

Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference 2023

Common Knowledge of Social Norms and Political Behavior: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan

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Outline

Introduction

Theoretical framework

Context and design

Results

Motivation

Social norms are an important determinant of (political) behavior (Bicchieri and Dimant, 2023; Cheema et al., 2022; Jayachandran, 2015, 2021).

Individuals can be misinformed about others' privately held opinions leading to pluralistic ignorance.

Conforming behavior with a social norm can persist even if individuals know that others privately oppose the norm.

→ The community might enforce the norm against private opinions if community members are subject to pluralistic ignorance.

Creating **common knowledge about private opinions** can align social norms with private opinions.

This paper

Does creating common knowledge about support for or opposition to female political activism affect women's behavior?

What do we do?

- Field experiment with more than 5000 women in rural Kyrgyzstan.
- Provide expert opinion stating either high or low levels of support for female political activism.
- Cross-randomize whether we create common knowledge about the expert opinion.
- Measure whether women show up at community meetings about grants to improve the community.

We are currently collecting additional data to explore mechanisms.

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Set-up

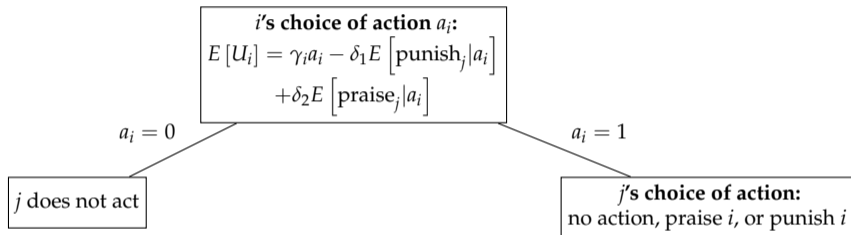
Two-period decision problem for women i :

- In the first period, i decides whether to act or not.
- In period two, the community decides whether to punish, praise, or ignore action.

The community's action depends on their private opinion and perceptions of prevailing norms.

Perception of social norms shapes whether i expects punishment or praise for her action a_i .

Overall decision tree



- γ_i is the private return to political action.
- δ_1 and δ_2 are the utility of punishment and praise, respectively.

Simplified community action in period two

Private opinion (s_j)	Perceived social norm \widehat{s}_-	
	Oppose (0)	Support (1)
Oppose (0)	Punish	No action
Support (1)	No action	Praise

The community only acts if private opinion and perceived norms align.

→ This can be relaxed to stochastic enforcement conditional on beliefs.

For i 's decision, her beliefs about the community action \tilde{s}_j and \tilde{s}_- are relevant.

→ We shift these beliefs experimentally.

Key prediction: Creating common knowledge should lead to weakly more expectations of norm enforcement and, hence, compliance with the norm.

Context and sample

We study female political participation in Kyrgyzstan:

- Seven-million landlocked hybrid democracy in Central Asia.
- Battleground for more female political empowerment:
 - First female president in Central Asia and election quotas at local level.
 - Increasing Islamic radicalism and deeply entrenched patriarchal values.

We work with 5,212 women in 150 villages in three provinces:

- All women who are active in village health committees ($n = 775$).
→ These women are already very active in local politics and society.
- Representative sample of women who are not active in village health committees ($n = 4,437$)

Data collection

In-person baseline surveys:

- Measure demographics and beliefs.
- Provide treatment information as part of this baseline survey.
- Provide information about a meeting about community grants (recruitment for separate project).
- Measure beliefs and intentions about political participation.

Main behavioral outcome: attendance at the community grants meeting.

Active control experimental design (Haaland, Roth and Wohlfart, 2023)



We provide information about an expert opinion about the prevailing *injunctive* norm.

→ We provided true information.

All participants receive some information.

→ direction of treatment effect is independent of baseline perceptions of social norms.

We also vary the gender source of the social norm but pool for the analysis as we do not see any differences.

No common knowledge condition

The research team consulted Kyrgyz experts on female political participation in Kyrgyzstan to understand whether people in Kyrgyzstan want women to be more active in politics. These experts have a lot of experience working on female political participation or conducting research on this topic. We like to tell you about what we found in our conversations with the experts. One expert told us that they think that [High: 7 / Low: 1] out of 10 women believe that women should participate more in politics. In other words, a [High: large majority / Low: small minority] of Kyrgyz women believe that women should become more active in politics.

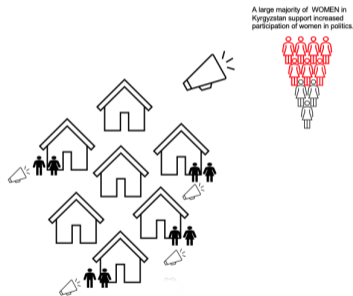
7 out of 10 women living in Kyrgyzstan want women in Kyrgyzstan to be more active in politics



No common knowledge condition

*We have conducted similar interviews across this and other communities. In the interviews, we **told many of your neighbors** that a [large majority / small minority] of women in Kyrgyzstan support increased participation of women in politics. This means that **many of your neighbors now know** that there [is / is no] widespread support that women should become more active in politics.*

We told many of your neighbors that a large majority of WOMEN in Kyrgyzstan support increased participation of women in politics.



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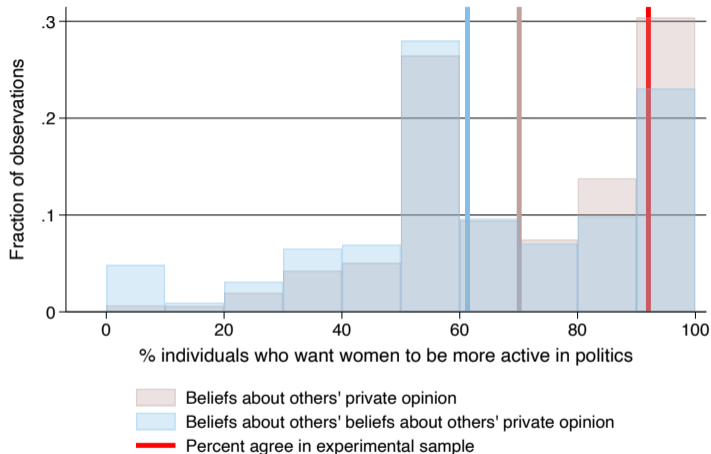
Context and design

Results

Summary statistics and balance

	Pooled	Low support		High support		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
		No common knowledge	Common knowledge	No common knowledge	Common knowledge	p-value
<u>Panel A: Demographics</u>						
Age	44.16	44.48	44.18	43.95	44.03	0.73
Female	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Number of children	3.75	3.77	3.79	3.70	3.74	0.55
Married	0.86	0.86	0.85	0.87	0.86	0.57
Kyrgyz	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.95	0.95	0.63
Has work income	0.29	0.28	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.91
Tertiary education	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.68
Secondary education	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.72	0.83
Primary education	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.46
<u>Panel B: Beliefs</u>						
Belief: Societal support for female engagement (%)	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.99
Neighbors' belief: Societal support for female engagement (%)	0.51	0.49	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.07
<u>Panel C: Intentions</u>						
Likelihood of engagement (scale 0-4)	2.94	2.93	2.94	2.92	2.97	0.51
Interest in grant program (scale 0-4)	2.86	2.85	2.84	2.87	2.87	0.80
Number of observations	5,212	1,295	1,358	1,268	1,291	

Prior beliefs



→ Spike at 50 indicative of uncertainty.

→ Our low expert opinion provides negative news to most participants.

Treatment shifts perceptions of social norms

	Update: Beliefs about neighbors			Update: Beliefs about neighbors' beliefs		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: High vs low support	Pooled	Common knowledge	No common knowledge	Pooled	Common knowledge	No common knowledge
High support treatment	0.508*** (0.050)	0.578*** (0.072)	0.411*** (0.073)	0.490*** (0.056)	0.595*** (0.081)	0.377*** (0.080)
Mean outcome	-0.061	-0.049	-0.073	0.121	0.095	0.148
Observations	5092	2584	2508	4742	2408	2333
Panel B: Common knowledge treatment	Pooled	Low support	High support	Pooled	Low support	High support
Common knowledge treatment	0.017 (0.051)	-0.049 (0.074)	0.097 (0.073)	-0.049 (0.057)	-0.163** (0.082)	0.080 (0.078)
Δ Common knowledge treatment			0.149 (0.101)			0.244** (0.111)
Mean outcome	-0.061	-0.309	0.196	0.121	-0.115	0.365
Observations	5092	2590	2502	4742	2410	2331

High treatment effects both beliefs about others' private opinions and beliefs about neighbors' beliefs.

Common knowledge in the low support condition reduces beliefs about about neighbors' beliefs.

→ The estimate for the high condition is insignificant.

Effects of common knowledge

	Meeting attendance		
	(1) Pooled	(2) Low support	(3) High support
Common knowledge treatment	-0.020** (0.009)	-0.033** (0.013)	-0.008 (0.013)
Δ Common knowledge treatment			0.031* (0.018)
Mean outcome	0.179	0.178	0.179
Observations	5212	2653	2559

Common knowledge decreases attendance, in the low condition.

We observe no effect in the high support condition.

Results on intentions are consistent but less precisely estimated. [results](#)

Heterogeneity by VHC membership

	Meeting attendance		
	(1) Pooled	(2) Low support	(3) High support
Common knowledge treatment	-0.030*** (0.009)	-0.031** (0.013)	-0.031** (0.013)
Common knowledge treatment × High baseline propensity to be active	0.066* (0.037)	-0.012 (0.051)	0.153*** (0.053)
High baseline propensity to be active	0.342*** (0.026)	0.357*** (0.036)	0.328*** (0.037)
Common knowledge treatment: High baseline propensity to be active	0.035 (0.035)	-0.043 (0.049)	0.122** (0.051)
Mean outcome	0.179	0.178	0.179
Observations	5212	2653	2559

Common knowledge induces more attendance in the support condition for active women.

→ More likely to be punished for not attending?

Beliefs do not change for active women. [results](#)

Conclusion

Creating common knowledge about a community's private opinions can affect women's behavior.

However, there seems to be an asymmetry: common knowledge about low support has a stronger effect than common knowledge about high support.

- Is it because prevailing perceptions of high support?
- Is it because of a fundamental asymmetry in enforcement of positive and negative norms?

The heterogeneity by whether women were active at baseline rather supports the second interpretation.

→ We will run vignette experiments to better understand the underlying mechanisms.

Contribution

We show that higher-order beliefs about social norms can drive political behavior. (Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020; Bursztyn et al., 2023; Bursztyn, Egorov and Fiorin, 2020; Gottlieb, 2016*a*)

Document asymmetry in the effect of common knowledge across the “direction” of social norms.

Still to come: provide micro evidence on how (expected) enforcement of social norms shapes behavior.

Context: We provide evidence on how social norms in Kyrgyzstan shape local female political participation. (Giné and Mansuri, 2018; Gottlieb, 2016*b*; Prillaman, 2021)

Thank you

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