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(8827 words)

Abstract

Traditional community rules are formally recognized in multiple constitutions across Latin America. Scholars debate the extent to which these practices conform to broader principles of gender equality. A unique institutional feature in the impoverished state of Oaxaca, Mexico, divides municipalities into traditional and party-based governance. We exploit this feature with original survey data and find that rates of female participation in traditional communities are not different when compared to non-traditional ones. We also conduct a survey experiment to explore how perceptions about female leadership change with factual information about female mayors. We find the strongest demonstration effect on women recipient of the conditional cash-transfer program Oportunidades. Our evidence suggests overall that traditional governance is not a relevant dimension to understand female disempowerment, and that entrenched discriminatory practices against women (which exist but are not inherent to traditional rule) are sensitive to community bargains and well-designed policy.

1. Introduction

Traditional community rules have been formally recognized in multiple constitutions across Latin America since the mid-1990s. The constitutions of Bolivia, Colombia, Nicaragua and Mexico clearly recognize the right to autonomy for their indigenous people. And governments throughout the region have recognized the importance of

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harmonizing old practices of governance among indigenous and Afro-American communities with the formal systems of law that regulate non-indigenous peoples. Armed conflict, grassroots indigenous mobilizations and an increasing public awareness about the historical abandonment of indigenous groups have primed elites to accept these constitutional formalizations with varying degrees of reluctance (see Eisenstadt, 2011; Postero, 2007; Trejo, 2012; Van Cott, 2005 and Yashar, 2005). A point of contention both in politics and academic debate is the degree to which traditional systems of law and indigenous autonomies abide by broader principles of democratic life, particularly regarding the respect to the rights of women. Of interest here is the perceived tension between systems of traditional rule and the *public* role of women. In her lucid ethnography of Teotitlan del Valle, Oaxaca, Lynn Stephen (2005b) demonstrates that Zapotec women “will push to be formally included in the structure of government, yet also continue to use the institutions of social reproduction as a basis for defining their cultural citizenship” (p.322). Danielson and Eisenstadt (2009) strike a quite familiar cord, when they claim that “women are explicitly, and legally, excluded from full participation in voting and from holding positions of power” (p.177) in Oaxacan municipalities ruled by traditional systems of government.

We seek to contribute to the current debate with two novel elements. First, our paper specifically addresses the question of female participation in the southern state of Oaxaca, Mexico, one of the poorest and most indigenous in the country, by comparing female participation in municipalities ruled by *usos y costumbres* (*UyC* hereafter), essentially a model of participatory democracy, with the situation of women in municipalities ruled by political parties. Second, using a survey experiment we randomize the assignment of an informational treatment about the extent of female political leadership in Oaxaca, and we gauge its effect on the acceptance of women in government . All of our data comes from a state-wide survey which is designed to be representative of the population living under each governance type –and of course for the whole state.

Our results show that female participation does not systematically change across governance type. They also show that perceptions of women in government are sensitive to new information, with a particularly strong effect among households recipient of the conditional cash-transfer *Oportunidades*, —which requires women to participate in discussion groups and committees, providing them a space for public debate and participation—. Finally, we present evidence that allows us to conjecture that the poor situation of women in Oaxaca stems not from

governance type itself but from other structural conditions of the population related to urbanization and educational levels.. Overall, we find no clear-cut evidence that *UyC* is inherently biased against women, and we find that attitudes towards women are adaptive to new information, specially under *UyC*.

These are findings that should also be informative to the broader development community. Development requires the empowerment of women. As noted by Sen (1989, 1999) women take consequential decisions related to investments at very early stages of human life in the form of pre-natal care, nutrition, hygiene and health, which are essential for the development of cognitive abilities to accumulate human capital in the schooling system. However, women have been, and continue to be, discriminated in most areas critical for development. Despite international attention and funding, women still face lower levels of nutrition and literacy than men, are more prone to sexual and physical abuse, share a disproportionate burden of work (both domestic and in the labor market) relative to income, have lower levels of land endowment and property, and are more likely to live in poverty and be politically underrepresented in the public sector (UNWOMEN, 2011; UN 2009; UNDP 2008; Gordon and Dew-Becker, 2008; Nussbaum 2001; Agarwal, 1994).

There have been at least three types of interventions to address the disempowerment of women. First, national governments have become increasingly receptive to the need for gender-sensitive policies and institutional processes to guarantee the proper political representation of women. Research in India has shown that when women become more prominent politically, even when their representation may be artificially created through quotas, empowerment effects are permanent (Bhavnani, 2009); that women as policy-makers are more likely to emphasize public good provision when they are empowered to make decisions as political leaders (Pande, 2003); and that women elected as leaders under reservation (quota) policy in India invest more in public goods more closely linked to women concerns, such as water or roads (Chattopadhyay and Dufflo, 2004).

The second set of policies attempt to curb discrimination of women who live under traditional systems of law embedded within Western-type legal systems (legal pluralism). In Burundi, efforts have been made to incorporate women into the circle of *bashingantahe*, traditional elders in charge of conflict resolution that has been traditionally dominated by men. Women now comprise around 40% of *bashingantahe*, introducing a gendered perspective into community conflict such as violence against women and inheritance rights. In Indonesia there are

six official religions with different legal provisions regulating marriage and divorce. Efforts in this country have focused on waiving divorce fees for poor women who want for some reason to end a marriage. Waiving the fees serves the purpose of increasing women agency over their lives and obtain legal documents to help them have a life independent of their husbands. In Ecuador, indigenous women have organized to promote gender equality from within their cultures and their traditional legal systems, in an attempt to adapt their traditional systems to a gender-sensitive approach to communal justice (UNWOMEN, 2011).

The third set of policies does not target the broader institutional framework, but focuses instead in the micro-dynamics within the household that disenfranchise women –especially in the gendered distribution of assets that curb the agency of women. Conditional cash-transfer programs (CCTs hereafter) are an example of this last type of policies. CCTs have become a major component in the inter-generational poverty alleviation efforts in some developing countries¹.

In Mexico, *Oportunidades* transfers cash bi-monthly directly to mothers in eligible households. Households are means-tested to declare eligibility, and receive transfers that range from about \$25 USD to over \$200 USD, depending on the number of children and seniors, their ages and their enrollment status and level (SEDESOL, 2013). Conditionality requires changes in behavior within the household related to children nutrition, health and education. For example, households receive cash to use in the local markets to buy higher quality food, with additional transfers to households with pregnant or lactating women. Households also receive cash conditional on children assisting to health clinics for regular check-ups, as well as to buy schooling material such as notebooks, pencils and the like. This program redistributes the control of intra-household assets to exploit the complementarity between nutrition, health and education (Levy, 1991) in order to break the inter-generational transmission of poverty by modifying the incentive structure within poor households that keeps children out of school and undernourished. It also involves the attendance of mothers to educational meetings to discuss issues of prenatal care, nutrition and health (general and reproductive). A subset of these women become commissioners (*vocales*) in their communities within the *Oportunidades* structure in charge of the health or education components of the program, and actively participate in the conduction of these meetings. This is a key element of the program for our argument below

1 For example *Red de Protección Social* in Nicaragua, *Oportunidades* in Mexico, *Bolsa Familia* in Brazil, *Familias en Acción* in Colombia or *Juntos* in Peru.

because it provides women with real control over community resources.

Recent work has measured the extent to which the program succeeds in targeted households. There seems to be a positive overall balance linked to the overall empowerment of recipient women in terms of prenatal procedures (Barber and Gertler, 2010, 2009), obesity and hypertension (Fernald et al., 2008), growth in children of poor urban households (Leroy et al. 2008) and enrollment rates and household consumption (Rawlings and Rubio, 2005). Furthermore, qualitative evidence from localities surrounding Mexico City suggests that Oportunidades does not induce male violence toward women as an unintended side effect of the internal redistribution of income that is central to the program (Maldonado et al., 2006). There is, however, mixed evidence in the effects of the program in other important areas. For example, Berhman et al. (2009) find a positive effect on the development of language among children of rural beneficiaries after ten years, but find no significant effect on educational attainment.

A less explored avenue of research is whether these programs can have a multiplier effect on the *political* role of women within their communities. This paper walks in this direction by looking at whether recipients of Oportunidades are more likely to accept women in government, and importantly, whether there are any systematic differences for women living under traditional rules. Given that CCTs attempt to empower women on multiple dimensions, it is important to ask whether Oportunidades-style programs can have any significant effect on the political empowerment of women in the communities.

Our field research in the state of Oaxaca provides anecdotal evidence suggesting that women are increasingly participating in community *cargos* (roles) thanks, in part, to their participation in informational meetings and as representatives of Oportunidades. These meetings are for many women the only form of collective participation in their communities, and appear to have gradually transformed power and gender relations within indigenous communities in Oaxaca.

Our survey confirms what we learned in the field, and suggests that a) there are no significant differences in female participation across governance type, and b) Oportunidades is the single most important factor we discover to be related with acceptance of women in government, in both men and women, with stronger effects in women that come from traditional municipalities governed by UyC.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 provides a simple analytical framework to distinguish

UyC from standard party competition. Our sample design takes this distinction into account to stratify the population, which is discussed in section 3. Section 4 discusses female participation in Oaxaca. Section 5 reports the design and compliance of our survey experiment, and discusses briefly the mechanism by which poor households are targeted with Oportunidades. Section 6 presents the results of the survey experiment and, finally, section 7 discusses and concludes.

2. Usos y Costumbres in Oaxaca

Oaxaca presents an extremely rich cultural landscape. It is the state with the most municipalities (570) in Mexico and is extremely poor. The state's economic share of total output is well below its total share of the population, is mostly rural and about a third of its population fall under the category of nutritional poverty² (INEGI 2010, CONEVAL, 2012).

In 1995, the Oaxacan legislature modified the local constitution to formally recognize its multicultural composition and the right of indigenous people to determine their rules of governance. In the following years municipalities were allowed to opt-out of electoral competition to select municipal presidents (becoming formally ruled by *UyC*) or to stay in the default condition of selecting local authorities through political parties like the rest of the municipalities in the country³. In Oaxaca, 420 out of 570 municipalities are now governed by *UyC*. Migration in Oaxaca is an all-too-common exit strategy, with California, North Carolina, New York, Minnesota and New Jersey

2 Official sources cited show that Oaxaca has 3.38% of the country's population, but produces only 1.54% of the national GDP, and more than half of its population (53%) lives in rural areas, while the national average is 24%. Additionally, 39.9% have no access to health services and 41.4% suffer deficiencies in their dwellings such as a lack of drinking water, sewerage or electricity.

3 The federal constitution would be modified only until 2000 to incorporate this formal recognition.

Municipalities with majoritarian indigenous composition can still opt-out of local electoral competition for local authorities. This has put some indigenous municipalities in contentious relationships with state authorities – notably the case of Cherán, in the state of Michoacán, which switched to self-government in late 2011, amidst violence and widespread allegations of links between organized crime and local party leaders.

being preferred destinations. The religious landscape is very fragmented between Catholics, Evangelists, Jehova's Witnesses and a wide array of smaller Christian-based faiths.

Oaxaca has a complex mixture of traditional and non-traditional communities. It is unique to the extent that it has been formally recognized in the state constitution (unlike other states with prevalent indigenous population such as Chiapas). *Usos y costumbres* is an all-encompassing system of participatory democracy that regulates most, if not all, aspects of public life in those communities that abide by it. The term UyC refers to a panoply of practices and norms that encompasses the selection of leaders, mechanisms of conflict resolution and a system of unpaid community work. UyC is a complex layering of political and social organizational practices which combines civil and religious services with mandatory participation in public life (Hernández-Díaz 2007: 40, Recondo 2007).

Our own experience in the field confirms this appreciation about the complex institutional variations that fall with this category. The fact that political parties cannot directly postulate candidates does not mean that they uniformly have no influence in the internal politics of the communities. Citizens from the municipality of San Juan Guelavía explained to us that for the selection of municipal presidents begins with a list of candidates linked to political parties at the state level. By contrast, in a different municipality called Magdalena Peñasco, political parties are mostly absent from the process of candidate selection,

Mandatory participation in public life under UyC takes two main forms. The first one (called *servicio*) consists of unpaid community work through *cargos* (posts) that last anywhere between one and three years. Examples of these posts range from municipal president to community police (*topiles de policía*), to school-key manager to stray-dog controller (*saca-perros* in Etlá). The second one, called *tequio*, consists of short-term unpaid community work such as fixing roads or installing common infrastructure (water grids, electricity poles).

Although universal and widely considered mandatory, there is variation in the extent of its practices and the consequences of non-compliance. In many municipalities candidates for *cargos* are self-nominated, but in others like Villa Díaz Ordaz senior citizens play a dominant role in the assignment of these posts, and citizens there reported an unspoken rule of no self-nomination under the risk of being perceived as wanting the post to engage in corrupt practices. In the municipality of Matatlán *tequio* has ceased to exist for many years, although *servicio* is still an important part of community life; however, failing to comply does not entail physical punishment (as is the case in

San Juan Guelavía or San Pablo Etla). This sort of punishment sometimes puts the community at odds with human rights organizations, with the ensuing conflict being part of an ongoing intra-community bargain. Failure to comply with *tequio* also has varying responses, ranging from community shaming to the prohibition of using the public infrastructure (like in Villa Díaz Ordaz).

Despite all its complex institutional variations, we argue there is a core set of practices that characterize a core of these indigenous rules in Oaxaca: a) direct participation of adults in local assemblies to discuss public affairs, and b) mandatory participation of adults in a system of unpaid communal work (Díaz Cayeros et al., 2014). These obligations entail acquired rights of access to communal land for farming and living, access to communal resources (e.g. water or cemetery), as well as the right to participate and vote in the communal assembly (Stephen, 2005a)⁴. Key to our argument is that participation in community work does not depend on gender. Both men and women participate fully in community work, although the allocation of specific roles might be gender-specific, with physically more demanding labor going exclusively to men, and more organizational cargos (school, church) going to women. As discussed in the introduction, our field research suggests that the more egalitarian participation of women in cargos is a recent shift spurred in part by the program *Oportunidades* (which we discuss below in greater detail).

Some authors argue that the set of practices we now call *UyC* are historical adaptations of mechanisms of social control implemented in the early colonial days by the viceroyalty of New Spain, in order to command authority over the indigenous population (Bartra 1999). The patterns of social organization that emerged became in the early XXth century functional to the consolidation of the revolutionary single-party regime, which established a clientelistic pact with indigenous communities to provide local autonomy and (scant) material benefits in exchange for political support (Recondo, 2007; Lajous, 1981).

However, these practices have been historically appropriated by indigenous communities and are subject to intense internal renegotiation (Recondo 2007, Hernández-Díaz 2007). Democratic innovation and amalgamation

4 Stephen (2005a) categorizes these acquired rights and obligations in the context of her anthropological work in the community of Teotitlán del Valle, but our own field research has confirmed that these are indeed general characteristics of *UyC*.

with non-traditional rule is a recurrent conclusion of scholars looking at traditional indigenous rules (see for instance the work in Juchitán by Rubin, 1997). In this sense, Stephen (2005a, 2005b) argues that these processes of internal adaptation reflect –and at the same time shape– local, state, national and global movements of definition of what constitutes a “right” properly, as well as the definition of group identities in the face of increasingly integrated global markets.

However, adaptation is conflictive. The tensions between broad democratic principles and local community practices are expressed vividly in the sometimes contradictory relationship between *UyC* and other rights. For example, political rights within the community are tied to rules of reciprocity --the right to participate in assemblies and in public affairs in general is conditional on performing cargos and short-term free community work called *tequio* (for example renewing rural roads). These reciprocity-based norms conflict with broader constitutional principles of political rights that are conditional exclusively on citizenship⁵.

Scholars differ in their assessment of the effects of *UyC* on the internal life of the communities in general, and of women participation in particular. Some argue that the formalization of *UyC* was a demobilization strategy by the dying single-party regime in the decade of the 1990's to control the rise of the opposition, a mechanism by which political elites (*caciques*) have become entrenched (Benton, 2012; Cleary, 2008; Eisenstadt, 2007) and where vast numbers of citizens, particularly women, have been disenfranchised (Danielson and Eisenstadt, 2009) because of traditional patriarchal practices that seem bundled with *UyC*. This paper offers a plausible alternative by arguing there is no evidence that a bias against women is inherently bundled to traditional rule.

Another line of research looks at how governance rules in *UyC* might reinforce preexisting biases. The municipal population in Oaxaca (indeed, in most rural Mexico) is concentrated in the *cabecera* (municipal seat). Other smaller and highly scattered localities exist within each municipality but they have little political clout. The centralization of municipal power in the *cabecera* is a generalized phenomenon elsewhere in Mexico (Fox, 2007; Fox and Aranda, 1996). What makes *UyC* particularly susceptible to a political bias is the fact that assemblies gather in the municipal seat. The municipal president and all municipal government also reside in the municipal seat.

5 See Stephen (2005a) for a vivid account of how a protestant family that refused to take part in catholic related cargos and servicios in a Zapotec community in Oaxaca was denied burial lots in the local cemetery.

Federal transfers arrive directly and are discussed and allocated in the municipal seat. This makes peripheral localities prone to political and budgetary disenfranchisement. Each of these smaller localities (called *agencias* in the case of Oaxaca) reproduces *UyC* to deal with public affairs. They also gather in assemblies and select authorities (called *agentes*) which then have to coordinate and maneuver with the municipal government. This important distinction between cabecera and locality will structure our analysis below because it reflects a broader cleavage of modernization that we conjecture is more highly correlated with the role of women (rather than governance itself). Compared to cabeceras, *agencias* are less populated and more rural, they rely heavier on subsistence agriculture, have less access to basic public services such as water, sanitation, health clinics and schools), have higher infant mortality rates and are much more indigenous (when measured through language).

The structure of municipal governments in Mexico is regulated at the federal constitution level and does not distinguish between *UyC* and non-*UyC*. From a research design standpoint, this fixes the institutional framework but allows variation in governance practices. We exploit this unique opportunity by using a stratified survey sample to measure our variables of interest --participation in community assemblies and in the system of communal duties (*cargos*), as well as our survey experiment which is detailed below. We now turn to our survey and elaborate further on our research design.

3. Survey Design

We designed and collected a stratified random sample of 568 questionnaires of men and women over 18 years old in rural and semi-rural areas in Oaxaca. The stratification divided Oaxacan municipalities according to governance, their rural character and the size of their cabecera. Strata were established for rural municipalities with less than 2500 inhabitants in the cabecera, regardless of the overall size of the municipality; semi-rural municipalities with between 2500 and 5000 inhabitants; and urban municipalities, which were not included in the survey. Coverage in the study was designed to enable inferences about governance conditions in territories that could meaningfully be thought of as single units. It therefore excluded both the largest metropolitan areas as well as mid-size cities.

On the governance dimension, stratification was done along *UyC* and party-based competition. The

classification used comes from the *Instituto Electoral Estatal de Oaxaca* (Electoral Institute of the state of Oaxaca) which established in 2009 that 418 municipalities were governed through traditional law. This joint stratification by size and governance yields the following design, where the entries in each cell are the number of municipalities falling under each category and the parenthesis indicates the aggregate population of each cell.

[TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

Table 1 shows the number of municipalities that fall within each stratum --a total of 152 governed by political parties and 418 by UyC. We stratified the sample in this way to ensure the possibility of making inferences regarding those places where much of the rural poverty and many serious governance problems are found, given the characteristics described in the previous section.

[FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE]

Figure 1 shows the municipalities in Oaxaca that are governed through UyC. For the selection of individual municipalities we used the mapping of the Federal Electoral Institute that divides the territories into tracts comprising 750 voters. Each of these so-called *secciones electorales* (electoral sections) are equally likely in terms of their probability of being chosen, hence providing a reliable sample frame for the kind of rural areas where the survey was carried out. Around half of the sample points fell into cabeceras while the rest fell in the smaller *agencias*. Sixteen questionnaires were collected in the cabeceras and eight in *agencias*. This design oversamples rural localities and municipalities governed by UyC⁶. The final distribution of surveys across governance and locality types is presented in Table 2:

[TABLE 2 AROUND HERE]

6 The number of questionnaires were chosen by calculating the power of the tests across governance structures and localities that we planned to make, using software developed by Spybrook et al. (2008).

The survey was collected in August 2009, and permission was obtained from municipal presidents to enter the communities⁷. In addition to the survey, in-depth qualitative work was done as a follow up in a selected number of polling points in the central valley region close to Oaxaca City to acquire a richer description of the data. In the next section we present the survey results about women participation in Oaxaca. Since our two broad dimensions of analysis are municipalities governed by UyC/Parties, and Cabeceras/Agencias, we present the data segmented by these dimensions additionally to gender.

4. Female Participation and Indigenous Governance

Oaxaca is a state with a highly complex and diverse ethnic composition, with over 13 indigenous groups. In our survey, on average 72% of respondents report identifying as indigenous. Table 3 shows difference in proportions tests⁸ segmenting by the dimensions discussed above⁹:

[TABLE 3 AROUND HERE]

As expected, more people in UyC self-identify as indigenous (75%) than in non-UyC municipalities (70%). Perhaps a more informative ethnic marker than self-identification (see Chandra, 2006), more people speak an indigenous language in the former than the latter. Surprisingly, however, a higher proportion self-identifies as

7 Some adjustments were made to the survey in the field to solve unavoidable logistical problems: seven polling points were repeated with a corrected version of the questionnaire; four substitutions were made, and three additional locations governed by political parties were added.

8 All statistical tests at $\alpha = .10$ level unless otherwise noted.

9 For clarity, in all subsequent tables only the answers for *Yes* are reported unless otherwise noted.

indigenous in the more urban cabeceras (75%) than in the small, rural agencias (69%). The tests show that gender is not statistically significant, which is reasonable because it cuts across ethnic identity.

Our survey shows that, overall, only 15% of respondents reported knowing a woman in government, whether as a municipal president or as a member of the *cabildo* (town council). When dividing by governance type we get a slight increase in affirmative answers in UyC (15%) with respect to parties (13%)¹⁰. Dividing by locality type we get a similar pattern: 17% of respondents in cabeceras recall knowing women in government, whereas 9% of respondents in agencias, suggesting that people in the municipal seat tend to recall (or observe) more women in government. Finally, positive answers to this item are slightly higher for men (15%) than women (13%).

The next item (*Woman elected*) asks respondents whether or not they know a woman who is a municipal president (that is, excluding women in *cabildo*). The data suggests that people in UyC know slightly three times more women who are municipal presidents than their counterparts. The strongest difference arises across locality type: 38% for municipal seats vs. ~0% for agencias. This suggests that recalling women in government is an urban phenomenon, and that the lack of information about women as presidents is confined to the rural, more remote localities. Population density seems to be a more relevant dimension.

Regarding the participation of women in assemblies, an overwhelming majority of respondents said women are allowed in municipal assemblies. Around 90% of respondents in both governance systems answered that women were allowed to participate in the assemblies, and between 98% and 93% of respondents (in UyC and parties, respectively) claimed that women are allowed to vote. There is no evidence in our survey that women are relegated in UyC particularly more than in non-traditional municipalities. It is important to notice here the scope and limitations of our method. As with all survey data which measures perceptions, responses might be distorted by issues of recalling and social desirability bias. The survey data itself as it is does not give direct evidence of female participation in assemblies. It does however provide strong evidence of a homogeneous and consistent perception that women are allowed to participate in assemblies under UyC.

¹⁰ Official data at the time of the survey shows that 8 municipalities were governed by women, and a total of 124 were part of the *cabildo*.

Our field research (that is, in-depth interviews with adult men and women, as well as focus groups performed over the course of multiple months) suggests also that the general perception is that women are allowed (and many times do) participate in assemblies. A grocery seller of San Juan Guelavía, for example, confirmed that women are allowed (and in fact do attend) the general assemblies, and a female restaurant owner from Villa Díaz Ordaz remarked how women “talk the most” during the assemblies, to which her 87 year old mother added how women “now are more in command than men (*mandan más que los hombres*)”. In Matatlán, two female interviewees confirmed separately that they regularly assist to the assemblies, but one of them regretted that women tend to attend less than men.

To be sure, interviewed women in multiple municipalities did complain about the unfair status of women, but there was never a direct reference to UyC. This was particularly prevalent when asked to discuss the access of women to public office, where the recurrent complain was that even when women get nominated for high-level municipal office people don't vote for them (either in the polls or the assemblies). Two young women in the municipal seat of Santiago Nochixtlán (governed by political parties) complained that, although women have been gaining clout in public life, they feel discriminated and did not feel that they could voice their opinions freely. In San Juan Guelavía another two women considered that women were treated with respect in the assemblies.

Given that women are perceived to freely *be able* to participate in assemblies regardless of governance or locality type, do they merely delegate their vote and authority to a man or do they personally engage in the process of voting? Our survey asks whether women vote on their own, discuss their opinion with their husbands but let them vote, or if they cannot vote at all. The overwhelming majority of respondents report that women can vote on their own, and only 3% report the remaining answers (not shown). A woman in the mostly rural locality of San Juan Guelavía (governed by UyC) confirmed that she assists to all assemblies with her husband but voices her vote through her husband after discussing the issue at hand with him.

We find no clear-cut evidence of perceptions of systematic formal or informal exclusion of women in traditional municipalities. If anything, perceptions of female participation are in fact reported to be slightly higher in UyC.

Municipalities governed by UyC rely heavily on community service for road and school maintenance,

construction services for the community, policing, organizing religious and civic festivities or taking part in the municipal government. This community service, called *servicio* lasts between one and three years, and is a widespread practice in Oaxaca: 75% of respondents reported that either themselves or someone they know had performed *servicio*.

In terms of gender, there is a perception that women have in general an equal chance to participate in *servicio* without the mediation of their husbands. Our data show that 74% of respondents think that women have the ability to participate in *servicio*, but a high 26% think they should not perform *servicio* independently. There is no statistical difference in these proportions when segmenting by gender.

Respondents in municipalities governed by UyC were asked what types of public tasks (*cargos*) women perform in the community. When we disaggregate the types of *cargos* women hold in the communities we find some evidence that women are confined to gendered roles when performing *servicio*. The third set of variables in Table 3 presents the percentage of affirmative answers for five different response categories, which have been classified from an open-ended question with up to three mentions.

The category “Official” includes *cargos* in the municipal government, police and assorted committees (e.g. child development). This is the category with the most mentions, but an important caveat is in place: most of the mentions in this category are related with minor roles in government. Inferring from this data that women actually have a good chance of accessing high level local offices is incorrect. The categories “Education” and “Health” correspond to school committees (similar to parent-teacher associations in the U.S.), libraries, water committee, cleaning and so forth. Together these categories make up almost as much as the first one. Finally *cargos* related to Oportunidades committees account for a small but important number of activities for women.

When segmenting the responses by locality type we see that women are perceived to be more actively engaged in (minor) government roles by about 15% more in *cabeceras* than *agencias*. It is important, as we argue below, that the other significant difference corresponds to those *cargos* related to Oportunidades, which engages 3% of the women in *agencias*. Finally, none of these differences are significant when segmenting the sample by gender.

In sum, we have presented descriptive statistics for various public roles of women: in government, participation, delegation of their votes, and type of *cargos*. Our evidence does not support the idea that women in

municipalities governed by UyC are at a clear disadvantage relative to women who live in non-traditional municipalities. In fact, the data suggests that a more relevant cleavage might be locality type (strongly linked to population density and urbanization).

In this context we explore in the following sections whether factual information about women already in government has any effect in the propensity to accept women in government. We are interested in how demonstration effects vary across the same three broad dimensions we have used until now, and whether beneficiaries of Oportunidades show any differential effect of information. The ability to process new information plays a fundamental role for empowerment by providing the discursive possibility about alternative states of the world (Kabeer, 1999): one in which women exercise political power.

The next section elaborates on our survey experiment and its compliance, followed by a brief discussion of how Oportunidades targets poor households. This is important to establish the exogeneity of the program with respect to previous levels of social capital and organizational capabilities that might be correlated with female participation.

5. Experimental Treatment and Compliance

Survey experiments are powerful tools for exploring causal mechanisms because they combine the internal validity of experimental designs and the external validity of surveys (Transue, Lee and Aldrich, 2009). In its basic form, the researcher randomly assigns a treatment to different sets of questionnaires. The treatment can come in the form of different wording or ordering of the questions. It is considered experimental because treatment in the survey is randomly assigned. In political science, survey experiments of the type we use have been applied elsewhere to reduce social desirability when asking about sensitive topics; to gauge whether and how priming affects the measurement of attitudes and opinions, or for inference purposes (Gaines et al., 2007).

Experimental treatment spillover effects can occur when a previous treatment influences a subsequent survey question or experiment (Transue et al., 2009: 2). If the treatment in one question affects responses further down the survey, two potential problems may arise. In the first one --mean bias-- previous experimental treatments affect the initial attitude of a subsequent question. However, even if the starting attitudinal point is shifted, this does

not necessarily create inference problems. The second type of bias --inference bias-- occurs when previous experiments affect the sensitivity respondents have to subsequent treatments, in which case testing threats can alter the quality of our inferences, inducing type I or type II errors artificially.

Our survey contained three embedded experiments. The one we will present here was the first one in order, and so we do not expect any spillover effects because there is no other experiment preceding the one presented here. Additionally, it was administered early in the survey and the topics for each experiment are different. Thus, we are confident we can rule out any potential treatment spillover effects.

The control question asks the following: “With which of the following phrases do you agree the most? 1) Only men should be municipal presidents or 2) Women should be able to serve as municipal presidents”. The treatment simply adds the following preamble to the question: “In the state of Oaxaca 8 municipalities are governed by female municipal presidents, and in 124 municipalities there are women in the town council. With which of the following phrases do you agree the most?”.

All elements of the question (wording, response categories, procedure to ask, and position in the survey) are the same except for the factual information added to the treatment¹¹.

This experiment relates to empowerment (as in Kabeer, 1999) in a number of ways. First, it gauges the effect that additional factual information about non-traditional roles of women has on the perceptions about women in public office. Second, attitudes about women exercising political power relates to a fundamental choice of women. Running for office is a decision that (provided they win enough votes) gives women real access and control over valuable resources, and is therefore a decision that can have real effects on the status quo. Third, because it provides information about other municipalities in Oaxaca where women have actually assumed office, it creates in the respondent's mind the discursive possibility that women can occupy positions of power.

Our survey experiment randomized treatment in 275 surveys and control in 293 ($n=568$). In order to test the randomization across our experimental design we conducted difference in proportions tests (or difference in means tests where appropriate) between control and treatment groups in the following dimensions: governance type

11 It is important to note that the experiment does not measure merely the effect of wording or framing because the treatment provides respondents with additional information, absent in the control.

(UyC/parties), locality type (cabecera/agencia), population structure (rural/urban), ethnic identity, gender, income, education, age, and receiving Oportunidades. Where a categorical variable had more than one category, we conducted difference in proportions tests for each subcategory¹².

Our results show proper balance was obtained across all variables. None of the differences between these averages in both treatment and control groups were statistically significant, and an inspection of the kernel density of these comparisons shows a similar distribution of respondents in both groups. The only variables that were significantly different were income in the 6001-10000 range (*income₄*), and whether or not respondents had a refrigerator in the household. This means that, in general, randomization worked correctly and it complied with the requirements of the experimental design, except in the two variables mentioned.

We cannot of course definitively rule out bias due to omitted variables, but we tested variables that are strongly linked with poverty and ethnicity and found proper compliance. We thus believe that unobserved variables will have little effect on the selection of treatment, but we test for robustness in the next section by including the two non-compliant variables to control for any systematic bias that might affect our results.

We conclude this section with a brief discussion about the selection of Oportunidades' beneficiaries and how the program's design is linked to the role of women within the communities. The goal is to argue that being a recipient of the CCT is uncorrelated with previous levels of social capital and organizational capabilities (important for our identification strategy) and is key to enhance the leadership position of women within the household and their communities.

Beneficiary households are selected in a two-staged calculation (Orozco and Hubert, 2005). First, a geographic targeting is performed on localities sorted using a marginalization index, which is constructed applying principal component analysis over illiteracy, access to running water, sewerage and electricity, dirt floors, population in the primary sector and the average members per household. Localities are then sorted along the first component. The second stage involves the selection of households within localities, which are surveyed to obtain information about the structure of homes in terms of income, federal benefits, migratory status, health services and

12 For instance, income was segmented into 5 categories: <1500, 1501-3000, 3001-6000, 6001-10,000, >10,000 (in Mexican pesos).

household infrastructure. These variables are weighted using a point system which, in combination with market prices for food that guarantees the basic nutritional (caloric) intake, creates the poverty line. Households below the poverty line are then selected if they can fulfill the schooling and health requirements of Oportunidades.

Eligibility to the program is thus exogenous to previous levels of organizational capabilities. It would be problematic to analyze the effects of Oportunidades if the selection of households were endogenous to previous levels of social capital, potentially influencing overall female participation and attitudes towards women. Many social policy programs during the authoritarian days of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) allocated development funds in exchange for regime support. By establishing specific organizational preconditions for the allocation of funds, the regime was able to target money to communities (or its local strongmen) with the highest probability of delivering support. By showing how Oportunidades is assigned to households we rule out a potential bias that would threaten our internal validity.

The inclusion in the program has a strong redistributive component within the households. Because cash transfers are provided to mothers directly, the control over household resources is rebalanced in favor of women, who start having control over a (relatively) substantial share of total household resources. This increase in real control over household resources, we argue, is key to understand the priming effect of Oportunidades in recipient households towards a higher acceptance of female authority in the public space.

A second effect on perceptions about the public role of women is a (perhaps unintended) consequence of the participation of mothers in the required meetings (which are part of the conditionality of the program).. A woman from one of the small UyC agencies in the municipality of Santiago Nochixtlán mentioned how women in meetings engage in discussions about local public affairs when they meet, and how this is one of the few sources of political information they have (besides their husbands). Importantly, interviewed women mentioned that the Oportunidades' promoters regularly talked about women equality and how women are entitled to participate in political life. This succinctly exemplifies our argument: these meetings provide a very valuable space not only for the participation of women, but also for the dissemination of information about the status of public life. It also gives women the role of meeting coordinators that provides them with spaces of public authority (albeit limited) which provides them with the important insight that they can exercise authority independently of their households and

husbands. This perceptual breakthrough is a key step in the empowerment of women (Kabeer, 1999)¹³.

6. Attitudes Towards Women in Government

We now present our results and robustness tests. Our most general result is that truthful contextual information about women in office shifts acceptance by 6%. This baseline result is significant at the 95% level, and it is interesting that our subtle treatment increases positive perceptions about women in municipal office that much. Table 4 shows the means, standard errors and confidence intervals for this result¹⁴.

[TABLE 4 AROUND HERE]

To test for robustness with the non-compliant variables described in the corresponding section above we run the model
$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_i + X_i \gamma + \epsilon_i$$
, where D_i is the dummy variable that captures the treatment, and X_i is a matrix of the non-compliant variables discussed in the previous section. Table 5 presents the results. After controlling for those variables where randomization failed, we can see that all the values for the treatment are still in the vicinity of 6%.

[TABLE 5 AROUND HERE]

Our next results decompose the baseline effect along the dimensions by which the sample was stratified. Recall from Section 5 that the survey is designed to be representative across governance and locality type, as well as for urban and rural areas, so we can segment respondents along these variables. Table 6 reports the average

13 “(The) availability of alternatives at the discursive level, of being able to have chosen differently or at least being able to imagine such a possibility, is thus crucial to the emergence of a critical consciousness, to the process by which people move from position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical, and perhaps transformatory, perspective on it” (Kabeer, 1999: 9).

14 $H_a : p_t - p_c > 0$.

treatment effect on the treated (ATT) for each population subgroup. Respondents in UyC municipalities are 7.4% more likely to accept women in local governments, compared to a 4.6% in party-based ones. When looking at locality type, respondents in municipal seats responded positively to the item by 5.8%, compared to a 7.1% of change in respondents from *agencias*. Finally, urban respondents show no treatment effect, while rural respondents show a 7.1% increase in acceptance of female mayors. There is a consistent pattern at this stage of the analysis: people in traditional societies, who do not live in the municipal seat and from more rural areas show the largest effects of the informational treatment.

[TABLE 6 AROUND HERE]

These dimensions are mutually exclusive, so we now look at treatment effects in their intersection (e.g. a respondent from UyC that lives in a rural *agencia*). To do so we calculate the average treatment effect on the treated for the following interactions of subsamples in our survey: governance and locality type, governance and population density, and locality type and population densities. Our results (not shown here but available upon request) reveal that respondents in municipalities governed by UyC have a barely significant positive effect of 5.8% if they live in *cabeceras* ($n=117$), but an 11.6% effect if they live in *agencias* ($n=86$). Respondents who live in municipalities governed by political parties who live in municipal seats show again a barely significant effect of 5.4% ($n=145$), but no statistically significant difference of they live in *agencias* ($n=109$).

The strong result in *agencias* of UyC is consistent with the overall patterns in Table 6, where we see the strongest marginal effects in UyC and in *agencias*. The zero effects in *agencias* of municipalities governed by political parties suggests that the effect for *agencias* in Table 6 could be driven by governance rather than locality type.

For governance type and population density we find that a significant effect¹⁵ of 11.6% for respondents in rural municipalities governed by UyC, and no effect for urban ones. We also find no effect for respondents who live in municipalities governed by parties regardless of their population density. This is again consistent with the lack of

15 The number of observations for each crossing are similar to the ones shown above.

effect for urban places in Table 6, but it is informative to see that the dominant dimension for the ATT at this stage seems to be population density rather than governance type.

Finally, for respondents in urban cabeceras there is no significant treatment effect, but we find a 7.1% difference for rural agencias. Rural cabeceras and urban agencias have no observations because these are structurally incompatible values for each variable: agencias are small and unpopulated, which are opposite characteristic of urban areas.

These effects are consistent with the overall effects in Table 6: we find the strongest effect in rural agencias of municipalities governed by UyC.

Until now the analysis has focused on how the ATT varies at different values of variables that stratify the sample, and which are related to structural characteristics of municipalities or localities of respondents. We now turn to analyze treatment effects along the gender of respondent and whether Oportunidades recipient.

[TABLE 7 AROUND HERE]

The overall response between recipients and non-recipients of the conditional cash-transfer is shown in Table 7. The treatment effect disappears for non-recipients, but it increases from the baseline of 6% to 12.2% for recipients of the conditional cash-transfer program. The Table also shows that treated women have on average 6.8% more acceptance of female mayors than women in the control, and this effect decreases to 5.7% among men.

So far we have presented a series of results that together suggest that information effects increase for a) respondents in agencias from municipalities governed by UyC, and b) recipients of Oportunidades.

We now discuss results when further unpacking the responses along these dimensions. We are careful however about the power in our tests because the number of observations drops. We report them throughout.

Women in municipalities governed by UyC ($n=156$) show a 7.3% significant increase in acceptance of women in government, compared to no effect of women in party-based municipalities ($n=130$). Similarly, men in UyC ($n=147$) who were treated are 7.6% more likely to respond positively than men in the control group. Women who receive Oportunidades ($n=129$) are 16.5% more likely to accept women in government when provided with the

treatment, compared to zero effect for women who do not receive the CCT ($n=157$).

Furthermore, women who receive Oportunidades in UyC ($n=80$) show an ATT of 15.6%, whereas women who do not receive the CCT in the same governance type ($n=76$) show no statistically significant effect. Men in these municipalities who live in recipient households ($n=85$) show a 9.9%, but men from non-recipient households show again no effect ($n=62$). In municipalities governed by political parties the effect for women who receive Oportunidades ($n=49$) increases to 18.5%, and the effect for women who do not is zero.

[TABLE 8 AROUND HERE]

Finally, with regards to the discussion about the role of community tasks discussed above (cargos) Table 8 shows the ATT for women only, segmented by whether they have performed cargos or not: women who have are 12.9% more likely to accept women in government, compared to a zero effect for women who have not. The number of observations in the former is $n=140$, but in the latter it is only $n=56$, so it might be that there is some sort of effect that we do not have enough power to detect. However, the result for women who perform cargos is reliable in this regard, so we can confidently claim that women who have performed cargos show a strong treatment effect.

Our evidence in this section shows that treatment increases overall positive perceptions of women in municipal governments by ~6%. Women in UyC show a 7.3% increase, compared to no effect for women in party-based municipalities. Our strongest and most reliable effect (given the number of observations after segmenting) is that women who receive Oportunidades are 16.5% more likely to accept women in government, compared again to no treatment effect for women who do not. In UyC, the women who have performed leadership positions related to cargos also show a strong positive and significant effect of treatment, which is absent in women who have not performed cargos.

When further segmenting the sample (with the statistical power caveats discussed) women and men from recipient households in UyC municipalities show strong positive and significant effects, while those who are not recipients show no treatment effect regardless of gender. In party-based municipalities, only recipient women show a positive and significant treatment effect, but recipient men do not. Non-recipients show no effect regardless of

gender.

Oportunidades seems to be priming both men and women for more receptivity to information about women's non-traditional roles in the communities. The fact that we cannot find any treatment effect when there is no Oportunidades, regardless of gender, suggests that information is being processed differently in part due to this governmental program. Since the effect of information among women in UyC is about twice the effect among men suggests that women are being targeted better. This could be because it is women who attend the meetings of Oportunidades, and they might then disseminate the information within their household. Other members, especially men, would be exposed to this information, albeit with a weaker effect.

Our evidence also suggests that the information treatment is stronger among rural respondents living in *agencias* of municipalities governed by UyC. Our survey does not have the statistical power to construct more nuanced claims about the extent to which recipient women, living in rural *agencias* in UyC are affected by our treatment. However, if the patterns we find persist with larger samples, this would be the case.

7. Discussion

Our paper addressed two related issues. The first one is whether UyC municipalities show any systematic difference with party-based ones in patterns of female participation. Previous work (Danielson and Eisenstadt, 2009) has found evidence that suggests women are actively excluded from the political process in some municipalities governed with traditional indigenous law. Our state-wide survey finds no clear-cut evidence when asking men and women about exclusionary practices. We find no significant difference across governance type in perceptions about female participation in assemblies or *cabildo*. We do find, however, a sharp difference in the degree to which people recall knowing women in local government when segmenting by population density, suggesting that people in the municipal seat tend to recall (or observe) more women in government than the more remote (and usually more rural) people in the *agencias*.

We interpret our results as pointing to the need to construct more nuanced expectations about the conditions under which a traditional society like *UyC* will be detrimental for women. There does not seem to be, in our data, an intrinsic bias against women in UyC. It is possible that UyC is in fact correlated with other variables

(such as urbanization, education or media exposure) that explain better the condition of women.

To be sure, women are indeed in a disadvantageous situation in Oaxaca (and most of Mexico) but our evidence suggests that governance type (that is, *UyC*) is not the relevant dimension to understand the variation in the conditions of women.

The second issue addressed in this paper is the extent to which truthful information can increase the likelihood of accepting women in government. Our survey experiment suggests that factual information can play a crucial role in increasing acceptance of women in government. We also find that the effects are mostly driven by whether respondents are recipients of the conditional cash-transfer program *Oportunidades*. We interpret participation in *Oportunidades* as a variable that relates to the fast changing role of women in indigenous communities.

The underlying mechanism is that the conditionality of this program requires women to attend meetings where relevant information is disseminated, and where leadership is exercised by local women. These meetings and community-oriented service increase their role as political agents in their communities. The effects of our mild treatment are strongly mediated by receiving the conditional cash transfer, and it disappears altogether for those people that do not receive it, regardless of gender and governance type. This is consistent with previous research that finds development projects in poor and fragmented communities are sensitive to good policy design (Khwaja, 2009).

The disempowerment of women in the household and public life is a dynamic bargain that can be politically contested from within (Kabeer, 1999; Volpp, 2001; Nussbaum, 2006; Honig, 1999). Political institutions and practices in Oaxaca are not static. They are, as all human institutions, subject to internal bargains (Recondo, 2007) and are capable of adaptation to the larger national and international context (Stephen, 2005a, 2005b). They are also sensitive, as our results show, to well-thought policy that can catalyze the role of women within the communities.

Overall we present evidence that suggests *UyC* is not the relevant dimension to understand female disempowerment, and that entrenched discriminatory practices against women (which exist but are not inherent to governance type) are sensitive to policy interventions that catalyzes the dynamic institutional adaptation.

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Size	Parties	Usos
Rural (pop<2500)	63 (243,915)	371 (890,864)
Semi-Rural	27 (192,713)	36 (217,207)
Urban (pop>5000)	62 (1,827,586)	11 (134,536)

TABLE 1. THE SIZE OF PARTIES AND USOS

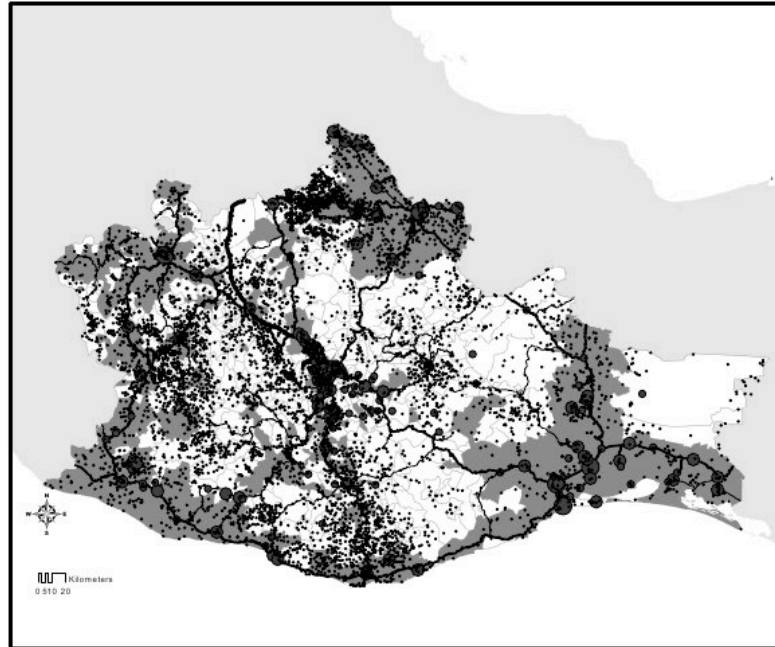


Figure 1: Municipalities Governed by Usos y Costumbres

	Cabecera	Agencia
Usos	39%	15%
Parties	26%	20%

Table 2: Respondents by Government and Locality (n=568)

	Governance		Locality Type		Density		<i>n</i>
	Usos	Parties	Cabecera	Agencia	Women	Men	
Indigenous	.75	.70	.75	.69	.71	.75	555
Speaks	.72	.51	.60	.60	.57	.63	450
Knows woman gov.	.15	.13	.17	.09	.13	.15	565
Woman elected	.47	.14	.38	.00	.31	.38	206
Women assembly	.89	.90	.89	.91	.88	.91	391
Women vote	.98	.93	.97	.96	.96	.97	347
Official	.56	–	.60	.47	.53	.59	217
Education	.28	–	.29	.27	.30	.26	217
Health	.26	–	.27	.22	.25	.26	217
Oportunidades	.01	–	.00	.03	.01	.01	391
Other	.12	–	.04	.91	.11	.15	391

Note: Bold indicates significant difference.

Table 3: Means by governance, locality type and gender

	Mean	Std. Error	95% C.I.
Treatment	.92	.016	(.89,.95)
Control	.86	.020	(.82,.90)
$T - C$.062***		
$p(Z < z)$.0092		

Table 4: Average Treatment Effect for the Treated in the survey experiment (n=557)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model
Treatment	0.062** (0.025)	0.06** (0.025)	0.059** (0.025)
$Income_4$.11 (0.074)	0.13* (0.077)
Refrigerator		.041 (.028)	.037 (.028)
$Income_1$			0.005 (0.034)
$Income_2$			0.055 (0.036)
$Income_3$			0.04 (0.042)
Constant	.86*** (.017)	.83*** (.025)	.81*** (0.034)
R^2	.008	.018	.024
$Pseudo-R^2$.016	.013	.014
Significance:	* .1, ** .05, *** .01		

Table 5: OLS models to control for non-compliance in randomization. DV: Perceptions of women in municipal governments.

	Governance		Locality Type		Density	
	Usos	Parties	Cabecera	Agencia	Urban	Rural
Treatment	.90 (.025) 145	.94 (.02) 126	.93 (.019) 174	.92 (.028) 97	.91 (.028) 103	.92 (.028) 97
Control	.83 (.03) 158	.90 (.026) 128	.87 (.025) 188	.85 (.036) 98	.89 (.031) 102	.85 (.036) 98
Difference	.074**	.046*	.058**	.071**	.02	.071*

*Note: Cells show mean, standard errors and number of observations.
Significance *.1,**.05,***.01*

Table 6: ATT by governance, locality type and population density

	Oportunidades		Gender	
	Yes	No	Women	Men
Treatment	.92 (.023) 133	.92 (.023) 138	.93 (.022) 137	.92 .86 134
Control	.80 (.035) 132	.91 (.023) 154	.86 (.029) 149	.86 (.029) 137
Difference	.122***	.011	.068**	.057**

Sig. : *.1, **.05, ***.01

Table 7: ATT by recipients of Oportunidades and gender

	Cargos	
	Yes	No
Treatment	.91 (.033) 70	.87 (.07) 23
Control	.79 (.049) 70	.91 (.05) 33
Difference	.129**	-.04

Sig. : *.1, ** .05, *** .01

Table 8: ATT for women by cargos.