

Gender gaps in support for vigilante violence

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Abstract

Mob vigilantism - the punishment of alleged criminals by groups of citizens - is widespread throughout the developing world. Drawing on surveys with more than 10,000 respondents from hundreds of communities in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, we show that women are more likely than men to support mob vigilantism. This result runs counter to a large literature in public opinion that finds women are less supportive of violence than men across a variety of domains throughout industrialized contexts. Drawing on qualitative evidence, a vignette experiment in Uganda, and additional survey measures from Tanzania, we show that men and women differ in their beliefs about mob vigilantism. Men are more convinced that mob vigilantism creates risks of false accusation for those who do not commit crime. We trace this divergence in beliefs to differences in the extent to which men and women are at personal risk of being accused of a crime that they did not commit. Our results speak against the notion that women are inherently more peaceful than men and highlight the role that beliefs play in the link between gender and views about violence.

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1 Introduction

When confronted with criminal acts, ordinary citizens in developing countries frequently eschew the police. Instead, they call on their immediate community – neighbors, friends, and family – who apprehend and brutally punish or even kill the accused. Mob vigilantism of this kind is extremely widespread. A police report from Uganda suggests vigilante mobs killed more than one person per day in 2013 (Uganda Police, 2013). In the main city of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, groups killed one person every two days over the course of a year (Ng’walali and Kitinya, 2006). In South Africa, the police registered almost six cases of vigilantism per day in 2018, with about two resulting in murder (SAPS, 2018/2019). Because many incidents of mob vigilantism do not come to the attention of the authorities, these numbers likely underestimate their prevalence.

Vigilante punishments often turn into gruesome public spectacles watched by entire communities. In many cases, spectators do not step in to stop the violence but rather cheer it on. Where police attempt to investigate, they frequently face tight-knit communities that refuse to testify about what happened and frustrate the police’s attempts to separate witnesses from perpetrators. In addition to those who actively inflict violence, vigilante acts are thus fueled by larger groups of people who view mob vigilantism as legitimate and are willing to support it.

In this paper, we investigate who supports mob vigilantism and why. Much of the existing literature on vigilantism and other non-state mechanisms of crime control focuses on the role of police and state capacity.¹ We instead home in on the social drivers of mob vigilantism. We draw on original survey data collected through over 10,000 interviews conducted in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, as well the Afrobarometer, to demonstrate that there is a robust gender gap in support. Women are substantially more likely to support vigilante violence than men.² In some instances, support among women exceeds that among men by a factor of almost two-to-one.

¹See, for example, Acemoglu et al. (2019), Cooper (2018), Blair (2018), Blair, Karim, and Morse (2019), Jaffrey (2021), Lazarev (2017), Magaloni, Franco Vivanco, and Melo (2018), Nussio and Clayton (2021), Sandefur and Siddiqi (2011), Wilke (2020).

²In this paper, we use the terms “men” and “women” to describe gender identities, not biological traits. Thus, “women” includes both cis- and transgender women. As our survey measures rely on self- or enumerator-coded binary gender identification, we cannot explore whether the processes described work differently for cis- and transgendered individuals, or for non-binary individuals. Some authors we discuss use the terms “men” and “women” to describe biological differences.

What explains this gender gap in support for vigilante violence? We draw on two additional data collection efforts to investigate this question. Study 1 consists of a vignette experiment that we implemented in Uganda in 2017. Study 2 makes use of survey measures collected in Tanzania in 2019. Study 1 suggests that women and men differ in their beliefs about mob vigilantism. A possibility that seems to loom large in the minds of men is that vigilantism can be directed towards the “wrong” person. Rather than the outcome of a deliberate investigation and adjudicative process, vigilante acts are typically committed by “angry mobs” that move to murderous violence with little deliberation. Our evidence suggests men see scenarios that are conducive to false accusations as more plausible than women. Men’s stronger belief that vigilantism puts even those who do not commit crime at risk may be one driver of the observed gender gap in support.

Why might women and men diverge in their perceptions of the risk of false accusations? One reason may be that women perceive a lower personal risk of being falsely accused and attacked by a vigilante mob.³ Drawing on survey data from Tanzania, we find that 70% of men believe it somewhat or very likely that they could be attacked for a crime that they did not commit. Only 37% of women think they could be targeted in this way. This difference in views may be related to the dynamics of mob vigilantism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Victims of vigilante violence in this context are almost always men (see e.g. Uganda Police, 2013). In comparison to women, personal experience may heighten men’s perceived risk of wrongful accusation by vigilante mobs. Our vignette experiment in Uganda suggests that men rate scenarios in which a woman experiences a vigilante attack as less plausible than scenarios in which vigilantism is directed at a man. On average, there is little evidence women perceive such gender differences in the risk of being attacked by a mob.

In sum, we argue that gender conditions support for mob vigilantism, because it shapes how men and women understand the costs of mob vigilantism as a social practice. We describe a series of alternative explanations for the gender gap and show that we find little support for these accounts.

Our study makes several contributions. First, our paper is one of few to explicitly investigate how gender shapes support for mob vigilantism.⁴ To the extent that it plays a role in existing work,

³Below, we consider that this argument may be less applicable to accusations of black magic.

⁴One exception is a chapter by Abrahams (1998).

gender is mostly included as a control variable in large multivariate regressions. The results of these pre-existing analyses are difficult to interpret, because many of them condition on attitudinal variables that are plausibly affected by gender *and* by the respondent’s views on vigilantism.⁵ We make use of six different data sources from various contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa to show that women consistently support mob vigilantism at higher rates than men, and propose a specific mechanism that links gender to views about vigilantism.

Even though few perpetrators of vigilante violence are women, anecdotal evidence suggests that women can encourage or discourage vigilantism in important ways. Subject to rampant attacks on their safety around the world, women may instigate vigilante acts and convince bystanders to take part.⁶ Having witnessed a vigilante incident, women can choose whether to cooperate with police and may encourage others to do the same. The views of parents are also particularly likely to shape how mob vigilantism is viewed by younger generations. Finally, women, just like men, may join movements that protest vigilantism. Such movements exist in several parts of the world and seem to have had some success in generating greater police presence in areas affected by mob vigilantism.⁷

Our findings suggest that women support mob vigilantism more than men because women are less convinced that vigilantism poses risks even for people who are not involved in criminal activities. Thus, raising awareness about these risks might bolster opposition to vigilante violence. The realization that vigilantism can endanger people who did not commit crime has fueled protest in the past. In 2018, for example, protests erupted after mobs in India killed more than two dozen people in response to false rumors about child kidnappers spread through the messaging platform,

⁵These attitudinal variables are “colliders” on the path from gender to support for mob vigilantism (Pearl, 2009). Existing evidence regarding the existence of a gender gap in support is mixed. Papers on Ghana (Tankebe, 2009), Pakistan (Tankebe and Asif, 2016), and the Netherlands (Haas, de Keijser, and Bruinsma, 2014) provide no statistically significant evidence of a gender gap. Two studies in Latin America find that support for vigilantism is greater among men (Nivette, 2016; Zizumbo-Colunga, 2017).

⁶A report from South Africa provides an example of a vigilante act instigated by a woman: “Let me give you an example of what happened in my neighborhood just this morning at 5.00am! We heard a woman screaming *i-Bag yam? I-Bag yam? Nal’isela* (My bag! My Bag! Here’s a thief!). In no time, I mean, in no time, everybody was coming out, slamming doors behind them. I mean, it was like a split second – and they were all dressed in their clothes, not pyjamas. It was as if they were waiting, ready all night for exactly this kind of thing to happen. Then they descended upon this man – they came with all sorts of weapons to assault him. Rocks on the street were thrown at him. In no time, the man was gone – in no time – they had finished him (Khayelitsha Commission, 2014, p.342).”

⁷Social movements following a spate of necklacing incidents in Cape Town, South Africa, for example, led to a government inquiry called the Khayelitsha Commission in 2014.

WhatsApp.⁸ As one protester complained:

Everyone could feel: ‘it could have been my son, it could have been me’. That feeling is impacting people a lot. That it could have been anyone, so innocent, in that barbaric incident.⁹

Our results may be of relevance to campaigns seeking to discourage vigilantism.

Finally, the findings we present contribute to a large literature in public opinion that finds women are generally less supportive of violent practices than men. This finding stems primarily from research in the United States and Western Europe and spans a range of domains including views on capital punishment (Applegate, Cullen, and Fisher, 2002; Hurwitz and Smithey, 1998; Whitehead and Blankenship, 2000), gun control (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986), military aid and the usage of troops (Fite, Genest, and Wilcox, 1990), defense spending (Togebly, 1994), inter-personal violence, and the display of violence on television (Smith, 1984). One common interpretation of these findings holds that traditional gender norms socialize women into an “ethic of care,” which leads them to oppose violence (Gilligan, 1993). The notion that women are more peaceful than men has also come to structure popular expectations about the consequences of female empowerment. Fukuyama (1998), for example, predicts that “[a] truly matriarchal world (...) would be less prone to conflict and more conciliatory and cooperative than the one we inhabit now.”

By focusing on a kind of crime-related violence that is ubiquitous in developing country contexts, our paper joins a set of studies that add nuance to these claims (Dube and Harish, 2020; Karim et al., 2018; Tessler, Nachtwey, and Grant, 1999; Tessler and Warriner, 1997). Our findings suggest women can support violent practices at higher rates than men, even in societies where women are strongly expected to play caregiver roles. In contrast to existing work, we interpret this gender gap as resulting from differences in the *beliefs* women and men hold, rather than from intrinsic differences in their tastes. We do not argue that women have a greater preference for violent punishments of those who commit crime. Nor do we claim that men care more about protecting those who do not commit crime. Instead, we show that women and men have different beliefs about the extent to which mob vigilantism targets the innocent and trace this disparity to gender

⁸“India WhatsApp rumors: Mob kills man in latest attack, 30 arrested”, CNN, July 16 2018 (accessed on July 20 2018 at): <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/16/asia/india-whatsapp-lynching-intl/index.html>

⁹“Death by ‘fake news’: social media-fueled lynchings shock India” in AFP, 14 July 2018 (accessed on 21 July 2018 at): <http://www.france24.com/en/20180714-death-fake-news-social-media-fuelled-lynchings-shock-india>

differences in indirect and direct experiences with mob vigilantism.

2 Background

We are here interested in the phenomenon of mob vigilantism. In line with Bateson (2020), we define vigilantism as the extralegal investigation and punishment of alleged offenses. The word “mob” indicates that we have in mind vigilante violence perpetrated by spontaneous groups, in public and as a defense against (alleged) criminals.¹⁰ This phenomenon is thus distinct from organized vigilante groups such as peasant vigilante committees (see Gitlitz and Rojas, 1983, on Peru), state-sponsored groups like crime prevention panels (see Baker, 2008, on Uganda), armed self-defense groups (see Moncada, 2021, on Mexico) or gangs that enforce their own legal codes and run their own courts (see Rodgers, 2008, on Nicaragua).

The mostly “defensive” nature of this form of vigilantism distinguishes it from resemblant forms of group violence, such as racially motivated lynchings and ethnic riots (Tolnay and Beck, 1995; Pfeifer, 2021; Scacco, 2010; Weintraub, 2021; Wilkinson, 2006). Mob vigilantism does disproportionately target certain groups. Below, we provide evidence that mob vigilantism is more often directed toward men than toward women. Anecdotal accounts—e.g., on spates of violence targeting immigrants accused of theft in South Africa in 2008 and 2015—suggest members of minority groups may be particularly likely to be targeted. However, even if discriminatory in practice, the incidents we focus on here do not have as their putative purpose the persecution and control of specific identity groups. Rather, mob vigilantism is a response to alleged criminal acts.

We focus predominantly on violence in response to offenses that clearly fall under the jurisdiction of the state, such as robbery, assault, and reckless driving. However, we also consider a gray zone of mob vigilantism that arises in response to social transgressions many citizens may consider “criminal” even though these transgressions do not fall within the purview of the state. Into this gray zone falls mob vigilantism in response to allegations of black magic or witchcraft.¹¹ In the

¹⁰Bateson conceptualizes vigilantism along five dimensions: whether it is individual versus collective, violent versus non-violent, private versus public, spontaneous versus institutionalized, and defensive versus offensive. In these terms, mob vigilantism is collective, violent, public, spontaneous, and defensive vigilantism.

¹¹Another example is so-called “cow vigilantism” in India, whereby predominantly Muslim citizens are attacked by groups of predominantly Hindu citizens in response to allegations of killing cows. While many states place legal restrictions on cow slaughter, states such as Assam experience cow vigilantism despite placing no legal restrictions on cow slaughter.

contexts in which we work, group-based punishments appear to arise more commonly in response to allegations of petty crime than in response to witchcraft allegations. Among 426 cases of vigilante killings in Uganda in 2013, for example, 70% were a response to theft, robbery, or burglary, while only 1% arose in response to allegations of witchcraft (Uganda Police, 2013). As we describe in more detail below, witchcraft-related vigilantism is nonetheless of interest to our study. Previous research suggests that the ability to use black magic is often attributed to women (Miguel, 2005; Oster, 2004), which provides a potentially informative contrast to statutory offenses.

We assume throughout that mob vigilantism is more “violent” than punishments that would be meted out by the state for equivalent transgressions. This assumption may seem at odds with reports of human rights abuses by police and carceral systems in many Sub-Saharan African states. While incidents of mob vigilantism may sometimes deescalate or end without debilitating injury to the accused, respondents in our and other studies describe horrific acts of murder and public torture when asked to describe examples of “mob justice,” as it is colloquially known in many contexts. One common method of punishment called “necklacing,” for example, involves burning victims to death by placing a tire over the shoulders of the accused, filling it with petrol, and setting it alight.

3 Main results: Gender gaps in support for mob vigilantism

Table 3 presents our main results. All columns present coefficients from a linear model that regresses a binary indicator for whether the respondent supports mob vigilantism as opposed to reliance on police on community-level fixed effects and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. We calculate two-tailed p -values using a Wald test of the null hypothesis that the coefficient on gender is zero based on a normal approximation to the sampling distribution. Outcomes have been imputed through bootstrapping.¹² Since we draw on diverse sources of data, we describe details of sampling and measurement as we discuss each result in turn below.

The main takeaway is that, across different samples, countries, and question wordings, women consistently express higher support for mob vigilantism than men. In some cases, the share of women who support mob vigilantism is almost twice as high as the share of men.

¹²For each missing value, we randomly sample one non-missing value. All outcomes used in this paper have been imputed using this procedure. Section A.7 of the appendix shows that all results are robust to, instead, eliminating missing values through listwise deletion.

	Mob Vigilantism Preferred over Police Intervention								
	Uganda 1	Uganda 2	Uganda 3	Tanzania 1	Tanzania 2	South Africa	Pooled	Afrobarometer	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Woman	0.048*** (0.011)	0.046*** (0.007)	0.048*** (0.017)	0.036** (0.014)	0.041* (0.024)	0.049** (0.022)	0.012 (0.021)	0.043*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.003)
Mean among men	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.07	0.1
Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Target of mob	Driver	Driver	Thief	Driver	Thief	Thief	Driver	Mix	
Crime victim gender	W	W	W	W	W	M	W	Mix	
Observations	2,431	5,534	1,956	1,365	601	604	1,300	12,750	51,587
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.014	-0.004	0.019	0.006	0.003	-0.003	0.020	0.073

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 1: Across six different samples in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, as well as the 2015 Afrobarometer, women are more supportive of mob vigilantism than men.

Coefficients stem from a linear model that regresses a binary indicator for whether the respondent supports mob vigilantism as opposed to reliance on police on community-level fixed effects and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. Significance stars are based on a two-tailed Wald test of the null hypothesis that the coefficient on gender is zero using a normal approximation to the sampling distribution. The samples used in columns 2 and 3 share 1,041 respondents. The row labeled “Target of Mob” provides information about the hypothetical accused whom respondents were asked to consider when deciding whether they would support mob vigilantism. The row labeled “Crime victim gender” indicates whether the accused was described as having committed a crime against a man (*M*) or a woman (*W*).

The first three columns draw on data collected in 2015, 2016, and 2017 as part of an unrelated study on mass media and social norms in 168 villages in Uganda’s central region. Respondents in each village were sampled at random, but the set of villages is a convenience sample. Villages were selected to fit two criteria. First, each village had to have a local video hall. Video halls are akin to makeshift movie theaters and common in rural Uganda. Villages also had to be at least four kilometers apart from all other villages in the sample.¹³

Analyses in columns that label the “Target of mob” as “Driver” rely on a survey question that asks respondents to imagine that a truck driver drove through their village and ran over a small girl, killing her. The scenario suggests that a group of men from the respondent’s village got hold of the truck driver. It asks the respondent which of the following two statements comes closest to her view:

1. The group of men should beat the truck driver to teach him a lesson.
2. The group should leave it to the police to investigate and to determine the truck driver’s punishment.

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 show that women in the 2015 and 2016 samples are five percentage points more likely to select the first statement than men. Among men, 6% of respondents agree with the first statement. In relative terms, the support for mob vigilantism is thus 80% higher among women. The p -value indicates that this difference is highly unlikely to arise due to sampling variability alone ($p < 0.01$).

In 2017, when re-interviewing some 2016 respondents and adding new respondents from the same villages, we changed the question wording to focus on a common form of mob vigilantism that is of great concern to women: marketplace theft. The question wording was designed to create empathy with the crime victim. By placing the statements of support for mob vigilantism in the words of “friends,” we also hoped to reduce social stigma associated with endorsing violence. The question read:

¹³The distance constraint in the 2015 sample was five kilometers. In 2015 we interviewed 2,431 and in 2016 we interviewed 5,534 adult respondents. In 2017, we re-interviewed 1,041 respondents from the 2016 survey, in addition to 915 new respondents. When conducting pooled analyses, we exclude the answers of 1,041 respondents who were re-interviewed in 2017, and restrict attention to responses from the first time when respondents were asked about mob vigilantism in 2016. In total, we interviewed 8,880 unique respondents in Uganda. See Wilke, Green, and Cooper (2020) and Green, Wilke, and Cooper (2020) for more details on sampling.

Suppose a widow from your village is selling soap in the market in order to raise enough money to send her son to school. One day, when she is about to close up for the day, a young man on a boda [motorbike] from a different village rides past and grabs her money, stealing all the money that she made during the day. Observing the incident, some men from your village manage to push the driver off his bike. One friend turns to you and says, “We should call the police, this man could be hurt.” The other friend says, “The police won’t do anything, we should punish him now.” Which friend would you agree with?

The results are reported in column 3. As expected, the alternative wording does elicit higher levels of support. At 12%, men’s rate of support for mob vigilantism is twice as high as when they are asked about the truck driver. However, the absolute difference between men and women’s support remains constant. Women are five percentage points more likely to indicate they would agree with the friend who endorses mob vigilantism. In relative terms, the gender gap is lower in magnitude, but support for vigilante violence is still 40% higher among women.

Column 4 reports results based on data from a baseline survey conducted in 2018 in thirty-six villages in Pangani, Tanzania, as part of a field experiment on radio and social norms (Green and Groves, 2018). Respondents were randomly sampled from within villages and villages were selected as a function of their proximity to radio transmitters. The question wording is the same as that used for the outcome in columns 1 and 2, focusing on the treatment of a truck driver who recklessly killed a young girl. Again, we see a sizable and statistically significant gender gap: women are four percentage points more likely than men to support mob vigilantism.

Columns 5 and 6 report results from a separate field experiment on radio soap operas conducted in thirty rural villages throughout fifteen wards in Tanzania’s northeastern Tanga Region (Green, Groves, and Manda, 2020). Again, the villages were selected non-randomly as a function of the experimental requirements, and respondents were randomly selected within villages. The question wording focused on a common form of mob vigilantism in Tanzania:

A [man/woman] from your community is blowing the whistle, because [he/she] saw someone stealing food and a box of cold drinks from [his/her] yard. The neighbors come running and one of them gets hold of the thief. Again, which of the following do you believe the neighbors should do?

As indicated by the pronouns in square brackets, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two versions of the scenario that differ in terms of whether the crime victim is a man or a woman. We used simple random assignment and each respondent was read only one scenario. Respondents

who answered “The neighbors should beat the thief there and then” instead of “The neighbors should call the police and leave it to them to deal with the thief” are coded as supportive of mob vigilantism. Despite differences in region and question wording, the results are remarkably consistent with the three Ugandan samples and the other sample from Tanzania. Women are four to five percentage points more likely than men to support mob vigilantism, irrespective of whether the crime victim is a man or a woman. Hence, the gender gap we observe does not seem to be driven by the gender of the victim of crime that we chose for our vignettes.

Column 7 reports the gender gap in answers to the truck driver question fielded during a nationally-representative survey in South Africa. Citizen Surveys South Africa included our question as part of their May 2018 public opinion survey, fielded in-person among a multi-stage, stratified random sample. The estimated gender gap is again positive, though it is not statistically significant.

In column 8, we pool the samples included in columns 1 through 6.¹⁴ Across data collection efforts from 2015 to 2019 in over 640 Sub-Saharan African communities, we find that women are four percentage points more likely than men to support mob vigilantism over police intervention. The standard error is small relative to the estimated effect, suggesting the likelihood of this difference arising due to sampling variation alone is low ($p < .001$).

In the final column of Table 1, we use the 2016 round of the Afrobarometer data to test for gender gaps in support for mob vigilantism across thirty-six Sub-Saharan African countries. The question asks, “If you were a victim of crime in this country, who, if anyone, would you go to first for assistance?” We code as supportive of mob vigilantism any respondent who answers they would first go to their “own family or friends” or that they “would join with others to take revenge.” Again, we recover statistically significant (if substantively smaller) evidence for a gender gap in support for mob vigilantism.

4 Mechanisms

Why might women be more supportive of vigilantism than men? In this section, we delve into beliefs that may underpin the observed gender gap in support for extra-judicial punishment. We

¹⁴Excluding 1,041 observations from the sample in column 3 who were already interviewed as part of the sample in column 2.

make use of additional survey measures and vignette experiments from Uganda and Tanzania to provide evidence that men and women differ in their understanding of how vigilantism operates. We show that men are more likely than women to believe that mob vigilantism poses risks for the innocent and for them personally.

4.1 Conceptual framework

Vigilante acts typically consist of gruesome assaults and often result in the death of criminal suspects. Nonetheless, a substantial minority of citizens in all contexts in which we work appears to support vigilantism. What generates demand for such extreme violence? In qualitative interviews, respondents often justified their support by pointing out that those accused of crime deserve harsh punishments and that harsh treatment of supposed criminals in public will teach a lesson to others who commit crime. One South African woman said, for example, “Yes, when we get them [‘the criminals’], we will kill them,” suggesting criminal suspects deserve to be executed. Similarly, market vendors in Uganda spoke in favor of the public beating of thieves with a *kiboko* (heavy cane), explaining that they believed this practice to have a discouraging effect on other pickpockets.

Vigilante punishments are, in many cases, harsher than sentences handed out by the state. It is common for vigilante mobs to kill suspects for snatching a handbag or for burglary of household items. Such petty crimes would, at most, result in a prison sentence when reported to the state. Incidents of vigilante violence are also often watched by entire communities. A preference for harsh and public sanctions, linked to an inherent taste for punishment or a strong concern for deterrence of crime, may thus drive demand for vigilante violence. This logic is in line with other recent work on vigilantism. Smith (2019) argues, for example, that supporters of vigilantism in South Africa believe that the state does not punish criminals harshly enough.¹⁵

An important assumption that appears to underly the view that vigilantism is an effective way to place harsh punishments on wrongdoers is that vigilante acts are indeed directed towards those who break the law. Anecdotal accounts suggest, however, that the evidence base for community judgments of guilt or innocence is often tenuous. Where suspects have not been caught red-handed, accounts of individual witnesses or vaguely related circumstantial evidence often seem sufficient to

¹⁵See Baron et al. (2021) for related arguments on punitive violence in Mexico.

trigger vigilante violence.¹⁶ These features open the door for both accidental accusations of innocent individuals who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and deliberate false accusations levied to settle personal vendettas.

The possibility that vigilante attacks could target innocent community members may be one downside that shapes citizens' views on vigilantism. Even someone who would like those who commit crime to be executed, for example, may be hesitant about supporting a practice that executes innocent people. Assaults on individuals who did not commit crime are unlikely to bring satisfaction to those who have an intrinsic preference for harsh punishments of rule breakers. Moreover, the suspicion that vigilantism targets non-criminals may also create doubts about its deterrent effect. The ability of vigilantism to deter crime crucially depends on the perceived correlation between guilt and the likelihood of being the target of vigilante violence. To see why, imagine that vigilante mobs were known to randomly select their victims without any regard to involvement in crime. In this case, all citizens would face the same likelihood of being attacked by a mob, irrespective of whether they engage in crime. Vigilantism should not have any impact on whether individuals decide to break the law in this scenario. Finally, the notion that vigilante mobs may target innocent community members also raises the possibility that oneself or one's friends or family could be attacked for a crime that was committed by someone else.

The very real possibility of wrongful accusation may dampen citizens' categorical support for mob vigilantism. Similar dynamics have been documented with respect to harsh punishments by the state. Norris and Mullinix (2020), for example, show that information about the prevalence of wrongful convictions in the US justice system reduces overall support for capital punishment.

The possibility of false accusations appeared to loom large in the minds of the men we spoke to in qualitative interviews. The head of security of one of the largest markets in Uganda, for example,

¹⁶The following anecdote illustrates the fragility of the evidence base on which vigilante violence can be based. Residents of a police precinct in South Africa's Northwest Province where we conducted fieldwork in 2018 assaulted a man who had come to the precinct from a neighboring community. Community members found that the man had in his possession a phone, which was thought to have been stolen by a group of men known for their addiction to nyaope (a prevalent drug in South Africa). Since those engaged in substance abuse often exchange stolen goods for drugs, community members concluded that the man must be a drug dealer. Police arrived before the accused was injured, and could not ascertain any evidence that the accused was involved in the drug business. It remained unclear whether his phone was indeed the phone that had been stolen, and whether any phone had been exchanged for drugs. The accused opened a case against the community members who assaulted him (Interview with police, 8 May 2018, Northwest Province).

described how he must be careful where he puts his hands when he moves about the market, lest his brushing past someone be mistaken for an attempt at pickpocketing. Similarly, a South African respondent recalled a case in which a man was running away from a group of men who were attempting to rob him and ended up being mistaken for the accused and attacked. Market vendors in Uganda mentioned that criminals sometimes levy false accusations against innocent vendors in the market to create a mob situation that allows them to escape. Finally, a young man in South Africa expressed the view that mobs often beat up people who did not actually commit the crime of which they are accused. When asked whether he was personally afraid of being accused, he responded: “it is very risky.” He explained that, once one has been accused, it is almost impossible to convince “the community” of one’s innocence.¹⁷ Women, on the other hand, were less likely to mention the risk of false accusations in qualitative interviews. Of sixteen female focus group participants in South Africa, for example, not one mentioned false accusations as a problematic feature of vigilantism – all seemed convinced that vigilante mobs mostly assault victims who in fact committed a crime.

Hence, one reason for the gender gap in support for vigilantism may be that men are more convinced of the risks that it poses not only for those who are involved in crime but also for those who are not. Yet, if different beliefs about the risks associated with mob vigilantism do lead to the gender gap observed in Table 3, how does this disparity in beliefs arise?

One possibility is that men estimate the tendency of vigilante mobs to attack innocent citizens to be higher, because men face a greater risk than women of being personally accused of a crime that they did not commit. In many contexts, men are more likely to commit crimes than women. Figure 1 in section A.1 of the appendix, for example, shows that women make up roughly 3% of the prison population across Sub-Saharan Africa. Unless state justice systems are severely biased in favor of women or women are substantially better at committing crimes without being caught, the plot suggests that the vast majority of crimes are committed by men.

¹⁷Similar accounts can be found in other contexts where mob vigilantism is prevalent. Consider the following example from an article on lynching in Nigeria: “In Ikeja, Lagos, in 2011, two men, Alaba and Samuel were severely beaten and very nearly killed for eating human flesh. Closer investigation showed that what they’d been chewing on was, in fact, beef.” (in: “Perplexed... Perplexed’: On Mob Justice in Nigeria”, in *The Atlantic*, October 24 2012 (accessed on July 21 2018 at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/perplexed-perplexed-on-mob-justice-in-nigeria/264006/>))

As described above, vigilante mobs make quick decisions about whether someone is guilty or not, often in the face of substantial outrage over the crime that was committed. Widely held beliefs about the kinds of people who typically commit crime may play an outsized role in who is singled out as a target. As a consequence, the risk of being falsely targeted for a crime that one did not commit may be substantially higher for men than for women.¹⁸ In line with this logic, Uganda’s Annual Crime Report lists that 94% of the 508 people killed by mobs in 2013 were men (Uganda Police, 2013), which is similar to the figures reported in a recent press review in Ghana by Adzimah-Alade et al. (2020), who find 92% of those targeted by mobs are men. The vast majority of cases of vigilante violence about which we learned during our fieldwork were directed at men.

Both women and men may judge the overall risk of false accusations based on their own personal experience and the experiences of people in their networks. If the risk of being punished for a crime that one did not commit is concentrated on men, men may over- and women may underestimate this risk, especially in societies where social networks are formed along gender lines.¹⁹ Alternatively, men may have greater incentives to learn about the frequency of false accusations. Scrutinizing an allegation may not be a first priority among people who never expect to be subject to allegations. However, people who feel they could be falsely accused themselves may pay greater attention to the details of the evidence base or attempt to investigate after the fact. Hence, men may face stronger incentives to learn about the risk of false accusations than women.

One exception to this logic may be vigilante attacks in response to accusations of “witchcraft” or “black magic.” In some contexts, stereotypes about witches are highly gendered with the stereotypical “witch” being a woman (Miguel, 2005). Where this is the case, the risk of being accused of and punished for using witchcraft may be concentrated on women. Moreover, it is unclear what it means for a witchcraft allegation to be based on a tenuous evidence base or how one should think about certainty of guilt in the case of witchcraft. Neither our measurements of support for vigilantism nor our explanation for the gender gap that we observe fully extend to witchcraft related vigilantism. Hence, our subsequent analyses mainly focus on vigilante violence in response to

¹⁸See Farmer and Terrell (2001) for similar arguments about gender and crime in the US context.

¹⁹Zalman, Larson, and Smith (2012) make use of a similar logic to explain why non-white respondents in the US perceive a greater frequency of wrongful convictions by the state’s justice system than white respondents.

offenses that are unrelated to black magic. We discuss findings that relate to witchcraft in passing.

4.2 Study 1: Gendered understandings of vigilantism in Uganda

We designed a vignette experiment in order to answer two questions. First, is it indeed the case that men and women differ in their assessments of whether vigilante incidents that are based on a tenuous evidence base are plausible? Second, what are women’s and men’s perceptions of scenarios that describe vigilante violence that is targeted at, respectively, men and women? The experiment was implemented as part of the 2017 household survey in rural Uganda described above (Wilke, Green, and Cooper, 2020; Green, Wilke, and Cooper, 2020). Respondents were asked to rate a hypothetical scenario that involves an act of vigilantism in terms of how likely they believe it is that the scenario could happen in their village. We randomly varied a number of characteristics of the scenario in order to find out what kinds of vigilante scenarios men and women find plausible.

4.2.1 Design

Our 2017 household survey encompassed a sample of $N = 1,956$ respondents from rural Ugandan villages (see section 3 above for details on sampling of respondents). As part of a longer interview on a variety of topics, enumerators read the following scenario to respondents:

Imagine a situation in which a [man/woman] [from your community] [is accused of/is observed] [stealing from/using black magic against] a [man/woman] [from your community]. [A bystander/the victim] gathers a group of people [in the garden/in the market place] and they [beat/kill] the [accused/perpetrator].

The square brackets indicate attributes of the scenario that were varied at random. Each attribute could take two possible values. For example, the accused was introduced as either a man or a woman. The second attribute shows only one expression because the accused was either labeled as “from your community” or no information was given on the origin of the accused. All attributes were varied independently using simple random assignment and each respondent was read exactly one randomly assigned version of the scenario. Respondents were then asked to rate how likely it is that such a situation could occur in their community.

Three of the attributes were designed to vary the extent to which the scenario allows for false accusations. First, we varied whether the scenario implies that the suspect has been caught red-handed. The scenario describes the suspect either as being “observed” or as being “accused” of

committing the offense. The word “observed” primes respondents to think that witnesses exist. The word “accused” creates the possibility that the evidence base is more tenuous. The second variation is that the scenario refers to the criminal suspect either as “the accused,” which implies uncertainty of guilt, or as “the perpetrator,” which implies certainty of guilt. Finally, we varied whether it is a bystander or the victim who gathers the group of people who beat the accused. A scenario in which the alleged victim him- or herself rallies the community leaves more room for accusations to be fabricated. Mention of a bystander who gathers a group of vigilantes suggests again that there is at least one other person who is willing to corroborate that the crime actually happened. Apart from the extent to which the scenario implies a tenuous evidence base, we also varied the gender of the person who is the target of the vigilante act.

We are interested in the effect of these variations on whether women and men believe that such a vigilante incident could ever happen in their village.²⁰ All results shown in the text are based on a dataset that excludes respondents who received the version of the scenario in which the suspect is accused of black magic rather than of theft. Results for respondents that were assigned to a black magic scenario are shown in the appendix.

As standard in the literature on vignette experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014), we focus on the average marginal component effects (AMCEs) of each prime. The effect of each individual prime may vary depending on the other details of the scenario to which a respondent was assigned. The AMCE reflects the average effect of each prime, where the average is taken across the distribution of all other characteristics of the scenario that results from our randomization scheme. We estimate AMCEs separately among men and women using a simple difference-in-means estimator.

4.2.2 Results

We begin by describing the effect of the three primes that vary the extent to which the scenario allows for false accusations. The first subtable of Table 2 displays the percentage of women and

²⁰The original answer options were “Something like this would never happen in my village,” “Something like this could happen, but it is not very likely,” “This is the sort of thing that sometimes happens in my village” and “Things like this are very common in my village.” We focus on a binary outcome that takes the value 0 if the respondent said ‘Something like this would never happen in my village’ and the value 1 otherwise.

men who indicate that the vigilante incident could happen in their village broken down by whether or not respondents were assigned to the version of the scenario that explicitly mentions that the crime has been observed.

Men are roughly five percentage points *less* likely to say the scenario could happen in their village if the scenario specifies that the crime has been observed. Even though this estimate falls short of statistical significance, the direction of the effect suggests that men are more inclined to deem a scenario plausible if it leaves open the possibility that the target of the vigilante act is innocent. The opposite is the case for women. The share of women who consider it likely that the scenario could happen in their village is around 9 percentage points *higher* if the scenario mentions that the crime has been observed. This difference in means is highly statistically significant. In contrast to men, women thus seem more inclined to deem vigilante scenarios plausible if the guilt of the suspect appears certain. These results are in line with the notion that men are more likely to believe that vigilante mobs operate on a tenuous evidence base.

This interpretation is re-enforced when we focus on the descriptive differences across men and women, holding constant the randomized primes. The share of women who consider plausible a scenario in which a suspect has merely been accused but not observed in the act is almost 10 percentage points lower than the share of men who consider such a scenario plausible. When it comes to scenarios in which the suspect has been observed, on the other hand, the share of women who believe that such a scenario could happen in their village exceeds that of men by roughly 4 percentage points.

Similar patterns can be observed in the second and third subtables of Table 2. Men are roughly 10 percentage points more likely to think it plausible that a vigilante incident could have happened in their village if the suspect is referred to as “the accused” rather than the “perpetrator,” a difference in means that is highly statistically significant. The same change in wording does not appear to have any effect on women’s assessments of whether a scenario is plausible.

Mob responding to [observation / suspicion] of crime could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob observes crime (N = 529)	65.3%	61.4%	+3.9 pp.
Prime: Mob suspects crime (N = 479)	56.1%	66.5%	-10.4 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-9.2 pp.**	+5.1 pp.	-14.3 pp.**

Mob targeting [perpetrator / accused] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob target described as ‘perpetrator’ (N = 535)	60.3%	59.3%	+1 pp.
Prime: Mob target described as ‘accused’ (N = 473)	61.7%	69.3%	-7.7 pp.*
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+1.4 pp.	+10.1 pp.**	-8.6 pp.

Mob instigated by [bystander / victim] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Bystander instigates mob (N = 501)	62.6%	59.5%	+3.1 pp.
Prime: Victim instigates mob (N = 507)	59.2%	67.8%	-8.6 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-3.5 pp.	+8.2 pp.*	-11.7 pp.*

Mob could happen when all three primes [reduce / heighten] false accusation risk

	Women (N = 149)	Men (N = 128)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: All three primes reduce risk of false accusation (N = 149)	67.9%	49.2%	+18.6 pp.**
Prime: All three primes heighten risk of false accusation (N = 128)	52.3%	71.4%	-19.1 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-15.5 pp.*	+22.2 pp.**	-37.7 pp.***

Table 2: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men in Uganda

Data stem from 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Results are estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic). Last subtable is subset to respondents assigned either to all three primes that increase uncertainty of guilt (scenario does not mention that crime was observed, suspect is referred to as “accused” and incident was instigated by victim) or to none of these primes (scenario mentions that crime was observed, suspect is referred to as “perpetrator” and incident was instigated by a bystander). Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test of the null hypothesis that the AMCE is zero or that group means are equal across genders. **p*<0.1; ***p*<0.05; ****p*<0.01

Turning to the identity of the instigator, men are eight percentage points more likely to deem

victim-instigated incidents plausible as compared to bystander-instigated incidents. Again this difference is statistically significant. Women are, if anything, less likely to believe that an incident could have happened in their village if the scenario mentions that the incident was instigated by the victim of the crime. Finally, comparing across genders, both subtables illustrate men are more likely than women to believe in scenarios that suggest the suspect may not have committed a crime.

The final subtable restricts attention to extremes, comparing respondents who received either all three of the primes signaling uncertainty of guilt or none of them. Scenarios that do not mention that the crime was observed *and* refer to the target of the vigilante act as “the accused” *and* state that the vigilante act was instigated by the crime victim should be most indicative of the possibility that the suspect may not have committed the crime. Conversely, scenarios that describe the crime as observed *and* refer to the suspect as the “perpetrator” *and* state that the vigilante act was instigated by a bystander should provide the strongest indication that the suspect is guilty.

The patterns that emerge are striking. A little less than half of the men who were assigned to a scenario that strongly implies certainty of guilt believe that the scenario could have happened in their village. Among men who were assigned to a scenario that casts doubt on the guilt of the target, roughly 70% consider the scenario plausible – an increase of more than 20 percentage points. This effect is highly statistically significant. Among women, the effect is almost of the same size but in the opposite direction. Roughly 68% of women who were assigned to a scenario that implies certainty of guilt believe that the scenario could have happened in their village. This share decreases by almost 16 percentage points to around 52% if women are asked to consider a scenario in which the evidence base seems tenuous. Not only are the estimated effects among women and men statistically significant, but the difference between them is highly statistically significant as well. Moreover, the estimated gender gaps indicate men are almost 20 percentage points more likely than women to consider scenarios in which the evidence base is tenuous plausible. The share of women who believe that scenarios that strongly imply certainty of guilt are plausible exceeds the share of men who find such scenarios convincing by roughly the same amount.

Overall, the results from our vignette experiment are thus in line with the patterns that emerged from our qualitative evidence. Women appear to believe less strongly in the possibility that vigi-

lantism can be directed towards someone who did not commit a crime. Men’s perception of high risks of false accusations may lead them to support vigilantism at lower rates than women.

Above, we hypothesized that this divergence in beliefs may be due to men being more likely to become the targets of vigilante attacks. Do women and men indeed see vigilante violence that is directed toward women as less plausible? As can be seen in Table 3, both women and men appear to find scenarios in which vigilante mobs target a man more plausible than scenarios in which the target is a woman. The estimated difference between the share of women who believe that, respectively, a man or a woman could be targeted by a vigilante mob in their village is roughly six percentage points. This difference falls short of statistical significance. Among men the estimated difference is almost 17 percentage points and the estimate is highly statistically significant. While this evidence does not directly speak to the risk of *false* accusations, these patterns suggest that men in particular perceive that they are more likely to be targeted by vigilantism than women. The tendency is similar among women, though less pronounced. While the rates of women and men who find a scenario with a female target plausible are similar, the share of men who consider the scenario in which the target is a man plausible exceeds the share of women who find such a scenario plausible by roughly nine percentage points.

Mob targeting [man / woman] could happen in my village.			
	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob targets woman (N = 491)	57.9%	55.7%	+2.2 pp.
Prime: Mob targets man (N = 517)	63.7%	72.4%	-8.7 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+5.8 pp.	+16.7 pp.***	-10.9 pp.*

Table 3: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men in Uganda by whether the target is a woman or man

Data stem from 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Results are estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic). Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test of the null hypothesis that the AMCE is zero or that group means are equal across genders. **p*<0.1; ***p*<0.05; ****p*<0.01

Taken together, the results of our vignette experiment are in line with the idea that men perceive considerable risks of vigilante violence for themselves, even if they are not involved in

criminal activities. Women, on the other hand, appear less convinced that vigilantism can target citizens who have not committed a crime and do not hold as strong a view as men of the gender gap in risks.

Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix show that patterns are less clear cut among respondents who were assigned to a scenario that involved an accusation of black magic. Here, none of the three primes that imply a tenuous evidence base appears to make a difference for the extent to which both men and women rate a scenario as plausible. The gender of the person who is the target of the vigilante attack, however, does appear to matter. Both men and women again find scenarios in which the target is a man more plausible. The estimated increase in the share of men who find the scenario plausible is 12 percentage points and highly statistically significant. Among women, the estimated effect is an increase of 5 percentage points that falls short of statistical significance. These results suggest that stereotypes about magical offenses may not be highly gendered in Uganda. They also support the notion that certainty of guilt is a murkier concept when it comes to black magic.

4.3 Study 2: Vigilantism and false accusations in Tanzania

We designed study 2 to further explore our interpretation of the evidence in two ways. First, our survey in Uganda did not include any direct survey measures of citizens' perceptions of the likelihood of false accusations or the risk that one could personally become the target of vigilante punishment for a crime that one did not commit. Instead, the vignette experiment manipulated the degree to which a scenario of vigilante violence allows for false accusations through subtle primes. This approach helped us shed light on the kinds of scenarios that women and men find plausible while guarding against experimenter demand effects. In study 2, we take a more direct approach and ask respondents about their perceptions of the risk of false accusations. This evidence bolsters our claim that the beliefs of men and women diverge.

4.3.1 Design

Study 2 is based on a 2019 household survey with $N = 1,205$ respondents in rural Tanzania (Green, Groves, and Manda, 2020). Details of the sampling strategy are provided in section 3 above. The

study included two measures of respondents' perceptions of the likelihood of false accusations. The first measure concerns general beliefs about the accuracy of community perceptions of guilt but is not specific to the occurrence of vigilante violence:

I will now read you two statements. Please tell me with which of the statements you agree more, even if you do not agree with either one completely.

- Statement 1: If most people in a community think that a person is a criminal, that person is probably a criminal.
- Statement 2: If most people in a community think that a person is a criminal, this does not mean that the person is actually a criminal.

The second measure presents respondents with a scenario that more explicitly involves vigilante violence against an innocent person and asks them to assess the likelihood that they themselves could become the victim of such violence:

Imagine the following situation: A group of people accuses someone of stealing and beats up the person. Later, it turns out that the person was innocent. How likely do you think it is that you would ever be falsely accused and attacked in this way?

- It is very likely for an innocent person to be falsely accused.
- It is somewhat likely for an innocent person to be falsely accused.
- It is not very likely for an innocent person to be falsely accused.
- It is not likely at all for an innocent person to be falsely accused.

We are interested in whether men and women differ in how they answer these questions.

4.3.2 Results

Table 4 shows that women and men are about equally likely to think that community perceptions of guilt may be wrong. Around 50% of both women and men believe that someone who is deemed a criminal by most people in the community may not necessarily have committed a crime. Hence, women and men do not seem to differ in their general assessments of the likelihood that communities may wrongly denounce community members. Recall, however, that this question does not make any explicit mention of vigilante violence. Do women and men differ in their assessments of whether they could personally become the victim of a vigilante attack without having committed a crime?

The lower subtable reports the share of women and men who think it “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that they could be personally attacked by a vigilante mob for a crime that they did not commit. Here, we find a large difference between the beliefs of men and women. Only around 37% of women believe it likely that they could be falsely accused and attacked. The share of men

who believe that they could be attacked in this way is almost twice as high: 70% of men deem it likely or very likely that they could be attacked for a crime that they did not commit. That men perceive a greater risk of personally becoming the victim of a false accusation may be one reason why men find vigilante scenarios that are based on a tenuous evidence base more plausible and why they are less supportive of mob vigilantism than women.

Some people suspected of crimes are not necessarily criminals.

	Women (N = 604)	Men (N = 601)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
% who agree:	49.2%	49.6%	-0.4 pp.

It is somewhat or very likely I could be falsely accused.

	Women (N = 604)	Men (N = 601)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
% who agree:	36.6%	70.2%	-33.6 pp.***

Table 4: Beliefs about mob vigilantism among women and men in Tanzania

Data stem from 2019 household survey in rural Tanzania. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test of the null hypothesis of equal means across groups. **p*<0.1; ***p*<0.05; ****p*<0.01

5 Alternative explanations

The previous section has proffered an explanation for the gender gap in support for mob vigilantism. Women and men have different understandings of the risk that such violence poses to innocent bystanders and themselves. Of course, we cannot conclusively establish that this divergence in beliefs is behind the gender gap in support that we observe. We here provide evidence with regard to alternative mechanisms that we initially considered. We uncover little evidence in favor of these alternatives.

5.1 Differential police treatment

Most of our measures of support for mob vigilantism invite respondents to identify which of two alternatives comes closest to their preferred option: mob vigilantism or police intervention. Accounts of mistreatment and misogyny at the hands of predominantly male police forces can be found throughout the world, as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, one might ask whether women are more likely to support mob vigilantism because they hold a dimmer view of police than men.

Table A3 in section A.3 of the appendix displays estimates of gender gaps in several measures

of respondents' approval of police. All outcomes vary from 0 to 1. Section A.5 of the appendix provides details on question wording. Columns 1, 2, and 4 suggest women in two of the Uganda surveys and the first Tanzania survey are more likely than men to expect satisfactory treatment by police if they were robbed. Column 3 illustrates that women are more likely than men to indicate it is unlikely a police officer would expect a bribe in exchange for police work. Columns 5 and 6 provide no evidence that women are less trusting of police than men in South Africa and in the Afrobarometer sample. Women in the Afrobarometer are further less likely than men to believe that police are corrupt and are no more likely than men to report difficulties with access to police.

In sum, the table lends no support to the notion that gender gaps in support for mob vigilantism are driven by women's distaste for police. If anything, women are more likely than men to expect satisfactory treatment from and to express trust in police.

5.2 Differential demand for deterrence

Previous research has suggested women may be more afraid of crime than men and as a result more supportive of harsh punishments (Hurwitz and Smithey, 1998). Therefore, women may express greater support for mob vigilantism than men simply because women have a stronger preference for deterrence. To investigate this possibility, our 2017 survey in rural Uganda elicited respondents' demand for harsh punishments, independent of respondents' support for mob vigilantism. Specifically, we focused on respondents' views about punishment by the state. Because we were unsure what kinds of punishments would be considered severe, we randomized the seriousness of the crime and the length of the resultant sentence:

Imagine you've been robbed at [gunpoint / knifepoint] and you report the robbery to the police. They arrest the robber, and he will be kept in prison for [1/5/10] year[s]. Is that a severe enough punishment, or should he have been punished more?

1. It is severe enough
2. He should have been punished more

Column 1 of Table A4 in the appendix shows that women in our sample from Uganda are indeed more supportive of harsh punishments than men. The gender gap in support for mob vigilantism, however, is the same magnitude as reported in the main results table and is statistically significant, even if we control for respondents' preferences over punishment (see columns 3 and 5). Thus, while

women may prefer harsher punishments than men, this difference alone does not appear to account for the gender gap in support for mob vigilantism.

5.3 Differential demand for due process

We argue that women support mob vigilantism more than men because women’s estimate of the risk of getting the “wrong” person tends to be lower than that held by men. Implicit in this claim is the notion that, if women came to believe that this risk is higher, their support for mob vigilantism would drop. An alternative possibility is that men simply care more about protecting those who do not commit crime. If so, a mere change in women’s *beliefs* about the risk of false accusations would not be enough to counter their support for mob vigilantism. In our 2017 Uganda survey, we used the following survey measure to elicit how respondents navigate the trade-off between effective punishment and due process protections:

What about situations in which you cannot be sure whether the accused actually committed a crime? Some people say that it is better to punish the accused there and then even if you are not certain of their guilt, because otherwise they might get away with it. Others say that you should get all of the facts before deciding whether to punish someone even if it means that guilty people will sometimes escape punishment. Which view comes closest to your own?

1. It is better to punish the accused there and then even if you are not certain of their guilt, because otherwise they might get away with it
2. You should get all of the facts before deciding whether to punish someone even if it means that guilty people will sometimes escape punishment

As can be seen in column 2 of Table A4 in the appendix, we find no evidence that women have a greater willingness to abandon due process protections and to punish without certainty of guilt. Moreover, the estimated gender gap in support for mob vigilantism remains unchanged from the main results when we control for respondents’ demand for due process (see columns 4 and 5). Hence, our evidence does not support the interpretation that women’s greater support of mob vigilantism is driven by a greater tolerance for punishments of those who do not commit crime.

6 Discussion

Across a range of domains and industrialized settings, a large public opinion literature finds greater support for violence among men than among women. In this paper, however, we find men support vigilante violence at lower rates than women across six different surveys conducted in different

countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on qualitative evidence, vignette experiments, and additional survey data from Uganda and Tanzania, we have explored the underpinnings of this gender gap. We find that men are more convinced than women that vigilantism poses risks even to those who do not commit crime. We trace this disparity in beliefs to differences in the extent to which women and men are personally affected by such risks.

Like many existing accounts of women’s apparent opposition to violence, our explanation points towards the influence of distinct gender roles in society. We suggest that the perception that crimes are mostly committed by men and not women results in a concentration of the risk of being falsely accused by a vigilante mob on men. In contrast to existing accounts, however, we do not link differences in how society treats women and men to tastes for violence. The essence of our account is not that women have a stronger desire for violent punishments of those who commit crime. Nor do we argue that men are inherently more inclined to protect those wrongly accused. Instead, we demonstrate that women and men hold different *beliefs* about the extent to which vigilantism threatens the innocent and argue that these beliefs drive varying levels of support.

While we have shown that the gender gap in support for vigilantism exists across several samples from Sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to ask whether this finding will travel to other points in time and parts of the world. Some aspects of our argument suggest that one should expect to see similar patterns elsewhere. Given the spontaneous and unregulated nature of mob vigilantism, the risk of false accusations is likely a recurrent feature. It is not difficult to find anecdotes about vigilante attacks on innocent citizens in contexts other than the ones in which we have worked.²¹ In contexts where the risk of being attacked for a crime that one did not commit concentrates among men, similar divergences in beliefs may arise. All else equal, such beliefs may produce similar gender gaps elsewhere. However, it is entirely possible that other ways in which gender identity shapes people’s experiences may offset or even reverse the patterns we observe here.

One more complicated question is why the gender disparity in beliefs about vigilantism persists

²¹Consider a case of mob vigilantism that provoked widespread protests in July 2018 in the Indian state of Assam. Two young men from the state capital went to visit a famous waterfall in the poor, rural district of Karbi Anlong. Unbeknown to the men, rumors of child kidnappers had been circulating for months in the villages neighboring the waterfall. The men were confronted by a villager as they relaxed by a river, so they fled in their car. Convinced he had caught the child kidnappers, the villager phoned ahead to the next community, who stopped the men and beat them for over an hour and a half, as they pleaded for their lives.

despite cross-gender communication and whether the factors that contribute to its persistence are present elsewhere. If men are personally afraid of being wrongly accused, why do they not communicate this fear to the women in their lives? Presumably, women would not want to support a practice that puts their husbands, sons, and friends at risk. While definitively answering this question falls outside the scope of this paper, our data allow us to speculate.

Figure 2 in section A.6 of the appendix shows that the gender gap in support for vigilantism widens with age in our six original survey samples in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa. Women and men support vigilantism at almost the same rate among 18 to 20 year olds, but the gender gap measures five to seven percentage points among those of age 30 or older. Since older cohorts may differ from younger ones in many ways, this pattern is open to multiple interpretations. One possibility in line with our findings is that older cohorts were raised under gender norms that limit cross-gender communication and help sustain the divergence in beliefs across women and men. Another is that women in older cohorts were more confined to tasks that take place in the home and had less exposure to village-level processes such as vigilantism. The ability of these and other explanations to account for gender differences in public opinion observed elsewhere remains a topic for future research.

In contexts in which the gender gap that we observe does exist, our interpretation suggests that informing both women and men about the tenuous evidence base of vigilante attacks may be one way to reduce support for vigilante violence. Doing so may also reduce the gender gap in support that we observe. While vigilante violence is like other violence in that it is mostly perpetrated by men,²² women nonetheless play an important role in limiting or exacerbating the prevalence of mob vigilantism. Women around the world are frequently assaulted and robbed, and may be driven to instigate mob vigilantism. Yet, women and men who do not support vigilantism may stop others from participating or deescalate incidents. Raising awareness about the risks that vigilantism poses for those who do not commit crime may be one way to shore up societal opposition to vigilantism.

²²See White and Rastogi (2009) for notable exceptions to this rule in India.

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A Appendix

A.1	Share of women in prison population across Sub-Saharan Africa	2
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A.1 Share of women in prison population across Sub-Saharan Africa

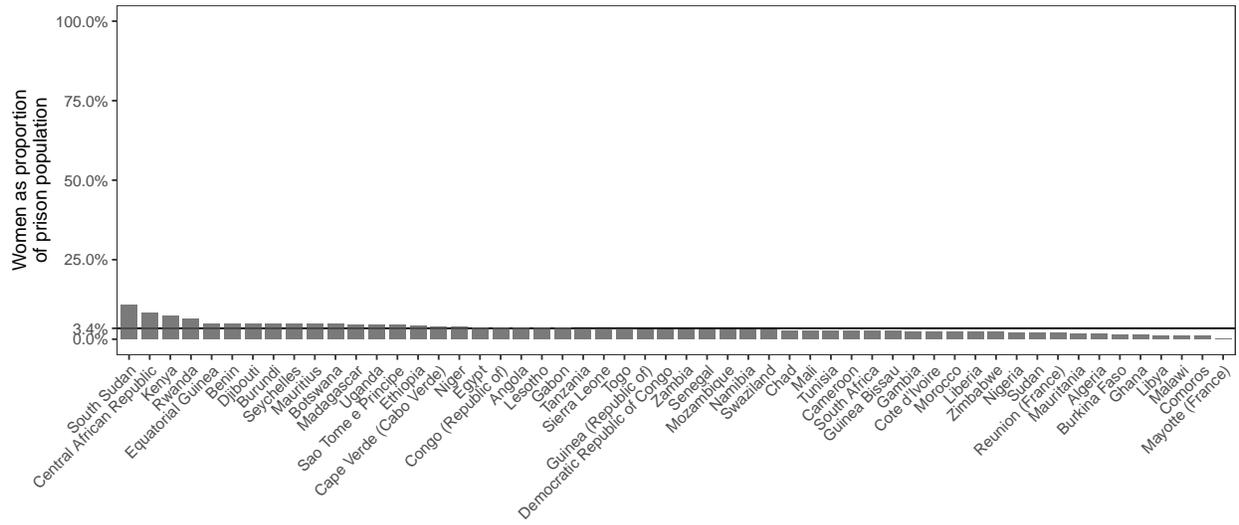


Figure 1: In Africa women make up 3% of the prison population on average.

Source: ICPR 2018.

A.2 Results of vignette experiment for vigilantism against “black magic”

Mob targeting [perpetrator / accused] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 493)	Men (N = 455)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob target described as ‘perpetrator’ (N = 476)	52.2%	67%	-14.8 pp.***
Prime: Mob target described as ‘accused’ (N = 472)	47.5%	61.5%	-14.1 pp.***
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-4.7 pp.	-5.4 pp.	+0.8 pp.

Mob instigated by [bystander / victim] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 493)	Men (N = 455)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Bystander instigates mob (N = 464)	49.8%	60.8%	-11 pp.**
Prime: Victim instigates mob (N = 484)	50%	67.2%	-17.2 pp.***
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+0.2 pp.	+6.4 pp.	-6.2 pp.

Mob responding to [observation / suspicion] of crime could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 493)	Men (N = 455)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob observes crime (N = 471)	49.4%	67.7%	-18.3 pp.***
Prime: Mob suspects crime (N = 477)	50.4%	60.9%	-10.4 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+1 pp.	-6.9 pp.	+7.9 pp.

Mob could happen when all three primes [reduce / heighten] false accusation risk

	Women (N = 131)	Men (N = 104)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: All three primes reduce risk of false accusation (N = 115)	49.3%	63.6%	-14.3 pp.
Prime: All three primes heighten risk of false accusation (N = 120)	51.7%	55%	-3.3 pp.
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+2.4 pp.	-8.6 pp.	+11 pp.

Table A1: Table 2 in main text, but subset to respondents who received a prime about black magic.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Mob targeting [man / woman] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 493)	Men (N = 455)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob targets woman (N = 462)	47.5%	58.2%	-10.7 pp.**
Prime: Mob targets man (N = 486)	52.2%	69.8%	-17.6 pp.***
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+4.7 pp.	+11.6 pp.***	-6.9 pp.

Table A2: Table 3 in main text, but subset to respondents who received a prime about black magic.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

A.3 Alternative pathways: Police treatment

5

	Police Approval							
	Uganda 1	Uganda 2	Uganda 3	Tanzania 1	South Africa	Afrobar.	Afrobar.	Afrobar.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Woman	0.038*** (0.014)	0.028*** (0.011)	0.043*** (0.015)	0.030 (0.019)	0.021 (0.024)	0.008*** (0.003)	0.015*** (0.002)	0.0002 (0.002)
Mean among men	0.61	0.51	0.07	0.52	0.42	0.52	0.47	0.47
Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Outcome	Satisf.	Satisf.	No Bribe	Satisf.	Trust	Trust	Not Corrupt	Easy access
Observations	2,431	5,534	1,157	1,365	1,300	51,587	51,587	51,587
Adjusted R ²	0.022	0.011	0.025	0.032	0.074	0.156	0.129	0.127

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3: Women in our samples express more favorable views of police than men.

Outcomes range from 0 to 1. Coefficients stem from a linear model that regresses the outcome on community-level fixed effects and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. Significance stars are based on a Wald test using a normal approximation to the sampling distribution. The row labeled “Outcome” contains information about the outcome measure. See section A.5 of the appendix for details on question wording.

A.4 Alternative pathways: Demand for deterrence and due process

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Should punish more severely	Should punish more swiftly	Mob	Should Beat	Thief
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Woman	0.054** (0.023)	-0.005 (0.010)	0.045*** (0.017)	0.049*** (0.016)	0.046*** (0.016)
Should punish more severely			0.057*** (0.017)		0.054*** (0.016)
Should punish more swiftly				0.263*** (0.037)	0.260*** (0.037)
Mean outcome among men	0.54	0.05	0.12	0.12	0.12
Observations	1,956	1,956	1,956	1,956	1,956
Adjusted R ²	-0.0002	0.004	0.001	0.021	0.027

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A4: Greater preferences for swift and severe punishments among women in Uganda does not appear to account for the gender gap in support for mob vigilantism.

Data stem from 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Coefficients stem from a linear model that regresses the outcome on community-level fixed effects, the respective covariate where applicable and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. Significance stars are based on a Wald test using a normal approximation to the sampling distribution.

A.5 Question wording for Table A3

Column 1, 2 and 4

Imagine you've been robbed and you report the robbery to the police. How likely is it that the police officer will deal with the case in a satisfactory manner?

- 0 = Not at all likely
- 0.5 = Somewhat likely
- 1 = Very likely

Column 3

If you went to the police, how likely do you think it is that they would ask for something in exchange for helping you, e.g. money, cell phone credit, food or fuel?

- 1 = Not likely at all
- 0.66 = Not very likely
- 0.33 = Somewhat likely
- 0 = Very likely

Column 5

How much do you trust the police?

- 1 = A lot of trust
- 0.66 = Some trust
- 0.33 = Little trust
- 0 = No trust

Column 6

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Police?

- 1 = A lot
- 0.66 = Somewhat
- 0.33 = Just a little
- 0 = Not at all

Column 7

How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police?

- 1 = All of them
- 0.66 = Most of them
- 0.33 = Some of them
- 0 = None

Column 8

Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is it to obtain the following services from government? Or do you never try and get these services from government: Help from the police?

- 1 = Very easy
- 0.66 = Easy
- 0.33 = Difficult
- 0 = Very difficult

A.6 Gender gap in support for mob vigilantism across age cohorts

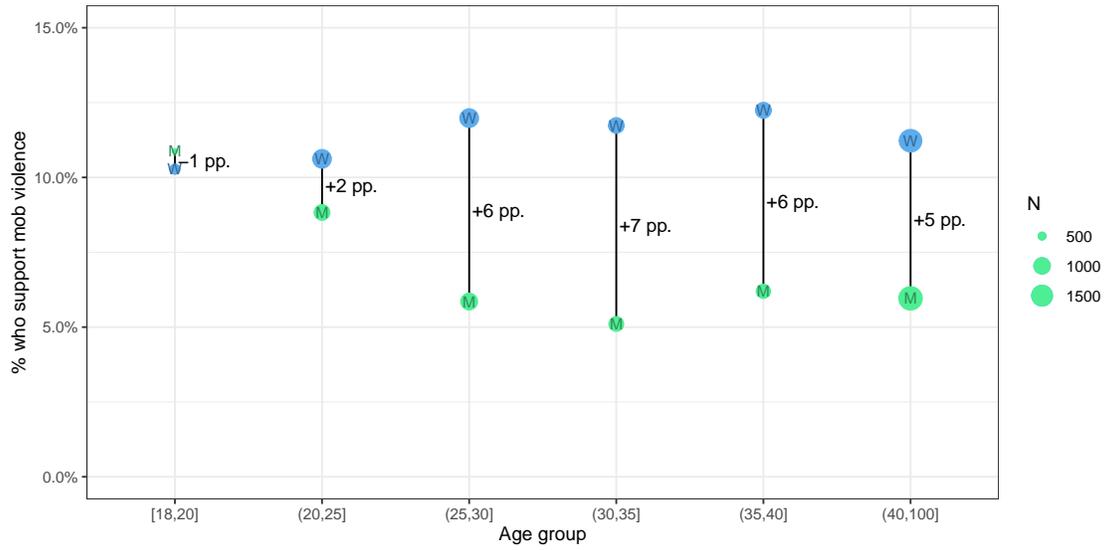


Figure 2: The gender gap in support for mob vigilantism widens with respondent age in our six samples from Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa.

Blue dots depict average support for mob vigilantism among women in a given age group; green dots depict average support for mob vigilantism among men. The size of the dots corresponds to the sample size. See section 3 for details on question wording in each of the six surveys.

A.7 Estimates based on listwise deletion

	Mob Vigilantism Preferred over Police Intervention								
	Uganda 1	Uganda 2	Uganda 3	Tanzania 1	Tanzania 2	South Africa	Pooled	Afrobarometer	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Woman	0.048*** (0.011)	0.046*** (0.007)	0.048*** (0.017)	0.036** (0.014)	0.041* (0.024)	0.049** (0.022)	0.022 (0.023)	0.044*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.003)
Mean among men	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.11	0.07	0.1
Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Target of mob	Driver	Driver	Thief	Driver	Thief	Thief	Driver	Mix	
Crime victim gender	W	W	W	W	W	M	W		
Observations	2,431	5,528	1,954	1,362	601	604	1,186	12,626	51,587
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.014	-0.005	0.019	0.006	0.003	0.001	0.021	0.073

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A5: Across six different samples in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, as well as the 2015 Afrobarometer, women are more supportive of mob vigilantism than men.

Coefficients stem from a linear model that regresses a binary indicator for whether the respondent supports mob vigilantism as opposed to reliance on police on community-level fixed effects and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. Significance stars are based on a two-tailed Wald test of the null hypothesis that the coefficient on gender is zero using a normal approximation to the sampling distribution. The samples used in columns 2 and 3 share 1,041 respondents. The row labeled “Target of Mob” provides information about the hypothetical accused whom respondents were asked to consider when deciding whether they would support mob vigilantism. The row labeled “Crime victim gender” indicates whether the accused was described as having committed a crime against a man (*M*) or a woman (*W*). Outcomes have not been imputed, i.e., missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion.

Mob responding to [observation / suspicion] of crime could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob observes crime (N = 529)	65.3%	61.4%	+3.9 pp.
Prime: Mob suspects crime (N = 479)	56.1%	66.5%	-10.4 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-9.2 pp.**	+5.1 pp.	-14.3 pp.**

Mob targeting [perpetrator / accused] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob target described as ‘perpetrator’ (N = 535)	60.3%	59.3%	+1 pp.
Prime: Mob target described as ‘accused’ (N = 473)	61.7%	69.3%	-7.7 pp.*
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+1.4 pp.	+10.1 pp.**	-8.6 pp.

Mob instigated by [bystander / victim] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Bystander instigates mob (N = 501)	62.6%	59.5%	+3.1 pp.
Prime: Victim instigates mob (N = 507)	59.2%	67.8%	-8.6 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-3.5 pp.	+8.2 pp.*	-11.7 pp.*

Mob could happen when all three primes [reduce / heighten] false accusation risk

	Women (N = 149)	Men (N = 128)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: All three primes reduce risk of false accusation (N = 149)	67.9%	49.2%	+18.6 pp.**
Prime: All three primes heighten risk of false accusation (N = 128)	52.3%	71.4%	-19.1 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	-15.5 pp.*	+22.2 pp.**	-37.7 pp.***

Table A6: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men in Uganda

Data stem from 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic). Last subtable is subset to respondents assigned either to all three primes that increase uncertainty of guilt (scenario does not mention that crime was observed, suspect is referred to as “accused” and incident was instigated by victim) or to none of these primes (scenario mentions that crime was observed, suspect is referred to as “perpetrator” and incident was instigated by a bystander). Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test of the null hypothesis that the AMCE is zero or that group means are equal across genders. Outcomes have not been imputed, i.e., missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Mob targeting [man / woman] could happen in my village.

	Women (N = 543)	Men (N = 465)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
Prime: Mob targets woman (N = 491)	57.9%	55.7%	+2.2 pp.
Prime: Mob targets man (N = 517)	63.7%	72.4%	-8.7 pp.**
<i>Estimated prime effect:</i>	+5.8 pp.	+16.7 pp.***	-10.9 pp.*

Table A7: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men in Uganda by whether the target is a woman or man

Data stem from 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic). Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test of the null hypothesis that the AMCE is zero or that group means are equal across genders. Outcomes have not been imputed, i.e., missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Some people suspected of crimes are not necessarily criminals.

	Women (N = 604)	Men (N = 601)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
% who agree:	49.1%	49.7%	-0.6 pp.
It is somewhat or very likely I could be falsely accused.			
	Women (N = 604)	Men (N = 601)	<i>Estimated gender gap:</i>
% who agree:	36.6%	70.2%	-33.6 pp.***

Table A8: Beliefs about mob vigilantism among women and men in Tanzania

Data stem from 2019 household survey in rural Tanzania. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test of the null hypothesis of equal means across groups. Outcomes have not been imputed, i.e., missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

	Police Approval							
	Uganda 1	Uganda 2	Uganda 3	Tanzania 1	South Africa	Afrobar.	Afrobar.	Afrobar.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Woman	0.039*** (0.014)	0.030*** (0.011)	0.040*** (0.015)	0.036* (0.020)	0.013 (0.024)	0.009*** (0.003)	0.018*** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.003)
Mean among men	0.61	0.51	0.07	0.52	0.42	0.52	0.47	0.47
Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Outcome	Satisf.	Satisf.	No Bribe	Satisf.	Trust	Trust	Not Corrupt	Easy access
Observations	2,424	5,513	1,146	1,314	1,261	50,485	47,012	44,376
Adjusted R ²	0.021	0.012	0.026	0.030	0.077	0.162	0.153	0.165

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A9: Women in our samples express more favorable views of police than men.

Outcomes range from 0 to 1. Coefficients stem from a linear model that regresses the outcome on community-level fixed effects and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. Significance stars are based on a Wald test using a normal approximation to the sampling distribution. The row labeled “Outcome” contains information about the outcome measure. See section A.5 of the appendix for details on question wording. Outcomes have not been imputed, i.e., missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Should punish more severely (1)	Should punish more swiftly (2)	Mob Should Beat Thief (3)	(4)	(5)
Woman	0.055** (0.023)	-0.005 (0.010)	0.045*** (0.017)	0.049*** (0.016)	0.047*** (0.016)
Should punish more severely			0.057*** (0.017)		0.054*** (0.016)
Should punish more swiftly				0.263*** (0.037)	0.260*** (0.037)
Mean outcome among men	0.54	0.05	0.12	0.12	0.12
Observations	1,953	1,956	1,951	1,954	1,951
Adjusted R ²	-0.001	0.004	0.001	0.021	0.026

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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Table A10: Greater preferences for swift and severe punishments among women in Uganda does not appear to account for the gender gap in support for mob vigilantism.

Data stem from 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Coefficients stem from a linear model that regresses the outcome on community-level fixed effects, the respective covariate where applicable and a binary indicator for whether the respondent identifies as a woman. Significance stars are based on a Wald test using a normal approximation to the sampling distribution. Outcomes have not been imputed, i.e., missing values are dealt with through listwise deletion.