

Candidate Qualifications and Out-Group Support: Evidence from Afghanistan

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Abstract

Can qualifications help candidates from historically marginalized groups win over out-group voters? We help answer this question with an original conjoint experiment fielded in three Afghan provinces between 2016 and 2017. The conjoint asked over 2,000 Afghan respondents to rank and choose between profiles of hypothetical candidates with varying gender, ethnic and educational attributes. We explore whether candidate qualifications – as measured by educational attainment – can amplify respondents’ support for hypothetical candidates from two traditionally excluded social groups: women and Hazaras – a historically persecuted ethnic group. We find that higher qualifications consistently increase male (non-Hazara) respondents’ ranking and likelihood of choosing profiles with female (Hazara) candidates. These gains, however, do not completely offset male (non-Hazara) respondents’ in-group biases. Qualifications help but are not enough to level voter preferences for in-group candidates.

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1 Introduction

Voters generally prefer political representatives who look like them (Barnes and Burdard 2013; Carlson 2015; Chandra 2007; K. Dolan 2008; Hankla, Banerjee, Thomas, and Banerjee 2022; Kao and Benstead 2019; Schwarz and Coppock 2022). This bodes poorly for candidates from minority and historically under-represented groups who depend on out-group support to enter office. Can qualifications - be they professional experience, political accomplishments or educational attainment - help these candidates win over out-group voters?

Scholars disagree whether candidates' qualifications mitigate voters' in-group biases. Some argue that qualifications boost candidates' appeal to out-group constituents (Manzano and Sanchez 2010). Qualifications help dispel the assumptions and stereotypes that anchor biases against out-group candidates (Conroy-Krutz 2013). Others, however, warn that in-group biases diminish if not trivialise voters' assessments of out-group candidates' qualifications (Adida, Gottlieb, Kramon, and McClendon 2017; Carlson 2015).

This paper examines how candidate qualifications shape public attitudes towards female and Hazara¹ candidates in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRoA) - which fell to the Taliban in 2021. Afghanistan is a *hard* case to measure the value of candidate qualifications. If qualifications can deepen the popularity of female and Hazara candidates - members of two groups that have historically endured mass and state sponsored violence and discrimination (Mousavi 2018; UN Women 2021) - in Afghanistan, they can aid minority and historically under-represented candidates anywhere. We assess whether candidate qualifications - as measured in terms of educational attainment - ameliorate female and Hazara candidates' appeal to male and non-Hazara Afghans.

Determining whether qualifications can broaden public support for historically under-represented candidates matters because candidates have much greater agency over their qualifications than other drivers of voter support. Ascriptive characteristics are largely fixed. Candidates' ability to tap into clientelistic networks to win votes may be bound by their ascriptive characteristics as well (Corstange 2016). Qualifications, in contrast, can be earned. If qualifications enhance out-group voters' support, then nominating highly qualified female and minority candidates can help diversify the political arena through the ballot box.

Measuring the impact of qualifications on public support for historically under-represented candidates, however, is challenging. Candidates from these groups are often *more* qualified than their competitors. This is due to a selection effect; only the most qualified female and minority candidates are willing to run for office (Anzia and Berry 2011). The absence of less qualified female and minority candidates limits our ability to gauge the impact of qualifications on support for historically under-represented candidates. Quotas and institutionalized power-sharing arrangements obfuscate comparisons between female and male candidates or minority and majority candidates as well. More broadly, elections - especially in countries with a history of weak rule of law and rampant electoral fraud like Afghanistan (Callen and Long 2015) - are imprecise measures of popular will.

We circumvent these empirical challenges with an original conjoint survey experiment conducted in three Afghan provinces between 2016 and 2017. The conjoint experiment

1. Hazaras are a predominantly Shi'a ethnolinguistic minority group.

asked over 2,400 Afghan respondents to rank and choose hypothetical leadership profiles. These profiles randomly varied a hypothetical candidate's gender, ethnic group and educational attainment. We assess whether profiles with higher levels of educational attainment augment male and majority group respondents' ranking and likelihood of choosing candidates with female, minority, and minority female attributes.

We find that qualifications generally increase men (non-Hazara) respondents' ranking and likelihood of choosing a female (Hazara) candidate. Qualifications also attenuate in-group biases. Male (non-Hazara) respondents are more likely to pick a profile with a high educated female (Hazara) candidate over a profile with a low educated male (non-Hazara) candidate.

The benefits of qualifications, however, do not erase in-group biases. High qualification in-group candidate profiles are the most highly ranked and most likely to be picked. Low qualification out-group candidate profiles are the lowest ranked and least likely to be picked. In-group biases are also additive across groups. A non-Hazara male respondent will pick a highly educated female Hazara candidate profile less than half the time. He will pick a highly educated male non-Hazara candidate profile two-thirds of the time.

These findings advance our understanding of ethnic politics, gender politics and the power of candidate qualifications in the court of public opinion. We provide original evidence that qualifications can enhance historically under-represented candidates' favorability to voters from historically favored groups. But we also uncover that qualifications do not erase in-group biases completely. They help, but are not enough.

Our analysis helps nuance a divided literature over whether candidate qualifications can curb in-group biases. It also joins an exciting stream of new research that highlights the importance of candidates' ascriptive and activated identities - be they their policies (Bauer 2017; Blackman and Jackson 2021), piety (Benstead, Jamal, and Lust 2015; Kao and Benstead 2021) or party (K. A. Dolan 2014; Hayes and Lawless 2016; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Ono and Burden 2019; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018)- in moulding public preferences.

Lastly, we present original public opinion data from Afghanistan. In the wake of the fall of the IRoA, many wonder whether the Afghan's public indifference towards the Taliban's patriarchal policies enabled the Taliban's return to power. We provide strong evidence that the Afghan public was not uniformly hostile to women's political inclusion. That qualifications ameliorated male respondents' valuations of female candidates proposes that many Afghans were in fact open to female political leadership for candidates with sufficient qualifications.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section surveys existing work on qualifications on public support for female and minority candidates. We then present our hypotheses. The third section provides background information on the Afghan case. We then describe our survey and empirical approach. The fifth section exhibits our results. We conclude by proposing future avenues of research and discussing the policy implications of our findings.

2 Candidate Qualifications and Out-Group Support

Existing work on qualifications and out-group support is divided. Optimists argue that qualifications can dismantle the informational heuristics that anchor in-group biases (Conroy-Krutz 2013). Absent of information about a candidate's qualifications, voters apply prevailing stereotypes about a candidate's capabilities and preferences. These stereotypes reinforce in-group preferences. For example, all else equal, voters will assume a coethnic candidate is more hardworking and more likely to favor coethnic constituents than a non-coethnic candidate. Likewise, unless informed otherwise, voters may assume female candidates are less qualified and less interested in policy areas stereotypically associated with male expertise, like crime or national security. The historical absence of women and minorities in the formal political arena buttress voters' doubts about women and minority candidates' competencies (Mo 2015). Qualifications can correct these assumptions.

Voters may also value qualifications in and of themselves. Incumbency, one measure of qualifications, narrows the electoral gender gap in Chile (Piscopo, Hinojosa, Thomas, and Siavelis 2022; Shair-Rosenfield and Hinojosa 2014) and Indonesia (Toha and Hazra 2022). Manzano et al. (2010) find that on average Latino voters are more likely to support a qualified non-Latino candidate over a less qualified Latino candidate, except among Latinos with strong ethnic attachments. Similarly, Collingwood (2020) argues that Anglo / White candidates in the United States can win over minority voters by developing group-specific policy expertise, minority-group cultural competence and fostering shared party identification.

Pessimists, however, warn that in-group biases taint voters' evaluations of candidate qualifications. Using experimental and survey data from Benin, Adida et al. (2017) demonstrate that ethnicity shapes voters' evaluations of politicians' performance. Voters only reward good-performing incumbents if they are coethnic, and only punish bad performing non-coethnics. In Uganda, Carlson (2015) argues that ethnicity is not a heuristic for candidate quality. Instead, ethnicity and quality interact in shaping Ugandan' candidate preferences. She finds that Ugandans voters' value coethnic *and* high performing candidates in tandem. Low performing candidates do not benefit from coethnicity. Likewise, high performance does not endear non-coethnic candidates to voters because voters do not think they will benefit from a non-coethnic's high performance.

Meanwhile, an enduring puzzle in the women and politics literature is why women remain politically under-represented despite female candidates generally having greater political experience, professional expertise and higher education levels than male candidates (Barnes and Holman 2019; O'brien and Rickne 2016).² This disconnect suggests that voters may not view candidate's qualifications in a gender-neutral manner (Bauer 2020). Unlike with male candidates, respondents may be either indifferent or actually sanction female candidates with high qualifications. Profeta et al. (2022) reveal that women with higher qualifications were not more likely to be elected in Italy.

Survey evidence, meanwhile, finds little difference in how respondents' value political experience and educational qualifications across candidates' sex (Teele et al. 2018, p.534;

2. See Profeta and Woodhouse (2022, p.1472) for an excellent overview. Anzia et al. (2011) argue that prevailing gendered biases create a selection effect where women must outwork and out qualify men to enter and stay in the political arena.

Hankla et al. 2022, p.18 Hayes et al. 2016; Clayton, Robinson, Johnson, and Muriaas 2020; Shockley and Gengler 2020). Mo (2015) demonstrates that qualifications do not improve the likeability of female candidates among participants with male biases. Others warn that while respondents may value men and women’s qualifications equally, they still expect women to uphold traditional gendered household expectations, imposing a “double-bind” on female politicians (Clayton et al. 2020; Teele et al. 2018).

Finally, a parallel strand of scholarship uncovers backlash against women whose opportunities and qualifications defy prevailing stereotypes (Barnett, A. Jamal, and Monroe 2021; Benstead et al. 2015; Brulé 2020). Pessimists worry that male (ethnic majority) voters may punish highly qualified female (ethnic minority) candidates for fear that historically under-represented candidates’ empowerment would usurp existing hierarchies.

Existing literature presents three contrasting expectations about the relationship between candidate qualifications and out-group support.

H0: Candidate qualifications have no impact on out-group support.

H1: Higher candidate qualifications increase out-group support.

H2: Higher candidate qualifications decrease out-group support.

We advance this scholarship by examining how candidates’ intersecting group identities influence the relationship between qualifications and candidate favorability. This intersectional approach, pioneered by Crenshaw (1990), argues that the public does not view candidates’ multiple identities in isolation. Instead, these identities interact in complex ways when shaping public attitudes towards political candidates (Mügge and Erzeel 2016). For example, coethnicity and religiosity boosts public support for female candidates in Jordan (Kao et al. 2021) and Tunisia (Benstead et al. 2015).

We explore whether qualifications’ ability to boost support for an out-group candidate is a gendered phenomenon. A highly qualified female candidate from a historically excluded ethnic group may signal very different leadership traits³ and policies to a voter from a historically included ethnic group than a highly qualified male candidate from a historically excluded ethnic group. Being highly qualified *and* belonging to *two* historically marginalized groups (woman; ethnic minority) could invoke a candidate’s greater capacity and willingness to change existing power hierarchies that benefit voters from politically dominant social groups (male; ethnic majority) than a highly qualified candidate from one historically marginalized group. We hypothesize:

H3: Higher candidate qualifications only increase out-group support for *male* candidates.

3. We define traits as a distinguishing characteristic of one’s personal nature (Bauer 2020, p.5).

3 Background: Gender and Hazara Politics in Afghanistan

3.1 The Historical Marginalization of the Afghan Hazaras

Comprising approximately 10 to 20 percent of the population of Afghanistan ⁴, the Hazaras mainly hail from the Central Highland region of the country. They predominately follow variants of Shi'a Islam, in contrast to the vast majority of the country (85-90 percent) which identify as Sunni Muslim (Saikal 2012). While there is no definitive data available, popular myths claim that they are descended from mongol soldiers who first populated the area during the expansion of the Mongol Empire in the 13th and 14th centuries and subsequently intermixed with local and neighbouring populations (He, Adnan, Rakha, Yeh, Wang, Zou, Guo, Rehman, Fawad, Chen, et al. 2019).

The Hazaras have a long history of persecution and marginalization in Afghanistan. While individual Hazaras enjoyed some socio-economic power as feudal landlords and occasionally advanced to elite positions in government, historical records indicate that most Hazaras lived as subsistence farmers or as members of the servant class until well into the 20th century (Mousavi 2018; Saikal 2012). Frequently targets of discrimination, violence and slavery, Hazaras particularly suffered under the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan, who massacred an estimated 60 percent of the Hazara population during a succession of Hazara uprisings in the late 19th century (Mousavi 2018).

While slavery was outlawed in 1923 and conditions gradually improved throughout the 20th century, Hazaras still faced disproportionate obstacles in accessing education and political rights (Mousavi 2018). Notably, Hazara political parties and activist groups began to emerge in the mid-20th century and became particularly active during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, most prominently the political party *Hezb-e-Wahdat*. More recently, Hazaras suffered grievously under the initial period of Taliban rule in the 1990s, as exemplified by successive mass killings, the assassination of prominent Hazara leaders such as Abdul Ali Mazari, and the destruction of the renowned giant Buddha statues in the Hazara heartlands of Bamiyan in early 2001 (Rashid 2002; Saikal 2012).

After the Taliban regime was ousted later that year by US-led forces, conditions once again improved for Hazaras, who were given equal recognition under the country's new constitution. Shi'a Islam was formally recognised under the new constitution as well. During the lifespan of the republic, several prominent Hazara political leaders emerged, including Karim Khalili, who served as Vice President of Afghanistan between 2004 and 2014, and Habiba Sorabi, who in 2005 was appointed as Provincial Governor of Bamiyan, making her the first female governor in the country (Saikal 2012). Opportunities also improved for ordinary Hazaras to take up positions in the civil service, universities, civil society and the private sector (Saikal 2012). While many Hazara-populated areas were poorer than the national average, significant advancements were made in education, labour market participation and the reduction of poverty, with provinces like Bamiyan being among the most advanced in the country with improving literacy rates and reducing poverty and

4. As there has been no proper census of the Afghan population since the 1970s, the population share of Hazaras relative to the population is an estimate.

gender inequalities (Bamik 2018).

However, as conflict intensified in the latter years of the republic, Hazara communities increasingly came under threat and were frequently the victims of several of the deadliest attacks on civilians by insurgent groups. Atrocities such as the 2011 Ashura massacres and several attacks on Shi'a mosques, perpetrated not only by Taliban forces but also the Islamic State, spread fear throughout the public, who became increasingly disillusioned with promises of additional protection from the government (Adili 2022). Additionally, grievances against the national government over inequalities over public goods provision, particularly a lack of reliable electricity in the central highlands, were an ongoing source of tensions (Chioyenda 2014).

In spite of conciliatory rhetoric towards Hazaras from various Taliban leaders, the situation for Hazaras has worsened since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Hazaras continue to be victims of violent attacks, and state repression against them has substantially increased (Adili 2022; UK Parliament 2022).

3.2 Women in Afghanistan

The plight of women in Afghanistan has undergone a similar trajectory over the past twenty years. During the initial period of Taliban rule in the 1990s, women and girls were almost entirely barred from the public sphere, including most work and educational opportunities (Zulfacar 2006). Post-2001, the situation for women improved steadily, if unequally, across the country. The 2004 Constitution recognized the equality of women and mandated protections for women's rights (Shah 2005). Quotas for female political leaders were implemented at national and local levels, with 27 percent of seats in the national parliament allocated for women (Krook, O'Brien, and Swip 2010). While these quotas were not always fulfilled, during the lifespan of the IRoA, many prominent women took on leadership roles as ministers, senators, civil society leaders, journalists and artists (Nijat and Murtazashvili 2015).

Women and girls made particularly impressive gains in education. From a starting point of virtually zero in 2001, by 2017 women made up approximately 28 percent of university students and 14 percent of faculty members (Hayward and Karim 2019). Girls' enrollment in primary and secondary education soared during IRoA rule, increasing from under 1 million in 2001 to almost 10 million by 2018 (UN Women 2021).

These gains, however, were unevenly distributed and obscured by high rates of absenteeism, poor quality education, and in the worst cases, attacks on students and teachers at girls' schools (Niaz Asadullah, Alim, and Anowar Hossain 2019; UN Women 2021). Many prominent female leaders, including activists, politicians, and judges, were also targeted by insurgents (UN Women 2021). In spite of significant progress, Afghanistan ranked 180th out of 191 countries on the Gender Development Index in 2021 (UNDP 2021). Since the collapse of the IRoA in August 2021, most of these gains have been reversed, and women have once again been banned from accessing almost all work and educational opportunities by the Taliban authorities (UN Women 2021).

4 Data Collection and Survey Experiment

We test our hypotheses with an original survey of over two thousand Afghan respondents. We conducted the survey in 2,485 households between 2016 and 2017 in three northern Afghan provinces: Balkh, Kunduz and Sar-e-Pul.⁵ All three provinces are ethnically and socio-economically diverse.

The analysis' dependent variable is support for an out-group candidate. We measure respondents' candidate preferences with a conjoint experiment of hypothetical candidate profiles. Because conjoint experiments require respondents to choose between profiles with numerous attributes, including non-sensitive ones, and never ask respondents for their preferences directly, scholars argue that conjoint experiments mitigate social desirability biases (Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022), which may be especially pronounced towards out-group candidates.

Enumerators read respondents the following text off of their enumerator tablet:

Now I am going to show you a few pairs of profiles of potential leaders and ask you to choose, between the two, the one that you think would be the best advocate for you. Given a choice between these two profiles, which person would you prefer as a leader?

We categorize political leadership broadly in terms of a leader's ability to advocate for their constituents. We prefer this broader measure over specifying political leadership positions like president, parliamentarian or mayor to prevent respondents from thinking of actual candidates for these positions when choosing between leadership profiles in the conjoint experiment.

Enumerators then read leaders' profiles with the following attributes and values:

5. See SI Section 7.1 for more information on survey logistics and implementation.

Table 1: Attributes of Leaders' Profiles

Attributes	Values
Gender	Male, Female
Age	28, 37, 49 57, 68
Education	Madrassa, High School, University Education in Afghanistan, University Education Abroad
Ethnicity	Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek Hazara, Turkmen, Balkh
Place of Birth	Balkh, Kabul, Kandahar Saripul, Kunduz
Professional Experience	Business Owner Donor Agency Employee Military Government Employee Private Sector Employee

The survey randomized candidates' attributes' values and the order they were read. There were three constraints in the randomization of candidate attribute values to ensure profile plausibility. Potential leaders or candidates younger than 30 would typically not have had less than a High School level of education.⁶ Candidates born in Kandahar - a

6. This is because of the vast expansion of public school education in Afghanistan over the last twenty

Pashtun-dominant province - were Pashtun. No hypothetical female leader had a military professional background. This is because there were so few women in the Afghan National Army (ANA) (Jones 2018). Finally, though party affiliation has an important effect on public perceptions of women’s leadership abilities (Holman et al. 2016; Ono et al. 2019), we did not include a political party attribute; Many Afghan leaders run for positions independently, and most major parties are associated with particular individuals and/or ethnic factions.

Educational attainment is our chief measure of a candidate’s qualifications. We recognize that education is one of many measures of a candidate’s qualifications. For example, both Adida et al. (2017) and Carlson (2015) focus on candidates’ past performance as an indicator of quality. Past performance and incumbency are undoubtedly valid measures of a candidate’s qualifications. These measures, however, cannot tell us how voters would evaluate qualifications of first-time candidates, who are often from historically under-represented groups.

Furthermore, education is a valid measure of candidate qualification in the Afghan context because our respondents strongly value leaders with high levels of education. When asked to rate the importance of a leader having a high level of education from one to six, with one being the least important and six being the most important, our survey respondents’ median response was five. This is higher than their median rating for a leader with government experience (three), strong religious values (four) or has served in the Afghan National Army (two). For this reason, a candidate’s educational attainment is our chief measure of their qualifications. We code candidates with education attributes of *University Education*, whether in Afghanistan or Abroad, as *High Educated*.

We examine the relationship between candidates’ qualifications and respondents’ support towards candidates from two types of ascriptive groups. The first is a candidate’s *gender*. Though gender is a spectrum, in the Afghan political context, most Afghans perceive a candidate’s gender as a binary between Male and Female. The second ascriptive group is an ethnic one. We assess how candidate qualifications impact respondent attitudes towards hypothetical candidates from the Hazara ethnic group. We also treat this variable as a binary, with hypothetical candidates being either Hazara or Non-Hazara. Lastly, we explore the impact of qualifications on support for candidates across both gender (male, female) and ethnic (Hazara, Non-Hazara) group categorizations.

Out-group support is the dependent variable. Male respondents are the out-group in assessing qualifications and support for female candidates. Non-Hazara respondents are the out-group in examining qualifications and support for Non-Hazara candidates. Non-Hazara Male respondents are the out-group of interest when examining the impact qualifications on respondent support across candidates’ gender and ethnic groups. We subset each analysis to the respondents of the relevant out-group.

We then measure out-group respondents’ candidate support through a forced choice conjoint experimental design (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014) where respondents had to choose between a pair of leadership profiles with randomized attributes three times. Respondents also had to rank each profile from 1 to 5. This produces 14,910 profile-observations.

Of dataset’s 14,910 profiles, less than half have female candidates (*Female* = 1).

years.

Almost twenty percent of the hypothetical candidates are Hazara ($Hazara = 1$). Finally, over half of the profiles have hypothetical leaders with high levels of education ($High\ Educated = 1$).

We investigate whether out-group respondents' preferences for hypothetical leaders vary across candidates' qualifications and ascriptive identities. Most conjoint analysis examines attributes' Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE). However, AMCEs estimated across subgroups are sensitive to reference or baseline category specification (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020). We follow Leeper et al. (2020) and use the *cregg* package to calculate and plot conditional marginal means (MM) and conduct omnibus F tests to determine whether respondents' preferences for female leaders differ across subgroups.⁷ We cluster standard errors at the respondent level to account for the repeated number of observations per respondent.

In a forced choice design, an attribute with an MM value of one indicates that respondents would choose a profile with that attribute with a probability of one. MMs in a forced choice design average 0.5 by definition, with values greater (lower) than 0.5 representing positive (negative) bias towards an attribute (p.210). The following analysis presents MMs of a hypothetical leader's gender.

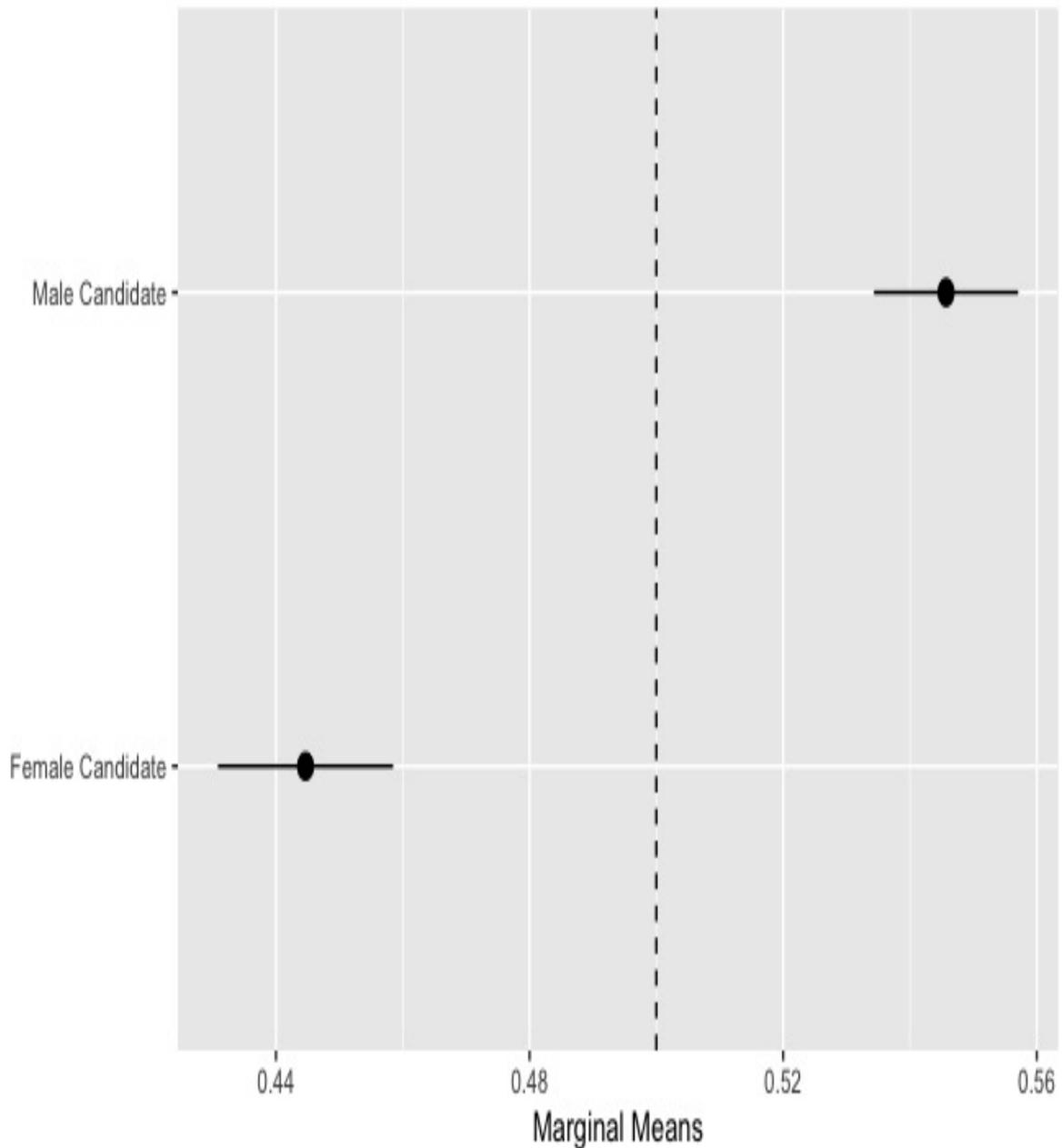
5 Results

5.1 Qualifications and Support for Female Candidates

We begin the analysis by estimating male respondents' support for female candidates without taking qualifications into account. Figure 1 illustrates a gender gap in men's preferences for male over female candidates. It estimates that a male respondent will choose a profile with a male candidate roughly fifty-five percent of the time on average, and a profile with a female candidate forty-four percent of the time (See Table 2).

7. See 7.2 in the SI and Leeper et al. (2020) for a discussion on why MMs are a more appropriate measure for conjoint subgroup analysis.

Figure 1: Male Respondents' Preferences for Male and Female Candidates: Estimated Marginal Means (MM) and 95% Confidence Intervals

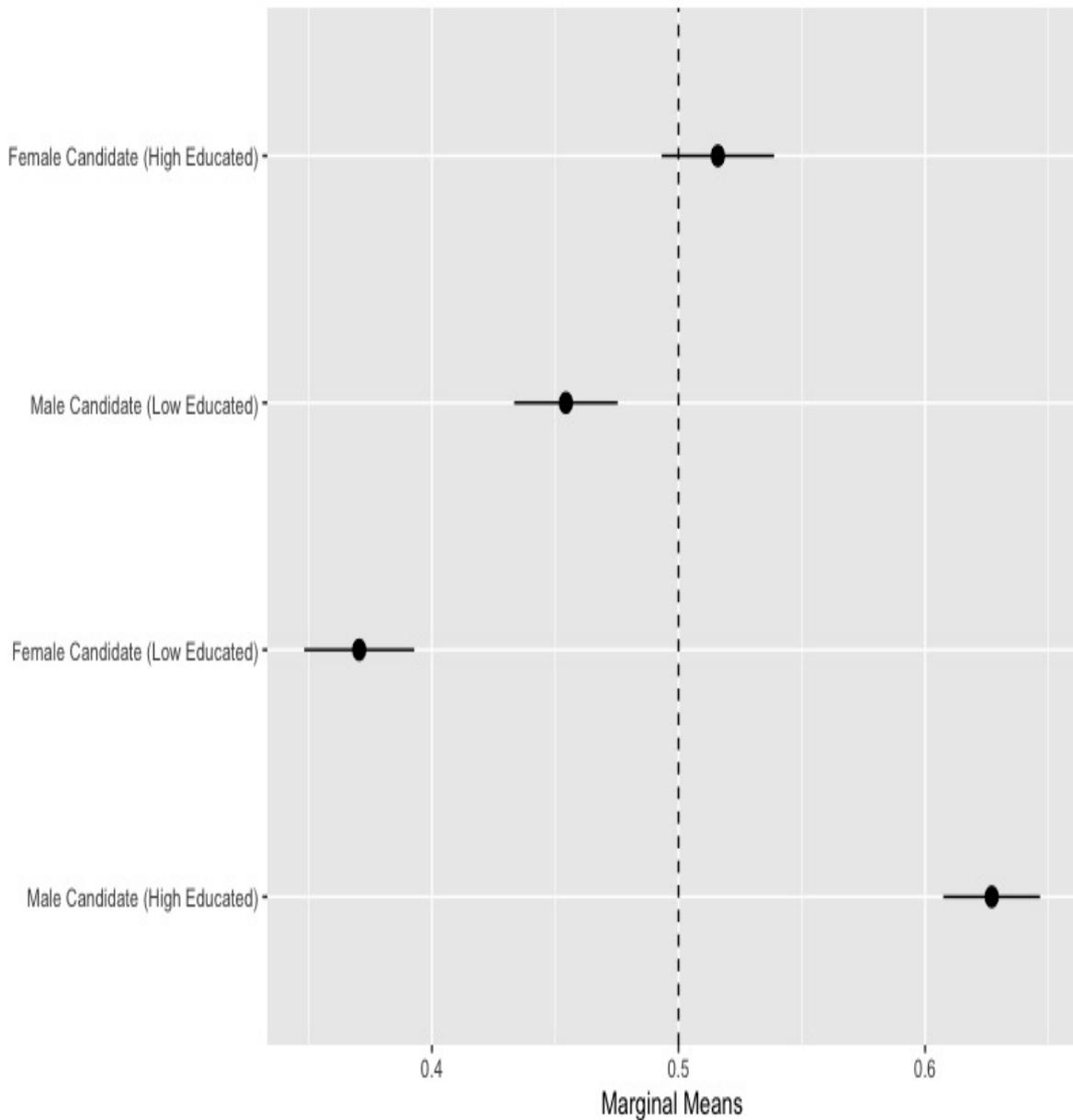


Note that the forty-four percent likelihood of choosing a female candidate is not an indicator of overall support for female leadership because all of the other candidate attributes (ethnicity, age, place of birth and as we will see shortly, education) also inform respondents' profile assessments (Horiuchi, Smith, and Yamamoto 2020). Conjoint experiments also do not disclose the intensity of respondents' biases (Abramson, Koçak, and Magazinnik 2022). Figure 1 simply reveals that respondents are on average more likely to pick a profile with a male leader over a female leader overall.

Figure 2 incorporates candidates' qualifications. When candidates' qualifications are taken into account, higher education reverses the gender gap in men's preferences when

higher qualified female candidates compete against less qualified male candidates. Our models estimate that men would choose a candidate profile with a highly educated woman almost fifty two percent of the time. This is seven percentage points higher than their likelihood of choosing a profile with a less educated male candidate (See Table 2).

Figure 2: Male Respondents' Preferences for Male and Female Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Marginal Means (MM) and 95% Confidence Intervals



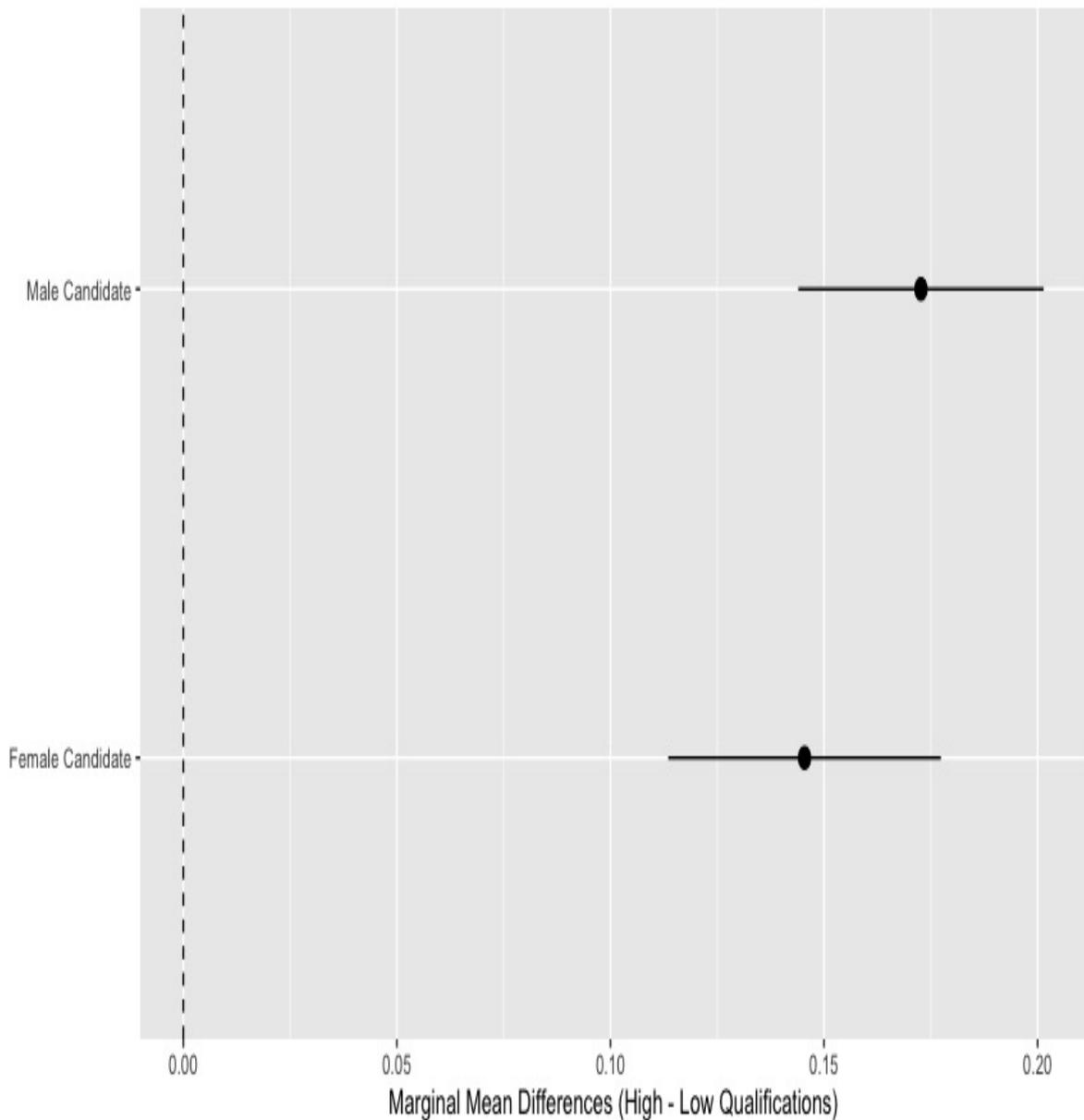
At the same time, qualifications widen the gender gap when more educated male candidates compete against less educated female candidates. Candidate profiles with highly educated men had the highest mean probability of being chosen (sixty-two percent, plus

or minus two percentage points) across the four types of candidates. Profiles with low educated women had the lowest mean probability of being selected (thirty-seven percent, plus or minus two percentage points) (See Table 3 in the SI). These patterns hold when examining male respondents' rankings of candidate profiles (See Table 4). Nor are these findings under-powered (power: 0.99).

Unlike with highly educated male candidates, men do not favor profiles highly educated female candidates; they simply do not have a bias for or against them.⁸ Nevertheless, qualifications do increase men's support for female candidates. Figure 3 estimates that high qualifications increase the average probability of a female candidate's profile being selected by almost fifteen percentage points. Though less than the estimated gain in male candidate profile's likelihood of selection, this increase is still substantial. We find no evidence of male backlash against highly educated female candidates. In support of H1, higher candidate qualifications augment men's support for female candidates.

8. This "unbiasedness" is reflected in men's MM of 0.516 in choosing a profile with a highly educated female candidate. The Confidence Interval of the MM estimate crosses 0.5.

Figure 3: Support for Male and Female Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Differences Marginal Means (MM) Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals (Choice)



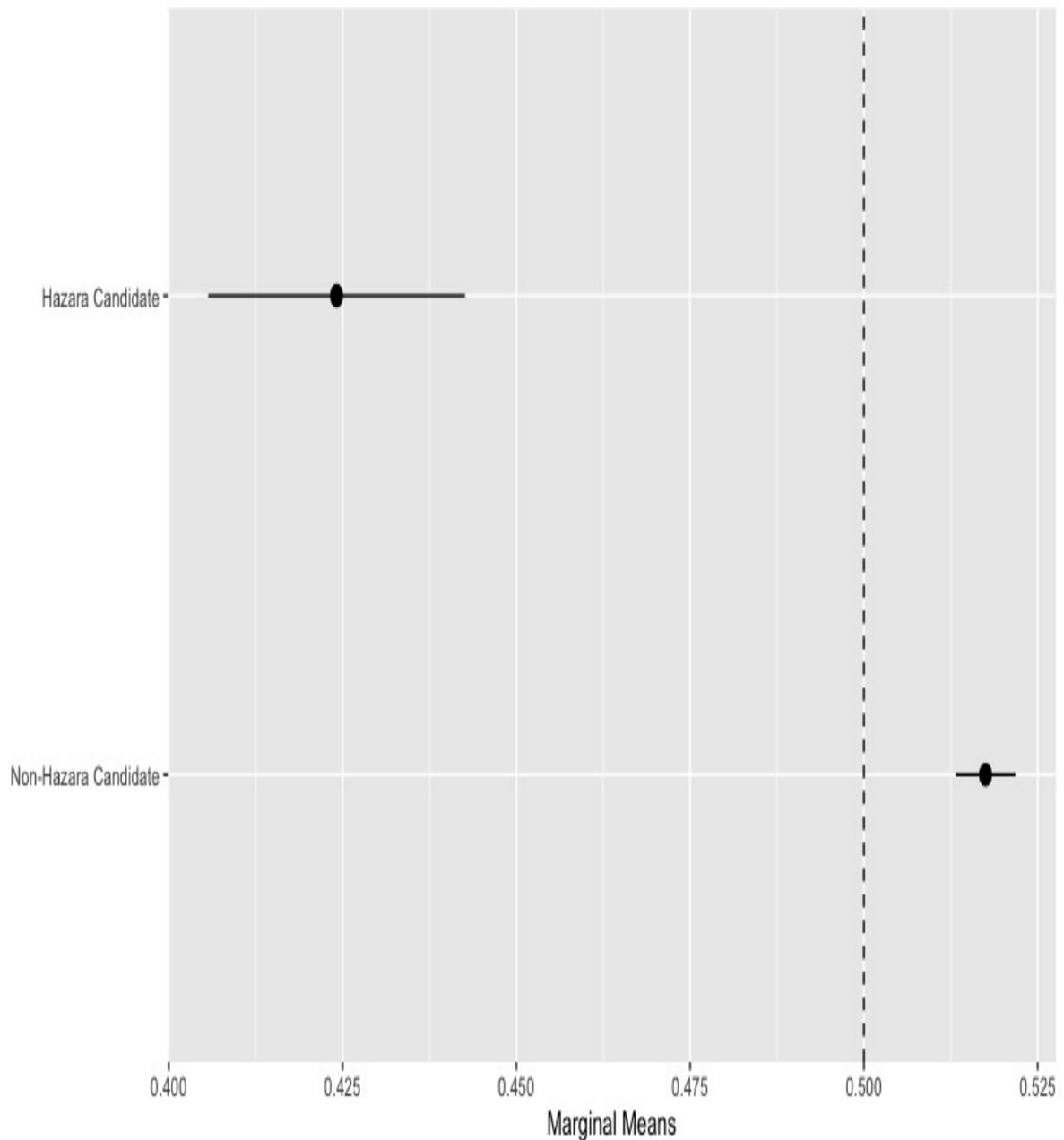
5.2 Qualifications and Support for Hazara Candidates

Next we examine whether high qualifications can boost out-group support for candidates from historically persecuted minority ethnic groups, like the Hazaras. For this analysis we exclude the roughly eight percent of respondents who self-identified as Hazara.

When ignoring qualifications, a hypothetical candidate profile with a Hazara has a forty-two percent likelihood of being chosen by a non-Hazara respondent (See Table 5 in

the SI). This is almost ten percentage points lower than a non-Hazara profile's likelihood of being chosen, and two percentage points less than a female candidate's average likelihood of being chosen.

Figure 4: Non-Hazaras' Preferences for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates: Estimated Marginal Means (MM) and 95% Confidence Intervals

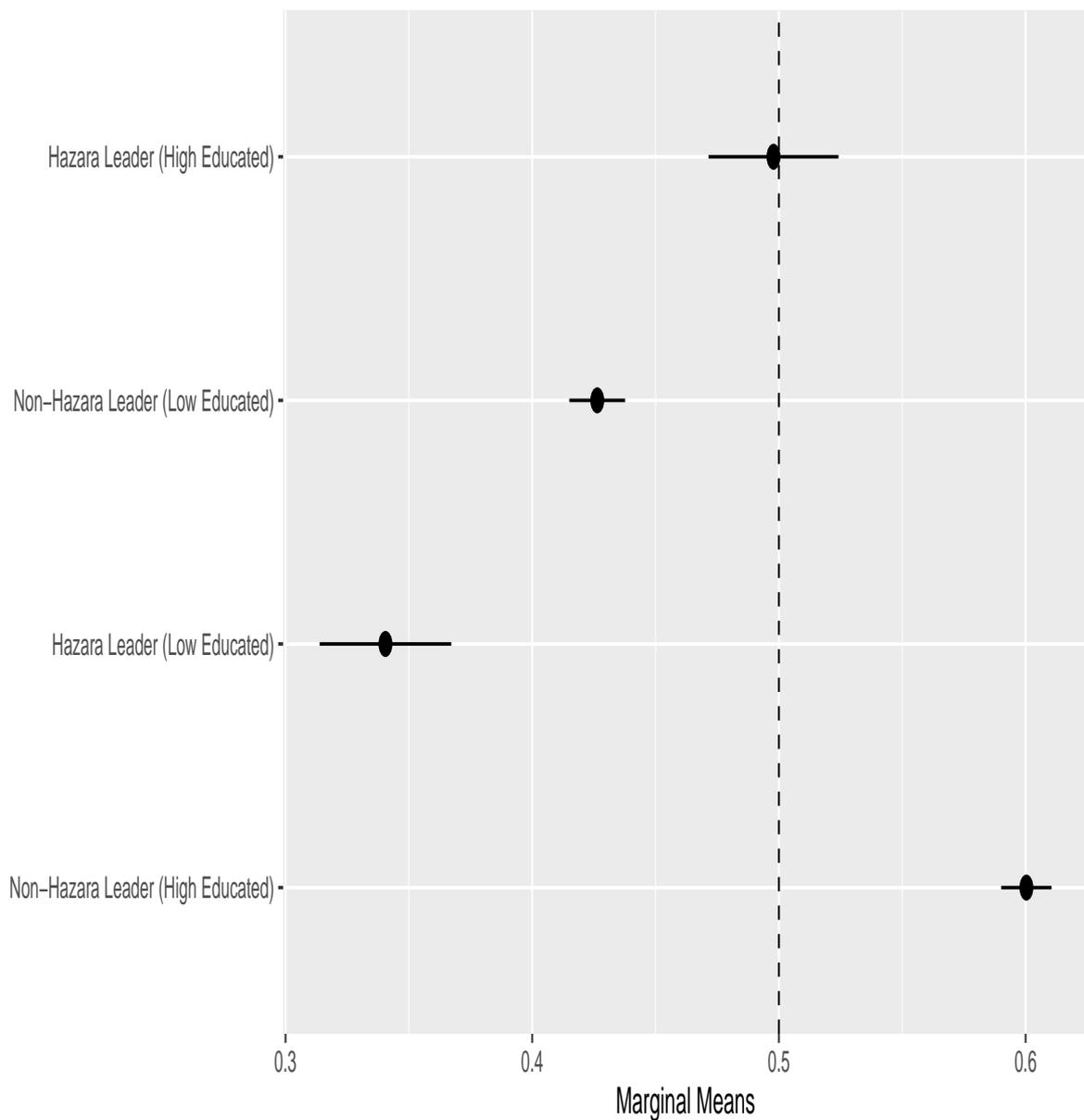


Non-Hazara respondents' attitudes towards Hazara candidates' qualifications closely mirror men's attitudes towards female candidate candidates' qualifications. As with female candidates, high education bolsters non-Hazara respondents' preferences for Hazara candidates. Profiles with highly educated Hazara candidates have a marginal mean rates of selection of almost fifty percent, plus or minus two percentage points (See Table 6).

This is roughly seven percentage points higher than a profile with a less educated non-Hazara candidate's likelihood of selection. However, as with highly educated female candidates, non-Hazara respondents do not exhibit a bias in favor (or against) profiles with highly educated Hazara respondents.

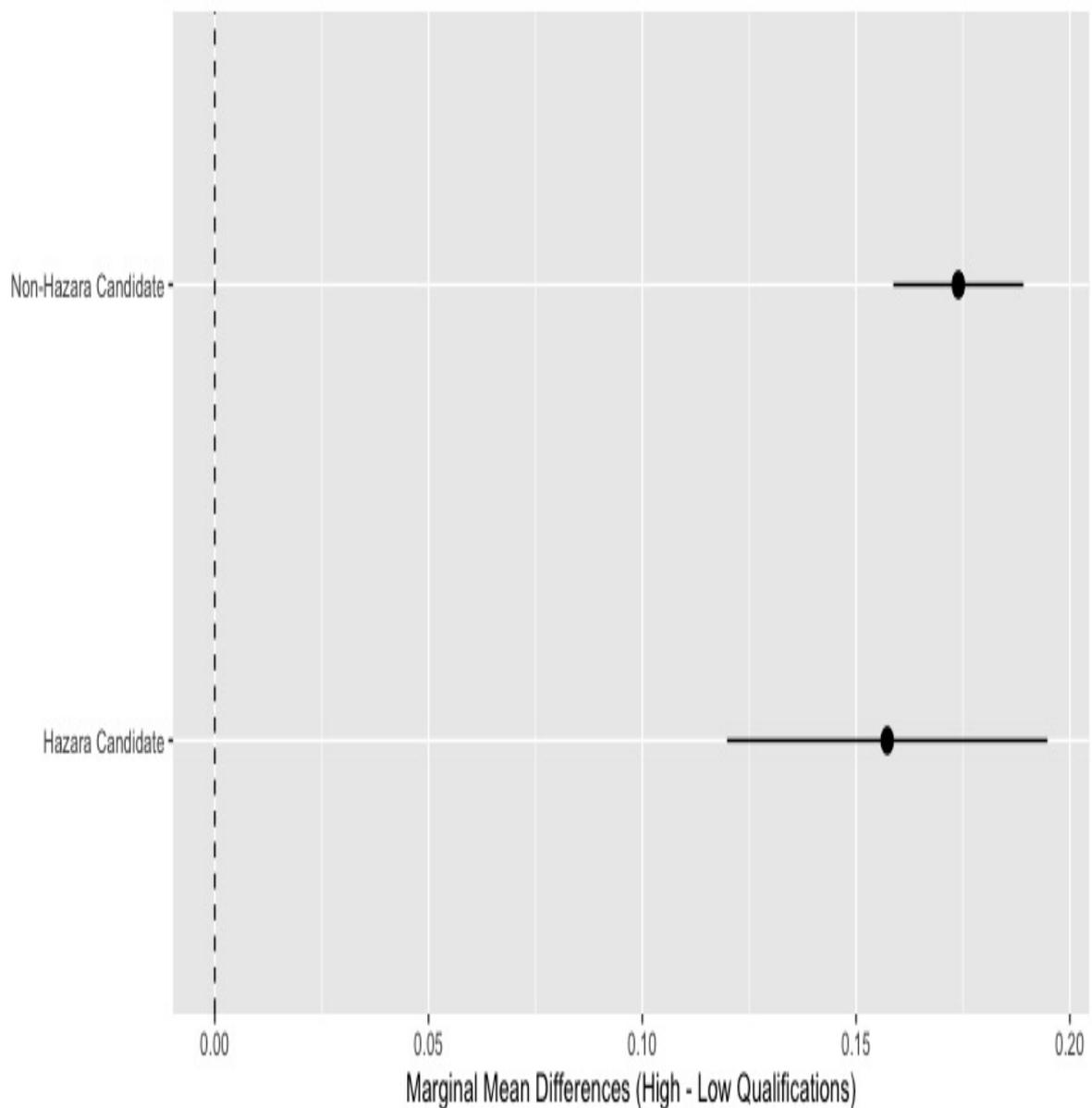
As in the in the previous analysis, profiles with highly educated in-group candidates (non-Hazara) have the highest likelihood of selection. Profiles with less educated out-group candidates (Hazara) have the lowest likelihood. These patterns persist when examining non-Hazara respondents' rankings of the different candidate types (See Table 7).

Figure 5: Non-Hazaras' Preferences for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Marginal Means (MM) and 95% Confidence Intervals



We do not find non-Hazara backlash against highly qualified Hazara candidates. Higher educational attainment unambiguously augments a Hazara profile's likelihood of selection. The fifteen percentage point increase in highly qualified Hazara profiles average selection over less qualified Hazara profiles is substantively similar to the gains enjoyed by high qualified over less qualified non-Hazaras. As with female candidates, qualifications can lessen in-group biases. But they do not dismantle them completely.

Figure 6: Support for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Differences Marginal Means (MM) Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals



5.3 Qualifications and Support for Hazara Female Candidates

Lastly, we investigate the impact of qualifications on out-group support when taking into account candidates' gender *and* ethnicity. Figure 5 presents marginal means estimates of a profile's likelihood of selection across profiles that vary the qualifications, gender and ethnicity of a hypothetical candidate. The in-group and respondents in this analysis are Non-Hazara men.

Figure 7: Non-Hazara Men's Preferences for Hazara and Female Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Marginal Means (MM) and 95% Confidence Intervals

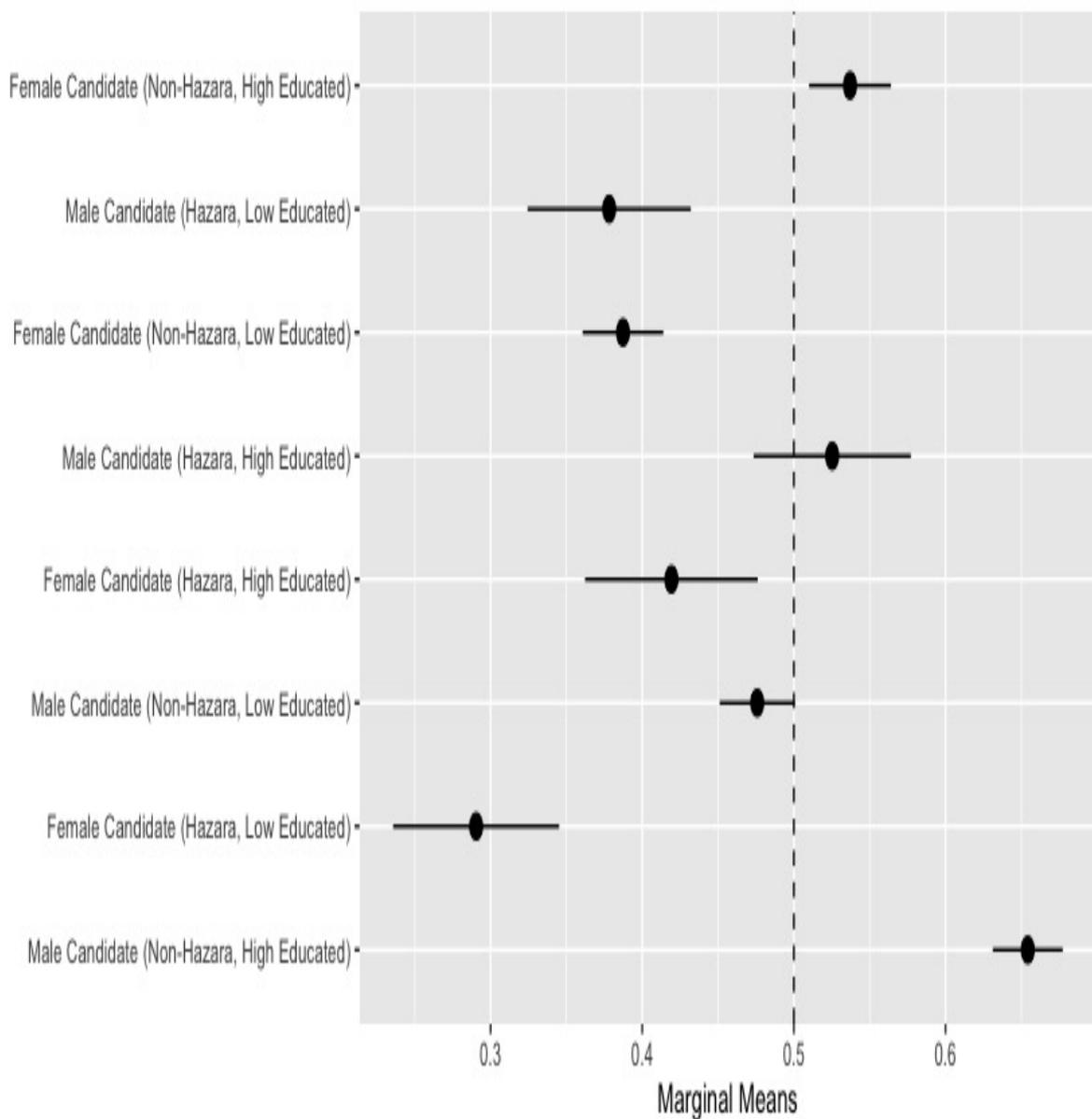


Figure 5 demonstrates that qualifications and belonging to a majority ethnic group

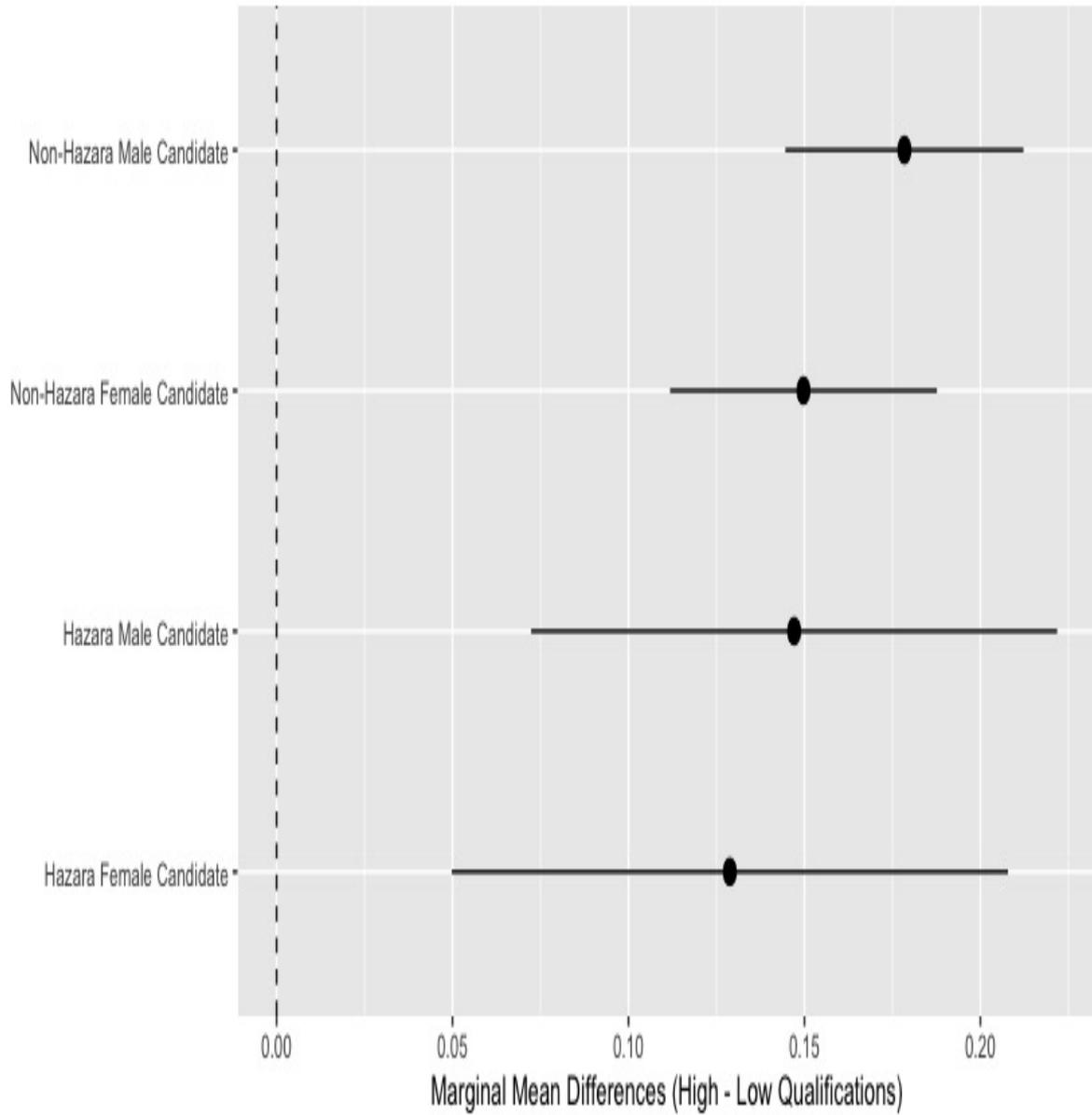
can reverse the gender gap in out-group support. A profile with a highly qualified non-Hazara female candidate has a higher mean probability of selection than a profile with a less qualified Hazara male candidate (0.53 versus 0.48) (See Table 8).

Figure 5 parallels the preceding analyses. High qualifications amplify support for in-group candidates. Profiles with highly qualified non-Hazara males have the highest marginal means (sixty-five percent, plus or minus two percentage points). Low qualifications accentuate out-group biases. Profiles with lesser educated Hazara female candidates had the lowest marginal means (roughly thirty-nine percent, plus or minus two percentage points). However, low qualified in-group candidates were still less likely to be chosen in the conjoint's forced choice design on average (forty-eight percent, plus or minus two percentage points). In-group membership is a necessary but insufficient condition for robust support. Qualifications matter too.

The most striking feature of Figure 5 is that non-Hazara men remain biased against highly qualified Hazara female candidates. We estimate that non-Hazara men chose a profile with a highly educated Hazara female candidate roughly forty-two percent of the time, plus or minus six percentage points. This rate of selection was six percentage points lower than profiles with less educated, male non-Hazaras candidates.

This does not imply that qualifications hurt Hazara women in the court of public opinion; on the contrary, qualifications increase female Hazara profiles' favorability. However, we suspect that belonging to two out-groups (Women; Hazara) dampens these profiles' appeal to Non-Hazara male respondents. Though qualifications diminish out-group biases, these biases persist because female Hazara candidates are at a lower floor of favorability than their male and non-Hazara peers. We therefore reject our third hypothesis - qualifications also increase out-group support for female candidates. They are just not enough to erase out-group bias against female candidates.

Figure 8: Support for Hazara and Female Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Differences Marginal Means (MM) Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals



6 Discussion and Conclusion

We find strong evidence that qualifications improve candidates' appeal to out-group voters. Across gender and ethnic groups, higher candidate qualifications correlate with greater out-group support. Voters do value candidate qualifications, even among out-group candidates. We find no evidence of qualifications hurting out-group candidates.

Nevertheless, while qualifications erode in-group biases, they do not displace them. Hazara and female candidates are not positively rewarded for higher qualifications (unlike men and candidates of other ethnicities), they simply no longer endure a negative bias from out-group voters.

Our findings contribute to a rich scholarship on gender, ethnicity and qualifications. Though our findings aligns with scholarship that views qualifications as a lever for out-group support (Collingwood 2020; Conroy-Krutz 2013; Manzano et al. 2010), they also warn that qualifications may not be enough to erode in-group biases against some types of candidates (Adida et al. 2017; Carlson 2015; Profeta et al. 2022). We tread new ground by highlighting that candidates' intersecting identities may limit the benefits of qualifications to out-group supporters. The more out-groups a candidate belongs to, the less likely higher qualifications will disable in-group biases.

These insights point to many exciting paths for future research. Our findings do not disclose the mechanisms underpinning why respondents value out-group candidates' qualifications. Do they interpret higher qualifications to signal that an out-group candidate will be more likely to attend to their group's interests? Future scholarship can investigate whether candidates with higher qualifications are less prone to favoring in-group constituents. Our findings also do not disclose why patterns of out-group support for qualified candidates persist across gender and ethnic determinants of group membership. We also cannot tell whether these findings are a developing world phenomenon. A dearth of highly educated candidates may have pushed Afghan respondents to value candidates' educational attainment irrespective of a candidate's gender or ethnic group. Future work can replicate our research design in higher income contexts.

Our findings carry important policy implications. Donors and policymakers who wish to address under-representation in political leadership in developing democracies should make widespread investments in improving qualifications among traditionally under-represented groups. While these investments may be costly, our research suggests that these investments are likely to contribute to significant changes in public acceptance of out-group political leaders. While our findings also point to limitations of such investments, they only capture a particular point in time—it is possible that, in the longer-term, increased investments in qualifications may eventually eliminate these biases entirely. However, it is also possible that investments in qualifications are not enough, and must be accompanied by changes in broader societal norms. Supporting interventions, such as quotas and other power-sharing mandates, may also be needed. While we have no conclusive findings about the limitations of qualifications, it is clear that investments in qualifications are helpful. In making these investments, policymakers should also consider the multidimensional aspects of out-group biases and allocate resources accordingly.

Finally, with regards to the current situation in Afghanistan, our findings challenge the Taliban government's depiction of the Afghan public as uniformly opposed or indifferent to women's political inclusion. On the contrary, our research suggests that the invest-

ments made in women's education over the last two decades have likely made headway in terms of shaping public opinion to be more accepting of female leaders. The findings also emphasize that candidate qualifications were crucial determinants of candidate support for many Afghans. This suggests that the Taliban's Pashtun-centric approach in assigning senior government positions since 2021 is likely to be unpopular among significant portions of the population. Unfortunately, given that many many highly qualified individuals have fled the country, along with recent Taliban edicts barring women and girls' access to education, much of the progress made towards political inclusion of women and marginalised ethnic groups is under threat for the foreseeable future.

7 Supplementary Information (SI)

7.1 Background on Survey Implementation

We worked with an Afghan survey company to survey over 2,485 household surveys between August 2016 and January 2017 in three northern provinces: Balkh, Kunduz and Sar-e-Pul. The Taliban briefly occupied Kunduz during our survey collection. They had also occupied Kunduz briefly in September 2015, before IRoA forces retook control. This survey was a part of a broader project examining Afghans' attitudes towards political leadership in relation to insecurity, ethnic politics and corruption. The International Growth Centre funded the survey. Standards for pre-analysis procedures were still in flux when we ran our survey in the second half of 2016. These were the "early days" of pre-registration (Ofosu and Posner 2021). As our result we did not pre-register the survey experiment before data collection.

Prior to data collection, we carried out 50 pre-test surveys in Afghanistan in May 2016. The 50 pre-test surveys are not included in the final sample.

The survey's sampling design relies on 80 sampling points selected by random draw per province, with a quota of 10 surveys per sampling point (half male, half female respondents). Enumerators began at a central landmark in the village and sampled every third house using a random walk method. Enumerators selected adult household members using the Kish Grid method. Male enumerators surveyed male respondents and female enumerators surveyed female respondents. Accordingly, enumerators worked in mixed-gendered pairs, often consisting of husband and wife or brother and sister.

7.2 Marginal Means and Subgroup Analysis in Conjoint Experiments

Most conjoint analysis examines attributes' Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE). However, AMCEs estimated across subgroups are sensitive to reference or baseline category specification (Leeper et al. 2020).

We follow Leeper et al. (2020) and use the *cregg* package to calculate and plot conditional marginal means (MM) and conduct omnibus F tests to determine whether respondents' preferences for leaders differ across subgroups. MMs capture average levels of favorability for a profile with an attribute—like a female candidate—ignoring all other attributes. AMCEs, by contrast, demonstrate how much an attribute changes an outcome's favorability relative to a baseline attribute level, conditional on averaging across all other attributes. AMCEs and MMs are similar across an entire sample. But the AMCEs for the reference categories of attributes are zero by design (p.210). Because absolute levels of favorability for a leader may vary across subgroups, a baseline attribute's favorability may also vary across subgroups. MMs incorporate these baseline differences in subgroups' preferences. MMs are therefore a more appropriate measure for conjoint subgroup analysis (Leeper et al. 2020).

7.3 A. Qualifications and Support for Female Candidates Among Male Respondents

Table 2: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Female and Male Candidates

Candidate's Gender	MM (SD)
Female	0.445 (0.007)
Male	0.546 (0.006)
Observations	6792

Table 3: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Female and Male Candidates Across Education Levels (Choice)

Candidate's Gender	Low Education	High Education
Female	0.371 (0.011)	0.516 (0.011)
Male	0.454 (0.010)	0.627 (0.010)
Observations	3258	3534

Table 4: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Female and Male Candidates Across Education Levels (Rating; 1-5)

Candidate's Gender	Low Education	High Education
Female	3.085 (0.037)	3.307 (0.039)
Male	3.166 (0.037)	3.417 (0.036)
Observations	3258	3534

7.4 B. Qualifications and Support for Hazara Candidates Among Non-Hazara Respondents

Table 5: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates

Candidate's Ethnicity	MM (SD)
Hazara	0.424 (0.009)
Non-Hazara	0.518 (0.002)
Observations	13746

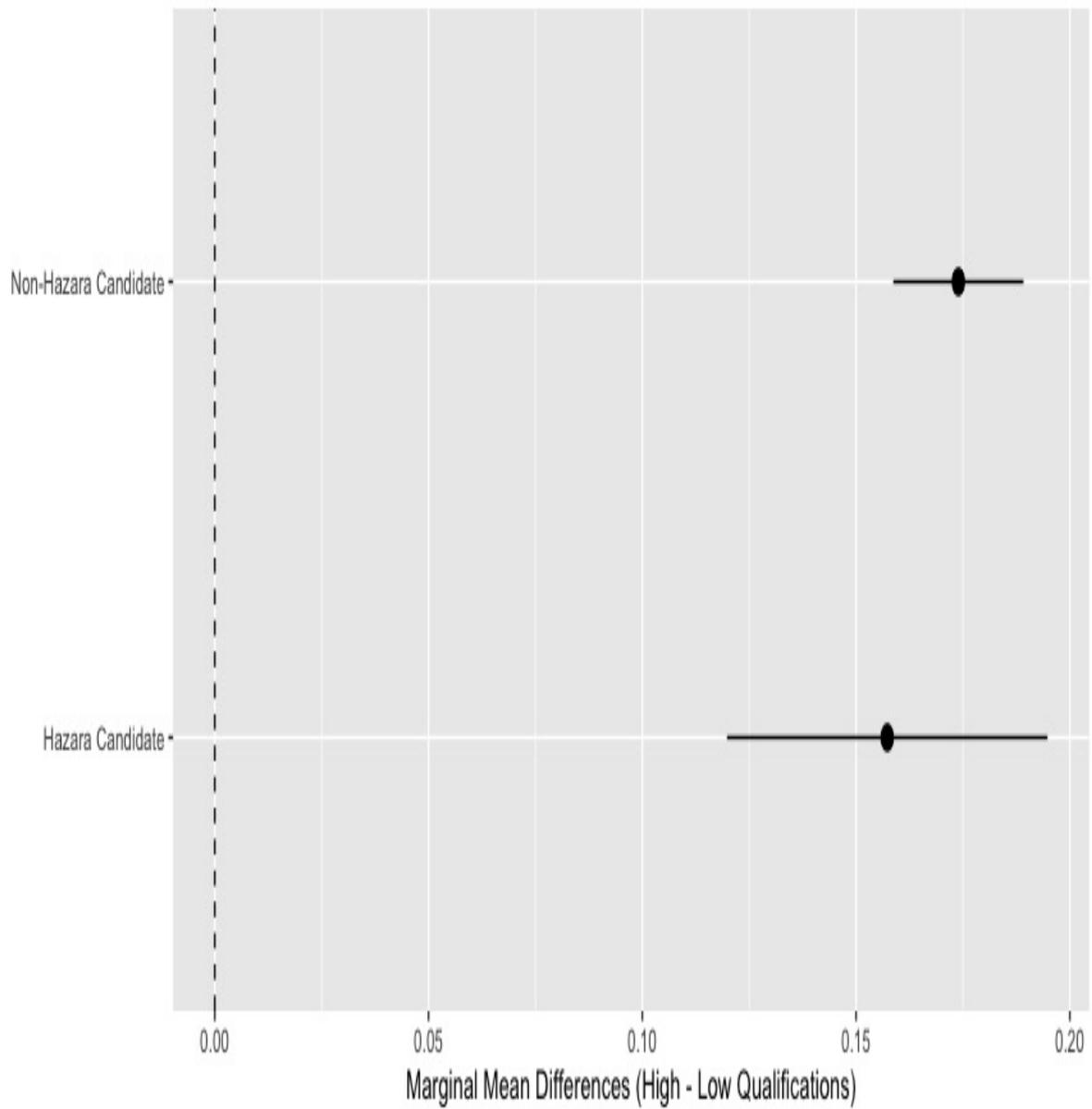
Table 6: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates Across Education Levels (Choice)

Candidate's Ethnicity	Low Education	High Education
Hazara	0.341 (0.013)	0.498 (0.013)
Non-Hazara	0.426 (0.006)	0.600 (0.005)
Observations	6524	7222

Table 7: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates Across Education Levels (Rating; 1-5)

Candidate's Ethnicity	Low Education	High Education
Hazara	3.058 (0.043)	3.274 (0.043)
Non-Hazara	3.208 (0.021)	3.583 (0.020)
Observations	6524	7222

Figure 9: Support for Hazara and Non-Hazara Candidates Across Qualifications: Estimated Differences Marginal Means (MM) Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals



7.5 C. Qualifications and Support for Female Hazara Candidates

Among Male Non-Hazara Respondents

Table 8: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Candidates Across Gender, Ethnicity and Levels of Education (Choice)

Candidate's Gender and Ethnicity	Low Education	High Education
Female Hazara	0.290 (0.027)	0.419 (0.028)
Female Non-Hazara	0.387 (0.013)	0.537 (0.014)
Male Hazara	0.378 (0.027)	0.525 (0.026)
Male Non-Hazara	0.476 (0.012)	0.654 (0.012)
Observations	3057	3297

Table 9: Marginal Means (MM): Preferences for Candidates Across Gender, Ethnicity and Levels of Education (Rating; 1-5)

Candidate's Gender and Ethnicity	Low Education	High Education
Female Hazara	2.879 (0.087)	2.893 (0.088)
Female Non-Hazara	3.119 (0.042)	3.390 (0.042)
Male Hazara	2.958 (0.082)	3.025 (0.084)
Male Non-Hazara	3.199 (0.041)	3.501 (0.040)
Observations	3057	3297

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