

Why Does the Impact of Western Donor Endorsements Depend on the Type of Women's Rights?

Experimental Evidence from Malawi

Lindsay J. Benstead
Ragnhild L. Muriaas
Vibeke Wang



Research Questions



- International actors seek to promote gender equality reforms, often working in concert with local women's right organizations.
- Rigorous evidence for how to best shape public acceptance of women's rights reform is scarce.
- Are western donors or Malawian women's rights organization effective when it comes to improving public support for women's rights reforms?
- Does effectiveness depend on whether a public gender quota reform or private equal land rights' reform issue is being considered?
- Experimentally test using LGPI
- Western donors increase support for quotas; endorsers decrease support for land reforms (backfire effect)

Public Rights versus Private Rights

- Variation between states in women's rights policies adopted in SSA
- Non-doctrinal status policies vs. doctrinal status policies (Htun and Weldon 2011; 2016)
- The rapid spread of gender quotas versus slow change in rights having to do with family, inheritance, and land (Tripp et al. 2009)



Actors for Change: Western Donors and Women's Organizations



Relevance of the Case: Malawi



- Malawi highly aid dependent with strong presence of donors.
- Relatively small, fragmented, and weak women's movement (Tiessen, 2008).
- No electoral gender quota but issue has been on the agenda.
- Gender equality in access to land: Lineage-based land holding systems (Berge et al., 2014).

Theoretical Mechanisms

- Endorsements could **help** (increase support for reforms):
 - Having a message presented by an **expert source**, can increase the likelihood that positive thoughts or favorable interpretations of information are generated (DeSteno et al., 2000; Petty et al., 1993).
 - **Biased assimilation**: Those who support similar views on a related topic will be more positive because they will be more open to accepting messages they agree with.
 - **Interests**: Those who see the messenger as acting in their **interests** will be more open to accepting messages.

Theoretical Mechanisms

- Endorsements could hurt (decrease support for reforms):
 - Backfire effect: Support decreases if the source is not trusted (Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009), messages is against prior views (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010), or the messenger is not acting in receiver's interests.

Hypotheses: Average Treatment Effects

- **H1:** Endorsements, regardless of their sources or of the background or views of the receiver, will increase support for reforms. (Strong influence)

Hypotheses: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Variation in Trust of the Endorser: Backfire Effects)

- **H2a:** Endorsements by western donors will decrease support for reforms among those who distrust western donors. (Backfire effect)
- **H2b:** Endorsements by western donors will decrease support for reforms among those who distrust Malawian women's organizations. (Backfire effect)

Hypotheses: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Variation in Prior Views of Receiver: Backfire Effects)

- **H3a:** Endorsements by western donors and Malawian women's organizations will decrease support for reforms among those who disagree with women's rights in the public sphere. (Backfire effect)
- **H3b:** Endorsements by western donors and Malawian women's organizations will decrease support for reforms among those who disagree with women's rights in the private sphere. (Backfire effect)

Hypotheses: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Variation in Prior Views of Receiver: Backfire Effects)

- **H4a:** Endorsements by western donors and Malawian women's organizations will decrease support for reforms among **men more than women**. (Backfire effect)
- **H4b:** Endorsements by western donors and Malawian women's organizations will decrease support for reforms among people in **patrilineal than matrilineal areas**. (Backfire effect)

Hypotheses: Homogenous Treatment Effects (Variation in Authority and Reform Type: Biased Assimilation and Backfire Effects)

- **H5a:** Endorsements by western donors will depress support less than Malawian women's organizations. (Authority and interests hypothesis)
- **H5b:** Endorsements will decrease support for land reforms more than quotas. (Reform type hypothesis)

Experimental Design

- Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) survey
- 1,704 randomly selected participants who were exposed at random to one of six control and treatment conditions
- Probabilistic sample of Malawians, nationally-representative (Response rate: 94.5%)
- Effective randomization
- Ordered logistic regression

Experimental Design: Quotas (Non-Doctrinal)

Quotas	<p><u>1. Western donors:</u> A group of WESTERN DONORS are supporting a new law to increase the number of women elected to parliament. They say that reserving a set number of seats for women will result in a higher number of women being elected. Would you be not at all likely[=1], somewhat unlikely[=2], somewhat likely[=3], or very likely to support this policy[=4]?</p> <p><u>2. Women's organizations:</u> Malawian WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS are supporting a new law to increase the number of women elected to parliament. They say that reserving a set number of seats for women will result in a higher number of women being elected. Would you be not at all likely[=1], somewhat unlikely[=2], somewhat likely[=3], or very likely to support this policy[=4]?</p> <p><u>3. Control:</u> There are discussions of a new law to increase the number of women elected to parliament. Reserving a set number of seats for women will result in a higher number of women being elected. Would you be not at all likely[=1], somewhat unlikely[=2], somewhat likely[=3], or very likely to support this policy[=4]?</p>
--------	---

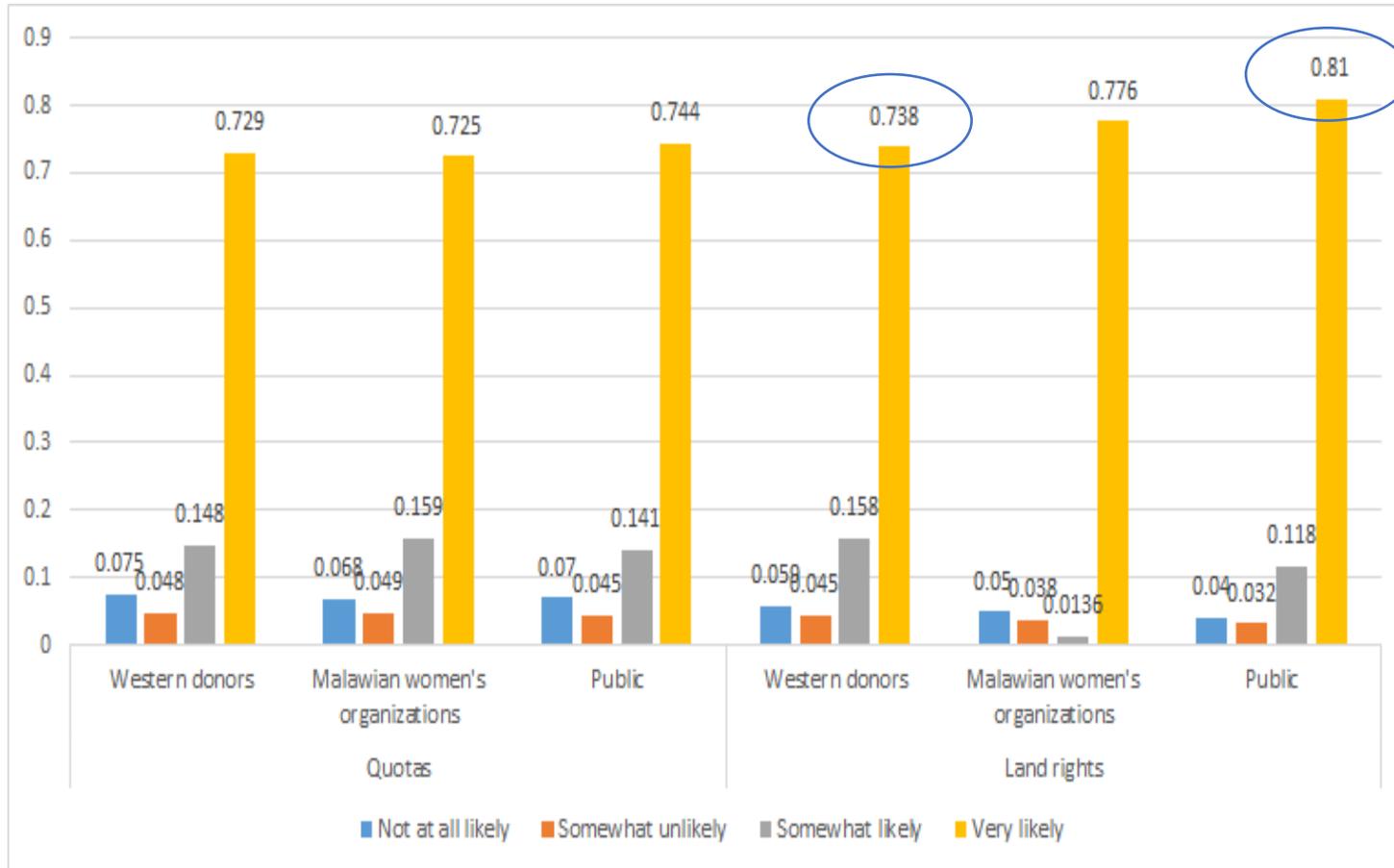
Experimental Design: Land Rights (Doctrinal)

Land Rights	<p><u>4. Western donors:</u> A group of WESTERN DONORS are supporting a new law to ensure that all Malawian women have and can exercise equal rights to own and control land. They say that changing the law will make women more economically independent. Would you be not at all likely[=1], somewhat unlikely[=2], somewhat likely[=3], or very likely to support this policy[=4]?</p> <p><u>5. Women's organizations:</u> Malawian WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS are supporting a new law to ensure all Malawian women have and can exercise equal rights to own and control land. They say that changing the law will make women more economically independent. Would you be not at all likely[=1], somewhat unlikely[=2], somewhat likely[=3], or very likely to support this policy[=4]?</p> <p><u>6. Control:</u> There are discussions of a new law to ensure all Malawian women have and can exercise equal rights to own and control land. Changing the law will make women more economically independent. Would you be not at all likely[=1], somewhat unlikely[=2], somewhat likely[=3], or very likely to support this policy[=4]?</p>
-------------	---

Independent Variables

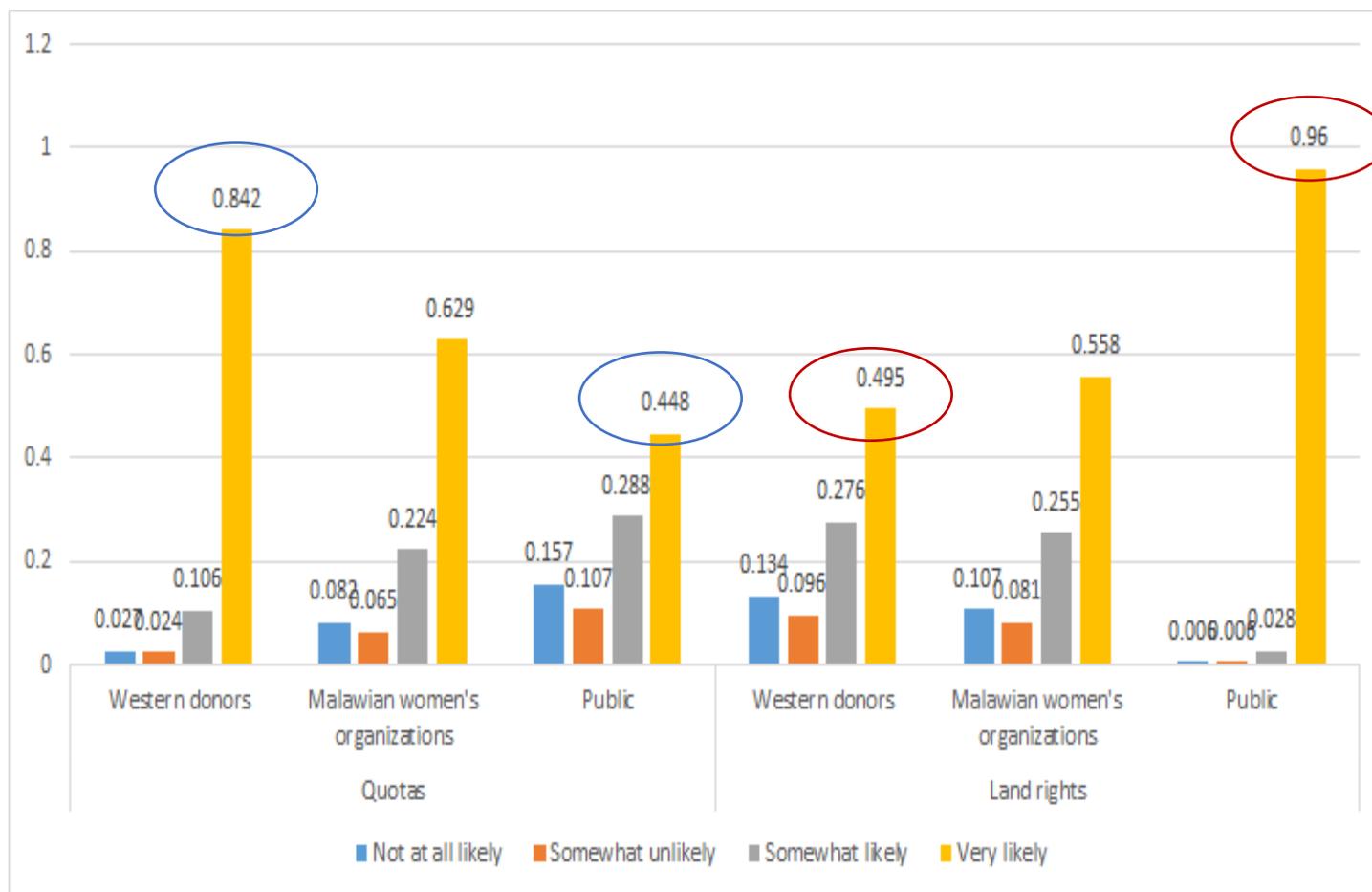
	More likely to support	Less likely to support	Measure
Prior views (Backfire effect)	Women	Men	Respondent sex
	Supporters of gender equality (Public sphere)	Opposers of gender equality (Public sphere)	To what extent are the following serious problems in Malawi today? Low number of women in political offices. Not serious at all. Somewhat serious. Very serious.
	Supporters of gender equality (Private sphere)	Opposers of gender equality (Private sphere)	To what extent are the following serious problems in Malawi today? Unequal land rights for men and women. Not serious at all. Somewhat serious. Very serious.
	People in matrilineal areas	People in patrilineal areas	In your family, is Lobola paid when people get married (bride price/dowry)? Yes. No.

Results: Average Treatment Effects



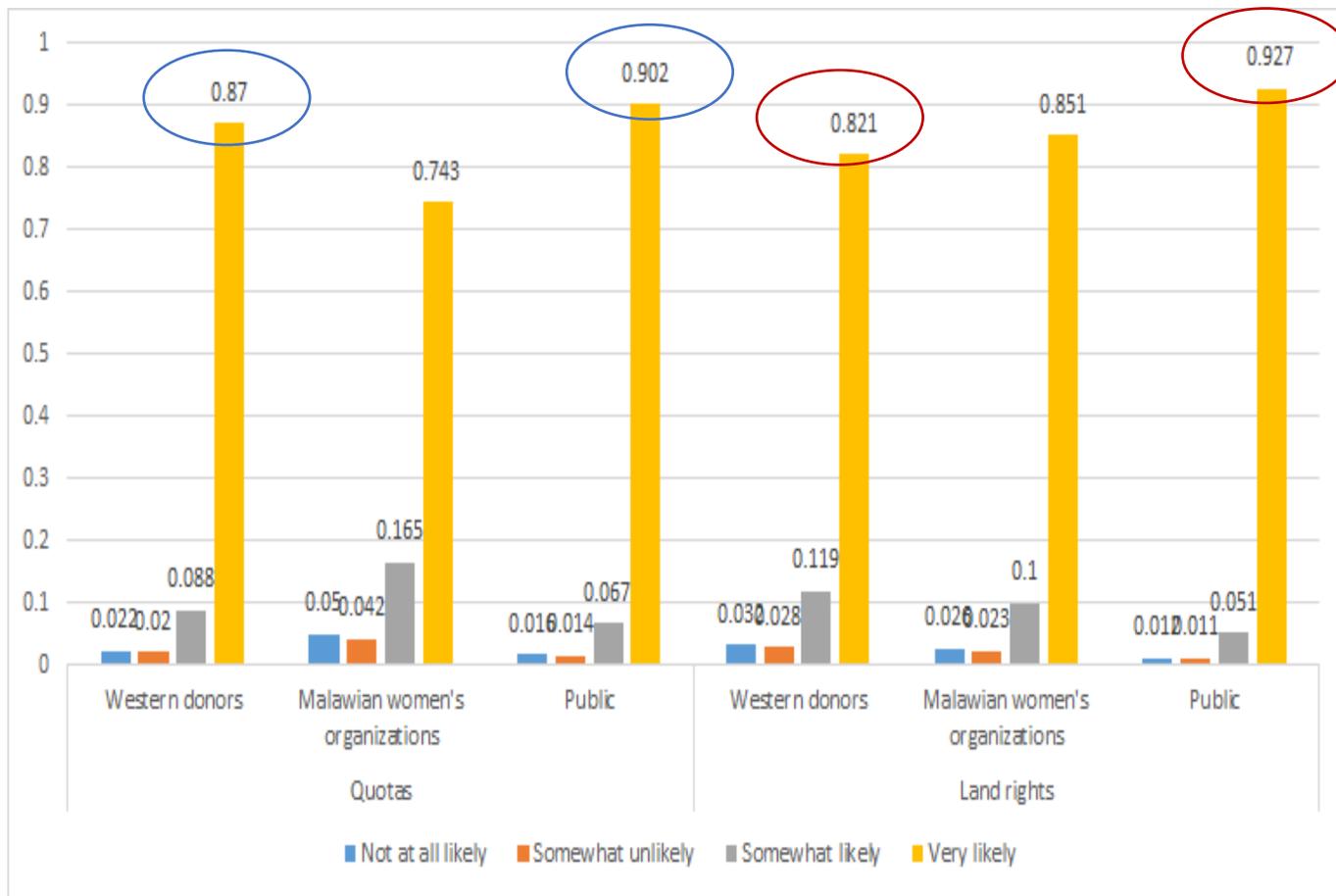
- Contrary to H1, donors decrease support for land reforms relative to the control.
- The probability of being very likely to support land reform decreases by 7 percent on average compared to control ($p < .05$).
- Consistent with a backfire effect in the sample as a whole.

Results: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects: Effects for males with patrilineal customs (interviewed by a male) and with sexist views on both quotas and land reform



- Contrary to expectation, western donors increase support for quotas among males, those with inegalitarian views, and patrilineal customs in partial support of H5a.
- Probability of strongly supporting quotas increases from 45% to 84% when a western donor supports the reform, compared to the control.
- Suggests the importance of interests.

Results: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects: Effects for males with patrilineal customs (interviewed by a male) and with non-sexist views on both quotas and land reform



- Effects become insignificant for men, even if they follow patrilineal customs as long as they do not hold sexist views.

Conclusions

- Western donors can play an important role in increasing support for quotas.
- Western donors and Malawian women's organizations may inadvertently undermine their efforts to change public opinion on doctrinal issues. Alternative strategies (or messages) to empower women may be needed.

