

How Are Gender Norms Perceived?*

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Abstract

This paper provides global evidence on misperceptions of gender norms, drawing on newly collected, nationally representative data from 60 countries. We establish that misperceptions are pervasive across the world. Through a simple conceptual framework, we provide evidence that gender stereotyping and overweighting of minority views are ubiquitous and can account for the global structure of misperceptions. Both respondents' own support and their perceived support are shown to be associated with relevant economic behaviors, including female employment and actions promoting women's representation in leadership.

Keywords: social norms, misperceptions, gender.

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1 Introduction

Gender inequality is a major issue in all parts of the world, but the nature of the gender gap varies significantly across countries. It ranges from women not having the same basic rights and freedom as men (Jayachandran, 2015) to women being underrepresented in leadership positions in both private and public sectors (Bertrand, 2018). Gender norms represent a major obstacle to progress towards gender equality (Fernández, 2007; Fernández and Fogli, 2009; Field et al., 2021), and thus, it is crucial to understand how they vary across societies and domains, and how people perceive them.¹ While gender norms are often slow-moving (e.g., Alesina, Giuliano and Nunn, 2013) and may require deeper interventions to be changed (Dhar, Jain and Jayachandran, 2022), simple informational interventions may be able to correct miscalibrated perceptions of gender norms and lead to fast changes in the societal equilibrium (Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020; Bursztyn and Yang, 2022).

In this paper, we take a global perspective. Using a newly-collected nationally representative dataset from 60 countries that represent over 80% of the world population, we study gender norms and perceptions about gender norms on two distinct policy issues: 1) *freedom to work*, allowing women to work outside of the home, and 2) *affirmative action*, prioritizing women when hiring for leadership positions. The global focus allows us to establish a comprehensive understanding of how misperceptions of gender norms on different gender policies vary across the world, and to investigate whether there are general mechanisms that can explain misperceptions across societies. The study was implemented as part of the Gallup World Poll 2020 with a between-individual survey design. Participants were randomly allocated either to a freedom to work module or to an affirmative action module. We first elicited the participants’ support for the respective policy (first-order beliefs), before eliciting their perceptions about the extent to which other respondents supported the policy (second-order beliefs). Perceptions were elicited separately for the support among men and the support among women in their country.

We took several steps to validate our measures of actual and perceived norms. We extensively tested the design through cognitive interviews, ensured high-quality translations across 108 country–language combinations, and followed strict interviewing procedures. We also implemented several measures to minimize social desirability bias when eliciting first-order beliefs. Direct and indirect elicitation methods yield nearly identical responses; first-order beliefs are insensitive to interviewer gender and to respondents’ general tendency to provide socially desirable answers; and a treatment comparing beliefs about what others “would say” versus “would truly” agree shows only minimal

¹We follow Ostrom (2000) and conceptualize norms as ‘shared understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted, or forbidden,’ associated with social sanctions or rewards (Benabou and Tirole, 2026) that encourage or discourage certain behaviors (see also Cialdini, Kallgren and Reno, 1991; Bicchieri, 2005; Acemoglu and Jackson, 2017). Consistent with the empirical misperception literature, we characterize the distribution of individuals’ views on a given issue as the foundation of *actual* social norms (Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020). *Perceived* social norms, by contrast, represent individuals’ beliefs about the views held by others in their society.

differences, consistent with recent evidence on the robustness of norm misperceptions (Bursztyn and Yang, 2022). Together, these exercises indicate that our measures capture genuine beliefs rather than artifacts of survey design.

As a foundation for our analysis of misperceptions, we document global patterns in actual gender norms. In line with prior global survey evidence (Ray et al., 2017), we find widespread support for women’s freedom to work outside of home across the world: in every country we study, a majority of the population is in favor, often by a wide margin. Although the share of women in favor is essentially always higher than the share of men in favor, we also find that a majority of men are in favor of women’s freedom to work in all countries. However, the magnitude of the gender gap in actual support varies substantially across countries. In the least gender-equal countries, like Jordan and Algeria, the gender gap exceeds 30 percentage points (pp), whereas in the most gender-equal countries, such as Canada and Norway, it nearly disappears and support for women’s freedom to work is close to unanimous.

Turning to affirmative action for women in leadership hiring, the pattern is more mixed. In 37 countries, the majority of both men and women support such measures, whereas in 12 countries the majority view is to oppose affirmative action. Support for affirmative action is strongly negatively associated with a country’s level of gender equality, with the majority opposing it in the most gender-equal countries. As with freedom to work, women are more supportive than men in virtually all countries, and the gender gap exceeds 10 pp in about two-thirds of the countries.

The main contribution of this paper is to show that misperceptions of gender norms are ubiquitous and systematic at the global level. How they manifest, however, depends on the policy issue, the country’s level of gender equality, and whether the perception concerns men or women. We establish four stylized facts about misperceptions of gender norms across the world. *First*, there is a universal underestimation of support for women’s freedom to work. *Second*, support for affirmative action for women is underestimated in less gender-equal countries, whereas it is overestimated in more gender-equal countries. *Third*, men’s support for women’s freedom to work is universally underestimated more than women’s support. *Fourth*, misperceptions about support for affirmative action are largely driven by underestimation of men’s support in less gender-equal countries, while in more gender-equal countries they are mainly driven by overestimation of women’s support for this policy. Combined with existing experimental evidence that correcting perceptions shifts behavior, the four stylized facts suggest that societal equilibria may change quickly if people’s perceptions of gender norms are corrected. In terms of freedom to work, correcting misperceptions of gender norms may be a promising approach to promoting gender equality in countries where the basic economic freedom of women remains challenged, consistent with evidence from Saudi Arabia (Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020). In terms of affirmative action, the finding that women’s support for affirmative action is systematically overestimated in more gender-equal countries highlights that misperceptions of gender norms in some situations may contribute to

sustaining gender policies that are not necessarily favored by women themselves.

We further explore and quantify the role of potential channels that can reconcile the stylized facts by examining mechanisms commonly highlighted as drivers of misperceptions: (i) false consensus—overestimating how widely one’s own view is shared (Fields and Schuman, 1976); (ii) minority overweighting—overestimating the prevalence of the minority position (e.g., Miller and Prentice 1994); (iii) gender stereotyping—exaggerating perceived gender differences (Bordalo et al., 2016, 2023); and (iv) motivated reasoning—forming beliefs that justify one’s behavior (Epley and Gilovich, 2016). Our analysis shows clear evidence of false consensus, minority overweighting, and gender stereotyping across countries, while motivated reasoning appears to play a more limited role in shaping misperceptions of gender norms.

To assess the quantitative importance of these mechanisms for explaining the stylized facts, we develop a conceptual framework in which second-order beliefs are determined by the actual gender norms together with false consensus, minority overweighting, and gender stereotyping. Despite substantial cultural, economic, and institutional heterogeneity across countries, our analysis shows that two forces can quantitatively explain misperceptions of gender norms in both policy domains: minority overweighting and gender stereotyping. False consensus, while widespread, plays a more limited role in determining the aggregate patterns. A decomposition analysis further shows that these two forces are sufficient to account for the stylized facts.

Finally, we provide evidence that both first-order and second-order beliefs are strongly associated with actual behavior. First, consistent with theories of social image concerns and existing experimental evidence from Saudi Arabia (Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020), Indonesia (Cameron, Contreras Suárez and Setyonaluri, 2026), and Colombia (Boltz et al., 2025), we find that both respondents’ own support and their perceived support for women’s freedom to work predict female employment in the Gallup World Poll data. Second, because the Gallup World Poll does not include behavioral measures relevant for affirmative action, we conducted a separate large-scale survey experiment in the U.S. In this experiment, both respondents’ own support for affirmative action and their perceived support among others strongly predict a range of pro-female behaviors—such as signing petitions, donating to a pro-female organization, choosing a female hire in hypothetical scenarios, and sharing supportive content on social media.

This paper connects to several strands of the literature. A broad body of work in economics, sociology, and social psychology examines how individual attitudes and social norms are formed, perceived, and misperceived.² This research highlights how individuals form beliefs about the views of others, how these beliefs may be systematically biased, and how misperceptions can shape social interactions and individual behavior. Related work in economics has explored the origins and persis-

²Social norms and misperceptions of them have been extensively studied in sociology and social psychology, from classic contributions (Asch, 1951; Bicchieri, 2016; Cialdini, Reno and Kallgren, 1990; Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Prentice and Miller, 1993) to more recent work on gender norms and other social issues (Tankard and Paluck, 2016; Paluck and Shepherd, 2012; Gelfand et al., 2011; Chung and Rimal, 2016).

tence of gender norms, documenting how historical, ancestral, and cultural characteristics continue to influence contemporary beliefs and behaviors (Alesina, Giuliano and Nunn, 2013; Ashraf et al., 2020; Giuliano, 2020; Becker, 2021). At the same time, survey-based studies have provided detailed evidence on contemporary gender attitudes and how they vary across time, cohorts, and countries (Scott, Alwin and Braun, 1996; Treas and Widmer, 2000; Brooks and Bolzendahl, 2004; Aboim, 2010; Cotter, Hermesen and Vanneman, 2011; Fortin, 2015).³ These contributions underscore the importance of understanding both the content of gender norms and their consequences for labor-market opportunities and gender equality. A further line of research examines public attitudes toward race- and gender-based affirmative action at the country-level (see also Parker, Baltes and Christiansen, 1997; Konrad and Hartmann, 2001; Fryer and Loury, 2005; Steinbugler, Press and Dias, 2006). This work provides important insights into the determinants of support for corrective and redistributive policies, but it typically does not examine misperceptions of others’ views or how these perceptions vary globally.

Against this background, we make four distinct contributions. First, to our knowledge, we provide the first global evidence that combines data on actual support and perceived support for two central policy domains—women’s freedom to work and affirmative action in leadership hiring—among both men and women and across the full distribution of gender equality. Second, we document four novel stylized facts about misperceptions of gender norms worldwide. Third, we provide new evidence on the mechanisms underlying these misperceptions, showing that two forces—minority overweighting and gender stereotyping—can account for the global patterns we uncover across countries with markedly different cultural, economic, and institutional characteristics. Fourth, we show that these beliefs have behavioral relevance: both respondents’ own support and their perceived support for women’s freedom to work predict female employment, and both respondents’ own support and their perceived support for affirmative action predict pro-female behaviors aimed at promoting women’s representation in leadership positions in a separate large-scale experiment.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes the global dataset, the survey implementation, and the key variables. Sections 3 and 4 present the main evidence on actual and perceived gender norms across the world. Section 5 explores the mechanisms that may distort perceptions of gender norms—false consensus, minority overweighting, stereotyping, and motivated reasoning. Section 6 introduces a simple conceptual framework to study the quantitative effects of these mechanisms. Section 7 provides evidence on how first-order and second-order beliefs are associated with different behaviors. Section 8 discusses the implications of our findings and concludes. The Online Appendix presents supplementary analyses and additional information on the global study as well as the complementary experiments.

³A large literature in economics has used survey-based measures of gender norms to assess their role in shaping women’s outcomes (Fernández, 2007; Fernández and Fogli, 2009; Fernández, 2013; Field et al., 2021; Charles, Guryan and Pan, 2022).

2 The Global Dataset

In this section, we provide an overview of the global dataset on actual and perceived gender norms that we collected in collaboration with Gallup World Poll. Further details about data set, experimental design, and procedures are provided in [Appendix C](#).

2.1 Global Sample and Survey Implementation

The study was implemented in 60 countries between September 2020 and February 2021, with a median of 1000 respondents in each country and, in total, 66,214 observations. The global sample represents 85% of the world population and 90% of the global GDP. It consists of 10 countries from Western Europe, 8 from Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 7 from the Middle East and North Africa, 11 from Sub-Saharan Africa, 11 from the Americas, 4 from South Asia, and 9 from Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Online Appendix [Figure A.1](#) lists the countries and illustrates the geographic coverage of the data. In all countries, Gallup World Poll used probability-based sampling, and the samples, adjusting for sampling weights, are nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 and older in terms of age, gender, education, and income.

The research team extensively pre-tested the survey instrument. In addition to the standard testing procedures used by Gallup World Poll, we implemented cognitive interviews with respondents in Brazil, Spain, Tanzania, and Turkey, who represented a balanced mix of the key demographic characteristics. These interviews provided valuable feedback on how respondents understood and interpreted the different questions, which we incorporated into the design of the final version of the survey.

The survey was implemented via telephone, except for in India and Pakistan where it was done through face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted by local professional enumerators. We translated the survey from English into 108 country-language combinations using standard back-and-forth translation techniques. The research team had native speakers reviewing each translation, in many cases over several iterations, to ensure that the translated version conveyed the same meaning as the English version. The enumerators were instructed to follow the interview script without deviations and were provided with a detailed guide on how to answer a broad range of possible questions from the respondents.

2.2 Description of Key Variables

Participants were randomly allocated either to a *freedom to work* module or to an *affirmative action* module. We first elicited the participants’ support for the respective policy (first-order beliefs), before eliciting their perceptions about the extent to which other participants supported the policy (second-order beliefs), separately for the support among men and support among women in their country.

Given the strict limit on the number of questions we could field globally, we prioritized questions on issues that are policy relevant over more abstract measures of attitudes toward gender. The two policy topics we explore are actively debated in different parts of the world. Freedom to work outside the home is a key issue in many countries with low levels of gender equality and is part of the broader debate on gender norms and basic economic freedom (Lowe and McKelway, 2021; Jalota and Ho, 2023; Ho, Jalota and Karandikar, 2026). Affirmative action in hiring for leadership positions is a relevant discussion issue even in more gender-equal countries, motivated by the persistent gender imbalance in leadership roles (Bertrand et al., 2019).⁴ Each question maps onto an underlying behavior governed by a norm, capturing the shared understandings associated with such a behavior: the freedom to work question concerns families’ decisions over labor supply, while the affirmative action question concerns firms’ and governments’ hiring policies.

Measurement of actual norms. To elicit respondents’ first-order beliefs (FOB) on these issues, we asked them whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- **Freedom to Work:** *“Women should have the freedom to work outside of the home.”*
- **Affirmative Action:** *“The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.”*

Let i index respondents and let $g \in \{w, m\}$ denote gender. At the individual level, FOB_i denotes respondent i ’s own support for the policy. We use the share of sampling-weighted respondents who agreed to the policy on freedom to work as a measure of the *actual gender norm* on freedom to work in a country, and correspondingly, we measure the actual gender norm on affirmative action by the share of respondents who agreed to the policy on affirmative action. We denote this country-level average by $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$. When actual support is calculated separately among women and men, we write $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_w]$ and $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_m]$, respectively. Throughout the paper, expectations are computed separately within each country; we suppress the country index to simplify the notation.

Measurement of perceived norms. To elicit respondents’ second-order beliefs (SOB), we told them that 100 random individuals in their country would be asked the same question they had just answered. Respondents then reported how many of the 100 random individuals they believed would agree to the policy, which we use as a measure of an individual’s *perceived gender norm*.⁵ This question was asked separately about 100 men and 100 women, with the order of the target gender randomized. Respondents were also randomly exposed to slightly different wordings of the

⁴To our knowledge, we provide the first global evidence on the actual and perceived gender norms concerning giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

⁵For the formal notation used below, we divide these responses by 100, so that $\text{SOB}_i^g \in [0, 1]$, on the same scale as $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_g]$. Figures and tables continue to report these quantities in percentage points.

second-order beliefs question to gauge the extent of social desirability bias, as we discuss in more detail in Section 4.4.⁶

We denote respondent i 's perceived support among members of target gender g by SOB_i^g . The corresponding Gallup-weighted country-level average is denoted by $\mathbb{E}[SOB^g]$. When pooling perceptions of men and women, for respondent i in country c , we define SOB_i in country c as the weighted average of SOB_i^m and SOB_i^w , where each gender is weighted by its sample-weighted share in the Gallup data in the country.

The corresponding country-level average, computed using the Gallup sampling weights, is denoted by $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$.

Measurement of misperceptions. At the individual level, we measure the *misperception of the gender norm* as the difference between the *perceived gender norm* and the *actual gender norm*, that is, the difference between the share of the 100 random individuals that the respondent believes support the policy and the share of the population that states that they support the policy. Using the notation introduced above, respondent i 's misperception about target gender g is $SOB_i^g - \mathbb{E}[FOB_g]$.

A respondent *overestimates* the support for the policy if they report a higher share than the actual share of support in the country, and *underestimates* the support for the policy if they report a lower share than the actual share of support. Correspondingly, we measure misperception of the gender norm at the country level as the difference between the average perceived share of individuals who support the policy and the actual share who state that they do.⁷

2.3 Supplementary Country-Level Datasets

In the analysis, we match the data from the Gallup World Poll with other country-level datasets, as discussed in more detail in B.1. In particular, to study how actual and perceived gender norms relate to the level of gender equality in a country, we classify countries according to the UN's Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2022). The index captures multiple dimensions of gender equality, including labor market outcomes and political empowerment. We reverse the index such that higher values indicate higher gender equality and refer to this measure as the Gender Equality Index (GEI).

⁶To test whether the lack of financial incentives may have influenced the second-order beliefs and misperceptions measured in the Gallup survey, we conducted a separate randomized online experiment in which 751 U.S. respondents were assigned to incentivized or unincentivized elicitation (see Figure A.39 for the details of the design). Respondents were asked to report how many of 100 randomly selected women and men in the United States would support giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions. For each guess, respondents in the incentivized arm received a \$3 bonus if their estimate was within two percentage points of the Gallup sample-weighted average. We find that reported perceptions are similar across the two conditions; see Appendix Figure A.2.

⁷Accordingly, country-level average misperception about target gender g is $\mathbb{E}[SOB^g] - \mathbb{E}[FOB_g]$. For the pooled measure, respondent i 's misperception is $SOB_i - \mathbb{E}[FOB]$, and the corresponding country-level average misperception is $\mathbb{E}[SOB] - \mathbb{E}[FOB]$.

3 Gender Norms Around the World

This section provides an overview of the main global patterns of the gender norms. We first show how the gender norms on freedom to work (outside of the home) and affirmative action for women (when hiring for leadership positions) vary across the world, before we discuss how they reflect differences in attitudes between men and women. In Appendix B.2, we discuss how these attitudes relate to different background characteristics (education, income, employment, age, location, and internet access).

3.1 Freedom to Work

Figure 1 (panel a) shows the average support for women’s freedom to work across all countries in the study. We observe that the support for this policy is widespread. A large global majority agrees that women should have the freedom to work, with a country-level average of 91.3%. In all countries, the majority view is to support women’s freedom to work, though there is substantial heterogeneity in support across countries. The lowest shares of support are found in Indonesia (66.0%) and Pakistan (61.0%), while the highest shares of support are found in the U.S. (100%) and the Netherlands (99.8%).

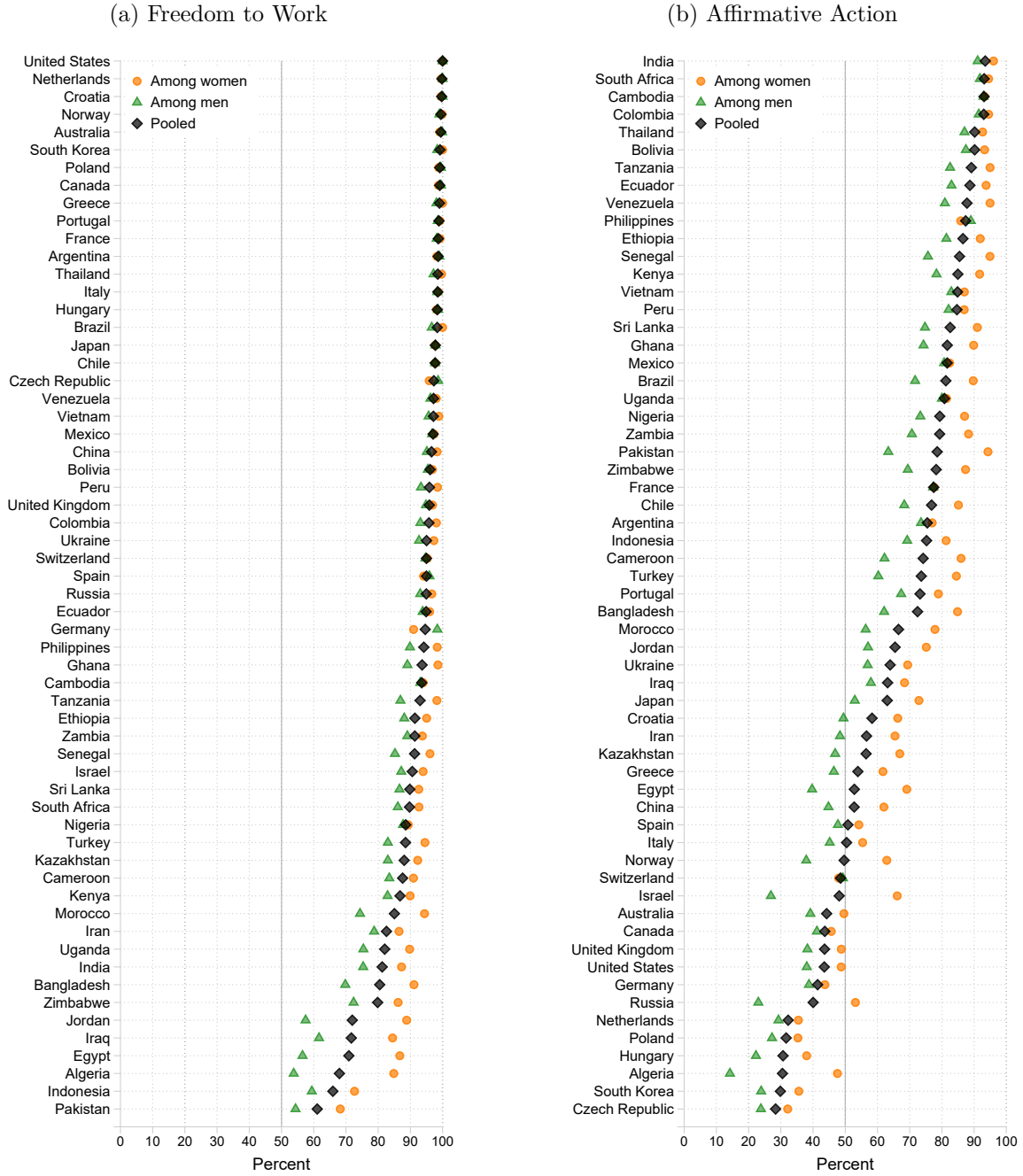
Turning to gender differences in first-order beliefs, we find that in most countries, a large majority of both men and women support women’s freedom to work, with a global gender gap in support of 6.2 pp: 94.4% among women versus 88.2% among men. The lowest shares of support are found among men in Pakistan (54.4%) and Algeria (53.8%), and among women in Indonesia (72.7%) and Pakistan (68.2%). Yet even in these countries, it remains a minority view, among both men and women, to oppose the freedom to work for women. The largest gender difference in the share of support for women’s freedom to work is in Jordan (88.8% support among women versus 57.5% support among men) and Algeria (84.8% versus 53.8%). Yet in many countries the gender gap is relatively small: in 34 countries, it is less than 5 pp.

In Figure 2 (panel a), we relate support for women’s freedom to work to the level of gender equality in the country, as measured by the Gender Equality Index (GEI). We observe a strong positive relationship between gender equality and support for women’s freedom to work, both among men and women, see also Appendix Figure A.3. In the most gender-equal countries, support for the freedom to work for women is almost universal, while in the least gender-equal countries there is a large gender gap in support. However, even in these countries, the overwhelming majority of both men and women support women’s freedom to work.

3.2 Affirmative Action

Figure 1 (panel b) shows the average support for affirmative action across the countries in the study. The global majority, 66.6%, agrees that the government and companies should give

Figure 1: Actual Support ($\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$) by Country and Respondent Gender



Notes: This figure shows actual support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$, for each policy by country and respondent gender. We separately report $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_m]$ among men (green), $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_w]$ among women (orange), and $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$ pooled across all respondents (black). *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

priority to women when hiring for leadership positions, although there is substantial opposition to affirmative action in many countries. Support is highest in India (93.5%) and South Africa (93.1%), while it is lowest in South Korea (29.9%) and the Czech Republic (28.4%). In 15 countries, the majority view is not in favor of affirmative action for women.

Women are more supportive of affirmative action than men in all countries, with a global gender gap in support of 13.1 pp: 73.1% among women versus 60.0% among men. However, the support among both men and women varies widely across countries. The lowest share of support among men is in Hungary (22.3%) and Algeria (14.2%), while the lowest share of support among women is in Poland (35.3%) and the Czech Republic (32.1%). In 37 countries, the majority view of both men and women is to support affirmative action for women, while in 12 countries the majority view of both men and women is not to support it. The largest gender gaps in support for affirmative action appear in Israel (66.1% among women versus 26.9% among men) and Algeria (47.6% versus 14.2%).

In [Figure 2](#) (panel b), we relate support for affirmative action to the level of gender equality across countries. Unlike the pattern for women’s freedom to work, we observe a strong negative relationship between gender equality and support for affirmative action, both among men and women; see also [Appendix Figure A.3](#). In the least gender-equal countries, an overwhelming majority supports affirmative action, whereas in many of the most gender-equal countries, support for the policy is a minority view. Across all levels of gender equality, women are consistently more supportive of affirmative action than men, with the gender gap remaining sizeable even in gender-equal countries.

4 Misperceptions of Gender Norms

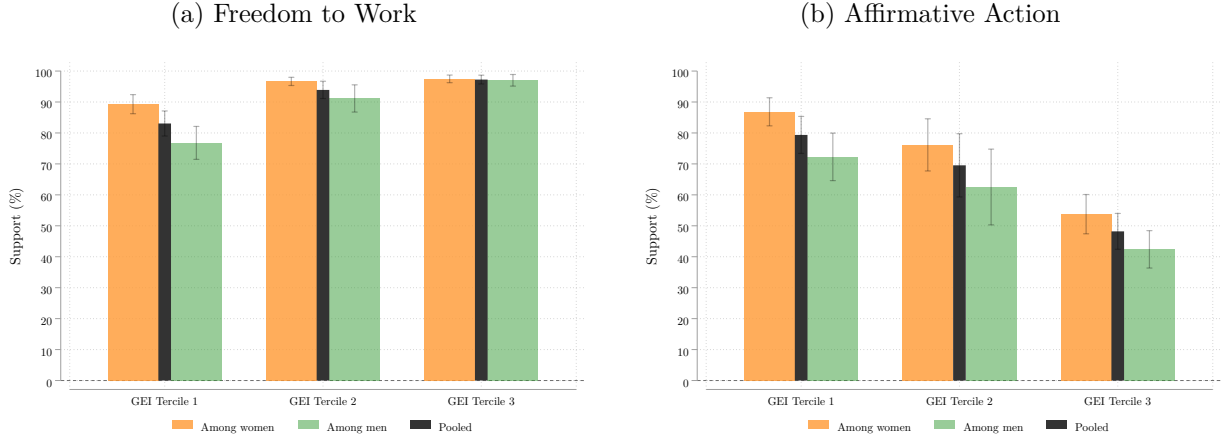
We now turn to study people’s misperceptions of the gender norms in society.

4.1 Freedom to Work

[Figure 3](#) (panel a) compares actual support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$, and average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}]$, in each country in our sample. We note that, in all countries, people underestimate the support for freedom to work for women. The country-level average indicates that people believe that the share of support for freedom to work for women is 20.6 pp lower than the actual support. The largest underestimation of support for women’s freedom to work is in Tanzania (-32.6 pp) and Bolivia (-31.6 pp), while the smallest underestimation is in Egypt (-7.4 pp) and Indonesia (-7.2 pp). In 49 countries, we find that more than 70% of the population underestimates the support for freedom to work.

Are men or women misperceived more? In [Figure 4](#) (panel a), we show the level of misperception of men and women’s support for freedom to work separately by country. We observe that men’s support of freedom to work for women is underestimated more than women’s support in almost all

Figure 2: Actual Support ($\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$) by Gender Equality Index and Respondent Gender



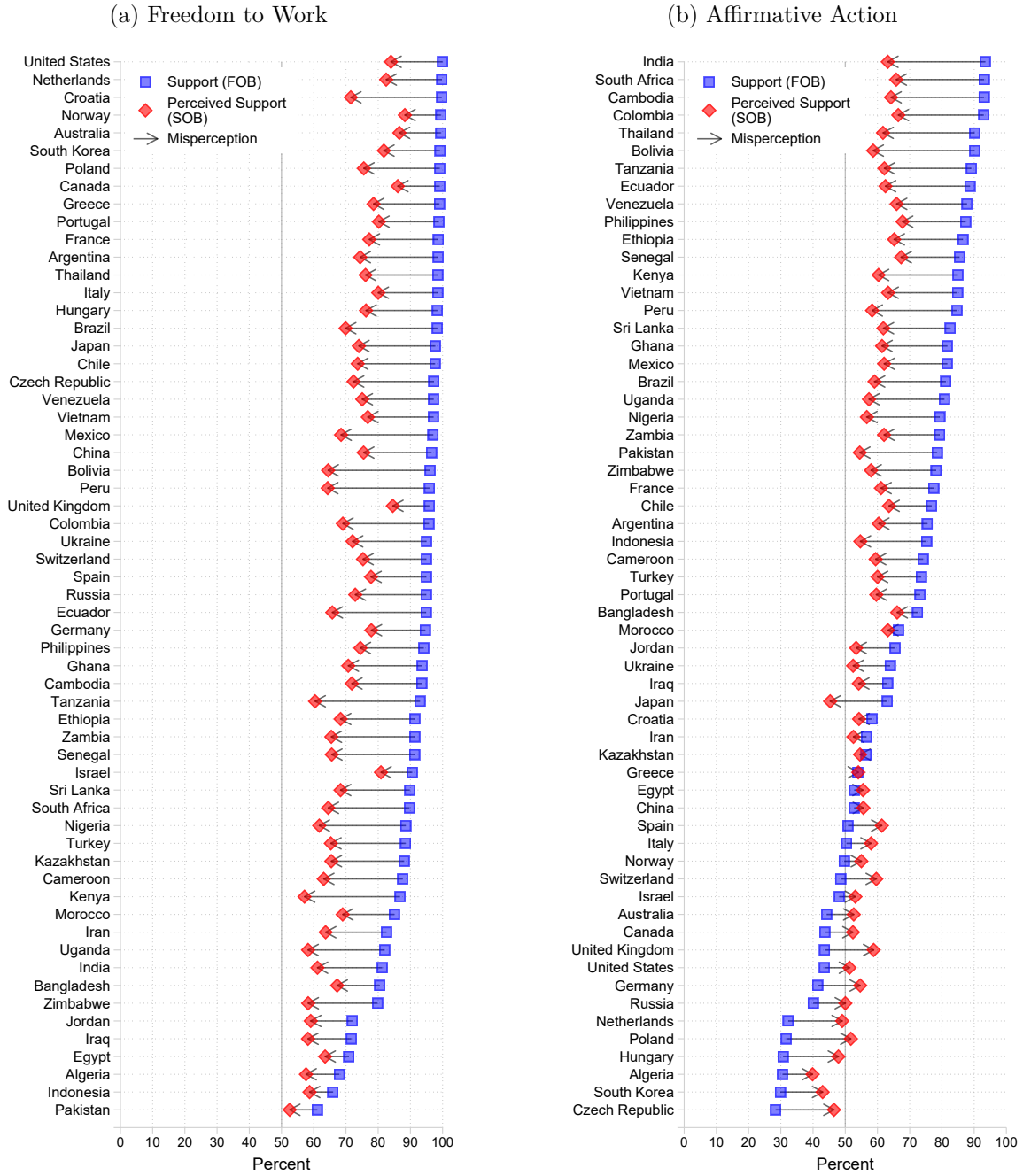
Notes: This figure shows actual support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$, for each policy across countries by respondent gender and by level of gender equality. We separately report $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_m]$ among men (green), $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_w]$ among women (orange), and $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$ pooled across all respondents (black). We use a gender equality index (GEI) which increases with the equality between women and men. Countries are divided into terciles of the GEI. Means are computed across respondents within each GEI tercile using Gallup sampling weights. The vertical bars report 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered at the country level. Data: Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

countries. The country-level average is that men’s support for freedom to work is underestimated by 28.6 pp, while women’s support for freedom to work is underestimated by 13.1 pp. Men’s support for freedom to work is underestimated the most in Brazil (-46.3 pp) and Mexico (-44.5 pp), while women’s support for freedom to work is underestimated the most in Tanzania (-23.9 pp) and Peru (-21.5 pp). In 51 countries, we find that more than 70% of the population underestimates men’s support for freedom to work, while in none of the countries, more than 70% of the population underestimates women’s support for freedom to work. We observe the largest difference in the misperception of men’s and women’s support for freedom to work in Brazil (34.3 pp) and Mexico (29.5 pp).

Finally, in [Figure 5](#) (panel a), we relate the misperception of support for basic freedom to the level of gender inequality in the country, see also [Appendix Figure A.4](#). We observe that the misperception of support for basic freedom has the same pattern across the terciles of gender equality, with men always being misperceived more than women.⁸

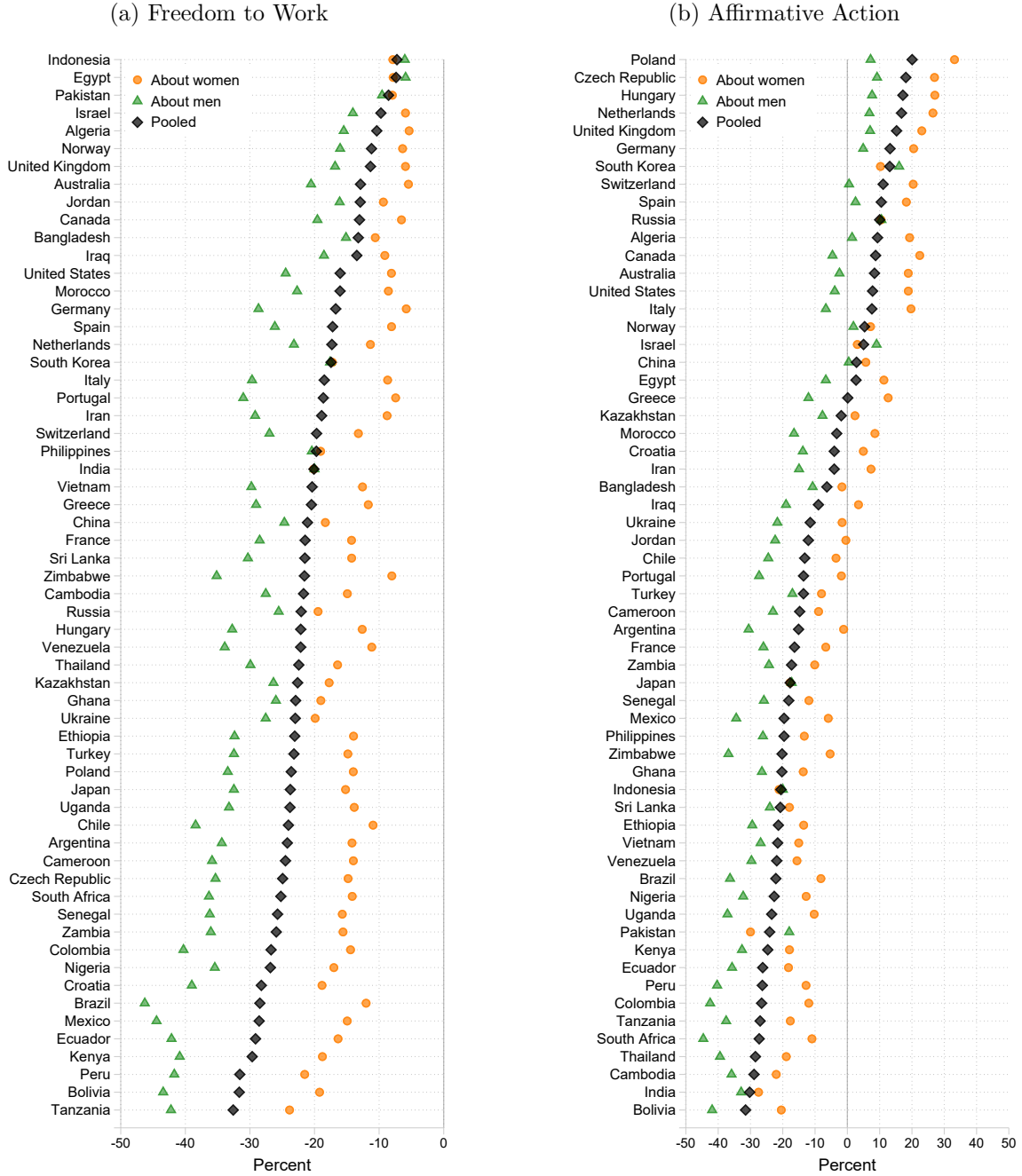
⁸To explore the relationship between misperceptions and the GEI more comprehensively, we examine the partial correlations between average misperceptions and the GEI, controlling for actual support $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_g]$. For freedom to work, the association is positive and statistically significant for misperceptions about both women’s and men’s support ([Appendix Figure A.5](#), panel a). For affirmative action, the association is not statistically distinguishable from zero for misperceptions about women’s support and is positive and statistically significant for misperceptions about men’s support (panel b).

Figure 3: Misperceptions by Country



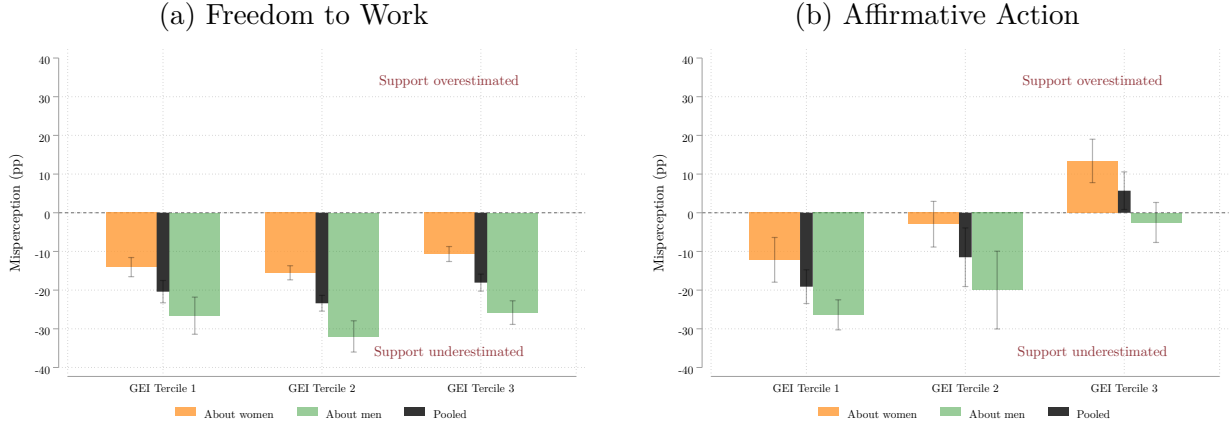
Notes: This figure compares actual support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$, and average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}]$, for each policy across the countries covered by our survey. Blue markers represent $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$, red markers represent $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}]$, and arrows represent average misperceptions, $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}] - \mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$. Arrows from left to right indicate overestimation of others' support, while arrows from right to left indicate underestimation. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure 4: Misperceptions by Country and across Genders



Notes: This figure shows average misperceptions about support for each policy by country and by the gender whose support is being estimated. We separately report misperceptions about women’s support (orange), about men’s support (green), and about overall support (black). For target gender g , average misperceptions are defined as $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}_g] - \mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_g]$. The pooled measure is defined as $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}] - \mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$. Positive values indicate overestimation of support, while negative values indicate underestimation. Data: Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure 5: Misperceptions: Stylized Facts



Notes: This figure shows average misperceptions about support for each policy across countries by level of gender equality and by the gender whose support is being estimated. We separately report misperceptions about women’s support (orange), about men’s support (green), and about overall support (black). We use a gender equality index (GEI) which increases with the equality between women and men. Countries are divided into terciles of the GEI. Means are computed across respondents within each GEI tercile using Gallup sampling weights. The vertical bars report 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered at the country level. Misperceptions are defined as the difference between *perceived support* and the *actual support* in the respondent’s country. For target gender g , average misperceptions are defined as $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}^g] - \mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_g]$, while pooled average misperceptions are defined as $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}] - \mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$. Positive values indicate overestimation of support, while negative values indicate underestimation. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

4.2 Affirmative Action

Our data reveal substantial underestimation of the support for affirmative action for women in many countries, as shown in [Figure 3](#) (panel b). The country-level average is that people believe that the share of support for affirmative action for women is 9.0 pp lower than the actual support. The largest underestimation of support for affirmative action is found in Bolivia (-31.5 pp) and India (-30.2 pp). However, in contrast to the universal underestimation of the support for freedom to work, we find that there is an *overestimation* of the support for affirmative action in 20 countries. The largest overestimation is in Poland (20.1 pp) and the Czech Republic (18.1 pp). In 31 countries, we find that more than 70% of the population underestimates the support for affirmative action, while in 12 countries more than 70% of the population overestimates the support for affirmative action.

In [Figure 4](#) (panel b), we observe that the pattern of misperception of men and women differs for affirmative action. Men’s support is significantly underestimated in most countries, while women’s support is overestimated in some countries and underestimated in others. The country-level average is that men’s support for affirmative action is underestimated by 17.6 pp, while there is, on average, almost no misperception of women’s support for affirmative action across countries, 0.9 pp. Men’s

support is underestimated most in South Africa (-44.6 pp) and Colombia (-42.5 pp), while women’s support is overestimated most in Poland (33.2 pp) and Hungary (27.1 pp). In 32 countries, we find that more than 70% of the population underestimates men’s support for affirmative action, while in 15 countries, more than 70% of the population overestimates women’s support for affirmative action. We observe the largest difference in the misperception of men’s and women’s support for affirmative action in South Africa (33.6 pp) and Zimbabwe (31.5 pp).

Finally, in [Figure 5](#) (panel b), we relate the misperception of support for affirmative action to the level of gender inequality in the country, see also Appendix [Figure A.4](#). We observe that the misperception of support for affirmative action is very different in the most gender-equal countries than in the less gender-equal countries. In the most gender-equal countries, women’s support for affirmative action is significantly overestimated, while men’s support is perceived almost accurately. In the less gender-equal countries, both men’s and women’s support for affirmative action are significantly underestimated, with the misperception being larger for men than for women.

4.3 Four Stylized Facts

We summarize the findings on misperceptions of gender norms across the world in the following four stylized facts:

- Fact #1: Support for freedom to work is underestimated in every country.
- Fact #2: Support for affirmative action is underestimated in low-gender-equality countries and overestimated in high-gender-equality countries.
- Fact #3: Men’s support for freedom to work for women is more underestimated than women’s support, essentially in every country.
- Fact #4: Men’s support for affirmative action for women is more underestimated than women’s support, essentially in all countries. In low-gender-equality countries, both men’s and women’s support are underestimated, while in high-gender-equality countries, women’s support is overestimated, and men’s support is not misperceived.

4.4 Social Desirability Bias

We now show that the stylized facts reflect genuine misperceptions rather than measurement error in first-order beliefs caused by *social desirability bias* (SDB). First-order beliefs may be mis-measured if respondents feel pressure to answer in a socially desirable way about themselves. If respondents adjust their answers to align with what they think is socially acceptable, our measure of misperception would conflate true misperceptions with SDB.

The design of our global study mitigates this concern. The participants were assured that their responses would be kept private and used only for research purposes.⁹ In addition, the existing literature provides strong evidence that SDB is not a major issue in the measurement of social norms. The meta-analysis in [Bursztyn and Yang \(2022\)](#) shows that misperceptions about others capture actual misperceptions rather than reflect SDB, and [Aycinena, Bogliacino and Kimbrough \(2024\)](#) shows that even experimental conditions designed to heighten social desirability bias—through the threat of third-party monetary sanctions—have only a minor effect on the measurement of social norms in the lab. See also [Bursztyn et al. \(2025\)](#) for a recent review of SDB.

However, to further demonstrate that our findings do not reflect SDB, we employ several complementary empirical strategies.

a. Indirect Elicitation Methods. These methods are widely recognized as standard tools for diagnosing the relevance of SDB when asking sensitive questions ([Chuang et al., 2021](#)). The basic idea is that the design provides respondents with cover for their answers, so that the surveyor cannot identify their view on the topic (i.e., plausible deniability of the actual response). This can be implemented through a list experiment, which provides cover by embedding individual answers within a group response, or through a randomized response technique, which provides cover by introducing randomness before the respondent reports an answer.

[Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott \(2020\)](#), using the list approach, provide strong evidence from Saudi Arabia that SDB is not a major concern in the study of the Freedom to Work question. To study the role of social desirability bias for the Affirmative Action question, we implemented a pre-registered online survey experiment in the U.S. with 1,006 subjects recruited nationwide through the online platform Prolific.¹⁰ In the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned either to a direct elicitation method, as used in the Gallup World Poll, or to a randomized response method that provides cover. We find no evidence of SDB in the responses: the level of support for affirmative action is very similar and not statistically significantly different between the two approaches (35% vs. 32%, $p = 0.589$).

b. The Gender of the Surveyor. In the Gallup World Poll, respondents could recognize the gender of the surveyor. Evidence from cross-disciplinary research indicates that surveyor gender can generate or reinforce SDB in sensitive gender-related questions (e.g., [Catania et al., 1996](#); [Benstead, 2014](#)).

To assess whether this concern applies in our context, we obtained data on the gender of the

⁹Participants were informed that: “Your participation in this survey is optional. Your information will be kept private and combined with the responses of other people for research purposes only. All data are reported so that individuals cannot be identified.” (Information provided by Gallup.)

¹⁰The experiment and hypotheses were pre-registered in the AEA RCT Registry (#0010779). See [Appendix C](#) for details about the experimental design.

surveyors from the Gallup World Poll for 54 countries, information that is not typically available to researchers.¹¹ We find little evidence that the gender of the surveyor affects respondents’ stated first-order beliefs. In almost all countries where surveyor gender varies, it is not significantly associated with beliefs about either freedom to work or affirmative action. This result holds both when we analyze all respondents together (Appendix Figure A.6) and when we examine men and women separately (Appendix Figure A.7). Consistent with this, the stylized facts are virtually unchanged when splitting the sample by interviewer gender (Appendix Figure A.8, Figure A.9).

c. Propensity to Give Desirable Answers. Another approach to assessing the role of social desirability bias is to examine how responses to a sensitive question relate to a respondent’s general tendency to present themselves in a favorable light (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960). The standard approach measures this tendency by aggregating answers to a set of “too-good-to-be-true” items, where the association between this aggregate score and the sensitive response is seen as evidence for whether the latter is influenced by SDB.¹²

Following the existing literature (Lee et al., 2024), we construct a Social Desirability Index (SDI) based on Gallup World Poll questions on civic engagement, which ask whether respondents have i) helped a stranger, ii) donated to a charity, or iii) volunteered in the previous month.¹³ We use this measure as a proxy for an above-median propensity to provide socially desirable responses relative to other respondents in the same country.

We find little evidence that the SDI is systematically associated with respondents’ first-order beliefs. As shown in Appendix Figure A.10, the estimated coefficient for the SDI is small and not statistically significant in most countries, both for the freedom to work and affirmative action question. Any tendency to give desirable answers therefore cannot explain the stylized facts we have documented, see also Appendix Table A.1.

d. Manipulating the Elicitation of Second-Order Beliefs. An alternative way to assess the role of SDB is to examine whether people, in their second-order beliefs, expect others to give socially desirable answers. We implemented this approach in the global study by randomly assigning participants to one of two versions of the second-order beliefs questions. In the *Reported* version, respondents were asked how many out of 100 random men/women in their country “will say that they agree” with the policy; in the *Truthful* version, respondents were asked how many they

¹¹This information is not available for Chile, India, Israel, Peru, South Africa, and the U.S.

¹²As highlighted by Dhar, Jain and Jayachandran (2022), this approach identifies only associations, which may reflect genuine relationships rather than SDB.

¹³To construct the SDI, we build a civic-engagement score by summing three binary indicators for whether the respondent helped a stranger, donated to charity, and volunteered in the previous month. This score ranges from 0 to 3. We then define the SDI as an indicator equal to one if the respondent’s civic-engagement score is strictly above the country-specific median and zero otherwise. Respondents with missing information on any of the three components are assigned a missing SDI and excluded from analyses using this measure.

think “will truly agree” with the policy. If respondents were distorting their own answer to these questions, it is reasonable to assume that they would also expect others to distort their answers. In that case, we should observe a difference in second-order beliefs between the *Reported* and the *Truthful* versions.

As shown in Appendix [Figure A.11](#), responses to the two versions of the second-order belief questions are remarkably similar for both the freedom-to-work and affirmative-action questions in almost all countries. In Appendix [Figure A.12](#) and [Figure A.13](#), we show that this also holds when analyzing responses separately by the gender of the target group and the gender of the respondent. Finally, we do not find that the difference between second-order beliefs in the *Reported* and *Truthful* versions is larger among respondents who themselves report agreeing with the policy, as might be expected if their own first-order beliefs were driven by SDB (Appendix [Table A.2](#)). Nor do we find larger differences among respondents with higher SDI (Appendix [Table A.3](#)).

Summary. Taken together, the evidence from indirect elicitation, individual propensity measures, interviewer characteristics, and experimental manipulations provides no indication of systematic social desirability bias. We therefore conclude that the stylized facts reflect genuine misperceptions of gender norms across the world.

5 Mechanisms: What Forces Distort Perceptions of Gender Norms?

In this section, we explore different mechanisms documented in the literature that may distort perceptions of gender norms and explain the stylized facts: *false consensus*, *minority overweighting*, *stereotyping*, and *motivated reasoning*.¹⁴

5.1 False Consensus

We begin by exploring false consensus, a positive correlation between one’s opinion and the perceived prevalence of such an opinion among others ([Ross, Greene and House, 1977](#); [Fields and Schuman, 1976](#)).¹⁵ False consensus could derive from people’s tendency to exaggerate the extent to which others share their views, sometimes denoted as “looking-glass perceptions” in the social psychology literature ([Fields and Schuman, 1976](#)). This tendency could be driven by projection bias

¹⁴In Appendix [B.3](#), we examine how the misperceptions relate to different background characteristics. The estimated differences across groups are small relative to the average level of misperception, indicating that misperceptions of gender norms are not concentrated among particular genders, socioeconomic groups, ages, or locations. This suggests that the misperceptions are largely driven by broad mechanisms that operate across the population.

¹⁵[Ross, Greene and House \(1977\)](#) introduced the term false consensus in a seminal paper showing that people systematically overestimate how widely their beliefs are shared, both in hypothetical and consequential contexts. [Fields and Schuman \(1976\)](#) examined false consensus in racial attitudes, and [Marks and Miller \(1987\)](#) reviewed more than 45 related studies, linking it to the availability heuristic ([Tversky and Kahneman, 1973](#)). More recently, [Bursztyn and Yang \(2022\)](#) documented robust evidence across 81 studies in economics of a positive correlation between individuals’ own views and their perceptions of others’ views.

(Madarász, 2012), identity-based motivated reasoning (Bonomi, Gennaioli and Tabellini, 2021), availability heuristics in peer groups with homophily (Marks and Miller, 1987), or the desire to justify one’s views by reporting similar second-order beliefs.¹⁶ Causality could also run in the opposite direction, as discussed in Bursztyn and Yang (2022), where people adopt a particular view if they believe it is relatively more prevalent.

Figure 6 reports, by country, the estimated coefficient for the respondent’s own view on the policy in a regression where the dependent variable is the respondent-level pooled perceived support, SOB_i , defined in Section 2. We find, both for the support of freedom to work for women (panel a) and for the support of affirmative action for women (panel b), a positive correlation between a respondent’s own view and their perception of others’ views. This pattern is present in almost every country in our sample, albeit not always statistically significant. In Appendix Table A.4, we report the corresponding global regression analysis and show that the false consensus effect is attenuated when respondents state their beliefs about the other gender.

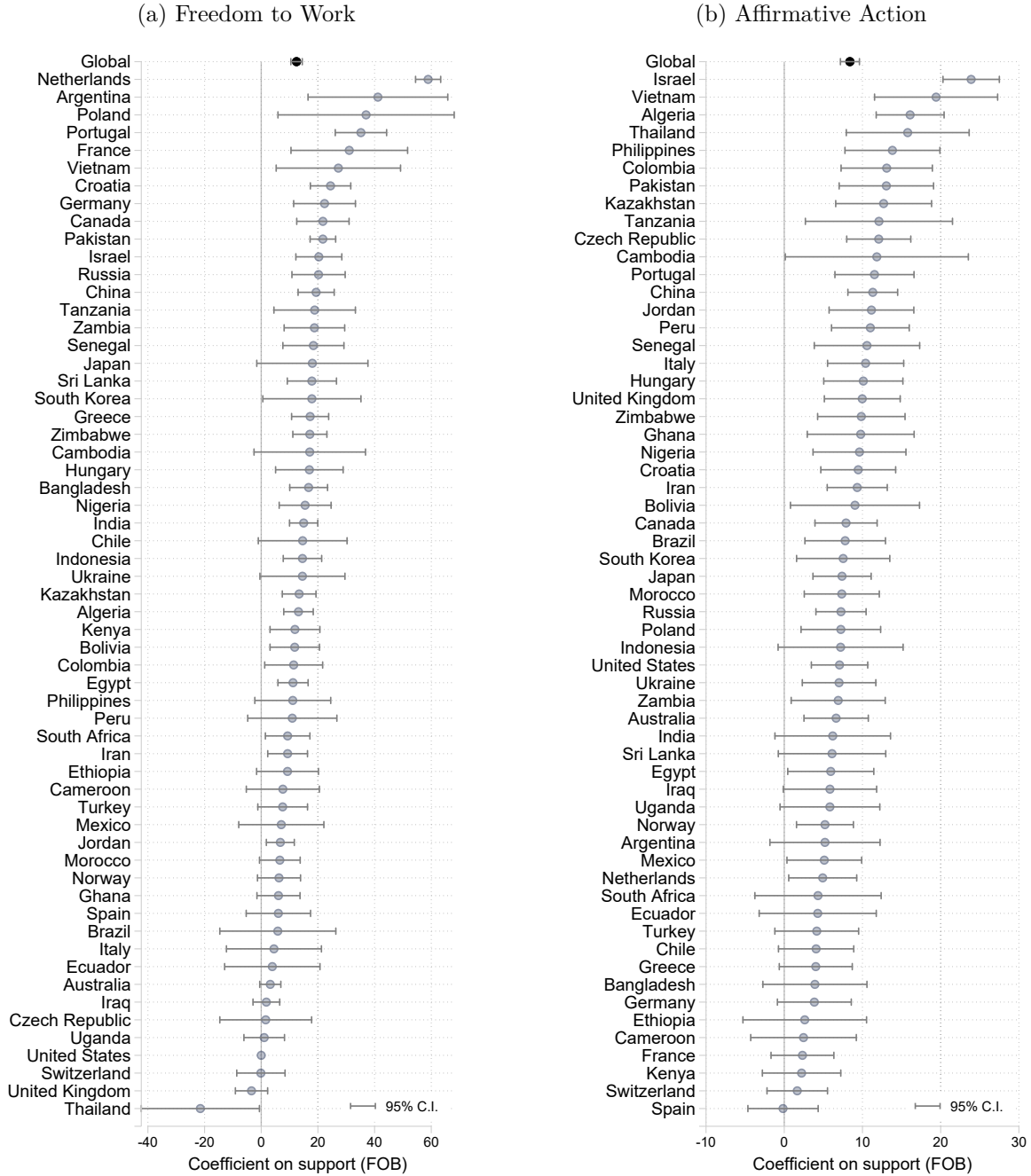
5.2 Minority Overweighting

We next consider the extent to which people overestimate the prevalence of the minority view in society. Different forces, including conservative bias, selective exposure to media, and cognitive biases can give rise to this pattern, and its role in driving misperceptions has been discussed extensively in the social psychology literature (see, for example, Miller and Prentice, 1994; Miller, 2023). If the overweighting of the minority view is sufficiently strong, it may lead to what is termed *pluralistic ignorance*, i.e., the situation in which people perceive the minority view to be the majority view.

In Figure 7, we use the individual-level data and classify each respondent into one of three categories: having approximately correct perception (± 5 pp); overestimation of the actual support for the minority view; overestimation of the actual support for the majority view. We find strong evidence that overweighting of the minority view is prevalent in our data. At the global scale, almost 80 percent of the respondents overestimate the support for the minority view in their country on freedom to work for women (panel a), and around 70 percent of respondents overestimate the support for the minority view in their country on affirmative action for women (panel b). We see the same pattern at the country level, with the overestimation of the support for the minority view being the dominant force in almost all countries. Indeed, the extent of overestimation of the support for the minority view is so large that it leads to pluralistic ignorance among a sizable share of the respondents for both policy issues in many countries, as displayed in Appendix Figure A.14.

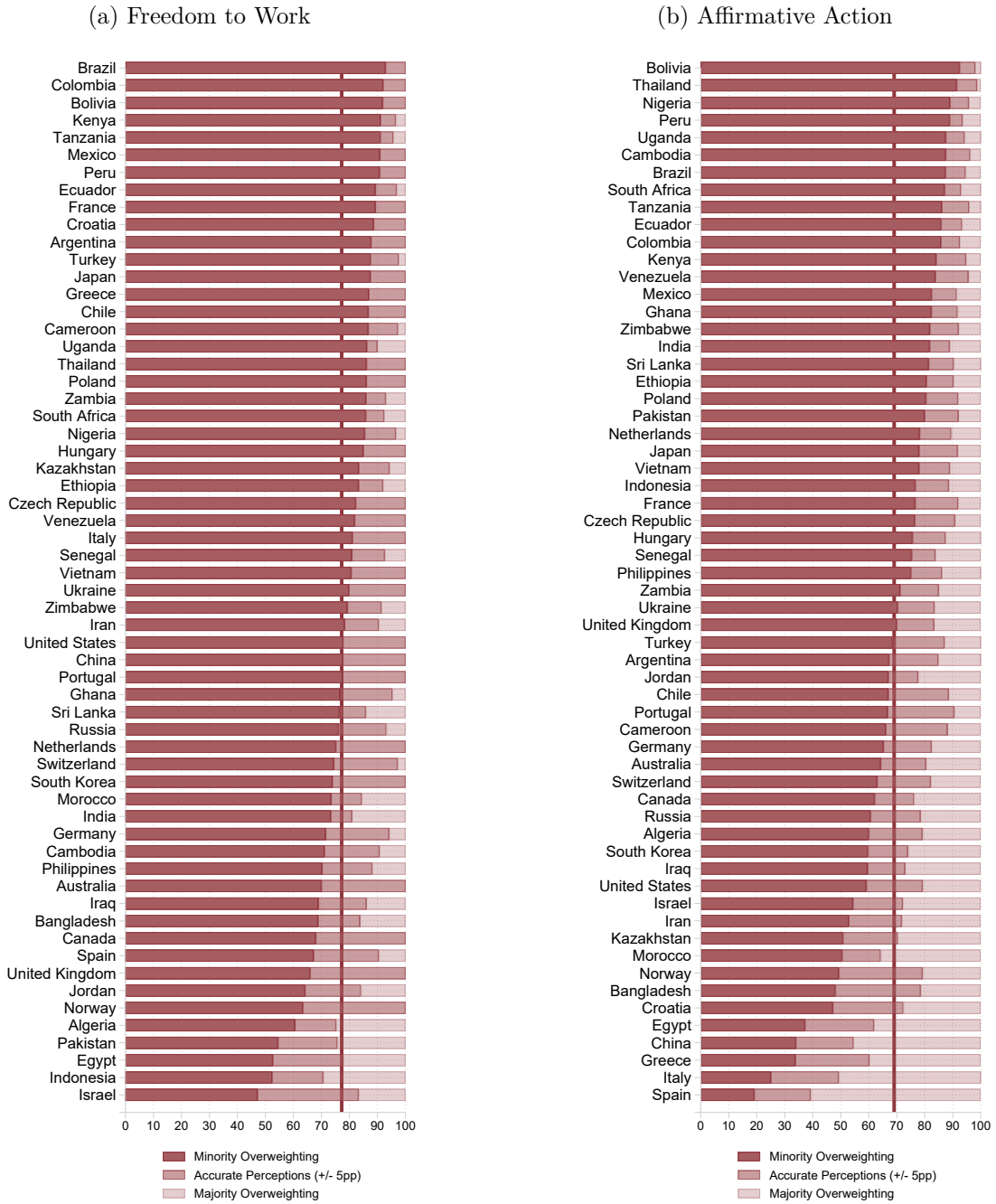
¹⁶A natural question is whether incentives could attenuate the tendency to provide positively-correlated FOB and SOB answers. The primary-belief sample used in the meta-analysis of Bursztyn and Yang (2022) comprises 53 papers and 311 elicitations. In Supplemental Figure A.5, they show that, across studies, the share of respondents who hold incorrect beliefs is not systematically related to whether belief elicitation is incentivized.

Figure 6: Correlation Between Own Views and Perceptions about Others' Views



Notes: This figure shows coefficients from regressions of respondents' second-order beliefs on an indicator for whether they themselves support the policy, estimated separately for each country. The dependent variable is respondent-level pooled perceived support, SOB_i , constructed as described in Section 2, for the policy indicated in the panel title. Each point is the coefficient on respondents' own support, controlling for background characteristics (gender, education, employment, income, age, urban residence, internet access). The "Global" estimate comes from an unweighted pooled regression with country fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the country level. Regressions estimated separately for each country report robust standard errors and use sample weights. Robust 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure 7: Percentage of Respondents that Overestimate the Prevalence of the Actual Minority Position



Notes: This figure shows the share of respondents in each country who overestimate, accurately perceive, or underestimate the prevalence of the actual minority position for each survey item. For each respondent, we compare their perceived level of overall support for the policy with the actual level of support in their country. Perceptions within ± 5 pp of the actual support level are classified as accurate. Misperceptions outside this range are classified as minority or majority overweighting in accordance with their sign and with the actual minority position. Country-specific shares use Gallup sampling weights. The vertical line shows the unweighted share of respondents in the pooled Gallup sample who overweight the minority view; it is not population-weighted across countries.

Data: Gallup World Poll 2020.

The prevalence of overestimation of the minority view in our study may partly reflect conservative bias (Breed and Ktsanes, 1961; O’Gorman and Garry, 1976).¹⁷ People’s views on these policies may have changed rapidly, while people’s beliefs may reflect an outdated true state of the world. For example, the support for freedom to work for women may have been weaker in the past. Countries may have moved in a more progressive direction in recent decades, which may not be fully reflected in the public debate on the matter or, more broadly, the available information in society. Similarly, support for affirmative action in relatively more gender-equal countries may have been stronger in the past, but as gender gaps in economic outcomes have been reduced, the support for the policy may have waned without this being fully recognized by the general population.

Another source of overestimation of the minority view could stem from how issues are portrayed in mass media. The minority view may get disproportionate coverage, both in debates about freedom to work and affirmative action. This could easily arise from the journalistic tradition of *equally* covering “both sides” of a policy issue.¹⁸ Mass media may find it profitable to highlight tensions in society, pointing to the lack of a consensus view. Moreover, since hard statistics are seldom included (or available), it may be difficult for the general population to draw correct inference based on observing both sides of an argument in mass media. Relatedly, vocal minorities may be more active in the public arena compared to their true traction in the public opinion (Miller, 2023). For example, they may be more invested in promoting their position on social media platforms, via public demonstrations, or via political campaigns. Finally, people might form beliefs based on the public stances of politicians. Some politicians might take a specific policy stance that does not necessarily reflect the views of the majority of the population (for example, pushing for gender-based affirmative action), either because these politicians personally want to adopt the policy, because it is important to their constituents, or because they misperceive the level of support by the public at large. The public, in turn, might sustain misperceptions by making inferences based on the choices of politicians.

Finally, cognitive phenomena in belief formation may also lead to minority overestimation in our study, as proposed and documented in a large literature on beliefs. These forces include phenomena such as *inattention* or *attenuation*, where beliefs tend to be anchored or driven towards the center. People may simply overestimate the size of the minority view on freedom to work and affirmative action for women because their inferences are distorted by uncertainty and a limited ability to cognitively process statistical moments.¹⁹ As modeled in Bordalo et al. (2023), people often rely

¹⁷This hypothesis would be testable if we had access to panel data on actual and perceived support going back several years. However, this is the first global dataset on people’s support for freedom to work and affirmative action for women, and thus, we are not in a position to test it at present.

¹⁸Shapiro (2016) argues that reputational incentives may induce journalists to appear not to be “taking sides” in reporting, leaving voters uninformed on matters like climate change.

¹⁹The literature on this topic is extensive and goes back decades. Two excellent discussions of the literature, as well as the current frontier, can be found in Gabaix (2019), who covers behavioral inattention, and Enke and Graeber (2023), who treat the issue of cognitive uncertainty.

on experiences and memory to estimate the probability of a given event. The retrieval of these memories may be influenced by frequency, similarity, and interference, which can cause agents to form biased beliefs. To illustrate, memories of people holding the minority view that women should not have the freedom to work outside of the home may thus lead to overestimating the true support of such a view in the present population.

5.3 Gender stereotyping

People may misperceive the gender difference in support for the two policies, driven both by cognitive processes and broader societal forces (Bordalo et al., 2016, 2019).

In Figure 8, we classify each respondent into one of three categories: having approximately correct perception (± 5 pp), overestimating the actual gender difference, or underestimating the actual gender difference. We find strong evidence of overestimation of the gender difference being prevalent in our data. At the global scale, around 65 percent of the respondents overestimate the gender difference in the support for freedom to work for women in their country (panel a), with a similar share of respondents overestimating the gender difference in the support for affirmative action for women in their country (panel b). We observe the same pattern at the country level, with the overestimation of gender differences being the dominant force in almost all countries.²⁰

The literature provides some hypotheses for why we observe this systematic overestimation of gender differences. First, as formalized in Bordalo et al. (2016, 2019), heuristics based on “representativeness” would give rise to exaggerated perceptions based on gender. In this model, cognitive processing of otherwise correct information distorts beliefs in a systematic fashion. Bordalo et al. (2023) show that the same cognitive processes could give rise to both availability and representativeness heuristics, simultaneously generating overestimation of the gender differences and the minority view.

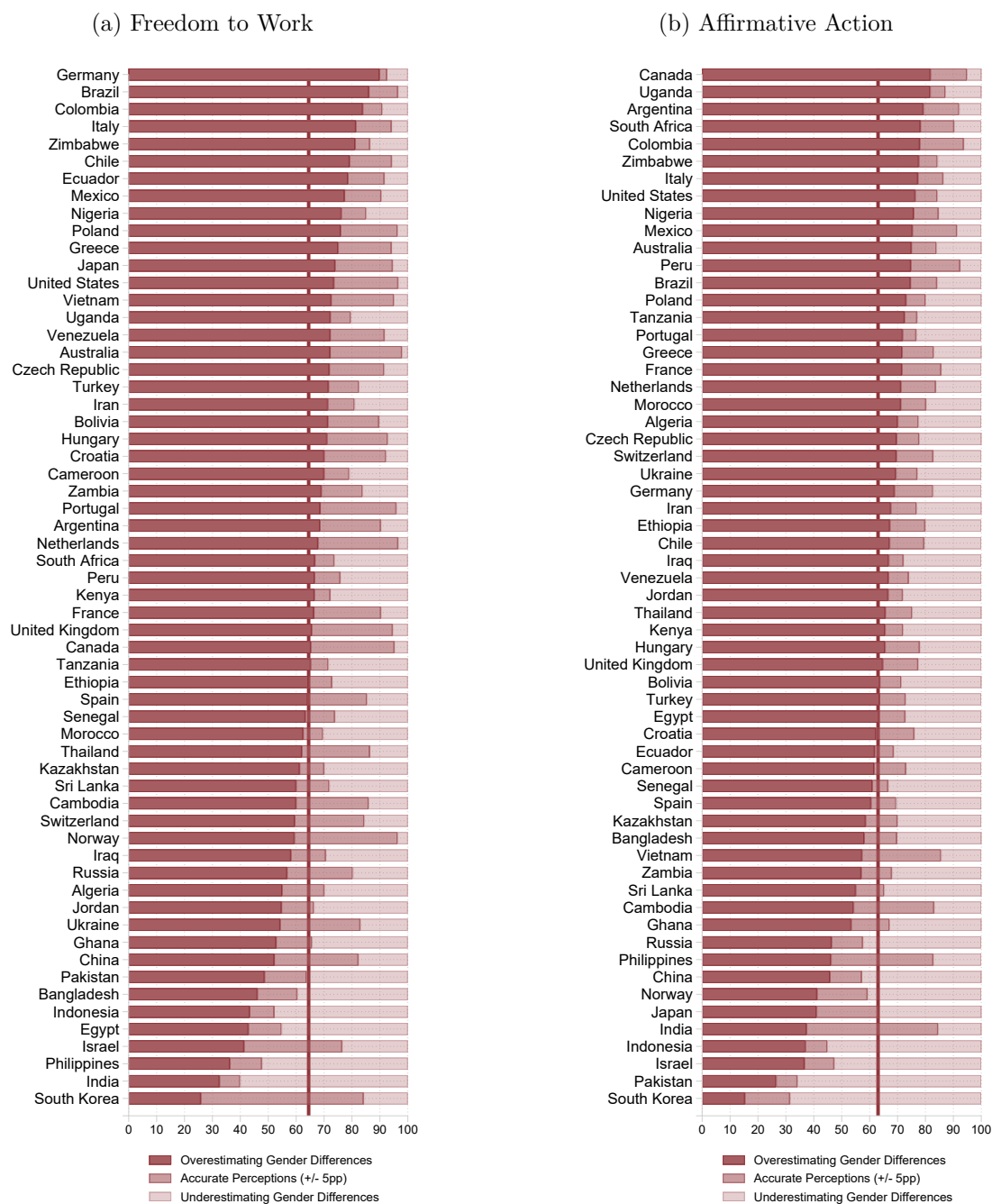
Second, broader forces in society could also explain the observed pattern. Available information itself can be imperfect for a number of reasons, where mass media or the entertainment industry may perpetuate stereotypes of how women and men think about freedom to work and affirmative action.²¹ Political representation may also play a role, as gendered patterns of political leadership or the public expression of views by vocal leaders may not reflect the average opinions of their gender in the population. For example, if female politicians tend to be particularly gender progressive compared to the general female population, beliefs will get distorted unless people are able to fully account for the selection in the political process.

Finally, all these different mechanisms may interact. To illustrate, mass media and the entertainment industry may play into cognitive tendencies among people to engage in gender stereotyping.

²⁰In Appendix B.4, we show that the observed gender differences are robust to whether respondents were first asked about men or about women.

²¹Global evidence from media studies is limited in this regard, but recent evidence from the U.S. by Ash et al. (2022) suggests that the perpetuation of stereotypes in mass media is pervasive.

Figure 8: Percentage of Respondents Who Overestimate Gender Differences in Support



Notes: This figure shows the share of respondents in each country who overestimate, accurately perceive, or underestimate the gender difference in support for each survey item. For each respondent, we compare the perceived difference between men's and women's support with the actual difference in their country. Perceptions within ± 5 pp of the actual difference are classified as accurate. Country shares are calculated using Gallup sampling weights. The vertical line shows the average of these shares across countries, giving equal weight to each country. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

These broad forces, separately or jointly, could thus give rise to the systematic overestimation of gender differences that we observe in our study.

5.4 Motivated Beliefs

Finally, misperception of gender norms may reflect that people hold motivated second-order beliefs—that is, beliefs about others that serve to rationalize one’s own behavior (Epley and Gilovich, 2016).

To explore the significance of this mechanism in our setting, we examine whether women’s misperceptions vary with their background characteristics. For the freedom to work, we consider whether their misperceptions relate to employment status: employed women may be motivated to believe that others approve of them working, while non-employed women may be motivated to believe that others disapprove. For affirmative action in leadership hiring, we consider whether their misperceptions relate to the level of education. Highly educated women may be more likely to be affected by a policy giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions, and may thus be motivated to believe that others approve of this.

As shown in Figure 9, we do not find systematic evidence for motivated beliefs across countries in either of the domains, and, consistent with this, we show in Appendix Figure A.15 that the stylized facts are robust across the different groups.

6 A Conceptual Framework

We introduce a simple conceptual framework to study the cross-country variation in second-order beliefs and misperceptions of gender norms. It assumes that second-order beliefs are determined by four components: actual support in the country, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$, false consensus, minority overweighting, and gender stereotyping. We first examine how well the framework can account for the observed cross-country variation in second-order beliefs, before quantifying the relative importance of each component and demonstrating that it can predict the stylized facts on misperceptions out of sample. This analysis leverages the unique feature of our global data that allows us to study how misperceptions vary with actual gender norms across countries.²²

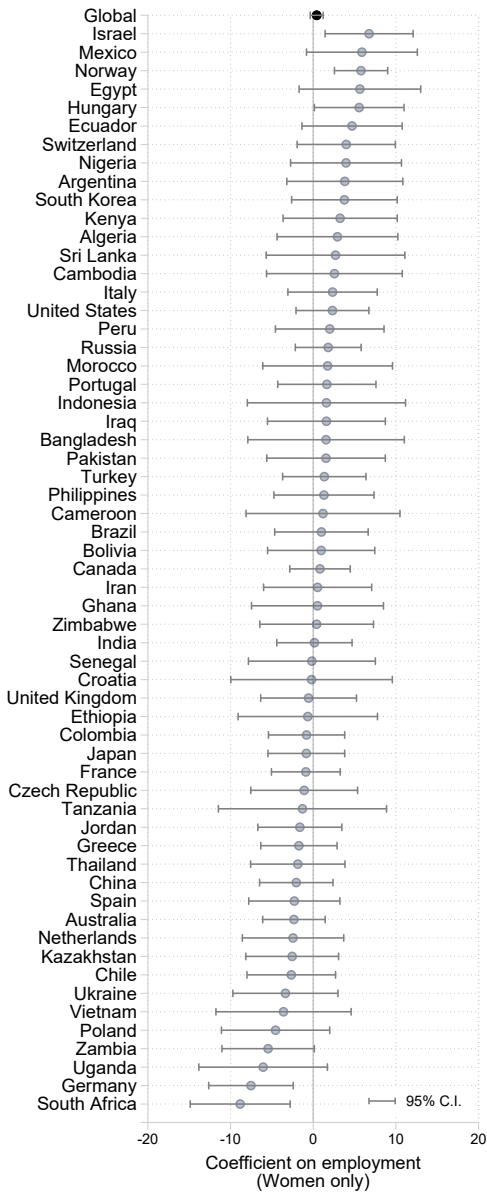
6.1 Cross-country variation in second-order beliefs

In the first part of the analysis, we study second-order beliefs about the aggregate support for a policy. In this case, we assume that the second-order beliefs of respondent i in country c are given

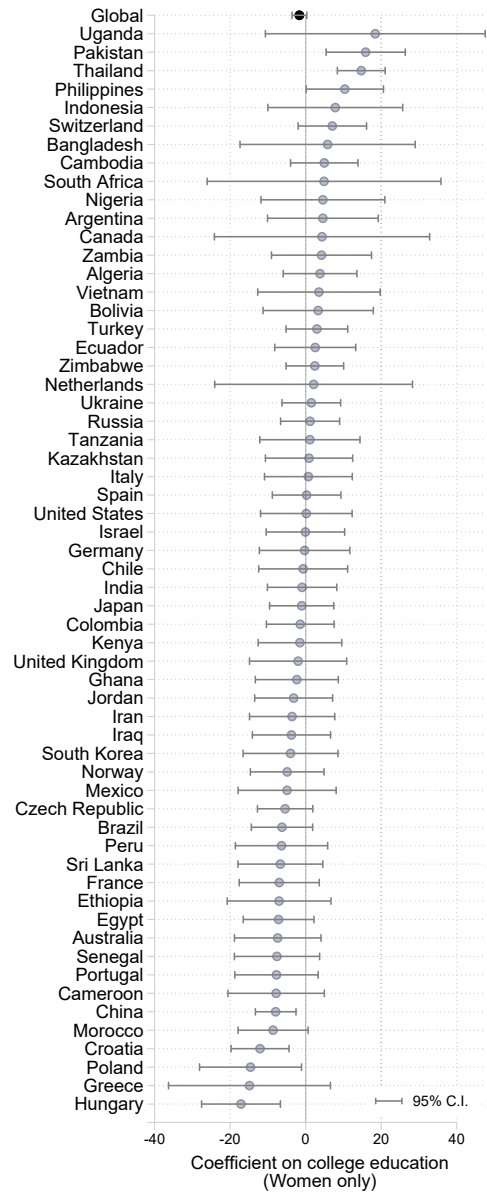
²²This type of data has been missing in the existing literature on misperceptions, as highlighted by Sargent and Newman (2021): “We are not aware of any studies that utilize discrete groups as the level of analysis and compare them in terms of the extent to which pluralistic ignorance is in evidence,” let alone cross-country studies, given the “paucity of research outside of North America.”

Figure 9: Motivated Beliefs by Country

(a) Employment and Freedom to Work



(b) College Education and Affirmative Action



Notes: This figure reports coefficients from regressions estimated separately by country among female respondents. Panel (a) reports the coefficient on employment from regressions of pooled misperceptions about Freedom to Work on employment, controlling for respondents' own support for the policy (FOB), college and secondary education, high income, age below 40, urban residence, and internet access, while Panel (b) reports the coefficient on college education from regressions of pooled misperceptions about Affirmative Action on college education, controlling for respondents' own support for the policy (FOB), employment, secondary education, high income, age below 40, urban residence, and internet access. The "Global" estimates come from unweighted pooled regressions with country fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the country level. They summarize associations in the pooled Gallup sample and are not population-weighted across countries. Regressions estimated separately by country use Gallup sampling weights and robust standard errors. Whiskers report 95% confidence intervals. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

by:

$$SOB_{ic} = \mathbb{E}[FOB] + \gamma \cdot FOB_i + \lambda \cdot (50\% - \mathbb{E}[FOB]) + u_{ic}. \quad (1)$$

where $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$ is actual support in the country, for the purposes of the conceptual framework, $FOB_i \in \{-1, 1\}$ is the respondent's own first-order belief (equal to 1 if respondent i supports the policy and -1 otherwise), $\lambda \in [0, 1]$ is the degree of minority overweighting, $\gamma \geq 0$ is the degree of false consensus, and u_{ic} is the residual. A respondent has correct second-order beliefs if $\lambda = \gamma = u_{ic} = 0$.

In what follows, we assume that the parameters γ and λ are common across countries, and that unobserved country-level factors $\mathbb{E}[u]$ are orthogonal to actual support. At the country level, equation 1 aggregates to:

$$\mathbb{E}[SOB] = (1 + 2\gamma - \lambda) \cdot \mathbb{E}[FOB] - \gamma + \lambda \cdot 50\% + \mathbb{E}[u]. \quad (2)$$

Equation 2 shows that false consensus and minority overweighting have opposite effects on aggregate second-order beliefs. When the majority supports the policy, false consensus pulls towards overestimating the support because the false consensus effect among those holding the majority view outweighs the effect among those holding the minority view. In contrast, minority overweighting pulls towards underestimating the support. The opposite patterns apply if the majority view is not to support the policy. Average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$, is equal to actual support, $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$, if $\lambda = \gamma = 0$ and $\mathbb{E}[u] = 0$.

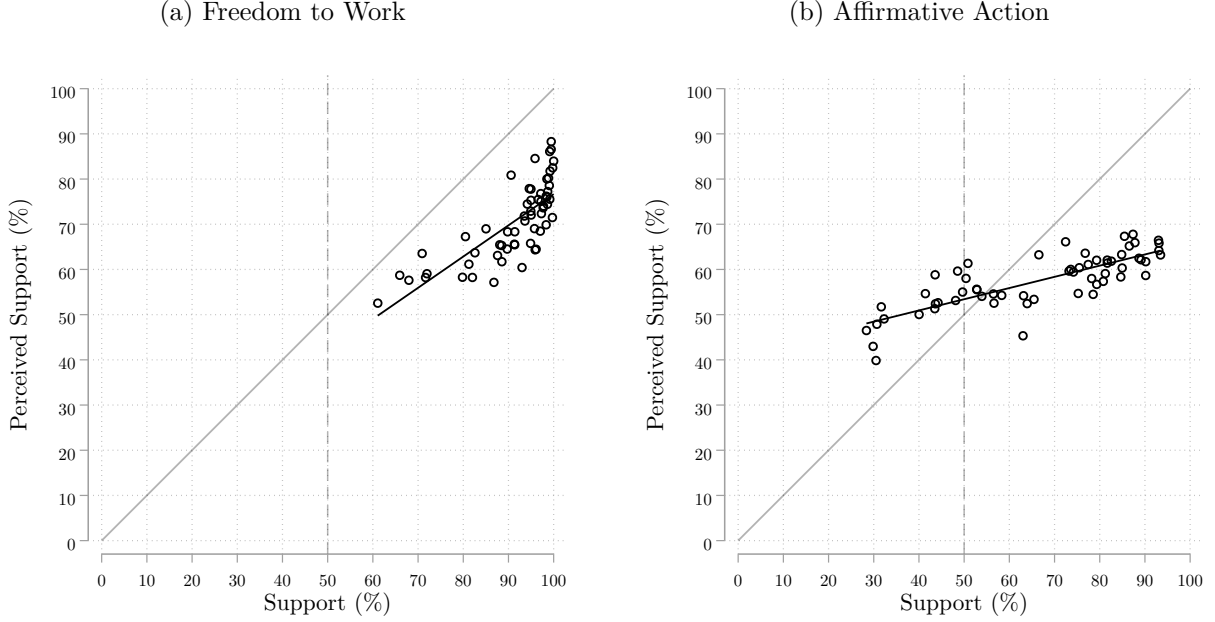
This framework provides two key predictions about the cross-country relationship between average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$, and actual support, $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$:

- $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$ is increasing in $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$.
- $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$ has a slope greater than one in $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$ if false consensus dominates ($2\gamma > \lambda$), and a slope less than one if minority overweighting dominates.

Figure 10 shows the cross-country relationship between average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$, and actual support, $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$. For both policies, and consistent with the first prediction, we observe a robust positive association, suggesting that respondents are, to some extent, aware of the gender norm in their society. We further observe that the estimated slope of the relationship is significantly lower than one for both policies, consistent with minority overweighting, rather than false consensus, prevailing as the main driver of the variation in aggregate misperception of gender norms across countries.²³

²³We show in the Appendix that the results are robust to excluding focal responses (Figure A.16), conditioning on different subsamples (Figure A.17), and applying several alternative specifications (Figure A.18, Figure A.19). Error

Figure 10: Cross-Country Relationship between Average Perceived Support ($\mathbb{E}[SOB]$) and Actual Support ($\mathbb{E}[FOB]$)



Notes: This figure plots, for each policy, actual support, $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$, against average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$, across countries. Each marker represents a country. The solid line shows the fitted regression of $\mathbb{E}[SOB]$ on $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$, and the 45-degree line is shown for reference. In Panel (a), the slope is 0.69 (SE = 0.065), the constant is 7.57, and $p < 0.001$ for the test H_0 : slope = 1. In Panel (b), the slope is 0.25 (SE = 0.024), the constant is 41.02, and $p < 0.001$ for the test H_0 : slope = 1. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

We now extend the framework to incorporate gender stereotyping, which may take two different forms. Following the model in [Bordalo et al. \(2016\)](#), second-order beliefs about the gender norm in a given group $g \in \{m, w\}$ may depend on how this gender norm compares to the gender norm of the other group $-g$, that is, on the difference ($\mathbb{E}[FOB_g] - \mathbb{E}[FOB_{-g}]$). In this case, people tend to exaggerate the actual difference in gender norms in society. However, gender stereotyping may also be partly independent of the actual gender difference and instead reflect general perceptions of how men and women think about different policies, which we capture with the parameter α^g .

The second-order beliefs of respondent i in country c about gender g can now be written as:

$$SOB_{ic}^g = \mathbb{E}[FOB_g] + \gamma \cdot FOB_i + \lambda \cdot (50\% - \mathbb{E}[FOB_g]) + \theta \cdot (\mathbb{E}[FOB_g] - \mathbb{E}[FOB_{-g}]) + \alpha^g + u_{ic}^g, \quad (3)$$

in the measurement of aggregate beliefs could mechanically attenuate the estimated slope toward zero, which limits the extent to which the magnitude of the slope can be interpreted structurally. We therefore view the evidence as suggestive and interpret the estimated relationship as being more consistent with minority overweighting than with false consensus, rather than as a definitive test between the two mechanisms.

where $\theta \geq 0$ is the weight on the actual difference in the gender norm.

It follows that, at the country level, the difference in second-order beliefs about men and women is given by:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}[SOB^w] - \mathbb{E}[SOB^m] &= (1 - \lambda + 2 \cdot \theta) \cdot (\mathbb{E}[FOB_w] - \mathbb{E}[FOB_m]) \\ &\quad + (\alpha^w - \alpha^m) + (\mathbb{E}[u^w] - \mathbb{E}[u^m]).\end{aligned}\tag{4}$$

Equation 4 shows that minority overweighting and gender stereotyping have opposite effects on the second-order beliefs about the gender difference in norms. In the context of our study, where $\mathbb{E}[FOB_w] > \mathbb{E}[FOB_m]$ in almost all countries, minority overweighting becomes a counteracting force to gender stereotyping and pulls towards underestimating the gender difference, while gender stereotyping based on actual gender differences pulls towards overestimating it. Gender stereotyping based on a general perception of women being more supportive of the policy than men ($\alpha^w > \alpha^m$) pulls towards an overestimation of the gender difference even in countries where there is no actual gender difference in first-order beliefs. Finally, false consensus has no effect on the perceived gender difference, because it is assumed to operate symmetrically for men and women.²⁴ Aggregate second-order beliefs about gender differences are equal to aggregate first-order gender differences in beliefs if $\lambda = \theta = 0$, $\alpha^w = \alpha^m$, and $\mathbb{E}[u^w] = \mathbb{E}[u^m]$.

We can now state three key predictions about the cross-country relationship between second-order beliefs and first-order beliefs about the gender difference in norms:

- Country-level second-order beliefs about the gender difference increase with the gender difference in country-level first-order beliefs.
- Country-level second-order beliefs about the gender difference have a slope greater than one in first-order beliefs if gender stereotyping based on actual gender differences dominates ($2\theta > \lambda$), and a slope less than one if minority overweighting dominates.
- Country-level second-order beliefs about the gender difference are positive even in countries where there is no actual gender difference if $\alpha^w > \alpha^m$ and $\mathbb{E}[u^w] \geq \mathbb{E}[u^m]$.

Figure 11 shows the cross-country relationship between aggregate second-order and aggregate first-order beliefs. Strikingly, we observe that for both policies and almost all countries, actual gender differences are exaggerated at the country-level.²⁵ Consistent with the first prediction, we

²⁴In Appendix B.5, we show that the findings are robust to relaxing this assumption by allowing false consensus to vary with the target gender and by interacting it with respondent gender.

²⁵In Appendix Figure A.20, we show the cross-country relationship between perceived support and actual support by target gender. We observe that, for all levels of actual support, the estimated relationship predicts that the average perceived support among women is higher than among men, consistent with gender stereotyping based on a general tendency to view women as more in favor of these policies than men. Further, we note that the estimated slopes are less than one and similar across target genders, consistent with the relative importance of minority overweighting and false consensus being the same for men and women, with minority overweighting being the dominant force.

estimate a robust positive association between the perceived gender difference and the actual gender difference in norms for both policies, suggesting that respondents are, to some extent, aware of the gender differences in their society. We further observe that the estimated slope of the relationship is significantly below one for both policies, consistent with minority overweighting—rather than gender stereotyping based on actual gender differences—being the main driver of cross-country variation in the aggregate misperception of gender norms. Finally, we find that gender differences in norms are exaggerated even in countries where there is no actual difference between men and women, consistent with the dominant form of gender stereotyping being a general tendency to perceive women as more supportive of these policies than men.

The interaction between minority overweighting and gender stereotyping based on general perceptions aligns with [Bordalo et al. \(2023\)](#), who argue that stereotyping and minority overweighting can emerge from the same deeper forces related to memory and cues from personal experiences (which may include society-level factors such as mass media, vocal minorities, or politics), and therefore need not be independent phenomena. Their framework predicts that misperceptions about group differences can arise even when no actual group differences exist, which is consistent with our findings and provides a micro-foundation for the reduced-form results.²⁶

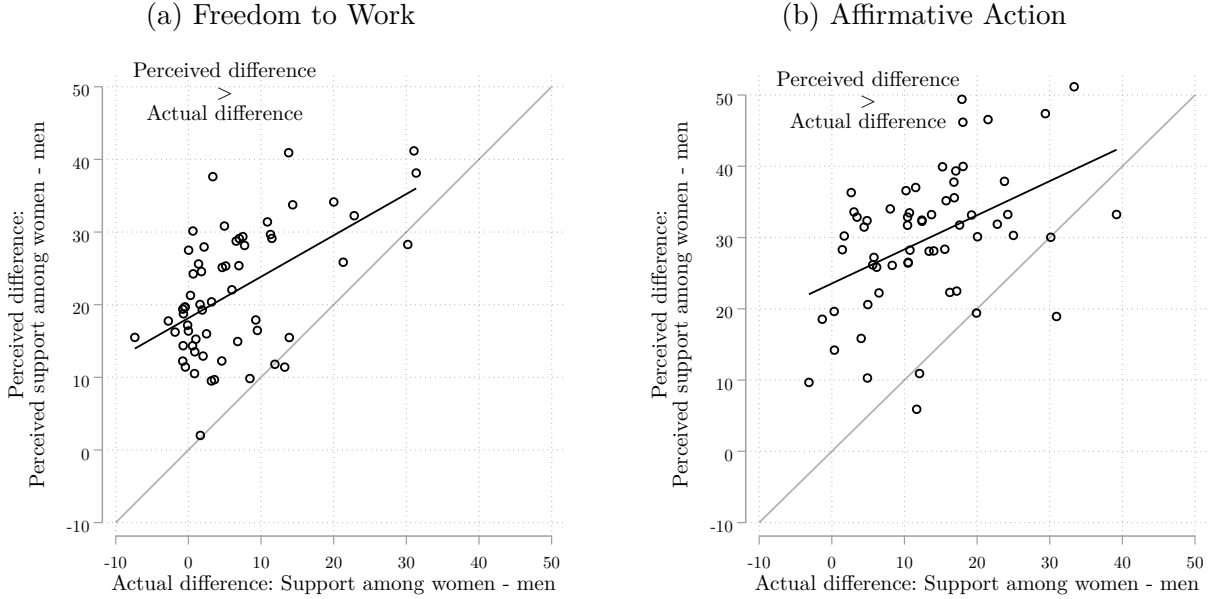
6.2 Out-of-Sample Validation and Quantifying Mechanisms

We provide a simple out-of-sample validation by estimating an augmented version of equation 3 on a randomly drawn subset of 30 countries, 10 from each GEI tercile. We then show that the estimated model can predict the global patterns of misperceptions in the remainder of the sample (see Appendix [Figure A.21](#) and [Figure A.22](#)).

To quantify the contribution of each of the three main channels within the context of our simple framework, we suppress each mechanism separately and in pairwise combinations and compute the implied average misperceptions by GEI terciles. In line with our discussion in Section 6.1, we find that minority overweighting and gender stereotyping quantitatively drive misperceptions of gender norms across the world for both policy domains: suppressing both minority overweighting and gender stereotyping almost eliminates the estimated misperceptions. In contrast, false consensus—while present—has only a limited impact on the nature of aggregate misperceptions. A more detailed description of this approach and the results is provided in Appendix B.5.

²⁶See also [Exley et al. \(2025\)](#), who find that people believe women to be more generous and equality-oriented than men even when such perceived differences are largely inaccurate. [Bandiera et al. \(2022\)](#) show that experts can exhibit similar biases in their beliefs about gender and overconfidence.

Figure 11: Cross-Country Evidence: Relationship between Perceived Gender Differences and Actual Gender Difference



Notes: This figure plots, for each policy, actual gender differences in support, $\mathbb{E}[FOB_w] - \mathbb{E}[FOB_m]$, against perceived gender differences in support, $\mathbb{E}[SOB^w] - \mathbb{E}[SOB^m]$, across countries. Each marker represents a country. The solid line shows the fitted regression of perceived support differences on actual support differences, and the 45-degree line is shown for reference. In Panel (a) the slope is 0.57 (SE = 0.091), the constant is 18.15, and $p < 0.001$ for the test $H_0: \text{slope} = 1$. In Panel (b) the slope is 0.48 (SE = 0.141), the constant is 23.55, and $p < 0.001$ for the test $H_0: \text{slope} = 1$. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

7 Relating Misperceptions to Behaviors and Laws

Our results indicate that misperceptions of gender norms are widespread around the world, with potentially important implications for economic behavior. In this section, we show that first-order and second-order beliefs in the two policy domains are strongly associated with relevant behaviors. We also examine how these beliefs relate to cross-country variation in laws promoting equal opportunities and quotas for women in the labor market.

7.1 Individual Behavior

Freedom to Work. We first examine how first-order and second-order beliefs about women's freedom to work relate to employment. In Table 1, we report regressions where the dependent variable is an indicator for whether the respondent works for an employer (as measured in the Gallup World Poll 2020). In column (1), we observe that first-order beliefs are highly predictive of female employment, with females who support women's freedom to work outside the home being

9.5 pp more likely to work for an employer than females who oppose the policy. In contrast, we find no association between first-order beliefs and male employment. In column (2), we show that the associations for second-order beliefs follow a similar pattern, and in column (3) that both first-order beliefs and second-order beliefs remain statistically significant with similar magnitudes when jointly included. Column (4) shows that these associations are robust to controlling for age, marital status, and education.

Together, these results provide evidence that both first-order and second-order beliefs about women’s freedom to work are strongly related to women’s labor-market participation. This complements a growing body of experimental evidence demonstrating that perceptions of gender norms can causally influence real decisions. In Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Colombia, for example, providing accurate information about others’ support for women’s work has been shown to affect labor-related choices ([Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020](#); [Cameron, Contreras Suárez and Setyonaluri, 2026](#); [Boltz et al., 2025](#)).²⁷ Across these contexts—consistent with our descriptive global evidence—people underestimate actual support for women’s work, and updating these beliefs influences behavior in ways aligned with social image concerns ([Benabou and Tirole, 2026](#)). The results in [Table 1](#) are also consistent with the opposite direction of causality: people who work, and especially women, may perceive higher support for freedom to work outside the home as a result of their workplace interactions. In addition, the results could arise from omitted variable bias, and be driven by factors that independently influence employment and second order beliefs.

²⁷To the best of our knowledge, no comparable field-experimental data exist for a country in the top tercile of the gender-equality (GEI) distribution; the closest evidence comes from [Cortés et al. \(2024\)](#), who use hypothetical vignettes in the U.S.

Table 1: Predicting Individual-level Employment Within Countries

	Employment			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Main Estimates:</i>				
Support (FOB)	0.015 (0.016)		0.011 (0.017)	-0.005 (0.017)
Support (FOB) $\times$ Female	0.080*** (0.024)		0.056** (0.025)	0.058** (0.027)
Perceived Support (SOB)		0.037 (0.025)	0.031 (0.025)	-0.005 (0.024)
Perceived Support (SOB) $\times$ Female		0.095** (0.037)	0.086** (0.036)	0.066* (0.036)
Female	-0.202*** (0.024)	-0.188*** (0.031)	-0.235*** (0.034)	-0.215*** (0.037)
<i>Linear Combinations (p-values):</i>				
FOB + FOB $\times$ Female	<0.001		0.001	0.011
SOB + SOB $\times$ Female		<0.001	<0.001	0.045
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	0.455	0.460	0.460	0.460
Observations	29,526	27,790	27,651	27,496
Adj. R ²	0.101	0.099	0.099	0.142

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is a dummy indicating employment (excluding self-employment). The independent variable “Female” refers to the gender of the respondent. The sample is restricted to respondents of working age (≤ 65). Perceived Support (SOB) is the respondent-level pooled measure SOB_i defined in Section 2. Column 4 includes age group, marital status, secondary and college education as controls. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Affirmative Action. The Gallup World Poll 2020 does not include behavioral measures suitable for studying the relationship between first-order and second-order beliefs about affirmative action and behavior. To address this gap, we implemented a large-scale survey experiment involving 1,995 participants in the U.S. recruited through Prolific. Participants were first asked whether they supported the statement that governments and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions (FOB), and then to predict the share of men and women in the U.S. who supported the statement (SOB).²⁸ We measured engagement across four affirmative action behaviors: two real behaviors—signing either a petition supporting policies that give priority to women in leadership hiring or a petition opposing such policies, and donating part of a potential bonus to either an organization advocating for or an organization advocating against such policies—and two hypothetical behaviors—giving priority to hiring a woman when candidates were equally qualified for a leadership position, and sharing social media posts either supporting or opposing giving priority to women in leadership hiring. For further details about the experiment, see [Appendix C](#).

The large majority of respondents who support giving priority to women in leadership hiring are also willing to engage in pro-female leadership behaviors, as shown in [Appendix Figure A.23](#). More than 70% sign a pro-female leadership petition, and more than 60% donate to a pro-female leadership organization. The corresponding shares are also high for the hypothetical behaviors: nearly 90% would give priority to hiring a woman if the candidates were equally qualified, and around 70% would share supportive content on social media. Overall, more than 90% of respondents who support giving priority to women in leadership hiring are willing to engage in at least one of these pro-female leadership behaviors.

In [Table 2](#), we show that both first-order beliefs and second-order beliefs are strongly associated with affirmative action behaviors for both males and females. Respondents who support giving priority to women in leadership hiring are substantially more likely to sign a pro-female leadership petition, donate money to a pro-female leadership organization, hire a woman when candidates are equally qualified, and share pro-female leadership content on social media. Second-order beliefs also matter: higher perceived support for women among both men and women predicts a greater willingness to engage in pro-female leadership behaviors, and in most cases these associations remain robust even when controlling for individuals’ own first-order beliefs. Finally, we show that the estimated associations are robust to controlling for a broad set of background variables. Taken together, these findings show that first-order and second-order beliefs about affirmative action are strongly associated with a broad range of behaviors related to women’s representation in leadership.²⁹

²⁸For this experiment, pooled perceived support is defined as the simple average of respondents’ perceptions about men and women, $SOB_i = (SOB_i^m + SOB_i^w)/2$.

²⁹[Appendix Table A.5](#) additionally reports how disagreement with the affirmative action statements correlates with real and stated behaviors *against* affirmative action. Taken together, [Table 2](#) and [Appendix Table A.5](#) show stronger pro-affirmative action behavior among supporters of affirmative action than anti-affirmative action behavior among its opponents.

7.2 Laws

In this subsection, we examine how first-order beliefs, second-order beliefs, and misperceptions relate to the presence of laws ensuring equal labor market opportunities for women and men. Two broad perspectives suggest that such a relationship should exist. The *expressive view* emphasizes that laws shape beliefs by signaling social values and norms (Sunstein, 1996; McAdams, 2015). In contrast, a *political-economy view* holds that laws primarily reflect citizens’ underlying first-order beliefs and political preferences (Downs, 1957; Benabou and Tirole, 2026). While these perspectives differ in the direction of causality, both generally imply a systematic association between societal beliefs and the legal framework.

To study this relationship for beliefs about women’s freedom to work outside the home, we use data from World Bank (2022) to construct a simple index of legal gender equality in the labor market. We focus on five legal provisions that most directly speak to women’s ability to work on equal terms with men: whether a woman can (i) get a job, (ii) work at night, (iii) work in jobs deemed dangerous, and (iv) work in industrial jobs in the same way as a man, as well as (v) whether the law prohibits discrimination in employment based on gender. Each provision is coded as a binary indicator, and we sum these to obtain an index ranging from 0 to 5, interpretable as the number of gender-equal labor market protections in place. Appendix Figure A.24 shows the distribution of this index across countries. While 53% of countries in our sample have all five protections in place, there is substantial variation, with some countries having only one or two of these legal provisions.

To study the relationship between affirmative-action policies and beliefs about giving priority to women in leadership positions, we use data from Corporate Women Directors International (2021) on national legal gender quotas for corporate boards. We construct an indicator for whether a country has a legally mandated quota for women’s representation on the boards of either state-owned enterprises or publicly listed firms. In our 60-country sample, 22 countries have a legal board quota in at least one of these two sectors. Our measure thus captures the presence of a legal affirmative-action policy aimed at increasing women’s representation in corporate leadership, closely corresponding to our survey question about giving priority to women in leadership hiring.

In Table 3, we study how these laws relate to first-order and second-order beliefs at the country level, keeping in mind that the two are strongly correlated (Freedom to Work: 0.766; Affirmative Action: 0.799, in line with Figure 10). In columns (1) and (2), we observe that both first-order and second-order beliefs are strongly positively associated with the number of freedom-to-work protections in a country, while column (3) shows that only first-order beliefs are significant when both are included jointly. In column (4), we observe that actual support for affirmative action is negatively associated with the presence of a board quota, while we find no significant association with second-order beliefs in column (5). In the joint specification in column (6), actual support is negatively associated with the presence of a board quota, while perceived support is positively

associated.³⁰

Taken together, these patterns provide suggestive evidence on the two perspectives on the relationship between laws and beliefs. The positive association between freedom-to-work protections and first-order beliefs is consistent with a political-economy view in which greater public support for women’s freedom to work outside the home is associated with stronger legal protections. For board quotas, we find the opposite relationship for first-order beliefs: quotas are more likely to be present in countries with lower actual support for affirmative action. This pattern is consistent with an expressive view in which laws are used to signal social values and shape people’s attitudes toward affirmative action. The positive association between the presence of a board quota and perceived support, conditional on actual support, is also consistent with laws signaling social values. We interpret this latter pattern with particular caution, however, given the strong correlation between first-order and second-order beliefs and the substantial changes in the estimated coefficients when both are included jointly. More generally, these patterns are purely descriptive and cannot establish the direction of causality or distinguish between the political-economy and expressive channels, which may operate simultaneously.

³⁰The estimated relationships are robust to excluding individual countries one at a time (Appendix [Table A.6](#)).

Table 3: Policy Measures and Country-Level Beliefs

	Number of Freedom-to-Work Protections			Any Board Quota		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Actual Support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$	0.063*** (0.018)		0.069** (0.027)	-0.914*** (0.296)		-1.609*** (0.484)
Average Perceived Support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}]$		0.050*** (0.016)	-0.009 (0.022)		-1.344 (1.023)	2.806* (1.503)
Mean of Dependent Variable	4.017	4.017	4.017	36.667	36.667	36.667
Observations	60	60	60	60	60	60
Adj. R^2	0.242	0.115	0.230	0.125	0.012	0.157

Notes: This table reports cross-country OLS regressions. In columns (1)–(3), the dependent variable is the Number of Freedom-to-Work Protections, ranging from zero to five. The five binary components indicate whether: (i) women can work at night in the same way as men; (ii) women can work in jobs deemed dangerous in the same way as men; (iii) women can work in industrial jobs in the same way as men; (iv) the law prohibits gender discrimination in employment; and (v) women can obtain a job in the same way as men. In columns (4)–(6), the dependent variable is an indicator equal to 100 when any corporate-board gender quota is present and zero otherwise. Within each three-column block, the first column includes actual support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$; the second includes average perceived support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}]$; and the third includes both measures jointly. The belief measures in columns (1)–(3) refer to Freedom to Work, while those in columns (4)–(6) refer to Affirmative Action. Country-level actual and perceived support are sampling-weighted pooled averages. All belief measures are expressed in percentage points, and all specifications omit the GEI. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020; Women, Business and the Law ([World Bank, 2022](#)); and Corporate Women Directors International ([Corporate Women Directors International, 2021](#)).

8 Concluding Remarks

Culture and social norms play a central role in shaping women’s economic opportunities around the world ([Fernández, 2007](#); [Alesina, Giuliano and Nunn, 2013](#)). A large body of evidence shows that both one’s own beliefs and the perceived beliefs of others influence economic and social behavior ([Fernández and Fogli, 2009](#); [Field et al., 2021](#); [Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020](#)). Yet, despite the importance of these perceptions, systematic evidence on how gender norms are perceived across countries has been lacking. This study fills that gap by providing the first globally comparable measurement of both first-order and second-order beliefs about gender-related policies, based on newly collected, nationally representative data from 60 countries. The richness and global coverage of these data allow us to offer a unified perspective on how gender norms are viewed—and misperceived—around the world.

Our global survey studies gender norms at the national level. However, the extensive literature on social influence, and in particular social image concerns, has established that perceptions about

local peers also influence a wide range of behaviors (Bursztyn and Jensen, 2017). To assess whether national-level perceptions matter for understanding local perceptions, we implemented an incentivized online experiment that measured beliefs about affirmative action norms at both the national and the state level in the U.S., see Appendix B.6. The experiment reveals a strong positive correlation between perceptions of gender norms at the national level and perceptions at the local level. Correcting misperceptions at the national level causes significant changes in perceived support at the state level and even among co-workers. These findings show that national-level misperceptions are not merely aggregate regularities but meaningfully shape how individuals perceive the views of their closer social environment.

Our data are consistent with misperceptions about gender norms stemming from overweighting of the minority view and from gender stereotyping, but the deeper origins of these mechanisms remain an important topic for future research. Beliefs about others’ views likely reflect underlying psychological processes, individual experiences, and social contexts, and may be shaped by structural features such as media environments, political narratives, and the visibility of minority groups. Understanding how these forces interact—and how they differ across societies—is essential for explaining why some misperceptions persist while others diminish. Our global evidence highlights the prevalence and correlates of distorted social beliefs, but also underscores how much remains to be learned about their origins, their evolution, and their role in shaping behavior and policy. Advancing this research agenda will be crucial for designing interventions that align with actual norms and for fostering policy debates that more accurately reflect the underlying preferences of society.

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Table 2: Affirmative Action Beliefs and Willingness to Engage in Pro-Female Leadership Behaviors

Panel A: Real Pro-AA Choices								
	Supporting petition				Donation to supporting organization			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Main Estimates:</i>								
Support (FOB)	0.590*** (0.027)		0.562*** (0.028)	0.544*** (0.029)	0.517*** (0.028)		0.495*** (0.029)	0.474*** (0.030)
Support (FOB) × Female	-0.004 (0.036)		-0.019 (0.040)	-0.022 (0.040)	-0.027 (0.038)		-0.036 (0.041)	-0.037 (0.040)
Perceived Support (SOB)		0.914*** (0.086)	0.302*** (0.074)	0.286*** (0.074)		0.771*** (0.092)	0.232*** (0.084)	0.210** (0.083)
Perceived Support (SOB) × Female		0.130 (0.122)	0.075 (0.113)	0.067 (0.112)		0.057 (0.129)	0.032 (0.123)	0.031 (0.122)
Female	0.034* (0.020)	0.083 (0.059)	0.021 (0.050)	0.032 (0.051)	0.016 (0.021)	0.072 (0.062)	0.016 (0.056)	0.024 (0.056)
<i>Linear Combinations (p-values):</i>								
FOB + FOB × Female	<0.001		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001		<0.001	<0.001
SOB + SOB × Female		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001		<0.001	0.003	0.007
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	0.396	0.396	0.396	0.396	0.363	0.363	0.363	0.363
Observations	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995
Adjusted R ²	0.366	0.102	0.375	0.385	0.272	0.066	0.276	0.294
Panel B: Hypothetical Pro-AA Choices								
	Supporting social media				Priority in hiring			
	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
<i>Main Estimates:</i>								
Support (FOB)	0.636*** (0.025)		0.596*** (0.027)	0.585*** (0.028)	0.610*** (0.025)		0.613*** (0.026)	0.592*** (0.027)
Support (FOB) × Female	-0.013 (0.034)		-0.042 (0.038)	-0.047 (0.038)	-0.085** (0.036)		-0.090** (0.038)	-0.086** (0.037)
Perceived Support (SOB)		1.076*** (0.083)	0.428*** (0.069)	0.378*** (0.069)		0.631*** (0.106)	-0.037 (0.091)	0.026 (0.089)
Perceived Support (SOB) × Female		0.211* (0.114)	0.181* (0.102)	0.169* (0.101)		0.024 (0.143)	0.049 (0.125)	0.046 (0.122)
Female	0.021 (0.016)	0.039 (0.054)	-0.029 (0.044)	-0.015 (0.044)	0.140*** (0.029)	0.188** (0.074)	0.117* (0.062)	0.120** (0.060)
<i>Linear Combinations (p-values):</i>								
FOB + FOB × Female	<0.001		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001		<0.001	<0.001
SOB + SOB × Female		<0.001	<0.001	<0.001		<0.001	0.881	0.388
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	0.370	0.370	0.370	0.370	0.598	0.598	0.598	0.598
Observations	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995
Adjusted R ²	0.426	0.145	0.448	0.465	0.360	0.070	0.359	0.378

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are dummies for signing a petition in support of affirmative action (1-4), donating to a pro-female leadership organization (5-8), sharing hypothetical posts in support of affirmative action on social media (9-12), and giving priority to women in a hypothetical hiring situation (13-16). The independent variable “Female” refers to the gender of the respondent. Where controls are indicated, they include income, age, secondary and tertiary education, left-wing political views, and private-sector employment. Perceived Support (SOB) is the simple average of perceived support among men and women. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. *Data:* Online survey fielded on Prolific, documented in [Appendix C](#).

“How Are Gender Norms Perceived?”

Appendix

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David Yanagizawa-Drott

Supplementary materials are structured as follows. [Appendix A](#) contains additional figures and tables. [Appendix B](#) contains additional analysis. [Appendix C](#) details the designs of all data collections and experiments.

Appendix A

A.1 Additional Figures

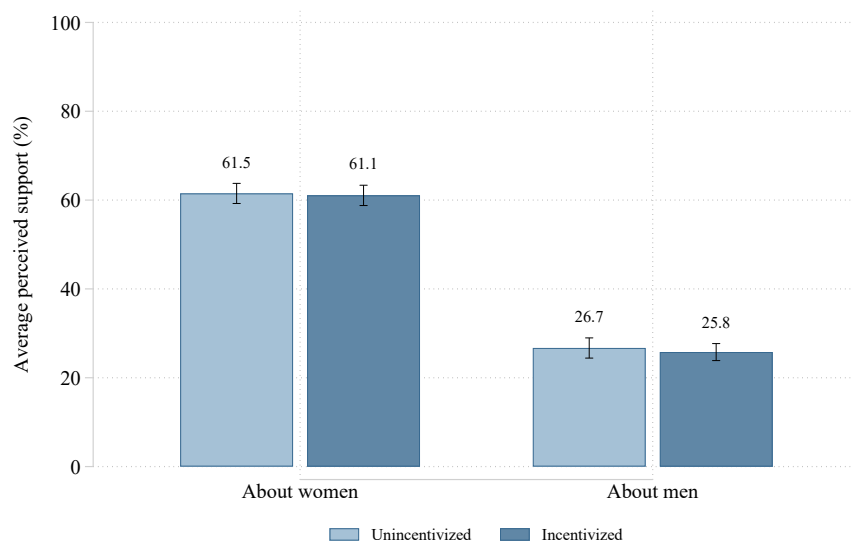
Figure A.1: Countries Included in the Study



ARG	Argentina	GHA	Ghana	NLD	Netherlands
AUS	Australia	GRC	Greece	NOR	Norway
BGD	Bangladesh	HRV	Croatia	PAK	Pakistan
BOL	Bolivia	HUN	Hungary	PER	Peru
BRA	Brazil	IDN	Indonesia	PHL	Philippines
CAN	Canada	IND	India	POL	Poland
CHE	Switzerland	IRN	Iran	PRT	Portugal
CHL	Chile	IRQ	Iraq	RUS	Russia
CHN	China	ISR	Israel	SEN	Senegal
CMR	Cameroon	ITA	Italy	THA	Thailand
COL	Colombia	JOR	Jordan	TUR	Turkey
CZE	Czech Republic	JPN	Japan	TZA	Tanzania
DEU	Germany	KAZ	Kazakhstan	UGA	Uganda
DZA	Algeria	KEN	Kenya	UKR	Ukraine
ECU	Ecuador	KHM	Cambodia	USA	United States
EGY	Egypt	KOR	South Korea	VEN	Venezuela
ESP	Spain	LKA	Sri Lanka	VNM	Vietnam
ETH	Ethiopia	MAR	Morocco	ZAF	South Africa
FRA	France	MEX	Mexico	ZMB	Zambia
GBR	United Kingdom	NGA	Nigeria	ZWE	Zimbabwe

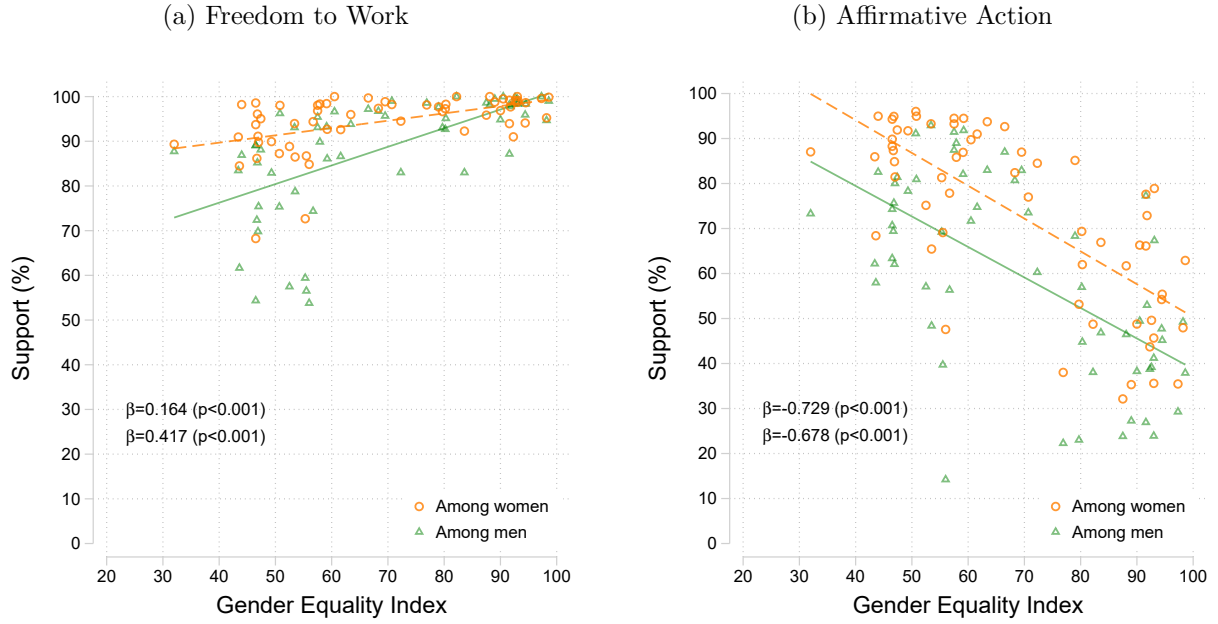
Notes: The map shows the countries included in the study. Covered countries are colored, those not covered remain blank. Covered countries are also listed in the table below. Geo data from [Belgiu \(2015\)](#).

Figure A.2: Incentivizing the Elicitations



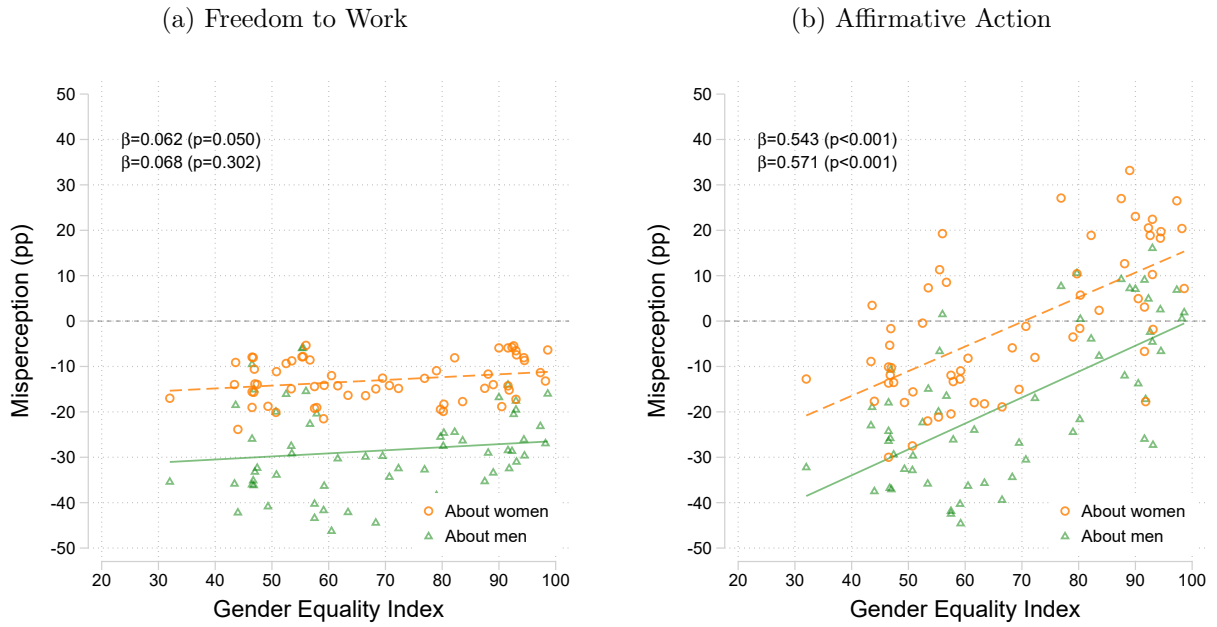
Notes: The figure reports mean perceived support for affirmative action among respondents randomly assigned to incentivized or unincentivized belief elicitation. Respondents estimated how many of 100 randomly selected women and men in the United States would support giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions. Respondents in the incentivized arm received a \$3 bonus if their estimate was within two percentage points of the truth. Bars denote arm means and vertical lines denote 95% confidence intervals. The sample comprises 375 respondents in the unincentivized arm and 376 in the incentivized arm. *Data:* Online survey fielded on Prolific, 2026.

Figure A.3: Correlation between Actual Support and the Gender Equality Index



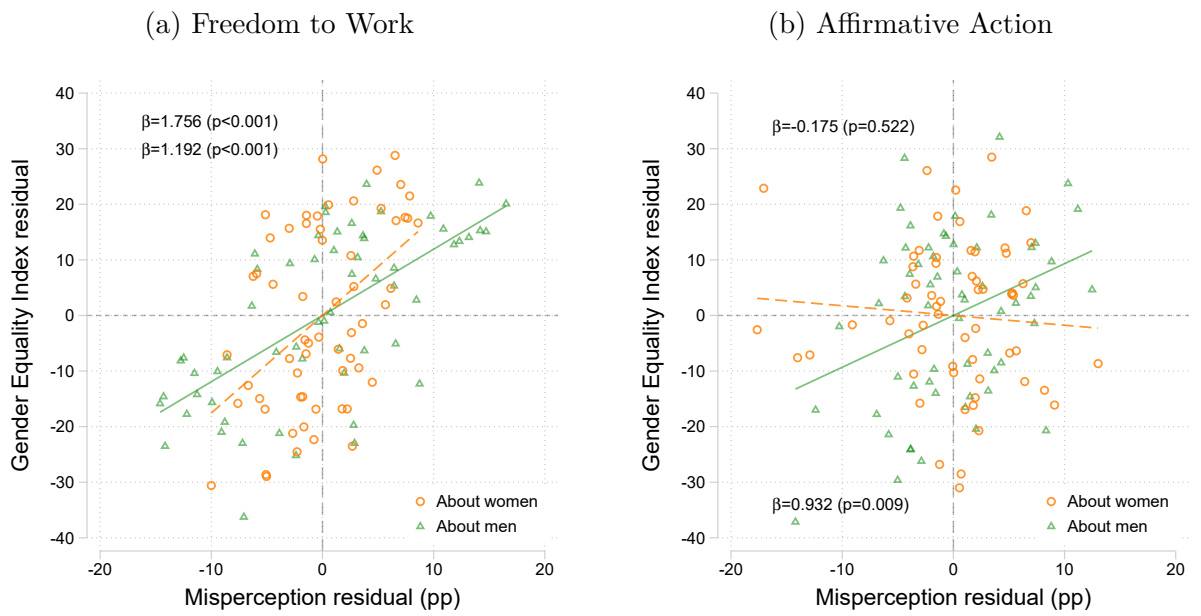
Notes: This figure plots, for each policy, actual support among women, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_w]$, and among men, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_m]$, against countries' Gender Equality Index (GEI). Each marker represents a country. The lines show fitted regressions of support on the GEI for each gender. Reported slope coefficients and p -values come from simple linear regressions using two-sided t -tests. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.4: Correlation between Average Misperceptions and the Gender Equality Index



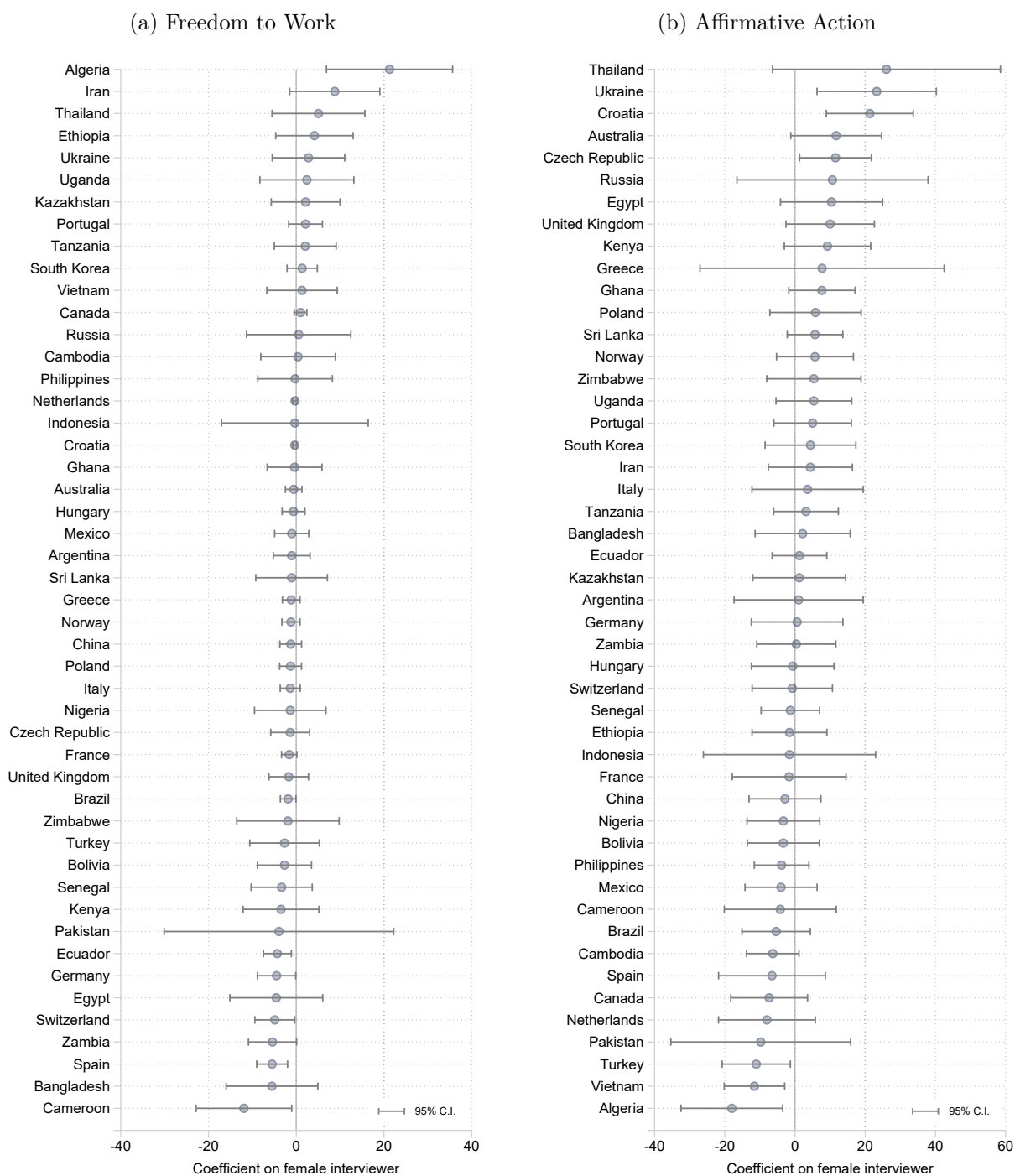
Notes: This figure plots, for each policy, average misperceptions about support among women, $\mathbb{E}[\text{Misp}^w]$, and among men, $\mathbb{E}[\text{Misp}^m]$, against countries' Gender Equality Index (GEI). Misperceptions are defined as average perceived support minus actual support for the corresponding gender. Each marker represents a country. The lines show fitted regressions separately for misperceptions about women and men. Reported slope coefficients and p -values come from simple linear regressions using two-sided t -tests. Data: Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.5: Partial Correlation between Misperceptions and the Gender Equality Index



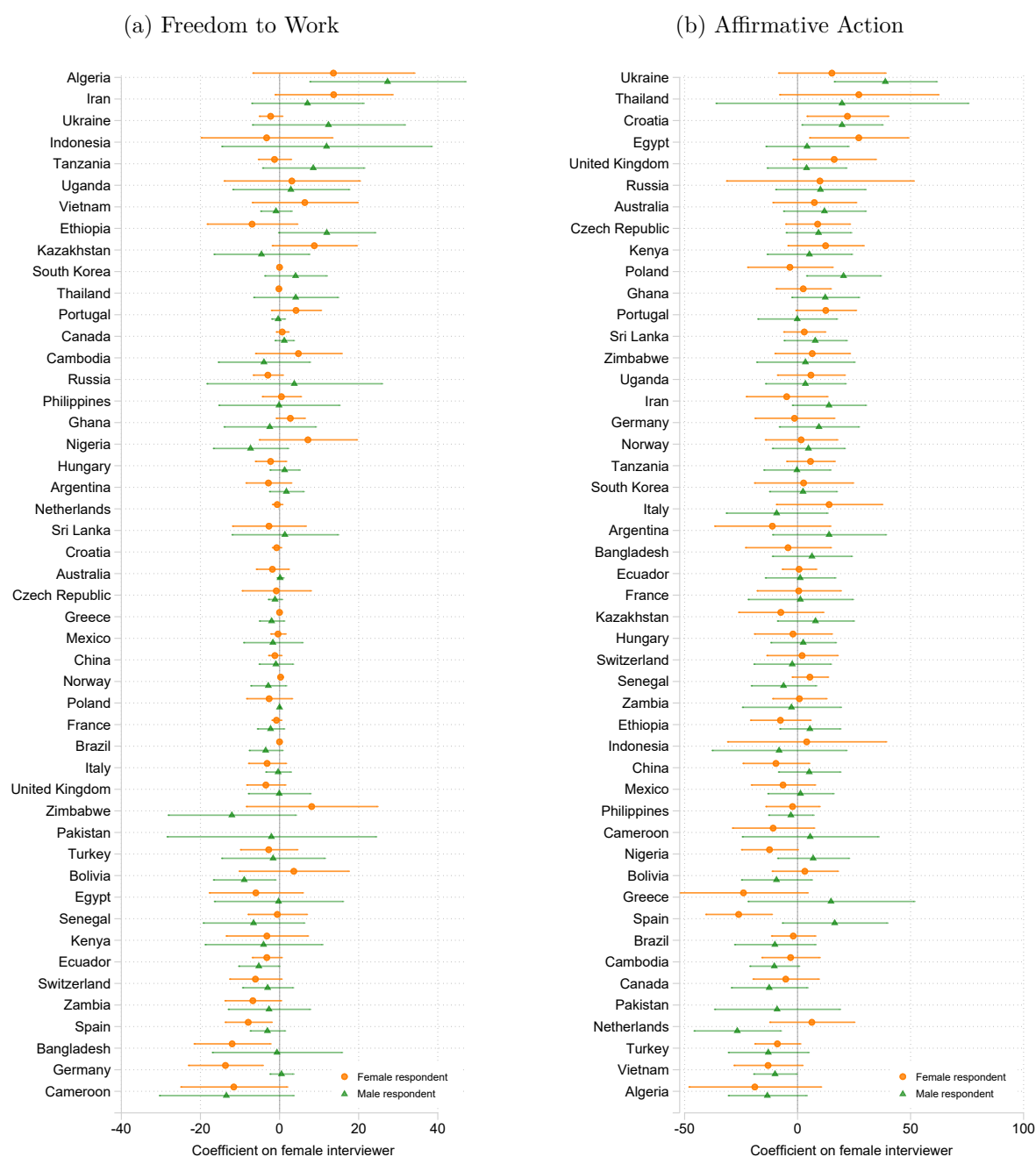
Notes: This figure presents country-level added-variable plots from OLS regressions of the Gender Equality Index on misperceptions and matching-gender actual support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}_g]$, separately for Freedom to Work (panel a) and Affirmative Action (panel b). Both axes residualize matching-gender actual support. Orange circles show misperceptions about women and green triangles show misperceptions about men. The displayed coefficients are partial slopes; p -values are based on robust standard errors. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020 and Gender Equality Index based on UNDP (2022).

Figure A.6: Interviewer Gender and Reported Support (FOB), by Policy and Country



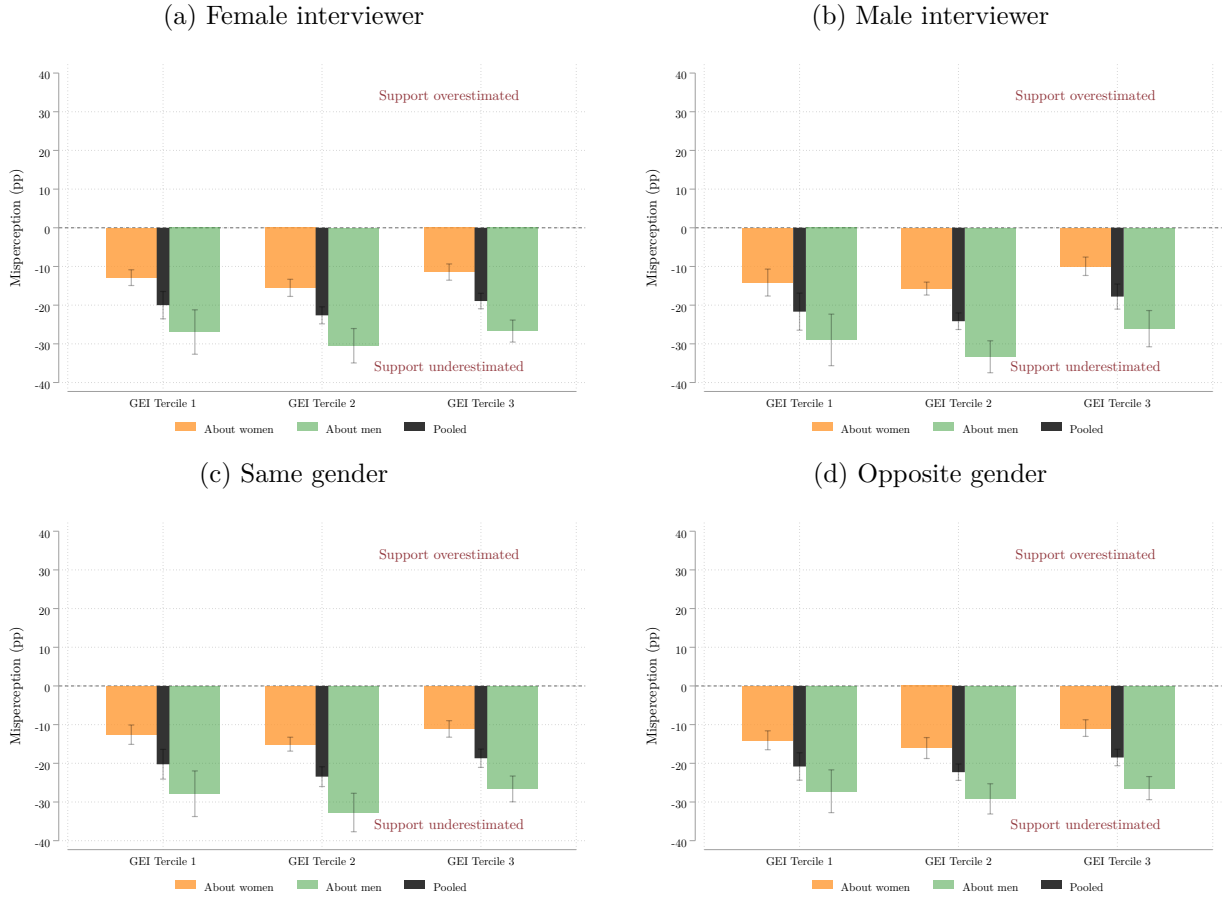
Notes: This figure reports coefficients from regressions of respondents' stated support for the policy indicated in the panel title on an indicator for being interviewed by a female surveyor, estimated separately by country. Each point represents the coefficient on the female-interviewer indicator. The regressions control for respondent gender, education, employment, income, age, urban residence, and internet access. Horizontal bars report heteroskedasticity-robust 95% confidence intervals. All regressions use Gallup sampling weights. Countries without sufficient within-country variation in surveyor gender are omitted; each panel reports estimates for 48 countries. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.7: Interviewer Gender and Reported Support (FOB), by Policy, Respondent Gender, and Country



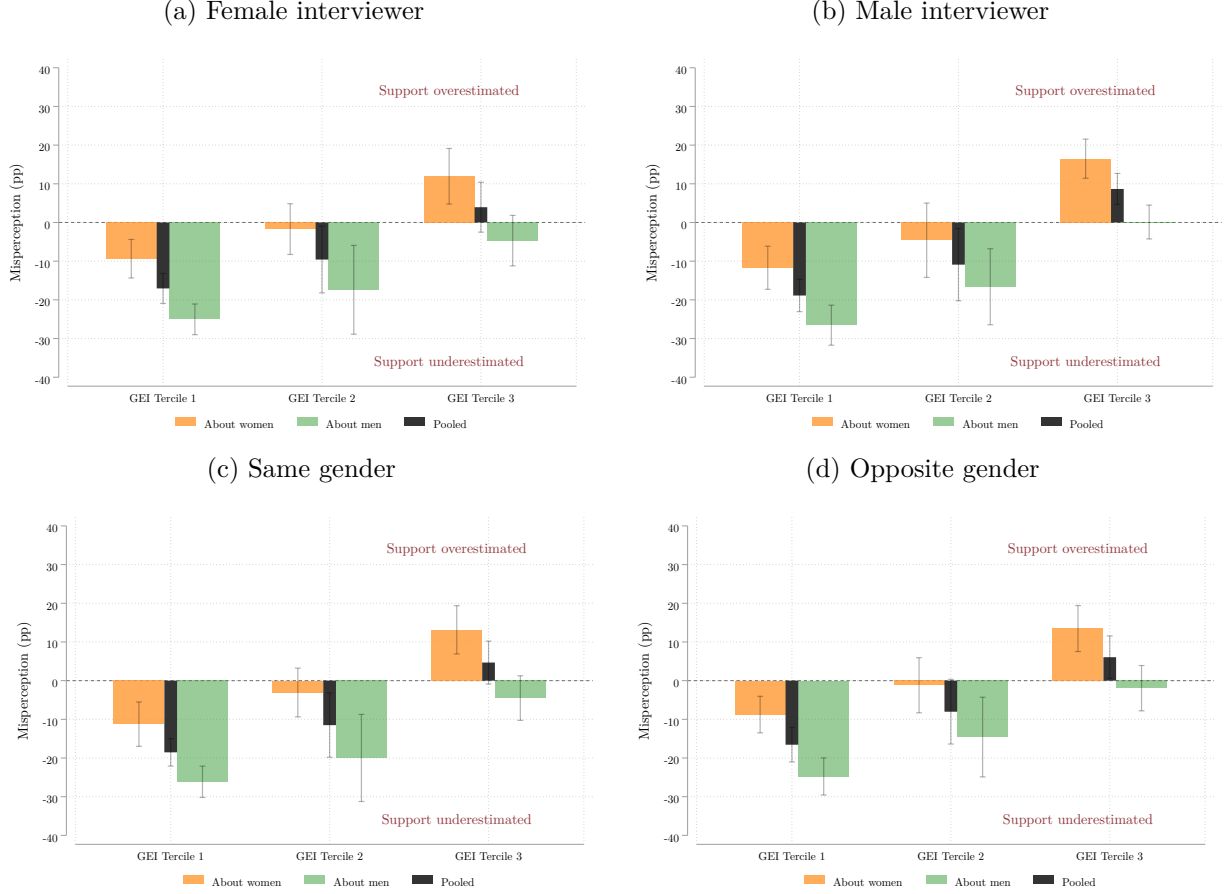
Notes: This figure shows coefficients from regressions of respondents' stated support for each policy on an indicator for being interviewed by a female surveyor, estimated separately by country and respondent gender. The dependent variable is support for the policy indicated in the panel title. Each point is the coefficient on the female-interviewer indicator, controlling for background characteristics (education, employment, income, age, urban residence, and internet access). Coefficients are reported separately for female respondents (orange) and male respondents (green). Robust 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. All regressions use sample weights. Country-by-respondent-gender cells without sufficient variation in surveyor gender to estimate the coefficient are omitted; each panel reports 95 coefficients. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.8: Robustness to Interviewer Gender - Freedom to Work



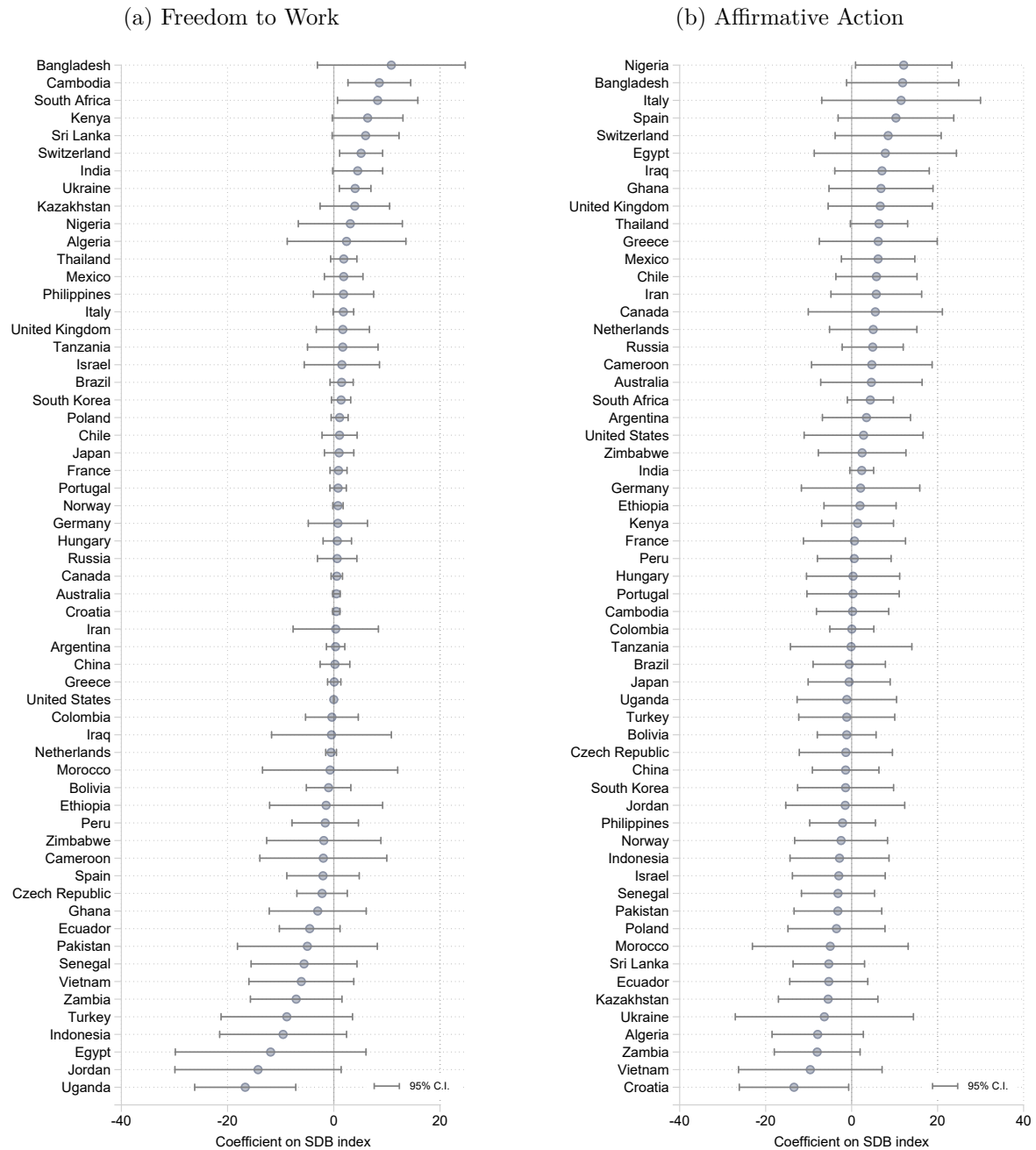
Notes: This figure shows average misperceptions about support for *Freedom to Work* across countries by level of gender equality and by the gender whose support is being estimated. Additionally, in each panel the sample is restricted to respondents interviewed by an interviewer of the indicated gender (female, male, same gender as the respondent, opposite gender). We separately report misperceptions about women's support (orange), about men's support (green), and about overall support (black). We use a gender equality index (GEI) which increases with the equality between women and men. Countries are divided into three groups corresponding to the first, second, and third terciles of the GEI, and we compute averages over respondents in each group. Misperceptions are defined as the difference between perceived support and the actual support in the respondent's country. Positive values indicate overestimation of support, while negative values indicate underestimation. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on UNDP (2022).

Figure A.9: Robustness to Interviewer Gender - Affirmative Action



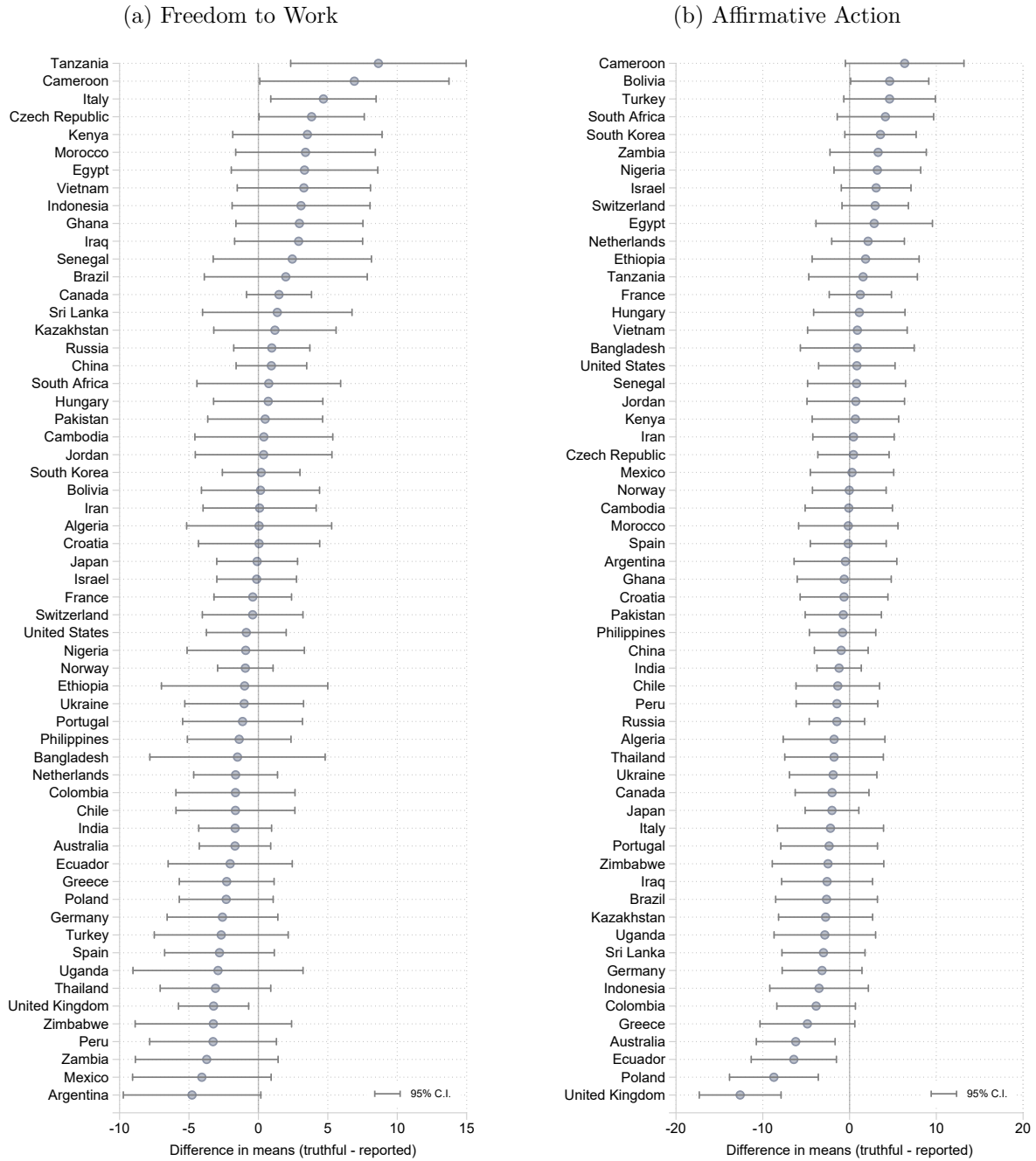
Notes: This figure shows average misperceptions about support for *Affirmative Action* across countries by level of gender equality and by the gender whose support is being estimated. Additionally, in each panel the sample is restricted to respondents interviewed by an interviewer of the indicated gender (female, male, same gender as the respondent, opposite gender). We separately report misperceptions about women's support (orange), about men's support (green), and about overall support (black). We use a gender equality index (GEI) which increases with the equality between women and men. Countries are divided into three groups corresponding to the first, second, and third terciles of the GEI, and we compute averages over respondents in each group. Misperceptions are defined as the difference between perceived support and the actual support in the respondent's country. Positive values indicate overestimation of support, while negative values indicate underestimation. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on UNDP (2022).

Figure A.10: Effect of Social Desirability Index on Stated First-Order Beliefs



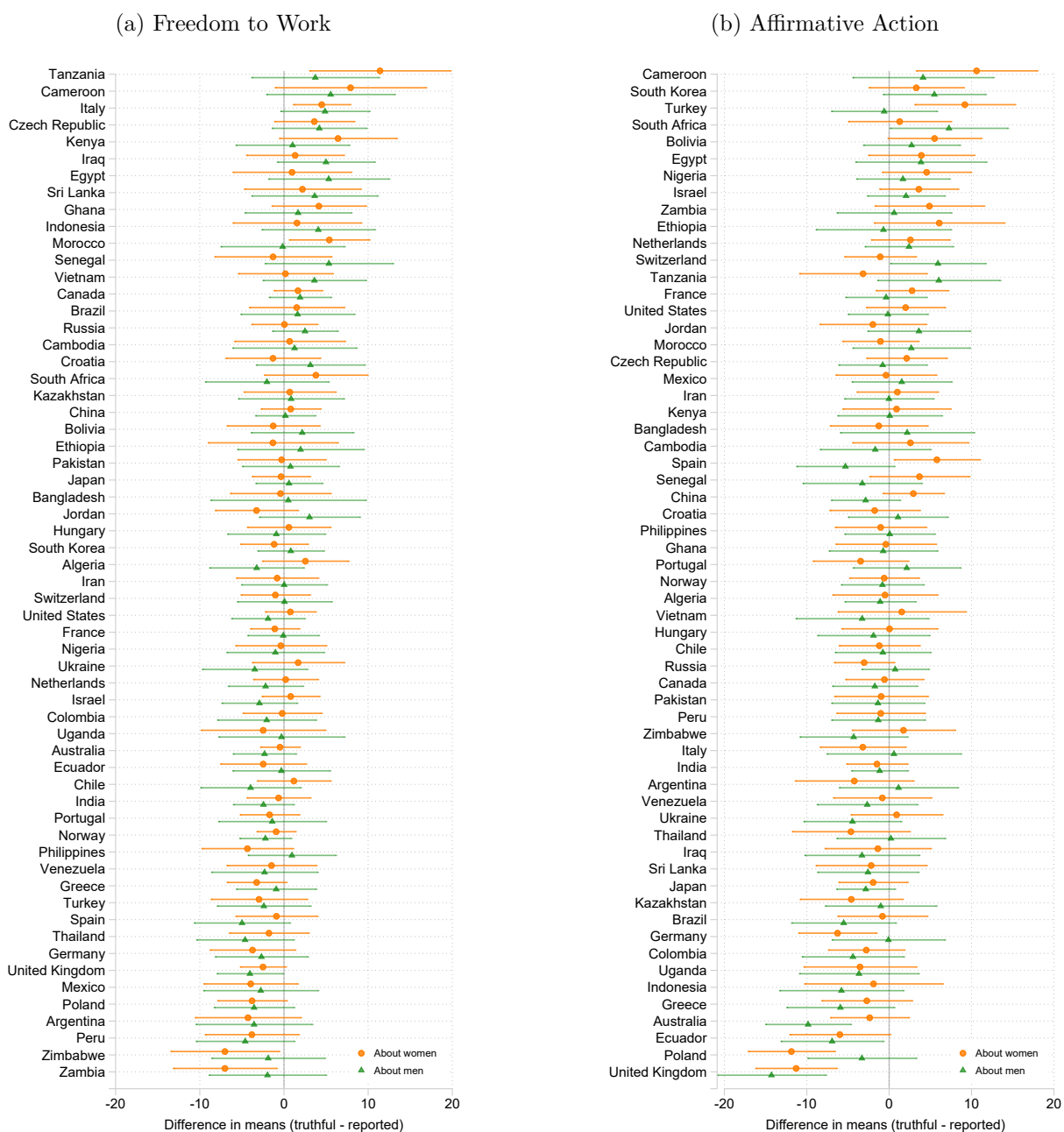
Notes: This figure shows coefficients from regressions of respondents' stated support for each policy on a binary measure of socially desirable behavior, estimated separately by country. The measure is equal to 1 if the respondent's combined score—defined as the sum of three dummy variables indicating whether the respondent donated money, volunteered time, and helped a stranger in the past month—is above the median within their country, and 0 otherwise. The dependent variable is support for the policy indicated in the panel title. Each point is the coefficient on the social desirability dummy, controlling for background characteristics (respondent gender, education, employment, income, age, urban residence, and internet access). Robust 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. All regressions use sample weights. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.11: Social Desirability Bias: Truthful versus Reported, by Question



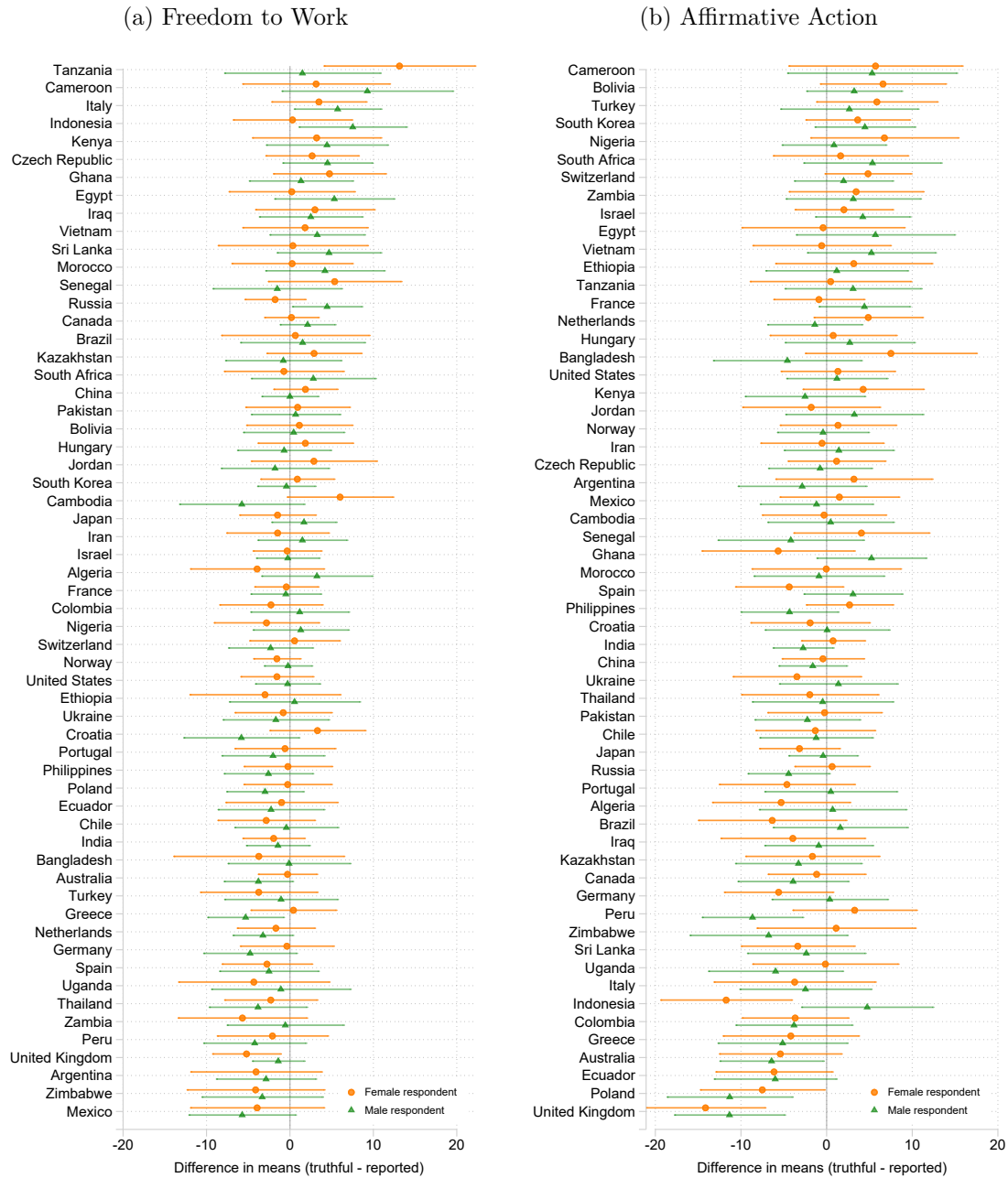
Notes: This figure shows the differences in mean answers across the “truthful” and “reported” variants of questions (see Section 4.4) regarding perceived support either for *Freedom to Work* or *Affirmative Action*. Each point is the coefficient on “truthful”, controlling for background characteristics (respondent gender, education, employment, income, age, urban residence, and internet access). Robust 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. All regressions use sample weights. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.12: Social Desirability Bias: Truthful versus Reported, by Question and Target Gender



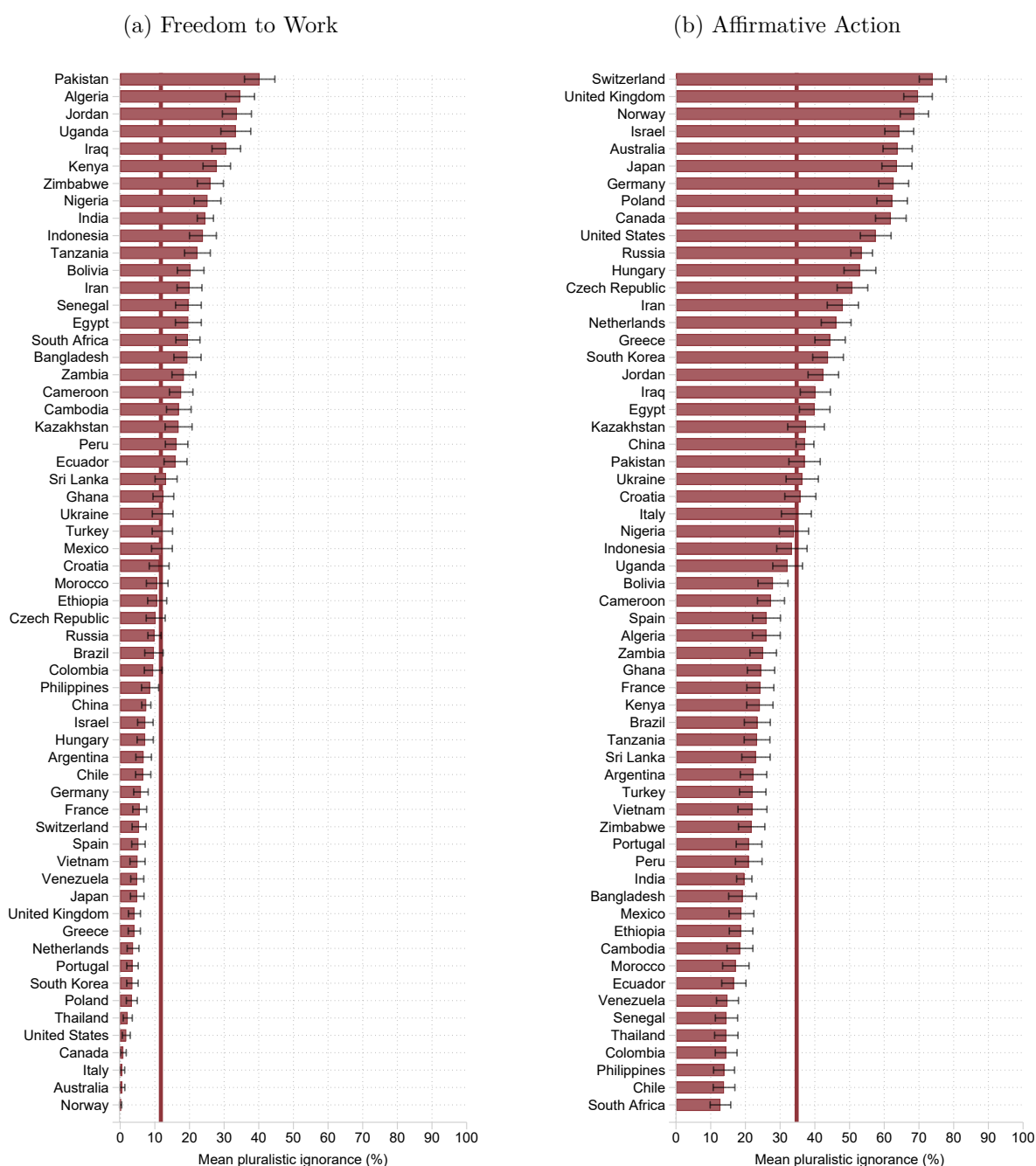
Notes: This figure shows the differences in mean answers across the “truthful” and “reported” variants of questions (see Section 4.4) regarding perceived support either for *Freedom to Work* or *Affirmative Action*, separately for questions asking about the support of males and females. Each point is the coefficient on “truthful”, from an unadjusted regression estimated separately by country and target gender. Robust 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. All regressions use sample weights. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.13: Social Desirability Bias: Truthful versus Reported, by Question and Gender of Respondent



Notes: This figure shows the differences in mean answers across the “truthful” and “reported” variants of questions (see Section 4.4) regarding perceived support either for *Freedom to Work* or *Affirmative Action*, separately for male and female respondents. Each point is the coefficient on “truthful”, controlling for background characteristics (education, employment, income, age, urban residence, and internet access). Robust 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. All regressions use sample weights. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

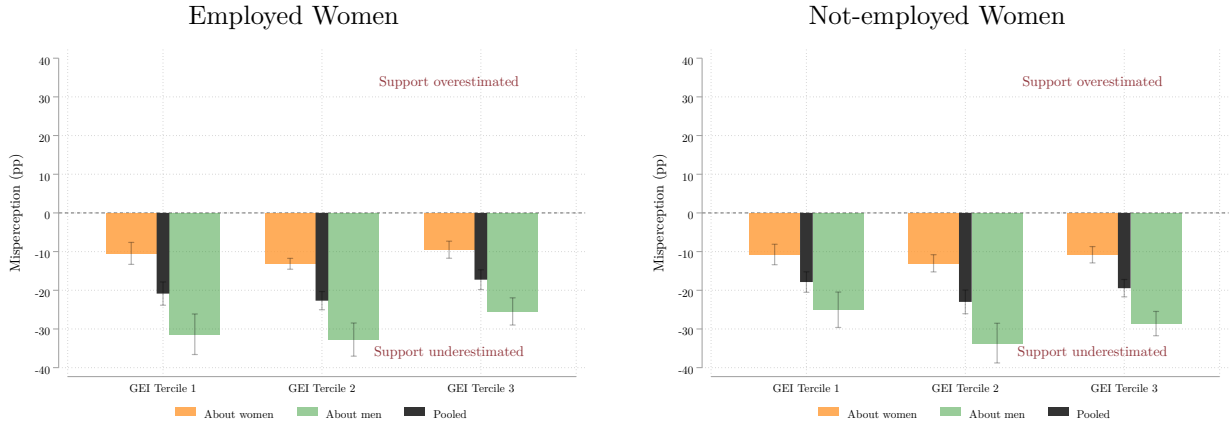
Figure A.14: Percentage of Respondents that Perceive the Minority Position as Being Held By the Majority in Sixty Countries



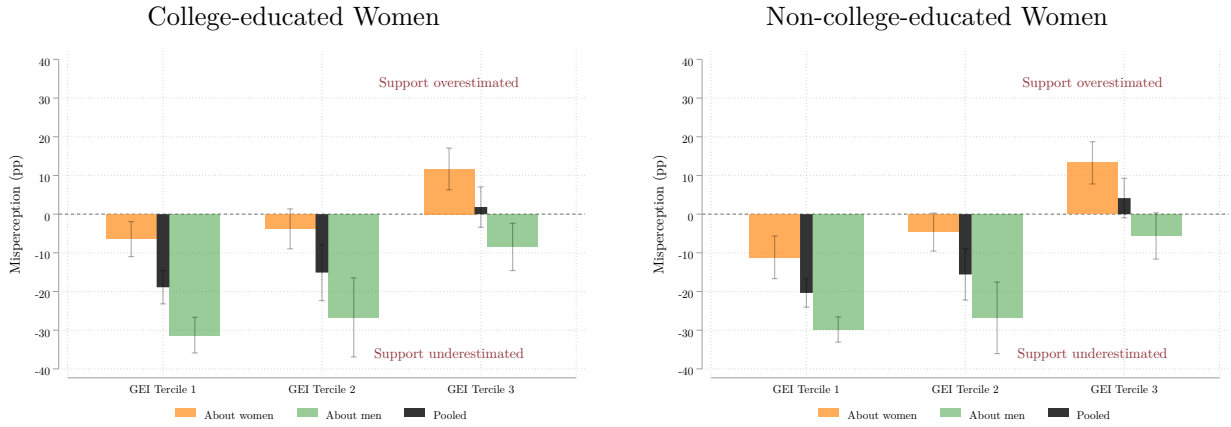
Notes: This figure shows the share of respondents in each country who exhibit pluralistic ignorance. Pluralistic ignorance is defined as perceiving a minority (majority) of the country to be in support while a majority (minority) is. 95% confidence intervals are shown for each estimate. Country-specific shares use Gallup sampling weights. The vertical line marks the unweighted share of respondents in the pooled Gallup sample who exhibit pluralistic ignorance. Respondents with missing perceived or actual support are excluded from the calculation. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.15: Misperceptions by Potential Causes for Motivated Beliefs

(a) Employment and Freedom to Work

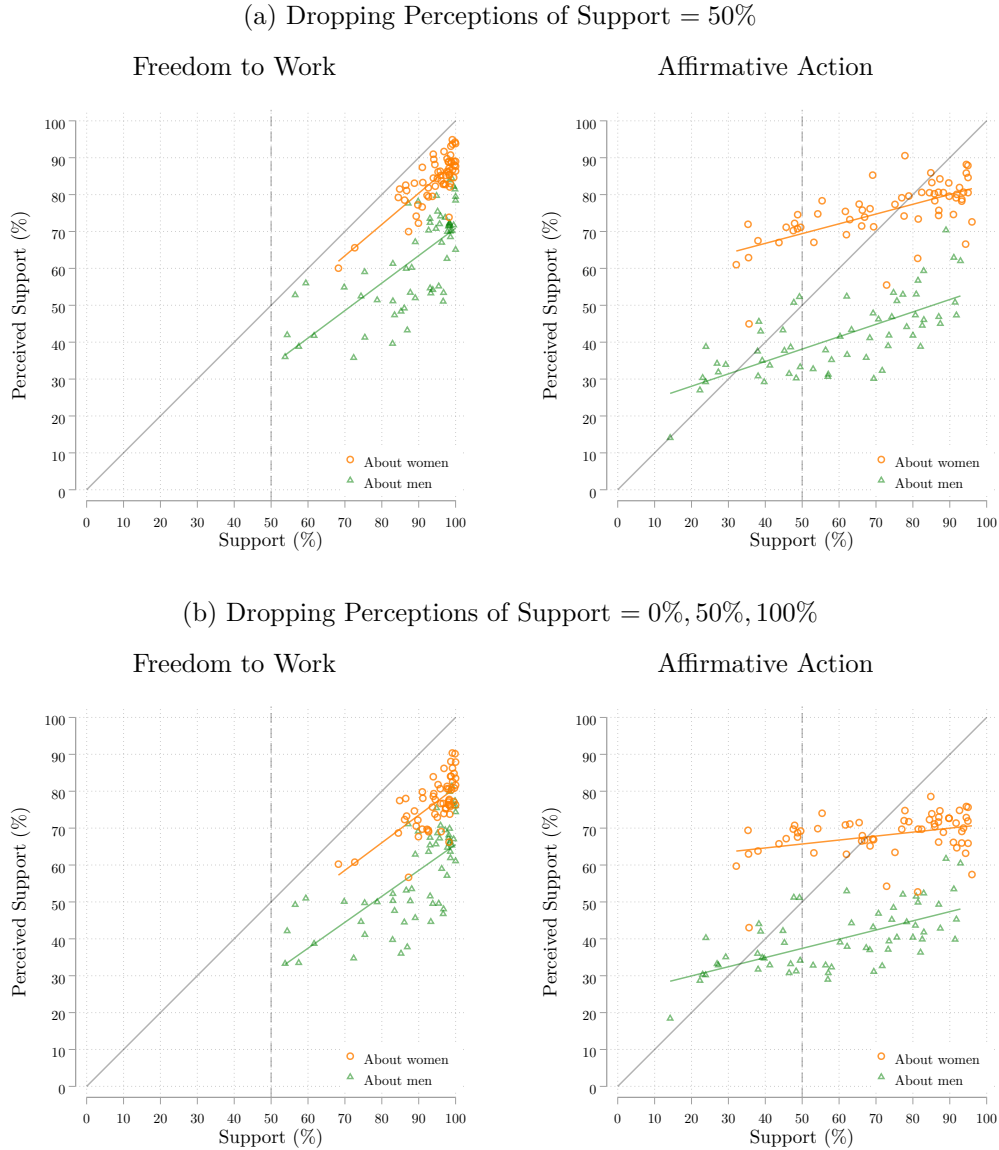


(b) Higher Education and Affirmative Action



Notes: This figure shows average misperceptions, broken down by respondents' background characteristics which might predispose them to motivated reasoning. The sample is restricted to female respondents of working age (≤ 65). Misperceptions are defined as the difference between a respondent's perception of the support for the policy in their country and the actual support in their country. All subgroup means are unweighted and describe respondents in the Gallup sample. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index (GEI) based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.16: Robustness: Mapping of True Attitudes to Perceptions



Notes: The figure shows the robustness of the patterns observed in Figure 10 to dropping focal responses. The first panel and second panels drop individuals reporting perceptions of exactly 50% and exactly 0%, 50%, or 100%, respectively.

Panel 1, Column (a): Women: slope = 0.85 (0.070), constant = 4.11, $p = 0.032$ (H_0 : slope = 1); Men: slope = 0.74 (0.087), constant = -3.55, $p = 0.005$ (H_0 : slope = 1).

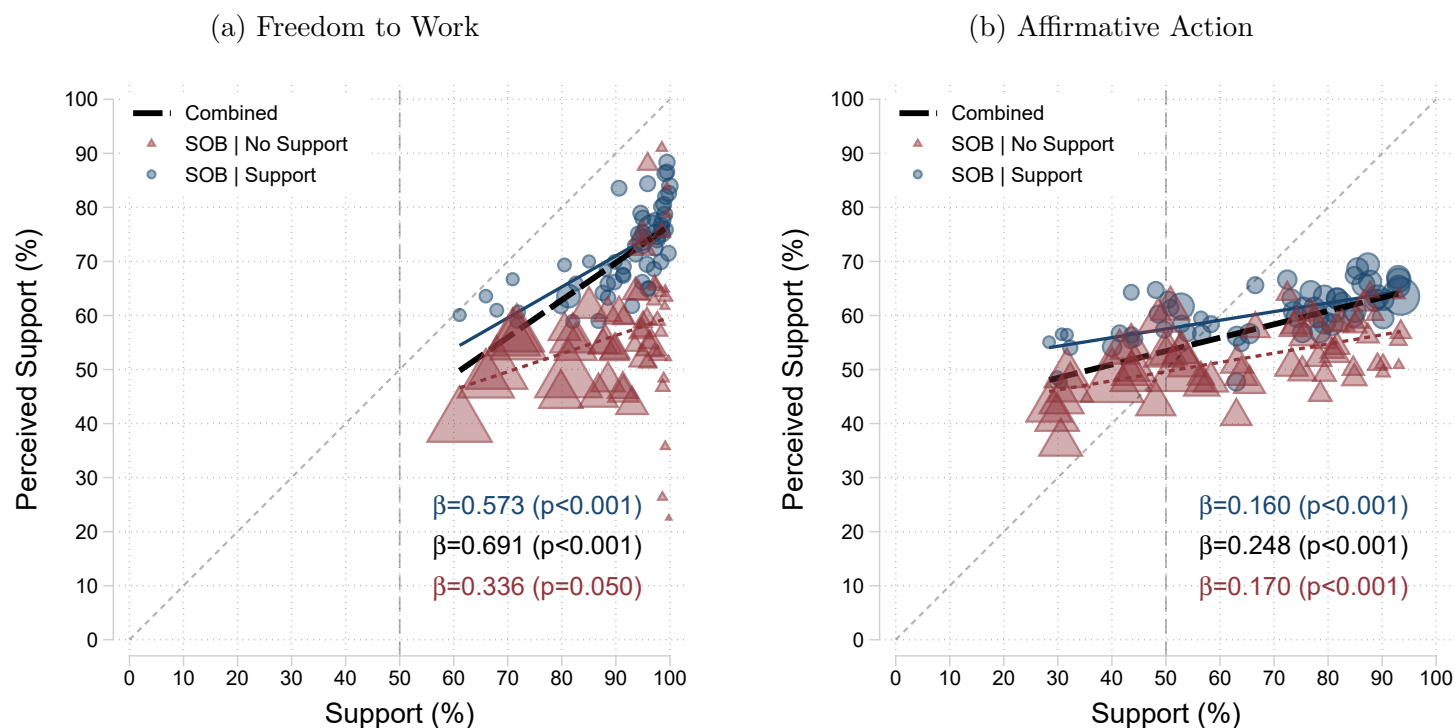
Panel 1, Column (b): Women: slope = 0.26 (0.047), constant = 56.19, $p < 0.001$ (H_0 : slope = 1); Men: slope = 0.34 (0.045), constant = 21.34, $p < 0.001$ (H_0 : slope = 1).

Panel 2, Column (a): Women: slope = 0.75 (0.093), constant = 6.29, $p = 0.009$ (H_0 : slope = 1); Men: slope = 0.70 (0.088), constant = -4.73, $p = 0.001$ (H_0 : slope = 1).

Panel 2, Column (b): Women: slope = 0.11 (0.047), constant = 60.34, $p < 0.001$ (H_0 : slope = 1); Men: slope = 0.25 (0.040), constant = 24.97, $p < 0.001$ (H_0 : slope = 1).

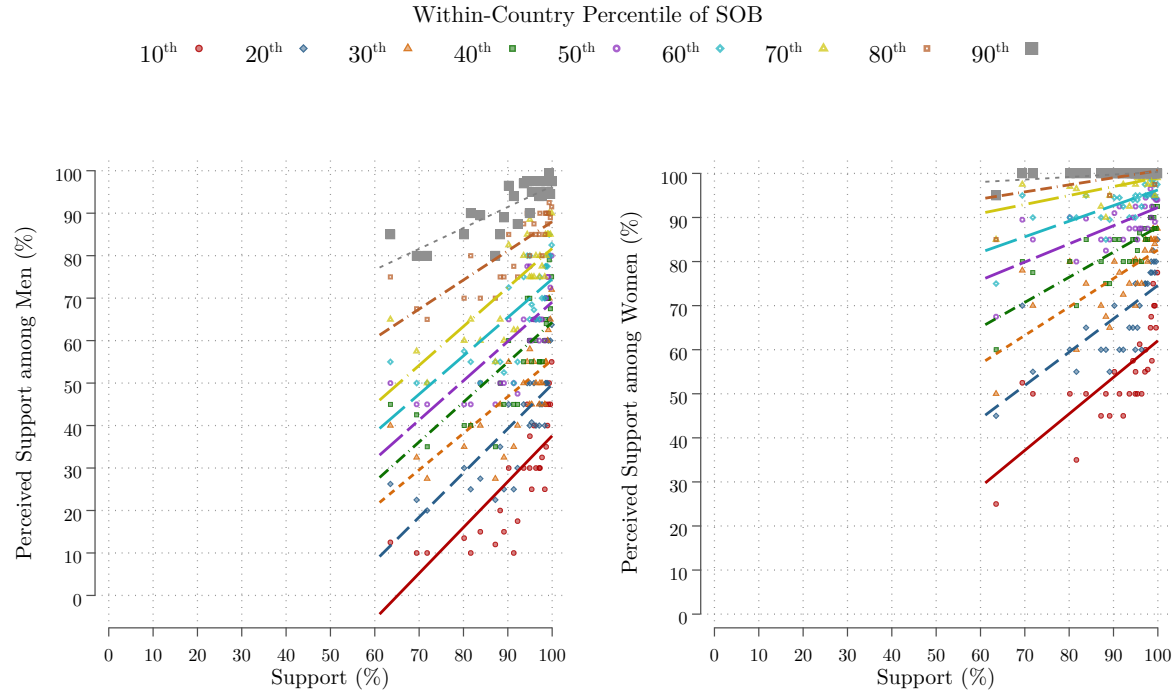
Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.17: Mapping between Actual Norms and Perceived Norms Conditional on Respondents' Own Support



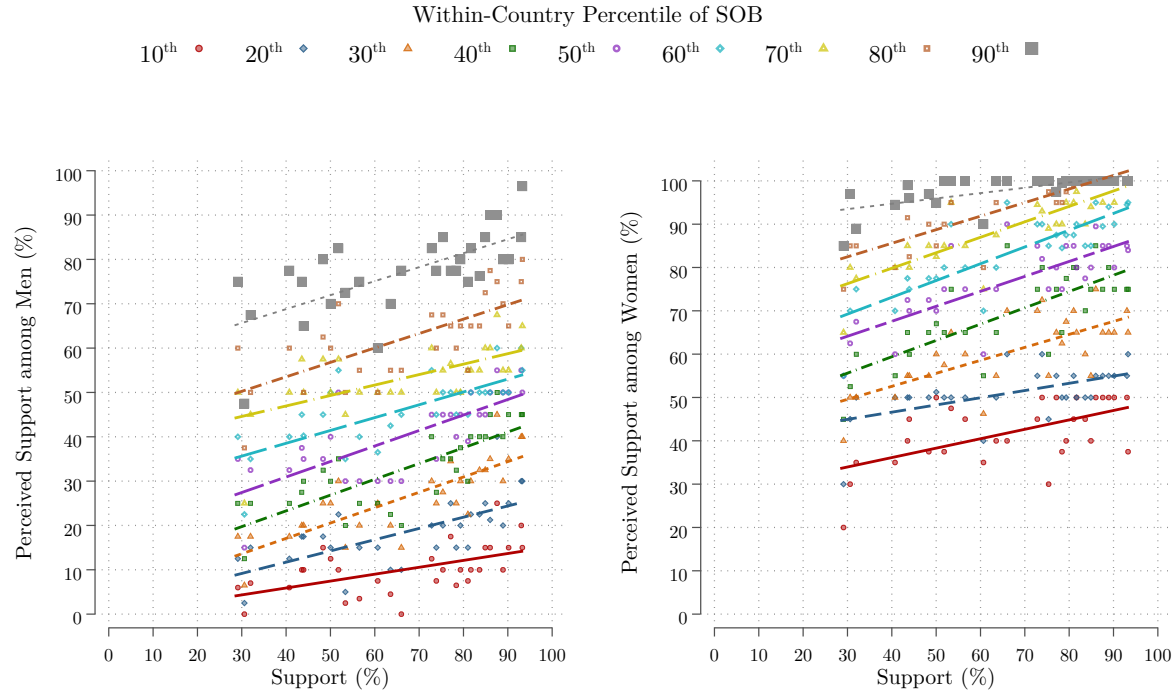
Notes: This figure shows the correspondence between actual norms and the perceived norms of two groups in each country. The two groups are respondents who support the policy and respondents who do not. Each country is represented by *two* markers, which share an x-coordinate but differ on the vertical axis: a blue circle indicating the level of support perceived by those who are themselves in support, and a red triangle indicating the level of support perceived by those who are not in support. Linear regression lines are included for each group (red and blue) and for the pooled data not conditioning on support (black line, data not shown). Conditional perceived-support means are computed using Gallup sampling weights, pooling respondents within each country. Marker areas are proportional to the number of respondents contributing to each country-by-support-status mean. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.18: Robust Cross-Country Patterns – Freedom to Work



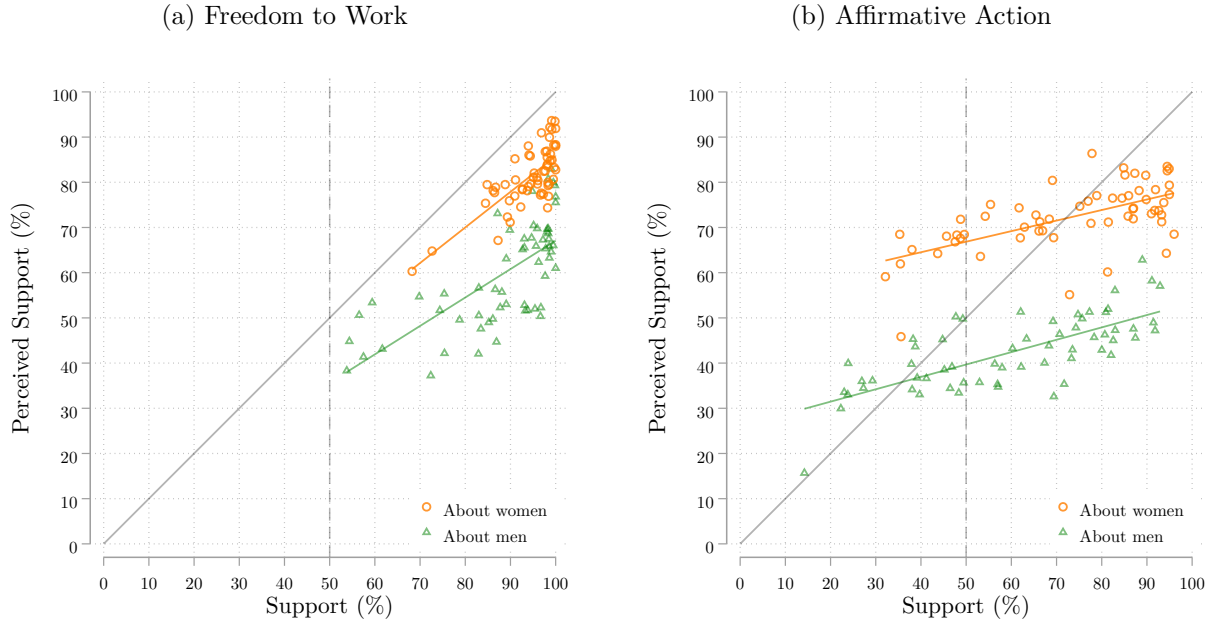
Notes: This figure plots the 10th through 90th percentiles of respondent-level perceived support for freedom to work, calculated within each country and separately for perceptions about support among men, SOB_i^m , and among women, SOB_i^w , against pooled country-level actual support, $E[FOB]$. For each percentile series, countries are grouped into quantile bins based on pooled actual support. The markers report the within-bin means of pooled actual support and of the corresponding within-country SOB percentile. Lines report separate linear fits for each percentile series. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.19: Robust Cross-Country Patterns – Affirmative Action



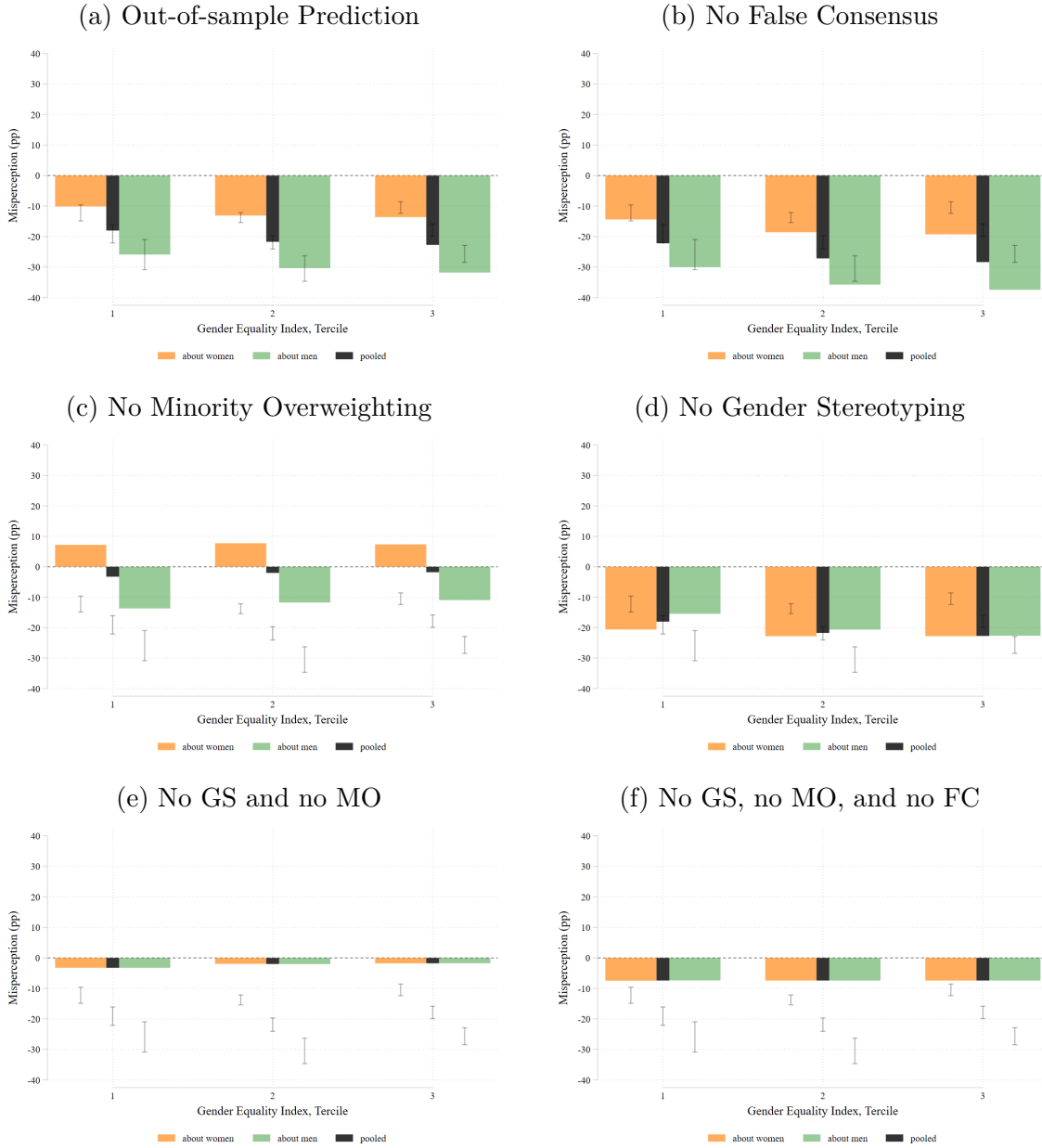
Notes: This figure plots the 10th through 90th percentiles of respondent-level perceived support for affirmative action, calculated within each country and separately for perceptions about support among men, SOB_i^m , and among women, SOB_i^w , against pooled country-level actual support, $\mathbb{E}[FOB]$. For each percentile series, countries are grouped into quantile bins based on pooled actual support. The markers report the within-bin means of pooled actual support and of the corresponding within-country SOB percentile. Lines report separate linear fits for each percentile series. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.20: Cross-Country Relationship between Average Perceived Support and Actual Support by Target Gender



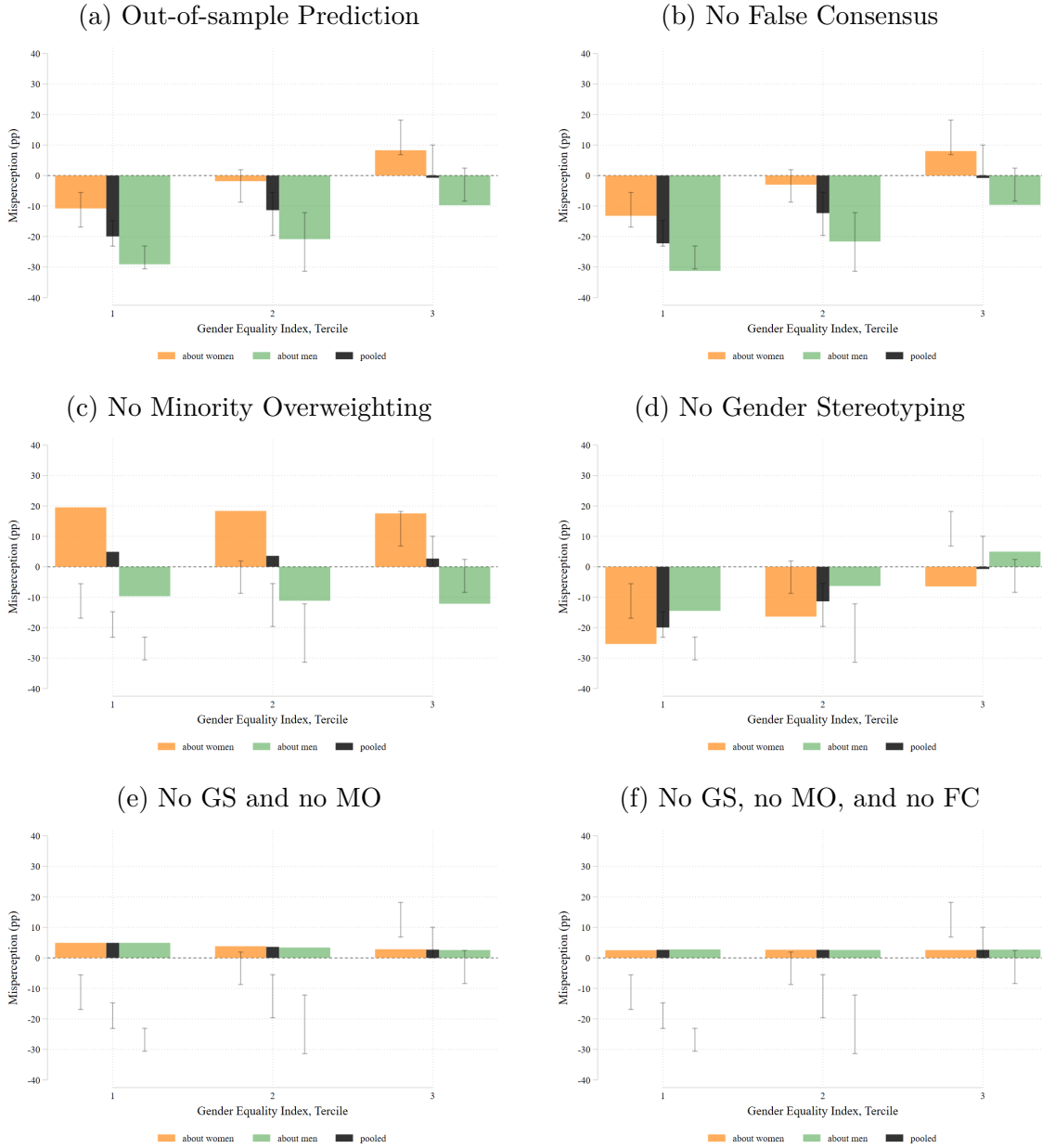
Notes: This figure shows, for each policy, how actual support for target gender g , $\mathbb{E}[FOB_g]$, relates to average perceived support for that gender, $\mathbb{E}[SOB^g]$, across countries. Each marker represents a country, with orange markers showing $\mathbb{E}[SOB^w]$ plotted against $\mathbb{E}[FOB_w]$, and green markers showing $\mathbb{E}[SOB^m]$ plotted against $\mathbb{E}[FOB_m]$. The solid lines plot fitted regressions of perceived support on actual support for each gender, and the 45-degree line is shown for reference. In Panel (a), for women, the slope is 0.79 (SE = 0.07), the constant is 7.03, and $p = 0.004$ for the test H_0 : slope = 1. For men, the slope is 0.63 (SE = 0.077), the constant is 4.20, and $p < 0.001$ for H_0 : slope = 1. In Panel (b), for women, the slope is 0.23 (SE = 0.042), the constant is 55.18, and $p < 0.001$ for H_0 : slope = 1. For men, the slope is 0.27 (SE = 0.038), the constant is 25.99, and $p < 0.001$ for H_0 : slope = 1. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.21: Quantitative Assessment of Mechanisms – Freedom to Work
Comparison of Model Simulations with the 95% Confidence Interval of the Data



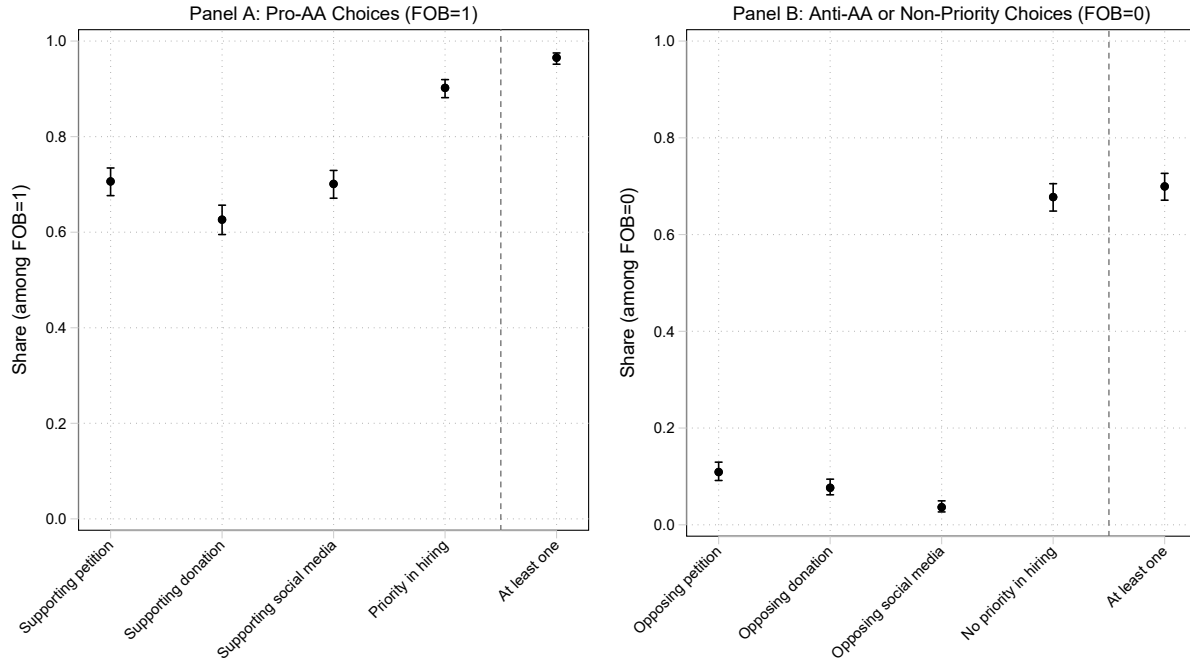
Notes: The figures showcase the out-of-sample predictions regarding average misperceptions of support (pp) for *Freedom to Work* conditional on countries' GEI index, based on equation 5. The various panels omit one or more mechanisms from the prediction between the following: false consensus (FC), minority overweighting (MO), and gender stereotyping (GS). The 95% confidence intervals refer to the standard errors of the underlying survey data, clustered at the country level. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.22: Quantitative Assessment of Mechanisms – Affirmative Action
Comparison of Model Simulations with the 95% Confidence Interval of the Data



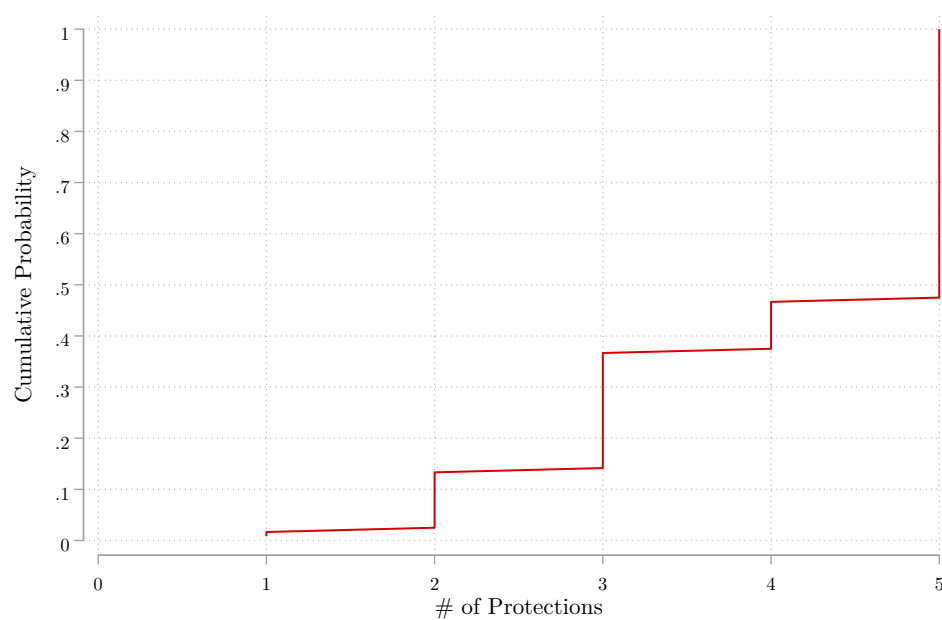
Notes: These figures showcase the out-of-sample predictions regarding average misperceptions of support (pp) for *Affirmative Action* conditional on countries' GEI index, based on equation 5. The various panels omit one or more mechanisms from the prediction between the following: false consensus (FC), minority overweighting (MO), and gender stereotyping (GS). The 95% confidence intervals refer to the standard errors of the underlying survey data, clustered at the country level. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.23: Affirmative Action Support and Behavioral Choices



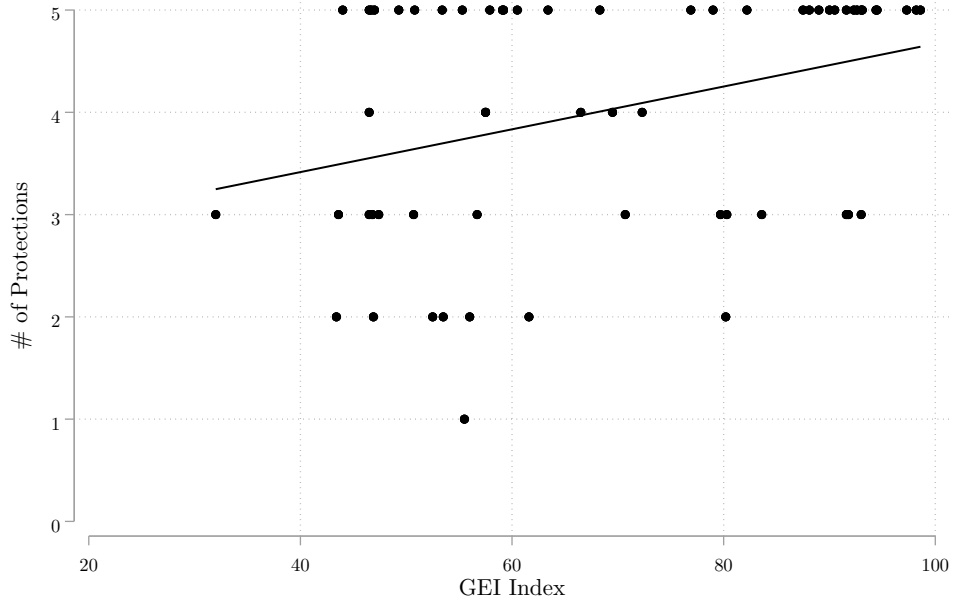
Notes: This figure reports behavioral choices separately by respondents' own support for affirmative action. Panel A restricts the sample to respondents who support giving priority to women in leadership hiring ($FOB = 1$) and reports Pro-AA choices. Panel B restricts the sample to respondents who oppose such priority ($FOB = 0$) and reports Anti-AA or non-priority choices. Petition and donation are real decisions; hiring and social-media sharing are hypothetical choices. In Panel B, the petition, donation, and social-media outcomes identify explicitly opposing choices. "No priority in hiring" is the complement of giving priority to a woman and therefore does not necessarily indicate active opposition. "At least one" equals one if a respondent selects at least one of the four choices in the corresponding panel. Points report sample proportions; vertical bars report Wilson 95% confidence intervals. *Data:* Online survey fielded on Prolific, documented in Appendix [Appendix C](#).

Figure A.24: Distribution of Labor Market Protections for Women



Notes: This figure shows the distribution of our five-item index of legal labor market equality across the 60 countries in the sample. The variable “# of protections” is the sum of five binary indicators for legal provisions that speak directly to a woman’s ability to work on equal terms with men (see Section 7.2 for details). The share of countries in our sample which satisfy all five items is 53%. *Data:* [World Bank \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.25: Relationship between the Number of Labor Market Protections for Women and the GEI



Notes: This figure plots our five-item index of legal labor market equality against the Gender Equality Index (GEI) across the 60 countries in the sample. The variable “# of protections” is the sum of five binary indicators for legal provisions that speak directly to a woman’s ability to work on equal terms with men (see Section 7.2 for details). The solid line plots a fitted regression of the number of protections on the GEI. The slope is 0.021 (SE = 0.008), the constant is 2.58, and $p = 0.008$ for H_0 : slope = 0. *Data:* [World Bank \(2022\)](#), GEI based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

A.2 Additional Tables

Table A.1: Social Desirability Bias and Respondents' First-Order Beliefs

	Support for Freedom to Work				Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
SDI	0.055 (0.463)	-0.052 (1.307)	0.008 (0.407)	0.930** (0.411)	1.028* (0.588)	2.075** (0.847)	0.358 (0.915)	0.827 (1.276)
Mean of Dependent Variable	92.407	84.701	95.061	97.412	63.275	77.945	64.724	45.608
Observations	31,490	10,295	11,379	9,816	30,497	10,270	10,812	9,415
Adj. R ²	0.125	0.105	0.103	0.038	0.215	0.121	0.260	0.075

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are individual support for *Freedom to Work* and *Affirmative Action*. The variable SDI (for Social Desirability Index) is a binary dummy equal to 1 if the respondent's combined score—defined as the sum of three dummy variables indicating whether the respondent donated money, volunteered time, and helped a stranger—is above the median within their country, and 0 otherwise. All models include individual-level controls (gender, secondary education, college education, high income, being employed, age below 40, urban living, and internet access) and country fixed effects. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.2: Relationship between perceived support, question wording, and own reported support by GEI Terciles

	Perceived Support for Freedom to Work				Perceived Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Truthful	0.803 (1.153)	2.224 (1.535)	-3.412 (2.102)	4.435* (2.393)	-2.005** (0.878)	0.247 (1.151)	-5.240*** (1.635)	1.313 (2.622)
Support (FOB)	12.733*** (0.985)	12.741*** (1.379)	11.332*** (1.084)	14.478*** (3.005)	8.289*** (0.759)	8.537*** (0.793)	9.504*** (1.170)	7.171*** (1.457)
Truthful $\times$ FOB	-0.482 (1.004)	-0.225 (1.276)	1.047 (1.476)	-2.145 (2.486)	0.253 (0.574)	-1.796** (0.726)	0.488 (0.913)	1.163 (0.952)
Mean of Dependent Variable	71.537	63.479	71.867	79.341	56.775	60.228	57.070	52.803
Observations	60,635	19,561	21,793	19,281	58,048	19,339	20,381	18,328
Adj. R ²	0.115	0.053	0.059	0.078	0.065	0.031	0.083	0.055

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are individual perceptions of support for *Freedom to Work* and *Affirmative Action*. Independent variables are dummies for question wording (“truthful” vs. “reported” versions, see Section 4.4), own support, and their interaction. All models include individual-level controls (gender, secondary education, college education, high income, being employed, age below 40, urban living, and internet access), their interactions with question wording, and country fixed effects. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.3: Perceived Support, SDI, and FOB by GEI Terciles

	Perceived Support for Freedom to Work				Perceived Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Truthful	-0.340 (0.265)	0.206 (0.479)	-0.664* (0.363)	-0.571 (0.553)	-0.402 (0.302)	-0.205 (0.328)	-0.733 (0.459)	-0.261 (0.765)
SDI	0.291 (0.304)	-0.076 (0.709)	0.651 (0.426)	0.170 (0.413)	-0.054 (0.257)	0.443 (0.473)	-0.593 (0.382)	0.042 (0.416)
Truthful $\times$ SDI	0.225 (0.409)	1.146 (0.835)	-0.302 (0.532)	-0.034 (0.662)	-0.972** (0.424)	-0.546 (0.681)	0.280 (0.673)	-2.809*** (0.641)
Support (FOB)	13.095*** (1.019)	13.155*** (1.430)	12.504*** (1.404)	14.088*** (2.851)	7.846*** (0.575)	6.730*** (0.718)	9.161*** (0.877)	7.579*** (1.068)
Mean of Dependent Variable	71.642	64.083	71.864	79.378	56.924	60.470	57.096	52.844
Observations	61,999	20,568	21,965	19,466	59,428	20,315	20,587	18,526
Adj. R ²	0.108	0.054	0.051	0.067	0.061	0.028	0.074	0.049

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are individual perceptions of support for *Freedom to Work* and *Affirmative Action*. Independent variables are dummies for question wording (“truthful” vs. “reported” versions, see Section 4.4), the Social Desirability Index (SDI), their interaction, and own support. The SDI is a binary dummy equal to 1 if the respondent’s combined score—defined as the sum of three dummy variables indicating whether the respondent donated money, volunteered time, and helped a stranger—is above the median within their country, and 0 otherwise. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All models include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.4: Correlation Between Own Views and Perceptions about Others' Views

Panel A: Basic Freedom								
	Overall Misperceptions		Misperceptions about Men			Misperceptions about Women		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Support (FOB)	12.93*** (0.992)	12.46*** (1.005)	11.01*** (1.028)	11.21*** (1.074)	12.26*** (0.960)	14.79*** (1.267)	13.68*** (1.278)	12.10*** (1.438)
Support (FOB) $\times$ Female					-3.666* (2.010)			5.468*** (1.801)
Constant	-31.66*** (0.923)	-36.31*** (1.313)	-37.64*** (0.955)	-39.64*** (1.437)	-40.64*** (1.338)	-25.91*** (1.177)	-33.22*** (1.499)	-31.70*** (1.670)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	-19.636	-19.580	-27.415	-27.271	-27.271	-12.168	-12.196	-12.196
Observations	30,777	29,804	31,212	30,218	30,218	31,425	30,417	30,417
Adj. R ²	0.125	0.138	0.140	0.153	0.153	0.076	0.090	0.090

Panel B: Affirmative Action								
	Overall Misperceptions		Misperceptions about Men			Misperceptions about Women		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Support (FOB)	7.824*** (0.565)	8.397*** (0.607)	7.860*** (0.725)	8.654*** (0.743)	9.842*** (0.910)	7.737*** (0.672)	8.076*** (0.697)	4.581*** (0.718)
Support (FOB) $\times$ Female					-2.753*** (0.834)			8.098*** (0.937)
Constant	-14.15*** (0.359)	-12.36*** (0.989)	-22.61*** (0.459)	-15.45*** (1.153)	-16.10*** (1.154)	-5.983*** (0.428)	-9.348*** (1.032)	-7.446*** (1.017)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	-9.184	-9.022	-17.633	-17.448	-17.448	-1.055	-0.887	-0.887
Observations	29,390	28,483	29,855	28,932	28,932	30,053	29,116	29,116
Adj. R ²	0.414	0.423	0.317	0.335	0.335	0.309	0.312	0.317

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are misperceptions about support, defined as perceived minus actual support, among different target groups. The principal independent variable is respondents' own support (FOB). Columns (5) and (8) of each panel additionally interact FOB with respondent gender. Where indicated, models include individual-level controls (gender, secondary education, college education, high income, being employed, age below 40, urban living, and internet access). All models include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

Table A.5: Affirmative Action Beliefs and Anti-Affirmative Action Choices

	Panel A: Real Anti-AA Choices							
	Opposing petition				Donation to opposing organization			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Main Estimates:</i>								
Support (FOB)	-0.098*** (0.016)		-0.095*** (0.016)	-0.091*** (0.017)	-0.061*** (0.013)		-0.062*** (0.014)	-0.062*** (0.014)
Support (FOB) × Female	0.012 (0.021)		-0.003 (0.023)	-0.006 (0.023)	0.014 (0.019)		0.005 (0.021)	0.003 (0.021)
Perceived Support (SOB)		-0.139** (0.065)	-0.036 (0.068)	-0.062 (0.068)		-0.056 (0.040)	0.012 (0.044)	0.001 (0.045)
Perceived Support (SOB) × Female		0.117 (0.073)	0.134* (0.080)	0.130 (0.080)		0.081 (0.055)	0.084 (0.062)	0.079 (0.063)
Female	-0.027 (0.019)	-0.094** (0.040)	-0.084** (0.039)	-0.081** (0.039)	0.001 (0.017)	-0.040 (0.029)	-0.033 (0.029)	-0.029 (0.029)
<i>Linear Combinations (p-values):</i>								
FOB + FOB × Female	<0.001		<0.001	<0.001	0.001		<0.001	<0.001
SOB + SOB × Female		0.523	0.019	0.114		0.496	0.030	0.080
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.064	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052
Observations	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995
Adjusted R ²	0.039	0.007	0.040	0.051	0.013	-0.001	0.014	0.017
Panel B: Hypothetical Anti-AA or Non-Priority Choices								
	Opposing social media				No priority in hiring			
	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
<i>Main Estimates:</i>								
Support (FOB)	-0.026** (0.010)		-0.026** (0.011)	-0.023** (0.011)	-0.610*** (0.025)		-0.613*** (0.026)	-0.592*** (0.027)
Support (FOB) × Female	0.002 (0.013)		-0.002 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.014)	0.085** (0.036)		0.090** (0.038)	0.086** (0.037)
Perceived Support (SOB)		-0.030 (0.032)	-0.001 (0.034)	-0.013 (0.034)		-0.631*** (0.106)	0.037 (0.091)	-0.026 (0.089)
Perceived Support (SOB) × Female		0.029 (0.036)	0.035 (0.039)	0.031 (0.040)		-0.024 (0.143)	-0.049 (0.125)	-0.046 (0.122)
Female	-0.012 (0.011)	-0.029 (0.020)	-0.026 (0.020)	-0.023 (0.020)	-0.140*** (0.029)	-0.188** (0.074)	-0.117* (0.062)	-0.120** (0.060)
<i>Linear Combinations (p-values):</i>								
FOB + FOB × Female	0.004		0.002	0.005	<0.001		<0.001	<0.001
SOB + SOB × Female		0.947	0.101	0.377		<0.001	0.881	0.388
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Mean of Dependent Variable	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.024	0.402	0.402	0.402	0.402
Observations	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995	1,995
Adjusted R ²	0.008	0.001	0.007	0.017	0.360	0.070	0.359	0.378

Notes: This table reports OLS estimates for explicitly opposing petition, donation, and social-media choices. The petition, donation, and social-media dependent variables equal one only for the opposing option; supporting and neutral responses equal zero, so neutral responses are never classified as Anti-AA. The hiring question does not distinguish neutral responses from active opposition. Consequently, “No priority in hiring” is the binary complement of the Pro-AA hiring outcome and should not be interpreted as independently observed active opposition. Each outcome has four specifications: FOB only, SOB only, FOB and SOB jointly, and the joint model with controls. All specifications interact the belief measure with respondent gender. Controls include income, age, secondary and tertiary education, left-wing political views, and private-sector employment. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. *Data:* Online survey fielded on Prolific, documented in [Appendix C](#).

Table A.6: Country-Level Beliefs and Policy Measures: Leave-One-Country-Out Jackknife

	Number of Freedom-to-Work Protections			Any Board Quota		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Actual Support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{FOB}]$	0.063*** (0.020)		0.069** (0.030)	-0.914*** (0.303)		-1.609*** (0.504)
Average Perceived Support, $\mathbb{E}[\text{SOB}]$		0.050*** (0.016)	-0.009 (0.024)		-1.344 (1.083)	2.806* (1.592)
Mean of Dependent Variable	4.017	4.017	4.017	36.667	36.667	36.667
Countries	60	60	60	60	60	60
Full-Sample Adj. R^2	0.242	0.115	0.230	0.125	0.012	0.157

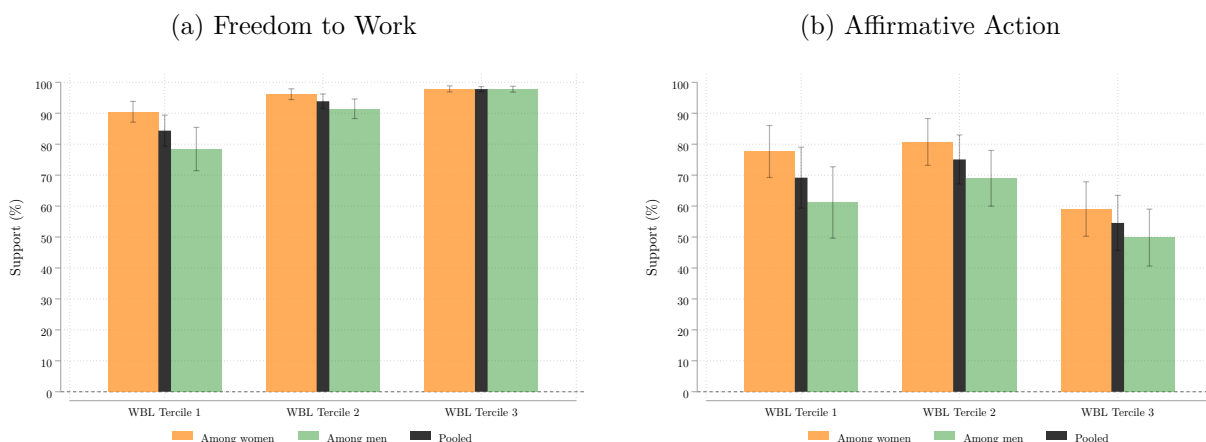
Notes: This table applies a delete-one-country jackknife to the six specifications in [Table 3](#). Each displayed coefficient is the full-sample OLS estimate. Standard errors in parentheses are jackknife standard errors computed from 60 replications, each of which omits one country and re-estimates the corresponding model. This procedure assesses sensitivity to individual countries; it does not create additional independent observations. Columns (1)–(3) use the Number of Freedom-to-Work Protections as the dependent variable and columns (4)–(6) use Any Board Quota, expressed as 100 when a quota is present and zero otherwise. Within each block, the first column includes actual support, the second average perceived support, and the third both measures jointly. All specifications omit the GEI. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020; Women, Business and the Law ([World Bank, 2022](#)); and Corporate Women Directors International ([Corporate Women Directors International, 2021](#)).

Appendix B

B.1 Description of Supplementary Country-Level Datasets

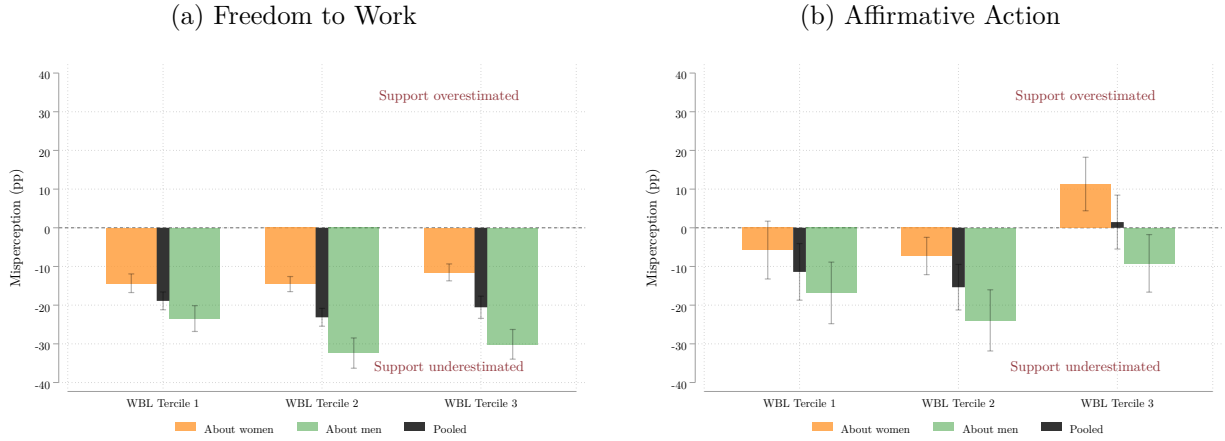
In the analysis, we match the data from Gallup World Poll with other data sources. In particular, to study how actual and perceived gender norms relate to the level of gender equality in the country, we classify countries according to the UN’s Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2022). The index captures multiple dimensions of gender equality, including labor market outcomes and political empowerment. We reverse the index such that higher values indicate higher values of equality, and we define it as the Gender Equality Index (GEI). We also show that our findings are robust to an alternative measure of gender equality based on legal aspects (World Bank, 2022), see Figure A.26 and Figure A.27. Figure A.28 illustrates the distributions of both gender equality measures across countries. Finally, we use World Bank data to establish the percentage of the total world population and world GDP covered by our study (World Bank, 2021a,b), and geospatial data from Belgiu (2015) to plot the maps.

Figure A.26: Support by WBL Terciles and Gender



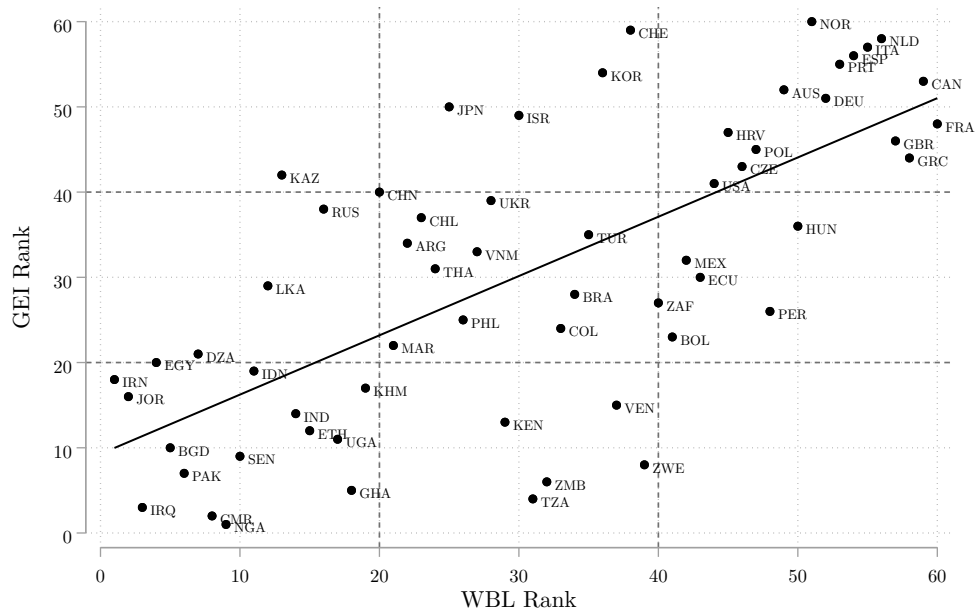
Notes: This figure reproduces the analysis in Figure 2, using an alternative measure of gender equality. The “Women, Business and the Law”-index (WBL-index) measures how laws and regulations affect women’s economic opportunity and increases with the equality between women and men. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. WBL-index from World Bank (2022).

Figure A.27: Misperceptions by WBL Terciles and Gender



Notes: This figure reproduces the analysis in Figure 5, using an alternative measure of gender equality. The “Women, Business and the Law”-index (WBL-index) measures how laws and regulations affect women’s economic opportunity and increases with the equality between women and men. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. WBL-index from World Bank (2022).

Figure A.28: Gender Equality Index and WBL Index



Notes: This figure shows where each of the 60 countries in our data ranks on the Gender Equality Index (GEI) and “Women, Business and the Law”-index (WBL-index). Tercile boundaries are indicated by dashed lines. Ranks are in ascending order of equality. Ties between countries are broken for the sake of readability. *Data:* GEI based on UNDP (2022). WBL-index from World Bank (2022).

B.2 Individual Support: The role of background characteristics

We provide evidence here on how individual attitudes relate to background characteristics, using individual-level regressions with country fixed effects. [Table A.7](#) shows this analysis for freedom to work for women (columns (1)-(4)) and for affirmative action for women (columns (5)-(8)), both for the global sample and separately for each tercile of gender equality. In [Figure A.29](#), we report the estimated interaction effects between the gender of the respondent and the different background characteristics.

We observe from the first row in [Table A.7](#) that the gender difference in support is robust to controlling for other background characteristics. Women are significantly more supportive of freedom to work and affirmative action for women than men.

From the second and third rows, we observe that the individual attitudes are strongly associated with the educational level of the respondent, where the estimated effect (absolute value) of having a college education is typically as large as the estimated gender difference. However, education relates very differently to support for freedom to work and support for affirmative action. In the global sample, secondary and college education are associated with greater support for freedom to work for women, while they are associated with less support for affirmative action. The positive association between education and support for freedom to work is driven by the less gender-equal countries, and in [Figure A.29](#), we show that it is particularly strong for men. Since one's support for freedom to work for women can be naturally linked to one holding gender-equal attitudes, these findings may suggest that education is an important driver of gender-equal attitudes in a society. In contrast, we observe that there is a negative relationship between education and support for affirmative action, especially in the more gender-equal countries. This negative relationship is present both among men and women, and may suggest that education is associated with support for meritocratic outcomes, and thus more reluctance to affirmative action. The estimated negative effect is stronger for men than for women, see [Figure A.29](#), in line with highly educated men running the risk of being disfavored by such policies.

In contrast to the strong association between individual attitudes and education, we find much weaker relationships with the other background characteristics. In the global sample, high income and living in an urban area are positively associated with support for freedom to work, while high income, employment, and being less than 40 years old are negatively associated with support for affirmative action.³¹ However, the estimated effects of these background characteristics are small compared to what we establish for education. Finally, we find that access to the Internet is associated with stronger support for freedom to work for women in the less gender-equal countries,

³¹In terms of the age effect, there is a significant difference between men and women, see [Figure A.29](#). Younger men are more likely than older men to be against freedom to work for women in the least gender-equal countries and against affirmative action for women in the more gender-equal countries, while we do not observe a similar age effect for women.

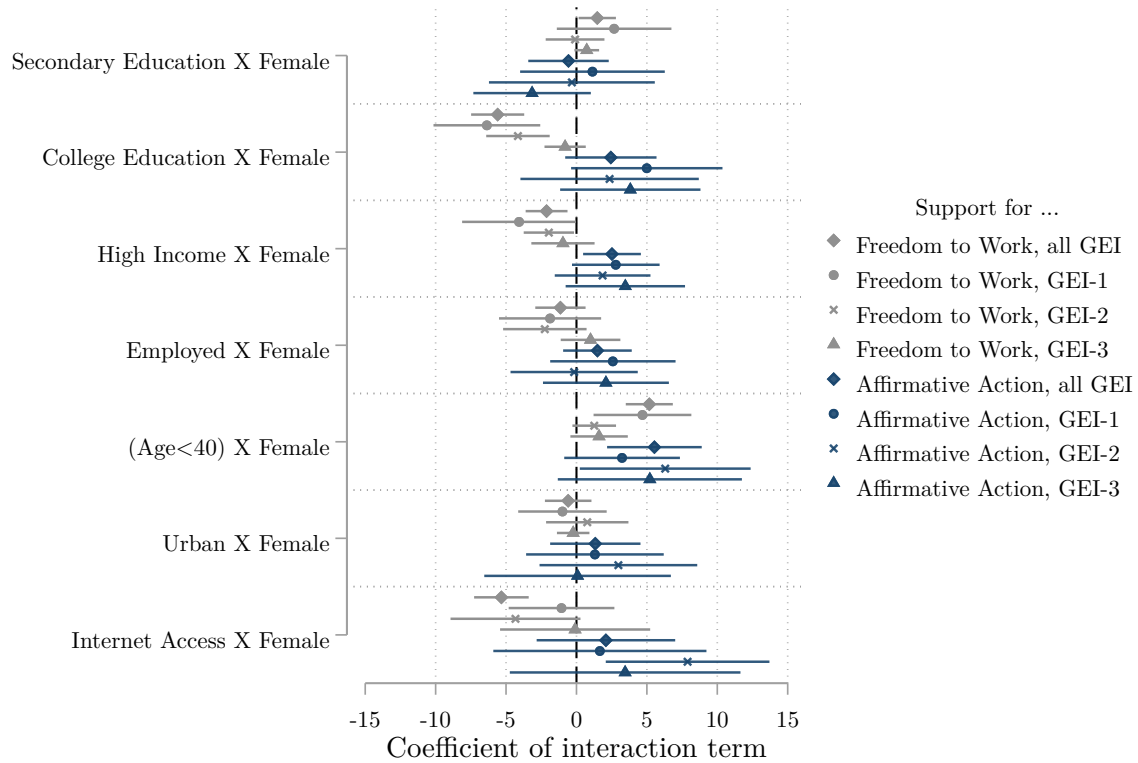
while it is associated with less support for affirmative action in the most gender-equal countries. These patterns may suggest that access to the Internet plays a role in shaping individual attitudes and that it may contribute to increasing the support for the majority view in society.

Table A.7: Determinants of Individual Attitudes

	Support for Freedom to Work				Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Female	6.175*** (1.024)	12.80*** (1.480)	4.759*** (1.509)	1.139* (0.653)	13.11*** (1.259)	15.66*** (2.169)	13.44*** (2.167)	10.39*** (2.226)
Secondary Education	4.146*** (0.938)	5.637*** (1.826)	3.549*** (1.018)	0.920 (1.213)	-3.415** (1.698)	0.0501 (1.268)	-4.309 (2.773)	-10.53*** (2.946)
College Education	5.972*** (1.109)	11.12*** (2.195)	5.034*** (1.186)	1.210 (1.532)	-9.428*** (2.135)	-4.859* (2.477)	-13.98*** (3.570)	-12.94*** (3.063)
High Income	1.647*** (0.379)	2.519*** (0.691)	1.103** (0.519)	1.136 (0.718)	-2.772*** (0.613)	-0.679 (0.881)	-4.165*** (0.932)	-3.277*** (1.036)
Employed	-0.816* (0.480)	-1.113 (1.085)	-0.673 (0.644)	0.521 (0.523)	-2.753*** (0.664)	-0.982 (1.216)	-2.929*** (0.831)	-2.863** (1.108)
Age < 40	-0.509* (0.297)	-1.857*** (0.602)	-0.218 (0.408)	-0.195 (0.524)	-2.165* (1.129)	-0.179 (1.243)	-3.392 (2.060)	-2.213 (1.574)
Urban	1.357*** (0.416)	3.195*** (0.959)	0.534 (0.464)	0.321 (0.414)	-1.595** (0.683)	-0.152 (0.925)	-4.027*** (0.848)	-0.0368 (1.374)
Internet Access	3.472*** (0.573)	3.745*** (0.904)	3.721*** (1.024)	2.438* (1.262)	-1.601 (1.093)	0.0783 (1.417)	-2.237* (1.209)	-7.480** (2.791)
Mean of Dependent Variable	92.3	84.6	95.0	97.4	63.3	77.9	64.6	45.6
Observations	31,841	10,417	11,545	9,879	30,777	10,383	10,932	9,462
Adj. R ²	0.126	0.105	0.107	0.039	0.215	0.120	0.260	0.075

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is individual support (FOB) for the indicated policy. The independent variables are characteristics of the respondent, specifically: being female, secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, and having internet access. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All regressions include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.29: Individual Attitudes – Interaction Effects with Gender of Respondent



Notes: This figure shows regression coefficients, each from a different specification. Dependent variables are individual support for *freedom to work* (gray) and *affirmative action* (blue). All regressions include binary dummies for the respondent's gender and additional background characteristics (secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, internet access) and country fixed effects. In addition, each regression includes *one* of the interaction terms on the vertical axis. The coefficient on the interaction is shown, along with 95% confidence intervals. We estimate each model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). Standard errors are clustered at the country level. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

B.3 Misperceptions: The role of background characteristics

We here study how individual misperceptions of support relate to important background characteristics of the respondent, using individual-level regressions with country fixed effects. [Table A.8](#) shows how misperceptions about support for freedom to work for women (columns (1)-(4)) and affirmative action for women (columns (5)-(8)) are related to important individual-level background characteristics, both for the global sample and separately for each tercile of gender equality. In [Figure A.30](#), we report the estimated interaction effects between the gender of the respondent and the different background characteristics.

We observe from the first row in [Table A.8](#) that there is no gender difference in the misperception of overall support for freedom to work and only a small gender difference in the support for affirmative action. Women tend to underestimate more than men the support for affirmative action in the less gender-equal countries but at the same time overestimate less the support for affirmative action in the most gender-equal countries. In the second and third rows, we observe that education is strongly associated with underestimating less the overall support for freedom to work for women, particularly college education. The association between education and the misperception of overall support for affirmative action is weaker and differs across the gender spectrum. College education is associated with greater underestimation of the support for affirmative action in the less gender-equal countries but with less overestimation of the support for affirmative action in the most gender-equal countries. However, as shown in [Figure A.31](#), the stylized facts about misperceptions hold for both college-educated participants and those without a college education.

In the remaining rows of [Table A.8](#), we observe that the estimated effects of the other background characteristics are small and, in most cases, insignificant. However, we note that access to Internet is associated with less misperception of the support for freedom to work. In [Table A.9](#), we show that these patterns are robust to controlling for a host of other individual-level variables.

The corresponding analysis of misperceptions about gender differences in support is reported in [Table A.10](#), where we find that women, more educated respondents, and younger respondents tend to overestimate gender differences in support by more. Finally, [Table A.11](#) and [Table A.12](#) show systematic differences in misperceptions depending on whether respondents assess their own or the other gender. Across both policies and all GEI terciles, respondents underestimate men's support more than women's support. These patterns capture the direction of misperceptions and do not necessarily imply differences in absolute accuracy.

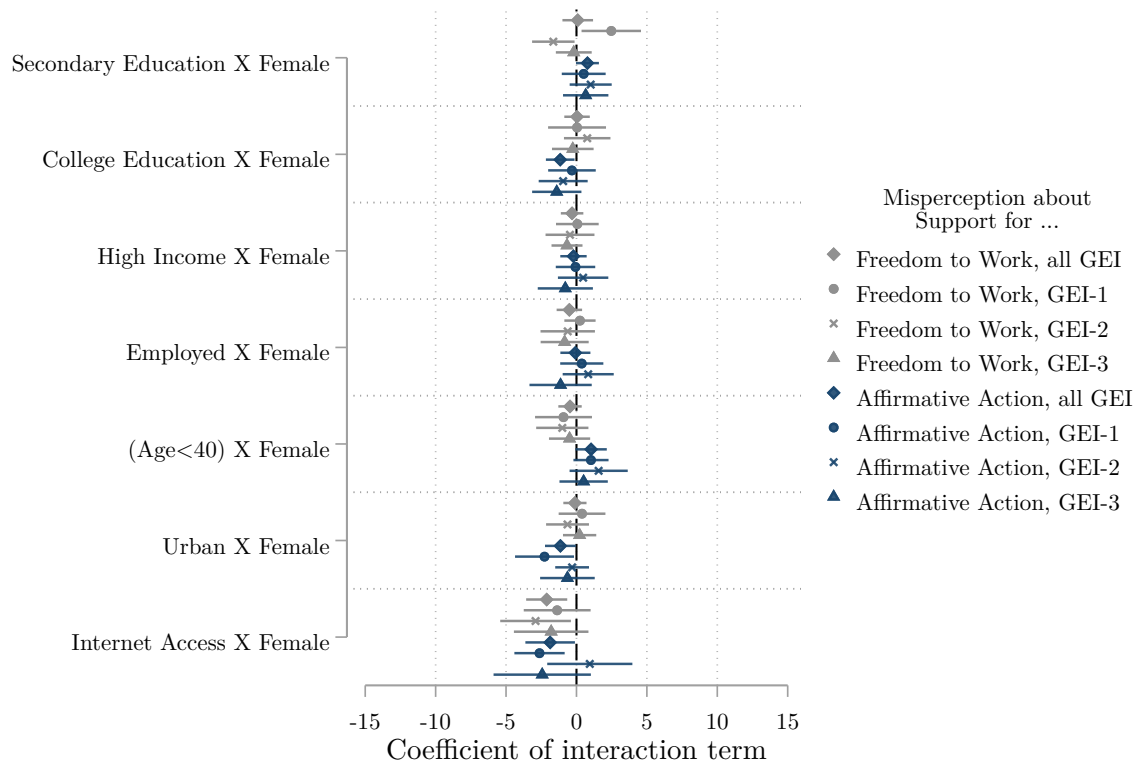
Table A.8: Misperceptions about Support

	Misperceptions about Support for Freedom to Work				Misperceptions about Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Female	-0.577** (0.271)	0.164 (0.508)	-1.321** (0.517)	-0.627* (0.315)	-3.005*** (0.413)	-1.986** (0.849)	-3.729*** (0.570)	-3.175*** (0.685)
Secondary Education	2.466*** (0.443)	2.692*** (0.644)	3.035*** (0.736)	0.992 (0.734)	-0.0169 (0.658)	1.024 (0.626)	-0.762 (1.156)	-1.721* (0.835)
College Education	4.399*** (0.563)	4.081*** (1.104)	5.927*** (0.785)	2.519*** (0.829)	-2.745*** (0.808)	-1.346 (0.914)	-3.957** (1.533)	-3.985*** (1.077)
High Income	1.234*** (0.248)	1.508*** (0.404)	0.965** (0.392)	1.153** (0.469)	-0.514 (0.319)	0.978** (0.458)	-1.031** (0.469)	-1.462*** (0.414)
Employed	0.956*** (0.300)	0.543 (0.594)	0.684 (0.505)	1.412*** (0.425)	-0.452* (0.240)	0.0611 (0.368)	-0.372 (0.450)	-0.583 (0.357)
Age < 40	-0.0871 (0.369)	-0.711 (0.676)	-0.996* (0.572)	1.399** (0.575)	-0.249 (0.400)	0.703 (0.535)	-0.383 (0.708)	-0.779 (0.656)
Urban	1.220*** (0.241)	2.037*** (0.406)	1.274*** (0.387)	0.217 (0.348)	-0.154 (0.261)	0.161 (0.517)	-0.355 (0.406)	-0.158 (0.373)
Internet Access	2.622*** (0.475)	2.052*** (0.573)	2.450** (0.990)	4.820*** (1.125)	0.768 (0.524)	1.050 (0.824)	-0.0820 (0.781)	0.406 (0.762)
Mean of Dependent Variable	-19.6	-18.9	-21.8	-17.9	-9.0	-18.8	-12.5	4.9
Observations	29,955	9,662	10,681	9,612	29,089	9,583	10,167	9,339
Adj. R ²	0.113	0.124	0.092	0.099	0.401	0.162	0.372	0.283

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is individual misperceptions of support (averaged across genders) for the indicated policy. The independent variables are dummies for characteristics of the respondent, specifically: being female, secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, and having internet access. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All regressions include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

The main takeaway from this analysis is that misperceptions of gender norms are prevalent and stable across society. The estimated effects of the different background characteristics are small compared to the average level of the misperception, which means that the misperceptions of gender norms in a country are not particular to a certain gender, socioeconomic background, age, or location. The analysis thus suggests that the misperceptions are largely driven by general mechanisms that apply across the population.

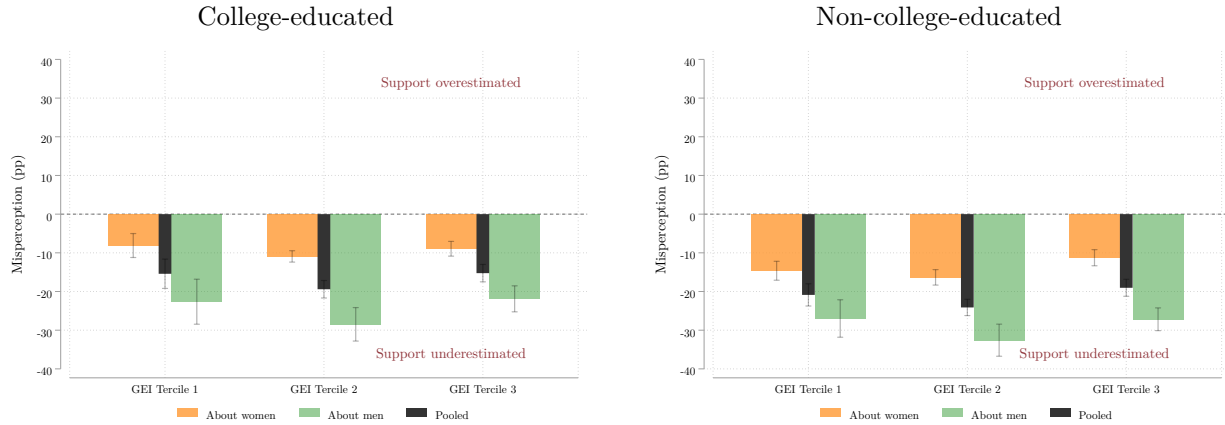
Figure A.30: Misperceptions of Individual Attitudes – Interaction Effects with Gender of Respondent



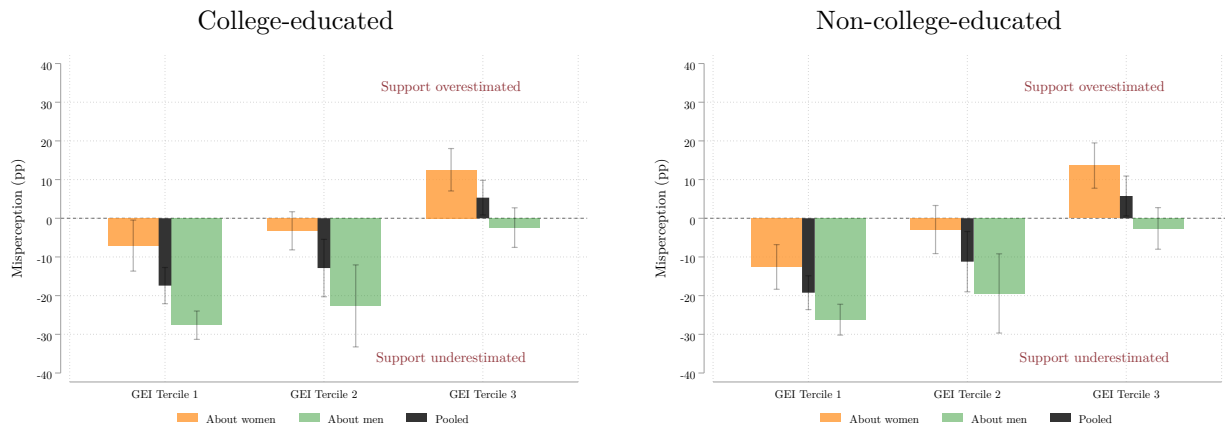
Notes: This figure shows regression coefficients, each from a different specification. Dependent variables are misperceptions about support (perceived minus actual support) for *freedom to work* (gray) and *affirmative action* (blue). All regressions include binary dummies for the respondent's gender and additional background characteristics (secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, internet access) and country fixed effects. In addition, each regression includes *one* of the interaction terms on the vertical axis. The coefficient on the interaction is shown, along with 95% confidence intervals. We estimate each model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). Standard errors are clustered at the country level. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Figure A.31: Misperceptions by Education Level, by Tercile of the GEI

(a) Freedom to Work



(b) Affirmative Action



Notes: Average misperceptions about support for *freedom to work* and *affirmative action* conditional on how gender-equal a given country is on a global spectrum, as measured by a gender equality index (GEI). The GEI increases with the equality between women and men. Misperceptions are defined as the difference between a respondent's perception of the support for the policy in their country and the actual support in their country. A positive (negative) value indicates that support is overestimated (underestimated). Results are reported separately for college-educated and non-college-educated respondents. Data: Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.9: Misperceptions about Support – All Controls

	Misperceptions about Support for Freedom to Work				Misperceptions about Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Female	-0.358 (0.299)	1.040* (0.547)	-1.727*** (0.541)	-0.128 (0.356)	-2.694*** (0.470)	-1.364 (0.802)	-3.424*** (0.911)	-3.101*** (0.698)
Secondary Education	2.585*** (0.684)	3.443** (1.225)	2.956*** (0.857)	0.585 (0.689)	0.519 (0.586)	0.711 (0.914)	0.937 (1.054)	-0.947 (0.889)
College Education	4.281*** (0.796)	5.159*** (1.683)	5.645*** (0.946)	1.688* (0.851)	-2.282*** (0.732)	-1.925 (1.325)	-2.308 (1.465)	-3.004** (1.070)
High Income	1.342*** (0.309)	1.631** (0.561)	1.429** (0.532)	0.915 (0.546)	-0.920** (0.344)	0.555 (0.508)	-1.406** (0.643)	-1.522*** (0.480)
Employed	0.836** (0.326)	0.363 (0.783)	0.809 (0.544)	1.079** (0.408)	-0.748*** (0.246)	-0.176 (0.504)	-0.770* (0.420)	-0.654 (0.391)
Age < 40	0.600* (0.352)	-0.385 (0.676)	-0.0439 (0.615)	1.573*** (0.511)	-0.319 (0.361)	0.599 (0.682)	0.251 (0.474)	-1.208* (0.590)
Urban	0.917*** (0.301)	2.015*** (0.556)	0.754 (0.572)	0.0337 (0.339)	-0.191 (0.301)	0.466 (0.547)	-0.352 (0.580)	-0.500 (0.408)
Internet Access	2.034*** (0.530)	1.699** (0.638)	1.205 (1.156)	3.717*** (1.167)	1.688** (0.674)	1.933* (1.077)	0.415 (0.789)	1.393 (0.956)
Women Treated with Respect	2.570*** (0.472)	1.714* (0.803)	3.034*** (0.897)	3.048*** (0.638)	0.911*** (0.299)	1.057** (0.454)	0.830 (0.662)	0.958* (0.490)
Good Place for Immigrants	1.043*** (0.285)	0.329 (0.451)	1.067* (0.549)	1.634*** (0.478)	0.100 (0.302)	-0.0977 (0.497)	0.650 (0.593)	-0.279 (0.445)
Confidence in Government	-0.380 (0.427)	-0.121 (0.831)	-1.982*** (0.643)	0.811 (0.478)	0.126 (0.372)	1.538* (0.801)	-0.631 (0.514)	-0.210 (0.543)
Satisfied with Personal Freedom	1.080** (0.440)	0.779 (0.794)	1.650** (0.748)	0.855 (0.781)	1.224*** (0.391)	1.262* (0.678)	1.531* (0.751)	0.819 (0.651)
Subjective Well-Being	0.264** (0.110)	0.213 (0.214)	0.200 (0.133)	0.303 (0.187)	0.342*** (0.127)	0.648*** (0.201)	0.311* (0.159)	-0.0930 (0.195)
Satisfied with Standard of Living	-1.553*** (0.390)	-1.262 (0.759)	-2.161*** (0.690)	-1.403** (0.533)	-0.192 (0.323)	0.0733 (0.370)	-0.613 (0.670)	0.179 (0.715)
Household Income Difficulty (1–4; higher is worse)	-0.210 (0.273)	0.311 (0.278)	-0.613 (0.541)	-0.403 (0.551)	0.242 (0.260)	0.0434 (0.276)	0.318 (0.687)	0.313 (0.426)
Donated Money	0.174 (0.301)	0.445 (0.826)	-0.257 (0.279)	0.380 (0.411)	-0.194 (0.340)	0.277 (0.719)	-0.218 (0.663)	-0.475 (0.436)
Volunteered Time	-0.142 (0.327)	0.401 (0.763)	-0.533 (0.426)	-0.0942 (0.411)	-0.400 (0.307)	-1.012 (0.609)	0.0149 (0.561)	-0.296 (0.432)
Helped Stranger	-0.0680 (0.270)	0.511 (0.584)	-0.270 (0.498)	-0.177 (0.419)	0.436 (0.295)	1.304** (0.589)	0.654 (0.494)	-0.314 (0.431)
Has Children Under 15	-0.261 (0.338)	-0.765 (0.791)	-0.322 (0.602)	0.111 (0.389)	-0.259 (0.348)	-0.0548 (0.540)	0.00886 (0.733)	-0.928** (0.432)
Landline	-0.0611 (0.460)	0.157 (1.380)	0.0957 (0.975)	-0.279 (0.535)	-0.579 (0.353)	0.381 (1.347)	-0.273 (0.394)	-1.201** (0.537)
Mobile Phone	1.038 (0.733)	1.852 (1.322)	1.221 (1.996)	0.0146 (0.960)	-1.161 (0.724)	-1.418* (0.696)	1.062 (2.365)	-1.658 (1.168)
Household Size	0.0940 (0.0722)	0.106 (0.100)	0.0874 (0.144)	0.114 (0.164)	-0.0633 (0.0784)	0.0490 (0.110)	-0.170 (0.154)	0.0875 (0.143)
No Partner/Spouse	-0.131 (0.277)	0.250 (0.597)	0.163 (0.465)	-0.501 (0.426)	0.436 (0.306)	-0.317 (0.428)	0.851 (0.596)	0.696 (0.557)
Mean of Dependent Variable	-20.3	-21.0	-23.3	-17.5	-8.8	-19.9	-16.2	5.4
Observations	20,481	6,016	6,398	8,067	20,135	6,027	6,184	7,924
Adj. R ²	0.108	0.105	0.075	0.100	0.425	0.142	0.351	0.268

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is individual misperceptions of support (averaged across genders) for the indicated policy. The independent variables are dummies for characteristics of the respondent, including additional variables collected by Gallup. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All regressions include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Data: Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.10: Misperceptions about Difference in Support among Women and Men

	Misperceptions about Difference in Support for Freedom to Work				Misperceptions about Difference in Support for Affirmative Action			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Female	4.606*** (0.557)	7.399*** (1.016)	5.080*** (0.859)	1.597*** (0.387)	6.272*** (0.586)	7.844*** (0.904)	6.532*** (1.157)	4.325*** (0.903)
Secondary Education	2.568*** (0.500)	2.669*** (0.731)	2.435** (0.946)	2.000* (1.053)	2.233*** (0.691)	2.436** (1.009)	2.739** (1.078)	-0.369 (1.617)
College Education	2.477*** (0.704)	3.818*** (0.989)	2.051 (1.302)	1.371 (1.538)	3.834*** (0.839)	5.084*** (1.132)	5.162*** (1.624)	-0.0836 (1.583)
High Income	0.0217 (0.363)	0.181 (0.595)	0.538 (0.691)	-0.721 (0.541)	0.834* (0.455)	0.842 (0.740)	1.329 (0.854)	0.131 (0.728)
Employed	-0.367 (0.416)	0.981 (1.089)	-0.493 (0.564)	-0.629 (0.553)	1.100** (0.476)	1.231 (0.873)	-0.0911 (0.805)	2.513*** (0.791)
Age < 40	1.842*** (0.510)	2.162* (1.243)	2.737*** (0.881)	0.237 (0.434)	1.676*** (0.447)	0.670 (0.835)	2.040** (0.732)	1.727** (0.630)
Urban	-0.432 (0.351)	-0.484 (0.812)	-0.731 (0.507)	-0.0874 (0.490)	0.532 (0.480)	1.056 (0.854)	0.949 (0.928)	-0.662 (0.547)
Internet Access	2.221*** (0.566)	1.849* (0.885)	3.425*** (1.029)	1.407 (1.192)	3.596*** (0.719)	3.299*** (0.971)	4.105*** (1.381)	3.432** (1.506)
Mean of Dependent Variable	15.1	13.1	16.9	15.2	16.7	15.8	18.6	15.5
Observations	29,955	9,662	10,681	9,612	29,089	9,583	10,167	9,339
Adj. R ²	0.105	0.114	0.109	0.068	0.110	0.095	0.110	0.126

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is the difference in individual perceptions about support among women and men minus the difference in actual support among women and men. The independent variables are dummies for characteristics of the respondent, specifically: being female, secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, and having internet access. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All regressions include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.11: Misperceptions about Support for Freedom to work among Men and Women

	Misperceptions about Men				Misperceptions about Women			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Female	-2.902*** (0.363)	-3.629*** (0.776)	-3.780*** (0.554)	-1.477*** (0.439)	1.699*** (0.423)	3.881*** (0.645)	1.180 (0.808)	0.128 (0.284)
Secondary Education	1.239** (0.514)	1.332* (0.718)	2.035** (0.806)	-0.0979 (1.189)	3.636*** (0.520)	3.965*** (0.741)	4.045*** (0.977)	1.890*** (0.587)
College Education	3.281*** (0.710)	2.285 (1.348)	5.148*** (0.916)	1.767 (1.550)	5.609*** (0.658)	5.895*** (1.130)	6.926*** (1.139)	3.173*** (0.665)
High Income	1.262*** (0.368)	1.398** (0.558)	0.781 (0.661)	1.570** (0.649)	1.237*** (0.217)	1.457*** (0.437)	1.302*** (0.278)	0.830* (0.413)
Employed	1.158*** (0.366)	-0.0167 (0.723)	1.074** (0.496)	1.709*** (0.593)	0.804** (0.335)	1.118 (0.778)	0.571 (0.582)	1.015** (0.415)
Age < 40	-1.041* (0.522)	-1.786* (1.021)	-2.458*** (0.800)	1.309 (0.768)	0.840** (0.330)	0.475 (0.696)	0.349 (0.563)	1.509*** (0.431)
Urban	1.462*** (0.330)	2.221*** (0.598)	1.681*** (0.576)	0.339 (0.482)	1.007*** (0.273)	1.886*** (0.575)	0.811** (0.343)	0.198 (0.367)
Internet Access	1.593*** (0.534)	1.251* (0.695)	0.740 (0.964)	4.264*** (1.328)	3.680*** (0.571)	3.045*** (0.808)	4.066*** (1.162)	5.214*** (1.160)
Mean of Dependent Variable	-27.3	-25.4	-30.5	-25.7	-12.3	-12.4	-13.7	-10.5
Observations	30,378	9,806	10,904	9,668	30,592	9,857	11,023	9,712
Adj. R ²	0.141	0.165	0.129	0.093	0.064	0.063	0.050	0.084

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are individual misperceptions of support for *Freedom to Work* about the target gender. The independent variables are dummies for characteristics of the respondent, specifically: being female, secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, and having internet access. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All regressions include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.12: Misperceptions about Support for Affirmative Action among Men and Women

	Misperceptions about Men				Misperceptions about Women			
	(1) All	(2) GEI-1	(3) GEI-2	(4) GEI-3	(5) All	(6) GEI-1	(7) GEI-2	(8) GEI-3
Female	-6.205*** (0.522)	-5.892*** (1.020)	-7.105*** (0.830)	-5.399*** (0.964)	0.131 (0.502)	2.013** (0.956)	-0.477 (0.762)	-1.083 (0.651)
Secondary Education	-1.203 (0.783)	-0.190 (0.836)	-2.233 (1.346)	-1.638 (1.137)	1.010 (0.652)	2.023** (0.784)	0.680 (1.028)	-2.000 (1.242)
College Education	-4.752*** (0.949)	-3.794*** (1.237)	-6.799*** (1.653)	-3.994*** (1.356)	-0.896 (0.829)	1.101 (0.901)	-1.312 (1.621)	-4.134*** (1.396)
High Income	-0.898** (0.399)	0.540 (0.619)	-1.524** (0.596)	-1.570** (0.625)	-0.0565 (0.371)	1.373** (0.560)	-0.267 (0.616)	-1.382** (0.489)
Employed	-1.047*** (0.352)	-0.558 (0.572)	-0.419 (0.624)	-1.901*** (0.530)	0.159 (0.327)	0.757 (0.597)	-0.287 (0.582)	0.669 (0.549)
Age < 40	-1.110** (0.517)	0.393 (0.514)	-1.519 (0.932)	-1.594* (0.825)	0.610 (0.391)	0.995 (0.789)	0.630 (0.589)	0.190 (0.652)
Urban	-0.419 (0.413)	-0.325 (0.814)	-0.905 (0.653)	0.235 (0.538)	0.134 (0.301)	0.759 (0.558)	0.135 (0.546)	-0.524 (0.392)
Internet Access	-1.032** (0.505)	-0.630 (0.635)	-2.087* (1.060)	-1.262 (1.060)	2.486*** (0.726)	2.675** (1.175)	1.883* (0.994)	1.954* (1.055)
Mean of Dependent Variable	-17.4	-26.7	-21.7	-3.1	-0.9	-11.1	-3.4	12.4
Observations	29,586	9,724	10,425	9,437	29,787	9,837	10,496	9,454
Adj. R ²	0.321	0.104	0.358	0.212	0.297	0.171	0.194	0.254

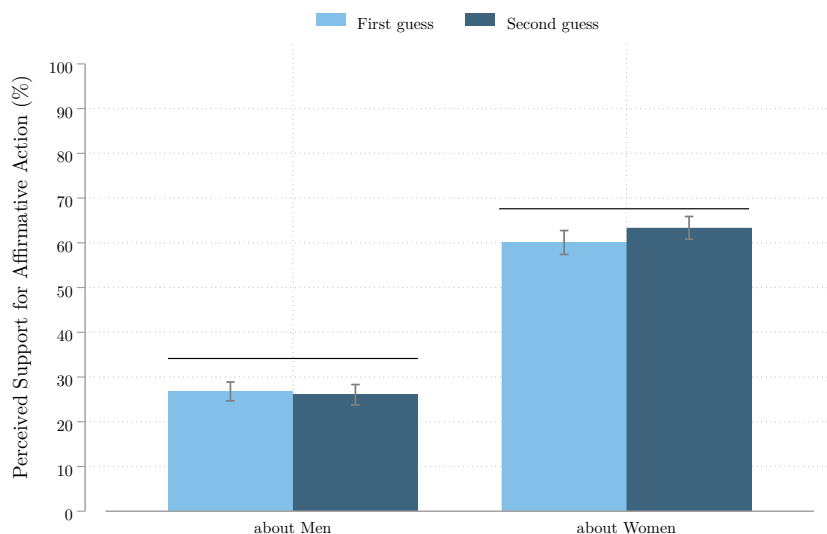
Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. Dependent variables are individual misperceptions of support for *Affirmative Action* about the target gender. The independent variables are dummies for characteristics of the respondent, specifically: being female, secondary education, college education, being in the top two income quintiles of one's country, being employed, being under the age of 40, living in an urban/suburban area, and having internet access. We estimate the model within each tercile of the Gender Equality Index (GEI). All regressions include country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

B.4 Gender stereotyping: Robustness to Order Effects

Order effects are a concern when perceptions about men and women are elicited separately. If respondents are first asked about one gender—say, men—they may then form their perceptions about the other gender relative to that initial benchmark, focusing on the *difference* between the two groups. In such cases, only the first question would yield an uncontaminated measure.

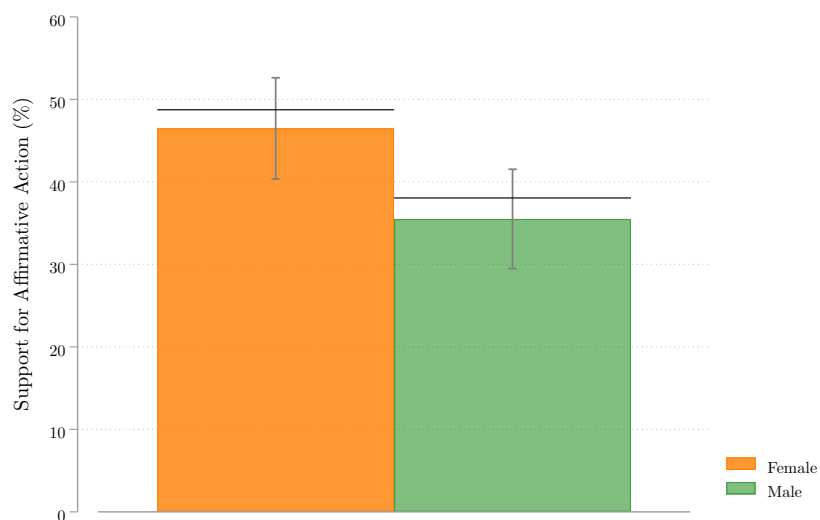
In our design, however, the order in which perception questions were asked by gender was randomized. As Gallup did not store the realized order for each respondent, however, we provide an additional validation to assess whether eliciting second-order beliefs separately for men and women induces order-driven stereotypical responses. We conducted an exact replication of the study in the U.S. in November 2023, eliciting support for and perceptions of affirmative action, and targeted the same sample size as in the Gallup World Poll 2020 data (final samples: $N = 486$ in Gallup World Poll 2020 and $N = 501$ in the replication). As shown in Figure A.32, the order in which perceptions of men’s and women’s views are asked does not meaningfully affect responses. Interestingly, we also note that the support for affirmative action remained stable since the original survey from 2020, as shown in Figure A.33.

Figure A.32: Order Effects Experiment – Perceived Support for Affirmative Action



Notes: The figure shows data from the exact replication study fielded in November 2023. All participants were asked questions about perceived support among both target genders, but the order of target genders was randomized. The light (dark) bars represent perceived support among the target gender when this gender is asked about first (second). T-test for difference between first and second guess: $p = 0.64$ (about Men); $p = 0.08$ (about Women). The added horizontal lines indicate perceptions of support for the U.S., as measured in the Gallup World Poll 2020. *Data:* Experimental data and Gallup World Poll 2020.

Figure A.33: Order Effects Experiment – Support for Affirmative Action (FOB)



Notes: The figure shows data from the exact replication study fielded in November 2023. The percentage of women and men supporting gender-based affirmative action is shown in orange and green, respectively. The added horizontal lines indicate the levels of support as measured in the Gallup World Poll 2020. *Data:* Experimental data and Gallup World Poll 2020.

B.5 Out-of-Sample Validation and Quantifying Mechanisms: Further Details

We here provide further details on the approach used to validate the framework out of sample and to quantify the relative importance of the different mechanisms.

In this analysis, we augment Equation 3 by allowing false consensus to interact with the target gender and the gender of the respondent:

$$\begin{aligned}
 SOB_{ic}^g - \mathbb{E}[FOB_g] = & \gamma_1 FOB_i \times (\text{Gender of respondent is } g)_i \\
 & + \gamma_2 FOB_i \times (\text{Gender of respondent is } -g)_i + \lambda (50\% - \mathbb{E}[FOB_g]) \\
 & + \theta (\mathbb{E}[FOB_g] - \mathbb{E}[FOB_{-g}]) + \alpha_w (\text{Target } g \text{ is female})_i + \alpha_m (\text{Target } g \text{ is male})_i \\
 & + \beta (\text{Gender of respondent is } g)_i + u_{ic}^g.
 \end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

In Table A.13, we report the estimated model based on the full data set. In line with the main analysis, the estimates indicate a substantial degree of minority overweighting, a systematic but relatively small degree of false consensus, and gender stereotyping driven primarily by a general perception that women are more supportive of the policy than men, with limited relevance of the actual gender difference.

For the out-of-sample validation, we split the individual-level dataset in half by randomly drawing 10 countries within each tercile of the GEI and estimating Equation 5 on the selected 30 countries.³² We then use the resulting parameter estimates to predict misperceptions in the held-out half of the sample (the remaining 30 countries). The idea is that if the mechanisms driving misperceptions are truly common across countries—despite substantial cultural, economic, and institutional heterogeneity—the predicted misperceptions not based on the held-out countries should closely resemble the actual misperceptions observed in the data.

We first examine how closely the framework can reproduce the global quantitative patterns—the stylized facts—out of sample, by tercile of gender equality. In Figure A.21 and Figure A.22, we show that the out-of-sample predictions match the data remarkably well, falling within the original 95 percent confidence intervals of the observed means (see Table A.14 and Table A.15 for the full set of estimates). The predictions lie within the confidence intervals in all cases except for freedom to work in the highest tercile of gender equality, where cross-country variation in actual gender norms is smallest. Overall, these results imply that, despite substantial cultural, economic, and institutional heterogeneity across countries, our simple framework with constant parameters can replicate the stylized facts in Figure 4 and Figure 5 both qualitatively and quantitatively *outside* the estimation sample.

Second, to quantify the statistical contribution of each channel, we compute counterfactual

³²The estimates are not sensitive to a particular random split of estimation versus hold-out sample. To see this, in Figure A.34, we plot the standard deviations in estimates across 100 random draws and show that the values are very similar across draws.

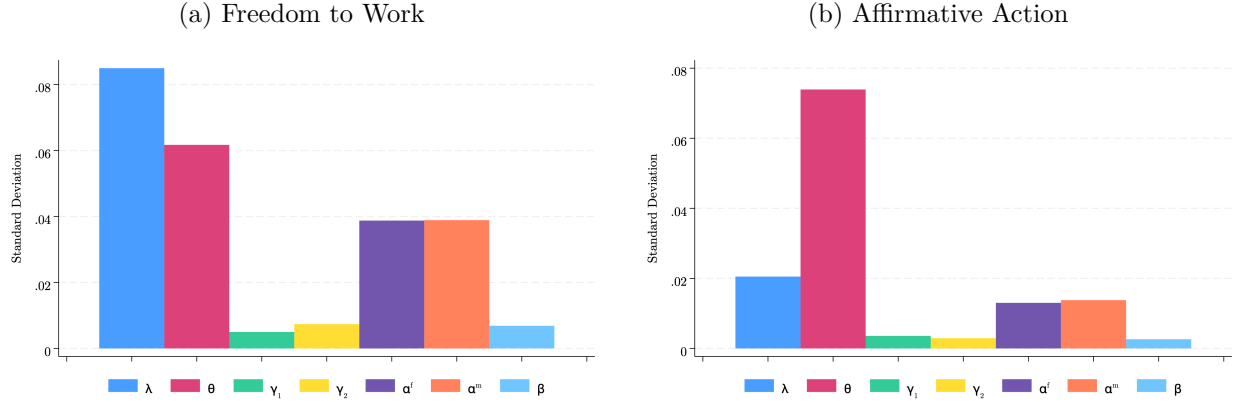
Table A.13: Regression analysis: Augmented model

	Freedom to Work	Affirmative Action
	(1)	(2)
λ	0.436*** (0.069)	0.811*** (0.020)
θ	0.017 (0.050)	0.113 (0.071)
γ_1	0.071*** (0.005)	0.053*** (0.003)
γ_2	0.056*** (0.007)	0.025*** (0.003)
α^w	0.011 (0.031)	0.136*** (0.012)
α^m	-0.166*** (0.030)	-0.105*** (0.014)
β	0.012* (0.007)	0.025*** (0.003)
$\alpha^w - \alpha^m$	0.177*** (0.012)	0.241*** (0.023)
Observations	62,637	59,908
Adj. R ²	0.479	0.396

Notes: This table shows coefficient estimates of equation 5. The outcome is misperception of support. The data is stacked to the level of one observation per respondent and target gender. Standard errors are clustered at country level. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

misperceptions by removing each mechanism from the predictions and plotting the implied average misperceptions. In particular, we remove minority overweighting by setting $\lambda = 0$, false consensus by setting $\gamma_1 = \gamma_2 = 0$, and gender stereotyping both by setting $\alpha^m = \alpha^w = \frac{\alpha^m + \alpha^w}{2}$ and by setting $\theta = 0$. Consistent with our prior findings, false consensus plays only a limited role in shaping aggregate misperceptions: it is present and typically attenuates misperceptions rather than exacerbating them, but it is not quantitatively important and does not contribute to the stylized facts. Minority overweighting and gender stereotyping each contribute meaningfully to aggregate misperceptions—by gender, pooled, and across GEI terciles. On average, minority overweighting leads to underestimation of support for freedom to work in all countries and underestimation of support for affirmative action in low GEI countries, while generating overestimation of support for

Figure A.34: Standard Deviations of Framework Coefficients Under Different Sampling Draws



Notes: This figure shows the standard deviations of the coefficients for the different mechanisms across 100 samples of the data – for *Freedom to Work* (left panel) and *Affirmative Action* (right panel). These are different, random samples without replacement of thirty countries out of the 60 surveyed ones; ten per each GEI tercile. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020.

affirmative action in high GEI countries. Gender stereotyping leads to systematic overestimation of women’s support and underestimation of men’s support for both policies. Importantly, however, no single mechanism can quantitatively account for the global patterns of misperceptions. In contrast, when *both* minority overweighting and gender stereotyping are jointly shut down, misperceptions almost entirely disappear: average absolute misperceptions fall sharply and become single-digit percentages across all countries and both policy domains.

In sum, the simple framework, the out-of-sample validation, and the mechanism quantification jointly indicate that two forces—minority overweighting and gender stereotyping—quantitatively account for the misperceptions of gender norms around the world for both policy dimensions. False consensus, while widespread, plays only a limited role in shaping aggregate misperceptions.

Table A.14: Quantitative Assessment of Mechanisms – Freedom to Work

	Target Men			Target Women			Target Pooled		
	GEI-1	GEI-2	GEI-3	GEI-1	GEI-2	GEI-3	GEI-1	GEI-2	GEI-3
Observed mean	-0.26	-0.30	-0.26	-0.12	-0.14	-0.10	-0.19	-0.22	-0.18
Observed SD	0.28	0.26	0.21	0.24	0.21	0.16	0.21	0.18	0.16
Prediction	-0.26	-0.30	-0.32	-0.10	-0.13	-0.14	-0.18	-0.22	-0.23
w/o FC	-0.30	-0.36	-0.37	-0.14	-0.19	-0.19	-0.22	-0.27	-0.28
w/o MO	-0.14	-0.12	-0.11	0.07	0.08	0.07	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02
w/o GS	-0.15	-0.21	-0.23	-0.21	-0.23	-0.23	-0.18	-0.22	-0.23
w/o MO, FC	-0.18	-0.17	-0.17	0.03	0.02	0.02	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07
w/o FC, GS	-0.20	-0.26	-0.28	-0.25	-0.28	-0.28	-0.22	-0.27	-0.28
w/o GS, MO	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02
w/o GS, MO, FC	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07

Notes: This table reports observed and model-predicted mean misperceptions about support for *Freedom to Work*, by target group and GEI tercile. Misperception is defined as perceived support minus actual support for the corresponding target group. Entries are proportions: -0.26 , for example, denotes an average underestimation of 26 percentage points. “Observed mean” and “Observed SD” are calculated across respondents within cells defined by target group and GEI tercile. The remaining rows show predicted values based on equation 5, with the coefficients on False Consensus (FC), Minority Overweighting (MO), and Gender Stereotyping (GS) successively set to 0 as indicated. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020, Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

Table A.15: Quantitative Assessment of Mechanisms – Affirmative Action

	Target Men			Target Women			Target Pooled		
	GEI-1	GEI-2	GEI-3	GEI-1	GEI-2	GEI-3	GEI-1	GEI-2	GEI-3
Observed mean	-0.27	-0.22	-0.03	-0.11	-0.03	0.13	-0.19	-0.13	0.05
Observed SD	0.28	0.31	0.27	0.27	0.26	0.25	0.21	0.23	0.21
Prediction	-0.29	-0.21	-0.10	-0.11	-0.02	0.08	-0.20	-0.11	-0.01
w/o FC	-0.31	-0.22	-0.10	-0.13	-0.03	0.08	-0.22	-0.12	-0.01
w/o MO	-0.10	-0.11	-0.12	0.20	0.18	0.18	0.05	0.04	0.03
w/o GS	-0.14	-0.06	0.05	-0.25	-0.16	-0.06	-0.20	-0.11	-0.01
w/o MO, FC	-0.12	-0.12	-0.12	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.03	0.03	0.03
w/o FC, GS	-0.17	-0.07	0.05	-0.28	-0.18	-0.07	-0.22	-0.12	-0.01
w/o GS, MO	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.03
w/o GS, MO, FC	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03

Notes: This table reports observed and model-predicted mean misperceptions about support for *Affirmative Action*, by target group and GEI tercile. Misperception is defined as perceived support minus actual support for the corresponding target group. Entries are proportions: -0.27 , for example, denotes an average underestimation of 27 percentage points. “Observed mean” and “Observed SD” are calculated across respondents within cells defined by target group and GEI tercile. The remaining rows show predicted values based on equation 5, with the coefficients on False Consensus (FC), Minority Overweighting (MO), and Gender Stereotyping (GS) successively set to 0 as indicated. *Data:* Gallup World Poll 2020. Gender Equality Index based on [UNDP \(2022\)](#).

B.6 Relevance of National-Level Perceptions for Reference Group

Our global survey measures gender norms at the national level. However, the extensive literature on social influence—and in particular social image concerns—shows that perceptions about local peers causally influence a wide range of behaviors (Bursztyn and Jensen, 2017). In this sense, co-nationals may not always constitute the relevant *reference network* (Bicchieri, 2016). A key question, therefore, is whether national-level perceptions of gender norms also matter for understanding local-level perceptions, which may more closely reflect individuals’ actual reference groups. To examine this, we complemented the global study with an incentivized online experiment designed to study the relationship between national-level and local-level perceptions. We focused on this relationship for the affirmative action policy in a country with relatively high gender equality (the U.S.), since evidence already exists on how national-level perceptions affect local-level perceptions for the freedom-to-work policy in a country with low gender equality (Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020).

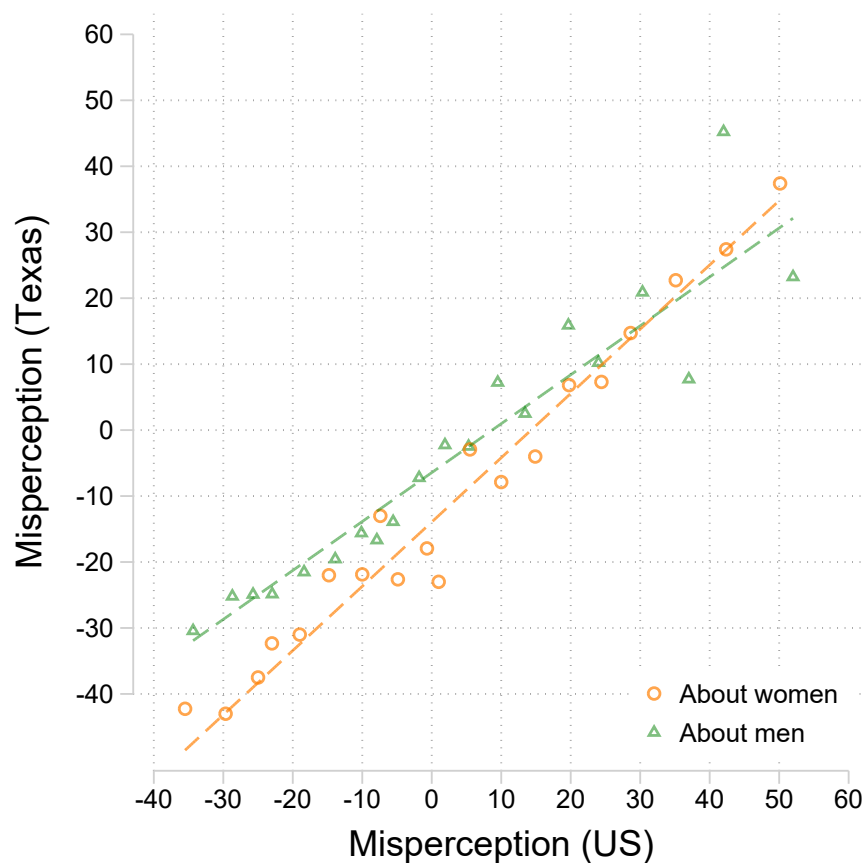
The study was implemented online with 501 participants from the state of Texas in the U.S., using the survey platform Prolific.³³ Participants were first asked whether they supported affirmative action (FOB), using the same wording as in the global study. We then conducted an incentivized elicitation of their perception of support for affirmative action at the national level in the U.S. (SOB-national). Next, participants were randomized either into a treatment group that received information about the actual national support for affirmative action or into a control group that did not receive any information.

We find the same pattern of misperception in the experiment as in the global survey.³⁴ Most importantly, the experiment provides strong evidence that national-level misperceptions play a major role in shaping local-level misperceptions. As shown in Figure A.36, correcting misperceptions at the national level causes a significant shift in local-level perceptions, both at the state level and among co-workers. In particular, when participants learn that support among men is about 11 pp higher than they believed at the national level, they increase their belief about support among men at the state level and among male co-workers by almost 8 pp. Similarly, when they learn that support among women is about 18 pp lower than they believed at the national level, they decrease their belief about support among women at the state level by about 8 pp and among female co-workers by about 6 pp. As a consequence, treated participants end the experiment with perceptions of affirmative action support in their own state that are close to correct. In other words, eliminating misperceptions at the national level almost fully eliminates misperceptions at

³³See Figure A.40 for an overview of the experimental design and Table A.19 for detailed instructions. We pre-registered the experiment in the AEA RCT Registry (#0010130).

³⁴On average, the participants in the experiment underestimate men’s support and overestimate women’s support for affirmative action both at the national and the state level. We also find that misperceptions at the state level are strongly correlated with misperceptions at the national level, with a raw correlation of about 0.8 for both women and men (see Figure A.35).

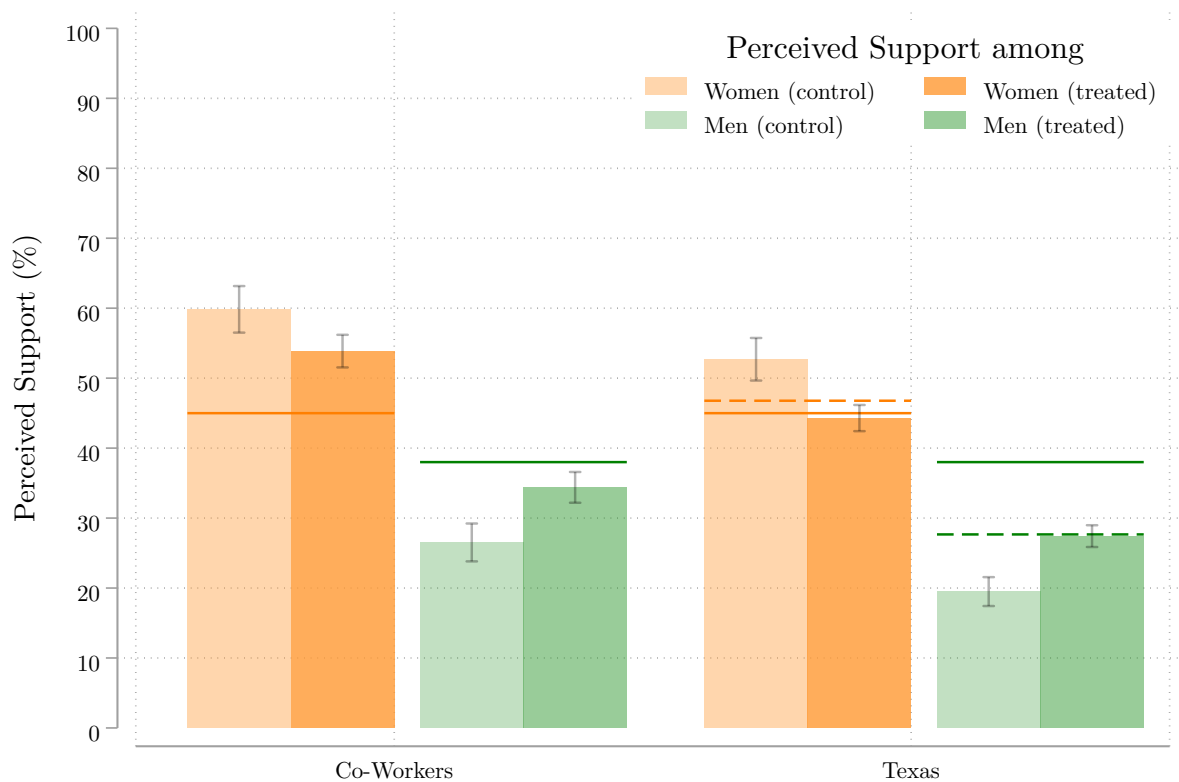
Figure A.35: Misperceptions about the Country Correlate with those about Local Groups



Notes: This figure plots misperceptions about support (pp) for *Affirmative Action* among women (orange) and men (green) in Texas against those about support in the U.S. We divide the data into 20 quantile bins separately by target gender, with approximately 12–13 observations per bin. Using the unbinned data, we find Pearson’s correlation coefficient to be equal to 0.78 (men) and 0.83 (women). *Data:* Experimental data, control group.

the local level. The experiment indicates that national-level misperceptions may not only directly shape beliefs, but may also indirectly influence beliefs about local norms.

Figure A.36: Effect of Information about National Support on Perceptions of Local Support



Notes: This figure shows perceived support for *Affirmative Action* among different target groups. The bars indicate average perceived support among women (orange) and men (green) as the target group. The darker-shaded bars represent beliefs of the treatment group, which received information about the actual national level of support, while the light-shaded bars represent the control group which did not receive information. The solid orange (green) horizontal lines indicate actual support among women (men) in the U.S., 45% and 38%, respectively. The dashed orange (green) horizontal lines indicate actual support among women (men) in Texas, as measured in the experiment, around 47% and 28%, respectively. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. *Data:* Experimental data.

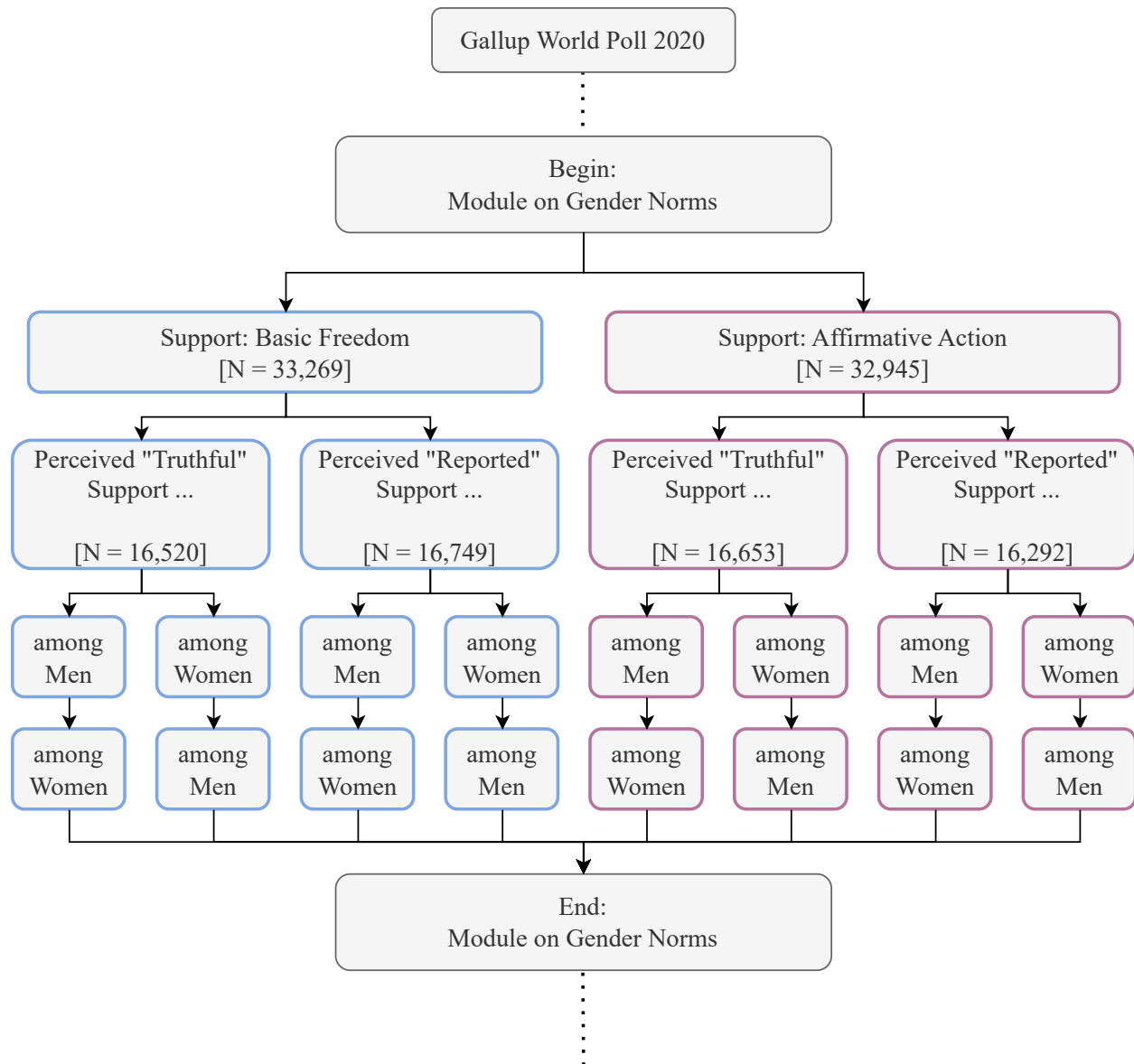
Table A.16: Effect of Information about National Support on Perceptions of Local Support

	Texas		Co-workers	
	(1) Male	(2) Female	(3) Male	(4) Female
Info treatment	7.927 (1.314)	-8.403 (1.814)	7.871 (1.772)	-5.970 (2.063)
Constant	19.49 (1.049)	52.70 (1.545)	26.52 (1.375)	59.83 (1.690)
Mean of Dependent Variable	23.511	48.439	30.493	56.826
Observations	499	499	499	500
Adj. R^2	0.067	0.040	0.036	0.015

Notes: This table shows estimates from OLS regressions. The dependent variable is perceived support for *Affirmative Action* among the indicated target group. The independent variable is a dummy indicating whether subjects received information about the levels of support for affirmative action in the U.S. (38% among men and 45% among women). Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Data:* Experimental data.

C.1 Global Study

Figure A.37: Survey Design: Global Study



Notes: The figure illustrates the survey design of our module in the Gallup World Poll 2020. The resulting variables of interest are: $FOB_{ip} \in \{0, 1\}$ and $SOB_{ip}^g \in [0, 1]$ for each policy issue $p \in \{\text{Freedom to Work, Affirmative Action}\}$, where i indexes respondents and g denotes the target gender. For our measure of misperceptions, we subtract actual support for the relevant target group, $\mathbb{E}[FOB_{gp}]$, from individual perceived support, SOB_{ip}^g .

Table A.17: Survey Details: Global Study (Details)

Block	Question
Support: Basic Freedom	Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. Women should have the freedom to work outside of the home.
Support: Affirmative Action	Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.
Freedom to Work: Perceived "Actual" Support among Men	We will ask the previous question to 100 random MEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, how many of the men will say that they agree with the following statement? Women should have the freedom to work outside of the home.
Freedom to Work: Perceived "Truthful" Support among Men	We will ask the previous question to 100 random MEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, regardless of what they will say to us, how many of the men do you think will truly agree with the following statement? Women should have the freedom to work outside of the home.
Freedom to Work: Perceived "Actual" Support among Women	We will ask the previous question to 100 random WOMEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, how many of the women will say that they agree with the following statement? Women should have the freedom to work outside of the home.
Affirmative Action: Perceived "Actual" Support among Men	We will ask the previous question to 100 random MEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, how many of the men will say that they agree with the following statement? The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.
Freedom to Work: Perceived "Truthful" Support among Women	We will ask the previous question to 100 random WOMEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, regardless of what they will say to us, how many of the women do you think will truly agree with the following statement? Women should have the freedom to work outside of the home.
Affirmative Action: Perceived "Truthful" Support among Men	We will ask the previous question to 100 random MEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, regardless of what they will say to us, how many of the men do you think will truly agree with the following statement? The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

Affirmative Action: Perceived "Actual" Support among Women	We will ask the previous question to 100 random WOMEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, how many of the women will say that they agree with the following statement? The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.
Affirmative Action: Perceived "Truthful" Support among Women	We will ask the previous question to 100 random WOMEN in [COUNTRY]. If you had to guess, regardless of what they will say to us, how many of the women do you think will truly agree with the following statement? The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

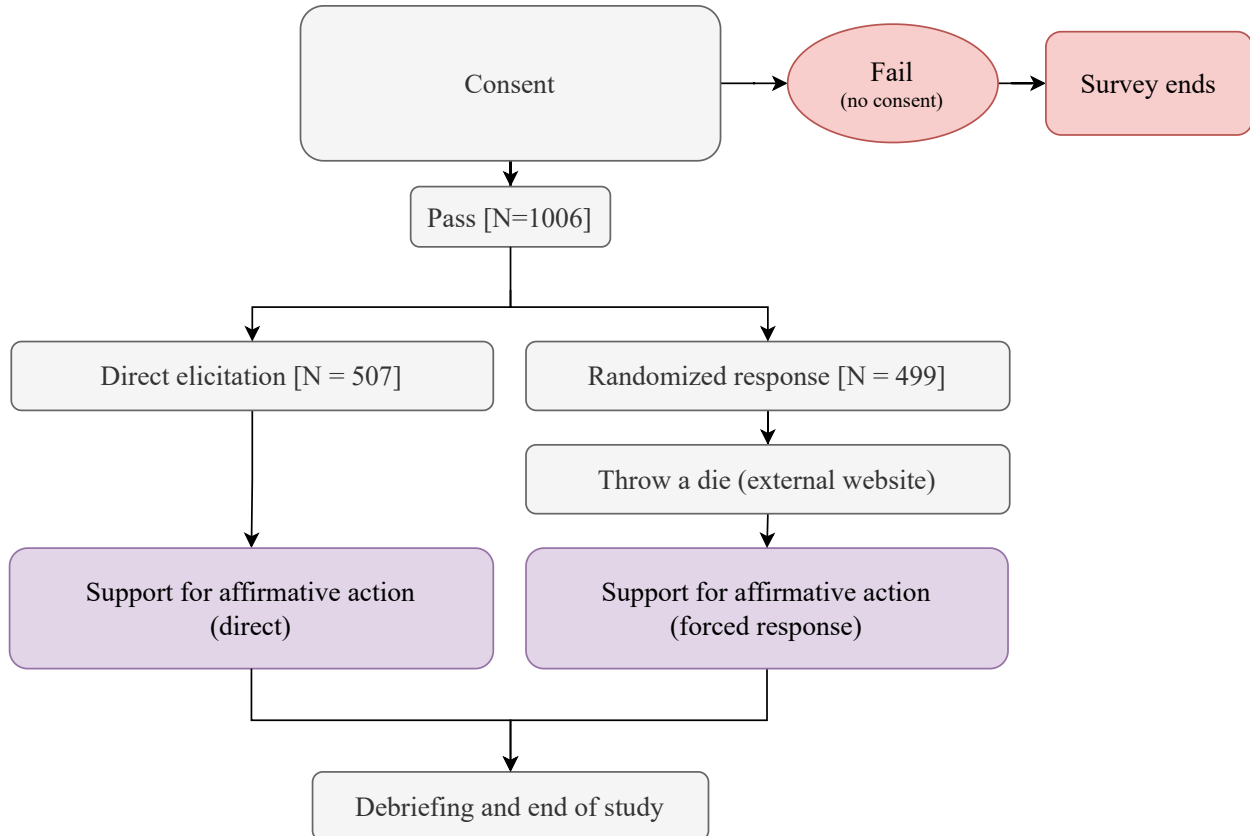
Data Coding Errors. We encounter a total of 19 data points with coding errors, which we remove from the original data set of 66,233 observations.

Sampling. In countries where interviews were conducted by phone, sampling was done either by random digit dialing (RDD) or using a nationally representative list of phone numbers. In most countries, a dual sampling frame including both landline and mobile numbers was used, while in some countries the sampling frame consisted of mobile phones only. One person was interviewed per sampled household. For landline calls, the interviewee was selected from among eligible household members aged 15 or older either by the "next birthday" method or by a random selection implemented in the interviewing program. Mobile phone users were interviewed directly. If the selected household member was not available, interviewers made several call attempts before moving on to another household.

In the two countries where interviews were conducted face-to-face—India and Pakistan—sampling units were constructed by stratifying along population weights or by random sampling at the ward or village level. Local enumerators then used a "random route" procedure to select a household. The respondent was selected from a list of household members using a computer program, and if the selected individual was unavailable, enumerators made repeated attempts to reach them before selecting another household.

C.2 Direct and Indirect Elicitation

Figure A.38: Experimental Design: Direct and Indirect Elicitation

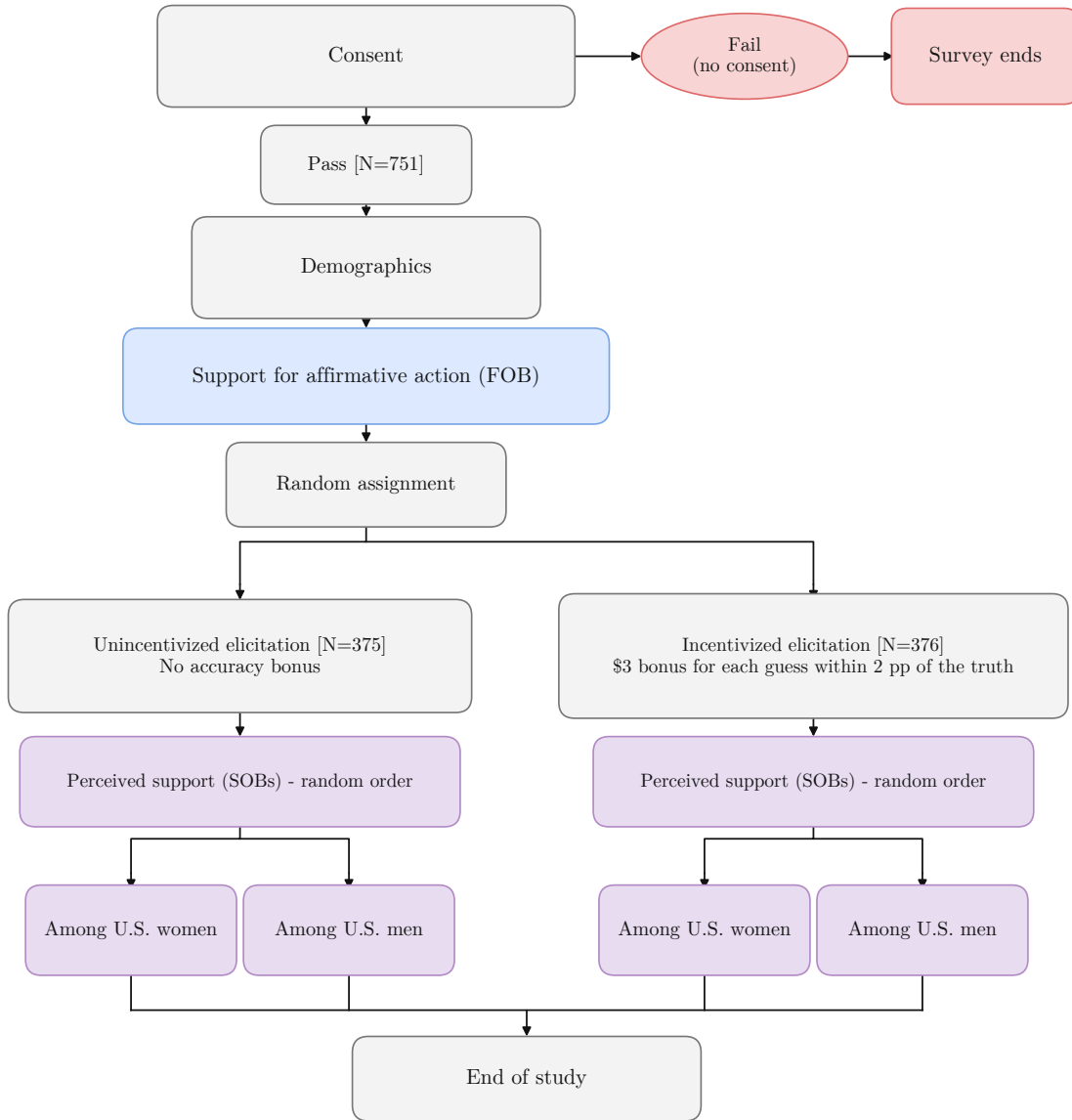


Notes: The figure illustrates the design of the online survey for our indirect elicitation experiment. The goal was to provide evidence on the role of social desirability bias for the Affirmative Action question.

Table A.18: Experimental Details: Direct and Indirect Elicitation (Details)

Block	Question
Direct elicitation	Do you agree ("yes") or disagree ("no") with the statement below? In my opinion, the government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.
Randomized response (forced response design)	For the following question, we want you to answer yes or no. But we want you to consider the number of a die throw. If 1 shows on the die, tell us no. If 6 shows, tell us yes. But if another number, like 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 shows, tell us your own opinion about the question that I will ask you after you throw a die. To ensure that we cannot see the outcome, please click on the link below and make sure to remember the number you rolled. Make sure to return to this survey afterwards. Click here to roll the die (www.random.org/dice/?num=1) Please confirm that you clicked on the link, rolled a die, and remember the number. [NEXT PAGE] • If you rolled a 2, 3, 4, or 5, please tell us your opinion: Do you agree ("yes") or disagree ("no") with the statement below? • If you rolled a 1, please tell us "No" (regardless of what you think). • If you rolled a 6, please tell us "Yes" (regardless of what you think). In my opinion, the government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

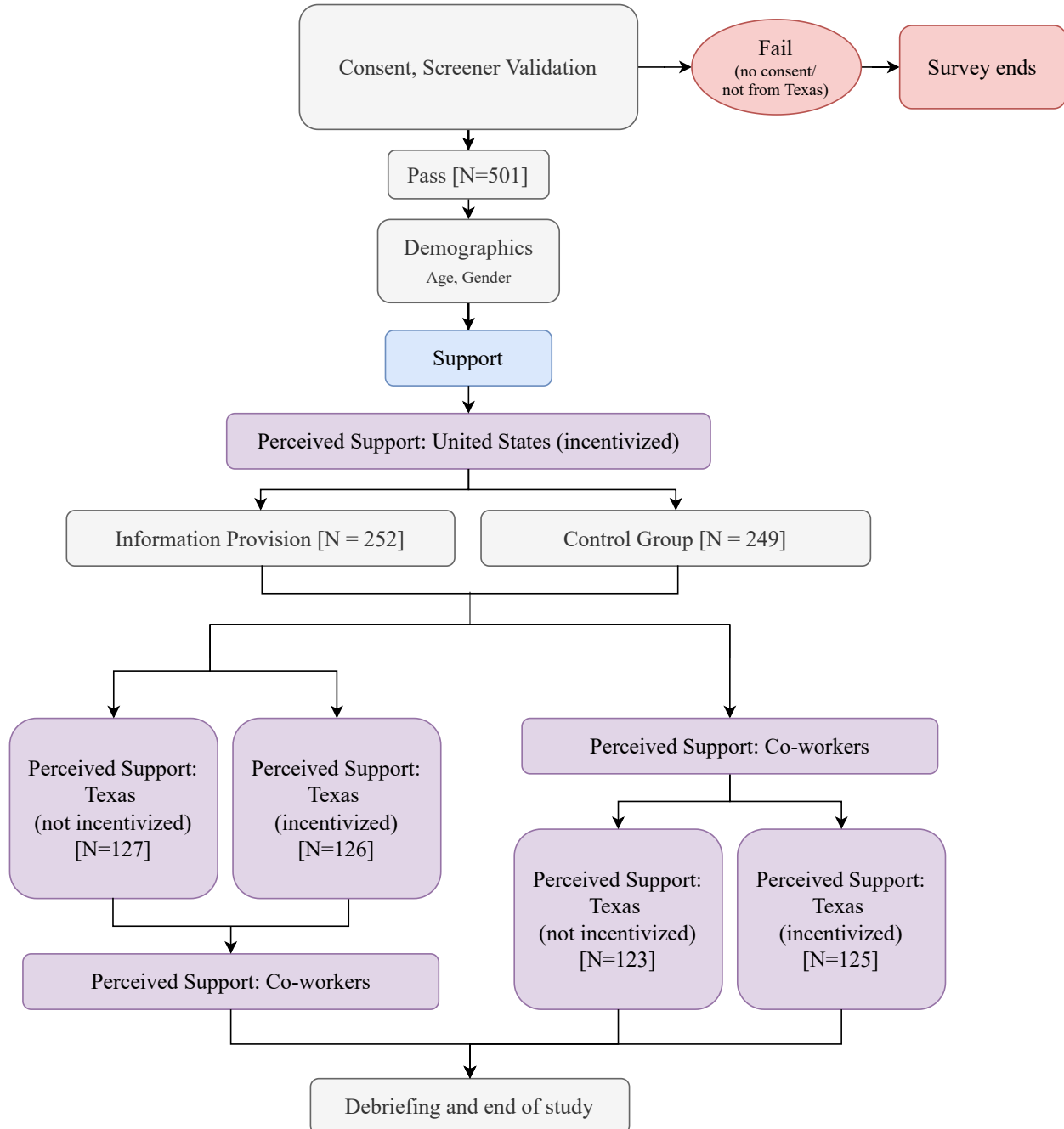
Figure A.39: Incentives and the Elicitation of Second-Order Beliefs



Notes: This figure summarizes the design of the online survey experiment. Following consent and a short demographic questionnaire, respondents reported whether they supported giving priority to women in leadership hiring (FOB). Respondents were then randomly assigned to an unincentivized elicitation arm ($N = 375$) or an incentivized elicitation arm ($N = 376$). In both arms, respondents estimated how many of 100 randomly selected women and men in the United States would support the same policy; the two target-gender questions were presented in random order. In the incentivized arm, respondents received a \$3 bonus for each estimate within two percentage points of the corresponding truth. Respondents in the unincentivized arm answered the same questions without an accuracy bonus. *Data:* Online survey fielded on Prolific, 2026.

C.3 Local Misperceptions

Figure A.40: Experimental Design: The Effect of Updating National Second-Order Beliefs



Notes: The figure illustrates the survey design for our online experiment with participants in Texas. The goal was to establish the connection between national-level and local-level second-order beliefs (and thus, misperceptions).

Table A.19: Experimental Design: Local Misperceptions (Details)

Block	Question
Support	Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."
Perceived Support: United States (incentivized)	We asked the same question you were just asked to a random sample in the US that is nationally representative. In the second part of this survey, we would like to know what you believe these people answered. If your guess is close to the truth (within 2 percentage points), you will earn an additional \$1 USD per question. Please guess: What percentage of MEN in the United States said that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions." Please guess: What percentage of WOMEN in the United States said that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."
Information Provision	You guessed that [RESPONSE]% of MEN agree with the statement that government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions. According to the nationally representative survey, the actual share of men that agree with this statement is 38%. You guessed that [RESPONSE]% of WOMEN agree with the statement that government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions. According to the nationally representative survey, the actual share of women that agree with this statement is 45%.
Control Group (No information Provision)	You guessed that [RESPONSE]% of MEN agree with the statement that government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions. You guessed that [RESPONSE]% of WOMEN agree with the statement that government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

Perceived Support:
Texas (not incentivized)

In this part of the survey, we will ask you a few questions about your perceptions of what people living in Texas think.

Please guess: What percentage of MEN in Texas would say that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."

Please guess: What percentage of WOMEN in Texas would say that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."

Perceived Support:
Texas (incentivized)

We asked the same question you were just asked to a random sample of men and women in Texas. In this part of the survey, we will ask you a few questions about your perceptions of what people living in Texas think. If your guess is close to the truth (within 2 percentage points), you will earn an additional \$1 USD per question.

Please guess: What percentage of MEN in Texas would say that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."

Please guess: What percentage of WOMEN in Texas would say that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."

Perceived Support:
Co-workers

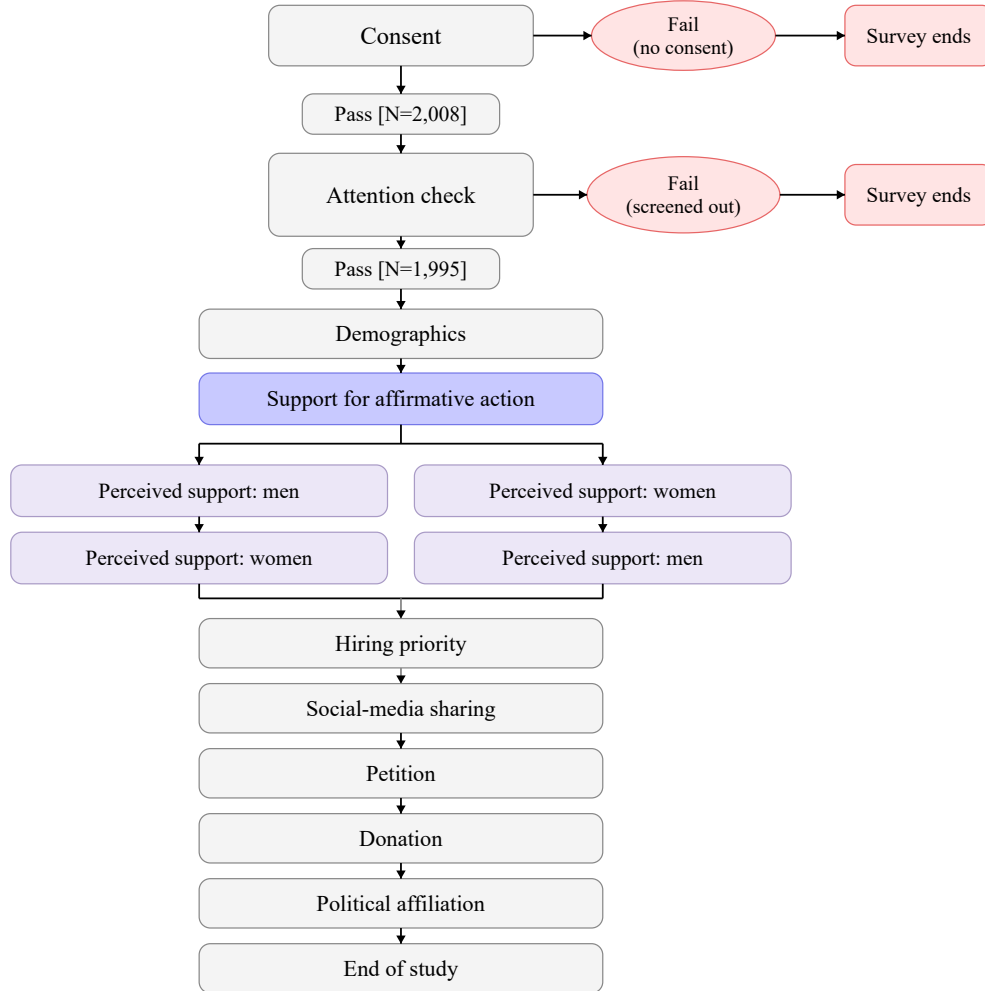
In this part of the survey, we will ask you a few questions about your perceptions of what your co-workers think.

Please guess: What percentage of the MEN you work with would say that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."

Please guess: What percentage of the WOMEN you work with would say that they agree with the following statement? "The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions."

C.4 Affirmative Action

Figure A.41: Experimental Design: Affirmative Action



Notes: The figure illustrates the design of the online study. The study contains no experimental treatment. The goal was to establish the associations between respondents' first-order beliefs (FOB), second-order beliefs (SOB), and their willingness to engage in corresponding affirmative action behaviors, including the joint role of FOB and SOB in explaining behavior. Following the belief measures, respondents completed the hiring-priority and social-media items, followed by the petition and donation tasks.

Table A.20: Survey Details: Affirmative Action

Block	Question
Beliefs	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “The government and companies should give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.” We asked this same question to 100 randomly selected men in the United States. If you had to guess, how many of them agreed? (Enter a number between 0 and 100.) We asked this same question to 100 randomly selected women in the United States. If you had to guess, how many of them agreed? (Enter a number between 0 and 100.)
Behavioral Intentions	Imagine you are hiring for a leadership position. If the candidates are equally qualified, would you give priority to hiring a woman? (Yes / No) We ask you to indicate which statement describes you best. • “I would share social media posts supporting policies that give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.” • “I would not share social media posts either supporting or opposing such policies.” • “I would share social media posts opposing policies that give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.”

Petition

The political debate over giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions is contentious, and the present academic study aims to help policymakers and the public better understand public sentiment toward it. The main findings from this study will be shared with a major news outlet.

We have prepared two petitions—one supporting and one opposing giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions—and invite you to sign either petition. Signing is entirely voluntary. We will report to the media the number of signatures supporting and the number of signatures opposing giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

Do you want to sign a petition?

- I would sign a petition supporting policies that give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.
- I would not sign a petition either supporting or opposing such policies.
- I would sign a petition opposing policies that give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

Petition Supporting [Opposing] Priority for Women in Leadership Hiring

We, the undersigned, call on decision-makers in governments and companies [not] to give priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

If you want to sign this petition, please enter any initials of your choosing (e.g., “AN”) in the text box above.

By signing, you also agree that we may contact you if the news outlet requests that signatories provide their full name. You are free to decline such a request — in that case, your signature will be removed from the petition.

If you do not want to sign the petition, simply leave the text box empty and proceed to the next question.

Donation Task

Now, we are entering you into a lottery with a small chance of winning \$100. You can choose to use some (or all) of your potential winnings to help fund an advocacy group that is supporting or opposing giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions. Any amount that you do not donate will be transferred to you.

Do you want to donate any money?

- I would donate to an organization advocating for giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.
- I would not donate to an organization either supporting or opposing such policies.
- I would donate to an organization advocating against giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions.

How much of the \$100 do you want to donate to the advocacy group supporting [opposing] giving priority to women when hiring for leadership positions?

(Slider: \$0 – \$100. Example: Selected \$50)

By donating, you also agree that we may contact you if the news outlet requests donors to provide their full name. You are free to decline such a request — in that case, we will not transfer your money to the advocacy group.