

# Group Gender Composition and Perceptions of Legitimacy\*

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## Abstract

How does group gender composition affect citizens' evaluations of decision-making processes and outcomes? Do citizens perceive decisions made by gender-balanced, legislative bodies as more legitimate than those made by all-male bodies? Extant work on the link between women's descriptive representation and perceptions of democratic legitimacy in democracies finds that the equal presence of women legitimizes decision-making processes. However, this relationship may not hold in more patriarchal, less democratic settings. We employ survey experiments in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia to investigate how citizens respond to gender representation in committees. We find that women's presence promotes citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of committee processes and outcomes, and moreover, that pro-women decisions are associated with higher levels of perceived legitimacy. Thus, this study demonstrates remarkable robustness of findings from the West regarding gender representation and contributes to the burgeoning literature on women's descriptive representation, and women and politics in gender conservative settings.

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# 1 Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the numerical presence of women in decision-making bodies. Existing evidence from established democracies demonstrates that descriptive representation increases citizens' perceptions of legitimacy in state institutions (Mansbridge 1999; Scherer and Curry 2010) and political outcomes (Banducci, Donovan and Karp 2004), thereby promoting institutional trust (Gay 2002; Ulbig 2007). Moreover, such representation may legitimize decisions which adversely affect women, an effect mainly driven by male responses to female representation (Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo 2019). However, recent work has shown that the effect of descriptive representation may not be uniform across different settings and positions of power (Lee, Solberg and Waltenburg 2021). Increased women's representation in decision-making institutions may engender backlash against women, especially in settings with highly conservative gender norms or less democratic systems (Biroli and Caminotti 2020; Yildirim, Kocapinar and Ecevit 2021).

We test whether recent findings on the causal link between women's descriptive representation and democratic legitimacy identified in democratic settings with higher levels of gender progressive norms extend to less democratic, gender conservative contexts. We do so using a survey experiment that varies two main treatment dimensions: gender composition of a legislative committee and the outcome reached by the group (expanding or limiting protections of women's rights).<sup>1</sup> We implement the experiment in three Middle East and North African (MENA) countries: Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, which have more gender conservative societies and less democratic regimes than the sites of most previous studies on this topic.

Contrary to expectations, we find Jordanians, Moroccans and Tunisians view equal inclusion of women in the decision-making process much the same as citizens in the West. Women's inclusion in decision-making increased respondents' perceptions of the legitimacy of processes and outcomes. Moreover, while we find no relationship between public acceptance of decisions and equal gender representation on committees, we uncover a strong positive relationship between pro-women decisions and respondents' expectations that the broader public will accept the committee's decision. A second important - and somewhat surprising - conclusion from the study is that respondents generally support pro-women decisions.

## 2 Group Gender Composition and Legitimacy

Descriptive representation, where representatives mirror the population from which they are drawn, is often conceptualized as "the politics of presence" (Mansbridge 1999). The argument for descriptive representation is based on the premise that elected officials are more likely to 'act for' those with whom they share personal characteristics (Pitkin 1967; Lovenduski and Norris 2003). Representation of the population in accordance with its demographic characteristics should lead to fairer outcomes (Easton 1965; Gay 2002) and serve to cushion unfavorable decisions (Arnesen and Peters 2018). Thus, descriptive representation can improve the quality of policies, particularly regarding women and other marginalized groups (Banducci, Donovan and Karp 2004). It may also

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<sup>1</sup>The survey experiment is inspired by one initially designed by Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo (2019). We modified the design and mode of the study to make it appropriate for the contexts we study.

bolster the legitimacy of legislative bodies, as the public is more willing to accept decisions made by more representative decision-making groups.<sup>2</sup>

Studies exploring the link between women's descriptive representation and democratic legitimacy have proliferated over the past decade (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo 2019; Lee, Solberg and Waltenburg 2021). Some of this research on the symbolic representation of women in politics (i.e., the attitudinal and behavioral effects of women's representation (Lawless 2004)) has found that women's numerical presence in decision-making bodies positively influences citizens' evaluations of both decisions (i.e., substantive legitimacy) and the fairness of the decision-making procedure as well as trust in the institutions (i.e., procedural legitimacy) (Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo 2019). Yet, other studies have shown that increased women's representation may lead to backlash against women (Krook 2015), especially among men who may view women's increased presence as a loss of their own political influence (Lee, Solberg and Waltenburg 2021).

Importantly, most studies have been conducted in more liberal societies of Western democracies, leaving open questions about how well findings travel to less democratic, gender conservative settings. We expect backlash effects to be more pronounced in gender conservative societies, such as in the MENA region, where women have traditionally been absent from political decision-making spheres. Patriarchal norms combined with discriminatory laws continue to favor male citizens in most MENA countries. Because backlash against increased female representation is more likely to occur when women suddenly become visible as political actors (Krook 2015), we posit that the presence of women in legislative bodies in the MENA should have a negative impact on citizens' perceptions of substantive and procedural legitimacy.

We anticipate this will be true even in less democratic regimes. Legislative assemblies in authoritarian regimes are often sites of co-optation, information-signaling, and contestation over policy outcomes (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Schuler and Malesky 2014). Autocratic legislatures may not enjoy similar policy-making powers as those in more democratic settings, but MPs still have the power to discuss and study the proposed laws in parliamentary committees (Shalaby and Elimam 2020), and to approve or reject laws.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we propose the following pre-registered hypotheses:

*H1: Citizens will be less likely to agree that the committee made the right decision when the committee is gender balanced (i.e., substantive legitimacy).*

*H2: Citizens will be more likely to report negative attitudes regarding the committee's decision-making process when the committee is gender balanced (i.e., procedural legitimacy).*

*H3: Citizens will be less likely to believe that the general public will accept a decision made by a gender balanced committee.*

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<sup>2</sup>We rely on Easton's conceptualization of democratic legitimacy as the 'reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed' (1975, 444). Easton (1965, 1975) argues that democratic legitimacy has three main sources: structural, ideological, and personal. As maintained by Scherer and Curry (2010), these aspects are directly linked to existing theories of institutional legitimacy: procedural justice, substantive representation, and descriptive representation.

<sup>3</sup>Note that we did not pre-register hypotheses specifically related to less democratic regimes.

### 3 Gender Conservative Societies, Non-Democratic Legislatures, and Domestic Violence

We test our hypotheses in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, focusing on deliberation over domestic violence penalties. This is a gendered issue, relevant across our cases, and one which extant studies and our own pretests<sup>4</sup> find to be contested. Domestic violence is an important substantive issue, and thus examining it lends additional value to this study. About one third of female respondents in Jordan reported experiencing domestic violence, despite the highly sensitive nature of this question (Clark et al. 2009). About 50% of Moroccan (Kasraoui 2019) and Tunisian (Veen, Jrad and Galand 2017) women report suffering from some sort of violence in their lifetime.

Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia have gender-conservative societies. As shown in Figure 1a, respondents in the three countries are more likely than Americans to agree with the statement that men make better political leaders than women. Conservative gender norms are also evident in the controversies over legislation regarding domestic violence, the focus of our study. For instance, some prominent Jordanians publicly opposed amendments that would strengthen laws against domestic violence (Watkins 2020); some prominent members of Morocco's former ruling Justice and Development Party opposed strengthening of laws against domestic violence (Etezadi 2016); and members of Tunisia's Ennadha party initially opposed the country's 2017 domestic violence law on the grounds that the phrase "gender-based violence" could threaten "family unity" (Abdo-Katsipis 2017; Khamis 2017).

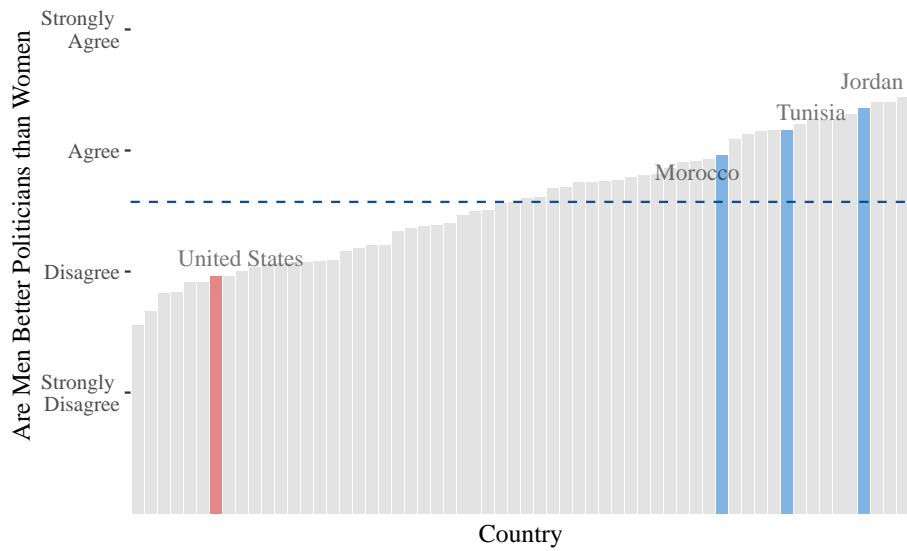
These countries also have varying degrees of authoritarian institutions (as shown in Figure 1b), but ones in which women's representation in deliberation over domestic violence penalties is realistic. In 2021, women parliamentarians made up about 12% of the elected legislature in Jordan, 24% in Morocco, and 26% in Tunisia. Moreover, while all three countries have passed legislation outlawing domestic violence, many find the legislation insufficient.<sup>5</sup>

We thus focus our study on group gender composition in decision-making bodies regarding penalties over domestic violence in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia for several reasons. These cases allow us to examine the findings from more gender progressive societies in Western democracies in less democratic systems with gender conservative societies in the MENA. They are also countries in which it is feasible that committees with different degrees of women representation would deliberate over domestic violence penalties. Indeed, majorities of our respondents in all countries viewed the scenario as realistic (see Figure A4 in our Appendix). Finally, these are contexts in which the outcomes of such deliberations are often contested, giving us reason to believe that we would find variation in respondents' evaluations of the committee and its outcomes.

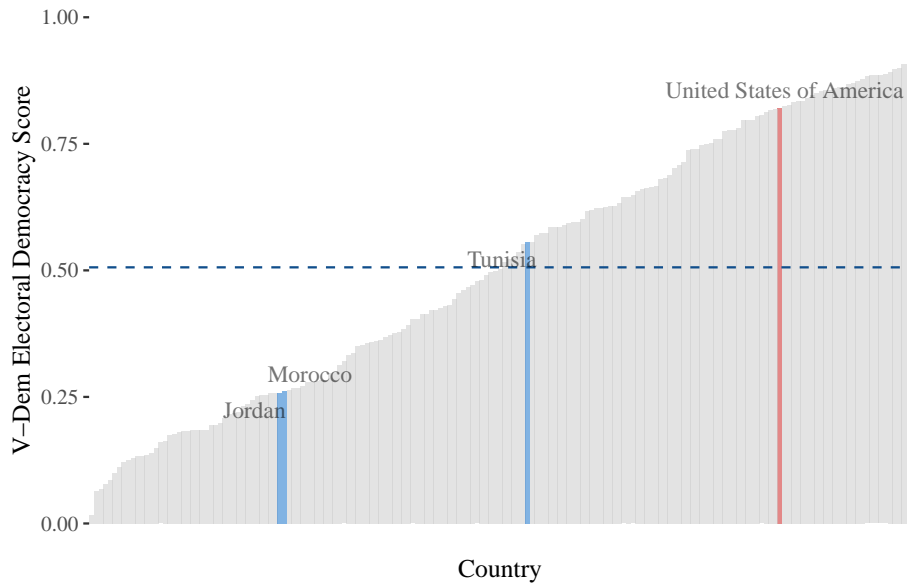
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<sup>4</sup>In the pilot phase, we asked 257 respondents which of three issues were most salient, namely: equal rights over decisions about children's affairs, equal pay among men and women for equal work, and increasing penalties for domestic violence. In each country, most respondents agreed that domestic violence was the most important issue. See Appendix A.3 for details.

<sup>5</sup>Regarding criticisms against Jordan's Law No. 6/2008 against domestic violence, see Nasrawin (2017); Tunisia's Law No. 2017-58, see Human Rights Watch (2022); and Morocco's 2018 Law No. 103-13, see Human Rights Watch (2020) and Kanso (2018).



(a) Cross-Country Variation in Gender Political Norms (WVS).



(b) Cross-Country Variation in democratic strength (V-Dem).

Figure 1: **Experimental Sites in a Cross-National Perspective.** Figure a reports average levels of agreement with the statement that men make better politicians than women. Data come from the sixth wave of the World Values Survey ([World Values Survey Association and others N.d.](#)). Figure b reports 2021 electoral democracy scores per country collected by V-dem ([Coppedge et al. 2021](#))

## 4 Research Design

To test our hypotheses we implemented a phone-based survey experiment, fielded between November 2021 and March 2022 in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. We asked 4,754 respondents a series of pre-treatment questions and then presented them with our experimental vignette: an excerpt from a mock radio show describing a legislative committee that decided whether to raise penalties on domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> In our main experiment, we randomized the gender composition of the committee (all male / gender-balanced) and the decision made by the committee (aligned with female interests / opposed to female interests), resulting in a fully crossed 2x2 experimental design.<sup>7</sup>

Following the vignette, respondents answered factual manipulation checks and questions related to our key outcomes. We identify the effects of gender balance on (H1) the evaluation of the committee’s decision (a 3-item index measuring belief that the committee made the right decision for all citizens, men, and women.  $\alpha = .804$ ); (H2) attitudes towards the committee procedure (a 2-item index measuring trust in committee and belief in committee fairness.  $\alpha = .668$ ); and (H3) perception that general public will accept the committee’s decision (a single-item measure).

We estimate the following pre-registered OLS regression, considering the average treatment effect of committee gender balance across all countries:

$$y_{ic} = \beta_{balance} + \delta_{decision} + \psi_i + \varepsilon_{ic} \quad (1)$$

Our main parameter of interest is  $\beta_{balance}$ , representing the gender balance average treatment effect on a given outcome of interest ( $y_{ic}$ ). To increase the precision of our estimate, we further control for our second treatment ( $\delta_{decision}$ ), as well as respondents’ country, gender, age, and education (represented by  $\psi_i$ ). We supplement our main analysis with similar, country-specific OLS regressions.<sup>8</sup>

## 5 Results

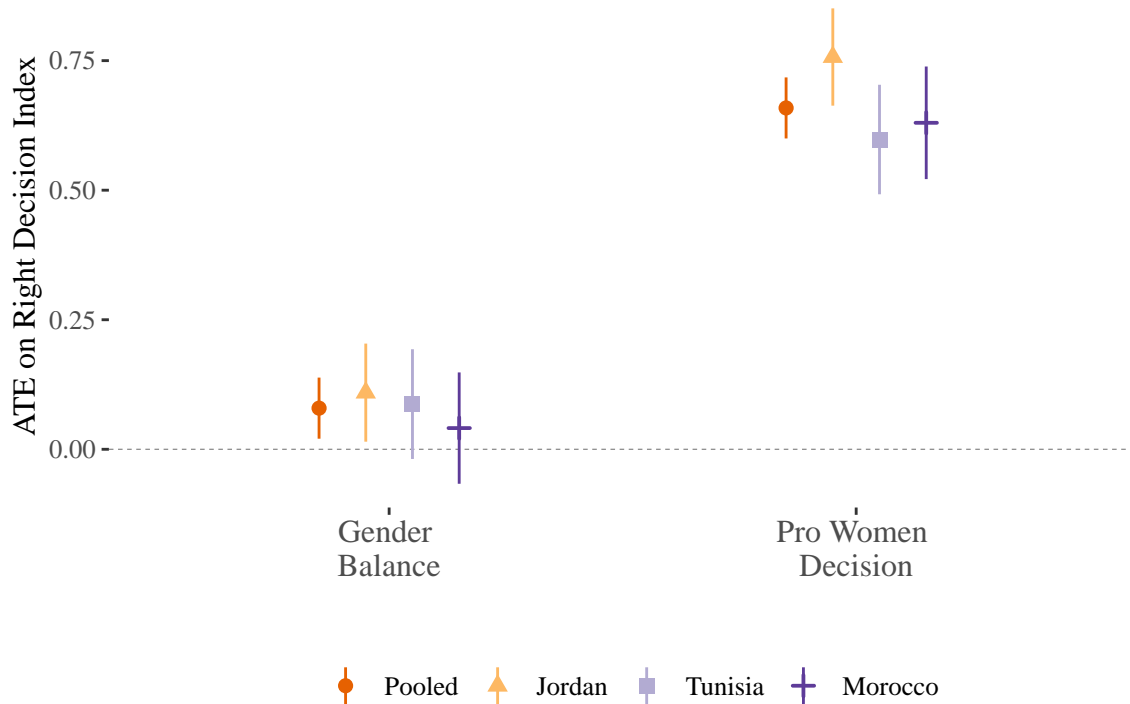
In this section we present our gender balance average treatment effects along with the average treatment effects of our secondary treatment, the committee’s decision. Figure 2 depicts the effects of our main treatments on respondents’ evaluation of the committee’s decision (H1, the substantive legitimacy hypothesis). As evident on the left side of Figure 2, in aggregate, gender balance modestly improved respondents’ evaluation of the committee’s decision by 7% of a SD. The Jordan sample largely drives this effect, and it is the only sample in which the gender balance treatment is precisely estimated at conventional levels of statistical significance. Interestingly, the pro-women decision treatment also improved respondents’ evaluation of the committee’s decision in all countries. In the aggregate, the effect of the pro-women decision treatment is almost 8.5 times larger than the effects of the gender balance treatment, suggesting that the decision is a more important

<sup>6</sup>A translated version of the vignette, as well as an overview of all survey measures is provided in Appendix A. The committee is not named, but recent examinations of abstraction in survey experiments suggest that adapting an unnamed committee should not substantially impact on the main inferences we draw (Brutger et al. 2020).

<sup>7</sup>The  $n = 4754$  sample size excludes 1,550 Jordanian subjects assigned to a vignette focusing on a non-gendered issue area. We discuss those results in Appendix C.8.

<sup>8</sup>We also check robustness of our results to enumerator-respondent gender congruence in the Appendix (see Section D.3 and Figure A16).

factor in shaping respondents' evaluation of substantive legitimacy. Taken together the results in Figure 2 stand in stark contrast to our pre-registered expectations, suggesting instead that gender balance and pro-women decisions increase popular evaluations of decisions made by legislative committees.



**Figure 2: Average Treatment Effects on Agreement that Committee Made the Right Decision.** This figure reports the average treatment effect of gender balance and committee decision treatments on a scale measuring respondents' belief that the committee made the right decision. We present four different models, focusing on our pooled sample ( $n = 4,061$ ), as well as Jordanian ( $n = 1,460$ ), Tunisian ( $n = 1,410$ ), and Moroccan samples ( $n = 1,191$ ).

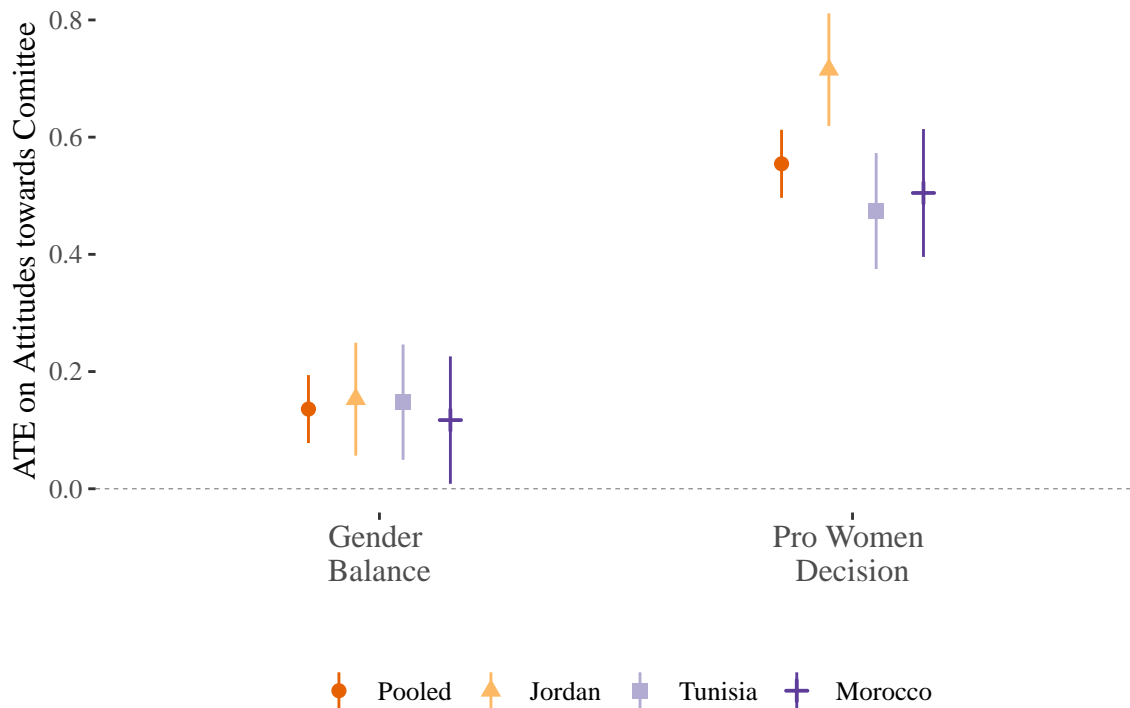


Figure 3: **Average Treatment Effects on Attitudes towards the Committee.** This figure reports the average treatment effect of our gender balance and committee decision treatments on a scale measuring respondents’ attitudes towards the committee. We present four different models, focusing on our pooled sample ( $n = 4,061$ ), as well as Jordanian ( $n = 1,412$ ), Tunisian ( $n = 1,403$ ), and Moroccan samples ( $n = 1,173$ ).

In Figure 3 we report the effects of our main treatments on respondents’ attitudes towards the committee (H2, the procedural legitimacy hypothesis). We find that gender balance increases respondents’ positive attitudes towards the committee by over 13% of a SD, and this effect is consistent across all countries. Pro-women decisions also increase positive attitudes towards the committee, and they are about four times larger than the effect of the gender balance treatment. Again, these results stand in stark contrast to our pre-registered hypothesis, and they emphasize that even in the MENA region gender balance and pro-women decision could increase procedural legitimacy.



In Figure 4 we consider the extent to which our treatments shape respondents' expectations regarding public acceptance of the committee's decision. Our results suggest that gender balance does not have a precisely estimated effect on this outcome, but pro-women decisions do increase respondents' expectation that the public will accept the committee's decision. In line with the findings reported in Figures 2-3, these stand in contrast to our pre-registered expectation, finding that citizens are more sensitive to committee decisions than composition.

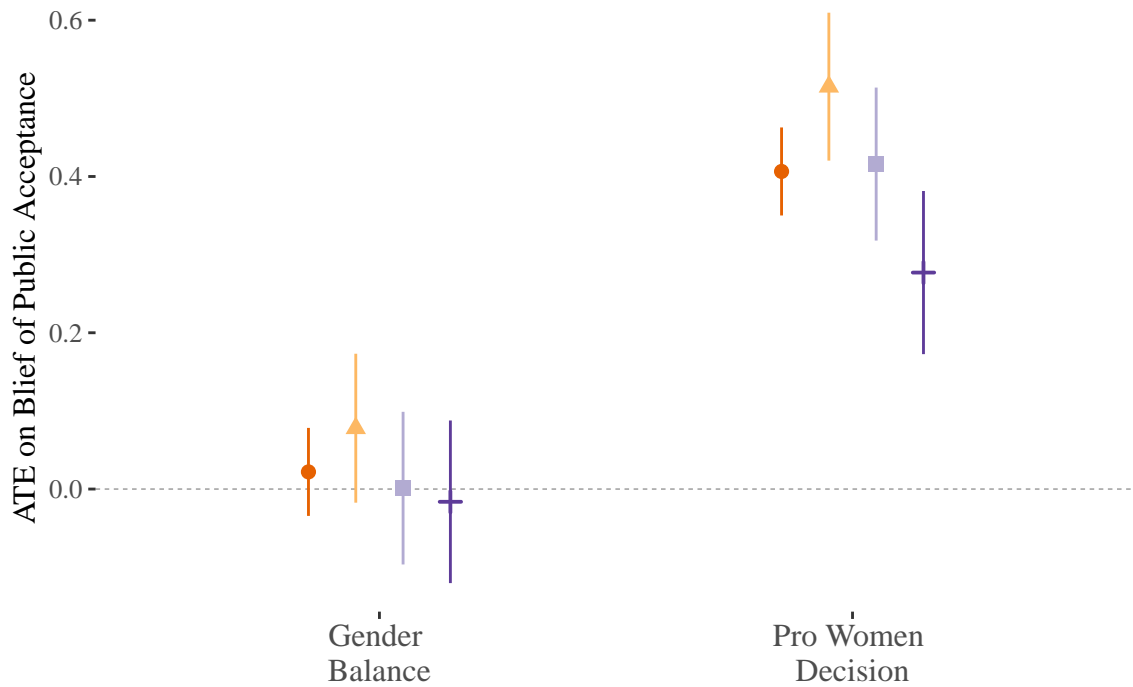


Figure 4: **Average Treatment Effects on Belief that the Public will Accept the Committee's Decision.** This figure reports the average treatment effect of our gender balance and committee decision treatments on a single outcome measuring respondents' belief that the public will accept the committee's decision. We present four different models, focusing on our pooled sample ( $n = 4,508$ ), as well as Jordanian ( $n = 1,595$ ), Tunisian ( $n = 1,541$ ), and Moroccan samples ( $n = 1,372$ ).

## 6 Conclusion

Taken together, our results suggest that descriptive representation can increase substantive and procedural legitimacy, even in highly patriarchal contexts. To our knowledge, we provide the first study to examine the causal relationship between the presence of women in decision-making processes and citizens' perceptions of substantive and procedural legitimacy in such settings, and the results are rather surprising. In contrast to our expectations, women's representation appears to have positive effects on the legitimacy of decision-making bodies and their outcomes. Indeed, the results are remarkably similar to those found in studies from more gender liberal societies in Western democracies.

The study makes several contributions to the literature on representation and bridges an important gap in our understanding on the intersection of gender and politics in less democratic settings. Unlike much of the extant work on descriptive representation that relies on observational data, our use of an experimental design allows us to test causation between increased female representation and legitimacy. Our study prompts scholars to delve deeper into understanding the impact of gender representation in non-Western contexts. In doing so, it calls for the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of when backlash effects are likely to surface. It also suggests the need to better understand the issues and processes over which gender conservative norms are activated, and to interrogate the variation within apparently conservative societies.

This study also has important implications for policymakers. It suggests that gender equality promoting policies may have positive benefits, even in less democratic, gender conservative contexts. More research should be done to examine implications of gender balanced decision-making bodies in real-world contexts and across varying levels of power, but our study's findings are promising for those who hope to see women's representation increase the legitimacy of decision-making bodies. Only by further exploring these outcomes can we fully understand how gender quotas, campaign support, and other programs aimed at increased women representation affect political institutions and outcomes.

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## *Supplementary Information*

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# A Survey Description

## A.1 Sampling Procedure

To test the hypotheses above, we implemented a series of phone survey experiments between November - December 2021 in Tunisia and Morocco and January - March 2022 in Jordan. Local survey providers hired and trained enumerators; our research team members prepared training materials, checked recordings for quality, participated virtually in the trainings, maintained constant contact with team leaders, and monitored the incoming data daily.

We implemented gender quotas in our surveys so that there would be an even number of male and female enumerator-led interviews across genders. In Jordan, however, our local survey provider could not find enough competent male enumerators to accomplish the job. We thus had to allow a higher number of female enumerators in Jordan, an issue which is discussed in further detail below.

## A.2 Pre-Treatment Measures

After consent, participants were asked their gender and citizenship. They were then asked about their positions regarding domestic violence penalties. These questions were followed by two batteries of questions in random order on benevolent and hostile sexism adapted for the most part from (Glick et al. 2004) as well as gender norms in the society. Finally, we asked respondents about their views of the government, the importance of democracy, and their religiosity.

Do you think that the penalties for domestic violence should be raised? (Yes, No)

(For those in Jordan only) Do you think that the penalties for littering should be raised? (Yes, No)

Different people hold different opinions regarding roles of men and women. I am going to read out some statements. For each one, can you tell me if you agree or disagree with it? (Agree, Disagree)

- Women should be cherished and protected by men.
- Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
- Women are too easily offended.
- A wife should not be significantly more successful in her career than her husband.

In different communities men and women also behave in different ways. Is it acceptable for women in your circle of friends and family: (Yes, No)

- To gather with men in the same space at weddings
- To publicly disagree with a man's opinion
- To travel out of town alone

How satisfied are you with the current government's performance overall? (Completely dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Satisfied, Completely satisfied)

How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? (Not at all important, Not important, Important, Very important)

In general, would you describe yourself as very religious, religious, not religious, not at all religious?

### A.3 Pretest to Determine Issue Area

During our piloting phase, we asked 257 respondents across our cases which of three different types of gendered issues was most salient in their society at the time of the survey: 1) increasing penalties for domestic violence; 2) giving mothers the same rights as fathers over decision regarding their children's education, travel and general welfare; and 3) ensuring women earn the same pay as men for performing equal jobs. Among these three topics, majorities considered domestic violence to be the most important issue to address in their society currently.

Below, we provide the text of our experimental stimuli which was read by a local. (For respondents in Jordan, randomization of topic also occurred where the words "domestic violence" were replaced with "littering in public spaces" in the text below.)

#### Vignette (Radio Broadcast)

In today's news, a committee of [**8 male / 4 male and 4 female**] legislators from varying parties and areas of the country [**supported/rejected**] a proposal to increase penalties for domestic violence.

Over the past month, the [**all-male/gender-balanced**] parliamentary committee thoroughly reviewed a law to increase the penalties for domestic violence. The committee of [**8 male / 4 male and 4 female**] legislators met weekly to hear opinions from citizens, experts, and bureaucrats, to learn about the issue, and to examine the potential costs and benefits of increasing the penalties.

Earlier today, one of our journalists visited the committee's meeting and recorded their debates. Here is a brief excerpt:

(Recording of committee deliberation plays, randomize order of statement 1 and 2 and for the gender-balanced committees randomize if male or female comes first (both are male voices for the all-male committees))

[Statement 1]: We thank our team for their work researching policy options relating to penalties for domestic violence. Clearly our team did important work that demonstrates the importance of the questions we are debating and the consequences of our decisions.

[Statement 2]: I am grateful for the important discussions in our committee, which has gone a long way to develop policies which will address our community's needs.

[Back to Radio discussion]

At the end of this meeting, our reporter learned that the committee, composed of [**8 men / 4 men and 4 women**] has decided to [**support/reject**] the proposed law on penalties for domestic violence. The committee stated that prevention of domestic violence is an important cause



[and they are glad they determined appropriate measures to support this cause/ but, in the end, the committee decided that the current penalties are enough and so, they will remain unchanged]. All committee members had equal say in deciding this matter.

#### **A.4 Quality Checks**

After the recording played, we checked if the respondent could hear it clearly. We had enumerators play it again if they could not, up to three times. If the respondent could not hear the recording after the third time, we terminated the interview.

- Could you hear the recording clearly or do you want me to play it again? (I could hear it fine, I need you to replay the recording please, Respondent could not hear the recording for the third time)

#### **A.5 Post-Treatment Measures**

After listening to the brief radio expert, study participants were asked a series of manipulation questions. Then they responded to several outcome measure relating to: Evaluation of the committee's decision (in general, and in terms of female interests), trust in the committee, perceived fairness of the decision making process, and the expectation regarding public attitudes towards the committee's decision.

##### *Manipulation Checks*

In the radio story that you heard, was the entire committee men, women, or was it half-half?

What issue was the committee discussing? (Women's shelters, Domestic violence, Littering, Equality in pay for work, Don't know/Refuse to answer)

What was the committee's decision regarding the penalties/budget proposal? (Support, Reject, Don't Know/Refuse to Answer)

##### *Outcomes*

Now I am going to ask you some questions about how you feel about the committee. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. . .

- The committee made the right decision for all citizens?
- The committee made the right decision for women?
- The committee made the right decision for men?
- The committee can be trusted to make future decisions that are right for all citizens?

- Still thinking about the radio story you just heard, how fair was the decision making process? (Very unfair, Somewhat unfair, Somewhat fair, Very fair)

- How likely is the general public to accept the committee's decision to (support/reject) raising penalties for (domestic violence/littering)? (Not at all likely, Not likely, Likely, Very likely,

Don't Know/Refuse to Answer)

*Additional Checks*

-Could you imagine a real legislative committee in (country name) considering raising penalties for (domestic violence/littering)? (Yes, No)

- What do you think this survey is about? (Law making/legislative processes, Differences between men and women, Environmental politics, Women's rights, Government service provision/spending, Other, Don't Know/Refuse to Answer)

## **A.6 Ethics**

We obtained ethical clearance for this study from the Institutional Review Board at XX. We also included a consent form before beginning the survey to ensure the respondent understood what they were agreeing to and their rights regarding the storage and use of their data. Finally, we confirmed that the respondent was above the age of 18 before continuing with the survey. The text read as follows:

Hello, my name is (enumerator name). I am calling you from (organization) to participate in a survey of about 20 minutes or less. Participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for refusing to participate. We are implementing this survey as part of a broad research project on governance in the Middle East and North Africa. First, just to confirm, how old are you?

By agreeing to take this survey, you are giving us the right to transfer the information you provide to our research partners at the XX. All the answers you are providing will be fully anonymous. We will not ask your name, and no identifying information will be collected. The data will be analyzed in XX. and when the results of this research are published, we will report general results which cannot be used to identify individual participants. We will never use a participant's name or personal information, so please feel free to tell us what you think. We would like your opinion with the knowledge that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions and that you may ask for clarification or stop the survey at any time. You are also free to skip questions you consider personal or invasive without penalty. If you would like to receive an overview of the final results of the study, if you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to withdraw your consent at a later time, please contact us via the email XX If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at XX. Are you willing to participate in the survey please? (Agree to participate/Do not agree to participate)

We also randomly recorded the reading of the consent form by our enumerators and conducted checks of these recordings to ensure that it was being read clearly and in full. These recordings were of our enumerators only to ensure consents were being read carefully and clearly; they did not allow us to listen in on the participant.

## B Descriptive Statistics

We present descriptive statistics in Table A1. This table reports the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum of key variables in our data. The table reports aggregate statistics for respondents from all countries, a total of 6,304 respondents.

We further plot the distribution of our key outcomes by country in Figures A1-A3. Our first outcome, is an index measuring the extent to which a respondent believes that the committee described in the vignette made the right decision. To create this index, we combine three four-item questions, asking respondents whether the committee made the right decision for i) all citizens, ii) men, and iii) women. As reported in Figure A1, the  $\alpha$  Cronbach for these items is 0.804, suggesting that they are correlated and suitable to be included in an index, as we specified in our pre-analysis plan.

In Figure A2, we plot our second index, which measures respondents' general attitudes towards the committee mentioned in the vignette. This index is comprised of two four-item survey measures asking respondents whether the committee can be trusted, and whether the committee's decision making process was fair. As reported in Figure A2, the  $\alpha$  Cronbach for this pre-registered index is slightly lower ( $\alpha = 0.668$ ), likely as a result of the fact that the index includes only two measures. However, given that these measures are associated, and given our theoretical pre-registered motivation to index both measures together, in the main analysis we report this index as one of our key outcomes. In Section C, we report additional analyses, demonstrating that our results are similar when considering the index and its components. In Figure A3 we report our third outcome. This outcome is a single item measure, eliciting survey respondents' belief that the general public will accept the decision made by the committee described in the experimental vignette. Finally, in Figure A4 we demonstrate that a majority of survey respondents in all countries perceive the scenarios reported in our vignette's as rather realistic.

We report balance tests in Tables A2-A3. As expected, respondents assigned to different values of our gender balance and committee decision are indistinguishable in terms of their demographics variables and pre-treatment attitudes relating to sexism and perceptions of gender norms in their locality.

## C Additional Analyses

In this section, we report table format results for our main findings reported in Figures 2-4. We further report results from additional pre-registered hypotheses and exploratory analyses.

### C.1 Hypothesis 1

In Table A4, we report the main result presented in Figure 2, by which both our gender balance and decision treatments increased respondents' perceptions that the committee made the right decision. Following our pre-registration, in Tables A5-A6, we report additional models, focusing on two components of our index, belief that the committee made the right decision for i) women, and ii) men. Though we did not pre-register this analysis, we further consider the effect of our treatment on the final component of our index—belief that the committee made the right decision for all citizens—in Table A7. Taken together, we interpret the results in Tables A5-A7 to suggest that

our main result reported in the paper (Figure 2), and in Table A4, is driven by citizens belief that gender balance committees make suitable decisions mainly for women and all citizens.

## **C.2 Hypothesis 2**

In this Section, we report Table format results for Hypothesis 2, considering the effects of our treatment on respondents' attitudes towards the committee. First, in Table A8, we report results plotted in Figure 3 of the main text. After doing so, we further consider the effects of our treatment on the individual components of our main index: i) respondents belief that the committee can be trusted to make the right decision, and ii) respondents belief that the committees decision making process was fair. An examination of Tables A8-A10 emphasizes that results of models considering our index and individual survey items yield similar substantive interpretation.

## **C.3 Hypothesis 3**

In Table A11, we further report Table format results of our test for Hypothesis 3 regarding the effects of our treatments on respondents' belief that the general public will accept the committee's decision. These results, are identical to the results we visualize in Figure 4 of the main text.

## **C.4 Hypothesis 4 – Moderating Effect of Decision on Gender Balance**

In this section, we report results of additional pre-registered tests, in which we examine whether the committee decision treatment, and specifically the committee's decision in favor of women, moderated the effects of our gender balance treatment on our key outcomes from hypotheses 1-3. To do so, we regress a given outcome over our two treatments, and their interaction. Our main parameter of interest is the interaction Balance\*Pro, representing the moderating effect of pro-women decision treatment on the gender balance treatment. We report results of this analysis in Figure A5 (see Table A12 for similar results in Table format), and find no evidence that pro-women decision moderate the effects of gender balance.

## **C.5 Hypothesis 5a – Moderating Effect of Sexism**

In our pre-analysis plan, we further registered analyses in which we consider whether individual level attributes, and specifically respondents' level of sexism might moderate the effect of our gender balance treatment. We test this expectation in Figures A6 by interacting a sexism index comprised of four measures of hostile and benevolent sexism. In Figures A6-A8, we show that are overall measure of sexism, and dis-aggregated measures of hostile or benevolent sexism do not consistently moderate the gender balance ATE, on our three key outcomes.

## **C.6 Hypothesis 5b – Moderating Effect of Gender Norms**

In this section, we consider another pre-registered hypothesis regarding gender norms. Specifically, we test whether respondents who perceive the gender norms of the community as more conservative, react differently to treatment. To do so, we create an index measuring individual level

perceptions of gender norms, based on three survey items asking people whether in their community it is common women to: i) disagree publicly with men, ii) travel alone, and iii) gather in public spaces with men. We interact our gender norm index with our key gender balance treatment, in order to test how perceptions of gender norms moderate the average treatment effect of gender balance on our key outcomes from H1-H3. As reported in Figure A9, we do not find evidence that gender norms moderate our main gender balance treatment.

## C.7 Moderating Effect of Gender on ATEs

In this section, we further consider the moderating effect of gender on our main gender balance treatment. To do so, we interact an indicator taking the value of 1, if a subject identifies as male (0 otherwise), with our gender balance treatment. As reported in Figure A10, we do not find an heterogeneity in effects by respondents gender.

## C.8 Moderating Effect of Issue Area on Main ATEs

Our main analyses consider the effects of the committee’s composition and decision, and focus on a committee which is discussing a gender salient topic — penalties for offenders of domestic violence. However, one may wonder whether similar effects would be identified when considering a committee discussing a topic unrelated to gender. As we describe in Section A.3, to address this question, in our Jordan experiment we further randomized the issue area discussed by the committee. Specifically, we assigned subject to learn about a committee discussing fines for domestic violence or littering. This design choice allows us to test whether the effects of gender balance and committee decisions vary across issue areas.

Focusing on our Jordanian sample (where we randomized issue area in addition to our main treatments), and considering our key outcomes from H1-3, we do not find evidence that the effects of gender balance are moderated by the issue area discussed by the legislative committee (see small and imprecise point estimates for Balance\*DV Issue). However, we do find some moderation with regards to our decision treatment, by which penalties for domestic violence are viewed as less favorable than penalties for littering, and committee’s making pro-women decisions are viewed as less favorable than committees making decisions to reduce littering (see columns 2 and 4, for the Decision\*DV Issue estimate).

## D Robustness Checks

### D.1 Attrition

In our surveys we provided respondents’ with an ability to report a “do not know” answer, or to refuse to answer any question. Consequentially, we have minor missingness in our key outcomes of interest. In Table A13 we consider whether our treatments increase the probability of not responding to our main outcomes, in the pooled and country specific samples. In most models reported in Table A13, we do not precisely estimate treatment effects on non-response to outcomes. However, since in some models we find a statistically significant relationship between our treatment and non-response to outcomes.

To address concerns regarding attrition, we follow [Gomila and Clark \(2020\)](#) and estimate additional models with inverse probability weights. In practice, we create weights that use observable and treatments to account for attrition in our key outcomes. We report weighted and non-weighted models for our main result in [Figure A15](#). The additional analyses suggest that accounting for attrition with inverse probability weights does not substantively change our estimate.

## **D.2 Treatment Recall**

In this section, we analyze responses to our main treatment manipulation check. In [Figure A12](#), we demonstrate that almost 83% of our full sample correctly recalled whether the legislative committee was comprised of 8 men, or 4 men and 4 women. Compliance with treatment was highest in Jordan and lowest in Tunisia, but overall quite high.

In [Figure A15](#) we demonstrate that correct treatment recall was lower for our decision treatment. Indeed, in the overall sample, 65% of subjects across all countries correctly recalled the committee's decision, and this lower percentage is largely driven by Tunisian respondents.

It is important to note that failure to correctly recall treatment amongst respondents would likely introduce downwards bias, leading us to identify conservative point estimates. Regardless, in order to address this issue, in [Table A14](#) we descriptively examine potential correlates of manipulation check failure for both our treatments. To do so, we regress a variable taking a value of 1 if a respondent correctly recalled their treatment (0 otherwise) over our treatment indicators and several demographics. We show that gender and education are predictors of failure to pass manipulation checks, and that respondents assigned to gender balanced committees and pro-women decisions were more likely to recall their treatment status.

Though not causally identified, in [Figure A15](#) we report our main models, employing respondents' response to the manipulation check instead of actual treatment status as independent variables. The results reported in [Figure A14](#) suggest that using perceived gender balance and committee decisions instead of respondents actual treatment status yields similar results. Moreover, we show that lower compliance with the decision treatment is unlikely the reason for our null result in H4 (moderating effect of decision on the gender balance effect). As reported in [Figure A15](#), in line with the results reported in [Figure A5](#) where pro-women decisions do not moderate the average treatment effect of gender balance, perceived pro-women decisions do not appear to moderate the original effects of gender balance. These additional analyses emphasize that failure in manipulation checks, and more generally incomplete compliance with treatment, likely pose a downward bias on our main estimates reported in the paper.

## **D.3 Enumerator Effects**

Since our survey was implemented via phone, one might worry that the identity of enumerators might shape respondents answers and reaction to our experimental treatments. To address this concern, we set up our implementation to ensure that overall, our enumerators interviewed even proportions of respondents of the same/opposite sex. Unfortunately though, in Jordan significant proportions of respondents refused to speak to male enumerators so we had to relax this requirement in that case. To reduce concerns regarding the consequences of enumerator identity for our main results, we report additional models controlling for enumerator identity. Specifically, we created a variable taking a value of 1 if an enumerator's gender identity is similar to a respondents'

gender identity (0 otherwise). In Figure A16 we report our main results further controlling for this enumerator-respondent congruence measure. Our results remain robust to this specification.

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics – Overall

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Male	6,104	0.502	0.500	0	1
Female	6,104	0.498	0.500	0	1
Age	6,102	42.556	14.249	18.000	90.000
Moroccan	6,104	0.240	0.427	0	1
Jordanian	6,104	0.525	0.499	0	1
Tunisian	6,104	0.235	0.424	0	1
Education	6,093	1.485	1.272	0.000	4.000
Income	6,048	1.895	0.999	0.000	3.000
Married	6,104	0.703	0.457	0	1
Sexism Index	6,104	0.624	0.204	0.000	1.000
Norms Index	6,104	0.468	0.370	0	1

Table A2: Covariate Balance (Gender Treatment)

	adj.diff	z
x_male	0.00	0.15
x_female	-0.00	-0.15
x_age	0.04	0.12
Education	-0.01	-0.20
Income	-0.02	-0.69
Married	-0.01	-0.65
m_sexism_ix	-0.00	-0.13
m_norms_ix	-0.02	-1.61

Table A3: Covariate Balance (Decision Treatment)

	adj.diff	z
x_male	-0.01	-0.44
x_female	0.01	0.44
x_age	-0.09	-0.24
Education	0.00	0.08
Income	-0.03	-1.19
Married	-0.01	-0.57
m_sexism_ix	0.00	0.23
m_norms_ix	0.00	0.01

Table A4: ATE on Decision Evaluation (H1)

	Committee Made Right Decision			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.08** (0.03)	0.11* (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Decision	0.65*** (0.03)	0.76*** (0.05)	0.58*** (0.05)	0.63*** (0.06)
Num. obs.	4061	1460	1410	1191

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A5: ATE on Decision Evaluation for Women (H1a)

	Committee Made Right Decision for Women			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.07* (0.03)	0.14** (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)
Decision	0.65*** (0.03)	0.79*** (0.05)	0.59*** (0.05)	0.60*** (0.05)
Num. obs.	4360	1509	1515	1336

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.



Table A6: ATE on Decision Evaluation for Men (H1b)

	Committee Made Right Decision for Men			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.02 (0.03)	0.07 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.06)
Decision	0.34*** (0.03)	0.43*** (0.05)	0.34*** (0.05)	0.25*** (0.06)
Num. obs.	4255	1496	1486	1273

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A7: ATE on Decision Evaluation for All Citizens

	Committee Made Right Decision for All Citizens			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.06* (0.03)	0.07 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Decision	0.60*** (0.03)	0.71*** (0.05)	0.53*** (0.05)	0.58*** (0.05)
Num. obs.	4388	1549	1513	1326

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A8: ATE on Evaluation of Committee (H2)

	Evaluation of Committee (Index)			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.14*** (0.03)	0.15** (0.05)	0.15** (0.05)	0.12* (0.06)
Decision	0.55*** (0.03)	0.72*** (0.05)	0.47*** (0.05)	0.50*** (0.06)
Num. obs.	3988	1412	1403	1173

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A9: ATE on Trust in Committee (H2a)

	Trust in Committee			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.09** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	0.12* (0.06)
Decision	0.36*** (0.03)	0.50*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.05)	0.50*** (0.06)
Num. obs.	4277	1467	1510	1173

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A10: ATE on Perceptions of Committee Fairness (H2b)

	Committee is Fair			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.14*** (0.03)	0.10* (0.05)	0.17*** (0.05)	0.16** (0.05)
Decision	0.59*** (0.03)	0.74*** (0.05)	0.52*** (0.05)	0.48*** (0.05)
Num. obs.	4290	1543	1479	1268

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A11: ATE on Perceptions of Public Accepting Decision (H3)

	Will Public Accept Decision			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.02 (0.03)	0.08 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
Decision	0.41*** (0.03)	0.51*** (0.05)	0.42*** (0.05)	0.28*** (0.05)
Num. obs.	4508	1595	1541	1372

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A12: Moderating Effect of Decision on Gender Balance (H4)

	Committee Made Right Decision				Attitudes towards Committee				Public Accept Decision			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.06 (0.04)	0.02 (0.07)	0.12 (0.07)	0.03 (0.09)	0.10* (0.04)	0.10 (0.08)	0.16* (0.07)	0.02 (0.09)	0.01 (0.04)	0.09 (0.07)	0.00 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.08)
Decision	0.63*** (0.04)	0.66*** (0.07)	0.62*** (0.07)	0.62*** (0.08)	0.52*** (0.04)	0.66*** (0.07)	0.48*** (0.07)	0.41*** (0.08)	0.39*** (0.04)	0.53*** (0.07)	0.42*** (0.07)	0.20** (0.07)
Balance*Decision	0.04 (0.06)	0.18 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.10)	0.02 (0.11)	0.08 (0.06)	0.12 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.10)	0.18 (0.11)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.00 (0.10)	0.16 (0.11)
Num. obs.	4061	1460	1410	1191	3988	1412	1403	1173	4508	1595	1541	1372

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A13: Attrition By Country – Treatment Effects on Non-Response

	Overall Attrition				Right Decision				Attitudes				Public Accept			
	Pool	JRD	TNS	MRC	Pool	JRD	TNS	MRC	Pool	JRD	TNS	MRC	Pool	JRD	TNS	MRC
Gender Balance	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Decision	0.00 (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.03* (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)
Num. obs.	4752	1654	1636	1462	4752	1654	1636	1462	4752	1654	1636	1462	4752	1654	1636	1462

All models control for age, education, and gender. Pooled model includes country FE.

Table A14: Correlates of Correct Response

	Recall Gender Balance?				Recall Decision			
	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco	Pooled	Jordan	Tunisia	Morocco
Gender Balance	0.17*** (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)	0.31*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Decision (Pro)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.04* (0.01)	0.05** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.22*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.02)	0.06** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
High School	0.05*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.08** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)
Vocational Diploma	0.08*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	0.08 (0.05)	0.14*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.06 (0.04)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.16*** (0.04)
BA	0.08*** (0.02)	0.07** (0.02)	0.06 (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.33*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.03)
MA	0.11*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.06 (0.04)	0.14*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.04)	0.11** (0.04)
Male	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.06** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.03* (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.06* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)
Num. obs.	4752	1654	1636	1462	4752	1654	1636	1462

The outcome variable in these regression takes a value of 1 if respondent correctly answers manipulation check.

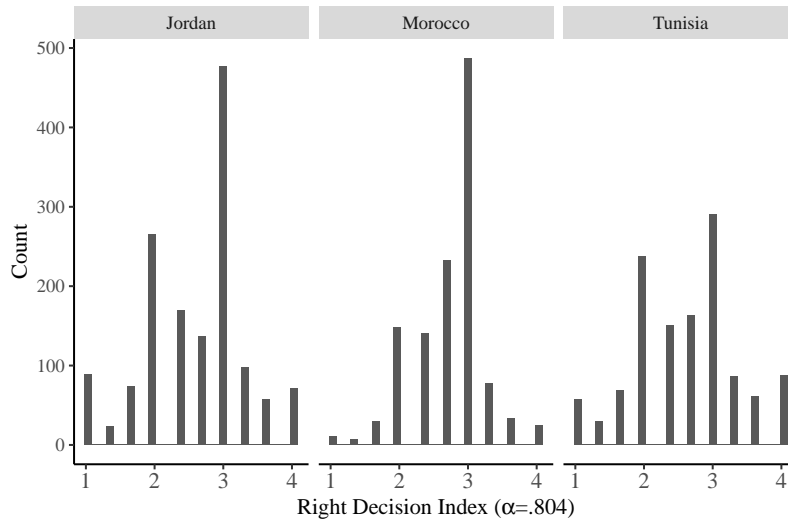


Figure A1: **Distribution of Right Decision Index by Country.**

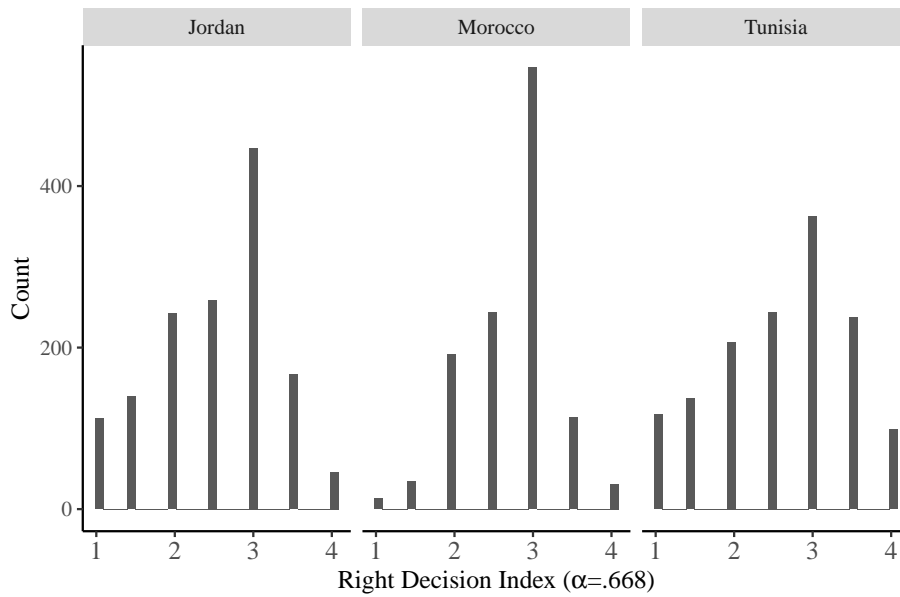


Figure A2: **Distribution of Attitudes towards Committee Index by Country.**

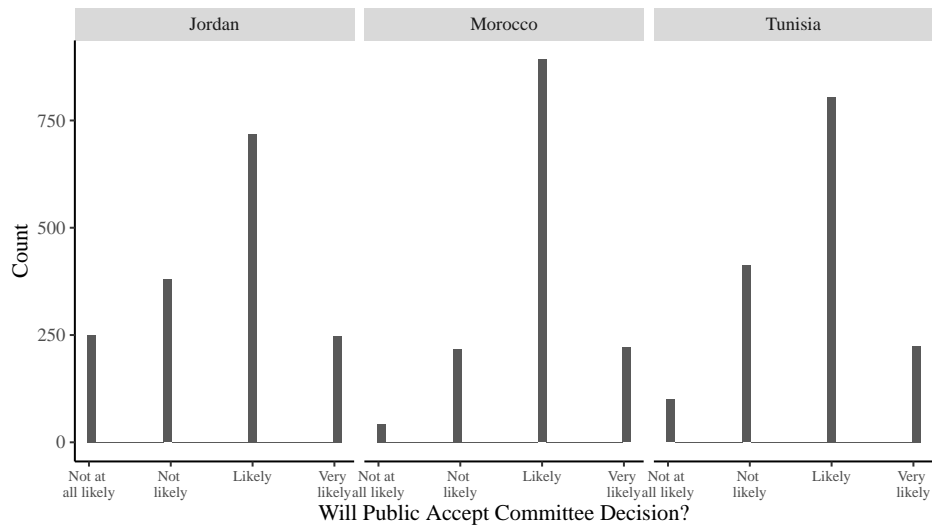


Figure A3: Distribution of Beliefs that the Public will Accept the Committee's Decision

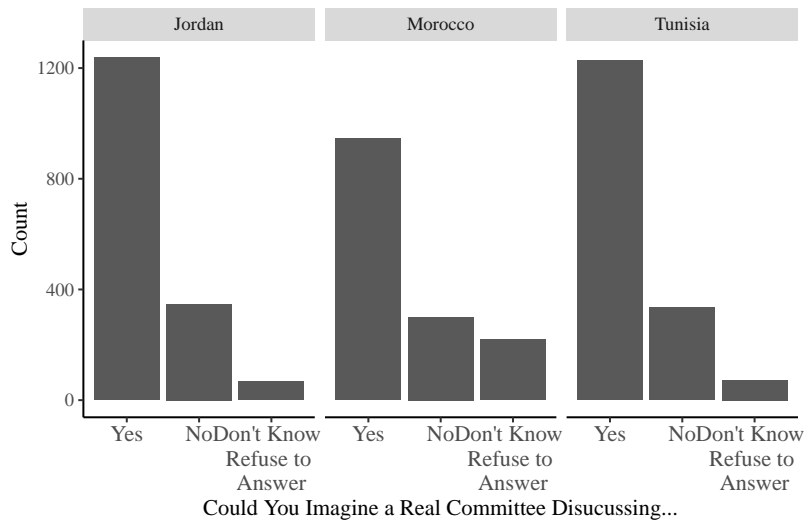


Figure A4: Distribution of respondent perceptions regarding the possibility that the scenario described in their experimental vignette is realistic.

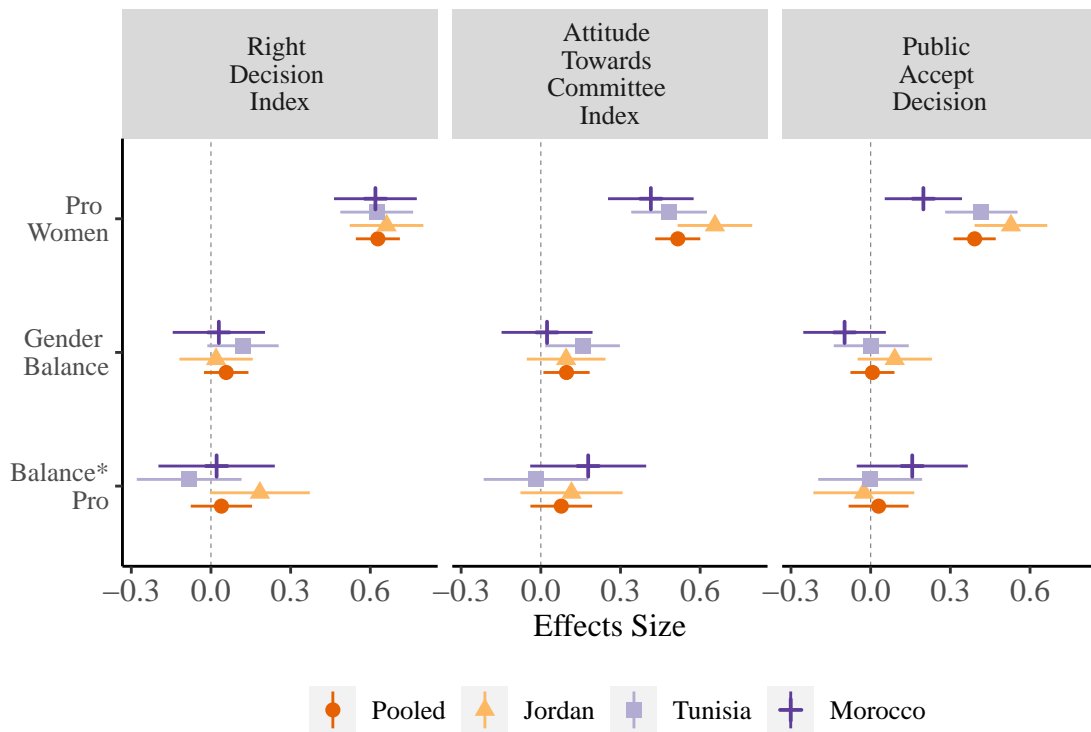


Figure A5: **Effect of Gender Balance Conditional on Committee Decision.** These plots consider the interaction effect of both our treatments on our three main outcomes.

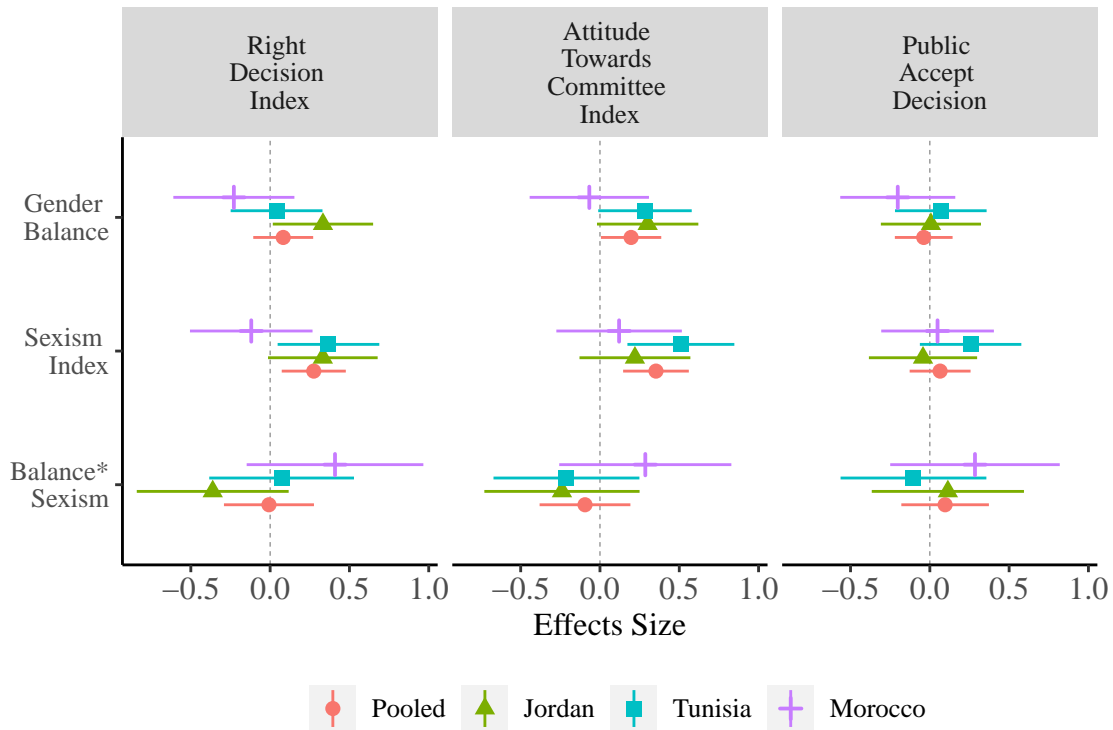


Figure A6: Moderating Effect of Overall Sexism Index on Gender Balance.

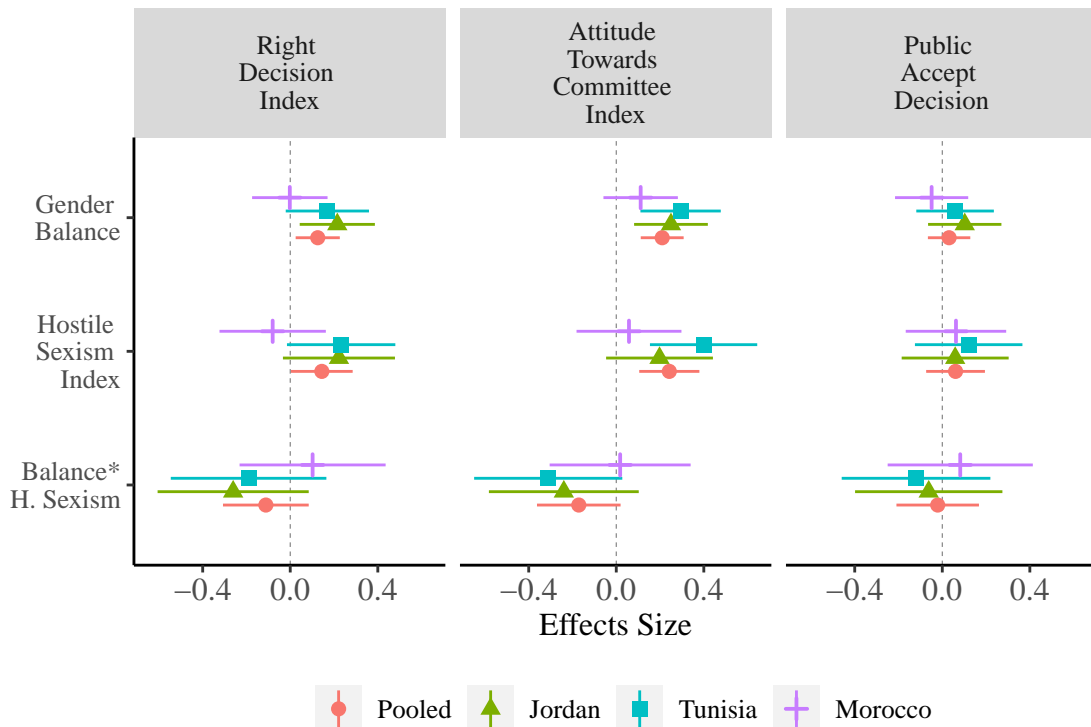


Figure A7: Moderating Effect of Hostile Sexism on Gender Balance.



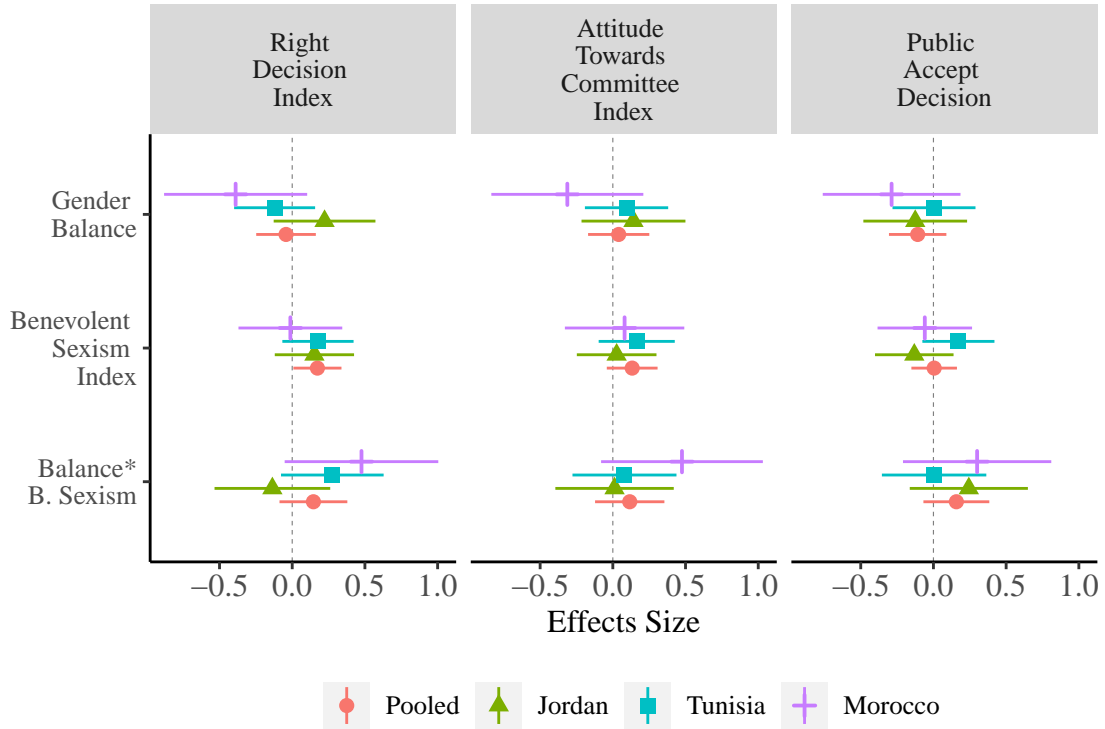


Figure A8: **Moderating Effect of Benevolent Sexism on Gender Balance.**

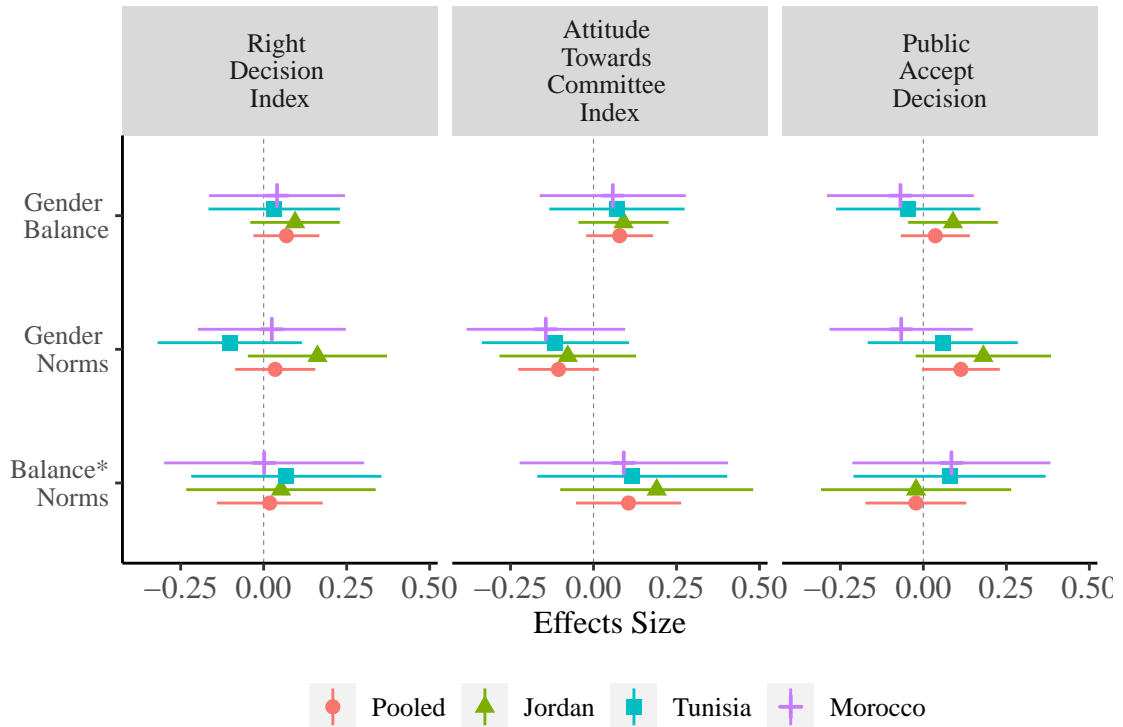


Figure A9: **Moderating Effect of Perceptions of Gender Norms on Gender Balance.**

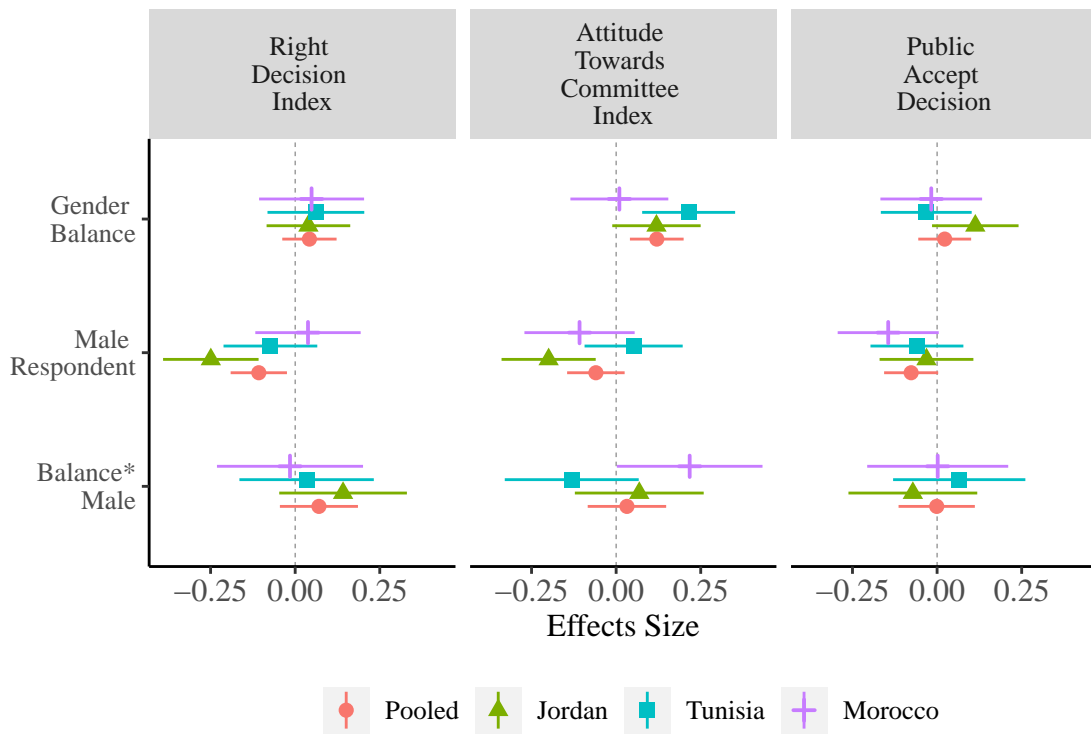


Figure A10: **Moderating Effect of Gender on Gender Balance Treatment.**

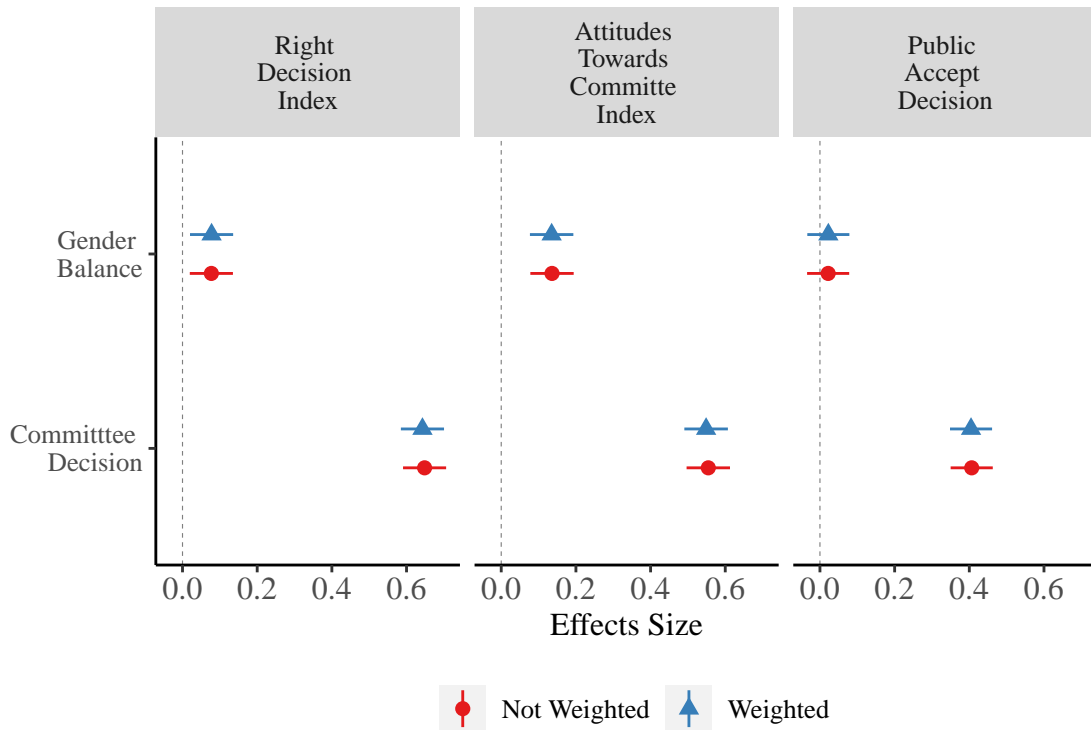


Figure A11: **Inverse Probability Models.** This figure presents weighted models accounting for the mild attrition in our main outcomes of interest. We benchmark weighted models with original models reported in the main text.

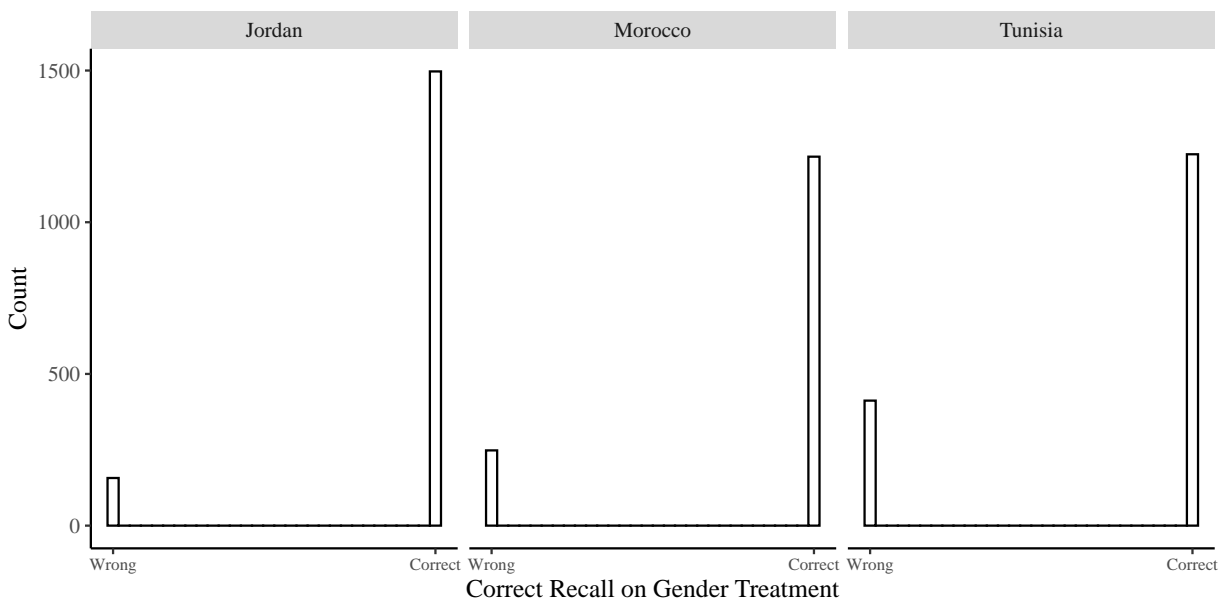


Figure A12: **Distribution of Correct Gender Balance Treatment Recall by Country.**

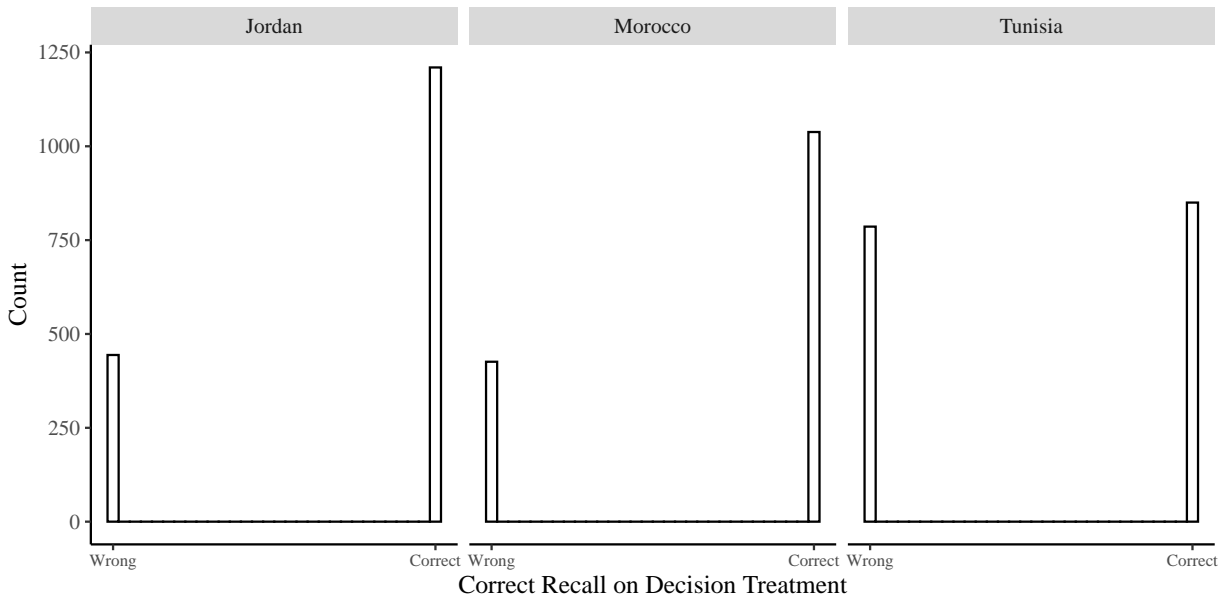


Figure A13: Distribution of Correct Decision Treatment Recall by Country.

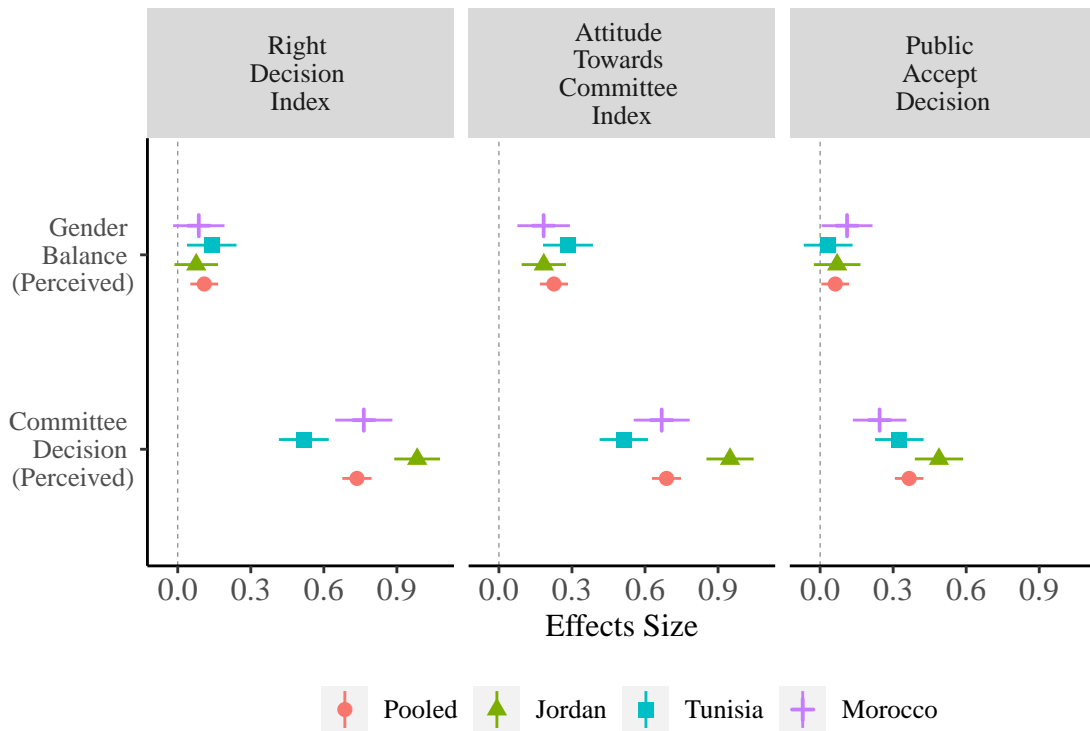


Figure A14: Correlation of Perceived Gender Balance and Committee Decision (i.e. Manipulation Check Answers) with Key Outcomes.

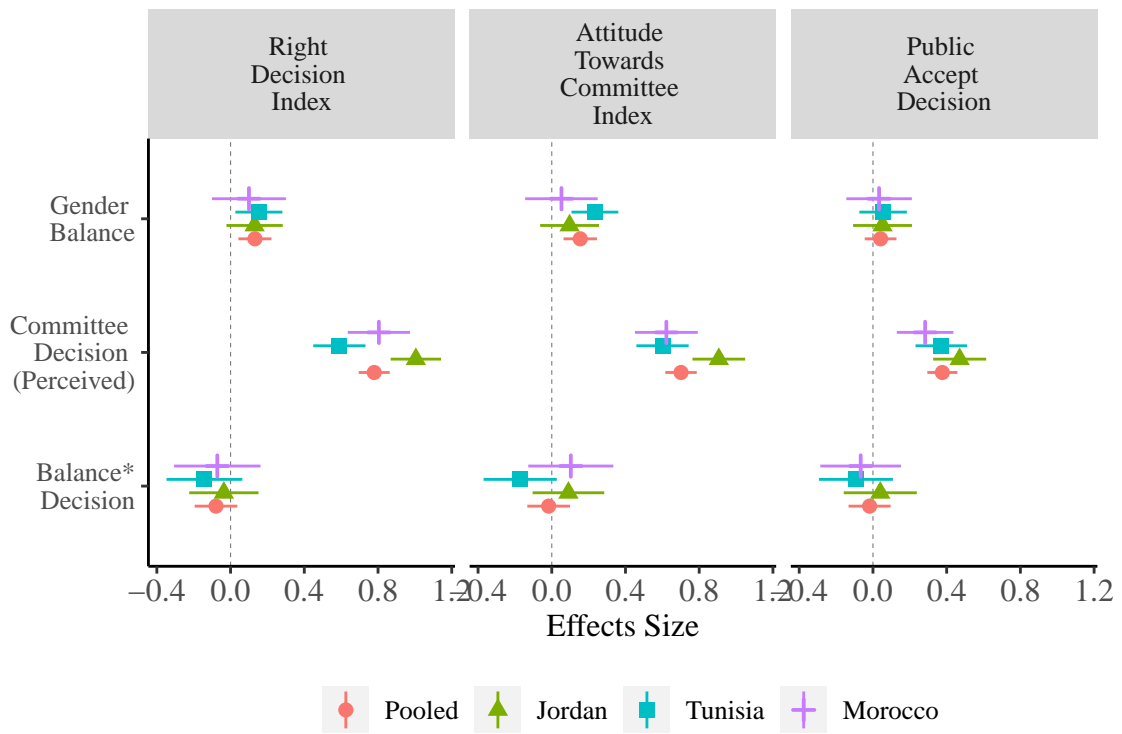


Figure A15: **Moderating Effect of Perceived Committee Support on Gender Balance Treatment.**

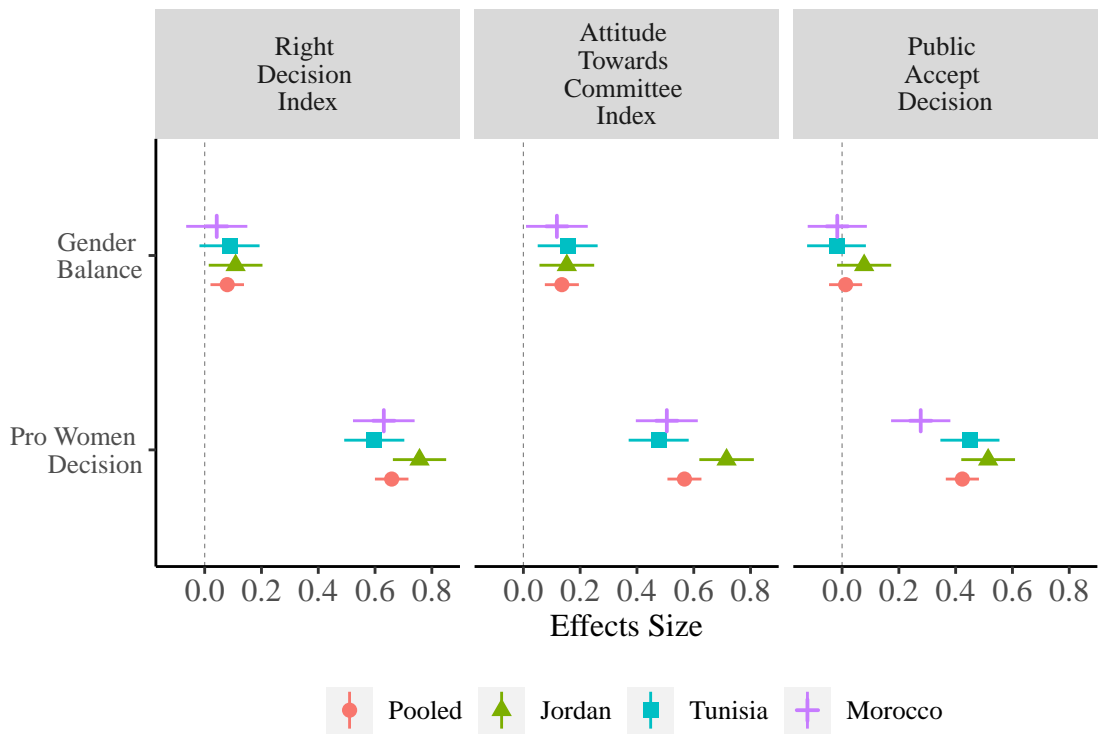


Figure A16: **Main Results Controlling for Enumerator-Respondent Gender Congruence.**