

Quotas for women in local politics brings surge in documented crimes against women in India

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An increase in female representation in local politics has caused a significant rise in documented crimes against women in India, new research has found.

That is good news, say the authors of the study carried out at the Centre for Competitive Advantage in the [Global Economy](#) (CAGE) at the University of Warwick in the UK, Harvard Business School and the IMF, who argue that the increase is down to greater reporting of crimes against women, rather than greater incidence of crimes against them.

The research examined the impact of the Panchayati Raj reform passed in 1993, which required Indian states to set aside one third of all member and leader positions in local government councils for women.

Panchayati Raj was implemented in different years by different states given their own election cycles, and is one of the largest experiments with quotas for female political representation anywhere in the world.

The researchers found that documented crimes against women rose by an average of 44 per cent after women entered local government, while rapes rose by 23 per cent and kidnapping of women showed a 13 per cent increase in the post-reform period up until 2004.

However there has been no significant effect on crimes not specifically

targeted against women, such as kidnapping of men, theft or public order offences.

The researchers believe there are two reasons behind the surge in reported crimes against women.

Firstly, greater numbers of female politicians make the police more responsive to crimes against women.

Since the quota legislation, the number of arrests has also increased significantly, particularly for cases dealing with kidnapping of women.

And women victims who encounter more sympathetic women leaders would feel more encouraged to report crimes.

Dr Anandi Mani, associate professor of economics at CAGE, said: "The first thing we want to point out is that this is good news.

"The reason it's happening is because more crimes are being documented than were before the reforms - it's not an increase in incidences of crime.

"From what we can see in our data, when you have more women political leaders it has a motivating effect on the police to take crimes against women more seriously.

"We see that both in the arrest data and also in terms of women's satisfaction in their interaction with the police in areas where they have women leaders.

"And consistent with our reporting hypothesis, areas with longer exposure to women in local government show an eventual decline in the crime rate against women, so there is a deterrent effect over time."

Dr Mani added that it was the presence of women in the broad base of political representatives, rather than solely in leadership positions at the higher levels of politics, that generates the powerful impact.

"Our results imply that the presence of women at the lowest level of governance, where they are closer to potential crime victims, is more important in giving voice to [women](#) than their presence in higher level leadership positions."

More information: The working paper, entitled The Power of Political Voice: Women's Political Representation and Crime in India is available [here](#).

Provided by University of Warwick

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