

Gender gaps in preferences 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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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Background	6
3	Main results: Gender gaps in support for mob vigilantism	8
4	Mechanisms	12
4.1	Conceptual framework	12
4.2	Study 1: Gendered understandings of vigilantism in Uganda	16
4.2.1	Design	17
4.2.2	Results	18
4.3	Study 2: Vigilantism and false accusations in Tanzania	24
4.3.1	Design	25
4.3.2	Results	26
5	Alternative Explanations	28
5.1	Differential police treatment	28
5.2	Experience of intimate partner violence	29
5.3	Greater demand for deterrence	31
6	Discussion	31
A	Appendix	1
A.1	Results of vignette experiment for vigilantism against “black magic”	2
A.2	Alternative Pathways	5

1 Introduction

A large literature finds that women are less supportive of violence than men.¹ Evidence in favor of this claim 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). These findings have stirred up a lively debate about the origins of this apparent gender gap in preferences for violence. While some attribute the gap to sex differences portrayed as biological (Fukuyama, 1998; Pinker, 2012), others point towards gendered processes of socialization (Gilligan, 1993; Hurwitz and Smithey, 1998), or to ways in which women’s interests may be shaped by social and economic marginalization (Fite, Genest, and Wilcox, 1990). The notion that women are, for whatever reason, 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.”

Despite such sweeping claims, our knowledge about the opinions of women and men in many of the more violent parts of the world remains limited. One of the most common forms of violence experienced by people around the world is violent crime. According to the United Nations, almost half a million people lost their lives to homicide in 2017, far more than the 89,000 people who were killed in active armed conflicts.² In places where violence is widespread, public attitudes toward violence may feed into policy responses by the state and provide the basis for social norms that can fuel or counter violent practices. Yet, existing work on gender gaps in views on violence is almost exclusively concentrated in the United States and Western Europe – contexts where crime rates have been on the decline for many years (Eisner, 2003; Farrell et al., 2011).³ Thus, what we know

¹In 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 gaps and processes described work differently for cis- and trans-gendered individuals, or for non-binary individuals. Note that some authors we discuss use the terms “men” and “women” to describe biological differences.

²See <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>

³See Tessler, Nachtwey, and Grant (1999) and Tessler and Warriner (1997) for exceptions.

about people’s views on violence may not reflect the contexts in which such opinions are likely to matter most.

In this paper, we focus on support⁴ for mob vigilantism, a form of crime-related group violence that is extremely widespread throughout the developing world. When they or others in their community are the target of crime, 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. In some contexts, mob vigilantism can also target suspects of “black magic” or “witchcraft.” Here, we focus predominantly on vigilante violence in response to non-magical offenses, such as theft, property damage, reckless driving, and assault, though we touch on witchcraft-related violence to explore specific hypotheses about gender.

Often, group punishments of even minor offenses turn into gruesome public spectacles watched by entire communities. Official statistics on mob vigilantism suggest groups regularly torture and murder individuals in this manner throughout many developing countries. An annual police report from Uganda in 2013, for example, reports vigilante mobs killed more than one person per day (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 cases per day 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 its prevalence.

We draw on original survey data collected through over 10,000 interviews conducted in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, as well the Afrobarometer, to analyze views on mob vigilantism among women and men. We find robust evidence of a gender gap in support. Women are *more* likely to support vigilante violence than men. In some instances, support among women exceeds that among men by a factor of almost two-to-one. This finding, we argue, is at odds with the notion that women’s views are inherently more anti-violent than men’s. In the case of vigilante violence, women are more likely than men to advocate for immediate physical punishment of the accused, rather than for calling the police.

⁴Note our aim is not to explain who *participates* in mob vigilantism; this is a distinct question beyond the scope of this paper.

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 additional survey measures collected in Tanzania in 2019. The results from our vignette experiment in Uganda suggest 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 reflection or deliberation. Our evidence suggests that men see scenarios that are conducive to such false accusations as more plausible than women. Men’s stronger belief that vigilantism puts even those who do not commit crime at risk may drive the observed gender gap in support for vigilantism.

Why might women and men diverge in their perceptions of the risk of false accusations? One reason may be that women, in contrast to men, face a lower personal risk of being falsely accused and attacked by a vigilante mob.⁵ 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. These findings align with what we know about 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, men are thus likely to have more opportunities to learn from personal experience about the risk that vigilantism poses for the innocent. Our vignette experiment in Uganda suggests that men correctly rate scenarios in which a woman experiences a vigilante attack as less plausible than scenarios in which vigilantism is directed at a man. Women seem less aware of this gender difference in the risk of becoming the target of vigilantism.

In sum, we argue that the gender gap in support for mob vigilantism stems from a difference in how men and women understand the downsides 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.

⁵Note that this argument may, in some contexts, be less applicable to accusations that involve black magic. We come back to this point below.

Our paper makes two main contributions. First, we demonstrate that women’s opinions are not necessarily more peaceful than men’s. Our results, which show that women consistently support mob vigilantism at higher rates than men, are based on six different data sources from various contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Existing work argues that biology, socialization, or gendered societal roles shape tastes for violence among women and men. A particularly prominent idea is that traditional gender norms socialize women into an “ethic of care,” which leads them to oppose violence (Gilligan, 1993). Our findings suggest women can support violent practices at higher rates than men, even in gender conservative societies like Uganda that should be particularly likely to socialize women into an ethic of care.

Second, we present evidence of the social origins of this gender gap and suggest a specific mechanism that links gender to views about violence. Our findings point towards the possibility that women support vigilante violence more than men because they are less convinced that vigilantism poses risks even for people who do not commit crime. In contrast to existing work, we thus focus on differences in what women and men *believe* about mob vigilantism and not on their tastes, in order to explain their willingness to support this violent practice. 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 differences in the risk of being attacked for a crime that one did not commit.

These findings speak to a growing literature on vigilantism and other non-state mechanisms of crime control. Much of this literature focuses on the role of state capacity and conditions under which state institutions substitute for or complement non-state efforts to deal with crime.⁶ Our paper is one of few to explicitly investigate how gender shapes support for mob vigilantism.⁷ To the extent that it plays a role in existing work on the determinants of support for vigilantism, gender is mostly included as a control variable in large multivariate regressions. Some existing analyses

⁶See, for example, Acemoglu et al. (2019), Cooper (2018), Blair (2018), Blair, Karim, and Morse (2019), Sandefur and Siddiqi (2011), Lazarev (2017), Magaloni, Franco Vivanco, and Melo (2018), Wilke (2020).

⁷One exception we are aware of is a chapter that Abrahams (1998) devotes to a qualitative consideration of “Vigilantism and Gender.”

produce results that are inconsistent with ours.⁸ Our account points to a number of mechanisms that may generate variation in how women and men think about vigilantism. Processes that cause women and men to have similar understandings of vigilantism’s risks, in combination with norms that socialize women into an “ethic of care,” for example, may offset or reverse the gender gaps that we observe. Our point is not to suggest a universal account of how gender influences preferences for violence, but rather to highlight the limitations of such accounts.

What *are* the broader implications of our explanation for women’s greater support, if we do not expect our finding to be universal and if most perpetrators of vigilante violence are men? Anecdotal evidence suggests women contribute to vigilantism in important ways. Survivors of rampant attacks on their safety, women in marketplaces and crowded streets around the world instigate vigilante acts and may encourage bystanders to take part.⁹ Yet both men and women in such contexts are also driven to take an active stance against such violence. Vigilantism has been a polarizing issue and has sparked protests in many parts of the world.¹⁰ In some cases, public discontent was fueled by the realization that vigilantism can target people who did not commit a crime. In 2018, for example, protests erupted after mobs in India killed more than two dozen people over the space of six months, fueled by false rumors about child kidnappers spread through the messaging platform, WhatsApp.¹¹ As one protester in Assam complained after two innocent men were beaten to death

⁸These analyses provide mixed evidence regarding the existence of a gender gap in support for vigilantism. Where they do find disparities across women and men, these disparities often point towards greater support for vigilantism among men. Papers that study 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). That said, such findings are difficult to interpret because big multivariate regression models tend to condition on attitudinal variables that are plausibly affected by gender *and* by the respondent’s views on vigilantism. In essence, the attitudinal variables of interest to the researchers are “colliders” on the path from gender to support for mob vigilantism (Pearl, 2009).

⁹The following anecdote taken from a report from South Africa provides an example of a vigilante act that happened in response to a woman’s call to the community when her handbag was stolen: “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).”

¹⁰Media coverage and social movements following a spate of necklacing incidents in Cape Town, South Africa, for example, led to a broad government inquiry called the Khayelitsha Commission in 2014.

¹¹“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>

by villagers who suspected them of kidnapping children:

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.¹²

Our findings suggest that raising awareness about the risks that vigilantism poses for those who are not involved in crime may be one way to strengthen movements of this kind that take a stance against vigilante violence.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides background information on vigilantism. Section 3 presents our main result – women are more supportive of vigilante violence than men. Section 4 explores the mechanisms that may give rise to this gender gap. Section 5 considers alternative explanations. Section 6 concludes.

2 Background

We use the term mob vigilantism to refer to the spontaneous physical group punishment of an individual in response to an allegation of crime. The word “mob” indicates that we have in mind vigilante action perpetrated by spontaneous groups. This phenomenon is distinct from organized vigilante groups such as the peasant vigilante committees in Peru described by Gitlitz and Rojas (1983), state-sponsored groups like Crime Prevention Panels in Uganda (Baker, 2008), or gangs that enforce their own legal codes and run their own courts (see, for example, Rodgers (2008) on gangs in Nicaragua).

The term “vigilantism” also carries meaning. The sorts of gruesome spectacles that arise in response to criminal accusations often resemble other forms of group violence, such as racially motivated lynchings and ethnic riots (Tolnay and Beck, 1995; Scacco, 2010; Wilkinson, 2006). Mob vigilantism does disproportionately target certain groups. For example, we provide evidence below that mob vigilantism is more often directed toward men than toward women. Anecdotal evidence—including several spates of violence targeting predominantly Mozambican immigrants accused of theft in South African townships in 2008 and 2015—suggest certain minority groups may be more susceptible to accusation and persecution by vigilante mobs than others. However,

¹²“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>

even if discriminatory in practice, the incidents we discuss 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 they do not fall within the purview of the state.¹³ Into this gray zone falls mob vigilantism in response to allegations of black magic or witchcraft. Group-based punishment in response to allegations of petty crime appears substantially more common than those that arise in response to witchcraft allegations in the contexts in which we work. Among 426 cases of mob 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. 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 non-magical offenses.

We assume throughout that mob vigilantism is the more “violent” option when compared to 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 it is true that some incidents of mob vigilantism may 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.

¹³One example we do not focus on is so-called “cow vigilantism” in India, whereby predominantly Muslim citizens are beaten and sometimes killed by groups of predominantly Hindu citizens in response to allegations of having transgressed religious and state laws by 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.

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. 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.

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 are common in rural Uganda. Villages also had to be at least four kilometers apart from all other villages in the sample.¹⁴

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.

¹⁴The distance constraint in the 2015 sample was five kilometers. In the first wave in 2015 we interviewed 2,431 adult men and women, and in the second wave in 2016 we interviewed 5,534 adult men and women. In our third wave in 2017 we re-interviewed 1,041 men and women 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 Green, Wilke, and Cooper (forthcoming) and Wilke, Green, and Cooper (2020) for more detail on sampling.

	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)
Woman	0.048*** (0.011)	0.046*** (0.007)	0.048*** (0.017)	0.036** (0.014)	0.045*** (0.016)	0.022 (0.023)	0.044*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.003)
Mean among men	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.06	0.11	0.07	0.1
Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Target of mob	Driver	Driver	Thief	Driver	Thief	Driver	Mix	Afro.
Observations	2,431	5,534	1,954	1,362	1,205	1,186	12,632	51,587
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.014	-0.005	0.019	0.008	0.001	0.021	0.068

Note:

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

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

Columns 1 and 2 of Table 3 show that women in the first sample from 2015 and the second sample drawn from different villages in 2016 are five percentage points more likely to select the first statement than men, among whom 6% agree with the first statement. In relative terms, the support for mob vigilantism is thus 80% higher among women than among men. The p -value, calculated through a Wald test based on a normal approximation to the sampling distribution, indicates that this difference between the groups is highly unlikely to arise due to sampling variability alone ($p < 0.01$).

In 2017, when re-interviewing some 2016 respondents and adding some new respondents from the same villages, we changed the question wording to focus on a form of mob vigilantism that we understood to be particularly common and of great concern to women: marketplace theft. The question wording is geared towards maximizing empathy with the victim of the crime. 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:

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 appropriate response to a truck driver

apprehended by the community for recklessly killing 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.

Column 5 reports 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 and randomized the gender of the victim of the alleged crime (we analyze the effects of this prime below):

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?

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 five percentage points more likely than men to support mob vigilantism.

Column 6 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 7, we pool the samples included in Columns 1 through 6.¹⁵ Across our original 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 very low ($p < .001$).

In the final column of Table 1, we use the 2016 round of the Afrobarometer data to test for

¹⁵Excluding the 1,041 observations from the sample in column 3 who were already interviewed as part of the sample in column 2.

gender gaps in preferences 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 preferences 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 preferences over extra-judicial punishment. We 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, in comparison to women, appear more cognizant of the risks that vigilantism poses for the innocent and that these risks may be concentrated on men.

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 criminals deserve harsh punishments and that harsh treatment of 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 that criminals 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 not uncommon for vigilante mobs to kill suspects for snatching a handbag or for theft of household items, for example. 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 the support for vigilantism in South Africa is driven in part by the view that the state does not punish criminals harshly enough.

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 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 criminals to be executed, for example, may be hesitant about supporting a practice that risks executing 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

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 in which we conducted fieldwork in 2018 assaulted a man who had come to the precinct from a neighboring community because they found that the man had in his possession a phone, which had previously belonged to one of the community members. The previous owner of the phone claimed that the phone had been stolen by a group of men known in the community 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. Fortunately for the man, police arrived before he got severely injured. Police could not ascertain any evidence that the man was involved in the drug business. It remained unclear whether his phone was indeed the phone that had been stolen from the community member and whether this phone or a different phone had been exchanged for drugs. The target of the vigilante act opened a case against the community members who assaulted him (Interview with police, 8 May 2018, Northwest Province).

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' support for mob vigilantism categorically, even in those cases where mobs "get the right person."

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, 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 criminals who are in fact guilty.

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

¹⁷Similar accounts are to be found in other contexts where mob vigilantism is prevalent. Consider the following account from an article on lynching in Nigeria, for example: "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. By this time, their punishers had long dispersed into the city." (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/>))

who are not. Even if the survey questions do not paint the accused in a particularly exculpatory light, men’s fear of false accusations associated with mob vigilantism may lead to a categorical rejection of its use as a practice of punishment. 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?

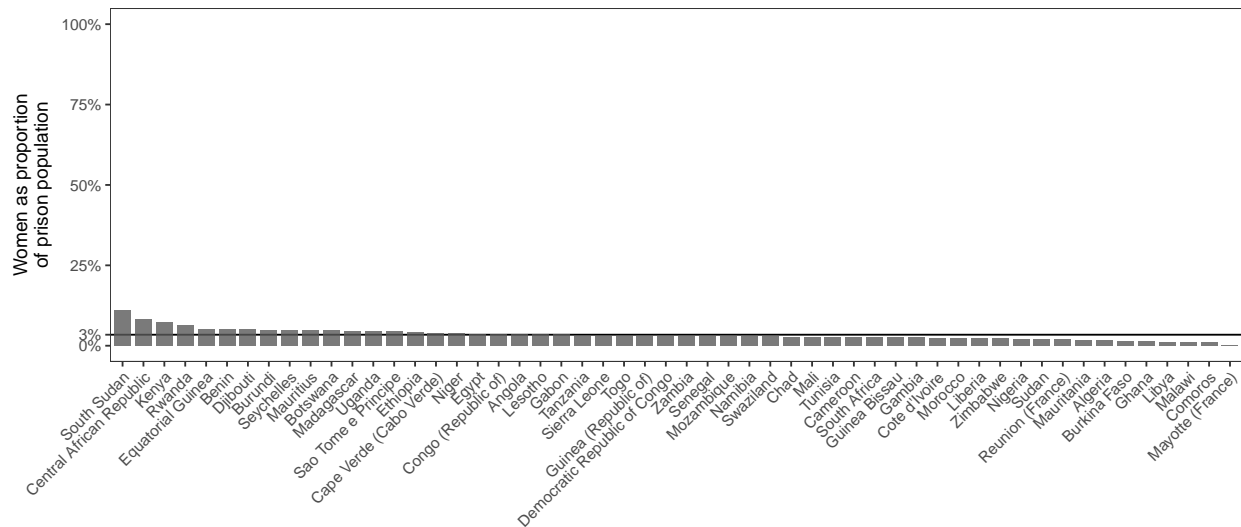


Figure 1: In Africa women make up 3% of the prison population on average.
Source: ICPR 2018.

One possibility is that the tendency of vigilante mobs to sometimes attack innocent citizens is more salient for men 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, 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.

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 and many of the men that we interviewed indicated that they could, at least in principle, imagine being falsely accused.

Below, we provide more systematic evidence of differences in perceptions of vigilantism across men and women using survey data and two vignette experiments from Uganda and Tanzania.

One exception to the logic presented in this section 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 and not men. An added complication is that 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. In other words, neither our measurements of support for vigilantism nor our explanation for the gender gap that we observe fully extend to witchcraft related vigilantism. Our main focus in the analyses that we present subsequently is thus respondents’ views about vigilante violence in response to 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 our 2017 household survey in rural Uganda. Respondents were asked to rate a hypothetical scenario that involves an act of vigilantism in terms of how likely they believe it

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

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.¹⁹ 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. Figure 2 displays the percentage of women and 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.

As indicated by the green bars, men are roughly five percentage points *more* likely to say the scenario could happen in their village if the scenario does *not* specify 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 *lower* if the scenario does *not* mention that the crime has been observed. This difference

¹⁹The 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.

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 women are more inclined to believe that vigilante mobs tend to punish those who are guilty, whereas men believe that vigilante mobs tend to operate on a tenuous evidence base.

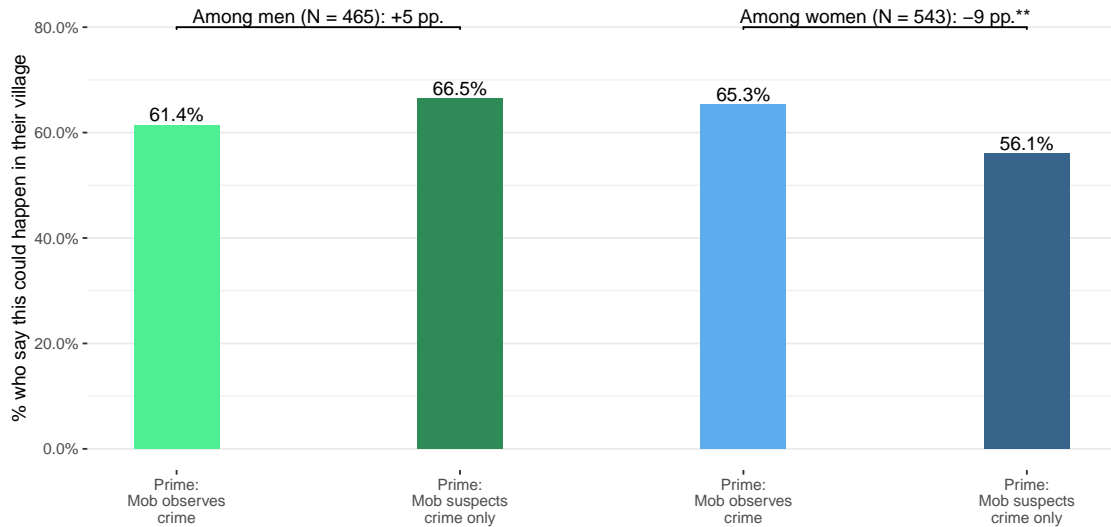


Figure 2: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether crime was observed. Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic). Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

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 (dark blue bar) is almost 10 percentage points lower than the share of men who consider such a scenario plausible (dark green bar). 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 (light blue bar) exceeds that of men (light green bar) by roughly 4 percentage points.

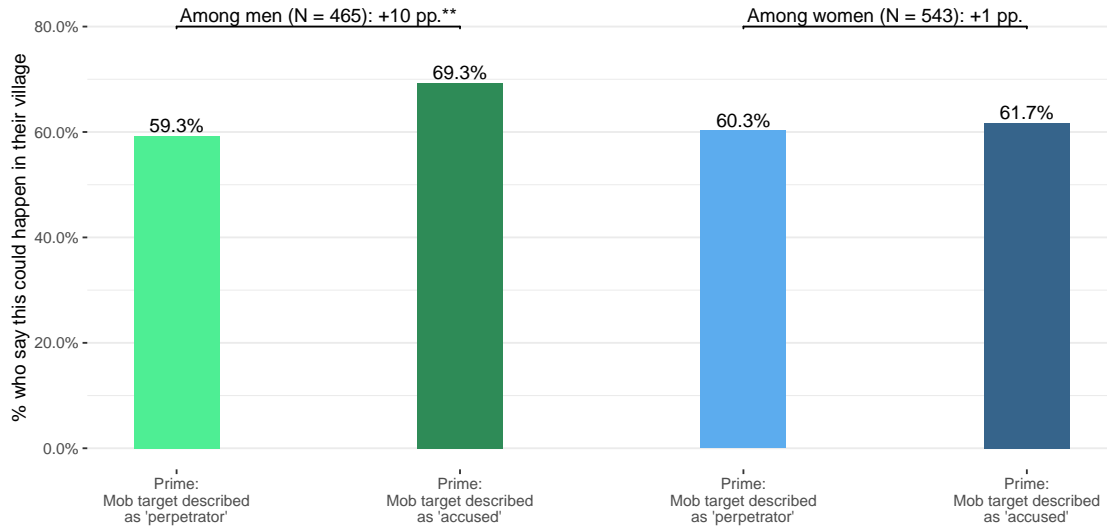


Figure 3: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether suspect is described as “perpetrator” or “accused”
 Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic).
 Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

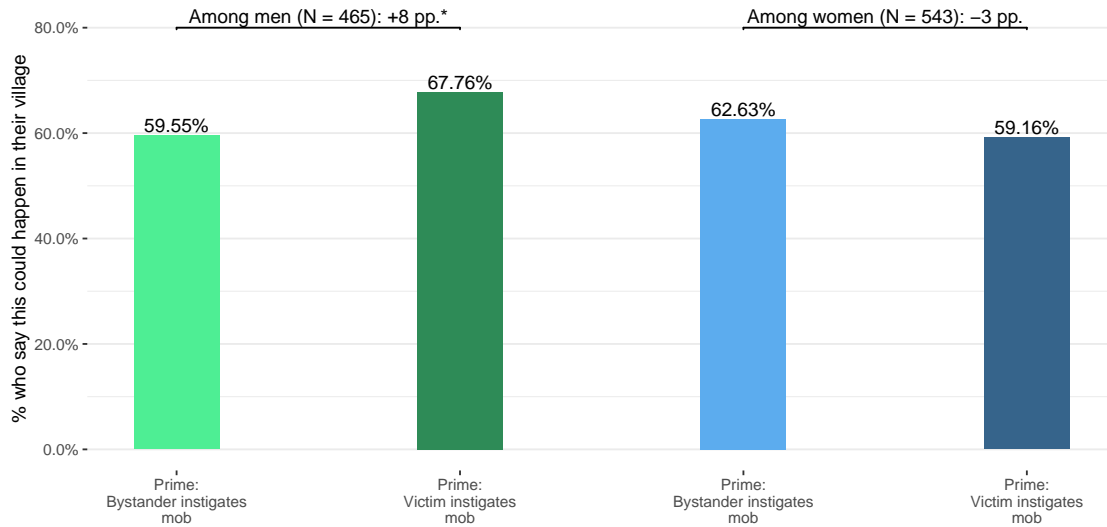


Figure 4: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether the instigator is the crime victim or a bystander
 Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic).
 Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

Similar patterns can be observed in Figures 3 and 4. 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 (see Figure 3). The same change in wording does not appear to have any effect on women’s assessments of whether a scenario is plausible. In contrast to women, men again seem to believe that scenarios in which the guilt of the suspect is uncertain are more plausible. Turning to the identity of the instigator (Figure 4), 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 by contrasting the dark green with the dark blue bar, both Figure 3 and 4 show again that men believe more strongly than women in scenarios that suggest the suspect may not be guilty.

Figure 5 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 be innocent. 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 likely to be guilty. Figure 5 compares men and women who were assigned to either one of these two possibilities.

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 in the share of men who think that the scenario could happen in their village 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 these estimates of the effects among women and men statistically significant, but the difference in effects is highly statistically significant as well. Moreover, comparing the dark green bar to the dark blue bar reveals that men consider scenarios in which the evidence base is tenuous almost 40 percent more likely than women. The share of women who believe that scenarios that strongly imply certainty of guilt are plausible (light blue bar) exceeds the share of men who find such scenarios convincing (light green bar) by roughly the same amount.

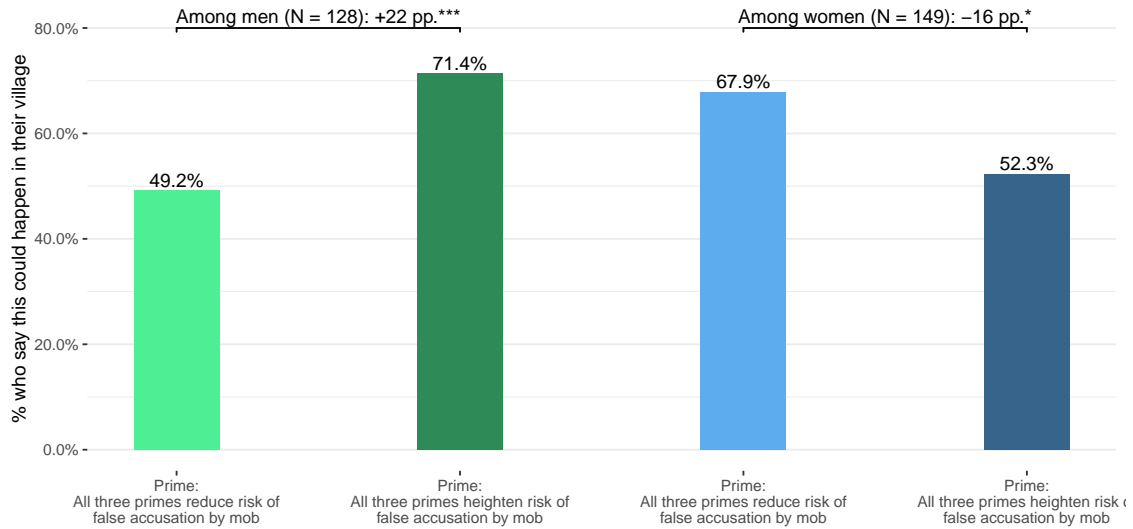


Figure 5: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men who were assigned to either all or none of the three primes that increase uncertainty of guilt

Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic), and 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.

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 vigilantism can be directed towards the innocent. 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 the fact that men are more likely to be the targets of vigilante attacks and, as a consequence, more attuned to the risk of being falsely accused.

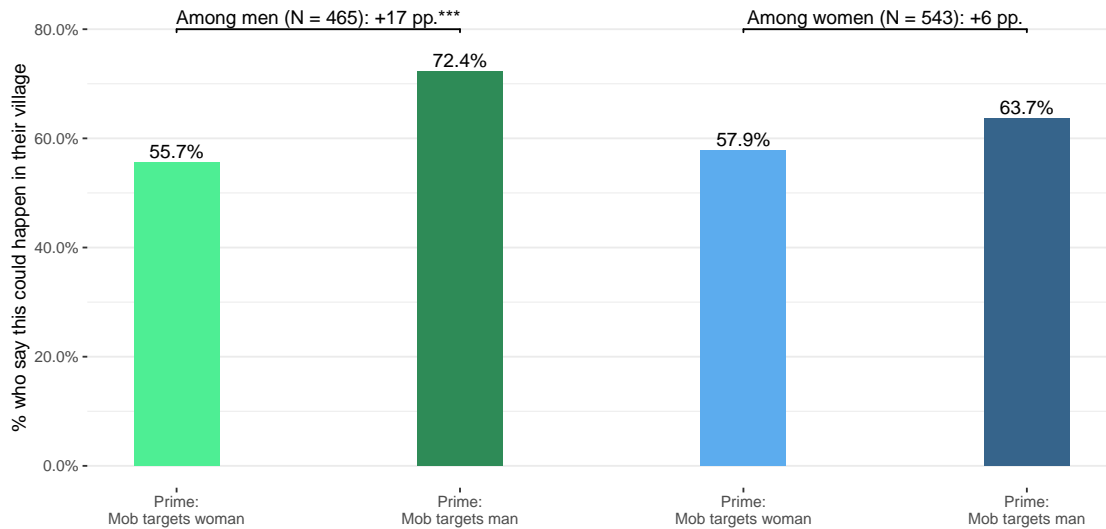


Figure 6: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether the target is a woman or man
 Results estimated among subset of respondents presented with an incident of theft (as opposed to black magic).
 Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

Do women and men indeed see vigilante violence that is directed toward women as less plausible? As can be seen in Figure 6, 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, it does suggest that men in particular perceive a substantially higher risk of becoming the target of vigilante violence for themselves than for 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.

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 aware that vigilantism may sometimes target the innocent and appear only somewhat attuned to the notion that risks may be concentrated on men.

Figures 11 to 15 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 4 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.

Second, most of our survey measures of support for mob vigilantism involve scenarios in which vigilante mobs punish someone who is accused of having committed a crime against a woman or a girl. One of our main measures, for example, asks respondents whether citizens should beat

up a truck driver who ran over a small girl. Another asks about the beating of a man who has stolen from a woman in a market place. Hence, an obvious alternative explanation for the gender gap in preferences that we observe may be that women identify more strongly than men with the crime victims in these scenarios. To assess these alternative explanations, we included a vignette experiment in our second study that randomly assigned respondents to a scenario in which a vigilante mob targets a suspect who has stolen from either a man or a woman.

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) (recall 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. Finally, we made use of the following vignette in order to elicit respondents' support for vigilantism:

Imagine the following: 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 them gets hold of the thief. Again, which of the following do you believe the neighbors should do?

- The neighbors should beat the thief there and then.
- The neighbors should call the police and leave it to them to deal with the thief.

We used simple random assignment to assign respondents to the scenario in which the crime victim is either a man or a woman. Each respondent again was read only one randomly assigned scenario. We estimate the effect of the crime victim’s gender on women’s and men’s support for the beating of the thief.

4.3.2 Results

We begin by analyzing gender differences in respondents’ answers to our survey questions that ask directly about false accusations. Figure 7 shows that women and men are about equally likely to agree 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 be a criminal. In other words, women and men do not seem to differ in their general assessments of the likelihood that communities may wrongly denounce innocent 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?

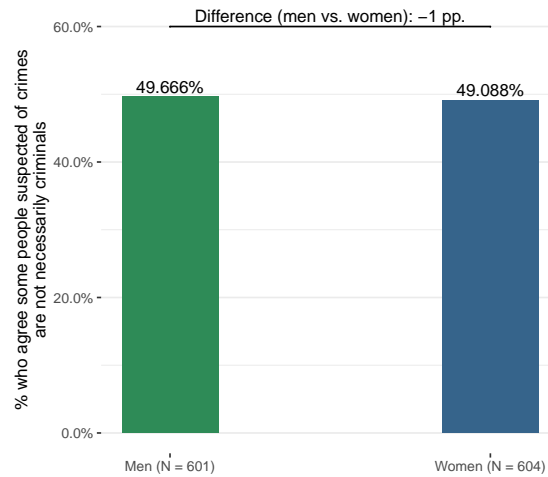


Figure 7: Beliefs about the accuracy of community perceptions of guilt by gender.

Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

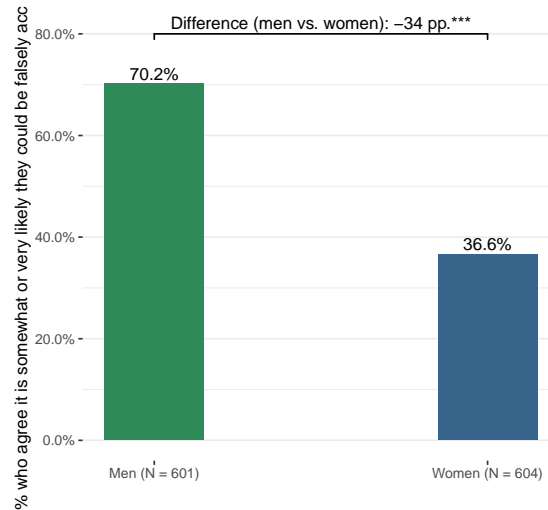


Figure 8: Fear of false accusations by gender.

Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

Figure 8 plots 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 the victim of a vigilante attack despite being innocent. This pattern is in line with the notion that men are more attuned to the risk of personally becoming the victim of a false accusation than women. This awareness 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 vigilante violence than women.

Is it possible that the gender gap in support for vigilante violence is instead driven by the fact that most of our survey measures involve crimes against women and girls? Figure 9 plots the share of women and men who support the beating of a thief by whether the thief is described as having stolen from a woman or from a man. The plot shows that the gender of the theft victim makes little difference to whether women and men think that the thief should be beaten. Both women and men are roughly as likely to support the beating of a thief who stole from a man as they are to support the beating of a thief who stole from a woman. As a consequence, the gender gap in

support is roughly constant across the two scenarios. Irrespective of whether the thief is described as having stolen from a man or from a woman, women are 4 to 5 percentage points more likely to believe that community members should beat the thief. This pattern speaks against the idea that the gender gap is an artifact of the way in which we measure support for vigilante violence.

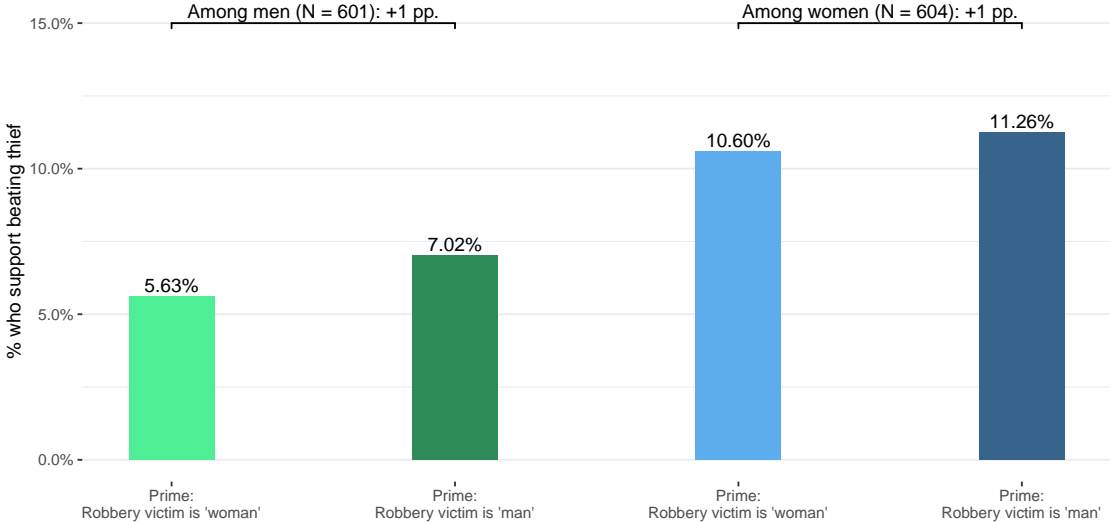


Figure 9: Support for vigilante violence against a thief by the gender of the theft victim. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

5 Alternative Explanations

The previous section has proffered an explanation for the gender gap in preferences 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 the driving force behind the gender gap in support that we observe. To strengthen our case that these beliefs are at least a contributing factor, we here provide evidence with regard to a range of 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, supporting mob vigilantism or bringing a case

to the police. Therefore, one might ask whether women are more likely to support mob vigilantism over police intervention simply because they hold a dimmer view of police than men. 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. In this case, what would appear as a preference for mob vigilantism would in fact arise due to distaste for police.

Table 2 displays estimates of gender gaps in several measures of respondents' approval of police that were included in our data sources. All outcomes vary from 0 to 1. Columns 1, 2, and 4 indicate women in two of our Uganda surveys and the first Tanzania survey would be 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 indicate the 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 preferences 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 Experience of intimate partner violence

The literature on intra-household violence suggests that individuals who have themselves survived violence may be prone to perpetrating or condoning violence against others (Arms and Russell, 1997; Ali and Naylor, 2013; Saile et al., 2014). Demographic health surveys in Uganda also indicate that women experience violence at especially high rates. A third mechanism that might mediate support for mob vigilantism is thus personal experience of violence. However, as we show in Table A1 in the appendix, women who have personally survived violence or seen a member of their own household victimized over the preceding six months are no more likely than those who have not to support mob vigilantism.

	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*** (0.003)	-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	0.152	0.140	0.154

Note:

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

Table 2: Women in our samples generally express more favorable views of police than men.

5.3 Greater demand for deterrence

Previous research has suggested women may be more afraid of crime than men and as a result may have a greater demand for deterrence (Hurwitz and Smithey, 1998). Since most respondents will conceivably place a high value on deterrence given the high rates of crime in the contexts in which we work, we designed a measure of demand for deterrence that makes apparent the tradeoff between due process protections and deterrence of crime:

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

Table A2 in the appendix reports the gender gap in the proportion of respondents who answer that it is better to get all the facts. The coefficient is statistically insignificant and very close to zero. Thus, it does not appear that gender gaps in preferences for mob vigilantism result from a greater demand for deterrence among women.

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 preferences 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.²⁰ In contexts where the risk of being attacked for a crime that one did not commit concentrates among men, women may generally have fewer opportunities to learn from personal experience about the risk that vigilantism poses. 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 despite cross-gender communication and whether the factors that contribute to its persistence are present elsewhere. If men are convinced of the downsides of mob vigilantism and are personally afraid of being wrongly accused, why do they not communicate these risks to women? 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.

²⁰Consider a case of mob vigilantism that provoked widespread protest and outcry in July 2018 in the Northeast Indian state of Assam, for example. Two young men – a musician and a businessman – from the state capital, Guwahati, 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 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. The men's deaths sparked outrage especially among the well-educated, urban populations of Assam.

Figure 10 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 more traditional 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.

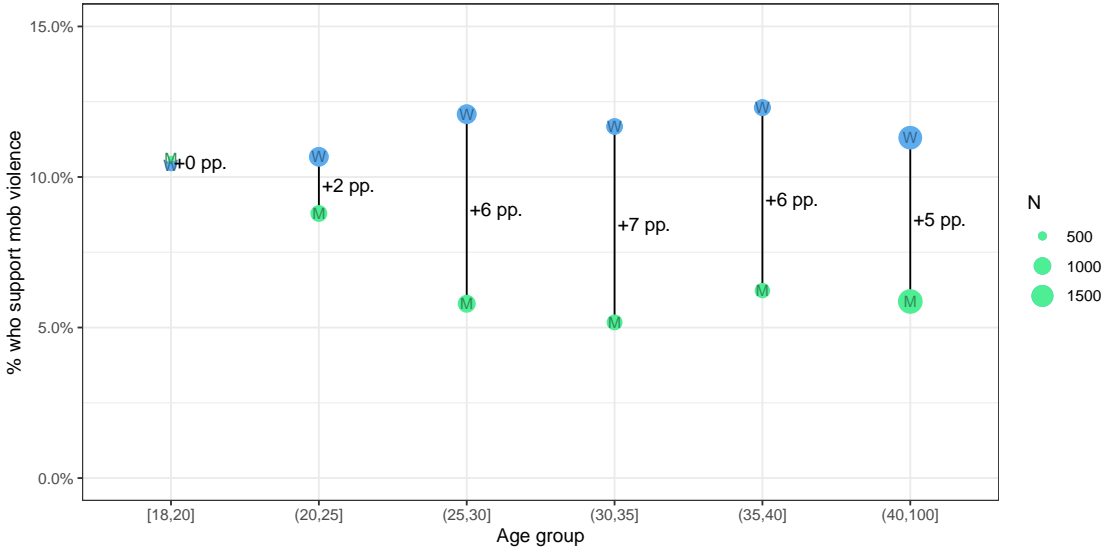


Figure 10: The gender gap in support for mob vigilantism widens with respondent age in our six samples from Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa.

In contexts in which the gender gap that we observe does exist, our findings suggest that informing men and women 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 (see White and Rastogi, 2009, for notable exceptions to this rule in India), women nonetheless play

an important role in limiting or exacerbating the prevalence of mob vigilantism. In marketplaces and crowded streets around the world where women are frequently assaulted and robbed, they are driven to instigate mob violence. Yet, women and men who do not support vigilantism may stop others from participating or deescalate incidents. Raising awareness of the risks that vigilantism poses for the innocent may be one way to shore up societal opposition to vigilantism. Ultimately, however, as long as states fail to tackle problems of crime and insecurity, consensus over the need to abandon brutal practices such as mob vigilantism may remain elusive.

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A Appendix

A.1 Results of vignette experiment for vigilantism against “black magic”	2
A.2 Alternative Pathways	5

A.1 Results of vignette experiment for vigilantism against “black magic”

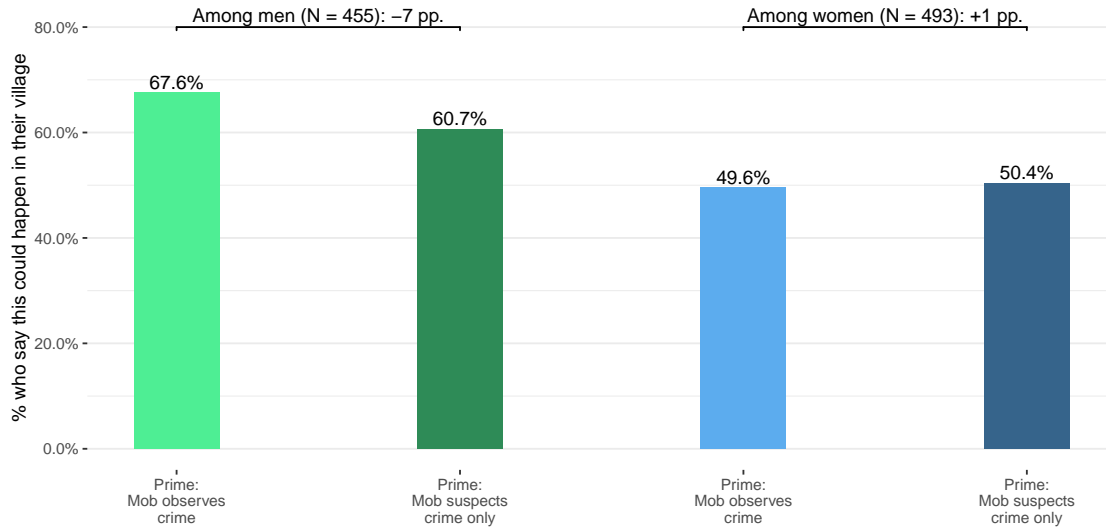


Figure 11: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether crime was observed. The figure is generated using a dataset that excludes respondents who were assigned to a scenario in which the suspect was accused of theft. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

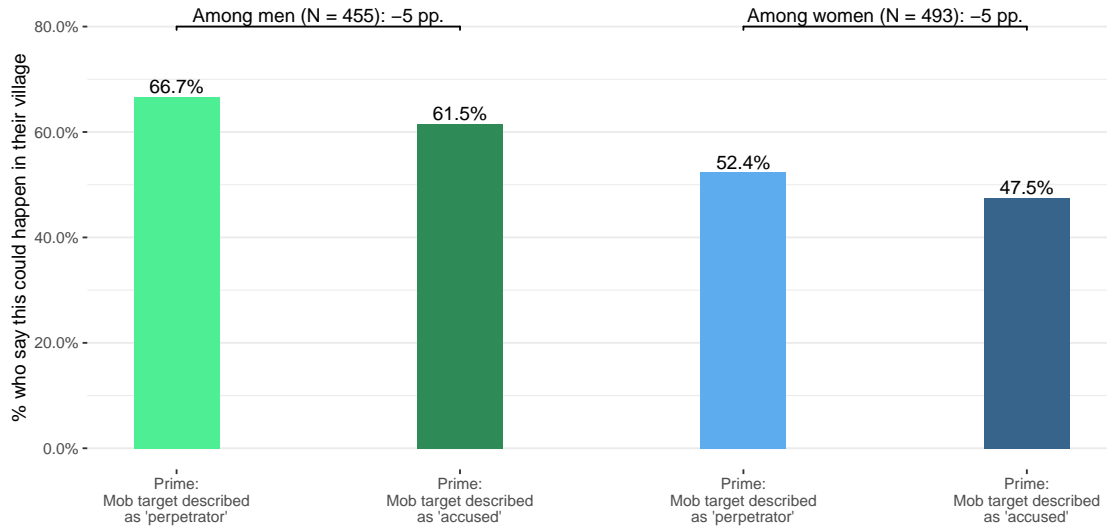


Figure 12: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether suspect is described as “perpetrator” or “accused”
 The figure is generated using a dataset that excludes respondents who were assigned to a scenario in which the suspect was accused of theft. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

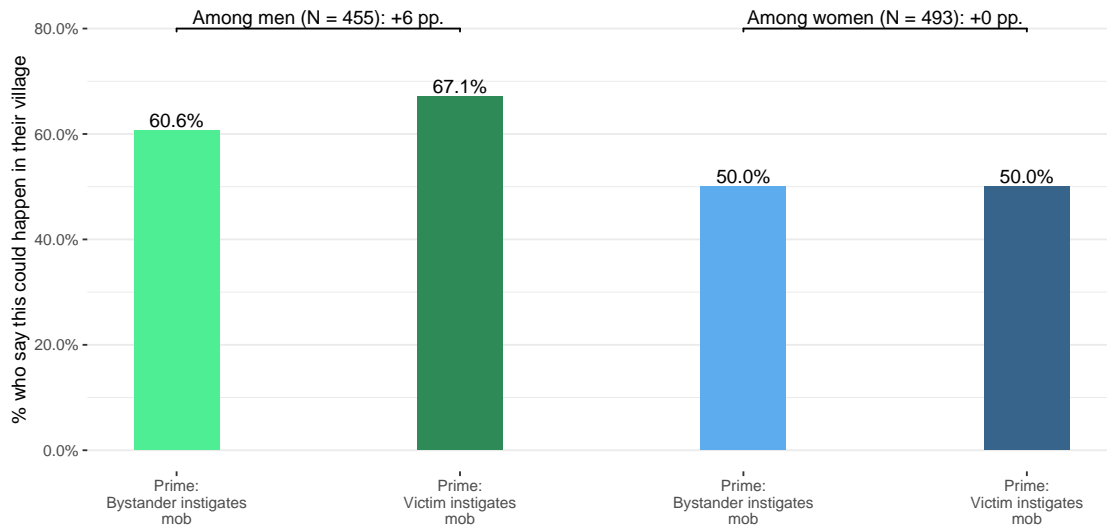


Figure 13: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether the instigator is the crime victim or a bystander
 The figure is generated using a dataset that excludes respondents who were assigned to a scenario in which the suspect was accused of theft. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

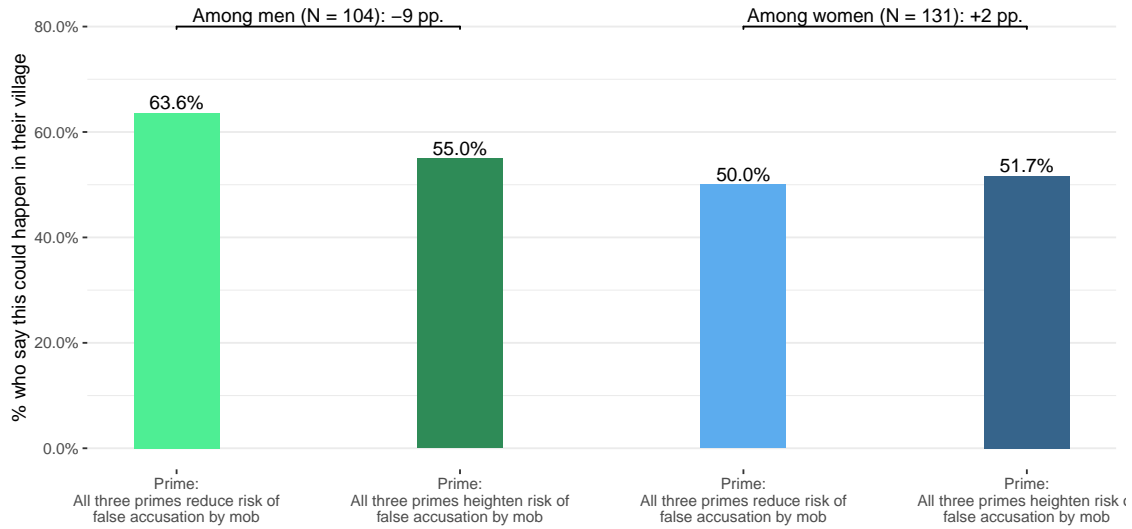


Figure 14: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men who were assigned to either all or none of the three primes that increase uncertainty of guilt

The figure is generated using a dataset that excludes respondents who were assigned to a scenario in which the suspect was accused of theft. Moreover, the dataset includes only respondents who were assigned 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 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.

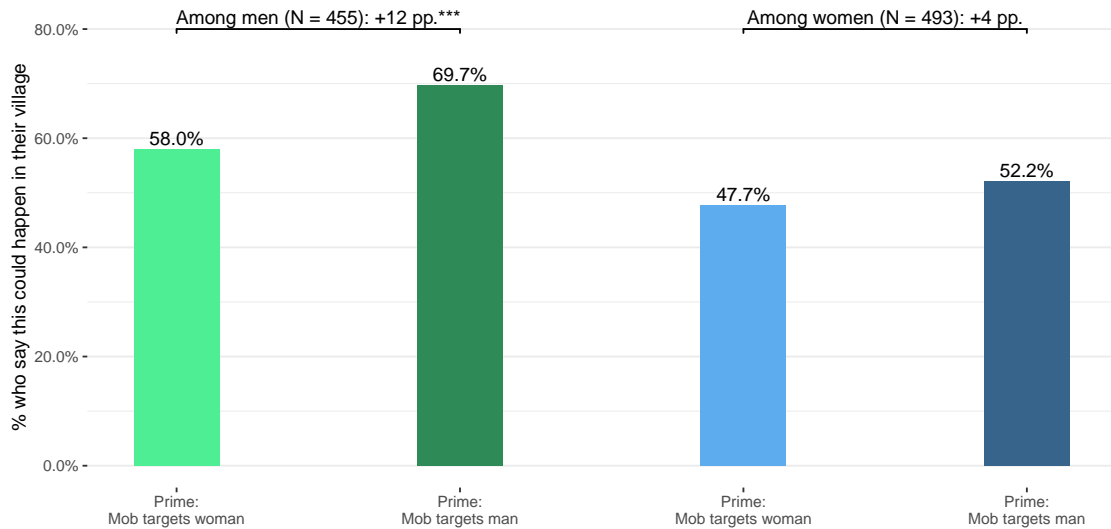


Figure 15: Beliefs about the plausibility of vigilantism among women and men by whether the target is a woman or man

The figure is generated using a dataset that excludes respondents who were assigned to a scenario in which the suspect was accused of theft. Significance stars indicate statistical significance based on a two-tailed unequal variance *t*-test.

A.2 Alternative Pathways

	SFMV
Experienced violence in past 6mo	-0.011 (0.034)
Community FE	Yes
Observations	1,031
Adjusted R ²	-0.028

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A1: Women who have experienced or witnessed violence against a woman in their own household over the preceding six months are no more likely to support mob vigilantism than those who did not experience or witness violence.

Note:

<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
Better to punish immediately	
Woman	0.005 (0.010)
Observations	1,956
Adjusted R ²	0.004

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A2: Women in Uganda do not appear to privilege deterrence over due process more than men.