

Lower sex-selective abortion rates in India districts with Muslim legislators

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New research by the universities of Kent, Warwick and Notre Dame (United States) has found that sex-selective abortion is lower in India districts with a Muslim state legislator, consistent with a higher reported

aversion to abortion among Muslims compared to Hindus.

Sex-selective [abortion](#) has dramatically increased in India in recent decades. Abortion was legalized in India in 1971 and while safe abortion is viewed as a woman's right, illegal abortion is still easily accessible with procedures and facilities deemed unsafe.

Published by the *Journal of Development Economics*, the study discovered a rise in fertility under Muslim legislators in India, suggesting a substitution from sex-selective abortion to greater fertility as a means of achieving the desired gender mix of children.

The sex ratio at birth in India has grown more male-biased since the mid to late 1980s despite rapid increases in income, improvements in women's education, a decline in stated son preference, and the implementation of a ban on prenatal sex determination in 1996. According to the research, Muslims have similar levels of son preference. However, because Muslims have stronger (stated) preferences against abortion than Hindus, Muslim legislators, acting on their preferences, are more effective at reducing abortion than Hindus.

Professor Irma Clots-Figueras (Kent's School of Economics), Professor Sonia Bhalotra (Warwick's Department of Economics and Associate Professor of Economics and Global Affairs Lakshmi Iyer (University of Notre Dame) led the research using nationwide survey data on the retrospective fertility histories of more than 450,000 women with more than 860,000 births over three decades.

Professor Clots-Figueras said that their "research shows that Muslim legislators are more effective at controlling the selective abortion of girls in India. Previous studies have not established a causal link between politician preferences and abortion outcomes, yet our findings suggest that the personal identity of legislators could indeed be a key component

of policy effectiveness."

More information: Sonia Bhalotra et al, Religion and abortion: The role of politician identity, *Journal of Development Economics* (2021).
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Provided by University of Kent

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