

Working Paper No. 153

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| February 2015

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### Abstract

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Gender quotas to increase women's representation are often motivated by the assumption that men and women have different policy preferences. In Africa – where gender quotas have been particularly widespread – we find that gender differences in preferences are quite small on average, but vary significantly across both policy domains and countries. We propose a theoretical framework for differentiating policy domains where preference divergence indicates increased gender parity from those where it signifies growing inequality. We then demonstrate that favourable gender gaps increase with female labour-force participation, while unfavourable gaps are more likely where women are most vulnerable. We show that these gender gaps in preferences are related to gender gaps in both political participation and representation.



## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the share of countries adopting quota policies for female representation in government.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly argued that increasing the inclusiveness of elected bodies impacts their democratic legitimacy, largely because it provides a voice for previously underrepresented groups (Young, 2000; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). Two key assumptions underlie such justifications for adopting quotas or other institutional reforms. It is assumed, first, that women have different policy preferences than men, and second, that female elected officials are more willing or able than men to represent the preferences of female constituents (Phillips, 1995).<sup>2</sup> If both assumptions hold, then it follows that low levels of participation by women, compounded by the reluctance of (some) men to vote for female candidates (Beaman et al., 2009), could reproduce gender inequalities in various social and economic domains.<sup>3</sup>

Surprisingly, even though the above assumptions are commonly invoked in both academic and policy circles, with few exceptions they have not been subjected to rigorous empirical testing by scholars of the developing world. To a large degree, whether women in developing countries do, in fact, have different political preferences than men, and the reasons that underlie divergent preferences if such exist, are open questions.<sup>4</sup> We begin addressing this gap in the literature by studying the first assumption (of gender-based policy preferences) in sub-Saharan Africa, where debates around gender quotas have been especially salient (Barnes & Burchard, 2013). To date, 21 African countries have either legislated candidate quotas or have reserved seats for female politicians in Parliament, and 11 have witnessed voluntary political party quotas. Largely as a result of these efforts, seven of the 20 countries with the largest share of female legislators hail from Africa. Thus, it is imperative to evaluate the assumption of gender divergence in preferences within this context.

To do so, we first evaluate the presence of gender-based differences in political preferences in a cross-section of 19 African countries ( $n = 22,483$ ) using nationally representative data culled from Afrobarometer.<sup>5</sup> Specifically we focus on whether female and male constituents differ in their

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<sup>1</sup> More than 100 countries have, to date, adopted some sort of electoral gender quota at the national level, out of which about 70 have reformed their constitutions or passed new electoral laws requiring that women fill certain percentages of legislative seats (Clayton, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> A third assumption is that a greater share of women holding office increases *symbolic representation*. Here women's increased presence in Parliament is expected to affect public attitudes toward women in politics (Beaman et al., 2009), women's own engagement in politics (Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012), and their willingness to challenge the power of traditional patriarchal elites (Clayton, forthcoming). These effects, to the extent that they are realized, are intrinsically important even if descriptive representation fails to translate into substantive representation.

<sup>3</sup> Note that this assumption implicitly adopts the perspective of citizen-candidate models of political selection. Here, the more difficult it is for candidates to make credible commitments ex-ante, the greater the importance of selecting candidates with shared identities (Besley & Coate, 1997). This is especially the case in young democracies, where policy commitment is wanting and thus the importance of a public official's *ascriptive identity* (e.g. religion, ethnicity, or gender) is magnified for distributional decisions. By contrast, in Downsian models of politics, the identity of incumbents is rather irrelevant.

<sup>4</sup> Whether elected female officials are better positioned to represent the preferences of female constituents is addressed in a companion paper. Female public officials may choose to advance issues that they believe are in women's *interest*, even if female constituents do not express these issues explicitly as *policy preferences*. Discrepancies between constituents' revealed preferences and assumed interests raise thorny issues about the nature of political representation, which cannot be addressed within the scope of this manuscript.

<sup>5</sup> The Afrobarometer initiative conducts nationally representative surveys on the attitudes of citizens in selected African countries toward various aspects of political and economic development. Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. The project receives technical support from Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT). Afrobarometer publications and data are available at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

policy priorities across 10 meaningful policy areas (see Table 1). While we find that the effect of gender on the prioritization of many of these policy domains is *statistically* significant, we cannot as robustly claim that these differences are *substantially* significant given that (a) the size of coefficients are relatively small (compared to findings from advanced industrial democracies) and (b) we find only minor differences in priority *rankings* across the two sexes.

However, this pooled analysis treats all domains as equivalent, potentially concealing important substantive differences across policy outcomes, some of which may be normatively more important than others. In particular, the extent to which shared preferences between men and women have positive or negative normative implications depends crucially on the particular policy domain itself. Recognizing these differences across domains, we next outline a theoretical distinction between favourable and unfavourable gender gaps.

Within this framework, a favourable gender gap in policy priorities refers to divergent preferences that reflect the growing economic and social independence of women. For example, in much of the developed world women began to prioritize the expansion of state services more than men as their social and economic independence increased (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006). Similarly, we expect women constituents who enter the labour market in African states to take a larger interest in management of the economy as compared to women whose livelihood depends on their spouse or extended family, consequently closing the gender gap or even surpassing men's prioritization. In contrast, an unfavourable gender gap in policy priorities refers to political preferences that reflect the fact that women are constrained by gender roles rather than liberated from them. For example, women who are constrained by traditional gender roles are more likely to prioritize access to clean water relative to other policy domains (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Olken, 2010). Once we disaggregate the 10 distinct policy outcomes into those for whom a gap would be favourable from those where it would be unfavourable, more meaningful patterns emerge.

Apart from the conflation of theoretically distinct constructs, variation in the size of the gap both *within and across countries* in our sample is also responsible for the small average gender gaps. The third step in our empirical approach is thus to explain variation within and between countries for a subsample of policy domains. Specifically, we look at the impact of economic and social factors at the country and individual levels on the extent of the gender gap for three key policy domains. Our goal is not to test for some root cause that accounts for a gender gap across all policy priorities and countries. Rather, we seek to demonstrate the utility of our framework for a sample of theoretically relevant policy domains in order to encourage students of developing countries to think carefully about the political implications of the interaction of socially constructed gender roles with contextual features of the polity.

We examine one policy domain – management of the economy – in which we expect to see a favourable gender gap emerge with economic and social development, and one policy domain – improved access to clean water – in which we expect to see an unfavourable gender gap emerge with increased economic and social vulnerability of women. We also examine one domain – poverty alleviation – in which we expect that the gender gap will be unmoved by changing socioeconomic factors. Here we draw heavily on the “ethics of care” literature (Gilligan, 1982), which stipulates that women are more likely to internalize – via differential patterns of socialization – a responsibility to care for others and to protect the most vulnerable in society. This general disposition leads women to be more likely than their male counterparts to hold the state responsible for poverty alleviation (Hutchings et al., 2004). We thus expect the gender gap for this policy preference to be unconditional on individual- or country-level correlates.<sup>6</sup>

The results are largely consistent with our expectations. Greater independence of women, measured as participation in the labour force, increases women's prioritization of the economy relative to men's and decreases women's prioritization of water relative to men's. Greater social vulnerability of women, by contrast, widens the differences between genders on the prioritization of water. Consistent with the expectations derived from the “ethics of care” literature, we not only find a large gender gap in prioritizing poverty alleviation, but also that this gap is independent of social vulnerability, class, employment status, etc. These findings are important, since they provide

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<sup>6</sup> See Crowder-Meyer (2007) for similar findings in the American context.

benchmarks (and a set of analytical tools) against which to better examine the substantive representation of women's needs and preferences.

Finding that gender gaps in preferences indeed exist in Africa, and in the policies and places we would expect, we conclude our analysis by briefly interrogating the political consequences of such gaps. We do so by examining the relationship between gender gaps in policy priorities and gender gaps in political participation and representation. We find a large, significant, *positive* relationship between gender gaps in policy priorities and gender gaps in political participation; put simply, it is exactly in places where women and men have the most divergent policy preferences – and thus female participation is most needed – where we also witness the greatest barriers to female participation in politics. Similarly, we find a strong *negative* relationship between gender gaps in policy priorities and the share of women in the national Parliament. This suggests that African countries that have yet to address gender inequality in descriptive representation – for example, via the use of quotas – are precisely those in which such representation is most needed due to the divergent preferences of male and female constituents.

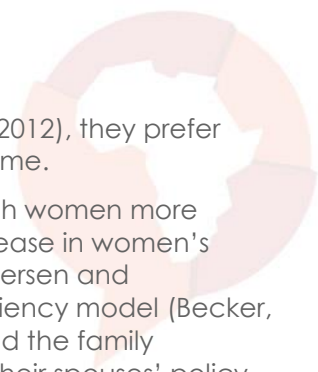
This paper's main contribution is to add new insight and empirics from the developing world to the growing literature on the relationship between gender and political preferences. Until recently, the study of gender gaps in preferences has concentrated on identifying (Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Chaney, Alvarez, & Nagler, 1998) and explaining (Finseraas, Jakobsson, & Kotsadam, 2012) gender-based preferences in a small number of developed industrial democracies. By contrast, the study of gender-based preferences in the developing world is small and for the most part focuses on a limited set of domains, such as support for democracy (García-Peñalosa & Konte, 2014) and women's health (Bhalotra & Clots-Figueras, 2014). We thus expand both the geographic coverage as well as the policy domains for which gender serves as a key identity in the construction of political preferences. Unifying findings from the developed world with findings from Africa led to our development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic relationship between gender and political preferences.

The paper also contributes to the nascent literature on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of women by female parliamentarians, especially that which focuses on gender quotas. Mostly qualitative (e.g. Bauer, 2004) and conceptual (Krook, 2014), with a few notable exceptions (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013), this literature has had a hard time substantiating the key assumption that women's policy preferences are distinct. We contribute to this existing literature by identifying the domains in which the assumption of women's distinct preferences is indeed supported (or not) by the data from a key developing region. By so doing, we aim to contribute to both theoretical and policy debates regarding the merits of women's descriptive representation.

## Theorizing gender gaps

In the developed world, existing scholarship has documented that men and women tend to hold distinct political preferences. These differences translate into women's greater support for liberal policies (Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006) and left-wing parties (Langer, 1996; Norrander, 1999). As a result, increased female political participation has historically been associated with larger government and increased social spending (Lott, 1999; Aidt & Dallal, 2008; Miller, 2008; Weldon, 2012).

While some explanations for this gender gap in political preferences focus on innate differences between the sexes (e.g. Conover, 1988; Gidengil, 1995; Welch & Hibbing, 1992), such an explanation seems unlikely given that divergent preferences have emerged over time (Inglehart & Norris, 2000; Gillion, Ladd, & Meredith, 2014), with women previously holding more conservative preferences than men (Duverger, 1955; Campbell et al., 1960; Inglehart, 1977). Thus, more recent research instead highlights the importance of women's changing socioeconomic status relative to men (Kaufmann & Petrocik, 1999; Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, & Lin, 2004) as well as the socialization of gender roles (Hutchings et al., 2004). In particular, declining marriage rates, increased risk of divorce, and subsequent increased female labour participation are thought to encourage women to support policies that alleviate traditional female responsibilities within the home, such as caring for children, the elderly, and the ill (Edlund & Pande, 2002). In short, as women become less reliant on their husbands' income (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006), and as they



increase their valuation of self-sufficiency (Finseraas, Jakobsson, & Kotsadam, 2012), they prefer that the state provide more services – especially those that free up women's time.

In the developed world, an increasing gender gap in political preferences, with women more liberal than men, is thus a sign of decreasing vulnerability of women or an increase in women's liberation from constraints placed upon them by family and social norms. As Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006, p. 2) explain in their deconstruction of Becker's seminal efficiency model (Becker, 1981), when the division of labour between husband and wife is maximized and the family constitutes the smallest organizing unit of the economy, women should share their spouses' policy preferences – for example on taxes and spending. In this sense, increasing gender gaps in policy preferences can be considered a normatively positive feature as it marks the erosion of assignment of women to traditional family roles. Under such conditions, a growing gender gap in political preferences can be consistent with democratic ideals of freedom, growing equality, and the ability to formulate independent preferences.

There are, however, several reasons we should take pause before applying these lessons to the developing world, especially low-income countries. First, states often have insufficient financial capacity to provide comprehensive welfare programs and a weak and personalized bureaucracy incapable of effectively implementing such programs. The political context is thus markedly different. Second, there are key social and economic differences in the largely pre-industrial societies of the developing world. For example, a woman with little economic independence may still be engaged in revenue-generating activities, but because of differential access to production and distinct roles in the household, her activities require different inputs than those of her male relatives. The resulting divergence in policy preferences may not then imply economic independence if a woman's production function is socially constrained, along with control of her own revenue. Evidence from Inglehart and Norris (2000) indeed supports the conditionality of theoretical predictions on context. While women are more liberal than men in post-industrial countries, the opposite is true in developing societies.<sup>7</sup> The authors argue this is because pre-industrial societies are characterized by strict gender roles that discourage women's participation in the labour force.

If gendered social and economic roles constrain women's choices in pre-industrial societies, then differences in policy preferences may be a sign of women's vulnerability rather than women's liberation. There is scant work on gender gaps in political preference in the developing world that allows us to investigate such a claim. In two prominent exceptions, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) and Olken (2010) document that women in rural India and Indonesia, respectively, prioritize drinking water more than men, since they are more likely to incur the opportunity cost of fetching water. Gender-based prioritization of access to clean water thus demonstrates the idea of a normatively unfavourable gender gap in policy preferences – one that is born out of constraints on women's economic opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

In Africa, the systematic study of gender differences has focused primarily on preferences in regime types rather than policy itself.<sup>9</sup> García-Peñalosa and Konte (2014) find that women are less likely than men to prefer democracy to other political systems and attribute this difference to women's greater risk aversion, stemming from the fact that elections in many developing countries are associated with instability (Mansfield & Snyder, 2005) and women bear a higher incidence or cost of conflict than men (Cohen, 2013). Earlier work found few differences in political attitudes by gender within Africa, but also documented less support for democracy and less aversion to one-party states (Logan & Bratton, 2006). While these findings are consistent with the idea that women in pre-industrial societies are more likely than men to hold conservative beliefs, our paper extends

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<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that the authors had a very small sample, with only nine advanced industrialized countries and only four developing societies, all from the same region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico).

<sup>8</sup> Olken (2010) further finds that men are more likely to prioritize roads and bridges, which attests to their greater mobility.

<sup>9</sup> The gender gap in political participation, by contrast, has received much more attention. For example, Isaksson, Kotsadam, and Nerman (2014) investigate the determinants of a gender gap in African political participation, but never test whether women actually differ from men in political preferences.

the analysis to examine differential preferences in several different policy domains within a given institutional context.

### **Favourable and unfavourable gender gaps in Africa**

Strategies to improve descriptive representation are most important where women and men have significantly divergent policy preferences. Our above discussion suggests that this may be the case not only where women are increasingly financially independent from their spouses (as is the case in the developed world), but also where such gaps signal women's vulnerability. To better understand the composition of gendered policy priorities in Africa, we investigate three particular policy domains for which we have strong expectations regarding how the gender gap varies with women's economic and social position relative to men. We focus on these domains because they represent ideal types in our framework: where larger gender gaps should result from women's increased liberation, where gaps should result from increased vulnerability, and where we expect unconditional differences relative to men. Through this focused examination, we demonstrate the utility of our theoretical framework as an analytical tool for studying gender gaps in preferences in other policy domains or regions.

To test whether at least some of the findings from the developed world extend to the African context, we examine the gender gap in preferences over managing the economy. To the extent that prioritizing management of the economy results from access to employment (which itself stems from greater access to education), women should care less about the economy relative to men when they have unequal access, or when they have access that is generally limited to non-monetized jobs. An increase in women's prioritization of the economy relative to men would therefore be consistent with evidence of a favourable shift in women's empowerment. If, on average, male constituents start off with higher preferences for the economy, it follows that a favourable shift would be evidenced by the narrowing of the gender gap.

By contrast, discussions of the gender gap in India (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004) and Indonesia (Olken, 2010) have focused on gendered preferences over access to clean water. Here, women's greater relative preference is considered an unfavourable gap as it reflects their vulnerability. Fetching water has a higher opportunity cost for poorer women and is more likely to be a strictly woman's role in the least modernized communities and in cultures and religions that emphasize traditional divisions of labour between men and women. Thus, women should care more about water relative to men when they are most vulnerable. If women start off with a greater prioritization for water, on average, then a larger gap would be evidence of less women's empowerment.

While management of the economy and access to safe water are policy domains in which we expect that women's preference will follow self-interest (which is a function of their socioeconomic status), we expect that prioritization of *poverty alleviation* should be independent of a woman's own vulnerability or economic status. This expectation builds on the social psychological understanding of how the differential patterns of socialization experienced by boys and girls impact their ethical dispositions. For example, Gilligan (1982) argues that morality itself is socially constructed differently for men and women. Through socialization processes that are reinforced since childhood, women internalize an expectation to care for others and to help protect society's most vulnerable members. Men, on the other hand, are encouraged to focus on self-fulfilment, ostensibly consistent with their roles as breadwinners and protectors of the family (Hutchings et al., 2004, p. 515).

In sum, gender differences in the prioritization of different policy domains have different normative implications, with some gaps revealing a favourable status of women and others revealing unfavourable conditions. While we will eventually focus on three specific policy domains – the economy, water, and poverty – in order to elucidate these differences, in the next section, we first measure gender gaps in preferences for a wider array of policy domains.

### **Gender differences in political preferences across Africa**

We locate our study in sub-Saharan Africa, where evidence on the gender gap in policy preferences is absent and yet assumptions about such a gap fuel policies to increase female political representation. Studying this region has several advantages. First, there is substantial variation in the status of women across Africa, which allows us to explore how local conditions

might affect the construction of gender-based policy preferences. Second, in exploiting this variation, we are still able to hold constant institutional features that are relatively common across the continent, such as similar colonial experiences, countries' relations to the West, and the diffusion of ideas. Finally, in Afrobarometer we have a standardized survey that allows us to compare a representative sample of men and women from a relatively large set of countries.

Using data from the fourth round (2008-2009) of the Afrobarometer survey (henceforth AB4), we evaluate respondents' policy preferences in various domains as a function of their gender. Nineteen countries are included in AB4: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> The data set includes 26,449 respondents across these countries, with roughly 1,200 respondents in all countries except Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda, where 2,400 respondents were interviewed. Samples are designed to be nationally representative, and thus all our regressions include sampling weights. The sampling frame for all Afrobarometer surveys is stratified by gender to ensure gender parity.

Respondents' policy priorities are captured by the following question:

*In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?*

Each respondent was asked to give up to three open-ended responses, which were later coded by the enumerator into one of 33 possible response categories. We collapse those 33 response categories into 10: economy, poverty, infrastructure, health, agriculture, water, education, violence, social and political rights, and "other" government services. An additional category ("none") identifies respondents who did not indicate any policy priorities. Each category is treated as a binary variable, such that a respondent is coded as prioritizing a policy domain (variable value equals 1) if she mentions it in one of her three responses. This classification scheme is elaborated in Table 1, and summary statistics for all variables discussed below are reported in Table A.1 of the online appendix.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> We dropped Cape Verde from our analysis given its unique history as an unpopulated island prior to colonialism and its very small population size.

<sup>11</sup> The online appendix is at <https://sites.google.com/site/jessicaagottlieb/research/OnlineAppendix.pdf?attredirects=0&d=1>.





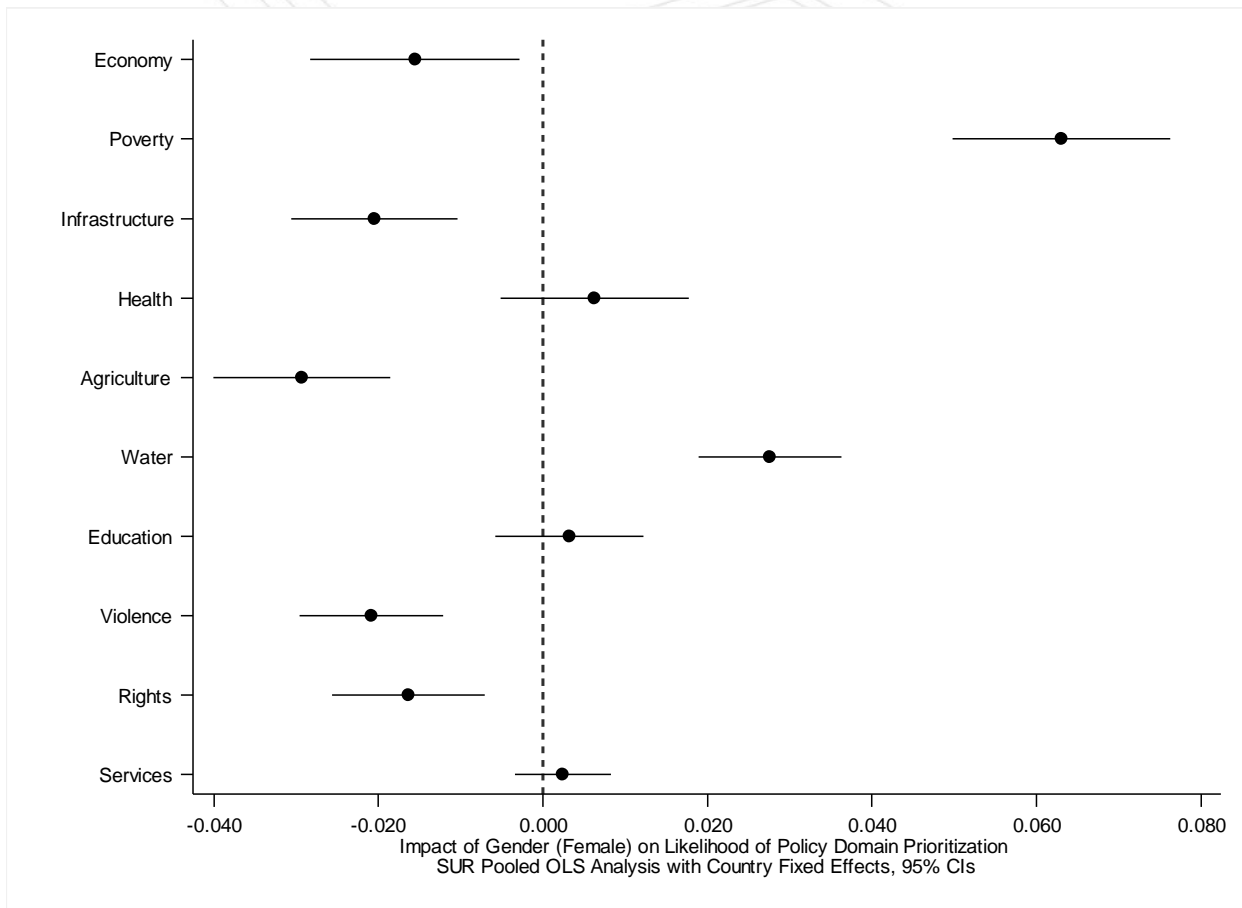
**Table 1: Classifying policy domains**

Category	Afrobarometer response
Economy	Management of the economy Wages, incomes, and salaries Unemployment Rates and taxes Loans and credit
Poverty	Poverty/destitution Food shortage/famine Orphans/street children/homeless children
Infrastructure	Transportation Communications Infrastructure/roads Electricity
Health	Health HIV/AIDS Sickness/disease
Agriculture	Farming/agriculture Drought Land
Water	Water supply
Education	Education
Violence	Crime and security Political violence Political instability/political divisions/ethnic tensions War (international) Civil war
Social/Political rights	Discrimination/inequality Gender issues/women's rights Democracy/political rights Corruption
Services	Housing Services (other)
None	Nothing/no problems Don't know

To explore whether policy preferences are structured along gender lines, we run seemingly unrelated OLS pooled regressions, with country fixed effects, separately for each of the 10 categories, controlling only for the total number of priority responses given (1–3).<sup>12</sup> We do not control for covariates on which men and women differ – such as wealth, education, urbanization, and labour market participation – since we are interested in political preferences that reflect differences in women’s social roles and cultural position, rather than limiting ourselves to biological differences. The results are presented graphically in Figure 1 and in tabular form in Tables A.2 and A.3 of the online appendix.

We find that women are significantly more likely to prioritize the government addressing poverty and access to clean water. In contrast, men are more likely to prioritize the economy, infrastructure, agriculture, violence, and social and political rights. There is no difference in the prioritization of education and the residual category of government services. While seven of the 10 substantive policy categories are prioritized by one gender over the other, these marginal differences are relatively small. The largest gender effect is for poverty, with women being 6 percentage points more likely to prioritize it, on average. For all other differences, the magnitude is less than 4 percentage points, which is a smaller difference than those identified in the developed world.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1: Impact of gender (female) on policy domain prioritization (pooled analysis)**

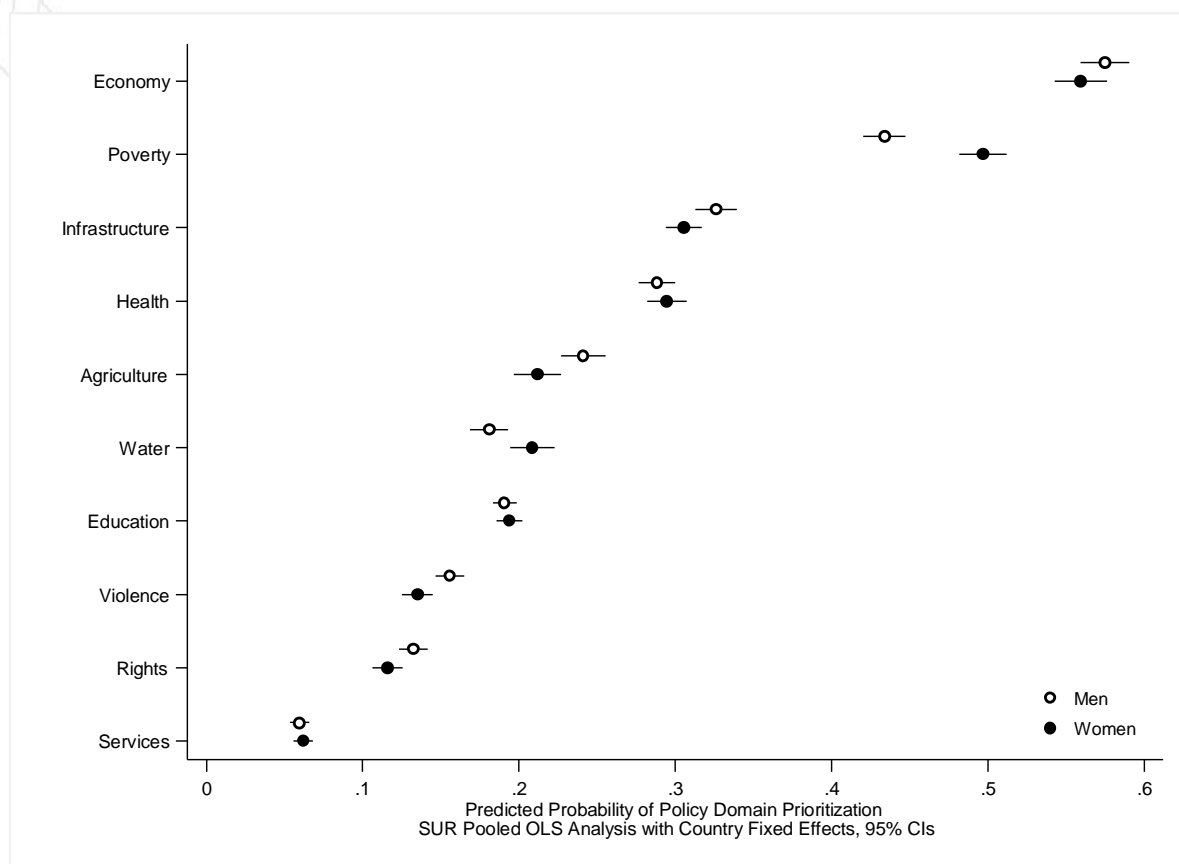


<sup>12</sup> We use seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) estimation since the 10 categories (i.e. outcomes measures) are not independent of each other. SUR allows combining the estimation results – parameter estimates and associated (co)variance matrices – into one parameter vector and simultaneous (co)variance matrix of the sandwich/robust type. This (co)variance matrix is appropriate even if the estimates were obtained on the same data.

<sup>13</sup> Edlund and Pande (2002), Inglehart and Norris (2000), and Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) document gaps in partisanship on the order of about 8 to 10 percentage points in the United States and Europe.

Additionally, these differences are not large enough to significantly change the rank order of preferences by gender. Using the pooled estimates, Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of policy prioritization by domain for men and women separately. The overall prioritization of the five most important policy domains is identical for men and women: economy, poverty, infrastructure, health, and agriculture. The only difference emerges with the sixth and seventh most frequently mentioned, with men prioritizing education (slightly) over water, while women prioritize water over education. In short, we identify small statistically significant gender gaps for most policy domains, but those gaps do not result in meaningful differences in the ranking of policy priorities.

**Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of policy domain prioritization by gender (pooled analysis)**



### Explaining variation in policy prioritization gender gaps

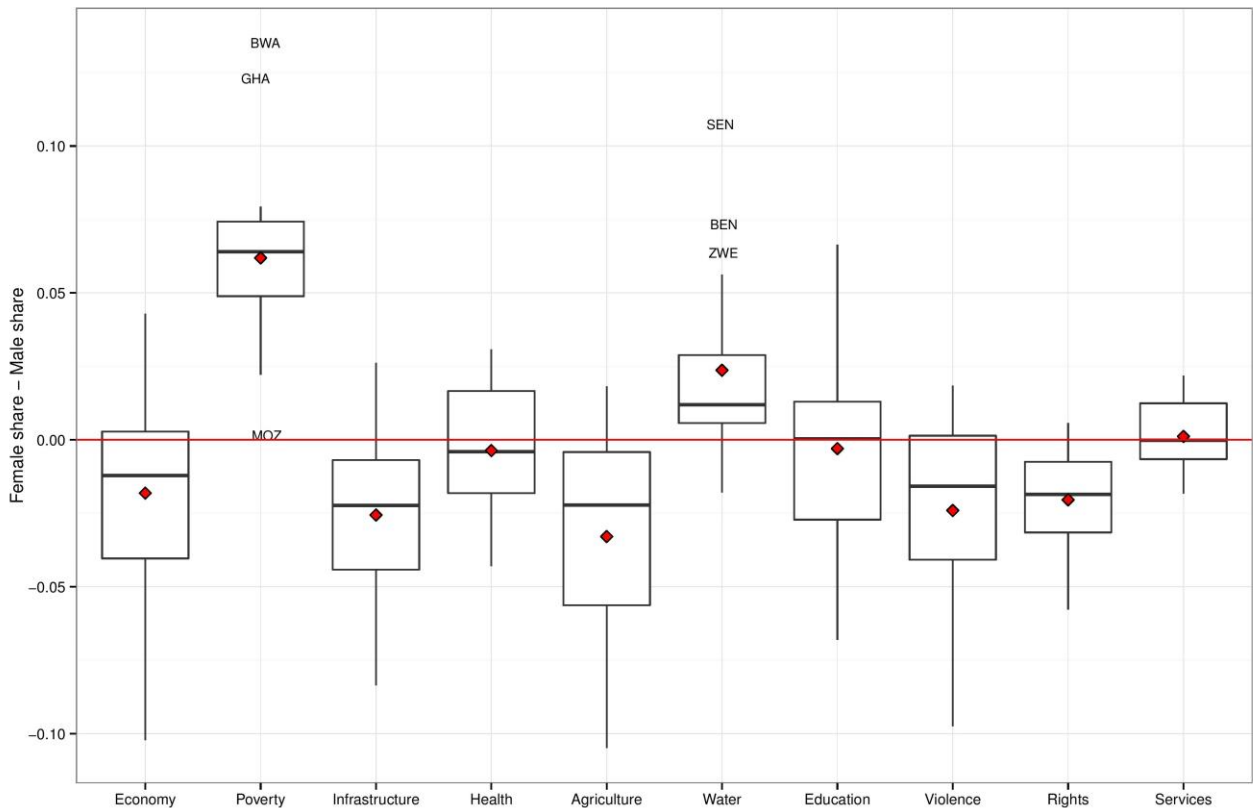
While the results presented above do not suggest large gender differences in policy prioritization, the pooled analyses on which they are based may mask significant variation in gender gaps both by policy domain and across and within countries. Figure 3 plots the distribution of country-level gender gaps (the proportion of women who prioritize a policy domain minus the proportion of men) by policy domain. The figure demonstrates clearly that while for some policy domains the gender gap diverges little between countries (e.g. poverty and water), for other domains the gap exhibits a rather large cross-country variation (e.g. economy and agriculture). This suggests that for some domains the sources of variation could be traced to country-level factors, whereas for other policy domains the gap between female and male survey respondents would need to be explained by other factors.

Figure 3 also demonstrates that while some domains are clearly much more likely to be prioritized by women (e.g. poverty and water) and others by men (e.g. infrastructure and agriculture), there are several policy domains that are arguably “gender-neutral” (such as health and education). The importance of these findings is that the extent to which policy priorities exhibit a gender gap is very much a function of the nature of the policy domain itself. Importantly, the fact that attributes of a policy domain mediate the extent to which female constituents exhibit different preferences than

their male counterparts informed our decision to refrain from combining the 10 domains into a single measure.



**Figure 3: Country-level gender gap distribution by policy prioritization**

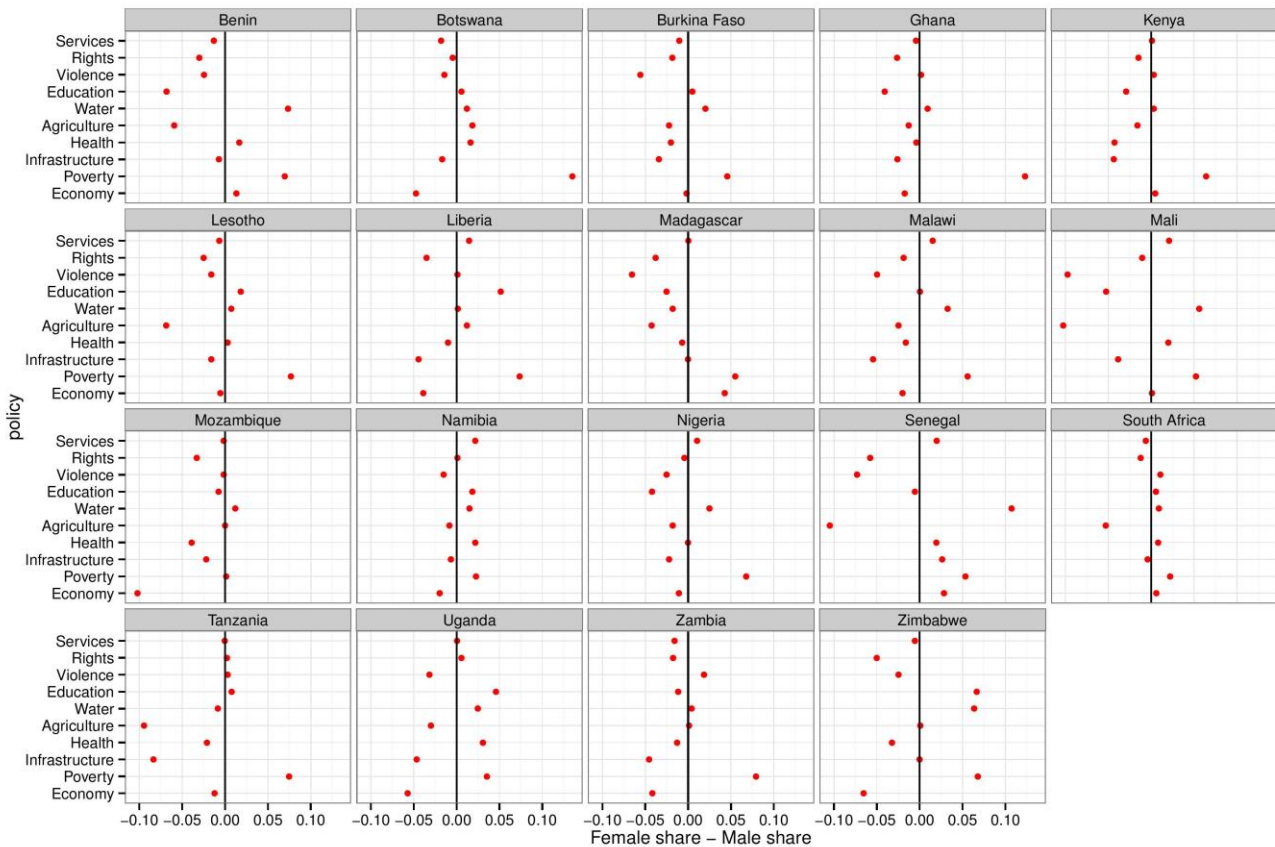


Note: Diamonds refer to the mean gap across the 19 countries.

Figure 4 plots, instead, the gender gaps in policy priorities separately for each of the 19 countries in the AB4 sample. The figure demonstrates clearly that overall gender-based divergence of policy priorities is larger for some countries (e.g. Mali, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and Benin) than for others (e.g. South Africa and Namibia). Combining the findings from Figure 3 and Figure 4, there is rather strong evidence that local conditions are (also) mediating the relationship between gender and policy preferences.

Finally, the pooled results may also belie variation *within* countries in the degree of gender divergences over policy prioritization. For example, if there are gender gaps in different directions across different segments of a society, this would result in a small average gender gap despite large differences among large portions of the population. We therefore exploit variation both within and across African countries as leverage to explore the correlates of the size of the gender gap in light of the theoretical distinctions between favourable and unfavourable gaps. As previously discussed, we focus in on three key policy domains – economy, water, and poverty – which serve as ideal types in our theoretical framework of how social and economic conditions should relate to variations in the size of the gender gap.

Figure 4: Gender gaps in policy prioritization by country



### Country-level correlates

We have argued, and presented tentative evidence, that the size of (at least some) gender gaps in policy preference is a function of local conditions. In this section, we evaluate empirically whether economic and social characteristics of countries are correlated with the size of the gender gap across the three key policy domains. Following our theoretical framework, we first create a variable that measures the proportion of women who are employed, which is estimated separately for each country in the sample using the proportion of AB4 female respondents who report being employed in a monetized job.<sup>14</sup> Female labour participation ranges from less than 10% in Malawi and Burkina Faso to almost 60% in Ghana.

As for social factors, we evaluate the impact of a country's female vulnerability score as well as its Muslim population share. A complex and multi-dimensional construct, female vulnerability for each country is represented as a standardized index that includes the extent and legality of polygyny,<sup>15</sup> adolescent fertility rate,<sup>16</sup> education gap between men and women,<sup>17</sup> maternal mortality,<sup>18</sup> and average age of first marriage for women.<sup>19</sup> These different factors are adjusted such that higher

<sup>14</sup> We rely on survey respondents' answer to the following question: "Do you have a job that pays a cash income? Is it full-time or part-time? And are you presently looking for a job (even if you are presently working)?" Women are considered to be employed if they answer yes to the first part of the question, regardless of whether the position is full- or part-time. We adjust our estimates of female labour participation to take survey weights into account.

<sup>15</sup> Rose McDermott's four-point scale regarding legality and prevalence of polygyny coded in 2010. Accessed at [womenstats.org](http://womenstats.org) on May 1, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Gender Inequality Index 2012, United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>17</sup> World Development Indicators 2005 (or closest year when missing), World Bank.

<sup>18</sup> World Development Indicators 2010, World Bank.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank, various years.

values reflect greater vulnerability, standardized, and then combined into a single index using an inverse covariate weighted average.<sup>20</sup> The resulting index suggests that women are least vulnerable in Namibia (-1.57), Botswana (-1.52), and South Africa (-1.34) and most vulnerable in Mozambique (0.86), Liberia (0.89), and Mali (1.17). We further explore the role of conservatism and traditional values using a measure of a country's share of the population identifying as Muslim culled from the Pew Research Center (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012).<sup>21</sup>

We first run both bivariate and multivariate regressions using our three country-level factors – female labour-force participation, vulnerability index, and Muslim population share – on the size of the gender gap (defined as share female minus share male prioritizing outcome) for our three main policy domains with 19 country observations.<sup>22</sup> The results of these six regressions are presented graphically in Figure 5, with coefficient size presented in standard deviation units, and in Tables A.4, A.5, and A.6 of the online appendix.

In order to examine whether the country-level correlates operate primarily through changes in male or female constituent preferences, we fit, in addition, the following multilevel model:

$$P_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 F_{ij} + \beta_2 L_j + \beta_3 (L_j \times F_{ij}) + \beta_4 V_j + \beta_5 (V_j \times F_{ij}) + \beta_6 M_j + \beta_7 (M_j \times F_{ij}) + \Gamma X_{ij} + \zeta_j + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where the dependent variable,  $P_{ij}$ , is a binary variable that takes the value of 1 if individual  $i$  from country  $j$  has prioritized policy domain  $P \in (\text{Economy}, \text{Water}, \text{Poverty})$ .  $L$ ,  $V$ , and  $M$  are our three country-level characteristics (female labour-force participation, vulnerability index, and Muslim population share), which are interacted with  $F$ , a gender indicator that takes the value of 1 for female respondents and 0 for male respondents.  $X_{ij}$  is a vector of individual-level controls, including a respondent's age, education, urban residence, wealth, and number of policies prioritized.<sup>23</sup> To account for the nested nature of the data we include  $\zeta_j$ , a random intercept for country  $j$ , and  $\varepsilon_{ij}$ , which is the individual error term. Regression results in tabular form are presented in Table A.7 of the online appendix, and predicted probabilities of prioritizing each of the policy domains for male and female respondents are presented graphically in Figure 6, allowing us to interpret the effects presented in Figure 5 in terms of men's and women's relative prioritization. We discuss the results of these two sets of analyses by policy domain, in light of theoretical expectations, below.

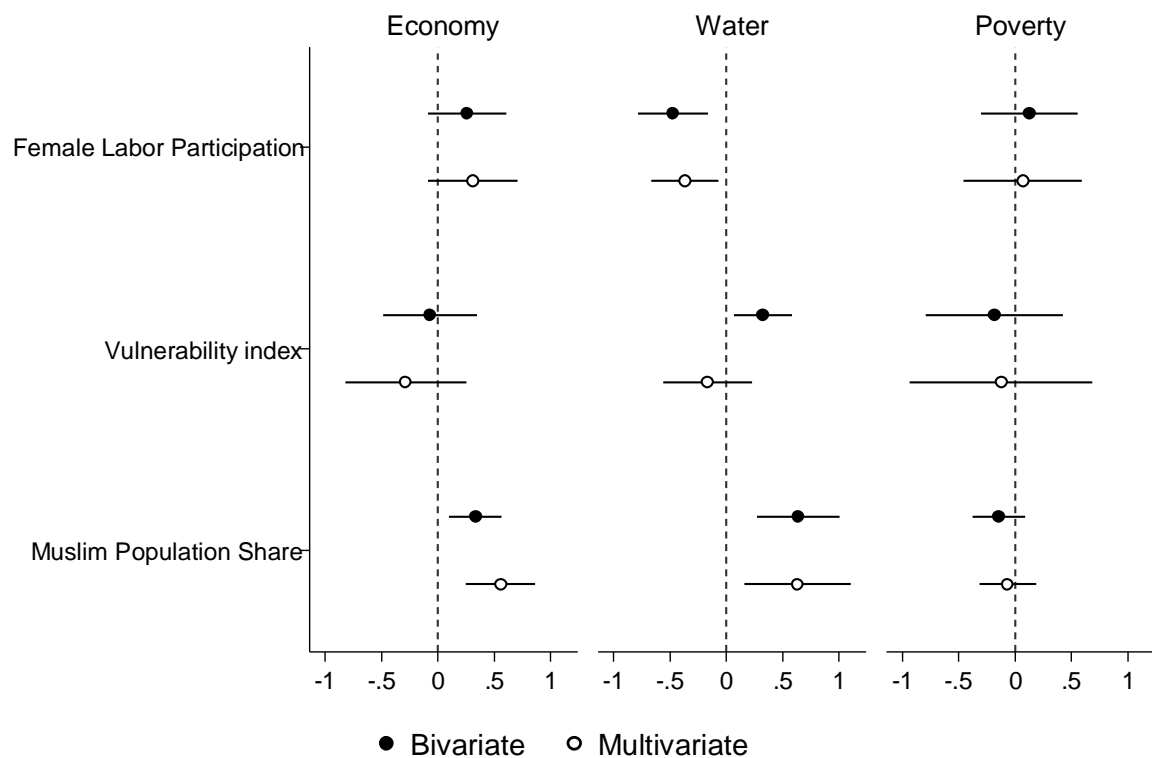
<sup>20</sup> Following the method laid out in Anderson (2008), we weight each component by the inverse of its covariance with other components of the index. This method gives greater weight to the components of the index that have larger variance; i.e. provide greater information.

<sup>21</sup> The correlation between the vulnerability index and a country's share of the population identifying as Muslim is high (0.48) but not perfect, suggesting that they capture different dimensions of vulnerability.

<sup>22</sup> Given the small sample size (19 countries), we refrain from adding control variables that are not derived directly from our theoretical framework.

<sup>23</sup> The wealth variable is itself a composite weighted index based on respondents' self-reported asset base and income as well as subjective evaluation of economic conditions.

**Figure 5: Country-level correlations of gender gap in policy prioritization (SD units, 90% CIs)**

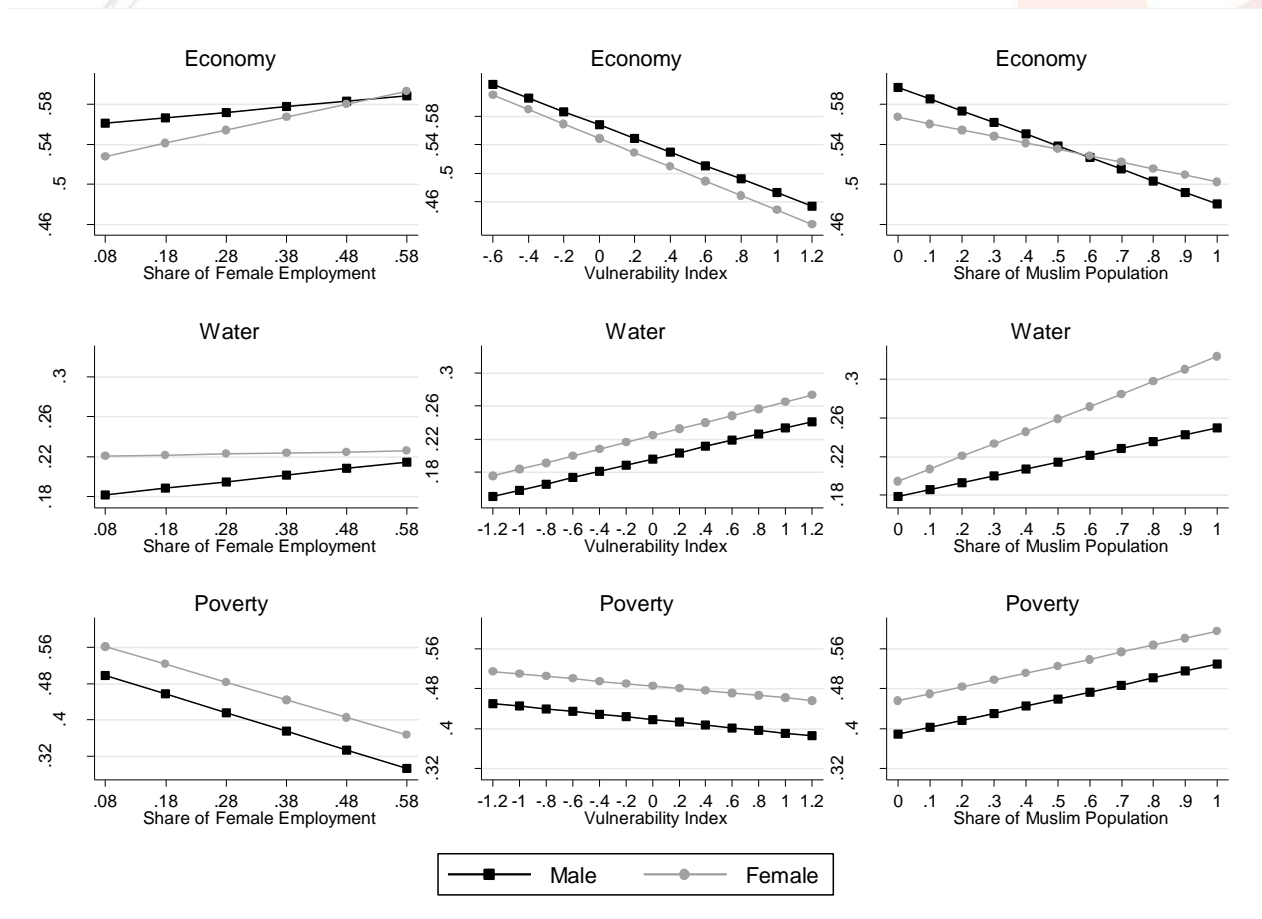


### Management of the economy

Men tend to prioritize management of the economy more than women, which means that the gender gap has a negative value (Figure 3). Thus, positive coefficients in Figure 5 indicate factors that *shrink* the size of that gap, while negative coefficients point to factors that widen the gap. Following our theoretical discussion, we expect that indicators of female advancement within society will shrink the gap, while indicators of female vulnerability and inequality will widen it. Consistent with findings from the developed world and our theoretical expectations, female labour participation reduces the gender gap between men and women. Though the size of the effect is relatively large (0.31 standard deviations), it nonetheless falls below conventional level of significance ( $p = 0.190$ ). We can see in the top left panel of Figure 6 that this effect is indeed driven by different degrees to which women prioritize the economy as a function of their participation in the formal work force, which has little impact on men's prioritization.

As expected, the vulnerability index is negatively correlated with the size of the gap (widens the gap), but the effect is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.368$ ), and there appears to be only a slight widening of the gap in the top middle panel of Figure 6. Finally, Muslim population share has a very large (0.56 standard deviations) and statistically significant positive effect on the gender gap ( $p = 0.006$ ), shrinking the size of the gap between men and women (see top right panel of Figure 6). In countries with a small Muslim population share, men prioritize the economy more than women. However, in Muslim majority countries, contrary to our expectation, women are more likely than men to prioritize the economy. Note, however, that as Figure 6 makes clear, Muslim population share has a bigger impact on men's likelihood of prioritizing the economy than on women's. In other words, while women's prioritization of the economy decreases with greater Muslim population share, the reversing of the gender gap is driven primarily by larger changes in the political preferences.

Figure 6: Predicted probability of policy prioritization by gender, country-level



Access to clean water

Women tend to prioritize access to clean water more than men, arguably due to their greater responsibility to fetch water for the household, especially in places where women possess fewer roles outside the home. Thus, positive coefficients in Figure 5 indicate factors that *increase* the size of that gap, while negative coefficients point to factors that *shrink* the gap.

Testing first for normatively favourable effects, the negative coefficient on female labour participation in Figure 5 (-0.37 standard deviations) suggests that, as expected, greater financial independence through monetized employment reduces the size of the gap on average ( $p = 0.048$ ). We can see in the left panel of the middle row in Figure 6, however, that this effect is largely driven by men: While women prioritize access to clean water in equal rates across countries, men become more likely to prioritize water as more women enter the work force. This reduction of the gender gap might be because working women increase their relative bargaining power, or because men internalize the greater opportunity costs of fetching water for employed women.

Contrary to expectations, vulnerability is slightly negatively correlated with the size of the gap (-0.17 standard deviations), i.e. the gap is somewhat smaller as women are more vulnerable. However, the correlation is not significant ( $p = 0.465$ ), and there seems to be little impact on differences in the expected rates of prioritization among men and women (second row middle panel, Figure 6). Finally, the large positive coefficient on Muslim population share in Figure 5 (0.63 standard deviations) suggests that the gender gap grows with the share of Muslim population ( $p = 0.033$ ), a pattern that is made clear in the right panel of the second row in Figure 6 and in the significant coefficient on the interaction term between female and Muslim share in Table A.7. This widening of the gap from no gap in non-Muslim countries to a very large gap in Muslim majority countries is consistent with our expectation that social roles within Islam might contribute to normatively negative gender gaps in political preferences.



### Poverty alleviation

On average, women prioritize poverty significantly more than men (Figure 1). As Figure 5 makes clear, none of our three country-level socioeconomic factors explains much of that variation. Female labour participation ( $p = 0.822$ ), female vulnerability ( $p = 0.792$ ), and Muslim population share ( $p = 0.660$ ) are simply uncorrelated with the size of the gender gap across countries (see also the parallel lines across all columns of the bottom row of Figure 6). These findings are indeed consistent with our theoretical expectations derived from the “ethics of care” literature.

We note also that gender gaps in prioritization of poverty-reduction policies are not only the unique domain that women prioritize more than men *in all countries*, but also the domain that exhibits the lowest cross-country variation (Figure 3). This suggests that, at least in the 19 sub-Saharan African countries in our sample, women feel more responsible to demand that the state alleviate the burden of poverty irrespective of key country-level conditions. The consistency of our findings with findings from the developed world (see especially Crowder-Meyer, 2007), suggests that there are clearly important determinants of the gender gap in poverty-alleviation prioritization that are not captured by socioeconomic factors. Indeed, the extent to which this variation stems from gender-based divergent socialization processes (Hutchings et al., 2004) offers exciting opportunities for future empirical research.

### Individual-level correlates

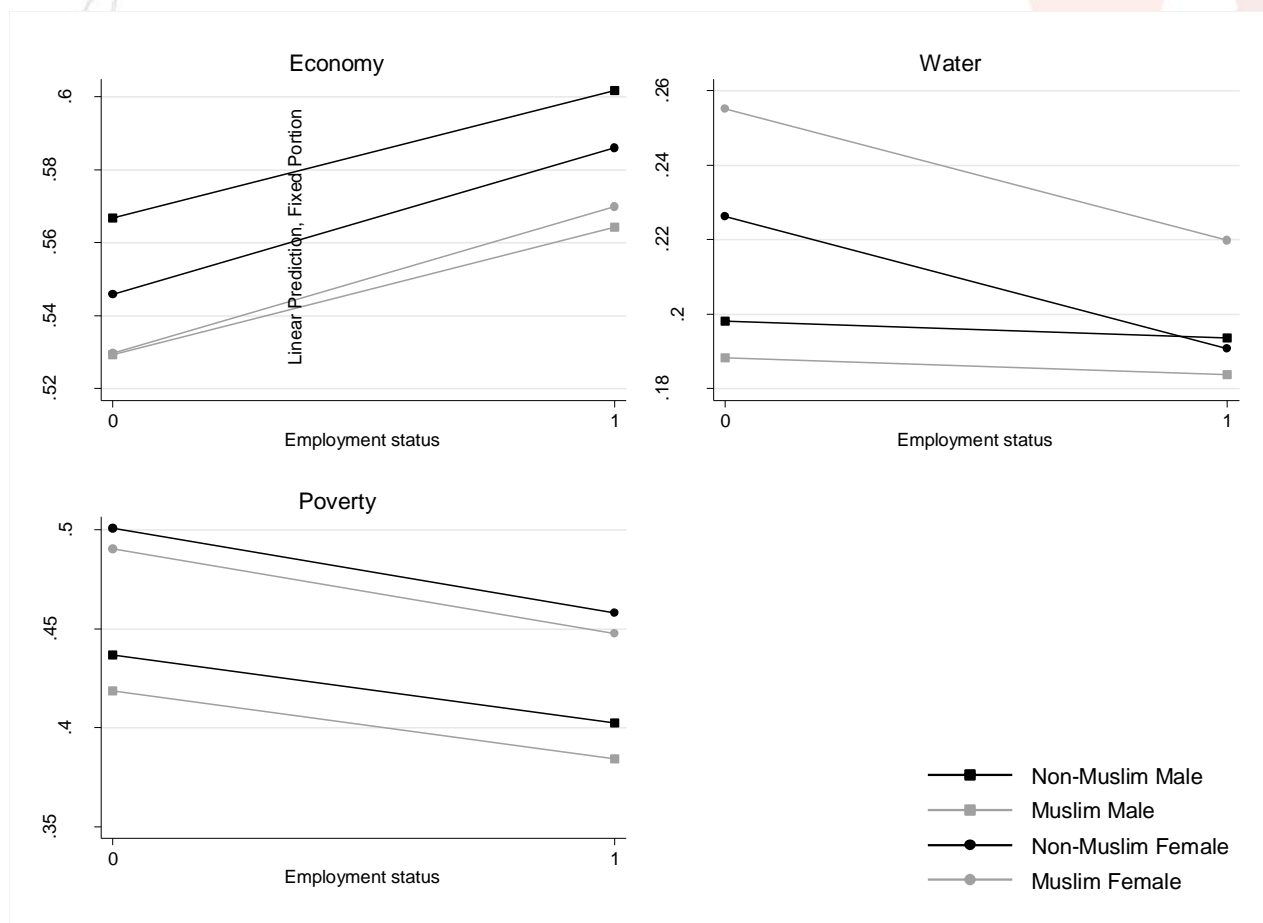
We next evaluate the impact of female labour-force participation and Islam at the individual level on gender gaps in policy prioritization.<sup>24</sup> To do so, we estimate a similar multi-level model as in Equation 1 with country random intercepts, this time interacting our female indicator variable with two individual-level characteristics: having a job that earns a cash income and identifying as Muslim. In addition, all models control for the extent to which a given policy domain is salient to the respondent.<sup>25</sup> The results are presented in Table A.8 of the online appendix and plotted as predicted probabilities in Figure 7.

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<sup>24</sup> Note that we do not have the data required to construct a measure of vulnerability at the individual level.

<sup>25</sup> For the *economy* outcome, we control for a five-point scale measuring whether the respondent’s economic situation is perceived to have gotten better or worse. For the *water* outcome, we control for a five-point scale measuring how often the respondent has gone without water over the past year. Finally, for the *poverty* outcome, we control for the extent to which the survey respondent or anyone in his/her family has gone without food in the past year.

**Figure 7: Predicted probability of policy prioritization by gender and religion, individual-level**



Consistent with the country-level results presented above and our theoretical expectations, labour participation at the individual level narrows the gap between men and women’s prioritization of the economy. This expected pattern, however, only holds for non-Muslims, for whom having a job that earns a cash income essentially eliminates the gap between men and women. For Muslims, women are on average more likely to prioritize management of the economy than men, and labour-force participation further widens this gap. For water prioritization, the gender gap is again much larger for Muslims than non-Muslims, with the gap reduced for both when individuals have cash-income employment. Interestingly, the reduction of the gap due to labour-force participation is driven entirely by women: Men’s prioritization of water does not depend on employment, while women’s employment drastically reduces the prioritization of access to water for both Muslims and non-Muslims (see also the large significant interaction term between female and employment in Table A.8). This finding is consistent with our notion of a normatively desirable gender gap that reflects greater female empowerment. Finally, the individual-level results for poverty are also consistent with country-level results: Neither employment nor Islam explains the gender gap in poverty prioritization.

The overall consistency between the country-level results and the individual-level results suggests that the former are driven by the latter. In other words, the impact of Muslim population share at the country level, for example, seems to be driven by the impact that Islam has on individual men and women, which is aggregated up, and not by some society-level impact of Islam’s importance.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, female labour-force participation overall seems to simply reflect the

<sup>26</sup> To test whether the Islam effect is instead being driven by a frequent correlate of Islam – living in the Sahel – we looked within mixed-religion countries that span the Sahel (e.g. Mali and Nigeria) and those that do not (e.g. Uganda and Malawi). There was no clear difference in the conditioning effect of Islam in the two contexts, suggesting that the Islam effect is not being driven by proximity to the Sahel.

aggregated impact that formal employment has on women's preferences rather than societal-level shifts due to employment expectations (that are independent of a woman's actual employment status).

### What does the gender gap mean for politics?

This research was motivated by the need to better understand the accuracy of two assumptions underlying gender-based quotas: that there are meaningful gender-based differences in policy priorities and that the current state of politics does not sufficiently represent these divergent preferences. We have demonstrated that important gender gaps do exist, especially after disaggregating policy outcomes, and we suggested that economic and social factors help shape those differences. In this section, we return to the motivation of the research and examine the relationship between gender gaps in policy preferences and barriers to the aggregation of female constituents' divergent priorities. We do so by examining the relationship between gender gaps in policy preference and gender gaps in political participation and formal representation.

#### *Gender gaps in political participation*

Existing research has documented a sizeable gender gap in political participation across African states (Logan & Bratton, 2006). While gender differences in access to information, education, employment, and poverty explain a portion of the gap, macro-level factors such as political intimidation and gender inequality are larger drivers of the gap in participation (Barnes & Burchard, 2013; Isaksson, Kotsadam, & Nerman, 2014). Within the context of this study, a gender gap in political participation has the most negative implications for representation when men and women have different preferences.

We therefore evaluate the degree of structural barriers for women to communicate their divergent preferences by examining the relationship between gender gaps in preferences with those in political participation. We measure political participation by combining the following set of variables using a standardized weighted summary index: membership in voluntary association or community group (AB4, Q22B), attendance at community meetings in the past year (AB4, Q23A), joining others to raise an issue (AB4, Q23B), attending a demonstration or protest march (AB4, Q23C), voting in the most recent general elections (AB4, Q23D), and contacting one's local government councillor (AB4, Q25A), MP (Q25B), or other government official (Q25C).<sup>27</sup> We calculate the average individual-level measure of political participation for men and women separately in each of the 19 countries, and then take the difference between the average for men and women as our measure of the size of the gender gap in political participation. The mean gender gap in political participation is equal to 0.18 standard deviations with small differences in Botswana (0.03 standard deviations), Namibia (0.05), and South Africa (0.05) and much larger gender gaps in Ghana (0.31) and Mali (0.33).

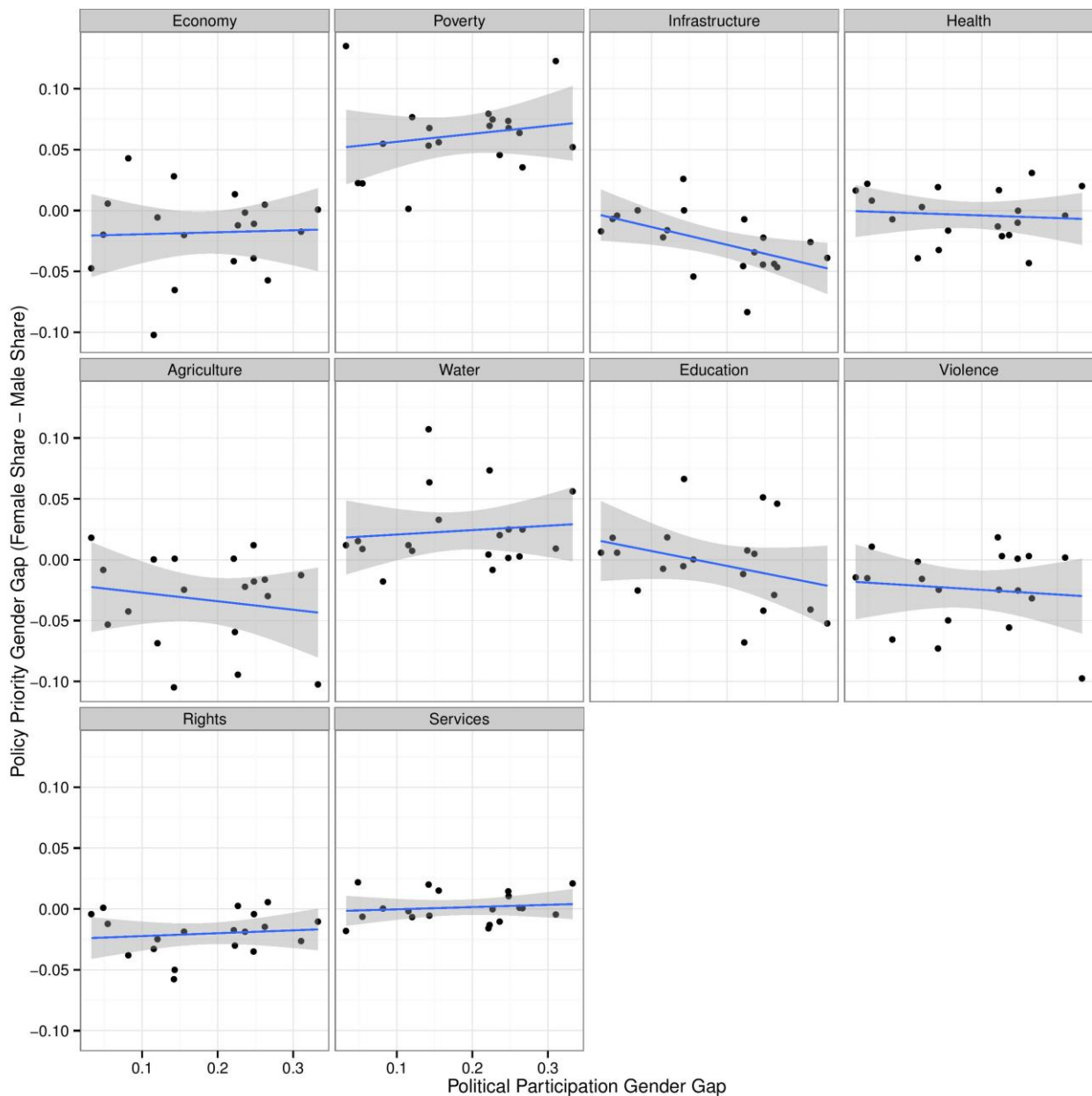
We begin by examining the relationship between the political participation gender gap and the gender gaps in prioritization of each policy domain. Figure 8 shows that in several key policy domains, larger divergences in policy prioritization are associated with larger gender gaps in political participation. For domains typically preferred by men – especially infrastructure, agriculture, and violence – the larger the gap between men and women (more negative values on the y-axis), the larger the gap in political participation. For domains typically preferred by women, such as poverty and water, the larger the gap (more positive values on the y-axis), the larger the gap in political participation. In short, for many domains, there is a positive correlation between gender gaps in preferences and participation.

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<sup>27</sup> All variables are positively correlated, and the index has a relatively high Cronbach's alpha score ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ).



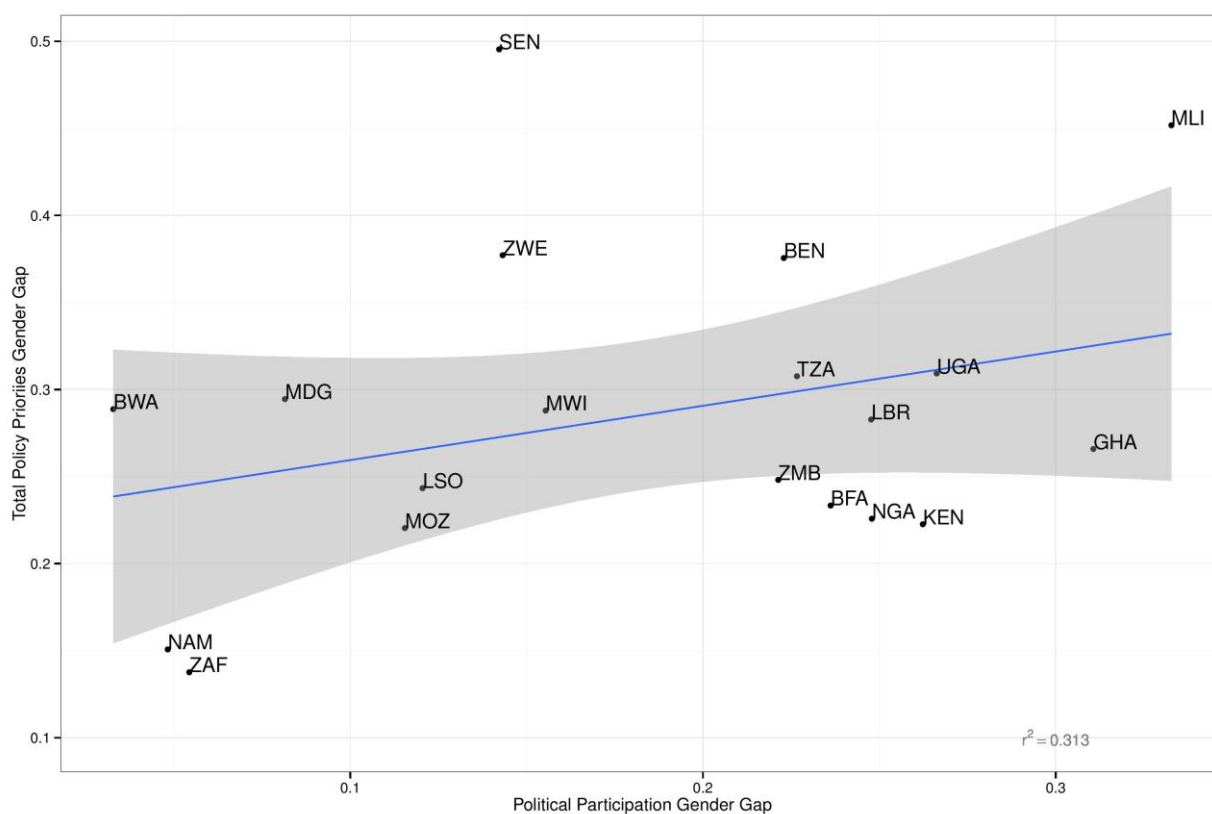
**Figure 8: Relationship between gender gap in (disaggregated) policy prioritization and gender gap in political participation**



If we combine the gender gaps across all domains into a single measure of total gap, by summing the absolute difference between the share of female and the share of male constituents that prioritize each policy domain, then we again see a strong association with the gender gap in political representation. Figure 9 shows this large and significant positive correlation between the gender gap in political participation and the aggregated measure of (total) gender gap in policy prioritization.<sup>28</sup> Together, these findings suggest that the greatest barriers to female participation are present exactly where their removal is most needed due to women's distinct preferences.

<sup>28</sup> The correlation coefficient is  $r = 0.313$ . If we drop the two outlier cases, Mali and Senegal, the correlation coefficient decreases slightly to  $r = 0.299$ .

**Figure 9: Relationship between gender gap in (aggregated) policy prioritization and gender gap in political participation**



### Gender gaps in political representation

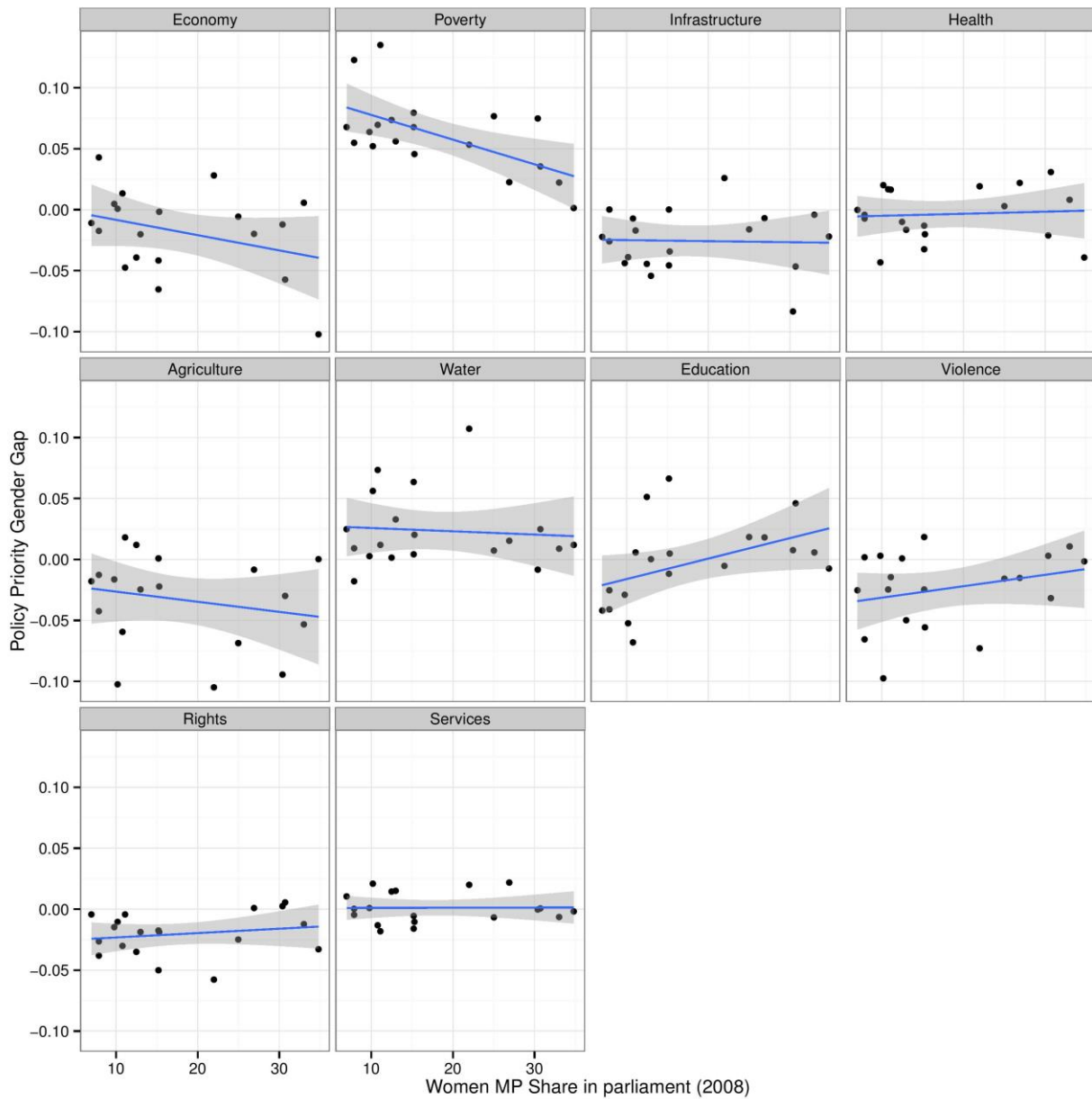
Even if women participate in politics less often than men, their distinct preferences might still be adequately represented if female politicians share their preferences and hold positions of power. While women are formally represented in politics at relatively high rates in Africa on average, there is significant variation across countries. Previous research has found that patriarchal culture and ethnic-based clientelism reduce female representation in positions of power, while institutional designs such as proportional representation and quotas increase it (Yoon, 2004; Arriola & Johnson, 2014). For the purposes of this research, we wish to understand whether there is a relationship between the gender gap in policy prioritization and descriptive female representation. We measure the degree of female representation using the share of members of Parliament – in the lower or single House – in 2008 who are female (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008). In our sample of 19 countries, Mozambique has the largest proportion of women (35%), while Nigeria has the smallest (7%).

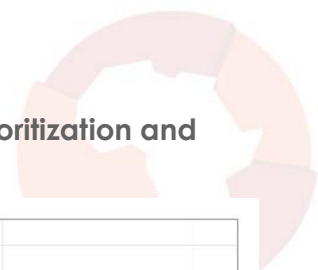
Similar to the results presented in the previous section, in Figure 10 we present the relationship with each policy domain separately, while in Figure 11 we present the relationship between female representation and the aggregated (total) gender gap in policy preferences. The results are consistent with the findings regarding political participation. The smaller the share of female representation in Parliament, the larger the gap in prioritization of several key domains, such as poverty, education, and violence, with a weaker relationship for political rights (and a surprisingly opposite relationship for management of the economy). When summing over all policy domains, a clearer picture emerges: Places that exhibit large divergence of gender-based preferences are also those in which the share of women members of Parliament is the smallest.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The correlation coefficient is  $r = -0.267$ . If we drop the two outlier cases, Mali and Senegal, the correlation coefficient is slightly stronger at  $r = -0.359$ .

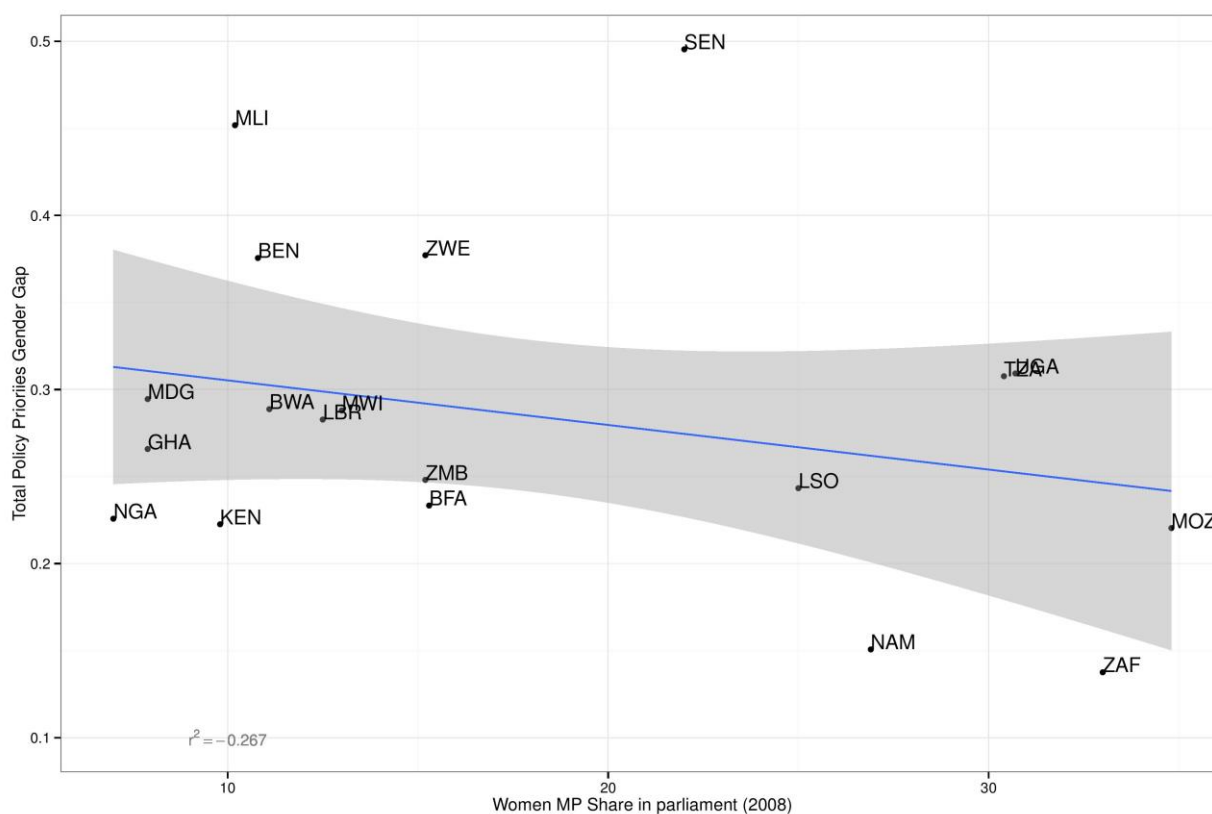
This analysis, again, suggests that where the representation of women is most needed due to gender-based differences in political preferences, female politicians are least likely to hold political office. The grim reality that emerges from this empirical exploration is that the assumption of gender differences in policy preferences that motivates institutional reforms encouraging women's representation (e.g. gender quotas) are most visibly present in the countries that currently exhibit the greatest barriers for both female participation and representation.

**Figure 10: Relationship between gender gap in (disaggregated) policy prioritization and female (descriptive) representation**





**Figure 11: Relationship between gender gap in (aggregated) policy prioritization and female (descriptive) representation**



## Discussion

This paper explores the size and direction of gender gaps in the prioritization of government action on a broad spectrum of policy areas in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, we find modest differences between men and women in terms of policy preferences when pooling across a relatively large number of countries, but more meaningful differences when disaggregating the analysis between and within countries. Drawing from existing literature on gender gaps in industrialized countries over time, we make normative evaluations of gender gaps across policy domains and then evaluate how economic and social factors shape those differences. Using variation in the size of the gender gap both across and within 19 African countries, we report a set of patterns that are consistent across both levels.

Measures of women's economic and social status indeed correlate as predicted with the size of the gender gap for the policy domains illustrating a favourable gap (economy) and unfavourable gap (water). However, the relationship between these correlates and the unfavourable gap, access to water, is larger and more statistically significant than it is for the favourable gap, management of the economy. This may be explained by the truncated nature of our sample, which is restricted to a set of relatively low-income countries that are more likely to suffer from problems of fiscal and bureaucratic capacity that weaken the relationship between women's financial liberation and government policy.

Specifically, we find that greater (financial) independence of women, proxied by female labour participation, closes the gaps between men's and women's prioritization of the economy and access to clean water. These results are consistent with earlier research that attributed shifts in women's political preferences in response to changes in their economic standing within the home and within society at large. Women's vulnerability widens the differences between genders on the economy, though this effect is admittedly small. The effect of Islam is both larger and more nuanced than the other two factors: While it increases the size of the gap for water prioritization, it reverses the typical gender gap for management of the economy, leading women to prioritize it more than men. This latter counter-intuitive effect seems to be a result of shifts in the economic

preferences of Muslim men more than Muslim women. Further, we find that individual- and country-level demographic variables have little explanatory power with respect to a gender gap in the prioritization of poverty alleviation. We have argued that this finding is consistent with theories focusing on differences in gender-based socialization processes in early childhood.

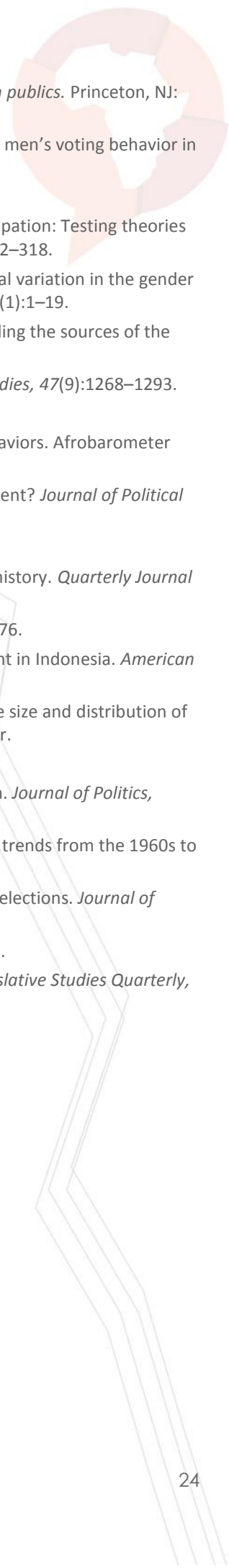
In the last section, we turned to exploring the relationship between gender-based divergence of policy priorities and the barriers that women face in aggregating those preferences. We find that there is a strong positive relationship between the gender gap in preferences and barriers to women's preference aggregation in the form of women's participation and women's representation. In other words, it is exactly in countries where women and men have the most distinct preferences that we also find that women face the greatest difficulties to participate in politics and to get elected to office.

Given that there are meaningful gender differences in preferences, at least in some contexts, an important avenue for future research is to examine whether greater descriptive representation actually leads to better substantive representation. Evidence from India suggests that female policy makers do better serve the interests of female constituents because of aligned preferences (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004), but whether this is the case in Africa is an open question. Many policy interventions on the continent are aimed at increasing the number of female representatives via quotas, presumably under the assumption that such policies will lead to better representation of "women's issues." However, the results of this paper suggest that at least some such interests, such as improved access to safe water, are only women's issues in contexts where women are vulnerable and dependent. Thus, rather than improving representation for women alone, perhaps policy should instead be aimed at alleviating the causes of divergent gender preferences.



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**Appendix**

An appendix containing tables A.1-A.8 can be found at <https://sites.google.com/site/jessicaagottlieb/research/OnlineAppendix.pdf?attredirects=0&d=1>.



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