

Using traditional leaders to end child marriage: Evidence from a survey experiment in Malawi

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Introduction

- International agencies and states use traditional leaders to spearhead reforms designed to end child marriages.
- Rigorous evidence for the success of using traditional leaders in promoting gender equality is scarce.
- We experimentally evaluate the added value of using male and female traditional leaders as campaign endorsers, compared to that of elected leaders in Malawi.
- Findings: Homogenous effects show that the only endorser who does not do damage, is the female traditional leader.

Literature review

- Traditional leaders effective partners in development projects focusing on infrastructure (Baldwin, 2016).
- Traditional practices, along with poverty, seen as a driver of child marriages (Wodon, 2015; Lee-Rife et al., 2012; Baird et al., 2011).
- Literature on gender equality see traditional leaders as potential counter-actors against family law reform (Htun and Weldon, 2010; Hudson et al., 2015; Tripp et al., 2009; Muriaas et al., 2016).

The source and content of a message

- Institutional trust and simple heuristics (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Carmines and Kuklinski, 1990; Mondak, 1993).
 - **Role incongruence** (Walker et al., 1986; Eagly, 1987; Cialdini and Trots, 1998; Eagly and Diekmann, 2006).
 - **Gender values: biased assimilation and backfire effect** (Kunda, 1990, Edwards and Smith, 1996; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010).

Data and Methods

- Local Government Performance Index (LGPI), 2016, 7,750 respondents
- Probabilistic multi-stage sampling (17 rural Traditional Authority (TA) and five urban local government wards), Random within household selection
- Face-to-face interviews in either *Chichewa* or *Chitumbuka*.
- 1,381 randomly selected respondents received survey experiment on child marriage
- Five conditions randomly distributed across sampling units; two independent variable significantly related to treatment (used ordered logistic regression for control)
- Direct questions (logistic regression) and experiment (ordered logistic regression)

Direct Questions: Dependent Variables

- Belief that child marriage is a problem in Malawi: Not serious at all (5%), somewhat serious (9%), and very serious (86%).
- Support for a law setting the minimum age of marriage to 18: strongly support (73%) support (13%), do not support (6%), do not support at all (8%).

Direct Questions: Independent Variables

- Respondent and interviewer gender: Female (=1), male (=0)
- Lineage practice: Patrilineal if the family pays lobola (=1), matrilineal if they do not (=0)
- Gender values: More likely to vote for a female candidate (=3), less likely (=1), or no difference (=2)
- Resident: Rural (=1), small urban/urban are (=0)
- Income: Number of rooms, 1-5 or more
- Age: Under 40 years (=1), 40 or more (=0)
- Education: No schooling or informal (=1), some primary (=2), primary completed (=3), some secondary (=4), secondary or higher (=5)
- Number of girls in the home not enrolled in school: 0, 1, or 2 or more

Direct Questions: Findings

- **Poverty** predicts lower support for reforms in both models
- Education not significant predictor of attitudes
- **Patrilineal customs** related to lower support for reforms
- More progressive gender values but not gender predict lower support for reforms

Experimental Design

Control:

The Parliament has passed a new law that sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. What do you think of the law? Do you support it strongly, support it, not support it, or not support it strongly? (N=286)

Female parliamentarian:

A female MP is supporting the new law that sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. What do you think of the law? Do you support it strongly, support it, not support it, or not support it strongly? (N=265)

Female traditional authority:

A female TA is supporting the new law that sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. What do you think of the law? Do you support it strongly, support it, not support it, or not? (N=272)

Male parliamentarian:

A male MP is supporting the new law that sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. What do you think of the law? Do you support it strongly, support it, not support it, or not support it strongly? (N=266)

Male traditional authority:

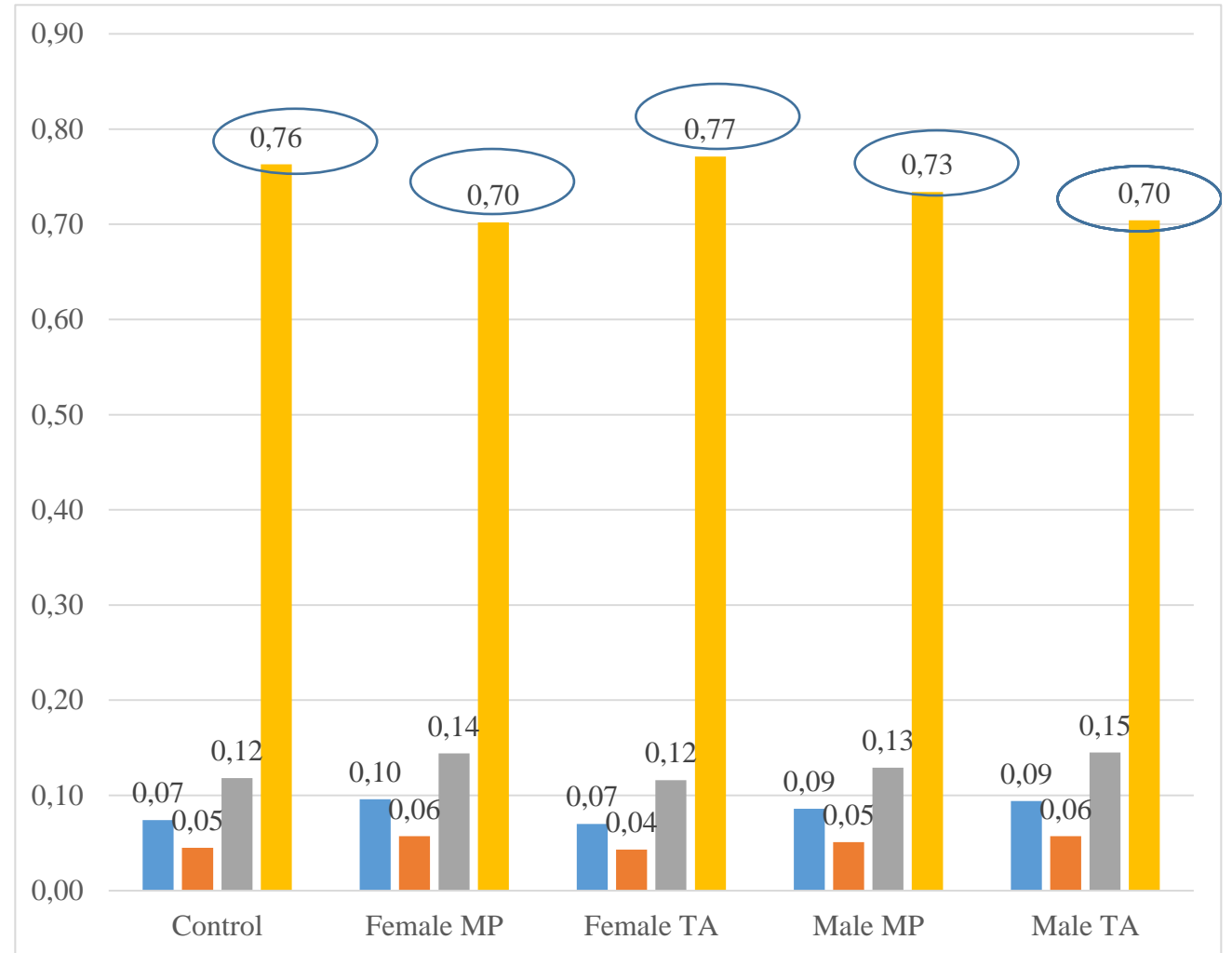
A male TA is supporting the new law that sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. What do you think of the law? Do you support it strongly, support it, not support it, or not support it strongly? (N=283)

Experimental: Independent Variables

- Respondent and interviewer gender: Female (=1), male (=0)
- Lineage practice: Patrilineal if the family pays lobola (=1), matrilineal if they do not (=0)
- Gender values: More likely to vote for a female candidate (=3), less likely (=1), or no difference (=2)
- Income: Number of rooms, 1-5 or more (dichotomized at 0-2, 3-6)
- Age: Under 40 years (=1), 40 or more (=0)
- Education: No schooling or informal-some primary (=0), primary completed-secondary or higher (=1)
- Higher trust in traditional authority: Somewhat or very much (=1), distrusts somewhat or very much (=0)

Average Treatment Effects

- Female traditional authority most effective messenger in full sample (differences significant at the $p < .10$ level)
- Female parliamentarian and male traditional authority least effective



Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

- Matrilineal and patrilineal lineage customs:
- Among those who practice lobola: Male traditional authority most effective, female parliamentarian least effective ($p < .10$)
- Suggests different messenger needed to target different groups

Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

- Prior gender values:
- Those who prefer to vote for males: All endorsements reduce support for the law relative to the control condition ($p < .05$), suggesting backfire effect
- Those who prefer to vote for females: Those who receive male parliamentarian endorsement less likely to strongly support the law than the control ($p < .05$)
- Effects do not vary across income, education, sex, interviewer gender, and trust in one's parliamentarian or traditional authority

Conclusions

- Poverty and cultural practices decrease support for reform (direct models)

The messenger effect:

- Female traditional authorities is the only effective endorser of message in country as a whole (homogeneous treatment effects)
- Among patrilineal respondents, the male traditional authority is most effective (heterogeneous treatment effects)
- Holders of negative gender values respond negatively to all endorsements, suggesting a backfire effect (heterogeneous treatment effects)