Abstract

How do voters evaluate women candidates in places where traditional gender norms are strong? We conduct a survey experiment in Malawi to assess both whether citizens discriminate against women candidates and how other salient candidate characteristics – political experience, family status, policy focus, and gendered kinship practices – interact with candidate gender to affect citizen support. Contrary to our expectations, we find citizens prefer women candidates *ceteris paribus*, and women and men with the same traits are evaluated similarly. Yet, we find two unexpected ways women candidates are disadvantaged in the electoral process. First, we find that citizens prefer candidates who are married with young children, a profile much more common among men than women candidates in practice. Second, we find pervasive qualitative reports of negative campaigning that likely affected citizens' evaluations of *actual* women candidates, while not affecting evaluations of hypothetical candidates. We discuss how our results speak to the ways gender biases operate in practice across political contexts.

Women's underrepresentation in national and subnational elected bodies remains a consistent feature of legislative politics worldwide. One potential cause of women's low numbers is voter bias against women candidates, a feature that may be most pronounced in societies with conservative gender norms. Using the context of Malawi's local elections, in which women won just 12 percent of seats, we test both whether and how citizens discriminate against women candidates. Specifically, we hypothesize that citizens may penalize women candidates due to gendered expectations related to political experience, family status, policy focus, and matrilineal or patrilineal kinship practices. To test these expectations, we run a survey experiment to identify how gender intersects with these other candidate features as citizens evaluate hypothetical candidates. Yet, contrary to our expectations, we find no evidence that voters discriminate against women candidates. Indeed, all else equal, our experimental results reveal a slight preference for women over men candidates. When examining how gender intersects with other salient candidate features, we also find that citizens evaluate men and women candidates similarly. That is, we find no evidence of a political double standard.

For a more inductive interpretation of our experimental results, we turn to two additional original data sources we collected simultaneously with our survey experiment: biographical data from real candidates for this office in a recent election and qualitative data from in-depth candidate focus groups. Two findings emerge from these data that suggest biases operate in ways not captured by our survey experiment. First, our experimental results suggest that citizens prefer candidates who are married with young children, a family status much more common in practice among men than among women who run for local council. Second, our focus groups reveal the survey experiment may miss a common form of gender discrimination propagated by political elites. The majority of women participants recounted experiences of extreme gender-related defamation during their campaigns by their political competitors, which, in turn, may have affected voters' attitudes towards them specifically, while not affecting respondents' evaluations of hypothetical women candidates as presented in our survey experiment.

Our findings contribute to the surprisingly small comparative literature examining how citizens

evaluate candidate gender. Whereas potential forms of bias against women candidates have been studied intensely in American elections (e.g. N. M. Bauer, 2015; Dolan, 2014; Holman, Merolla, & Zechmeister, 2016; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Teele, Kalla, & Rosenbluth, 2018), much less is known about how voters evaluate women candidates elsewhere. To our knowledge, only two published studies examine this question outside the United States. Using a choice experiment to evaluate citizen bias in Brazilian elections, Aguilar, Cunow, and Desposato (2015) find a consistent pro-women bias, despite women's underrepresentation in Brazilian politics. Similarly, Kage, Rosenbluth, and Tanaka (2018) find evidence of a preference for women candidates in Japan, despite the low number of women in Japanese politics. In a final working paper we are aware of on this topic, Kao and Benstead (2019) find evidence that citizens do discriminate against women candidates in Jordan. We return to these papers when discussing our unexpected result.

A much larger related comparative literature has sought to identify how exposure to women officeholders affects women citizens' political participation (Barnes & Burchard, 2012; Clayton, 2015; Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012) or citizens' attitudes towards women's representation in general (Alexander, 2012; Barnes & Córdova, 2016; Bush & Jamal, 2015; Clayton, 2018). The latter has been particularly well researched in African cases, with many scholars noting how women's increased presence in political decision-making has caused citizens to update their beliefs about the appropriateness and capabilities of women in this sphere (see Ahikire, 2004; G. Bauer, 2012; Burnet, 2011; Tripp, 2006), a point we also return to below.

Our multi-method approach adds to the literature on the causes of women's underrepresentation by examining how citizens evaluate candidates in a new African democracy where traditional gender roles are strong. Contrary to our expectations, our results suggest that voters do not have a generalized preference for male leadership. Rather our results suggest a different set of barriers related both to candidate emergence and the complex ways voters form candidate evaluations in real campaign environments, both of which have implications for the electoral success of women at the ballot box.

We begin by presenting our pre-registered hypotheses regarding how voters evaluate candidate

gender, both in the aggregate and in combination with other candidate features. After reporting the experimental results associated with these hypotheses, we present findings from two additional forms of data we collected simultaneously: biographical data from a sample of recent local council candidates in the district in which we fielded our survey and qualitative data from four in-depth focus groups with recent candidates for this position. Because the findings from the latter two data sources were not expected, we treat the associated results as suggestive. Our discussion considers how voters' evaluations of women candidates may be changing and the different forms discrimination may take as women become more accepted in politics. Connecting our work to the large literature on voter gender bias in American politics, we discuss the role of conjoint-like designs in assessing how voters form candidate evaluations in practice. We conclude by discussing implications of our results for future comparative research on the causes of women's underrepresentation worldwide and, in particular, for the increasing number of interventions designed to promote women's leadership in local political decision-making in developing countries (e.g., Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013; van der Windt, 2018; van der Windt, Humphreys, & de la Sierra, 2018).

Voter Demand for Women Candidates

To begin, we expect voters will exhibit biases against women candidates in the aggregate.[1] Voters may have a "distaste" for women candidates due to deeply held expectations about the appropriateness and capabilities of women in politics. Specific to our case, qualitative accounts describe how Malawian women in politics are expected to conform to cultural expectations, including engaging in "proper" behavior (Kayuni, 2016; Nkuuhe & Kanyongolo, 2014).[2] Moreover, an explicit preference among Malawians for male leadership is still relatively common.[3] In the

[1]All hypotheses were pre-registered in the Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) database (#[redacted for review].

[2]Even experienced women politicians must continue to navigate these expectations. For instance, Malawian news outlets praise longtime MP and Minister Patricia Kaliati as an exemplary woman politician for wearing a traditional cloth wrap (chitenje) and engaging in traditional women's activities, such as cooking or attending funerals (Nkuuhe & Kanyongolo, 2014).

[3]One might point to the presidency of Joyce Banda as seemingly in contrast to this point. Yet, we note that Banda was not popularly elected, but rather assumed the position after the sudden death of her predecessor, Bingu wa Mutharika. Further, after holding the presidency for two years, Banda lost the subsequent

most recent Afrobarometer data, one in four respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that "men make better political leaders, and should be elected rather than women." That a sizable perentage of respondents still report an explicit preference for male leadership suggests to us that, on average, citizens will prefer men candidates *ceteris paribus*.

Distinct from an animus against women in leadership roles, citizens may also form biases in more implicit ways. Specifically, voters may hold a double standard through which they judge men and women candidates with otherwise similar traits. Additionally, voters may make assessments based on statistical discrimination. In the absence of additional information, citizens may assume women and men candidates have different traits and base their evaluations on these assumptions. In particular, we theorize that four candidate features – political experience, family status, policy focus, and gendered kinship practices – may interact with candidate gender as citizens form evaluations. We detail each in turn.

First, because women have historically been excluded from political power, in the absence of additional information, voters may assume women are less qualified or experienced than otherwise similar men candidates (see Mo, 2015). A risk averse voter may have a preference for male leadership based on these perceived differences in qualifications. Because voters may already suspect that a man candidate has significant leadership experience, revealing this information about men may not affect citizens' evaluations; yet revealing that a woman candidate has relevant leadership experience may significantly improve her evaluations if it causes citizens to update their prior expectations. We thus expect that citizens' gender biases should be reduced or eliminated when women and men candidates have the same political experience.

Second, citizens may evaluate men and women candidates differently based on the candidate's family status. In the absence of information to the contrary, citizens likely assume both men and women candidates are married with children in the home, as this is the norm for Malawian adults.[4] If citizens are given information about a candidate's family status that does not meet this expecta-

campaign handedly, only garnering 20 percent of the vote.

[4]The average family size according to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey is 4.6 members living in the home.

tion, their evaluations may change. We suspect, however, that citizens will update their assessments of men and women candidates differently based on this new information. In particular, we theorize that citizens will penalize women candidates who are seen as abdicating societal caregiving expectations (see, e.g., Tamale, 1999, p. 93 - 94, for a discussion of these gendered campaign dynamics in Uganda). This may occur both when women are gender conforming (married with young children in the home) because they are seen as neglecting their household duties by running for office, or when women are gender non-conforming (unmarried with young children who stay elsewhere) because they are violating societal expectations about proper behavior. In both instances, family status serves to exacerbate potential discrimination against women in ways not experienced by men. We suspect that men candidates will be equally successful across different types of family statuses, but that women must walk a particularly difficult path; they must be gender conforming, but not seen as neglecting family responsibilities. We therefore theorize women will be evaluated particularly favorably if they are widowed with adult children. In these instances, women are gender conforming, but have already fulfilled their familial duties and can thus devote time to political office.

Third, a candidate's chosen policy focus may affect citizens' gender biases. Research across a diverse set of cases suggests men and women citizens and politicians hold different policy priorities. The most consistently observed division in the developing world is men's relative prioritization of infrastructure projects and women's relative prioritization of access to potable water and improvements in women's rights (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes, & Mozaffar, 2018; Gottlieb, Grossman, & Robinson, 2018).[5] Citizens may expect councilors to represent gender-specific policy priorities (e.g., for men to prioritize infrastructure and women to prioritize water and issues related to women's rights). Indeed, citizens may prefer a co-gender representative because they expect that he or she will hold gender-specific priorities and may evaluate candidates differently when presented with information to the contrary. Therefore, we expect that men will penalize men candidates who prioritize "women's issues" (water and women's rights) and

[5]We find similar patterns in Malawi from the 2014 and 2016 Afrobarometer data.

women will penalize women candidates who prioritize "men's issues" (infrastructure projects).

Fourth, above we theorized that citizens will generally prefer men candidates because of societal expectations about appropriate gender roles. On this point, Malawi offers an interesting source of within-country variation. Around two-thirds of Malawians practice matrilineal kinship, in which familial belonging is traced through women, typically resulting in matrilocal residence patterns and women's inheritance of land. Women in Malawi's matrilineal groups also enjoy significantly more local power, including influence over chiefly successions and distributional conflicts, and tend to be more politically engaged than women from patrilineal groups (Robinson & Gottlieb, in press). This variation allows us to test how cultural norms around women's political participation affect citizen support for women candidates. We theorize this may occur at both the candidate level and the citizen level. Matrilineal women candidates may experience less bias than patrilineal women because they are perceived as more qualified, due to greater local influence, or better financed, due to greater access to familial resources (see Brulé & Gaikwad, 2017). Additionally, Malawians from matrilineal groups may demonstrate less bias against women candidates because they hold more gender-egalitarian views.

Finally, we expect gender biases may vary across citizens' characteristics. Previous research indicates that men and women respond to women candidates in different ways, but the predicted direction of these effects remains unclear. Studies from Western cases often find that gender bias is most pronounced in men's evaluations of women leaders (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Other work has indicated that women may hold stronger cultural norms around appropriate gender roles than men in societies where male-dominated economic and political power structures are most firmly entrenched (Clayton, 2015; Gottlieb, 2016; Tamale, 1999, p. 99). We are thus agnostic about whether gender bias will be stronger among men or women citizens. Lastly, we expect conservative gender norms, and thus citizen bias against women candidates, will be stronger in rural areas than in urban centers (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

The Context: Malawi's Local Elections

Malawi appears a likely case to detect voters' gender biases. Voters directly elect representatives from single-member districts in both national and sub-national legislatures, and women are underrepresented in both arenas. In the two most recent local elections, women won just 8 percent and 12 percent of local council seats, respectively. Moreover, women seem to face an electoral disadvantage at the ballot box. In the most recent local council elections, despite a lack of incumbents, women made up just 17 percent of the councilor candidate pool and won 12 percent of councilor positions. At the national level, women ran for 20 percent of parliamentary seats, but won just 16 percent.[6] Based on national-level statistics of the single or lower house, the representation of women in Malawi trails both the sub-Saharan African (24 percent) and global (24 percent) averages, as well as all three neighboring countries (Mozambique at 40 percent, Tanzania at 37 percent, and Zambia at 18 percent) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). This relatively low rate of women's representation is despite a robust national effort called the "50-50 Campaign" to support women candidates and promote gender equity among elected officials during both the 2009 and 2014 elections (Kayuni & Muriaas, 2014; O'Neil, Kanyongolo, & Wales, 2016).[7]

We examine voter bias in the context of Malawi's first-past-the-post local council elections, which offers a particularly interesting arena to study potential discrimination against women candidates. On the one hand, political decentralization may make politics more accessible to women. Local elections tend to have lower barriers to entry, as the requirements for standing as a candidate and the benefits gained by winning office are more modest than in national elections. In Malawi, these barriers were particularly low in the 2014 elections because candidates where running to fill positions left vacant since the dissolution of local assemblies in 2005 (Chiweza, 2016a).[8] On

[6]The re-election rate for women MPs was also significantly lower than that for men in the most recent parliamentary elections (15 percent of women v. 39 percent of men won re-election, two-tailed t-test significant at p-value ≤ 0.001), suggesting women candidates might be held to a higher standard in office (see Patel & Wahman, 2015, p. 11).

[7]For more information on the 50-50 Campaign, see Appendix J, which reports on a priming experiment that framed this campaign in different ways.

[8]Most scholars attribute the resistance to decentralization as politically motivated, as the ruling party and members of parliament did not want to cede political power to local governments (Aalen & Muriaas, 2018; Chasukwa & Chiweza, 2013; Hussein, 2017).

the other hand, discrimination against women candidates may be more intense at the local level. First, traditional leaders, who hold customary claims to authority, may bar women's access to local decision-making more forcefully than at the national level (Clayton, 2014; Goetz & Hassim, 2003, p. 21). Second, local politics is typically more removed from domestic or transnational women's movements, which often provide support for women candidates running for national office (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, & Mungwa, 2008). Finally, voters in local elections may be less influenced by partisanship and other cues and more concerned with personal characteristics in making their vote choice (McGregor, Moore, Jackson, Bird, & Stephenson, 2017). These factors may explain the general electoral disadvantage women candidates experienced in Malawi's most recent local elections.

By law, Malawian local councils hold considerable authority: they are responsible for enforcing national legislation locally, soliciting national funds for local economic development projects, and overseeing the provision of essential public services such as education and health (Chasukwa, Chiweza, & Chikapa-Jamali, 2014). In practice, their authority is somewhat limited by incomplete fiscal decentralization (Chiweza, 2016b) and by more powerful actors – especially members of parliament, appointed district commissioners, and traditional authorities – who view local councilors as real or potential competitors (Chinsinga, 2008; Chiweza, 2016b; Hussein, 2017). Yet while *de facto* authority may vary depending on particular power-sharing tensions in each district, most councilors have at least some ability to fulfill their mandate. Further, local council positions are often seen as a training ground for higher office and allow councilors to establish their authority and reputation as local leaders (Chiweza, 2016b). In short, these positions are desirable for local elites and non-trivial in terms of the local decision-making authority they grant and the potential path to higher office they provide to winning candidates.

Empirically, we focus our data collection in one of Malawi's twenty-eight districts, Kasungu district, for two principal reasons. First, Kasungu is home to both matrilineal and patrilineal ethnic groups. This is relatively rare in Malawi, which has significant ethnic clustering, but Kasungu includes the geographic boundary between areas dominated by the patrilineal Tumbuka and Ngoni

to the north and matrilineal Chewa to the south (Robinson, 2016). As discussed above, previous research has shown that matrilineal cultural practices are associated with less gender disparities in citizens' political engagement (Robinson & Gottlieb, in press), and our focus on Kasungu district allows us to determine whether such differences in kinship also influence citizen support for women candidates. Second, there are two different local councils within Kasungu district, one for rural constituencies (18 members) and one for wards within Kasungu town (9 members). We observe that urban women both run more often than rural women (30 percent vs. 15 percent) and are elected at higher rates (33 percent vs. 11 percent). As outlined in our pre-analysis plan, we are interested in exploring these urban-rural differences, and Kasungu is one of only a handful of districts in Malawi that has two different local councils. Otherwise, Kasungu is fairly typical in terms a host of other demographic and development characteristics.[9]

Research Design

Our research design includes the collection of three original data sources: (1) a vignette experiment within a citizen survey of over 600 Kasungu residents; (2) biographical data on half of the total candidates for the 2014 Kasungu local council elections; and (3) four focus groups with men and women candidates who contested in the 2014 Kasungu local council elections. We originally intended the latter two data sources to provide context to the survey results, which we use to test the hypotheses outlined above. But given the unexpected experimental results we present below, we rely on these two additional data sources to more inductively investigate forms of gender bias that we did not anticipate.

Survey Experiment on Citizen Bias

To assess citizen bias, we implemented a survey experiment which allows us to causally identify which components of a multidimensional treatment (i.e. candidate profiles) affect citizens'

[9]Kasungu District is broadly similar to the rest of Malawi in terms of the literacy rate (67% in Kasungu vs. 64% nationally), infant mortality rate (0.089 in Kasungu vs. 0.087 nationally), radio ownership (66% in Kasungu vs. 60% nationally), and the proportion of households with mud flooring (78% in Kasungu vs. 75% nationally) (National Statistics Office of Malawi, 2008).

evaluations of hypothetical candidates, similar to a conjoint experiment but with characteristics embedded in a vignette (see Hainmueller, Hopkins, & Yamamoto, 2013). We employed a design which asked respondents to evaluate different hypothetical candidate profiles that rotate through a random set of professional, policy-related, and demographic features. Citizens received information on a candidate's gender, conveyed by title and first name (e.g., Ms. Agnes or Mr. Charles), and ethnicity – and, thus, kinship – conveyed by surname (e.g., Mbewe, which signals Chewa ethnicity and matrilineal kinship, or Chisale, which signals Tumbuka ethnicity and patrilineal kinship). Each profile also contained information about the candidate's chosen policy focus: one typically preferred by women in Malawi (building additional boreholes in the ward or working to end child marriage), one traditionally preferred by men (maintaining local roads), or an area equally prioritized by men and women (improving local schools)(see Chiweza, 2016a).

We theorized above that our two remaining features of interest – political experience and family status – affect bias by updating citizens' pre-existing beliefs about women candidates. Revealing these features of a candidate's profile to subsets of respondents allow us to assess citizens' baseline assumptions and how biases towards men and women candidates shift with new information (see Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2018). Citizens were either provided with no information about a candidate's leadership status (i.e. this component was not included in the profile), or they were told that he or she previously served on an area development committee. Similarly, respondents were either given no information about a candidate's family status or were told the candidate was one of the following: never married with young children who stay elsewhere (gender non-conforming for women), married with young children (gender conforming, but abdicating family responsibilities for women), or widowed with adult children (gender conforming, not abdicating family responsibilities for women). For both the leadership and family variables, we use "no information" as the reference category to assess citizens' baseline assumptions about candidates. If citizens do not change their evaluations from the "no information" category when new information is presented, this suggests the new category is in line with their prior expectations. If evaluations do change, citizens are updating their previous assumptions and changing their evaluations accordingly.

Because we fielded our survey in an area historically dominated by one political party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), all candidate profiles contained an MCP party affiliation.[10] Finally, each profile also varied candidate characteristics for which we did not have theoretical expectations concerning gender – namely, age, education, and profession – in order to mask our particular interest in gender.[11] Given the very localized nature of council elections, the types of information contained in these candidate profiles would be common knowledge to most community members. The following is a hypothetical candidate profile, with each randomized component bolded. The full set of treatments is presented in Table 1.

> *This candidate is named* ***Ms. Martha Chisale*** *and she is* ***42*** *years old. She is standing on the MCP ticket and her priority is* ***building new boreholes*** *in the ward. She has a* ***secondary*** *education and she is a* ***business owner****.* ***She is widowed with adult children****.*

Respondents were each asked to evaluate six candidate profiles and rate their support for each on a four point scale. The surveys were administered through vignettes read aloud to respondents by trained local enumerators during face-to-face interviews in respondents' homes across Kasungu district, including both urban and rural and both matrilineal and patrilineal kinship areas.[12] Appendix A provides greater detail on our sampling strategy. In total, we surveyed 604 individuals, each of whom evaluated six candidate profiles, for a total of 3,579 candidate profile evaluations.[13]

We simultaneously collected two additional forms of data, originally intended to provide background for the project: biographical data from recent local council candidates in Kasungu district

[10] Partisanship is unlikely to be suppressing the effects of other candidate characteristics. In our survey, only 39 percent of respondents reported feeling close to the MCP party, and MCP supporters were not significantly more likely to express support for our hypothetical candidates. Furthermore, over 70 percent of the variation in support measures comes from within-respondent differences in ratings, suggesting that candidate characteristics affected relative assessments of candidates from the same party.

[11] We were careful to choose characteristics that would appear realistic in combination. For instance, we choose an age range in which hypothetical candidates could plausibly either be widows with adult children, or married with young children.

[12] We implemented this survey in collaboration with the Institute for Public Opinion and Research (IPOR) in Zomba, Malawi, which has extensive experience in collecting high quality survey data.

[13] See Appendix B for sample demographics.

Table 1: Treatment conditions in the survey experiment.

Treatment Category	Variations	Values
Gender	Female	Ms. Agnes Ms. Dorothy Ms. Esther Ms. Grace Ms. Mary Ms. Patricia
	Male	Mr. Charles Mr. Emmanuel Mr. Francis Mr. James Mr. John Mr. Patrick
Ethnicity (Kinship)	Chewa (Matrilineal)	Mbewe Chisale Chingaipe Kalimanjira Kaomba
	Tumbuka & Ngoni (Patrilineal)	Chirwa Gondwe Nyirenda Ndhlovu Jere
Age		38 - 51
Education	Primary Secondary	Junior Certificate (JC) Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE)
Occupation		Business owner Tobacco farmer Teacher
Policy Focus	Men-preferred issue Women-preferred issue Women-preferred issue Gender neutral	Maintain roads Building new boreholes (water access) Ending child marriage Improving local schools
Political Experience	No information Experienced	 Served on the Area Development Committee
Family Status	No information Culturally appropriate, no family obligations Culturally appropriate, family obligations Culturally inappropriate, no family obligations	 Widowed with adult children Married with young children Unmarried with young children staying elsewhere

and focus groups with recent candidates for Kasungu's two local councils.

Candidate Biographical Data

We collected basic demographic data from all the candidates we could locate from the 2014 Kasungu local council elections (68 of 135). We received a list of candidates from the Malawi Electoral Commission, which identified candidate gender and party affiliation. We used contact information on file with Kasungu district administrators, and then solicited additional contact information from candidates we successfully interviewed. Each interviewed candidate was called on their mobile phone by a trained interviewer at the Institute for Public Opinion and Research in Zomba, Malawi. MCP candidates were slightly overrepresented among our respondents (26

percent of interviewed candidates versus 19 percent of total candidates), due to stronger party networks in this historically MCP-dominant district. Winning candidates were also slightly oversampled (28 percent of interviewed candidates versus 19 percent of total candidates), given that current councilors are typically more well known in their wards than losing candidates. Women were also slightly overrepresented, making up 25 percent of our sample but only 19 percent of the actual candidates pool.[14] While our candidate-level data is necessarily from a convenience sample due to the difficulty in locating candidates for local elections in a resource-poor country, we note that a response rate of 50 percent is high for elite surveys. Further, we note this sort of data collection is rare; we are not aware of other research that has employed a similar effort in other developing country contexts.

Candidate Focus Groups

Finally, we conducted four gender-segregated focus groups with eleven women and ten men who ran for local council during the 2014 elections, including both winning and losing candidates. Participants were asked identical questions about their campaign experiences. Group sessions lasted an average of two hours. Focus groups were held at central locations (typically schools) in Kasungu district and were led by trained local facilitators from the Institute for Public Opinion and Research.[15] We recorded, transcribed, and translated the group discussions and coded the most common barriers men and women reported while campaigning.[16]

Experimental Results

To estimate the causal effect of each candidate characteristic on voter support, we calculate average marginal component effects using linear regression with standard errors clustered by respondent (see Hainmueller et al., 2013).[17] The dependent variable is a four point scale of candidate

[14] We surveyed 17 women and 51 men candidates. See Appendix C for additional details about the biographical data collection.

[15] See Appendix D for additional details on the focus group discussions

[16] Four focus groups is typically when group opinion reaches "saturation" – i.e. when adding more groups does not add significantly to the diversity of opinion (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

[17] We refer to "citizen" and "voter" support interchangeably when describing our results. The main results we include here are calculated for all respondents. Our results are unchanged for the subset of respondents

support, which we rescaled from 0 (no support) to 1 (strong support).[18] The results of this estimation are presented graphically in Figure 1.[19] Contrary to our expectations, we find a slight but statistically significant preference for women candidates. In addition, voters prefer candidates with more education and leadership experience and those who do not prioritize the provision of water boreholes. Family status also affects support: citizens prefer a candidate who is married with small children over an unmarried candidate with small children who stay elsewhere ($F = 38.45$, $p \leq 0.001$) and over a widowed candidate with adult children ($F = 9.65$, $p = 0.002$).[20] Again, the reference category is the condition in which family status was not included in a candidate profile, which allows us to assess respondents' baseline assumptions in the absence of additional information. Respondents appear to assume that candidates are married with children in the home, as assessments are not significantly changed when this information is revealed.

To determine whether a candidate's gender interacts with other candidate characteristics, we estimate average component interaction effects, again using linear regressions with respondent clustered standard errors. In Figure 2, the estimated interaction between gender and other characteristics are presented alongside the marginal effect of each candidate characteristic for men and women candidates separately. The second and third panel show the results for men and women candidates, respectively, while the first panel shows the difference between these results.[21] Coefficients displayed in the first panel can be interpreted as whether men or women candidates are particularly rewarded or penalized for having a certain characteristic.

Controlling for all other candidate characteristics, we find that men and women candidates are both evaluated slightly more favorably when they are shown to have leadership experience.

(86 percent) who reported voting in the most recent tripartite elections (see Appendix E).

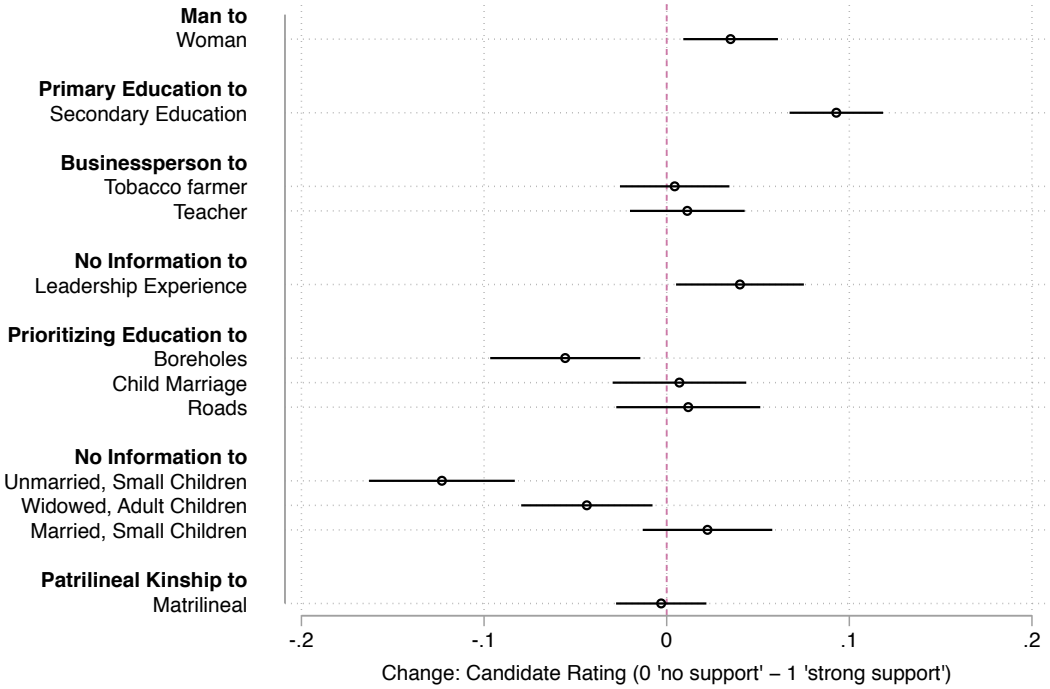
[18] We also asked four other candidate evaluation questions in addition to voter support:, expectations about others' evaluations, candidate quality, likelihood of winning, and support compared to a respondent's current councilor. Results for the other outcome measures are presented graphically in Appendix F and are largely consistent with our main results.

[19] Results for candidate age not reported in graphs due to space constraints. There are no clear age effects across possible ages (38-51), nor does candidate age systematically interact with candidate gender.

[20] Accounting for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni correction only eliminates the statistical significance of the effect of leadership experience.

[21] This figure follows the modeling and presentation choice of Teele et al. (2018).

Figure 1: The causal effect of candidate characteristics on voter support.



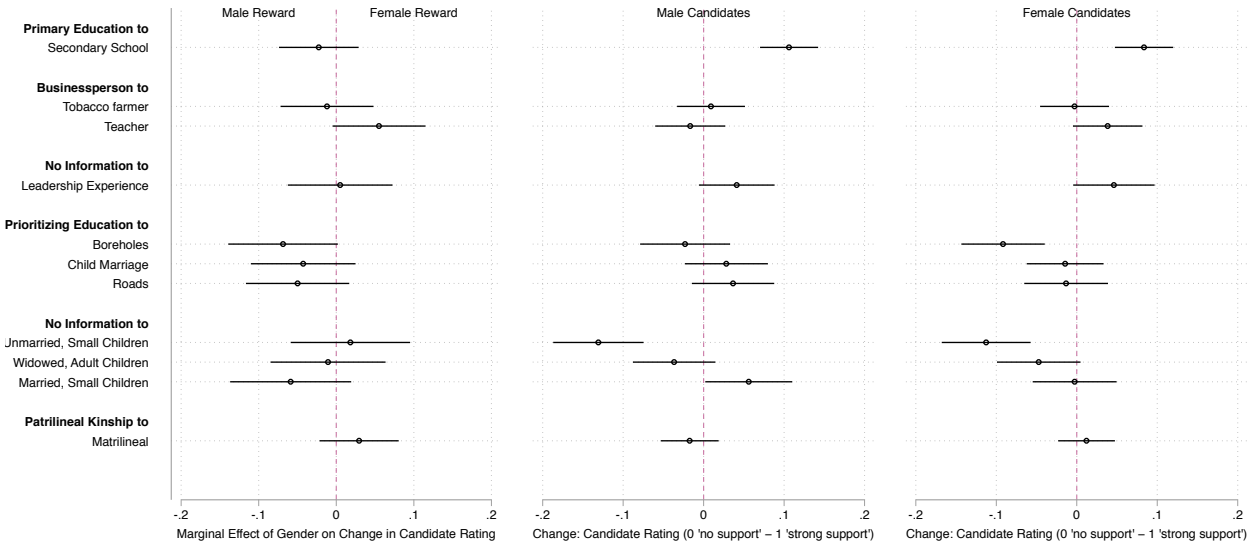
Note: Point estimates represent average marginal component effects for each candidate characteristic and 95% confidence intervals are based on respondent-clustered standard errors.

Contrary to our expectation, then, women do not receive an additional benefit in this condition. We also find that both men and women candidates are evaluated negatively when they are unmarried with small children who stay elsewhere, particularly compared to a candidate who is married with small children in the home. The coefficients depicted in the first panel of Figure 2 suggest that neither men nor women candidates receive an additional penalty or bonus in any family condition. Thus, voters do not appear to be evaluating candidates through a double standard.[22] Indeed, it appears as though we underestimated the extent to which men are also penalized for abrogating social expectations around family responsibilities. Citizens appear to strongly prefer candidates, both men and women, who are married with young children in the home.

Above we hypothesized that widowed men and women with adult children would appeal to voters more than married candidates with young children, as they fulfill norms about marriage and children but also have more time available to meet their elected duties. We further anticipated that

[22]See Appendix G for predicted levels of support by candidate gender and candidate family status.

Figure 2: The causal effect of candidate characteristics on voter support by candidate gender.



Note: Point estimates represent average marginal component effects for each candidate characteristic and 95% confidence intervals are based on respondent-clustered standard errors.

the potential political benefits of widowhood would be more pronounced for women than men, as running for office with young children might be seen as an abrogation of women's familial responsibilities. Surprisingly, widowhood had a negative impact on candidate rating among both men and women candidates, relative to being married with young children. One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that respondents prefer candidates with young children because they assume these candidates are themselves more youthful (Stalsburg, 2010, 396). However, we gave information on age directly, and neither age nor age interacted with family status conditioned levels of candidate support. It is also possible that a candidate with young children signals to voters that he or she is invested in the community, as someone who uses many community services, and is aware of the typical challenges faced by families. A second possibility is that, despite having complied with social norms earlier in life, widows and widowers face distinct biases because of their current status. For example, widows and, to some extent, widowers in matrilineal societies may lose access to property and resources after their spouses' death (Ngwira, Kamchedzera, & Semu, 2003, 35), perhaps causing our respondents to conclude that they do not possess the resources to

run for or occupy political office. In addition, in Malawi, widowhood status may activate specific taboos related to HIV/AIDS or the practice of witchcraft.

We also find no difference in how citizens evaluate men and women candidates with different policy priorities. Related to our hypothesis above, we examine how men and women citizens specifically evaluate co-gender candidates with different priorities (see Appendix H). While we do find that men slightly penalize women candidates who prioritize building new boreholes in their ward, we do not find a similar effect when men evaluate women candidates who prioritize the other women-preferred issue of ending child marriage (Figure H.1b, right panel).[23] Contrary to our hypothesis, we also do not find evidence that women penalize men candidates who prioritize building roads (Figure H.1a, middle panel). In short, this evidence suggests that a candidate's policy focus does not systematically affect how voters evaluate candidate gender. Contrary to our expectations, we also find no difference in the way citizens evaluate men and women candidates based on their kinship practices. Finally, related to heterogeneous treatment effects, we find that neither the causal effects of candidate characteristics, nor their interactions with candidate gender, vary systematically by respondent gender (Figure I.1), kinship system (Figure I.2), or urban vs. rural residence (Figure I.3).[24]

In sum, the results from our vignette experiment reveal no biases against women candidates either alone or in combination with other salient candidate characteristics. Citizens actually appear to prefer women candidates *ceteris paribus*, and men and women candidates with similar characteristics are evaluated similarly. How do we reconcile these unexpected results with our hypotheses above, and women's actual underrepresentation in local politics? Here we discuss two possibilities that may affect the interpretation and generalizability of our results: first, that our experimental results are an artifact of our particular design choices and, second, that women candidates are less penalized in local politics than national politics.

[23] Further, contrary to our expectations, we also find that women respondents also slightly penalize women candidates who prioritize building boreholes (Figure H.1a, right panel).

[24] While we did not theorize about the role of shared ethnicity in candidate support, our research design does allow us to assess the common expectation that support will be stronger for coethnic candidates. However, we uncover no such bias in favor of coethnic candidates in our sample.

To begin, we consider that our experimental results may be an artifact of our design choice. Our use of a single vignette experiment rather than a traditional conjoint in which candidate profiles are presented as lists either alone or through a paired comparison may have affected our results (see Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Yamamoto, 2015). Our choice of a single vignette over another approach was motivated by our survey context. Because illiteracy is common in rural Malawi, we could not ask respondents to evaluate a written list of candidate characteristics, as is typical in paired conjoint designs. Upon consultation with our survey implementing partner, we judged that asking survey enumerators to read aloud two candidate profiles for respondents to compare was too cognitively taxing, and that evaluating a single candidate was more feasible.[25] While our design choice was motivated by these factors, we find it unlikely that the use of single-profile vignettes specifically would affect implicit evaluations of candidate gender. Further, we note that when we use the outcome variable of whether the respondent would vote for the hypothetical candidate over his or her current councilor, we get similar results as those presented here, suggesting that the design feature of asking a respondent to choose between candidates is not affecting our results (see Appendix F).

Further, we conducted face-to-face interviews and asked some respondents a question about gender and political representation prior to the candidate vignettes, which may have prompted respondents to report socially desirable answers (see Carlson, 2016), including gender progressive preferences.[26] However, candidate gender was signaled indirectly by name and was only one of many characteristics we varied, a feature of conjoint-like designs that mitigates social desirability bias due to any single feature (Hainmueller et al., 2013). Further, our results are unchanged among the subset of respondents who did not receive a question about gender equality prior to their candi-

[25] We did ask each respondent to evaluate six separate candidates, which could have itself been quite taxing. However, the number of candidate evaluations did not emerge as a problem in our piloting, nor do we see evidence of respondent fatigue in our data (e.g., responses did not vary systematically by candidate vignette order).

[26] In particular, the survey also included priming experiment prior to the presentation of the vignettes which was designed to asses the effect of a national campaign to increase the number of women in elected office on voter gender bias. We discuss this experiment in Appendix J and show that our main results are not significantly affected by this priming experiment. When respondents received the control condition in which they were not primed about gender equality, our results are unchanged.

date evaluations and were thus not primed to think about gender in any way. Similarly, the gender dynamics of the interviews also reduce our concern that social desirability is driving our results: in particular, we do not find greater support for women candidates in interviews conducted by women enumerators, among both women and men respondents. Finally, all interviews were conducted by trained local enumerators who identified themselves as working for IPOR Malawi, a local research organization, mitigating concerns that respondents may have altered their responses to appear more progressive to Western researchers (see Cloward, 2014).

Finally, it is possible that our profiles represent the most "women friendly" type of political competition. We describe a community-oriented candidate for local office, a profile which may appear more socially acceptable for women than a profile of an ambition-driven candidate for higher political office (see Schneider, Holman, Diekman, & McAndrew, 2016). We find this plausible and future work might seek to vary this dimension of hypothetical candidate profiles. Yet we note that the slight preference for women candidates from our experimental results does not comport with the observational finding that women candidates were, on average, less successful than men candidates in the most recent local council elections. To address this apparent discrepancy, we turn to more inductive analyses based on our cumulative data collection effort.

Biographical and Focus Group Results

Our experimental results suggest that voters do not discriminate against women candidates. Yet we find this result puzzling given that women won less frequently than men in the most recent local council elections and given the consistent accounts of discrimination against women candidates we encountered during our fieldwork, both from candidates and from Malawian academics (see, for instance, Amundsen & Kayuni, 2016). To inductively explore this discrepancy between our experimental results and qualitative accounts, we turn to the two additional sources of data that we collected. These data suggest that the survey experiment we ran did not capture the actual barriers women face in local council elections in two important ways. First, while we find that hypothetical men and women candidates with similar characteristics are evaluated similarly,

candidate biographical data suggest that while most men have the desired family status, women candidates generally do not. Men candidates are much more likely to be married with children in the home. Second, data we collected through in-depth focus groups suggest that women candidates, in particular, experience elite-driven, gender-based defamation that may affect voter opinion about them specifically in ways not captured by our experiment.

To begin, our experimental results reveal that citizens prefer candidates, both men and women, who are married with young children, yet the biographical data we collected from half of the total candidates who ran for this office suggest this is a particularly uncommon profile for women. Among the 68 candidates we surveyed, we collected data on year of birth, marital status, number and ages of any children, education, prior occupations, and party involvement prior to running for office. While men and women candidates are of a similar age and have similar professional backgrounds and educations, they differ substantially with regards to family status. Indeed, this is the only characteristic where we find significant discrepancies between men and women. While all of the men candidates we surveyed were married, only 47 percent of the women candidates were (two-tailed t-test, $p < 0.001$).[27] Women candidates were also about half as likely to have children under five in the home (24 percent vs. 53 percent, two-tailed t-test, $p = 0.06$), and less likely to have children under eighteen in the home (53 percent vs. 86 percent, two-tailed t-test, $p < 0.01$). While voters prefer candidates who are married with young children, this describes very few women candidates, while it is the modal family status among men.

Turning to an analysis of our focus groups, our transcripts reveal one consistent gender difference in self-reported campaign experiences: women candidates experienced extreme gender-based defamation, while men did not. The majority of women participants (six out of eleven) reported gender-specific verbal abuse that they personally encountered on the campaign trail. The most common experience was being called a prostitute (e.g. "We women were insulted very much by our opponents, especially on the issue of prostitution, especially us single women."). Other experiences included: being told their husbands would divorce them, being accused of "sleeping

[27]Of the nine unmarried women, two were divorced, four were single, and three were widowed.

around" on the campaign trail, and being called witches. All participants noted that these slurs overwhelmingly came from their competitors, rather than from citizens. Two other women spoke in non-gendered terms about verbal abuse (e.g. "I faced several problems, mostly about how people talked of me."). The majority of women participants (seven out of eleven) felt citizens looked down on them because they were women. One participant directly connected the elite-driven rhetoric to voter opinion ("[The] result of women being insulted... [is] people doubt that person."). In short, women candidates overwhelmingly identified a toxic political climate in which sexist rumor-mongering perpetuated by their political competitors negatively affected voters' opinions about them specifically.

In contrast, only three out of ten men reported verbal abuse; two spoke about general name calling ("They talked a lot about me...I did not bother about that." and "Only at one point I was castigated at a rally.") and one man reported being criticized for not being originally from his area. Two men also noted the intense gender-specific abuse women candidates faced. One noted how women candidates were frequently called prostitutes and the other gave an example of a woman who was teased about menstruating. In sum, the focus groups reveal how targeted elite-driven defamation particularly affected women candidates in ways not captured by the hypothetical candidate profiles presented to citizens in our survey experiment. Focus group participants all generally described how gendered mud-slinging affected the reputation of specific women candidates, resulting in a particular form of voter bias commonly experienced by women, but not encountered by men.

We also note that the findings from our biographical data and from our focus groups are very plausibly related. While childrearing responsibilities likely prohibit mothers with young children from becoming candidates, this group may also be particularly concerned about potential slander. Five women in our focus groups mentioned the fear of being slandered as a reason women do not run for office. One man participant reported how this affects married women specifically ("[T]he women who could qualify to vie for the position of a councilor, you will find that she is [often] married and for her to leave her husband and concentrate on politics it becomes a challenge. As a

result, we don't have many women vying for these positions."). One woman participant claimed that husbands may forcibly prohibit their wives from running ("Mostly it could be due to gender violence where men don't allow their women to compete."). These qualitative accounts help to explain the finding from our candidate biographical data: married women with children in the home are much less likely to run for office than similarly positioned men.

Discussion and Conclusion: The Nature of Gender Bias in Elections

Few studies have examined whether and how voters discriminate against women candidates in emerging democracies. To our surprise, our experimental results did not reveal a generalized public distaste for women leaders. Rather, our observational and qualitative data suggest that women are disadvantaged in two less obvious and perhaps more pernicious ways in the electoral process: by societal barriers that prohibit the emergence of viable women candidates (those who are married with young children) and by a campaign environment that is particularly negative for women.

Related to the former, we note that our experimental findings are strikingly similar to those found in a recent study of citizens' evaluations of candidate gender in American politics. Using a conjoint experimental design, Teele et al. (2018) find that American respondents have a slight preference for women candidates, *ceteris paribus*, and that respondents evaluate men and women candidates with the same traits similarly. And, like us, they also find that voters prefer candidates, both men and women, who are married with children, a status much more common among men than women running for local and national office in the United States. That our findings are so similar across these diverse settings suggests a common and generalizable barrier in women's political recruitment, and one that is likely to persist as long as familial care-giving expectations make it more difficult for mothers with young children to run for office than fathers with young children (see also Kage et al., 2018).

Our qualitative results, which describe a particularly negative campaign environment for women, also find broad support in other work. In earlier qualitative work from Malawi, Tiessen (2008) finds that women running for political office report similar accounts of sexist abuse. Reporting on ac-

counts across the subcontinent, Tripp (2001, 153) notes that "campaigning and serving in office often involve travel, spending nights away from home, going to bars, and meeting men – all of which put women politicians at risk of being considered 'loose women' or 'unfit mothers."' Based on extensive interviews with Ugandan parliamentarians, Tamale (1999, p. 99) reports a similar occurrence, noting:

> Women spent a great deal of campaign time convincing the electorate of their moral aptness to stand for political office instead of articulating political issues. In fact, the campaign trail for female candidates resembled a court martial wherein they had to defend their sexual morality.... Women [...] encountered slurs regarding their marital status, sexuality, and (in)fidelity.

Of course, the gendered slurs and defamation experienced by women running for political leadership is not specific to African cases. Krook (2017) documents the many forms psychological and physical violence against women in politics can take and their common occurrence across a variety of cases. We have argued that this type of targeted misogyny weakens voters' evaluations of specific women candidate while not affecting their evaluations of hypothetical candidates. Again, importantly, we are not suggesting that voters do not discriminate against women candidates, rather we argue that these types of barriers are hard to capture in the assessment of hypothetical candidates that are divorced, by design, from the types of social contexts in which gossip and defamation thrive.

Our argument about specific versus hypothetical sexism also finds parallels in the American literature on stereotype activation and support for women candidates. For instance, N. M. Bauer (2015) finds that negative campaign advertisements can activate gender stereotypes that are otherwise dormant as voters evaluate women candidates. Our results suggest that political elites in Malawi are also "going negative" in a similar way to activate voters' stereotypes about the appropriateness of women campaigning for political office, thereby impugning the reputation and electability of specific women. While not the focus of our study, it is also possible that the hostile sexism employed by men candidates mobilizes voters with a preference for male leadership such that this group is particularly compelled to turn out to vote (see Cassese & Holman, 2019; Valentino, Wayne, & Oceno, 2018). More generally, our findings comport with work from the

American case that suggests that the process of running activates biases against women candidates rather than voters holding a strong *a priori* preference for male leadership (see Hayes & Lawless, 2016).

Again, we stress that both our qualitative findings and a close reading of the Americanist literature does not suggest that voters are without bias or that women's underrepresentation can simply be explained by women's lack of political ambition. Rather, our results suggest that biases are activated in ways that are difficult to manipulate experimentally. And, importantly, that fear of coming up against these biases may stop women from running for office in the first place. Our study thus also has implications for researchers and policy makers interested in designing interventions to increase women's representation. Our results suggest that interventions to encourage women to run for office or those that set aside temporary leadership positions for women may not change women's political ambition if they fail to address forms of sexism that affect the broader political environment in which candidates compete.

Further, the discrepancy between our experimental and qualitative results suggests standard conjoint or conjoint-like experimental designs may be ill suited to capture biases in ways that reflect how actual elections work. Our finding that Malawians have a slight preference for hypothetical women candidates comports with similar research from Brazil and Japan, cases in which women are also severely underrepresented in politics (Aguilar et al., 2015; Kage et al., 2018). Indeed, in a recent meta-analysis of candidate choice experiments, Schwarz, Hunt, and Coppock (2018) find that respondents across many survey contexts, on average, have a slight but statistically significant preference for women candidates. Why citizens appear to prefer women candidates when casting hypothetical votes remains an open question, but it seems highly likely that these designs are not accurately capturing the actual electoral contexts in which voters make decisions. In line with Teele et al. (2018), our study also highlights a different weakness of choice experiments: if the type of women who run for office are not the types of candidates voters generally prefer (i.e. those who are married with young children), then it may scarcely matter that citizens evaluate men and women with the same characteristics similarly if, in actual elections, they are seldom given this

choice.

The different interpretations of gender bias that emerge from our collective data also cause us to reflect on our epistemology. Our experimental results were surprising to us and, in retrospect, we would have benefited from conducting our focus groups first, rather than alongside our survey experiment. This would have given us more insight into our experimental design, allowing us to better include the specific barriers the women candidates themselves identified. For instance, we might have been able to design a "rumor-mongering condition" to test whether and how voter biases are activated in the electoral process. In light of this, we endorse the suggestion made by Lieberman (2016) that purely descriptive endeavors should proceed experimental designs.

Our study demonstrates the stubborn and socially-engrained nature of gender bias in elections. Yet, despite this, women are making remarkable progress in national and sub-national politics, both globally and in sub-Saharan Africa specifically. Indeed, women's representation in African parliaments has doubled in the last 15 years and tripled in the last 25. This progress has been in large part due to the rapid expansion of electoral gender quotas, which either reserve seats for women representatives or set aside places for women candidates on party lists. On average, once implemented, quotas dramatically increase women's representation, suggesting that when political opportunities exist, women take them. An open question in the literature, then, is how gender biases operate in elections involving quotas. For instance, the two forms of bias we identify may operate differently in quota contexts. Women running in races with only women candidates will not experience sexist slurs from male competitors. Further, social expectations about familial obligations that make running difficult for married women with young children may be less pronounced when parties need to recruit women to fill quota positions. These open questions and others related to how gender biases operate across comparative electoral contexts are important avenues of future research.

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