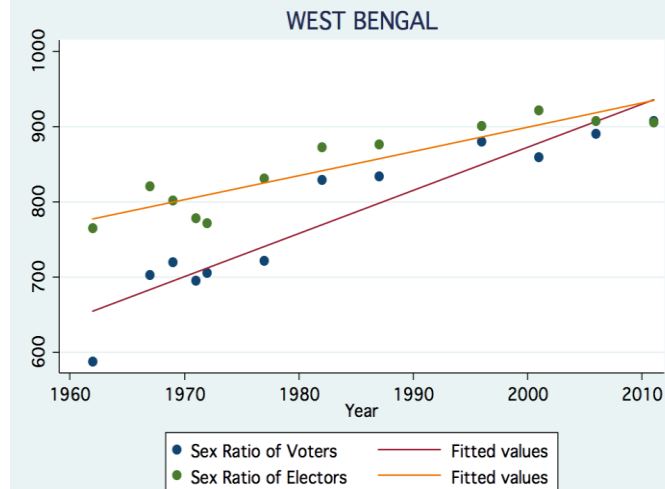
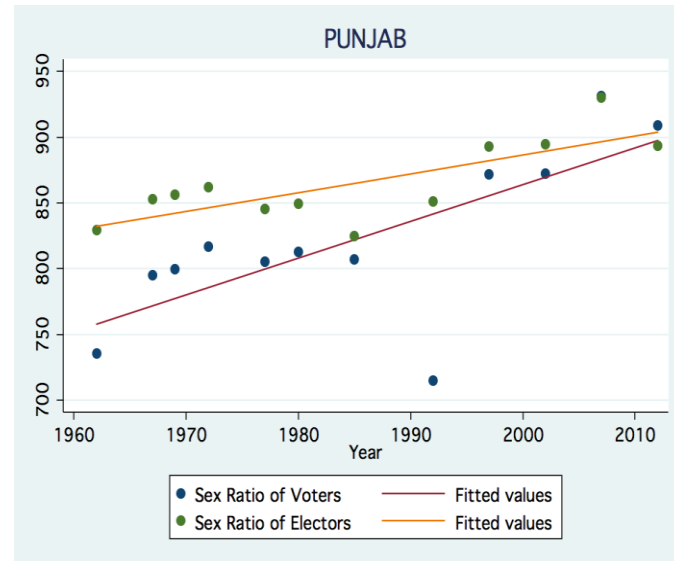
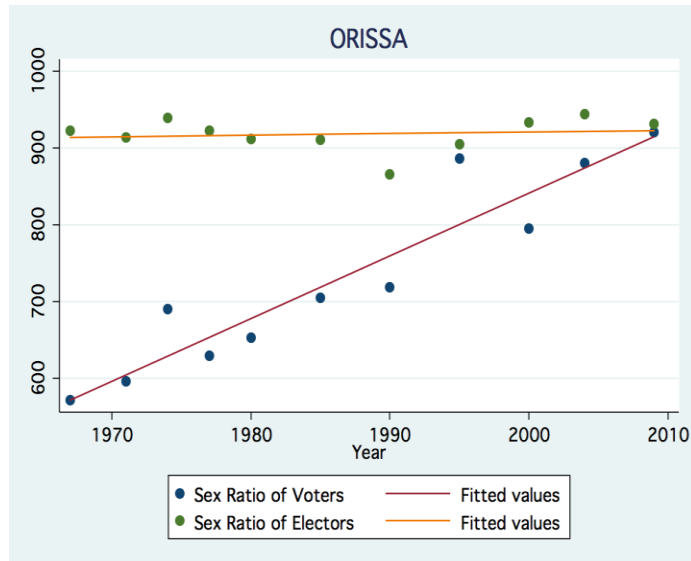
# Southern States



# Other Large States

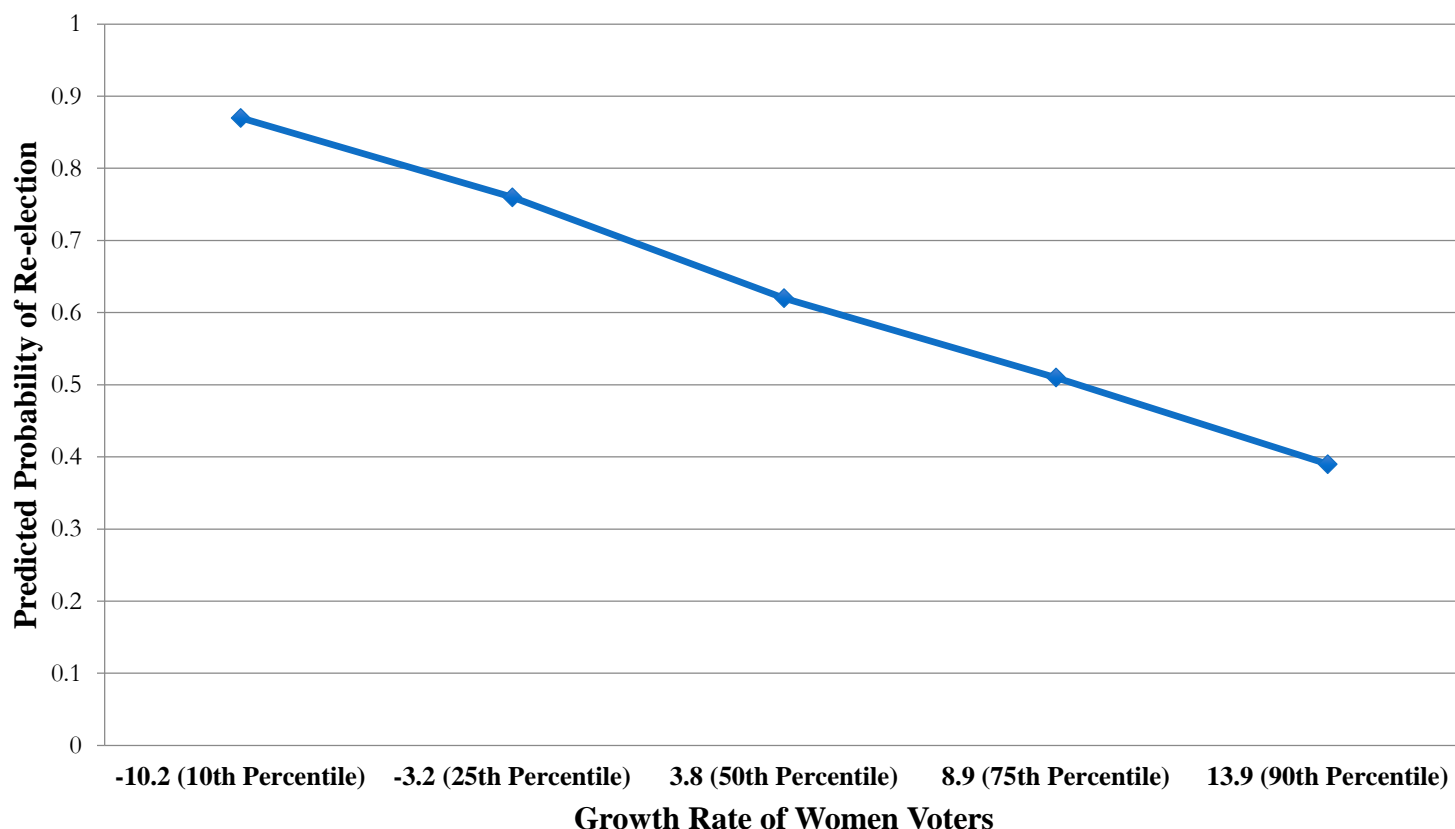


# Other Large States



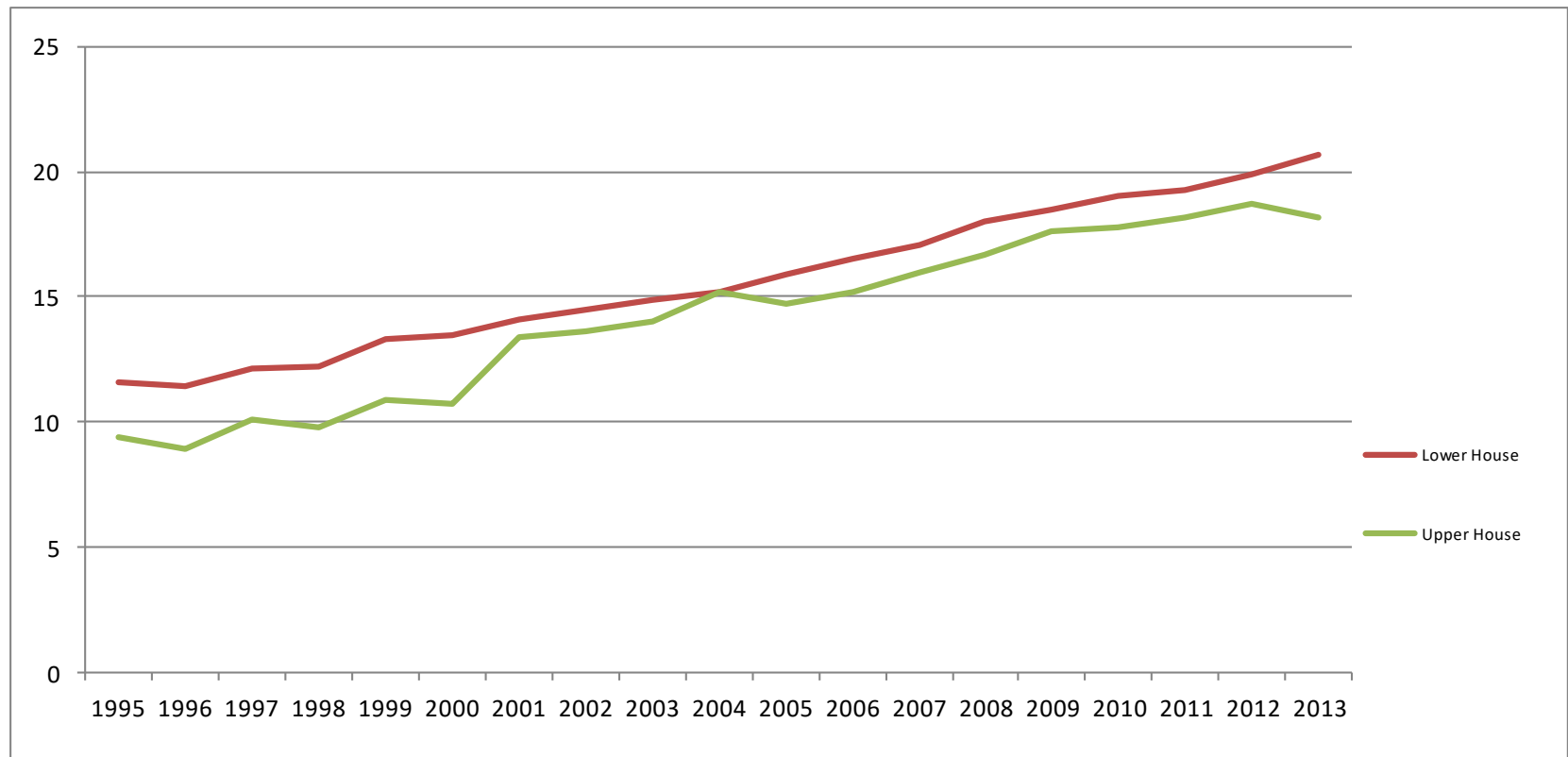
# Rising women voter participation: Does it matter?

- Significantly yes!
- Women voters as agents of change: Bihar re-elections 2005



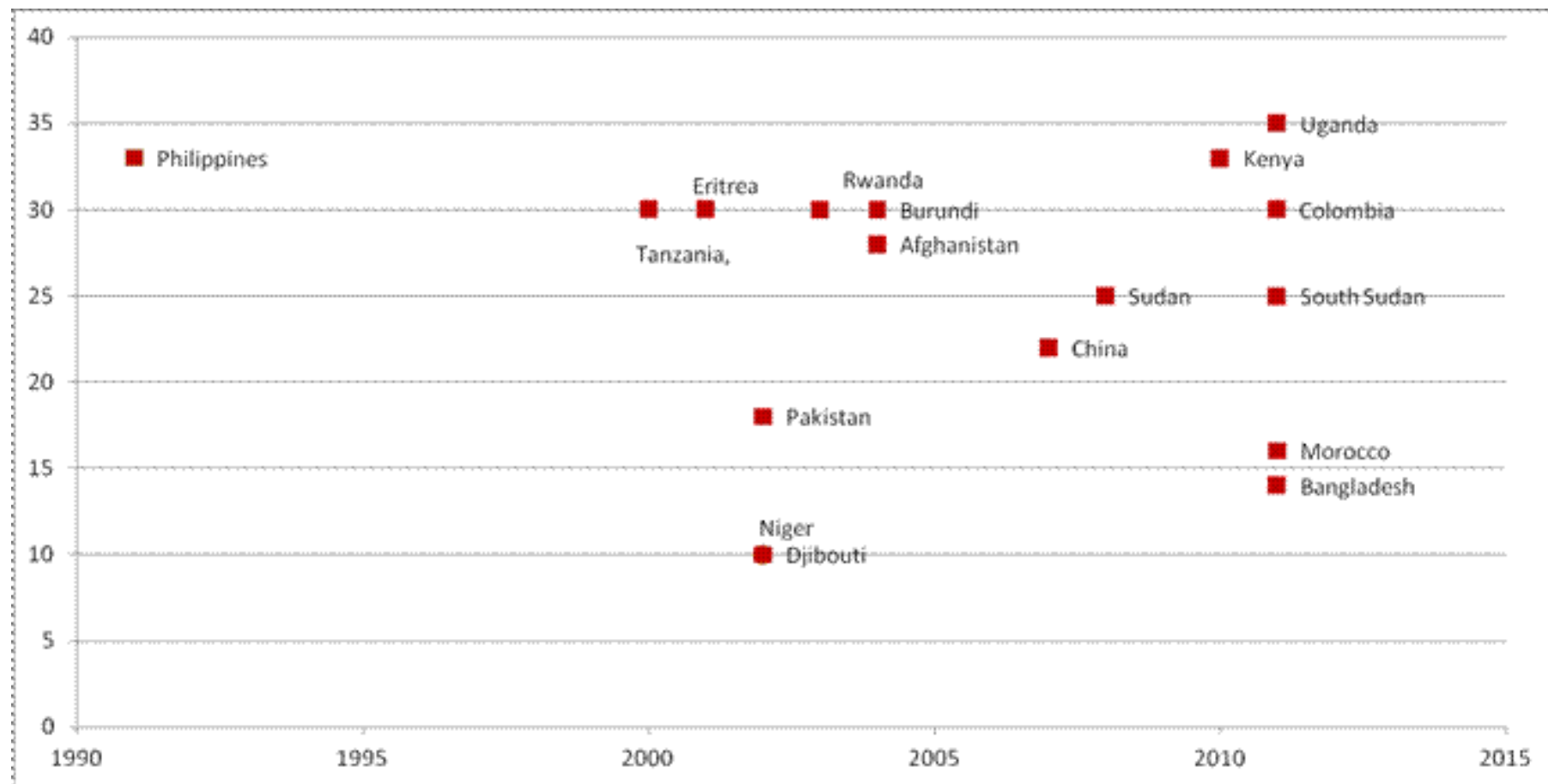
## 2. But why so few women in politics? (the Bad)

- Global data



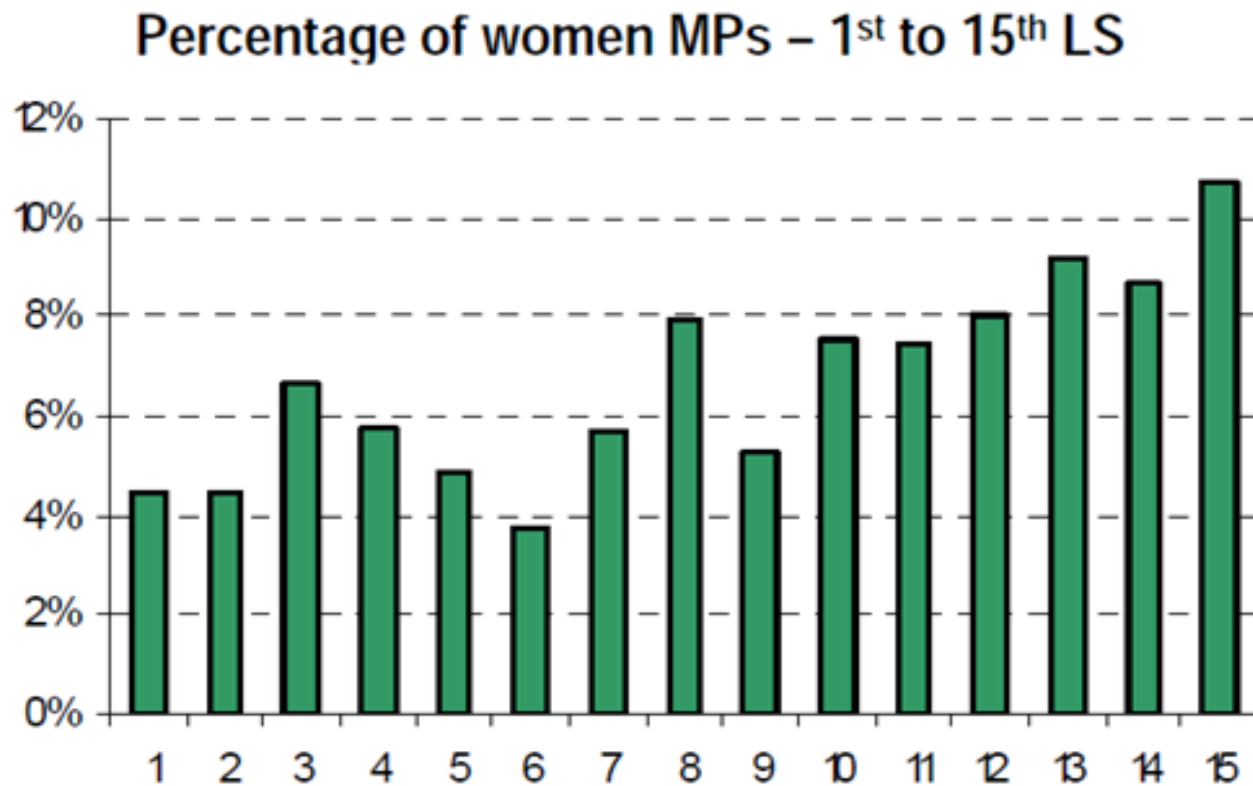


# Women's reservation in Parliaments



# Indian data

- Indian data

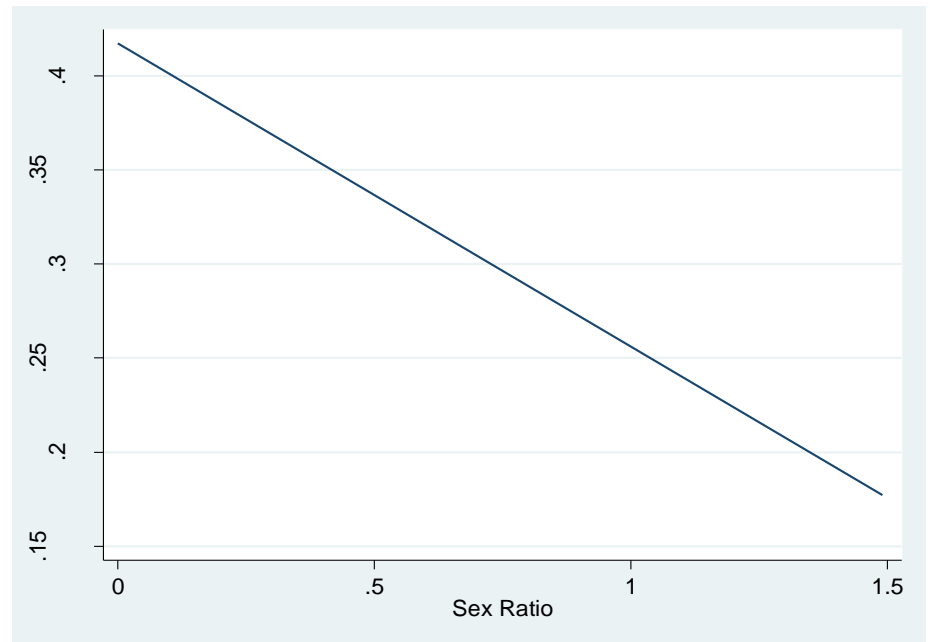


# Why so few women in politics?

- Study women candidates in India
- State assembly elections data
- 50 years data (1962-2012)

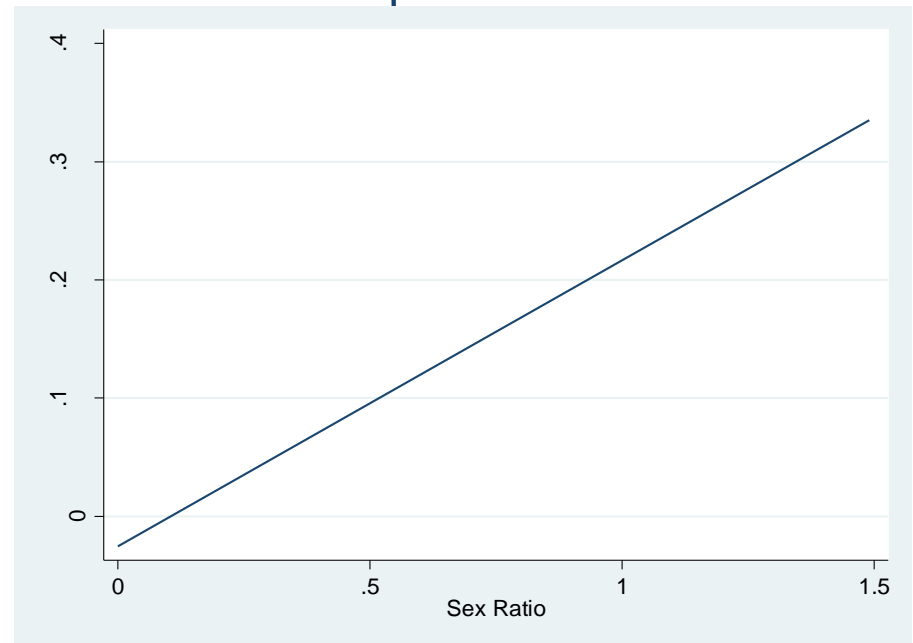
# Where are women contesting elections?

- Result 1: women are more likely to contest elections in constituencies where sex ratio of electors is worse
- Probability of women contesting is much higher in backward states like Bihar, UP than in Kerala and TN
- In states with higher sex ratio – women seek representation through voting



# Where are women winning elections?

- Result 2: women have lower chances of winning elections in constituencies where sex ratio of electors is worse
- Socially advanced states = women don't contest
- Socially backward states = women contest but don't win
- Together the two results = few women political leaders overall



# Women's Reservation in India

- If the logic for reservation is compensatory justice
  1. Then reservation should not be random
  2. It should be targeted in those constituencies where the sex ratios are worst

### 3. Will reservations solve problems? (the Ugly)

- Our estimates show that 20% of female electorate is “missing” in India (65 million)
- So the Indian elections reveal the will of a population that is artificially skewed against women
- The average Indian elector is a male.
- Missing female electorate is -
  1. Partly because significant number of women not registered to vote (9.3% in UP and 5.7% in Bihar)
  2. Largely because women are missing from the population – sustained gross neglect of women over all age groups of population life cycle.
    - Reflective of regressive social institutions: unequal access to healthcare, education, job markets, safety and security (India has largest number of female deaths due to intentional injuries.)

- Women's reservation at Panchayat level – mixed results for women's welfare
- Even with reservations – women candidates will cater to the preferences of the average voter --who is male
- Competitive electoral process even in the presence of women's reservation, will perpetuate gender-biased policies
- This is akin to market failure of democracy
- But reservations will lower cost of entry into politics and create a pipeline of female leaders
- Only one Indian political party has an active policy that promotes women candidates: BJP



# Making Indian democracy inclusive for women

1. Partly by aggressive registration drive targeting women electors
2. Partly through the Women's reservation bill...  
...which is unlikely to improve representation of female preferences in short run, but will create pipeline of women leaders
3. Largely dependent on correcting the sex ratio in the population (reflective of regressive social institutions: unequal access to healthcare, education, job markets, safety and security (India has largest number of female deaths due to intentional injuries...))

Otherwise Indian democracy will fail its women citizens