

Culture, Capital and the Political Economy Gender Gap: Evidence from Meghalaya's Matrilineal Tribes *

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Abstract

Scholars from Marx to Weber have debated whether the gender gap in political engagement and political economy preferences stems from material or cultural determinants. We argue, by contrast, that cultural norms themselves structure access to economic resources; it is through this channel that gendered disparities in representation emerge. Isolating the relationship between culture and resources is challenging in societies where both disadvantage women. We study a unique setting in northeast India where matrilineal tribes live alongside patrilineal communities. They share similar patriarchal cultures and political institutions, but maintain distinct norms about wealth: Patrilineal groups distribute inherited wealth through men, while matrilineal tribes do so via women. Employing survey experiments and behavioral games on representative samples of both communities, alongside extensive qualitative and ethnographic evidence, we show that the gender gap reverses across patrilineal and matrilineal groups. These findings demonstrate that culturally-sanctioned wealth inequities explain the political economy gender gap.

Keywords: Gender gap, political economy preferences, taxation and redistribution, political participation

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Around the world, women are significantly underrepresented in political life, from participation to elected positions (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Clayton 2015; Arriola and Johnson 2014; Kanthak and Woon 2015). A gender gap is also evident in policy preferences, with women and men expressing systematically different priorities about how the state should raise and invest resources (Reingold and Smith 2012). Women are more likely than men to favor redistribution, social security, and insurance, for example (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). Because participation is a conduit for policy change, women’s programmatic preferences are less likely to translate into government action when their political engagement is limited (Teele 2014; Strolovitch 2008; Fox and Lawless 2014). Explaining why women and men’s participation and policy preferences diverge is thus crucial for remedying gender-related inequities and for grasping fundamental dynamics of representation and empowerment (Bhavnani 2009; Mendelberg, Karpowitz and Oliphant 2014; Iyer et al. 2012).

What explains the gender gap in political engagement and political economy preferences? Most analyses fall into one of two camps, inspired by the debate between Marx and Weber on “whether social action springs from material conditions” or “values and beliefs” (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 1997, 374). One side argues that patriarchal cultural norms discourage women’s political participation and promote their support for a larger, more caring welfare state (Akerlof and Kranton 2000; Croson and Gneezy 2009). A second set of arguments focuses on material factors. Men’s greater stocks of wealth—in the form of assets, property, and income—give them more resources to invest in political participation and incentives to limit taxation and redistribution (Iversen and Soskice 2001; Edlund and Pande 2002). When scholars acknowledge both factors’ relevance, they mainly interpret culture as a by-product of material forces (Boserup 1970; Alesina, Giuliano and Nunn 2013).

We argue, in contrast, that analyzing the gender gap by separating culture and resources or treating culture as an offshoot of economic factors misses a central point:

cultural norms themselves govern which gender owns and manages wealth within a society. In particular, as many anthropologists have documented, cultural prescriptions lead men and women to differentially inherit and accumulate wealth across generations (Evans-Pritchard 1951; Levi-Strauss 2008). If the resulting material inequities influence political preferences and behaviors, then cultural norms governing wealth would be essential precursors to the political economy gender gap. We apply this insight to the study of gendered disparities in representation. Our key contention is that culturally-sanctioned imbalances in wealth explain why men and women engage differently with the state.

The purpose of our paper is to devise and implement a rigorous test of this hypothesis. We leverage variation in cultural norms regarding wealth across neighboring tribal societies in the northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya. It is home to the Garo, Khasi, and Jaintiya tribes—among the few remaining practicing matrilineal societies in the world (Gneezy, Leonard and List 2009). These tribes transmit ancestral property from mother to daughter, while assigning wealth management rights jointly to both genders. Living alongside the matrilineal groups are patrilineal communities that maintain conventional social norms regarding inheritance and economic decision-making. Property passes from father to son, such that economic resources are owned and controlled exclusively by men. This unique setting allows us to examine the relationship between cultural norms about wealth and gender-specific political attitudes and behaviors, while holding constant many other cultural, political, geographical and historical features that might alternately explain the gender gap.

For our analysis, we conducted a large, face-to-face survey of representative samples of men and women in both matrilineal and patrilineal communities. An innovative series of survey experiments and behavioral games probed respondents' patterns of political participation across formal and informal contexts, as well as policy preferences about taxation, redistribution, charitable giving, and household spending. We also collected extensive ethnographic and qualitative data over several rounds of field research, and use

this evidence to adjudicate the mechanisms behind our experimental results.

Overall, we find that cultural norms about wealth ownership and management explain entirely the gender gap in political participation and policy preferences. We first demonstrate that differences in political engagement are contingent on cultural norms about the gender-specific ownership of resources. The gender gap in participation fully reverses in matrilineal societies relative to patrilineal societies: traditional wealth owners—patrilineal men and matrilineal women—are more politically engaged than the genders culturally-excluded from wealth ownership (patrilineal women and matrilineal men, respectively). While seminal work by Schlozman, Burns and Verba (1994) argues that men’s representational advantage stems from the relatively larger stock of resources that they are able to devote to participation, we show that cultural norms precede the relationship between wealth, gender, and political engagement. Cultural norms provide representational advantages to particular genders—whether patrilineal men or matrilineal women—by regulating gender-specific differences in the accumulation of wealth.

Second, we establish that cultural norms about the control of wealth systematically influence political economy preferences. Policy preferences converge between genders in matrilineal tribes, where men and women jointly manage wealth and have an equal stake in household budgets. Both genders are equally sensitive to the personal cost of redistribution, and are uniformly willing to contribute funds to philanthropic causes. By contrast, in patrilineal cultures, policy preferences bifurcate. Men—who exclusively own and manage wealth—are more likely to oppose redistribution when it imposes a monetary cost on them. Women, meanwhile, remain insensitive to the costs of welfare state policies and are less likely to contribute personal funds to charities. These results help elucidate Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006; 2010)’s claim that the gender gap in welfare state policies derives from the different costs and benefits of policies for men and women. We extend this finding by showing that cultural norms regarding the control of wealth mediate gender-specific expectations about the distributive impact of policies. In

patrilineal societies, men disproportionately bear the costs of taxation, whereas women benefit more from redistribution; this drives a wedge in policy preferences. In matrilineal societies—where women and men have egalitarian stakes in wealth management—policy preferences converge and the gender gap closes.

Importantly, our research design allows us to rule out many theoretically-relevant alternate determinants of the gender gap. Both groups in our study are subject to common *patriarchal* cultural practices. That is, matrilineal tribes are not *matriarchal*; even though women have exclusive access to inheritance and wealth, men occupy positions of authority in the household and community and hold seats of traditional political power (Schneider and Gough 1962; Bareh 1967). In addition, Meghalaya’s patrilineal and matrilineal tribes are governed by similar state and local political institutions, indicating that formal institutional structures cannot explain differences in preferences and behaviors across the communities. Furthermore, by comparing both genders across these societies we are able to show that biological factors separating men and women are inadequate justifications for gender-related inequities in participation and preferences.

Our findings have far-reaching implications for theory and policy. We show that cultural norms that perpetuate gender differentials in wealth generate a “double penalty” for women because they lead to both divergent policy preferences and a diminished ability to translate preferences into state policy through political action. Together, these two aspects create reinforcing gender-based cycles of political underrepresentation and economic disempowerment. In turn, our results help explain why policies that target in isolation either social norms or economic opportunities for women have often been ineffective at achieving (and, at worst, have even inhibited) gender equity (Mabsout and Van Staveren 2010; Kabeer 2017). The upshot of our findings, however, is that policies that foster more gender egalitarian norms about wealth ownership and management within households have the potential of reducing the gender gap in important political domains, even when broader patriarchal institutions remain prevalent.

Theoretical Determinants of the Gender Gap

The political economy gender gap is a widely acknowledged phenomenon, credited with explaining resource allocations in domains from public health to capital investments (Miller 2008; Clots-Figueras 2011). Despite efforts to close this gap, the World Economic Forum’s 2014 Gender Gap Report reveals its persistence, particularly in political participation and representation (Schwab et al. 2014). Survey data corroborate these trends. Table 1 reports differences in average attitudes expressed by women and men from around the world and in India on a host of relevant questions and denotes a substantial gender gap. For example, men are more likely to express interest in politics and claim a good understanding of political issues (35 percentage points globally), attend political meetings (56 percentage points in India), and talk about elections (34 percentage points in India). Men typically also exhibit higher levels of political engagement and knowledge, while women assume men are more politically informed and competent (Kanthak and Krause 2010; Mendez and Osborn 2010; Fox and Lawless 2011).

[Table 1]

A gender gap also exists in individuals’ policy preferences regarding the welfare state (Huddy, Cassese and Lizotte 2008; Norrander and Wilcox 2008).¹ Women are more likely to identify issues of “care” and social support as their top policy priority, with taxes at the lowest rank (Crowder-Meyer 2007). On the other hand, men prioritize financial concerns about employment and taxation, and list welfare issues as their lowest concern (Welch and Hibbing 1992; Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler 1998). Table 1 shows, for example, that women are more likely to agree that the government should provide a job for everyone (14 percentage points globally), reduce income inequality (10 percentage points globally),

¹Women’s greater support for “leftist” policies is known as the “modern gender gap” (Inglehart and Norris 2000). Given its ability to explain current behavior, we refer to this as the contemporary gap.

provide care to those in need (27 percentage points in India), and subsidize the poor (15 percentage points in India). Overall, women prioritize state action to redistribute wealth and opportunity, whereas men typically prefer a smaller, leaner welfare state in order to maximize personal wealth.

The literature offers several explanations for the gender gap—cultural norms about gender-specific roles, economic disparities in income and wealth, political institutions, and even biological factors—to which we now turn.

Cultural Norms

Culture is manifest in social norms or prescriptions about how individuals should behave as members of households, communities, and states (Akerlof and Kranton 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2003). For example, patriarchal cultures traditionally feature norms that restrict women to the domestic sphere and exclude them from political life, just as they encourage men’s public and political engagement (Goldin 1990). Crucially, these behavioral prescriptions often discourage women from articulating, let alone acting on, their political preferences.

A similar argument links social norms to gendered differences in policy preferences. Here, patriarchal culture’s identification of women with domestic support roles is often credited with explaining women’s relatively greater support for “nanny” (or welfare) state policies globally (Lundberg and Pollak 1993; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Gottlieb, Grossman and Robinson 2016). Meanwhile, men’s patriarchal role as protectors and providers are predicted to make them relatively less likely to support state policies that restrict individual agency over wealth.

Wealth Ownership and Management

An alternate explanation for the gender gap emphasizes economic resources’ impact on political empowerment (Parry, Moyser and Day 1992; Schlozman, Burns and Verba 1994).

Because political participation requires costly contributions of time and wealth, gender-based differences in control over economic resources such as income or property can be important drivers of disparities in political behavior (Schlozman, Burns and Verba 1994; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995; Inglehart and Norris 2000). According to this viewpoint, men’s higher level of political engagement is attributable to their greater ownership of wealth relative to women (Agarwal 1994; Deere and Doss 2006; Schwab et al. 2014).²

Agency over wealth management similarly plays a key role in determining political economy preferences (Schlozman, Burns and Verba 1994; Kelly and Enns 2010). As Burns, Schlozman and Verba (1997, 373) show, individuals’ “control over major financial decisions” within households enables engagement with the state. Wealth disparities between genders explain why men tend to be more sensitive to the personal financial cost of taxation and redistribution (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). When one gender—typically women—neither owns nor controls household wealth, their lack of independent access to material resources disrupts the link between taxation and perceptions of the welfare state as a financial burden (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 1997). Indeed, financial exclusion also creates a reliance on the state for public goods (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; 2010).

Interaction Between Culture and Wealth

Existing work has widely studied patriarchal culture and wealth as independent triggers of political behavior and preferences, in turn adjudicating between the relative importance of each of these two theoretical determinants (Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997, 1052). The political economy literature has come down heavily in favor of economic factors as the root cause of gender differentials (Schlozman, Burns and Verba 1994; Iversen and Soskice 2001). Although some scholars acknowledge a role for culture in perpetuating

²Additionally, Prillaman (2017) argues that inclusion in economic networks can enhance women’s political participation.

gender hierarchies, they do so primarily by operationalizing culture as an outgrowth of material forces (Boserup 1970; Alesina, Giuliano and Nunn 2013, 474).

We posit that these prior approaches neglect a crucial channel by which culture and capital interact to shape the political economy gender gap. Cultural norms can trigger representational shortfalls by systematically generating gender-specific differences in wealth endowments. To build our argument, we apply insights from anthropology: cultural norms governing wealth ownership and control separate economic opportunities for men and women (Durkheim 1997; Levi-Strauss 2008; Evans-Pritchard 1951). We hypothesize that if cultural norms create resource inequalities across genders and if material inequities influence political preferences and behaviors, then culturally-specified norms would represent a root cause of gendered disparities in representation.

It is typically quite difficult to observe variation in how culture structures wealth, because most societies are based on both patriarchal *and* patrilineal traditions. In such societies, patriarchal norms favor men on a host of non-material dimensions and also consistently accord them more opportunities to inherit wealth (Agarwal 1994). Yet, within patriarchal systems, matrilineal cultures prescribe an alternative set of wealth ownership and management norms: they grant inheritance and property rights to women (Schneider and Gough 1962; Chacko 1998; Nongkinrih 2002). Additionally, while patrilineal cultures allocate wealth management rights exclusively to men, magnifying gender imbalances in the control of resources, matrilineal cultures allocate wealth management rights to both women and men, equalizing their voice in financial decision-making.

A reversal of the gender gap across patrilineal and matrilineal cultures would indicate that culturally sanctioned inequities in resources are key drivers of the political economy gender gap. In particular, we predict two sets of differences. First, because political participation is a costly endeavor, requiring personal investment of money and time, we expect to see a reversal in gender-based patterns in participation across matrilineal and patrilineal groups. Norms governing inheritance and wealth should differentially

enable the gender that traditionally owns resources (e.g., patrilineal men and matrilineal women) to participate in politics, hold politicians accountable, and trust the resulting political institutions, relative to the excluded gender. Second, because the welfare state has the ability to redistribute valuable resources and opportunities (Skocpol 1992; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006), we expect preferences about public and private redistribution to diverge in patrilineal groups, where access to resources is inequalitarian. In particular, the disadvantaged gender will be more likely to favor taxation and redistribution via the state, but will be less likely to support voluntary, charitable giving. Conversely, we predict preferences will converge in matrilineal groups, where access to wealth is egalitarian.³

Biological Factors

Might inherent biological differences between men and women explain the gender gap in political economy? One line of thinking argues that genetic variation between men and women undergirds gender-related differences in the public domain (Barres 2006, 133). These theories posit that men are biologically predisposed to systematize, analyze, and compete more than women, whereas women are better able to empathize, communicate, and care for others.⁴ In this account, biological factors help explain differences between

³Our theory resonates with findings from recent working papers on kinship structures in Africa. Women in African matrilineal systems evidence higher rates of political participation (Robinson and Gottlieb 2016), bargaining power (Lowes 2017), and consumption patterns (Walther 2016). Our theory provides a broader conceptual framework to interpret these findings. We argue that cultural norms about the ownership and control of resources drive both political engagement and policy preferences, reinforcing in tandem gendered disparities in the substantive quality of women's representation.

⁴Biological factors include physiological and psychological components. Accounts focused on the later posit that hormones and genes drive gender-based differences (Croson and Gneezy 2009, 249-54).

men and women’s preferences and behavior. For example, physiological and psychological factors may differentially build men’s interest in maximizing personal control over resources and willingness to be aggressive (Croson and Gneezy 2009). As a result, men might be more likely to participate politically and to prioritize policies such as security over welfare. Biological accounts in our context would predict that gender-specific behavior and preferences are invariant across matrilineal and patrilineal societies.

Political Institutions

Alternately, an important school of thought holds that formal political institutions such as laws and codes drive gender differentials in politics. For example, Engels (1909, 228) describes how political institutions reinforce patriarchal practices that privilege men’s monopoly over the state and economy. Despite initial exclusion, almost all countries today mandate women’s suffrage and the right to run for office; however, women continue to face more subtle institutional barriers to political inclusion, such as parties’ reluctance to recruit and nominate female representatives (Fox and Lawless 2011; Arriola and Johnson 2014; Teele 2014). The theoretical prediction that emerges in our context is that similar forms of gender gaps should emerge in societies that share common political institutions, all else equal.

Empirical Challenges in Studying the Gender Gap

Capturing the origins of the gender gap is fraught with methodological difficulties because the determinants discussed above—cultural norms, economic resources, biological factors, and political institutions—are typically correlated and offer similar predictions about the direction of the gender gap in most societies characterized by patriarchy.⁵ In order to evaluate the impact of cultural norms about wealth ownership and control, we compare

⁵See also Gneezy, Leonard and List (2009); Lowes (2017).

the determinants of the gender gap in two cultures that share similar patriarchal settings but that specify different norms about which gender owns and control resources.

Meghalaya's Matrilineal Society

We leverage the unique cultural landscape of Meghalaya, a state in northeast India, which is home to both matrilineal and patrilineal tribes. This variation enables us to examine how culture, via its influence on intergenerational economic entitlements, affects the gender gap in political preferences and behavior. Our study is situated in Meghalaya's capital city, Shillong, with a population of just over 350,000 (Government of India 2011).

Demography Matrilineal tribes, in particular the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos make up approximately 91 percent of Meghalaya's tribal population. The remaining 9 percent comprise patrilineal tribes (Government of India 2011). Mizos and Hmars are the most numerous patrilineal tribal groups in Shillong, and have resided there since the state's inception (Haokip 2013). 14 percent of Meghalaya's population is non-tribal. Originating from other northeastern states, they today mainly reside in Shillong (Government of India 2011). The remainder of patrilineal groups comes primarily from mainland Indian states (Chakraborty and Kim 2010).

Matriliny In Meghalaya's matrilineal tribes, daughters inherit family property and wealth, retain inalienable residency rights, and consequently play a considerable role in administering property and finances (Bareh 1967, Nongbri 2000, 370). At the same time, men are integral to managing household resources, including property. As Nongkinrih (2002, 163) explains, there is equitable "division of authority between the head of the 'iing' [lineage] (mother) and her eldest brother" for managing resources. When important decisions arise, both sit with adult family members to "take collective decisions on various" issues about "managing the property"; "the law of inheritance...is that both

husband and wife manage the house and the earnings of both” (Bareh 1967, 331).

Patriarchy Meghalaya’s matrilineal tribes are not matriarchal (Bareh 1967). Whereas matriarchal societies confer power exclusively to women, matrilineal groups allocate social and political decision-making responsibilities to male members of the descent group. That is, lines of social and political authority run through men in matrilineal cultures, just as they do in patrilineal societies. As Schneider and Gough (1962, 7) document, in matrilineal cultures the “the role of men as men is defined as that of having authority over women and children...positions of highest authority within the matrilineal descent group will, therefore, ordinarily be vested in statuses occupied by men.” The key distinction between our matrilineal and patrilineal groups, then, is that inheritance and succession runs through women in matrilineal cultures.

Political Institutions Both matrilineal and patrilineal cultures in Meghalaya retain similar patriarchal political institutions. Political office remains a strictly male domain in matrilineal tribes (Syiemlieh 1994; Nongbri 2000). Despite women’s economic integration, they are largely excluded from positions of leadership in *Dorbars*, the region’s traditional forms of local government (Syiemlieh 1994; Nongbri 2000). As Syiem (1998) notes, “male domination can be seen ... in matters of state and village administration ... [which] has been an exclusive[ly] male prerogative.” Thus, any observed variation in political behavior and preferences across matrilineal and patrilineal cultures does not stem from institutional structures. Note, however, that even though women are excluded from formal positions of power, they remain active participants in the political process by attending meetings and voicing their concerns—a point to which we will return shortly.

Basis of Comparison In Shillong, matrilineal and patrilineal communities live in close proximity, share analogous political institutions, subscribe to similar broader patriarchal structures, avail of common welfare state policies, and face comparable local economic

milieus and constraints. This allows us to hold constant several competing theoretical determinants of the political economy gender gap. A relevant question pertains to the origins of matriliney in Meghalaya and whether it is simply a proxy for other determinants, in particular economic factors. Appendix A3 presents detailed information from historical and anthropological sources to shed light on this question; importantly, scholars agree that the earliest available historical records point to the widespread prevalence of matriliney in Meghalaya’s matrilineal tribes, and there is no evidence to indicate that these tribes previously performed other forms of kinship or that matriliney was adopted in response to economic imperatives (Bareh 1967).⁶ In sum, the primary variation across our matrilineal and patrilineal groups pertains to cultural norms about wealth ownership and control. We leverage this variation to study whether culturally-sanctioned wealth inequities drive the political economy gender gap.

Research Design and Sampling Strategy

We conducted a large-scale, face-to-face survey on a representative sample of Shillong’s population between February and July 2015. Our team of enumerators and field researchers interviewed 3,509 Shillong residents. All respondents were voting-age citizens who had lived in Shillong for at least ten years.

To create a representative sample, our team first visited every household to generate a full census list of all citizens residing in 25 randomly selected wards in Shillong. We used stratified random sampling to select participants from the resulting census roll. To

⁶Additionally, both matrilineal and patrilineal tribes in Meghalaya historically practiced similar forms of economic activities, in particular, shifting cultivation and horticulture. According to prevailing accounts, ecological shocks at the geographical place of origin of Meghalaya’s patrilineal tribes may explain the divergent patterns of matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance norms practiced in Meghalaya today.

enhance the strength of our comparisons, we obtained balanced samples of men and women, matrilineal and patrilineal groups, and rich and poor citizens, as summarized in Table 2. Appendix A1 explains our sampling methodology in further detail.⁷ We matched enumerators and respondents on gender and ethnic background to encourage trust and reduce potential social desirability bias. The survey was offered in Khasi, Mizo, English, and Hindi, allowing respondents to communicate in the language in which they were most comfortable.⁸ Enumerators used hand-held tablet devices that automated the randomization process in our experiments.

[Table 2]

Appendix A4 presents descriptive statistics of our sample subdivided by gender, with comparisons across cultural groups. Notably, genders are similar across cultures on most demographic characteristics. The main differences we find are the results of cultural traditions about wealth ownership that we explicitly study here, such as differential land- and asset-ownership rates. We also find differences in educational attainment, for which we control. The treatments in all of our experimental tests were balanced across demographic characteristics (Appendices A5-A8).

Apart from the survey, we conducted one hundred ethnographic interviews and one month of focus group discussions to probe the mechanisms underlying our experimental findings. We present representative quotations alongside our results below. To ensure our study neither interfered with nor disrupted the unique, context-specific beliefs and practices, we recruited all members of our research team from local tribal groups and we obtained permission from every block council included in the study prior to our survey.

⁷Appendix A2 maps the location of surveyed kinship groups, illustrating the geographical proximity of the groups in our sample.

⁸Translations were checked and reverse translated to ensure substantive equivalence.

Empirical Specification and Results

In order to estimate the effects of our various experimental treatments on the outcome variables, we use an OLS model of the following form:

$$DV_i = \alpha + \beta * T_i + \gamma * X_i + \epsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

where DV_i is the outcome of interest, α is a constant representing mean values for the control group, T_i is a binary indicator of treatment status, and X_i refers to a vector of demographic controls: age, education level, wealth index, and religion. The Appendix presents results without controls and with an extended set of social controls. For all specifications we estimate robust standard errors. When estimating the gender gap for non-experimental questions, we use t-tests to check whether differences in means across genders in each cultural group are significant.

Political Participation and Accountability

The starting point of our analysis is the well-documented gender gap in political participation and accountability that prevails in most societies around the world. To determine whether gender differentials exist in our matrilineal and patrilineal samples, we probed respondents about their political behaviors. First, we asked whether respondents had voted in Meghalaya’s most recent state election.⁹ As Table 3a reports, the results effectively flip across the patrilineal and matrilineal societies.¹⁰ In the patrilineal group, men are 11 percentage points more likely than women to report voting ($p=0.000$). In the matrilineal group, by contrast, women are 9 percentage points more likely than men to

⁹Our question read: “Did you vote in Meghalaya’s most recent MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly] election? Yes or No.”

¹⁰Appendix A9a-d reports results of OLS specifications for Tables 3a-d in which we interact gender with cultural group status.

vote ($p=0.000$).¹¹ This result is striking. Recall that in Meghalaya’s matrilineal tribes, it is *men* who typically run for, and hold, office. Our results show, however that matrilineal *women* are much more likely to go to the polls and decide their community’s representatives.

[Tables 3a-d]

Do differing levels of trust in representatives explain the reversal of the gender gap in political participation that we document? If, as Levi and Stoker (2000: 476) posit, trust is based on an assessment of political representatives’ commitment to act in voters’ interests, we should expect to see higher levels of trust among individuals who vote (Almond and Verba 1963). Indeed, not only do women vote in higher numbers than men in Meghalaya’s matrilineal tribes, but they are also more likely to trust their political representatives. We asked our respondents whether they trusted their (a) local legislators, and (b) political parties “to do the right thing for people in Shillong.” Matrilineal women are 8 percentage points more likely to trust local legislators ($p=0.000$) and 13 percentage points more likely to trust political parties ($p=0.000$) than matrilineal men (Tables 3b and 3c, respectively). Among the patrilineal respondents, however, a traditional gender gap emerges. Patrilineal men are 9 percentage points more likely to trust their local legislators ($p=0.000$) and 7 percentage points more likely to trust political parties ($p=0.007$) than patrilineal women.

Why do patrilineal men and matrilineal women vote in higher numbers and trust their representatives in greater proportions than their respective co-genders? Scholars argue that an important predictor of political participation and trust is accountability: whether one can punish or reward representatives’ behavior (Levi and Stoker 2000). We thus asked respondents whether it was possible for them to hold local politicians accountable for the functions they are supposed to be performing. Akin to the prior

¹¹This reversal of the gender gap across cultural groups is statistically significant ($\beta=0.20$; $p=0.000$); see Appendix A9a.

results, we find a reversal of the gender gap across both groups (Table 3d). While 63 percent of matrilineal women report being able to hold elected officials accountable, the corresponding proportion among matrilineal men is significantly lower: 51 percent ($\beta = -0.12, p=0.000$). Patrilineal men are qualitatively similar to matrilineal women: 66 percent of these men feel that it is possible to hold officials accountable. But significantly fewer patrilineal women agree: 39 percent ($\beta = 0.27, p=0.000$).¹²

In our qualitative research, we found widespread consensus corroborating the high rates of political engagement among matrilineal women. One woman recounted, for example: “Women of our locality are active in politics, during election[s] we can see that they will leave everything and run for campaigning, accompany the candidate during house to house visit and attending public meetings [*sic*].”¹³ Another women noted: “There are some [women] who are very active that they even forget their children. Every day they will go to the candidate’s house, meeting and rally to canvass for their candidate.”¹⁴ Men agree. One respondent observed that women “actively participate, their numbers are more than the men, they are in rallies, meetings, canvass, etc.”¹⁵ In fact, gender-specific wealth ownership norms appear to channel incentives for political participation. As one respondent explained, “all the women in the family [are more politically engaged than men] because they feel that *they are the custodians of society*.”¹⁶

Overall, we find a reversal of the gender gap in political participation across cultures. Men are more politically engaged, have more trust in political representatives, and believe that they are better able to hold political officials accountable relative to women in

¹²The difference in the gender gap across matrilineal to patrilineal groups is statistically significant ($\beta=0.39; p=0.000$); see Appendix A9d.

¹³Interview #38, Female, June 20, 2014.

¹⁴Interview #39, Female, July 4, 2014.

¹⁵Interview #34, Male, Shillong, June 16, 2014.

¹⁶Emphasis added. Interview #50, Male, Shillong, August 2, 2014.

patrilineal communities, where men traditionally own wealth. However, women are more engaged, trusting, and confident in their agency to hold officials accountable relative to men in matrilineal communities, where women are the socially-sanctioned wealth owners.

Preferences about Public Giving

Next, to assess the determinants of policy preferences regarding state action, we opened the experimental portion of our survey with a question on respondents' welfare policy preferences. The text follows, with the experimental treatment in brackets:

In Meghalaya, many people lack access to essential services like water and electricity. Do you support an increase in the funding of government programs that provide essential services for the poor [*even if this means that the government must raise money from people like you*]?¹⁷

The treatment introduces a personal, financial cost to individuals' support for the welfare state. We expect treated individuals' support for welfare state policies to decrease as they anticipate relinquishing wealth *they control* to the government.

Table 4 reports the treatment effect on average support levels for public welfare schemes. We obtain similar results when we exclude controls or include a larger battery of social and political controls (Appendix A10). A decisive gender gap emerges in patrilineal policy preferences for welfare state support (Column 1), one that resonates with contemporary global patterns documented earlier. Men react negatively to the introduction of a personal cost to support public welfare. The treatment decreases patrilineal men's support for state-provided services by three percentage points ($p=0.016$).¹⁸ How-

¹⁷The setup of this question borrows from Margalit (2013).

¹⁸In all control groups, average levels of support for welfare state policies are very high, a pattern that helps explain the magnitudes of the treatment effects in this experiment. The subsequent behavioral experiment uncovers substantively larger treatment effects.

ever, women’s support is resistant to this cost; the impact of the treatment on women’s support for welfare state services is statistically insignificant.

[Table 4]

In contrast to our patrilineal sample, the gender gap closes entirely in our matrilineal sample. The treatment significantly deters both men and women from supporting an increase in state-provided services. Support for welfare state policies drops similarly across both genders: by four percentage points for men ($p=0.027$) and women ($p=0.001$).¹⁹

Cultural norms governing gender-specific wealth management explain the convergence in matrilineal men and women’s preferences. While women customarily retain exclusive ownership rights over ancestral wealth, they share wealth management responsibilities with men. As a result, both genders have an equal stake in financial decisions regarding the allocation of household budgets. Because men and women’s shared priorities drive intra-household resource allocation in matrilineal communities, both genders exhibit equal sensitivity to the cost of redistributive policies.

Evidence from qualitative interviews reaffirms this interpretation. For example, when asked whether the government should raise money from the rich to help poor citizens, one matrilineal woman answered: “I don’t agree with this because most of the rich people became rich because of their hard work.”²⁰ Another woman confirmed: “the government cannot raise money from the rich. This is because the rich earn because of their hard work so it is not fair for the government to raise money from the rich.”²¹ Matrilineal men used similar language, such as one respondent who answered: “No, I don’t think

¹⁹Notably, the gender gap is significantly different across cultural groups ($\beta=-1.98$; $p=0.035$). A11 presents regression analysis of the treatment’s marginal effects within and across cultural groups.

²⁰Interview #36, Female, June 17, 2014.

²¹Interview #97, Female, August 28, 2015.

it will be right to depend only on the rich.”²² In sum, matrilineal cultural norms that encourage both genders to control wealth aligns their preferences, making both groups equally sensitive to the financial cost of supporting welfare state policies. There is no such convergence in patrilineal societies, where wealth management rests solely with men.

Participatory Preferences: A Behavioral Experiment

We have thus far documented two findings. First, the gender gap in political participation reverses across matrilineal and patrilineal groups based on which gender exclusively owns culturally-sanctioned wealth. Second, the gap in preferences about public goods closes when norms about wealth control are gender-egalitarian relative to when they are inequalitarian. We now examine how political behavior and policy preferences fit together. In our study, we implemented a behavioral experiment to probe our respondents’ willingness to take political action in order to advocate their preferences about the welfare state. The behavioral component involved filling out and mailing a pre-stamped postcard with the following text:²³

Dear Sir/Madam,

I **support** ☐

I **oppose** ☐

raising the level of funding for government programmes that help the poor and the unemployed with training, employment and social services [*even if this means that the government must raise money from people like me*].

Table 5 presents the results of this behavioral study. We report the treatment’s impact on individuals’ policy support or opposition expressed in the received postcards.²⁴

²²Interview #18, Male, May 20, 2014.

²³Complete instructions in Appendix A17a.

²⁴12.02 percent of respondents (410 of 3,410) completed and mailed back postcards.

In patrilineal groups, evidence of the conventional gender gap emerges. Introducing an explicit cost makes men 12 percentage points more likely to express opposition to welfare policies ($p=0.042$, Column 1). In contrast, the personal cost does not have a statistically significant effect on patrilineal women’s policy preferences. The results differ among matrilineal groups, however. Women—as traditional wealth holders—are 14 percentage points more likely to oppose welfare state policies when informed about the policies’ cost ($p=0.001$, Column 2). The treatment effect among those traditionally excluded from holding wealth (here, men) is not statistically significant.²⁵

[Table 5]

Note that comparing results only among postcard senders will produce biased estimates if the treatment systematically alters respondents’ willingness to mail the postcards. This does not appear to be a concern, however. We find that individuals’ propensity to submit postcards is independent of treatment status. This result is robust to including a control for the factor most likely to physically constrain behavior: distance to the nearest post office, as well as to excluding or including our standard set of standard controls (Appendices A13-A16). Additionally, we use a Heckman selection model to account for individuals’ propensity to send postcards in estimating the treatment effect. Here, we first predict the probability of inclusion in our sample—that is, sending a postcard—based on one’s distance from the nearest post office. While this factor is a good predictor of sending postcards, it should be less likely to influence individuals’ preferences. Our results remain robust to this adjustment (Appendix A16).

Overall, these results indicate that cultural norms regarding wealth explain participation by traditional wealth holders to express policy preferences. Both patrilineal men and matrilineal women are highly responsive to the individual cost of welfare state policies. In

²⁵The gender gap in revealed preferences differs significantly across groups ($\beta=-3.01$; $p=0.059$). For regression analysis of the treatment’s marginal effects within and across cultural groups, see Appendix A15.

contrast, those excluded from wealth ownership do not alter their expressed preferences for these policies, irrespective of the policies' cost.

Preferences about Private Giving

Although the rich tend to be less supportive of government-sponsored taxation and redistribution schemes, studies find that wealthier individuals are consistently *more likely* to donate voluntarily to non-state, charitable programs (Andreoni 1990). If our theory about the role of cultural norms regarding wealth ownership and management is correct, we should expect to see groups with greater access to culturally-determined wealth display a greater proclivity to engage in private, philanthropic giving. We thus assessed respondents' donations to a charity involved in a type of public goods provision: humanitarian relief. We employed a version of the dictator game used by Eckel and Grossman (1996), in which the usually-anonymous recipient is replaced with the Red Cross, a well-respected charity organization. In our version, we focused on the Indian Red Cross (IRC). We introduced this charity by explaining: "The Indian Red Cross is a voluntary humanitarian organization that provides relief in times of disasters or emergencies and promotes the health and care of vulnerable people and communities."

Respondents were given a marked envelope containing Rs. 100 in ten-rupee bills (approximately \$4.50, accounting for purchasing power parity) and told that this money was theirs to keep and use as they wished. They were then offered the opportunity to donate some or all of this money anonymously to the Meghalaya Chapter of the IRC. Respondents were given the address and phone number of the IRC branch so that they could later confirm the organization's receipt of donations if they wished. Enumerators then asked respondents two questions about the instructions to confirm their comprehension of the task.²⁶ Finally, enumerators exited the room, leaving respondents alone facing a locked box with a slot. Respondents deposited their envelopes in the slot once they had

²⁶See Appendix A17b for script.

decided privately how much money they wished to donate. Thus, this non-experimental behavioral game captured individuals' willingness to contribute funds to private charities.

We expect individuals' revealed preferences for private giving (i.e., humanitarian relief by a non-governmental organization) will be contingent on the wealth ownership and management norms of their culture. In matrilineal cultures with egalitarian wealth management norms, men and women's preferences should converge. By contrast, in patrilineal societies, where wealth management roles are inequalitarian, we expect to see a separation in men and women's preferences.

Table 6 reports the mean differences in Red Cross donations across our groups of interest. As was the case with individual support for state-provided public goods, patrilineal groups evidence a significant gender gap in private giving. Men's mean donations are five rupees larger than women's ($p=0.000$). Among matrilineal men and women, however, the gender gap disappears. The difference between matrilineal men and women's average donation is insignificant ($p=0.679$) and both means closely resemble that of patrilineal men's donations.²⁷ These results are again consistent with our argument that cultural norms about the gender-specific control of economic resources explain individuals' political economy preferences.

[Table 6]

Our qualitative research helps illustrate the convergence of preferences for private giving across matrilineal women and men. One female interviewee argued: "The poor should learn to stand on their own feet and they should follow the examples of the people who become rich due to their hard work. The rich people, if they want, they can donate the surplus to the poor. They should provide charity like donating clothes and needful things."²⁸ Another woman opposed state-led taxation but supported charitable giving:

²⁷Overall, the gender gap varies significantly across cultures ($\beta=4.51$; $p=0.018$), see Appendix A18.

²⁸Interview #55, Female, December 8, 2014.

“no, it is not right as it is their [individuals’] private property. But it is possible if they want to give by their own will not by force.”²⁹ Men echo women’s language, arguing: “No, it’s not [required for the rich to reduce poverty]. But some who are good they [may] help the poor by giving household goods and some by monetary [contributions].”³⁰

Together, this evidence suggests that gender-specific norms about wealth ownership and management explain political economy preferences for both publicly and privately-provided welfare services. When norms give both genders a stake in managing household finances, both are similarly less likely to prefer redistribution via state-led channels and more willing to support private charities. This is not the case, however, when norms exclude one gender from the ownership and management of household funds: patrilineal women support public goods regardless of their cost and are less likely to donate private funds, given such behavior’s relatively more onerous cost for them.

To summarize, our findings thus far—based on a series of survey experimental tests, behavioral games, and ethnographic research—identify variation in wealth ownership and management norms as a decisive factor explaining the reversal of the gender gap in political engagement and political economy preferences across the patrilineal and matrilineal societies in our study.

The Role of Culturally-Determined Wealth

We now set out to interrogate our proposed mechanism: cultural norms dictating the gender-specific ownership and control of wealth. If this mechanism drives the gender gap, we expect gendered differences to be most distinct among individuals with access to the most culturally-determined wealth. The evidence supports this prediction. We partition our sample into individuals with high and low culturally determined wealth,

²⁹Interview #82, Female, August 15, 2015.

³⁰Interview # 28, Male, June 16, 2014.

and re-analyze our experiment from Table 4 (see Appendix A12).³¹ The treatment effect (i.e., introducing a personal financial cost to welfare state policies) is concentrated among the subset of high wealth individuals—those who would disproportionately have to bear the policies’ cost. In patrilineal groups, only men with high levels of culturally-sanctioned assets reduce support for redistribution when an explicit personal cost is invoked ($\beta=-0.04$; $p=0.051$). There is no such effect among patrilineal women. By contrast, both high-wealth matrilineal men ($\beta=-0.06$; $p=0.045$) and women ($\beta=-0.04$; $p=0.005$) respond to the treatment by lowering support for the welfare state.³² These results parallel Table 4, but show that it is high wealth individuals with culturally-sanctioned wealth management roles who are most sensitive to redistribution’s personal cost.

A strikingly similar set of results obtain when we analyze preferences regarding private giving (Appendix A19). Possessing high levels of culturally-transmitted assets predicts significantly higher donations among patrilineal men and matrilineal men and women. The treatment effect is concentrated in high wealth individuals with culturally-sanctioned wealth management roles. However, high asset ownership levels do not alter private giving for patrilineal women, the group excluded from resource management. The gender gap in preferences for public and private giving thus appears to be driven by cultural norms regarding the gender-specific ownership and control of wealth.

³¹We define ‘High wealth’ individuals as owning at least one of the following culturally-determined assets: land or a house titled in one’s name, or the equivalent asset for non-landed households: a car. ‘Low wealth’ individuals own none of these assets.

³²The treatment also lowers policy support among matrilineal women with fewer assets ($\beta=-0.03$; $p=0.067$). This is consistent with our qualitative research: matrilineal women consistently express the belief that they have a traditional responsibility for asset ownership regardless of the assets they possess.

Evaluating Alternate Mechanisms

Non-Inherited Wealth Does wealth accumulated outside of inheritance explain the closing of the gender gap in political economy preferences in matrilineal groups? To answer this question, we explore whether a relevant form of non-culturally determined wealth—earned wages—predicts the gender gap. We subdivide patrilineal and matrilineal groups into ‘high’ and ‘low’ wage earners.³³ If non-inherited wealth is the primary predictor of variation in preferences across cultural groups, indicators such as wages should explain the gender gap that we previously documented.

To study this question, we re-analyze Table 4’s survey experiment, after subdividing genders in each cultural group by wage levels. The gender gap between patrilineal men and women is no longer statistically significant: neither high nor low wage earners of either gender are responsive to the treatment (Appendix A25). Matrilineal men are similarly non-responsive to the treatment when subdivided by wages.³⁴ We also re-examine whether variation in wages predicts differences in preferences over private giving, first analyzed in Table 6. We do not find significant variation across high- and low-wage earners’ propensity to donate money to charities among patrilineal men, patrilineal women, or matrilineal women, although differences appear among matrilineal men (Appendix A26). We view this interpretation with caution given the observational nature of the analyses, yet these findings suggest that earned wages do not appear to explain the gender gap in preferences for public or private giving that we documented earlier.

³³We measure wages as above- or below-average for Shillong using individual responses to the question: “Would you say that your wages are above or below the average of workers in Shillong?” Respondents have the option of responding ‘Above’, ‘Below’, or ‘Not applicable (do not work)’.

³⁴Note that we see a treatment effect for one group: high wage matrilineal women.

Cultural Norms Unrelated to Wealth Might cultural norms and practices unrelated to wealth ownership and management drive our findings? We consider three salient sets of social practices that vary across the matrilineal and patrilineal tribes in our study. First, we examine parental co-residence. Because matrilineal societies are matrilocal, parents are more likely to reside with adult daughters than sons. In patrilineal societies, by contrast, parents typically reside with sons. Parents' co-residence may influence children's policy preferences and political participation if co-residence impacts children's responsibilities or resources. If so, children with whom parents co-reside should have different capacities to engage in politics, along with varied preferences for state action. However, we find no evidence that variation in co-residence drives the gender gap: results of all our analyses are robust to the inclusion of controls for parents' co-residence (Appendices A10, A13, A23a-d, and A24).

A second set of relevant cultural norms pertain to religious practices, since different religious traditions might support different social roles for women. In our sample, matrilineal groups are more likely to practice Christianity than patrilineal groups. Yet, our main results are robust to the inclusion of control variables for religion (Tables 4-5, 7-8 and Appendices A10, A13, A23a-d, and A24) and for levels of religiosity (Appendices A10, A13, A23a-d, and A24).

A third set of social norms concerns support for marriage, measured as marriage rates, which may alter political participation and preferences by changing individuals' access to, and control of, resources.³⁵ Indeed, members of patrilineal communities are less likely to be single than are those in matrilineal groups.³⁶ Yet, our findings are robust

³⁵We define as 'single' anyone with a self-described marital status of 'single', 'separated', 'divorced' or 'widowed; ' and 'married' anyone self-identified as 'married' or 'remarried.'

³⁶There is a consistent gender-based hierarchy in marriage rates across cultural groups: women remain significantly less likely to be single than men.

to controlling for individuals’ marital status (Appendices A10, A13, A23a-d, and A24). Overall, our tests of relevant cultural norms beyond those related to the control and management of wealth indicate that these norms are not meaningfully associated with the gender gap’s reversal across patrilineal and matrilineal cultures.

Intrinsic Behavioral Traits We designed an additional survey-experiment to test whether matrilineal and patrilineal groups vary along intrinsic behavioral traits beyond cultural norms. Risk aversion is a widely-cited trait for explaining gender differences in behavior, and many studies document that women are typically more risk averse than men (Croson and Gneezy 2009, 249-54). Unless differences in intrinsic traits like risk aversion drive our results, we should not expect to observe a gender gap in these traits across patrilineal and matrilineal communities. Put differently, risk aversion can serve as a placebo test to validate our argument about the role of culturally-determined wealth. We gauge levels of risk aversion by asking participants whether they prefer a secure but potentially low-gain option, versus a risky but high-gain bet based on a coin toss:

“Which of the following would you choose? Option one: receive [*Rs. 10,000/ Rs. 2,000*] for sure or option two: throw a coin and receive Rs 20,000 if you get heads and nothing if you get tails?”

The expected value of both options is the same when the secure value is Rs. 10,000, but the risky option should be more attractive when the secure value is only Rs. 2,000; thus, the treatment lowers the secure option’s value. Appendix A22 displays our results. The treatment has an effect in all groups, but women are significantly more likely to choose the secure option than men in *both cultures*. The emergence of a conventional gender gap in both patrilineal and matrilineal cultures indicates that gender-specific intrinsic traits cannot explain the findings that we have documented thus far.

To summarize, we do not find evidence that wealth accumulated independently of cultural prescriptions, cultural norms about behavior unrelated to wealth, or differences

in intrinsic behavioral traits explain the variation in the gender gap that we document in this study. This further corroborates our argument that it is cultural norms about resource ownership and control that drive gender differentials in representation.

Experimental Tests of Mechanism

Wealth Management Norms and Decision-Making We now provide evidence to illustrate how cultural norms regarding wealth management can influence intra-household decision-making over budgetary matters. If our posited mechanism impacts the gender gap in political economy preferences, then we should expect to find men and women developing different preferences surrounding economic decision-making across patrilineal and matrilineal tribes.

To probe this hypothesis, we designed an experimental question to understand the effect of gender-specific wealth management norms on individual authority to allocate valuable household resources. If a given culture’s wealth management norms are gender-egalitarian, we expect intra-household decision-making will be responsive to the preferences of whomever generates more household wealth. In contrast, if norms are gender-inegalitarian, we expect that the traditionally-dominant gender will be unwilling to relinquish decision-making authority, irrespective of the breadwinner’s gender. Respondents were presented with the following question:

Imagine a typical husband and wife in your community. [*The wife stays at home while the husband earns money/ The husband stays at home while the wife earns money*]. Let’s assume the two of them disagree over a costly household purchase. Should the man be the person to make the final decision?

The question tests whether changing the gender of the breadwinner impacts one’s willingness to lower support for male-centered decision-making. The treatment shifts the

economic arrangement from a more toward a less traditional scenario.³⁷ We hypothesize that cultures with gender-inegalitarian norms regarding wealth management will be unresponsive to the treatment, whereas those with gender-egalitarian norms will be more flexible, making women’s decision-making power more responsive to their economic contribution to the household.

Table 7 presents the results of our analysis.³⁸ As predicted, in matrilineal cultures with gender-egalitarian wealth management norms, both genders are significantly less likely to consider men as the appropriate group to make the final decision about intra-household wealth management when women become the dominant wealth-providers. But the effects diverge in the gender-inegalitarian context of patrilineal groups. Patrilineal women respond to the treatment by downplaying husbands’ traditional decision-making power. However, patrilineal men—the culturally-sanctioned decision-makers—are unwilling to relinquish traditional authority when they are no longer the main source of income. These findings support our hypothesis about the substantive difference between wealth management norms in matrilineal and patrilineal cultures. Inegalitarian patrilineal norms do not shift when the gender of the household’s main economic contributor changes, whereas egalitarian matrilineal wealth management norms adapt to individuals’ economic contributions within the household.

[Table 7]

Our qualitative research underscores the role played by egalitarian economic decision-making norms in matrilineal groups. Across Khasi women and men, respondents emphasized that household decision-making is a collective process. In one woman’s words: “We usually sit and decide things together as a family. We all have equal rights in [deciding about] household budget, education, child bearing and politics.”³⁹ Respondents

³⁷We code “No” as zero and “Yes” as one.

³⁸Appendix A21 displays results without demographic controls.

³⁹Interview #30, Female, July 14, 2014.

repeatedly underlined the importance of decision-making as a process where all familial members' views are heard: "We ... consult all members in the family and make a decision on majority's suggestions."⁴⁰ In particular, wealth management decisions are made jointly, as one man notes: "For us if there [are] any important issues, we [are] use[d] to discuss[ing] together in the family and tak[ing] the [decision together]."⁴¹ Similarly, another woman explains: "Issues which are important and which concern and involve huge expenditure or which are related to the welfare or future of anyone, then we sit and discuss them as a whole family."⁴² In sum, our qualitative research uncovers egalitarian wealth management norms in matrilineal societies, which contrast with the typical hierarchical wealth management norms that are practiced in patrilineal societies.

Wealth Management Norms and Policy Preferences Do wealth management norms impact financial decision-making outside the household and in the political arena? In order to provide the final link between cultural norms about wealth and political economy preferences, we test whether altering the mechanism for public goods' distribution—either by engaging or circumnavigating the household head—changes the value individuals place on public goods. Our theory implies that we should observe divergent preferences about the optimal method for distributing public goods in cultures with gender inequalitarian wealth management norms. By contrast, preferences should converge across genders in cultures with relatively more gender-egalitarian norms. To assess these claims, we asked respondents to choose between two state cash transfer policies:

Which policy would you prefer?

(0) The government will give Rs. 1,000 per month in cash to household heads of poor families to improve their welfare.

⁴⁰Interview #54, Female, August 11, 2014.

⁴¹Interview #42, Male, July 4, 2014.

⁴² Interview #45, Female, July 13, 2014.

- (1) The government will spend [*Rs. 1,000/Rs. 700*] per month on programs to improve the welfare of poor families.

Our treatment examines the impact of distributing cash directly to the household head (coded as zero) versus *43 percent less cash* via government programs (coded as one), in comparison to an equal amount of financial resources via either distribution mechanism.

If our theory about wealth management norms’ political salience is correct, in matrilineal cultures with gender-egalitarian norms, the treatment should nudge individuals to choose the financially more lucrative option. Since both genders have a voice in wealth management, they should anticipate benefitting equally from this policy. By contrast, in patrilineal cultures with gender-inegalitarian wealth management norms, the treatment should increase support for the direct distribution of resources to the household head only in the gender that controls household wealth (men). This is because the dominant gender benefits from the household’s receipt of the ‘public’ good disproportionately compared to the gender excluded from wealth management.

Table 8 displays the effect of treatment—making direct transfers to the head more remunerative than indirect transfers via the state—for each of our four groups of interest.⁴³ Amongst matrilineal groups, the treatment makes both women and men significantly more likely to prefer direct cash transfers to the household head. In other words, women and men’s preferences converge around maximizing the household’s net wealth. In patrilineal cultures, the treatment causes *only* men, the group with wealth management authority, to adjust their preferences such that they maximize the benefits of direct cash transfers. Lacking direct control over household wealth, patrilineal women continue to support the state’s distribution of resources even when this results in fewer resources for their household.

[Table 8]

In sum, this section augments our prior results, demonstrating that culturally-specific

⁴³Appendix A20 displays results without demographic controls.

wealth ownership and management norms explain the gender gap. Here, we presented decisive experimental evidence of these norms' impact on individual decision-making about the distribution of valuable material resources within the household as well as the political impact of these norms on individuals' interactions with the state. Altogether, this strongly supports our theoretical predictions about the gender gap's reversal across matrilineal and patrilineal groups in our study.

Conclusion

We conducted a study of neighboring patrilineal and matrilineal tribes in Meghalaya, India to examine whether cultural practices governing the ownership and control of wealth influence the political economy gender gap. When wealth is transferred from father to son and controlled by men (i.e., in patrilineal communities), we uncover evidence of the gender gap prevailing around the world: men are more likely than women to participate in the political domain and hold economic policy preferences that are consistent with a fiscally conservative world view (Inglehart and Norris 2000). They prefer lesser taxation for public redistribution and are more likely to support welfare through private charitable channels which afford them greater agency. Among matrilineal tribes, the opposite pattern emerges. When daughters inherit wealth from mothers, it is women who evince higher levels of political engagement. Here, we observe a convergence in preferences over economic policy, a pattern that we attribute to the relatively gender-egalitarian wealth management norms in this culture. That cultural norms about wealth predict consistent, significant variation in how men and women develop preferences about policy and politics indicates that norms are a substantive arbiter of the relationship between wealth and political economy preferences and behavior.

Our study focuses on cultural norms pertaining to inheritance, yet our theory has important implications for the political relevance of a broader set of prescriptions about

women’s ability to access and accrue wealth. Norms defining women’s agency over wealth include those specifying gendered differences in labor market participation, human capital investment, and engagement in unpaid household work and care-giving, to name just a few. If our premise that such norms direct substantive, gender-specific ownership and control over resources is accurate, variation in each of these norms should structure women’s preferences about the welfare state and modes of political participation (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; 2010; Clots-Figueras 2011).

We leverage Meghalaya’s distinctive cultural geography to identify the impact of changing social norms about wealth on political behavior, but our core theoretical argument can be applied to explain historical and contemporary cases in many other contexts. For example, where domestic conflict destroys cultural norms prohibiting women’s control over wealth, we might expect to observe an amplification of women’s political voice. Consider Cambodia, where between 1975-1979, 50% to 70% of working age men were killed in the country’s genocide (Soudis, Inklaar and Maseland 2016, 115). This catapulted women into the roles of primary breadwinners for their families. Subsequently, women’s political engagement rose, with help from women-led organizations such as Women in Prosperity (Jacobsen 2008). These groups mobilized women’s political engagement by “helping women [enter] in[to] political positions to develop skills and gain the courage to take the candidacy and become members of the parliament and the senate” (Jacobsen 2008, 155). This case illustrates that improvements in women’s political engagement can occur once norms prohibiting women’s wealth ownership and control are destroyed.

We can also apply our study’s insights to illuminate how other, related norms that indirectly impact wealth ownership and control—such as those about fertility and divorce—influence political preferences and behavior. For example, consider social norms about women’s fertility in Bangladesh. Changes in these social norms were driven by a long-term external intervention: a Health and Family Planning project in seventy villages of Matlab thana since 1978, where Community Health Workers visited all households and

provided free contraceptives every two weeks (Munshi and Myaux 2006). Subsequently, new social norms about contraception empowered women by “freeing up women’s time for paid employment” (Hashemi, Schuler and Riley 1996, 69). Indeed, women’s earnings and household assets increased significantly as a result of program-induced long-term fertility declines (Joshi and Schultz 2013). Changes in social norms that enable women’s access to contraception thus provide a channel for women’s labor force participation and subsequent autonomy in economic and political domains.

In a similar vein, we expect social norms about divorce to alter women’s wealth and subsequent political preferences and behavior. Empirical work suggests two competing ways in which shifting divorce norms alters women’s welfare. According to Stevenson (2008), increasing access to divorce improves female labor force participation. Subsequent income increases make divorce welfare-improving for women. Edlund and Pande (2002) reach the opposite conclusion, finding that greater social support for divorce makes women considerably poorer, largely because men traditionally transfer wealth to women in marriage. Our focus on the role of social norms regarding wealth provides a new way to reconcile some of these competing findings. Specifically, social norms can either constrain or facilitate women’s opportunities to own and control wealth within marriage. Where these norms are constraining, divorce provides an exit opportunity for women, enabling them to avail of outside options that improve their economic standing. When norms are more permissive, women already have better access to economic security within marriage. In these cases, the economic impact of divorce becomes contingent on other factors, such as strength of welfare state policies and women’s ability to compete in private labor markets—variables identified as important for explaining gender-specific political preferences and behavior by Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006).

In the policy domain, a corollary of our argument is that increasing women’s economic opportunities without commensurately shifting social norms that constrain women’s ownership and management of economic resources may be insufficient to trigger changes

in political representation and participation. For example, interventions that increase women’s access to micro-credit in cultural settings where men ultimately make decisions over the management of household finances are unlikely to enhance women’s political and economic agency. Indeed, the exceptional micro-credit programs that alter women’s political behavior are those that explicitly aim to alter social norms about women’s control over economic resources (Kabeer 2017). In a similar vein, increasing employment opportunities for women in deeply conservative cultures that eschew women’s economic empowerment can generate backlash—a phenomenon that has been documented in settings from rural India to Ethiopia.⁴⁴

Overall, our study explains variation in the political economy gender gap that arises when long-standing cultural norms about the ownership and control of wealth definitively privilege one gender over the other. Yet, if gendered conditions that currently favor men were made more equitable, how would the political economy gender gap respond? Our research design does not allow us to answer this question directly, yet our findings on political participation and political economy preferences are suggestive. We attribute the flip in gender-specific political participation to norms about wealth ownership that *unequivocally favor one gender*. At the same time, we find that *gender egalitarian* wealth management norms in matrilineal cultures lead to a closing of the gender gap in political economy preferences that we observe in patrilineal groups. This suggests that more egalitarian cultural norms regarding wealth—what we might expect to observe in real world settings—are likely to eliminate, rather than invert the gender gap.

Our research opens the door for further work on the relationship between social norms, economic conditions, and individual preferences about the public and private provision of scarce resources. In particular, research in three related directions will be particularly fruitful. First, further work to identify the impact of social norms about wealth

⁴⁴See, e.g., Barry, Ellen. “In India, a Small Band of Women Risk It All for a Chance to Work.” *The New York Times*. January 30, 2016; Mabsout and Van Staveren (2010).

ownership and management on political economy preferences for other disadvantaged population groups, including ethnic or racial minorities facing systemic discrimination. Second, investigations to identify the broader macro-historical determinants of changing gendered norms about who controls wealth; these dynamics may help explain variation in government's initial form and function, the state's expansion or reduction across space and time, and the extent to which backlash results from these policy changes. Third and finally, studies of the gender gap in political economy preferences about who "deserves" access to public goods and how state resources can be optimally distributed in cases of extreme scarcity. Whether or not the gender gap in preferences about domestic redistribution extends to questions of interpersonal redistribution, both for citizens and non-citizens, has significant implications for predicting variation in state responses to contemporary crises. Each of these analytic agendas can help us better understand how asymmetries in cultural norms about wealth ownership and management can create discrepancies in political representation and in the distribution of scarce resources for gender-based empowerment.

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Tables

Table 1: Political Economy Gender Gap around the World

Survey Question	Men - Women	Standard Error	Scope	Source
Political Participation				
Interest in politics	0.35	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Good understanding of political issues	0.35	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
No say about what the government does	-0.08	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Interest in politics	0.42	(0.05)***	India	NES
How much do you talk about the election	0.34	(0.04)***	India	NES
Attend election meetings	0.56	(0.06)***	India	NES
Did you work in the campaign	0.12	(0.02)***	India	NES
Political Economy Preferences				
<i>Government should:</i>				
Provide a job for everyone who wants one	-0.14	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Reduce the working week to create more jobs	-0.17	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Spend money on education	-0.05	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Spend money on health	-0.09	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Spend money on retirement	-0.11	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Spend money on unemployment benefits	-0.12	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Reduce income differences between rich and poor	-0.10	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Keep prices under control	-0.10	(0.01)***	World	ISSP
Take responsibility to ensure everyone is provided for	-0.27	(0.08)***	India	WVS
Tax the rich and subsidize the poor	-0.15	(0.09)*	India	WVS

Note: Data drawn from International Social Survey Programme's (ISSP) Role of Government (2006); World Values Survey's (WVS) Wave 6 (2010-2014); and the Indian National Election Study's (NES) survey (1985). Differences in means (men minus women) reported for each survey question. Standard errors for two-tailed t-tests in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 2: **Ancestral Breakdown of Main Groups Sampled**

	Matrilineal Tribes: Khasi & Jaintia	Patrilineal tribes: Mizo & Hmar	Patrilineal Non-tribal
Place of Origin	Meghalaya: East & West Khasi Hills, East & West Jaintia Hills	Meghalaya: East Khasi Hills, East & West Jaintia Hills North East India: Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Tripura	Mainland India: Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal
Traditional Inheritor:	Daughters	Daughters	Sons
Traditional Political Institutions	Male-only village councils	Male-only village councils	Male-only village councils

Table 3a: Mean Voter Turnout, Legislative Assembly Elections

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men	0.63	0.83
<i>Observations</i>	868	854
Women	0.52	0.92
<i>Observations</i>	838	850
Men - Women	0.11 (0.02)***	-0.09 (0.02)***

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 3b: Mean Trust in Local Legislators

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men	0.56	0.75
<i>Observations</i>	868	854
Women	0.47	0.83
<i>Observations</i>	838	850
Men - Women	0.09 (0.02)***	-0.08 (0.02)***

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 3c: Mean Trust in Local Political Parties

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men	0.48	0.45
<i>Observations</i>	868	854
Women	0.41	0.58
<i>Observations</i>	838	849
Men - Women	0.07 (0.02)***	-0.13 (0.02)***

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 3d: Mean Perceptions of Local Officials' Accountability

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men	0.66	0.51
<i>Observations</i>	868	854
Women	0.39	0.63
<i>Observations</i>	838	850
Men - Women	0.27 (0.02)***	-0.12 (0.02)***

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 4: **Effect of Personal Cost Treatment on Policy Preferences**

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men		
Explicit cost to policy	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.04** (0.02)
Constant (control)	0.94	0.99
<i>Observations</i>	868	854
Women		
Explicit cost to policy	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Constant (control)	1.02	0.97
<i>Observations</i>	838	850
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes

Note: Dependent variable takes a value of 1 (support increase in government funding for essential services for the poor) or 0 (do not support increase in funding). Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 5: **Effect of Postcard Treatment on Policy Preferences**

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men		
Explicit cost to policy	-0.12** (0.06)	-0.11 (0.12)
Constant (control)	1.04	1.06
<i>Observations</i>	101	50
Women		
Explicit cost to policy	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.04)
Constant (control)	1.03	0.90
<i>Observations</i>	112	147
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes

Note: Dependent variable takes a value of 1 (support increase in government funding for essential services for the poor) or 0 (do not support increase in funding). Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 6: Mean Red Cross Donations

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men	71.67	73.36
<i>Observations</i>	868	854
Women	66.63	72.84
<i>Observations</i>	838	850
Men - Women	5.04	0.53
<i>(Standard Errors)</i>	(1.43)***	(1.27)

Note: Mean amount of donations to the Red Cross are displayed, which can take a value at 10 Rupee increments between 0 and 100. Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 7: **Intra-household Wealth Treatment Effect on Decision-making Preferences**

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men		
Wife is the main earner	0.01 (0.02)	-0.17*** (0.02)
Constant (control)	0.67	0.99
<i>Observations</i>	577	564
Women		
Wife is the main earner	-0.03* (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.02)
Constant (control)	0.62	0.36
<i>Observations</i>	560	567
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes

Note: Dependent variable takes a value of 1 (husband should make the final decision) or 0 (husband should not be the one to make the final decision). Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.

Table 8: **Wealth Distribution Treatment Effect on Public Goods Preferences**

	Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Men		
Costly government distribution	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.08** (0.04)
Constant (control)	0.54	0.48
<i>Observations</i>	578	568
Women		
Costly government distribution	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.16*** (0.04)
Constant (control)	0.81	0.24
<i>Observations</i>	556	560
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes

Note: Dependent variable takes a value of 1 (support resources' distribution by the government) or 0 (support distribution by the household head). Robust standard errors in parentheses: *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01.