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Do voters (dis)like dynastic politicians? Experimental evidence from Pakistan[☆]

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ABSTRACT

While an extensive comparative politics literature focuses on the mechanisms that facilitate the emergence and persistence of political dynasties, we know relatively little about voters' views on them. A survey experiment in Pakistan, a country where dynasticism is common, allows us to study how voters perceive and evaluate politicians with dynastic ties. We find that dynastic politicians are perceived as lower quality and less supportive of universalistic policies than their non-dynastic peers. Additionally, respondents report a lower preference of voting for such candidates themselves, suggesting that the "dynastic electoral advantage" documented in previous research is elite-driven. Our findings suggest that voters also perceive non-dynastic candidates needing to be more qualified to overcome the higher entry barriers created by dynasticism. These results also have important implications for the quality of representation in many developing countries, where entrenched political families continue playing key roles in national and local politics.

Political dynasties are pervasive, even in democracies, which has led to growing academic interest in understanding the mechanisms that facilitate their emergence and persistence. Some of this work highlights the fact that politicians with dynastic ties enjoy a number of advantages in terms of their electoral and other career-advancement prospects (Asako et al., 2015; Feinstein, 2010; Smith and Martin, 2017; Smith, 2018), and analyzes how these advantages often allow dynastic political elites to entrench themselves in power (Bragança et al., 2015; Dal Bó et al., 2009; Querubín, 2016; Rossi, 2017). Other work focuses instead on how different political institutions – including electoral systems, candidate selection rules, gender quotas, and term limits – facilitate or inhibit the formation and continuity of dynasties (Amundsen, 2016; Chandra, 2016; Chhibber, 2011; Fiva and Smith, 2018; Labonne et al., 2021; Schwindt-Bayer et al., 2022; Smith, 2018).

What has received comparatively less attention in this literature, however, is how voter preferences might contribute to the perpetuation of dynastic power (see Horiuchi et al. (2020) and Miwa et al. (2022) for exceptions). Understanding how voters perceive and evaluate dynastic politicians is important for several reasons. First, research has shown that dynasts enjoy a considerable electoral edge or "inherited incumbency advantage" (Smith, 2018). Although this implicitly suggests that

voters "prefer" dynastic politicians over their non-dynastic counterparts, *why* that may be the case remains an open question. Second, this issue has significant normative implications. The persistence of political power within families is often described as a hindrance for the quality of democratic representation. If voters have a preference for family-based politics, the endurance of political dynasties could be interpreted as a sign of a healthy democracy that is responsive to its citizens. Alternatively, finding that voters dislike dynastic politicians should be a cause for concern, as that would indicate that entrenched families can remain in power *despite* popular opposition.

In this paper, we ask whether voters view dynastic and non-dynastic politicians differently. By doing so, we join a very small but growing recent quantitative literature that studies voter perceptions of dynasties (see, e.g., Horiuchi et al. (2020) and Miwa et al. (2022)) and, to our knowledge, is the first that focuses on this as the main question of interest outside of Japan.¹ We answer this question by conducting a survey experiment in Pakistan, a country in which scholars have discussed political dynasties playing a key role in national and local politics (see, e.g., Ahmad and Rehman (2019), Cheema et al. (2013), and Javid and Mufti (2022), among others) but one where voter perceptions of such politicians are relatively understudied. The proportion

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¹ Weaver (2021) studies how perceptions of future malfeasance create an incumbency disadvantage in Peru and, in her conjoint experiment, includes dynastic status as a control variable rather than the main attribute of interest.

of dynastic legislators in Pakistan has been as high as 50% in recent decades (Kohari, 2013) making it comparable with highly dynastic democratic countries (Smith, 2018). At the same time, its status as a developing country with relatively weak institutions makes it an interesting contrast to Japan.

In the experiment, we present respondents with a vignette describing a hypothetical politician. Critically, we randomly assign whether the vignette describes the candidate as having dynastic ties.² Following recent empirical work that shows female representatives are more likely to be dynastic than their male counterparts (e.g., Folke et al., 2021), we also randomly assign the politician's first name, which reveals their gender. This allows us to explore whether any effects of dynastic status are conditional on a politician's gender. Next, we ask respondents to evaluate the politician along different dimensions, such as their personal attributes and policy preferences.

Our analysis indicates that a politician's dynastic status significantly shapes how they are evaluated by voters. We have three main results. First, we find dynastic politicians are perceived as lower quality than their otherwise-identical non-dynastic peers, as measured by different individual attributes. This result is consistent with dynastic power shaping the pool of non-dynastic candidates who enter politics. Similar to how female politicians must often outperform their male counterparts in both electoral and legislative settings in order to advance their political careers (Anzia and Berry, 2011; Fulton, 2012), where dynasticism creates higher entry barriers non-dynastic candidates may need to work harder and be significantly more qualified in order to access political office (Dal Bó et al., 2009; Geys, 2017; Smith and Martin, 2017). In line with this logic, we find that voters perceive non-dynastic candidates as being more hardworking and approachable, although not necessarily more competent or honest, than those with dynastic backgrounds.

Second, we uncover evidence that voters perceive differences in the types of policies dynastic and non-dynastic politicians are likely to prioritize and implement. More concretely, we find that politicians with dynastic ties are seen as being generally less supportive of universalistic policies. This finding is in line with research that identifies the strategic use of particularistic, rather than universalistic, benefits as a mechanism of dynastic persistence (Asako et al., 2015; Muraoka, 2018; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre, 2013). Indeed, several works show that electing dynastic politicians results in greater government spending but not in better policy outcomes, a pattern that is typically explained by dynastic politicians using government expansion to deliver particularistic transfers to their core supporters (Bragança et al., 2015; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre, 2013). Though all sorts of politicians may rely on such strategies in weakly institutionalized countries like Pakistan, perhaps they are associated even more strongly with dynastic politicians (e.g., Malik et al., 2021).

Third, our data indicate that the perceived differences between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates might influence citizens' vote choices. Specifically, respondents report a lower likelihood of voting for dynastic politicians, which suggests dynastic candidates enjoy an electoral edge despite potentially being disadvantaged in terms of voter preferences. Therefore, we believe this finding provides some evidence that the so-called inherited incumbency advantage (Smith, 2018) is explained primarily by the elite-driven mechanisms highlighted by previous research.

In addition to the literature on political dynasties summarized above, our paper is part of a growing set of works that explore how politician's family backgrounds shape voter evaluations. While existing work has considered several factors, such as politicians' social

class (e.g., Carnes and Lupu, 2016; Vivyan et al., 2020) or marital and parental status (e.g., Clayton et al., 2020; Ono and Burden, 2019), among others, this is one of the first quantitative studies to analyze how politicians' dynastic status can shape how they are perceived by voters.

Finally, our paper also contributes to a literature that studies whether voters hold double standards for male and female candidates (e.g., Barnes et al., 2020; Okimoto and Brescoll, 2010). Although, for the most part, disclosing a politician's dynastic status affects perceptions of male and female politicians equally, we find evidence of a double standard, with dynastic female politicians being perceived as particularly susceptible to the influence of their families but not dynastic men. This pattern matches what Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) call a "label effect" that causes women (but not men) with dynastic ties to be seen as less autonomous than their peers. While evidence of this label effect comes from elite and female legislator interviews, and media coverage, (e.g., Choi, 2019; Khan and Naqvi, 2020; Zakar et al., 2018), we contribute to this literature by documenting evidence of this effect among the electorate.

1. Do voters (dis)like dynastic politicians?

Probably the most well-established finding in the political dynasties scholarship is that members of dynasties enjoy a considerable electoral advantage (e.g., Chandra, 2016; Querubín, 2016; Smith, 2018). The literature identifies different sources for this advantage. Some scholars highlight the fact that dynastic politicians inherit political resources that are particularly valuable at the local level, such as political connections or access to campaign funds (e.g., Dal Bó et al., 2009; Rossi, 2017). Others describe this advantage as driven by political parties, which disproportionately reward dynastic politicians with valuable opportunities for career advancement, particularly at the candidate selection stage (e.g., Bohlken and Chandra, 2016; Fiva and Smith, 2018; Smith, 2018). Finally, this electoral edge has also been linked to dynasts' access to state resources and clientelistic networks controlled by family members (e.g., Querubín, 2016; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre, 2013).

Despite these important advances in understanding the emergence and success of political dynasties, scholars have largely overlooked the potential role of voters in explaining the persistence of dynasties. In fact, we do not really know the answer to relatively simple questions. How do voters perceive and assess politicians from political families? Do voters view dynastic and non-dynastic politicians differently? If so, in what ways and what explains these differences? Do voters have a preference for politicians with dynastic backgrounds?

This paper takes a step towards answering these questions. In this section, we develop a series of hypotheses on how politicians' dynastic status might influence how they are viewed by voters. In order to make the comparison more systematic, we distinguish two dimensions in which voters might perceive dynastic politicians as being significantly different from their non-dynastic peers. The first of these, which we generically call politician quality or valence, refers to a number of non-policy attributes that voters inherently value in their public officials. Second, we also consider how a politician's dynastic status might provide voters information about the politician's policy preferences. Below, we discuss each of these in more detail and introduce our hypotheses; in each case, we first describe the mechanisms that could be at work in a wide set of cases and then discuss how these might operate in Pakistan.

1.1. Politician quality

We define quality as a composite of valence characteristics, that is, non-policy factors that voters intrinsically value in elected officials, such as their competence, diligence, reputation, campaigning skills, social recognition, previous experience in office, and dedication to public service (Adams et al., 2011; Groseclose, 2001; Mondak, 1995).

² We invoke dynastic ties in a general way in our experiment by saying that the (hypothetical) candidate comes from a family with a long history in politics with multiple relatives having served in office before, which is similar to other scholars coding dynasticism in Pakistan (Kohari, 2013) and other contexts (e.g., Miwa et al., 2022; Smith, 2018).

Because some of these attributes can be inherited, the connection between dynasticism and voter perceptions of politicians might depend on the type of attributes one has in mind. We return to this point after introducing the hypotheses.

There are several reasons why dynastic politicians could be perceived as higher quality than otherwise similar non-dynastic counterparts. First, at least since Mosca's (1939 [1896]) classic work, the emergence and endurance of dynasties have been linked to family-based inequalities in the distribution of key resources that can be inherited from one generation to the next, such as wealth, education, status, organizational affiliations, and other technical skills necessary for effective policymaking (Chandra, 2016; Dal Bó et al., 2009; Smith, 2018).³ This mechanism should play a larger role in highly unequal societies, where access to some of these resources (e.g., education) might be *de facto* restricted to members of the economic and political elites (Smith, 2018).

Second, holding office *per se* can create additional advantages for members of political families. For instance, children of politicians not only have greater political connections and insider knowledge but may also develop, over time, greater familiarity and skills with campaigning, the workings of party politics, policymaking, and other government affairs (Dal Bó et al., 2009; Feinstein, 2010; Smith and Martin, 2017). Thus, as noted by Mosca (1939 [1896], 61), dynastic politicians can avoid the “blunders that are inevitable when one enters an unfamiliar environment without any guidance or support.”

Finally, recent work by Folke et al. (2021) suggests dynasts benefit from contexts of imperfect information about the quality of new political aspirants, since both voters and political elites tend to use the experience and qualifications of senior politicians to make inferences about the quality of dynastic juniors. This argument resembles (Clubok et al., 1969)'s claim that dynastic politicians “inherit” the fame and prestige of their predecessors, which Feinstein (2010) identifies as part of the brand name advantages of dynasties. These mechanisms lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a. Dynastic politicians are perceived to be of higher quality than non-dynastic politicians.

At the same time, there are several reasons to doubt that voters have a positive view of politicians from political families. To start, dynastic politicians might be perceived as less deserving or qualified than others. Being part of a political family can serve as a substitute for other attributes (e.g., education, experience in office) helpful for individuals seeking to make a political career. As Smith (2018, 190) puts it, “if you are a Kennedy... does it matter that you have not first served in local office?” Precisely because of the several advantages resulting from their family ties, dynastic politicians are able to start and advance their careers even if they are of lower quality (e.g., less talented or dedicated) than their non-dynastic counterparts (Chhibber, 2011; Geys, 2017; Smith, 2018). This logic is analogous to the well-known “Jackie Robinson Effect” (Anzia and Berry, 2011); if dynasticism provides a considerable entry advantage, non-dynastic politicians will need to exert greater effort and generally outperform members of dynasties in order to enter and succeed in politics. Indeed, there is some evidence that, relative to their non-dynastic peers, dynastic legislators are less educated (Geys, 2017), and start their careers at younger ages and having less experience in office (Dal Bó et al., 2009; Smith and Martin, 2017).

Objective differences aside, there are at least two channels by which voters might perceive dynastic politicians poorly. First, political dynasties may seem to be at odds with basic democratic principles of equality and fairness. Thus, voters could be biased against dynasts as

a result of a generalized opposition to dynasties, independent of the traits of specific dynastic politicians. Such a pattern would be consistent with organizational psychology research on the effects of nepotism in the workplace, which shows that individuals believed to have benefited from family connections during the hiring process are viewed less favorably and perceived as less competent than other employees—regardless of their actual qualifications and performance (Padgett et al., 2015). Second, in some settings, the success of dynasties is partly driven by the use of illicit practices, such as diverting public resources for patronage and clientelism (e.g., Bragança et al., 2015; Querubín, 2016). In such cases, dynastic politicians might be perceived not only as being less qualified for office but also as having other undesirable traits (e.g., corrupt, dishonest).

Hypothesis 1b. Dynastic politicians are perceived to be of lower quality than non-dynastic politicians.

Before proceeding, there are two points that deserve additional discussion. The first is that the two hypotheses above are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, these hypotheses underscore that the concept we generically call politician quality or valence includes *different types* of attributes. **Hypothesis 1a** assumes that the main difference in the quality of dynastic and non-dynastic politicians is a *resource advantage*. Specifically, dynastic candidates have access to key resources inherited from their families, and could thus be perceived as being of higher quality than non-dynastic candidates. For instance, a voter might conclude that dynastic politicians are more capable than non-dynasts of “getting things done” because of their inside knowledge or political connections. In contrast, **Hypothesis 1b** sees quality as driven by a politician's *individual effort*. It is precisely because dynastic politicians enjoy a resource advantage that their non-dynastic peers need to be more talented or work harder than them in order to access the same positions. Consequently, a voter might presume that politicians with no dynastic ties will be more efficient and more dedicated to their job when compared to a politician with such ties.

To be clear, we are not making any absolute claims about either type of politician with respect to their resources or individual effort. That is, we do not contend that dynasts are lazy or that non-dynasts have no resources at their disposal. Instead, we think both types – dynasts and non-dynasts – have different *relative* strengths, which they use to their advantage when in office, and that these strengths can at times be substitutes for each other. This substitution effect is clearly illustrated in a setting similar to Pakistan. George (2019) shows political dynasties in India have a negative impact on economic development and provides evidence that 40% of the performance gap between dynasts and non-dynasts is driven by moral hazard: the political capital dynasts inherit from their family “dampens [their] incentives to exert effort and perform well in office” (George, 2019, 4). Therefore, we think it is perfectly possible for voters to perceive politicians from political families as being more knowledgeable or competent *relative to their non-dynastic peers* and, at the same time, as less diligent or hardworking (again, relative to non-dynastic politicians). Informed by this discussion, our experiment uses several measures to capture these different dimensions of candidate quality. We return to this point in Section 3 (“Research design and data”).

The second point is that whether or not voters perceive dynastic politicians as being of higher quality could be conditional on the politician's gender.⁴ The intersection of dynasticism and gender has been studied by scholars interested in the representation of women in politics (e.g., Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Zetterberg, 2008). In many countries, parties responded to institutional reforms that threatened the position of male incumbents – such as the adoption of gender quotas,

³ Some scholars have also entertained the possibility that dynasties are the product of intrinsic differences in political talent across families (Dal Bó et al., 2009; Mosca, 1939; Rossi, 2017).

⁴ A vast literature studies the effect of politicians' gender on voter evaluations (for a recent meta-analysis see Schwarz and Coppock (2022)). Here, we study the interaction between a politician's gender and their dynastic status.

term limits, and more stringent candidacy requirements – by nominating female relatives of male politicians (e.g., Afzal, 2014; Labonne et al., 2021; Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010). This recruitment strategy has generated and reinforced negative stereotypes about women in politics by creating the impression that party leaders select women who are not necessarily qualified for their position but they believe to be pliable (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Nanivadekar, 2006). Importantly, even when these beliefs are not factually true, they can create what Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) call a “label effect” that effectively causes women with dynastic ties to be regarded as less qualified and less autonomous than their peers. The pervasiveness of this label effect is illustrated in media coverage of female politicians across several countries, where those with dynastic ties are often portrayed as stand-ins or proxies for their male relatives (Choi, 2019; Spary, 2007).

Such an effect rings true in Pakistan as well where belonging to a political family helps with formal entry into politics, especially for women (Zakar et al., 2018). Scholars find that despite higher legislative attendance and involvement among women (Khan, 2019), almost a third of the respondents in a survey of female legislators reported being silenced or harassed by unwelcome messages from male colleagues (Khan and Naqvi, 2020). Similarly, in another survey of women legislators, Zakar et al. (2018) find that over half of the respondents reported senior male politicians in their family negotiating with other political actors and dictating decisions to them on important issues such as changing political affiliations, contesting elections from different constituencies, and even on the use of development funds. Thus, it is relevant and interesting to analyze whether voters in Pakistan share such perceptions as well.

We emphasize that the preceding arguments describe not only a negative bias against dynastic politicians but also, and most importantly, a *double standard*. Although both men and women could be affected by stereotypes stemming from their dynastic status, it is often “women, but not men, [who] must prove capacity while disproving nepotism” (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008, 404). While voters could regard dynastic politicians as proxies for senior family members, regardless of their gender, the literature indicates this belief predominately affects women. In terms of the previous hypotheses, this suggests that, among female dynastic politicians, the data should be more supportive of Hypothesis 1b than 1a.

1.2. Policy preferences

A growing literature shows that individual characteristics of leaders shape the policies they prioritize (e.g., Carnes, 2013; Chattopadhyay and Duflou, 2004). This literature documents a link between descriptive and substantive representation, with public officials investing greater resources into issues that are more directly relevant to the needs of their own group (e.g., Clots-Figueras, 2012; Logan, 2018). Of particular relevance for our purposes, research shows legislators with working-class backgrounds take positions and support policies that benefit working-class voters (e.g., welfare programs), while those with white-collar upbringings tend to favor policies skewed towards the upper class (Carnes, 2013; O’Grady, 2019). Thus, to the extent that dynasts are more likely to have upper class backgrounds than non-dynasts, which admittedly may not be the case in some settings, we expect them to be relatively less supportive of universalistic policies.

Another reason to expect dynastic politicians to be more supportive of policies that serve the interests of a narrow sector of the electorate is their dynastic status itself, which has been shown to have important consequences for policy outcomes (Asako et al., 2015; Malik et al., 2021; Rossi, 2017). Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre (2013) show that, in the Philippines, dynastic legislators have a negative effect on public goods provision and the quality of public services despite receiving greater resources from the central government. Similar patterns, with dynastic politicians both securing and spending more resources while delivering worse policy outcomes than their non-dynastic peers, have been found

in Japan and Brazil (Asako et al., 2015; Bragança et al., 2015). These findings are explained by dynasts strategically using government expansion to deliver particularistic benefits to their core supporters (Asako et al., 2015; Muraoka, 2018) and extract rents (Bragança et al., 2015; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre, 2013). We, thus, expect voters to perceive dynastic politicians differently on this dimension as well, as stated in our next hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. Dynastic politicians are perceived to be less supportive of universalistic policies than non-dynastic politicians.

We believe Pakistan is a hard case to test this hypothesis due to the prevalence of clientelism and patronage politics in the country (Javid, 2019; Malik et al., 2021). To start, it is unclear whether voters care about (or pay attention to) policy issues (Mohmand, 2014). As Zhirnov and Mufti (2019, 524) note, in Pakistan “voters cast their votes not so much for policy influence but personalized delivery of patronage.” Thus, even if it were the case that dynastic and non-dynastic politicians systematically support different types of policies, these differences might not be perceived by the electorate due to lack of information or interest.

On top of the previous challenge, the clientelistic environment might encourage dynastic and non-dynastic politicians alike to favor the use of particularistic benefits that can be targeted to specific groups of voters. While we believe this is a very real possibility, evidence from India and Pakistan suggests that, even in contexts of widespread clientelism, dynastic and non-dynastic politicians might supply different types of goods. In their empirical study of dynasties in Pakistan, Malik et al. (2021, 31) argue that entrenched dynasts tend to provide what they call “livelihood-protecting services”, which are personal favors for those dealing with temporary adversity (e.g., consumption loans, help with hospital admissions), while non-dynasts supply “livelihood-enhancing services”, which are aimed at promoting development and include a combination of *both* local public goods (e.g., schools) and personal benefits (e.g., jobs). This echoes George (2019)’s finding that political dynasties in India have a negative effect on public good provision at the local level. To the extent that voters are aware of these patterns, we should observe empirical support for Hypothesis 2.

2. Dynastic politics in Pakistan

Political dynasties are widespread in Pakistani politics across all levels and main political parties. Until the 2018 election, there were two main political parties – the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – that had alternated in power at the center; both are led by family members of the original party founders. In the case of the PPP, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who served as a federal legislator (MNA) for the first time after the 2018 election, has been the party chairman since his mother’s assassination in 2007. His mother, Benazir Bhutto, in turn became party chairman when *her* father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, founder and first chairman of the PPP in the 1960s, was executed by the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq. Also, Bilawal’s father, Asif Ali Zardari, was co-chairman since 2007 and served as the President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013. Similarly, the PML-N has been led by founder Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and his younger brother, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, with the former being Prime Minister and the latter the Chief Minister of the largest province of Punjab on three separate occasions. Nawaz’s daughter, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, became the *de facto* face of the PML-N for a couple of years after the 2018 election in which the *Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf* rose to national prominence for the first time.

At the same time, all of these mainstream parties have been sustained by dynastic politicians over time, regardless of the precise definition one uses for a ‘dynastic’ tie. For instance, before the 2013 election, Kohari (2013) found that approximately 44% of all outgoing federal and provincial legislators (MNAs and MPAs) had relatives who

had served in previous legislatures. Using a slightly broader definition of what counts as a dynastic politician, Cheema et al. (2013) find that approximately two-thirds of the MNAs belonging to Punjab's 148 constituencies (out of 272 in total) were dynastic from 1985 to 2018. In their work, a dynastic politician is an electoral candidate who has had multiple family members contesting national or provincial elections in Punjab, which is the largest of Pakistan's four provinces both in terms of GDP and population. Using the same definition of a dynastic tie, Ahmad and Rehman (2019) find similar patterns across the entire country from 2002 to 2013 where approximately 50% of all MNAs were dynastic across three legislatures.

At the same time, similar to findings in other countries, dynastic candidates have fared well in Pakistan. Approximately half of the MNA races in Punjab between 1985 and 2008 were effectively between a dynastic and non-dynastic candidate, and the dynastic candidate won two-thirds of the time (Cheema et al., 2013). Of note, they also find that levels of dynasticism are similar across the main political parties. In their period of study, the proportion of dynastic contenders in the PPP varied between 30% and 50% while that of PML-N was between 30% and 60%. There are fewer specific numbers of this sort available from PTI given its relatively recent prominence in national elections. However, multiple scholars have discussed its reliance on so-called 'electables' – candidates with strong independent vote bases, many of whom belong to the social elite and to influential political families – who defected to the PTI from other parties before the 2018 election, leading to its electoral success (Batool, 2023; Javid and Mufti, 2022; Sabat and Shoaib, 2019). Therefore, importantly, dynasticism is not linked to a particular type of political party in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the literature on dynastic politics often notes that women benefit more from dynasties because of greater constraints on their entrance to politics and subsequent success. This holds in Pakistan as well where women face numerous socio-cultural constraints on formal entry into politics and face a difficult work environment in office; consequently, being from a political family often makes entry into politics easier (Khan and Naqvi, 2020; Zakar et al., 2018). Even at the highest level, Pakistan's first and only female Prime Minister – the first at this level in any Muslim country – came to power through her political family and by taking over party leadership after her father's assassination.

In fact, focusing only on directly-elected seats, Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of female representation in the national legislature with the last one in 2018 having merely eight female MNAs out of 272; six of these come from political families.⁵ Including those who come to office through an electoral quota, the proportion of female representatives who are dynastic has remained higher than 70% since the 1990s (Khan, 2020).

As this section shows, therefore, the prevalence of dynasties has been extensively studied in Pakistani scholarship. However, to our knowledge, this is the first study that focuses on how citizens perceive dynastic politicians versus those who run for office on their own, so to speak. Given the context discussed here, we believe that Pakistan provides a very good case for addressing the questions we are interested in since both dynastic and non-dynastic candidates and legislators make up large chunks of the political landscape. Consequently, respondents will find profiles of both types of hypothetical candidates believable and will not associate each type of candidate with any particular political party.

3. Research design and data

3.1. Research design

We conducted a face-to-face survey experiment in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad in Pakistan in November and December

2019 among 760 male respondents.⁶ Though the all-male sample is a potential limitation of the study, it is unclear that this affects our results for two main reasons. First, though a mixed-gender sample would nonetheless be ideal, in the case of Pakistan, in particular, we believe our sample is more representative of overall voter perceptions than in other contexts due to men having an inordinate amount of control over the family vote. For instance, Khan (2017) finds that women are much less comfortable expressing preferences for political candidates when their preferences differ from the household compared to men.⁷ Similarly, Harris and Malik (2023) also find that women are significantly more likely than men to form their political preferences based on their family and spouse's preferences (74% versus 31%, respectively).

Second, there are two main findings in the scholarship on whether respondent gender affects support for political candidates of different genders. On the one hand, some scholars find in experimental studies that female respondents prefer female candidates more than men do (Ono and Yamada, 2020; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Schwarz and Coppock, 2022) though the size of this preference is not always large. On the other hand, however, other scholars do not find such evidence, especially in developing country contexts. For example, Bhatia (2017) finds in an experiment in Afghanistan that female respondents have no significant preference regarding candidate gender while Aguilar et al. (2015) find a general preference in Brazil for female candidates that is not driven by respondent gender. Additionally, the two existing studies that also look at voter perceptions of dynastic candidates (both in Japan) do not report any differences in perceptions based on respondent gender (Horiuchi et al., 2020; Miwa et al., 2022).

Importantly, there is no evidence to our knowledge that male respondents disproportionately prefer female candidates, especially in the context of developing countries. In terms of our hypotheses, what this implies is that if we do find that female candidates are perceived as lower quality, this is possibly driven by our sample. If, however, we find the opposite evidence, or no difference between how men and women candidates are perceived by voters in our study, this makes our findings more interesting as men are, if anything, more likely to have negative preferences for female candidates than women.

The structure of the survey, which was conducted entirely in Urdu, was such that respondents were first asked several demographic questions. Next, the enumerator read a short vignette to them about a potential candidate for the provincial assembly of Punjab and then asked them a few outcome questions to measure their perceptions of the candidate along several lines.⁸

There were two dimensions of treatment: whether the candidate was dynastic or not, and whether the candidate was male or female.

⁶ This survey was part of an unrelated larger study on attitudes towards labor migration, for which the sample was men who were interested in looking for temporary employment overseas. In addition to using the same sample for this study, we drew the other half of our respondents from men who were similar on other dimensions like age, education and income but were not interested in migrating to ensure there was no selection bias. As the survey took place in urban centers, the sample was also largely urban. Since voter-politician linkages can operate quite differently in rural versus urban settings in Pakistan, and even within rural settings depending on historical factors (Mohmand, 2019), in future work it would also be interesting to extend this research question to a more heterogeneous group of areas.

⁷ Khan (2017, 211) found in a survey of 800 respondents, both men and women, in the Faisalabad district of Pakistan that only about half (53%) of the women said they would be comfortable disclosing their support for a candidate that others in their household did not favor; the same was true for 80% of the male respondents.

⁸ Pakistan is a parliamentary political system with a National Assembly and four Provincial Assemblies, one for each of the four provinces. Punjab is the largest of these provinces and the one that our target cities fell into. We chose to use the provincial assembly rather than national because not knowing a potential candidate would be more believable to respondents in this context.

⁵ Authors' own data.

Table 1
Treatment vignettes.

Dynastic (Male/Female)	Saad/Saadia is a potential candidate who wants to run for the Punjab Assembly from his/her home constituency. He/She is 36 years old and has a Bachelor's degree. <i>His/Her family has been involved in politics for many years, including some of them having served in office.</i> He/She wants to work for his/her constituency, especially by bringing more jobs and more development projects to the area.
Non-dynastic (Male/Female)	Saad/Saadia is a potential candidate who wants to run for the Punjab Assembly from his/her home constituency. He/She is 36 years old and has a Bachelor's degree. <i>He/She does not come from a political family and is the first among his/her family members to ever run for office.</i> He/She wants to work for his/her constituency, especially by bringing more jobs and more development projects to the area.

In combination, therefore, there were four possible conditions that a respondent could be randomly put into. Importantly, the information respondents were given about both candidates was *exactly* the same, except for the two relevant dimensions. We purposely kept the information about candidates brief and innocuous, and chose very similar sounding-names to maximize similarity across conditions. For the same reason, we mentioned a dynastic tie in the broadest way possible.⁹ The vignette is summarized in Table 1. The single sentence that differed between both candidates is italicized here, and each respondent was told about *either* a male or a female candidate, who was *either* from a political family (top panel) or not (bottom panel). Crucially, as can be seen, respondents were not given any indication that the candidate belonged to a specific political party. Though we cannot know with certainty if respondents inferred a particular party when answering the outcome questions, it is unlikely that there is meaningful correlation between treatment conditions and thinking of specific parties as dynasticism is equally common across various parties in Pakistan, as discussed previously.¹⁰

Finally, we purposefully chose not to use real politicians for the vignette as that would have made it impossible to separate how respondents felt about those specific individuals from how they perceived political dynasties more broadly. With real politicians, it would also have been impossible to use the same candidate for the treatment and control conditions. Using a fictional politician allows us to keep the general description of the candidate identical across the four conditions so that any differential responses are only driven by the different treatment conditions. It also helps us understand how respondents

⁹ For identification purposes, we kept the reference to a dynastic tie very general by just mentioning being from a political family that had past experience in politics (or not). Anything more specific would have contaminated the treatment and made it impossible to disentangle the treatment effect of being from a political family from the more specific information that we had provided. Relatedly, while there is no reason to believe that respondents would have inferred political experience for either candidate, we nonetheless acknowledge that the non-dynastic vignette is more explicit about the candidate not having prior experience. We believe the Urdu version of the vignette (Figure A1 in Appendix A) minimizes this potential difference.

¹⁰ To ensure this in a setting like ours, in an earlier pilot study, also conducted in Punjab, we presented respondents with two vignettes very similar to the non-treatment portion of the vignettes shown in Table 1 (i.e., we provided only generic information about a hypothetical candidate, gave no information about how they came to politics and only randomized the politician's gender). Next, we asked two questions: (1) how do you think this person got into politics? With "comes from a political family" being one of the possible answers; and (2) what party do you think this politician is from? Our results reveal two relevant patterns. First, the distribution of answers to the partisanship question match the size of the parties in Punjab (e.g., around 41% of respondents picked the PML-N, the largest party in the region). Second, and perhaps more important, there is no meaningful correlation between the responses to the two questions. That is, the distribution of answers to the partisanship question are substantively and statistically similar between those who answered the politician has/does not have dynastic ties.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. dev.	Min	Median	Max
Dependent Variables:						
Candidate Quality	759	5.551	2.536	0	5	12
Universalistic Policies	759	5.572	3.299	0	6	12
Independent Variables:						
Age (Young)	759	0.925	0.264	0	1	1
Major Ethnicity	759	0.817	0.387	0	1	1
High School	758	0.503	0.500	0	1	1
Employed	759	0.848	0.359	0	1	1
Low Income	616	0.664	0.473	0	1	1
Small Household	704	0.577	0.494	0	1	1
Aspiring Migrant	759	0.381	0.486	0	0	1

perceive the idea of dynastic candidates in general, holding everything else fixed. We return to this feature of our design in the conclusion to discuss its implications for our findings. After the vignette was read to them, respondents were asked a set of questions to gauge their opinions about the potential candidate, which are detailed in the next sub-section.

3.2. Data

Table 2 summarizes our main variables. Among the dependent variables, *Candidate Quality* is an index that combines questions about how approachable, hardworking, 'clean' (i.e., not corrupt) and competent the candidate is perceived to be. Each question was on a 4-point scale (0 to 3) so the final variable is a 12-point index. We chose these four dimensions because they are complementary yet distinct ways of thinking about a politician's quality.¹¹ Not only might different respondents value different traits in a candidate, asking about each separately also allows us to delve deeper into the mechanisms discussed in our first hypothesis. [Chauchard et al. \(2019\)](#) use somewhat similar dimensions studying voter perceptions of politicians and politician quality in India, which provides reassurance about the pertinence of our measures.

The second main dependent variable of interest, *Universalistic Policies*, is an index based on how supportive the respondent believes the candidate is of policies that have universal appeal. This variable is based on four different policies, where respondents were asked to indicate how likely they thought it was that the candidate would support policies relating to affordable universal healthcare, subsidized childcare for working mothers, the provision of free legal counseling for women seeking a divorce, and improving the quality of education. The answers ranged from 'Not likely at all' (0) to 'Very likely' (3), and the sum of all four responses is the final variable.

The bottom half of Table 2 summarizes our covariates, all of which are binary variables based on respondent characteristics. Given the

¹¹ Correlations between these dimensions (in Appendix Table A1) indicate that we are measuring different aspects of quality, further supporting our decision to measure quality along multiple dimensions.

experimental setting, our respondents should be balanced on demographics but we nonetheless present ANOVA tests in Table A2 to ensure this is the case.¹² We also control for these variables in our main results in the next section. The sample size varies between these variables since some respondents chose not to answer certain questions. The variables are largely self-explanatory. *Age (Young)* indicates if the respondent is 40 years or younger, *Major Ethnicity* is 1 if the respondent is *Punjabi* or *Pashun*, which are the two main ethnicities in the part of Pakistan where the study was conducted, and *Small Household* is coded 1 if there are no more than six people living in the house.¹³

4. Results

Tables 3 and 4 summarize results from our two main hypotheses using OLS regressions. Despite the nature of the dependent variables, we chose this method for the main results for ease of interpretation. After presenting these, we also discuss robustness checks using logistic and ordered logistic regressions, all of which give us similar findings in terms of the direction and statistical significance of the main independent variables.

Results from the first hypothesis are presented in Table 3. All five panels have the same specifications, with the dependent variable of interest varying: *Candidate Quality* in Panel A, followed by its four constituent traits — *Hardworking*, *Competent*, *Approachable*, and *Clean (Not Corrupt)*. The first models in each panel look at the average treatment effect (ATE) of being a dynastic candidate while the second includes the ATE of being a female candidate. The third column introduces an interaction term for the two treatments (*Dynastic* × *Female*) and the last adds respondent covariates, whose details can be found in the table notes. These same four specifications are used in all the results throughout the paper. Control variable coefficients are not reported here but can be found in Appendix Table A3. Two main results emerge from this table.

The first, from Panel A, is that, overall, dynastic candidates are perceived to be of significantly lower quality, which is the case across all specifications. This consistent result lends credence to H1b over H1a, and looking at the remaining panels gives some indication of the underlying mechanisms. Panels B and D indicate that dynastic candidates are seen as significantly less hardworking and less approachable than their non-dynastic peers but not as less (or more) competent or more (or less) corrupt (Panels C and E). It thus appears that dynastic ties are perhaps a substitute for individual effort, as discussed earlier, which is why non-dynastic candidates are seen as significantly more hardworking; the same may be the case for approachability.

At the same time, we find no significant difference in perceptions of competence between various candidates, which may indicate that respondents genuinely see no difference or that some find dynastic candidates to be more competent due to their higher access to political resources (H1a) and others find them less competent (H1b) due to a perception that they got their positions through nepotism or that dynasties are undemocratic. Our current results do not let us separate these two possible explanations but do allow us to conclude that the significant difference in *Candidate Quality* is driven, at least in part,

¹² Table A2 shows our covariates are well balanced across all treatments with one exception: the dummy indicating whether a respondent is *Employed*. By itself, however, we do not believe this to be a cause for concern as we measure socio-economic status with income and household size as well, and control for all covariates in the main results.

¹³ While six may not seem like a small household to Western audiences, in Pakistan sons tend to continue living with their parents through the parents' lives, especially among financially less well-off families. Thus, a household with two brothers and their wives living with the brothers' parents comprises 6 individuals, as does one with a man, his wife and two children, and the man's parents. These are just two possibilities out of several more, and such a household is considered a very standard-sized one.

by dynastic candidates being perceived as less hardworking and less approachable. Similarly, dynastic candidates are perceived as similar to their non-dynastic counterparts when it comes to how clean, or 'not corrupt', they are. Circling back to earlier sections, these results indicate that, when thinking of valence attributes, voters perceive dynastic and non-dynastic politicians as being different primarily in terms of their individual-effort characteristics. While this perhaps suggests that voters do believe dynastic candidates enjoy resource advantages, which in turn allow them to exert lower effort, these advantages are not enough to make them seem more competent than their non-dynastic peers.

The second main finding is that the lower quality perception of dynastic candidates is no different for female versus male candidates. Interestingly, however, the earlier discussion about women needing to be higher quality than men does find support in Panel B but only in terms of non-dynastic female candidates. In other words, non-dynastic female candidates are perceived to be more hardworking than both categories of men and than dynastic female candidates. This result likely reflects the gender discrimination discussed earlier but does not apply to dynastic female candidates who are perhaps perceived as being able to run for office due to their family position so the same threshold of hard work is not expected here. Thus, H1b does not find more support among female dynastic candidates than similar male ones.

Next, in Table 4, we focus on H2 regarding politicians' support for universalistic policies. The results indicate that citizens do believe that dynastic politicians will be significantly less supportive of universalistic policies compared to non-dynasts, and results in Appendix Table A5 confirm that this is not driven by any one specific policy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, non-dynastic female candidates are seen as significantly more supportive of universalistic policies than even non-dynastic men. One interpretation of this result is that non-dynastic female candidates are relatively uncommon on open seats in Pakistan and therefore those who do run are perhaps seen as more cognizant and supportive of what the average citizen wants.¹⁴ This explanation is similar to how non-dynastic women candidates are perceived as more hardworking in the previous set of results.

The evidence so far indicates that, compared to similar non-dynastic politicians, voters find dynastic politicians to be lower quality (*Hypothesis 1b*) and less supportive of universalistic policies (*Hypothesis 2*). The estimates in Tables 3 and 4 not only provide strong support for our expectations but also raise some interesting questions. We briefly discuss two of these. First, a somewhat surprising result is that we find almost no differences in how respondents perceive male and female dynastic candidates. There are two possible reasons for this. The first is that respondents genuinely perceive no differences between the two types of dynastic candidates. A second possibility relates to what the literature calls the "label effect" (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008). That is, if voters view female dynastic politicians mostly as stand-ins for their male relatives, they might not perceive any differences between male and female dynasts because they believe that, ultimately, power resides in the hands of male family members.

We try to disentangle these two explanations by asking respondents whether they thought the given candidate was likely to make political decisions based more on their own opinions or those of their family. The resultant variable, *Candidate Independence*, is coded 1 if the respondent chose the candidate weighing their own opinion more and 0 if they chose family. If, once again, respondents perceive male and female dynasts similarly, this lends credence to the first explanation. If, however, female dynastic candidates are perceived as less independent of their families compared to their male counterparts, this points

¹⁴ Since 2002, Pakistan's National Assembly has 60 seats that are reserved for women. Female candidates do not run for open election on these, however, nor are these seats allocated to any specific constituencies. Rather, political parties are allocated these seats on a proportional basis after the election results have been tabulated and they can then assign their allotted seats to female party members in any manner they want.

Table 3
Perceptions of politician quality.

	Panel A. Candidate Quality				Panel B. Hardworking			
Dynastic	-0.74*** (0.18)	-0.74*** (0.18)	-0.91*** (0.25)	-0.77*** (0.27)	-0.35*** (0.08)	-0.35*** (0.08)	-0.32*** (0.11)	-0.24** (0.12)
Female		0.40** (0.18)	0.22 (0.26)	0.19 (0.28)		0.24*** (0.08)	0.27** (0.11)	0.29** (0.12)
Dynastic×Female			0.35 (0.36)	0.21 (0.39)			-0.05 (0.16)	-0.21 (0.17)
Intercept	5.92*** (0.13)	5.73*** (0.16)	5.81*** (0.18)	5.14*** (0.58)	1.73*** (0.06)	1.61*** (0.07)	1.60*** (0.08)	1.39*** (0.25)
Controls	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	✓
N	759	759	759	612	759	759	759	612
Adj. R-squared	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.08	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.13
	Panel C. Competent				Panel D. Approachable			
Dynastic	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.15 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.33*** (0.07)	-0.33*** (0.07)	-0.38*** (0.10)	-0.37*** (0.11)
Female		0.11 (0.07)	0.03 (0.10)	0.05 (0.10)		0.01 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.11)
Dynastic×Female			0.15 (0.14)	0.08 (0.14)			0.09 (0.14)	0.02 (0.15)
Intercept	1.39*** (0.05)	1.33*** (0.06)	1.37*** (0.07)	1.22*** (0.21)	1.12*** (0.05)	1.12*** (0.06)	1.14*** (0.07)	0.89*** (0.22)
Controls	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	✓
N	759	759	759	612	759	759	759	612
Adj. R-squared	0.0003	0.002	0.003	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04
	Panel E. Clean (Not corrupt)							
Dynastic	0.02 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.12)				
Female		0.05 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.12)				
Dynastic×Female			0.16 (0.16)	0.32* (0.17)				
Intercept	1.69*** (0.06)	1.67*** (0.07)	1.71*** (0.08)	1.64*** (0.26)				
Controls	X	X	X	✓				
N	759	759	759	612				
Adj. R-squared	-0.001	-0.002	-0.002	-0.001				

Note: The dependent variable in Panel A is an index of *Candidate Quality* based on the perception of four candidate traits: approachable, hardworking, clean (i.e., not corrupt) and competent. The first model looks at the ATE of a *dynastic* candidate, the second of a *dynastic* and *female* candidate, the third adds an interaction between *dynastic* and *female* while the fourth is the same specification as the third but adds control variables. Control variable coefficients are not reported but include *Age (Young)*, *Major Ethnicity*, *High School Education*, *Low Income*, *Employed*, *Small Household*, and *Aspiring Migrant*. The remaining panels use the same specifications and independent variables but with each constituent trait being a dependent variable. Full results for *Candidate Quality* can be found in Table A3. Significance levels: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4
Perception of politician support for universalistic policies.

	Universalistic Policies			
Dynastic	-0.85*** (0.24)	-0.84*** (0.24)	-0.80** (0.33)	-0.69* (0.35)
Female		0.86*** (0.24)	0.90*** (0.33)	0.88** (0.36)
Dynastic × Female			-0.09 (0.47)	-0.22 (0.51)
Intercept	6.00*** (0.17)	5.58*** (0.20)	5.56*** (0.23)	6.15*** (0.74)
Controls	X	X	X	✓
N	759	759	759	612
Adj. R-squared	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.04

Note: The dependent variable, *Universalistic Policies*, is an index based on four policies where each was measured on a 4-point scale (from 0 to 3). The specifications and controls are as in Table 3. Appendix Table A4 reports full results. Significance levels: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

towards the second explanation being more likely. At the same time, overall, compared to non-dynastic candidates, we expect respondents to view dynastic candidates as less independent of their families, since voters might believe they will adhere to the “family brand” while in office.

Table 5 supports the second interpretation. First, overall, as expected, dynastic politicians are seen as significantly less independent of their family than non-dynastic politicians. Second, the results also point

towards a label effect, not just in terms of the media and politicians themselves, as the literature has already found, but also in the eyes of potential voters. In terms of perceived independence from their families, women are affected by the “dynastic label” to a much larger degree than men. Note that it is not the overall effect of being a *female* candidate that we focus on here but, rather, on how dynastic status affects women and men differently. Specifically, while the marginal effect of *Dynastic* is always negative, the magnitude of this effect is almost three times larger for female ($-0.22 = -0.08 - 0.14$) than for male politicians (-0.08).¹⁵ This result makes particular sense in the case of Pakistan where female candidates are often presented as stand-ins for their close male relatives (Khan and Naqvi, 2020). An illustrative example comes from the national elections in 2018 where a campaign poster for the subsequent ruling party, PTI, had pictures of three men on it—two for provincial seats and one for federal. The federal seat candidate, whose name was on the poster, was a woman but the picture was of her husband meaning thereby that a casual glance at the poster would not even make one realize that the candidate was, in fact, a woman.¹⁶ Such instances can only fuel the label effect for female

¹⁵ Estimates from Table 5-Column (3), which also show the difference between the two marginal effects (-0.14) is significant at the 0.05 level.

¹⁶ The race was for NA-184 in the southwest of Punjab. Syeda Zahra Bait Bokhari was the actual candidate and she finished fourth. The campaign poster can be seen here: <https://www.geo.tv/latest/203944>.

Table 5
Perception of politician independence in decision making.

Candidate Independence (from Family)				
Dynastic	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.08* (0.05)	-0.07 (0.06)
Female		0.06* (0.04)	0.13*** (0.05)	0.16*** (0.06)
Dynastic × Female			-0.14** (0.07)	-0.14* (0.08)
Intercept	0.58*** (0.03)	0.55*** (0.03)	0.52*** (0.04)	0.65*** (0.12)
Controls	X	X	X	✓
N	759	759	759	612
Adj. R-squared	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.06

Note: The dependent variable, *Candidate Independence*, is an indicator of whether respondents thought the candidate would take their own opinion into account more than their family's when making decisions. The specifications and controls are as in Table 3. Appendix Table A6 reports full results. Significance levels: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

dynastic politicians and reiterate the common notion that they are mere proxies for their male relatives.

It is also interesting to note that non-dynastic female candidates are perceived as significantly more independent than even non-dynastic male candidates. A likely explanation for this is that, as discussed above, most female candidates on open seats in Pakistan tend to be from political families, and that too is a relatively low number. In other words, very few non-dynastic women run for open seats, meaning that those who do are likely perceived as being very independent in their decision making, even more so than their male counterparts.

The second question of interest then is how likely voters are to support dynastic candidates in an election. As mentioned previously, the fact that dynastic politicians enjoy an electoral advantage might suggest that voters have a preference for this type of candidate. At the same time, our previous findings – with voters evaluating dynastic candidates negatively in terms of both certain personal attributes and policy priorities when compared to non-dynastic ones – cast doubt on this possibility. To answer this question, we asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for the given candidate with answers ranging from 0 (Not Likely at all) to 3 (Very Likely). Table 6 interestingly indicates that respondents in our sample are *less* likely to vote for dynastic candidates over non-dynastic ones. Though the coefficient on *Dynastic* loses significance in the last specification, there is likely a power explanation here. As the *N* below indicates, quite a few observations are lost here due to non-responses on certain demographic questions. The most prominent of these is *Low Income* since 80 respondents refused to share their income; dropping just this *one* control variable from the final specification makes the coefficient on *Dynastic* highly significant once again. As before this finding does not differ between male and female politicians from political families.

As mentioned earlier, all results reported here have used OLS regressions primarily for ease of interpretation. However, given that our dependent variables are ordinal and binary in nature, we re-run the main specifications using ordered logistic and logistic regressions, respectively. These analyses, reported in Appendix Tables A8–A11, show that the findings discussed here are robust to using these different regression methods in terms of the signs of coefficients and significance.¹⁷

Taking all the results together, the picture that emerges is one where citizens perceive dynastic candidates to be lower quality and they are

¹⁷ Appendix A shows full regression results for all the main dependent variables. To save space, we do not present ordered logit estimates for the four components of *Candidate Quality*, but these are available upon request. Our findings do not change for those components either except for one minor case, where the fourth specification with *Hardworking* as the dependent variable marginally loses significance, with a *p*-value of 0.1097.

Table 6
Preference for dynastic politicians.

Vote Likelihood				
Dynastic	-0.14** (0.07)	-0.14* (0.07)	-0.22** (0.10)	-0.17 (0.11)
Female		0.05 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.10)	0.02 (0.11)
Dynastic × Female			0.16 (0.14)	0.06 (0.16)
Intercept	1.36*** (0.05)	1.33*** (0.06)	1.37*** (0.07)	1.76*** (0.24)
Controls	X	X	X	✓
N	690	690	690	566
Adj. R-squared	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.0023

Note: The dependent variable is *Vote Likelihood*, measured on a 4-point scale (0 to 3). The specifications and controls are as in Table 3. Appendix Table A7 reports full results. Significance levels: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

less likely to support such candidates compared to otherwise similar non-dynastic ones. This lower support could be driven by perceiving such candidates as comparatively less hardworking, less approachable, and less supportive of universalistic policies. It also appears to be the case that male and female dynastic candidates are largely perceived similarly but this is possibly due to a double standard when it comes to female candidates as they are seen as less autonomous candidates who are heavily influenced in their decision-making by their families. These findings are overall particularly interesting because we know from many contexts, including Pakistan, that dynastic candidates tend to be more electorally successful. Voters in this case do not seem to personally prefer such candidates, despite the political connections that they may bring, indicating that elite-driven explanations in the literature on dynastic candidates faring well likely hold more weight than voter-driven ones.

5. Conclusion

This paper is motivated by a growing literature in comparative politics that studies the persistence of political dynasties in modern democracies. Despite numerous efforts to identify the mechanisms behind the success of dynastic politicians, most empirical work, with a couple of recent exceptions focusing on Japan, has studied elite-driven explanations, overlooking the role of voter preferences. Consequently, we still know little about how voters perceive dynastic candidates and why, especially in the context of developing countries. Using a survey experiment in Pakistan, we find that voters perceive dynastic candidates to be different from their non-dynastic counterparts on both valence characteristics and policy attributes. In particular, they perceive such candidates to be lower quality and less supportive of universalistic policies. Perhaps in part due to such perceptions, they also report a lower likelihood of voting for such candidates themselves.

Our findings raise the question of why real world dynasts continue to be elected to office despite being perceived in a negative light by voters. Although answering this question is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible that, in Pakistan and other similar contexts, the success of dynastic politicians is partly explained by political parties. According to Smith (2018), in settings where elections are candidate-centered, parties have greater incentive to recruit dynastic candidates, since they enjoy a comparative advantage in cultivating a personal vote. In Pakistan, this incentive is likely exacerbated by the organizational weakness of political parties. Given their limited capacity to mobilize voters, parties must rely on so-called 'electables' who can deliver votes on their behalf through the use of clientelism and patronage (Javid, 2019; Mufti, 2015). Dynasts can use their wealth, family networks, and political connections to build and maintain strong independent vote bases, and thus are generally depicted as 'electables' (see, e.g., Zhirmov and Mufti, 2019, 525–527). In exchange, political parties –

particularly those with better prospects of government participation – facilitate access to state resources (e.g., development funds), which allow ‘electables’ to maintain their influence and reward their core supporters (Javid, 2019).

This point is consistent with comparative politics research. Scholars have linked political dynasties to weak party organizations in a variety of settings, either because powerful families can effectively take control of local party branches (Chhibber, 2011; Smith, 2018), or because they prevent the development of (or act as substitutes for) strong party organizations (Querubin, 2016; Velasco Rivera, 2017). Qualitative accounts suggest both mechanisms feature prominently in Pakistan. For instance, Zhirnov and Mufti (2019, 525–526) explain how, due to weak voter-party linkages, parties rely on candidates who use “their family legacies instead of local party organizations to mobilize voters.” Moreover, there is also systematic quantitative evidence that Pakistan’s “larger and more electorally successful parties...select candidates who have typically displayed high levels of autonomy and low levels of commitment to the party” (Javid and Mufti, 2020, 145). We highlight that these patterns are not only consistent with our claim that dynasticism creates high entry barriers but also explain why these barriers persist. Thus, we believe this further supports our interpretation that voters perceive non-dynastic candidates as being of relatively higher quality due to their ability to overcome these additional barriers to entry.

We conclude with a few thoughts on the generalizability of our findings. Our evidence is from Pakistan, a country where dynasties have played and continue to play a prominent role in national and provincial politics. We acknowledge that our findings could be driven by country-specific features, such as its culture, history of military rule, or level of economic development. As mentioned previously, we believe that, in the Pakistani case, non-dynastic aspirants might face relatively higher barriers to enter politics. These barriers could be the reason behind both the success of dynasts and the generally negative perceptions of these politicians among the electorate. Thus, one might speculate that countries with similarly low economic development and high political barriers should present similar patterns, especially other countries in the region, many of which are also characterized by the persistence of dynasties, including India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

At the same time, it is important to highlight the parallels between our findings and research on political dynasties in Japan, a country that is different from Pakistan along several dimensions. In line with our results, Miwa et al. (2022) also find that voters view dynastic politicians less favorably than their non-dynastic peers.¹⁸ Previous research suggests two possible explanations for these similarities. First, in line with the previous discussion, part of the “inherited incumbency advantage” in Japan is also driven by political parties, which tend to favor the nomination of dynastic candidates for strategic purposes (Smith, 2018). Thus, the relatively negative views of dynasts in both countries could be explained by the perception that they received special treatment or that they earned their positions not solely on merit (see, e.g., Padgett et al., 2015; Son Hing et al., 2002). Second, research shows that in both countries electing dynastic politicians hinders local development due to their reliance on clientelism and patronage (Asako et al., 2015; Malik et al., 2021). To the extent that this explains the relatively negative perceptions of dynasts, we would expect to observe similar patterns in places such as Brazil, India, and the Philippines, where both electoral politics have an important clientelistic component and dynasties have been shown to hurt development (Bragança et al., 2015; George, 2019; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre, 2013). Replicating this study in other countries could provide valuable insights about the factors that explain not only voters’ perceptions of dynastic politicians but also the persistence of dynastic power.

¹⁸ In fact, one might argue that their findings are even more “damaging” for dynastic politicians than ours, as they find them to be perceived as being relatively less competent and more corrupt.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sergio J. Ascencio: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Rabia Malik:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2024.102786>.

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