

The Effect of Electing Female Candidates on Attitudes toward Intimate Partner Violence

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What can be done to encourage people to condemn intimate partner violence? Looking at Indonesia, I combine electoral data with a large-scale health survey and find that the narrow victory of a female candidate—as opposed to a male candidate—in local council elections leads to a decrease in the share of female constituents who agree that a husband is justified in assaulting his wife. I observe similar results for male constituents, although some estimates are not statistically significant. These results improve our understanding of the role of descriptive representation as a cause, rather than simply a consequence, of changing attitudes.

For millions of women across the world, intimate partner violence (IPV) is a daily occurrence. A wave of new research has identified small-scale interventions effective in changing individuals' attitudes toward IPV, with the ultimate aim of diminishing the incidence of such events in the first place. Scholars have found that changes in educational curricula, mass media campaigns, and structured dialogues between partners can all have significantly positive effects in changing participants' stated tolerance of IPV (Dhar, Jain, and Jayachandran 2015; Green, Wilke, and Cooper 2018; Gupta et al. 2013).

These studies are promising but have led to a comparative neglect of the broader political forces that might affect attitudes toward IPV. A growing body of scholarship has identified institutional changes as influential in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Tankard and Paluck 2017). Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen (2011) present evidence in support of this hypothesis, finding that a country's legal codes are an important determinant of the incidence of violence against women. Perhaps most similar in design to the current study, Beaman et al. (2009) examine the effect of exposure to gender quotas in local elections in India and find that such policies durably reduced levels of gender-based bias among survey respondents.

Particularly relevant to this article, a cross-national literature has theorized about the causal mechanisms through which an increase in female political representation might lead to changes in attitudes toward IPV. These studies have hypothesized that an increase in female representation will enable resources for programs aimed at the prevention of IPV, with downstream attitudinal consequences. Two recent studies have found evidence of this process. In India, Iyer et al. (2012) examine the implementation of gender quotas in local councils in India in the early 1990s. After the implementation of gender quotas, the authors find that women are more likely to report incidents of IPV to the police. They attribute this finding to victims updating their attitudes about the acceptability of reporting IPV to the police, as they perceived officers held accountable by female politicians to be more amenable to hearing their claims. Looking at Rwanda, Burnet (2011) finds that a parliamentary gender quota increased female representation in the legislature and led to the passage of a law targeting gender-based violence in 2006. Drawing on qualitative evidence, the author argues that this law encouraged constituents to update their attitudes toward these events.¹

This article seeks to extend these findings to the Indonesian context, by estimating the effect of electing women to local councils on attitudes toward IPV. Looking at a large-scale

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Data and supporting materials necessary to reproduce the numerical results in the article are available in the *JOP* Dataverse (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset/jop>). An online appendix with supplementary material is available at <https://doi.org/10.1086/708685>. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. Burnet (2011, 323) writes that “these reforms, as a whole, have changed perceptions about . . . women’s roles.”

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health survey, I find that electing female politicians increases the proportion of constituents who condemn IPV. Specifically, the narrow victory of a female candidate in Indonesian local council elections—as opposed to a male candidate—leads to a significant decrease in the share of female constituents who agree that a husband is justified in assaulting his wife in the event of hypothetical perceived transgressions. I also observe similar results among male constituents, although the estimates of these additional tests are not always statistically significant.

CONTEXT

This research examines the case of Indonesia—the world’s fourth most populous country. Studying the relationship between female political representation and attitudes toward IPV is particularly important in Indonesia for two reasons. First, IPV is endemic in Indonesia. Nearly 40% of women report having experienced such violence in the last 15 years—5 percentage points higher than the global average. Second, Indonesia has recently undergone significant institutional transformations that make investigating the consequences of representation important. Following the return of democratic elections in 1999, the national parliament passed a law in 2003 implementing a gender quota for candidates on party lists.² Examining whether this institutional shift has had its intended effect with respect to constituents’ attitudes in Indonesia is a pressing question.

I examine the effect of electing female candidates to the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah II (DPRD-II). The DPRD-II is the legislative body for the rural regency (*kabupaten*) level of government, as well as for urban municipalities (*kota*). Legislators are elected to five-year terms in multimember districts by a system of proportional representation known as the “hare quota.” Starting in 2001, Indonesia underwent a process of extensive decentralization, with the number of districts growing from 292 in 1999 to 497 in 2012. The national decentralization law imbued these legislative bodies with significant new powers. By 2009, district legislatures were responsible for roughly 40% of all government spending in Indonesia.

These recent reforms make it likely that members of the DPRD-II are important players in changing attitudes toward IPV. With the 2001 decentralization law, the majority of policy portfolios were been handed over to the district level of government, including the provision of health care and education. While laws explicitly targeting IPV are

rare,³ local council members have used their new authority to direct resources toward the mitigation of IPV by allocating funding from ongoing health programs. One such initiative has involved “service centers for empowering women and children” (Pusat Pelayanan Terpadu Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Anak [P2TP2A]), which, as of 2012, existed in 161 (out of 497) Indonesian districts. These centers are primarily intended as places of refuge for victims. But recent case study evidence suggests that these centers are also active in public engagement, frequently holding educational events in their communities (Asih and Yohana 2017). Other legislative initiatives have been more direct in their efforts to shift attitudes toward IPV, providing educational campaigns that target young Indonesians in school with lectures from health officials and religious leaders. Emblematic of these efforts, the DPRD-II in Kabupaten Madiun enacted PERDA/no. 005/2008 that mandated “education promoting values against domestic violence towards women and children.”

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

I estimate the effect of electing an additional female legislator to the DPRD-II on stated tolerance of IPV among constituents. To do so, I leverage the particularities of the Indonesian electoral system whereby seats are allocated to legislators in multimember districts through a system of proportional representation known as the “hare quota.”⁴ Seat allocation takes place in two rounds. First, for each constituency, an electoral quota is computed (total votes divided by the number of seats). Parties with vote totals in excess of the quota receive a proportional number of seats. Second, parties are then ranked according to leftover votes.⁵ Remaining seats are distributed in descending fashion. I focus on the race for the last seat in the second round (i.e., the race between the last winner and the first loser).

The central identifying assumption of this article is that the outcome of such races—if narrowly contested between a female and male candidate—is decided as if randomly. I define “narrowly contested” as less than 1% of the total vote.⁶ Consistent with the as-if random assumption, 49.8% of races in the main estimation sample were won by female candidates.⁷

3. Out of 15,804 local laws passed between 1990 and 2009, I detect only seven pieces of legislation that mention IPV in the title.

4. See app. sec. B (appendix available online) for a more comprehensive explanation.

5. “Leftover” votes are the total votes minus the number of first-round seats multiplied by the electoral quota.

6. As a sensitivity check, I include additional analyses that look at larger bandwidths in app. sec. C.3.

7. A series of balance tests further bolster the plausibility of this assumption. See app. sec. B.2.

2. This institutional change does not disturb the assumption at the core of the causal identification strategy used in this article, since the new system does not create a quota for elected officials. Instead, the reform requires that political party lists include at least 30% female candidates.

Table 1. Effect of Female Incumbency on Female Attitudes toward Intimate Partner Violence

	Is a Husband Justified in Assaulting His Wife If She:					
	Goes Out (1)	Neglects Children (2)	Argues (3)	Refuses Sex (4)	Burns Food (5)	Index (6)
Female incumbency	-.064* (.031)	-.058* (.029)	-.036* (.015)	-.023 (.018)	-.032** (.011)	-.203* (.084)
Constant	.290** (.024)	.314** (.021)	.089** (.013)	.116** (.015)	.053** (.010)	.835** (.068)

Note. Beta coefficients from ordinary least squares regression. Standard errors (in parentheses) were calculated using the Huber-White (HC0) correction. The outcomes are drawn from a battery of questions that asked respondents whether a husband was justified in assaulting his wife if she (1) goes out without telling her husband, (2) neglects her children, (3) argues with her husband, (4) refuses sex, or (5) burns the food. The index is an additive measure. $N = 128$; bandwidth = 1%.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

I exploit this plausible source of exogenous variation to compare outcomes in constituencies in which a female candidate narrowly defeats a male candidate in the race for the last allocated seat to constituencies where a male candidate narrowly defeats a female candidate. This strategy therefore exploits an increase in the share of seats won by female candidates in a given constituency. In constituencies where a female candidate narrowly won, 23.4% of the seats were won by female candidates, compared to 15.1% in constituencies where a male candidate won the last seat ($p < .0001$, $t = 5.3$). This corresponds to a 54.9% increase in the share of seats won by female candidates (see app. fig. B.1i).

To measure attitudes toward IPV in Indonesia, I draw on a USAID Demographic and Health Survey, which was conducted in 2012 as a nationally representative survey of women age 18–49 ($N = 45,607$), along with a subsample of men age 18–49 ($N = 9,306$).⁸ Respondents were asked a series of questions about the acceptability of IPV as a form of punishment for perceived transgressions. Enumerators asked respondents whether they believe assaulting one's wife is justified if (1) she goes out without telling her husband, (2) she neglects her children, (3) she argues with her husband, (4) she refuses to have sex with her husband, or (5) she burns the food.

I aggregate all outcomes to the electoral constituency (*daerah pemilihan*).⁹ The analysis uses ordinary least squares to compare constituency-level acceptance of IPV across places where a female candidate narrowly defeated a male candidate

in the race for the last seat to places where the reverse occurred. In terms of outcomes, I first examine the disaggregated measures. I also examine an index, which is an additive measure of all responses (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$).

MAIN RESULTS AND PLACEBO TESTS

Table 1 summarizes the main effects, looking at female respondents interviewed in 2012, three years after the election in 2009.¹⁰ Electing a female legislator leads to a 6.4 percentage point drop in the proportion of women who say it is justified to assault one's wife if she goes out without telling her husband. Respondents were also less likely—by a margin of 3.6 percentage points—to say it is justified to assault one's wife if she argues with her husband. Under female incumbency, the proportion of female respondents stating that it is justified to assault one's wife if she burns the food drops by 3.2 percentage points. The effect of electing an additional female council member also appears to lead to a drop in the proportion of respondents who state that it is justified to assault one's wife if she refuses sex (col. 4) or if she neglects the children (col. 2), although it is worth highlighting that these estimates are not always statistically significant and are sensitive to the selection of bandwidth (see app. fig. C.3i). Finally, female incumbency leads to 0.20 drop in the additive index of all responses (col. 6), corresponding to a 23% drop over counterfactual constituencies.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the main analysis, looking at male respondents. The election of an additional female

8. The sampling procedure randomly selected female respondents. Male respondents were surveyed in every third household.

9. Constituencies are electoral creations. Administrative subdistricts (*kecamatan*) are perfectly nested within the constituencies.

10. I conduct additional sensitivity analyses that implement the tests using less restrictive bandwidths in app. sec. C.3. The results are substantively identical. I also conduct a graphical analysis of the main effect in app. fig. C.2i.

Table 2. Effect of Female Incumbency on Male Attitudes toward Intimate Partner Violence

	Is a Husband Justified in Assaulting His Wife If She:					
	Goes Out (1)	Neglects Children (2)	Argues (3)	Refuses Sex (4)	Burns Food (5)	Index (6)
Female incumbency	-.031 (.032)	-.031 (.031)	-.021 (.024)	-.033* (.013)	-.014 (.010)	-.133 (.084)
Constant	.144** (.021)	.150** (.021)	.057** (.021)	.040** (.012)	.017 (.009)	.406** (.069)

Note. Beta coefficients from ordinary least squares regression. Standard errors (in parentheses) were calculated using the Huber-White (HC0) correction. The outcomes are drawn from a battery of questions that asked respondents whether a husband was justified in assaulting his wife if she (1) goes out without telling her husband, (2) neglects her children, (3) argues with her husband, (4) refuses sex, or (5) burns the food. The index is an additive measure. $N = 128$; bandwidth = 1%.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

legislator appears to decrease the share of male respondents who say it is justified to assault one's wife. For one of the six main outcomes, the point estimate is statistically significant. I find that the narrow election of an additional female legislator leads to a 3.3 percentage point drop in the share of male respondents who say it is justified to assault one's wife if she refuses sex. It also appears to lead to a drop in the additive index measuring broad-based support for IPV among male respondents, although this result is not statistically significant at conventional levels.

One concern is that these observed effects might be driven by an imbalance in preelection differences in the distribution of outcomes. To examine this possibility, I conduct a series of placebo tests. Recall that the election took place in 2009. Thus, I conduct the main analysis using preelection outcomes from the 2007 USAID Demographic and Health Survey. I look at both female and male respondents. Interviewers asked the same questions. The results of these tests are summarized in table 3. For both male and female respondents, constituencies where female candidates narrowly win in 2009 appear statistically indistinguishable from those where female candidates narrowly lost.¹¹ Placebo tests for the additive index are provided in appendix table B.5ii. The

11. Although only marginally significant ($p = .059$), one exception is seen in table 3, col. 2, in which the proportion of male respondents who said assaulting one's wife if she goes out without telling her husband is roughly 7 percentage points lower in areas where female candidates won in 2009. Given the balance on all other lagged outcome variables, it is likely that this result is due to chance alone. However, to examine the extent to which this slight imbalance drives the main findings, I conduct the main analysis with the lagged (2007) dependent variable as a control. The results are presented in app. tables C.4i and C.4ii and are substantively identical to those results presented in the main analysis.

results of these additional tests betray no signs of a pre-election imbalance.

DISCUSSION

While the design of this study cannot definitively isolate the mechanisms that drive the results, one possible explanation is that female politicians are more adept at allocating state resources to address the issue of IPV, with downstream attitudinal consequences. I provide three pieces of suggestive evidence in support of this mechanism. First, I draw on newly available data documenting over 240,000 candidate platforms for local parliamentary office in 2019. Looking at these DPRD-II candidate platforms, I find that female candidates are, on average, 28 times more likely than male competitors to mention women's issues in their platform (fig. C.5i; 14.2% vs. 0.51%). These statements occasionally focus on IPV, indicating that female candidates are hopeful in their capacity to initiate change in this area. One candidate in Kabupaten Bangka Tengah, for instance, states in her platform that she is running to "fight for the interests of women in parliament so that domestic violence no longer happens."¹²

Second, I examine the effect of increased female political representation on funding for health initiatives. Recall that the main hypothesized lever through which local legislators have directed local resources toward mitigating IPV has been funding for programs under the broader umbrella of ongoing health initiatives.¹³ I adopt a correlational approach to examine the relationship between the total share of seats held

12. Original text: "Untuk memperjuangkan kepentingan perempuan di parlemen supaya tidak terjadi lagi kekerasan pelecehan."

13. Legislation enacted in Kabupaten Madiun, e.g., established crisis units within extant health centers for victims of IPV.

Table 3. Effect of Female Incumbency on Pretreatment Attitudes toward Intimate Partner Violence (Placebo Test)

	Is a Husband Justified in Assaulting His Wife If She:									
	Goes Out		Neglects Children		Argues		Refuses Sex		Burns Food	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Female incumbency	-.037 (.036)	-.073 (.038)	-.004 (.036)	-.008 (.043)	.010 (.018)	-.032 (.030)	.012 (.022)	.010 (.027)	.006 (.015)	.020 (.020)
Constant	.282** (.027)	.168** (.032)	.276** (.026)	.172** (.031)	.071** (.014)	.086** (.024)	.074** (.017)	.058** (.016)	.038** (.011)	.017* (.008)
Gender	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M

Note. Beta coefficients from ordinary least squares regression. Standard errors (in parentheses) were calculated using the Huber-White (HC0) correction. The outcomes are drawn from a battery of questions that asked respondents whether a husband was justified in assaulting his wife if she (1) goes out without telling her husband, (2) neglects her children, (3) argues with her husband, (4) refuses sex, or (5) burns the food. $N = 115$; bandwidth = 1%; F = female; M = male.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

by female legislators in constituencies and district health budget allocations.¹⁴ The results are presented in appendix table C.5i. The relationship between the share of seats held by female representatives in constituencies and the share of district budgets dedicated to health is positive and highly significant across all specifications. The first differences estimate obtained from the naive regression is instructive: increasing the share of female representatives from 0% to 50% is consistent with a 3.3% increase in the share of the budget dedicated to health (95% confidence interval: 0.94, 5.56).¹⁵

As a further test, I investigate the effect of electing an additional female legislator on the allocation of resources within existing local health centers. Specifically, I draw on the 2014 Indonesian Family Life Survey of 964 local health centers to examine the amount of funding dedicated to public outreach initiatives—a category that includes awareness campaigns targeting IPV.¹⁶ The results are presented in appendix

table C.5ii and are consistent with the hypothesized mechanism: the narrow victory of a female candidate over a male competitor leads, on average, to a doubling in funding for public outreach initiatives within health centers in their constituencies ($p = 0.073$).

Third, I examine heterogeneity in the effect of electing female legislators across districts with (and without) “service centers for empowering women and children” (P2TP2A). Qualitative evidence suggests that female legislators are active in channeling resources from health budgets toward P2TP2A centers, with the intent that these facilities provide shelter to victims and engage in community outreach to change attitudes toward IPV. If female legislators are active in funneling resources from health budgets to P2TP2A centers—and these centers are successful in achieving their stated goals—the observed effects of electing female candidates on attitudes toward IPV ought to be amplified in constituencies with such facilities in place. In appendix figure C.5ii, I conduct a split sample analysis. For all six outcomes, and consistent with this hypothesis, the effect of narrowly electing a female legislator on female respondents’ attitudes toward IPV is larger in districts with a P2TP2A center. In appendix table C.5iii, I present the results from formal interaction tests. These tests reveal at least marginally statistically significant heterogeneity for three of the six outcomes.

Qualitative evidence suggests that female legislators expect these measures to shape attitudes toward IPV. A local law passed in 2012 in the Trenggalek regency allocated funds for the construction of a safe house for victims of IPV, which the sponsors hoped would also have “social impacts” (*Antara News* 2012). Another local law passed in 2013 in the

14. Budget allocations are decided at the district level, rather than the constituency level, meaning the empirical strategy employed in the main analysis is inapplicable. For estimation, I regress the proportion of female legislators in the constituencies on the proportion of the budget dedicated to health in 2014. Appendix table C.5i col. 1 is the naive regression; col. 2 includes the lagged (2008) dependent variable; col. 3 adds a number of conventional control variables; col. 4 includes a provincial fixed effects term.

15. This estimate is consistent with those obtained from the other models. In the full specification (app. table C.5i col. 4), the first differences estimate implies that going from 0% to 50% female representation in legislatures leads to a 3.1 percentage point increase in the share of the budget dedicated to health (95% confidence interval: 1.03, 5.10).

16. As a set of additional outcomes, I also examine (1) the total funding for the local health centers, (2) the proportion of female doctors, and (3) the number of public health officials.

Penajam Paser regency is illustrative. The law directed resources toward the protection of victims. It also provided resources to skill-based training programs for survivors of IPV. Sarifah Ainun Jariah, a female legislator in the DPRD-II and the sponsor of the law, said she hoped the resources would help combat the social stigma that constrains the mind-set of survivors. "Oftentimes, [survivors] will temporarily hide at a family member's house in a neighboring district, but in the end they will move entirely or drop out of school," she told a local newspaper (*Antara News* 2013). Jariah said she hoped this legislation would combat the culture of shame that motivates this sort of action.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this article make at least two central contributions. First, it makes a clear contribution in terms of policy implications. Specifically, the increased election of female legislators would constitute a major push in the effort to empower people to condemn IPV. These results therefore offer at least partial support to those who advocate for gender quotas on the grounds that increases in descriptive representation might improve measures of substantive representation for female constituents (e.g., Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). More broadly, second, this research contributes to a growing literature that identifies the consequences of political representation for marginalized communities. The results suggest that increases in representation have an emboldening effect on the attitudes of in-group members. This is consistent with the work of Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) and Iyer et al. (2012).

This article adds to these findings in three respects. First, I extend these insights to the Indonesian context. To my knowledge, this is the first study examining the consequences of increased female political representation on attitudes toward IPV in the world's fourth most populous country. The institutional context makes this case a hard test. The effects of female representation in multimember districts should be diluted and thus bias away from observing effects on constituents' attitudes. Instead, I find that even a modest increase in the share of seats held by female council members can have substantively large consequences. Second, I examine the effect of electing female legislators on male attitudes and present evidence that the salutary effect of increased female representation partially carries over to this population, despite a smaller sample size. This is a normatively promising conclusion—one that cuts against the expectation of those who argue that such increases in representation might lead to a "backlash effect" among privileged out-groups (e.g., Sidanius et al. 2004). Third, by documenting more foundational attitudinal shifts, this study underscores an important mechanism through which descriptive representation moves relevant

outcomes. Namely, increases in female political representation might embolden female constituents to make greater demands in accordance with their self-interest.

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