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Does the Nobel Peace Prize Improve Women's Rights? Prize and Praise in International Relations

Kyosuke KIKUTA*

Manaho HANAYAMA†

1 October, 2023

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Keywords: Nobel Peace Prize, Women's rights, Violence against women

JEL classification: [D71](#), [F50](#), [J16](#), [K38](#)

* Research Fellow, Africa Study Group, Area Studies Center, IDE
(Kyosuke_Kikuta@ide.go.jp)

† Graduate Student. Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University.

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INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
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Does the Nobel Peace Prize Improve Women's Rights?

Prize and Praise in International Relations

Kyosuke Kikuta^{*}

Manaho Hanayama[†]

^{*} Research Fellow. Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization.

kyosuke.kkt@gmail.com. Corresponding author.

[†] Graduate Student. Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University.

Abstract

We examine the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize on women's rights to shed light on the roles of the positive symbolic action, "prize and praise," in international relations. Based on psychological theories, we argue that the Nobel Peace Prize increases people's confidence in women's rights activists by spotlighting prominent individuals. The change in people's beliefs alters the strategic interaction between women's rights groups and potential perpetrators. We substantiate these claims by applying natural experiments to individual-level surveys and event data. The analyses indicate that if the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to women's rights activists, it increases people's trust in women's organizations. Moreover, the Nobel Peace Prize decreases violence against women and women's rights protests. However, these changes are short-lived. These results imply that symbolic actions can entail real-world changes; however, the question of how to sustain these changes remains.

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What are the effects of international awards such as the Nobel Peace Prize on human rights? Do they improve human rights conditions? We answer those questions using psychological theories and natural experiments in the case of women's rights. We argue that international awards can signal the reliability of a recipient women's rights activist to citizens across the world. Although the signal pertains only to a specific recipient, people can generalize it and place more trust in women's rights activists. The increased support, in turn, shapes strategic interactions between women's rights activists and potential perpetrators. Thus, we hypothesize that international awards have sizable impacts on public opinion and behavior.

We substantiate these claims by analyzing individual-level surveys and event data. In the survey analysis, we exploit the as-if random coincidence between the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize and the dates of the survey interviews (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020). The analysis indicates that when the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to women's rights activists, it increases people's trust in women's organizations in general. Moreover, by using event data, we show that awarding the prize to women's rights activists lulls violence against women and women's protests. However, these changes do not last long. Overall, these results suggest that the Nobel Peace Prize has sizable real-world impacts, but the effects are short-lived.

The new theories and findings shed light on the crucial roles of positive symbolic actions in international relations—what we call “prize and praise.” Despite the plethora of studies about the effects of “naming and shaming” on human rights (e.g., NGOs' blaming of human rights

violations),¹ little attention has been given to positive symbolic actions.² However, as studies on electoral campaigns suggest (Lau and Rovner 2009), the effects of positive and negative campaigns can differ. While negative campaigns can only denounce human rights violators and spread their negative image, positive campaigns can spotlight human rights activists and enhance their reputation. This study balances the literature by focusing on the roles of positive symbolic actions in human rights issues. Also, in contrast to Krebs (2009), who has developed a typology and conducted case studies of eight Nobel Peace Prizes, we provide micro-level theories and quantitative evidence by focusing on the prizes awarded to women's rights activists.³

Moreover, by examining international awards, we highlight how the international community can help women's rights activists. Previous studies have analyzed women's rights activists and their tactics, such as demonstrations (2006; Htun and Weldon 2012) and international

¹ Rebovic and Voeten (2006, 2009); Hafner-Burton (2008); Murdie and Bhasin (2011); Davis et al. (2012); DeMeritt (2012); Krain (2012); Murdie and Davis (2012); Barry et al. (2013); Hendrix and Wong (2013); Kim (2013); Murdie and Peksen (2014, 2015); Dietrich and Murdie (2017); Terman and Voeten (2018); Gruffydd-Jones (2019); and Snyder (2020).

² There is a continuum between positive and negative symbolic actions. One can condemn human rights violations and, simultaneously, commend human rights activists. A positive campaign can also be interpreted as a negative campaign (e.g., Chinese government's reaction to the 2010 prize).

³ Alford (2008) and Heffermehl (2010) have reviewed the history of the Nobel Peace Prize. Bulloch (2008) and Adams (2012) have conducted interpretative discourse analyses. Kolstad (2020) has analyzed the effects of the 2010 prize and resultant economic sanction on trade. Many other studies have examined the effects of the Nobel Prizes on sciences (e.g., citation patterns).

campaigns (Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006; Murdie and Peksen 2015; Donno, Fox, and Kaasik 2022). However, those tactics may not work if the women’s rights groups lack popular support. While the literature has emphasized the roles of national legislation and media in this respect (Huddy, Neely, and Lafay 2000; Neumann 2017; Arias 2019; Green, Wilke, and Cooper 2020; Htun and Jensenius 2022), we examine how the international community can legitimize and thus boost the popular support across the world, suggesting an international origin of legitimacy (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Ferree and Tripp 2006).

Empirically, we incorporate recent innovations in public diplomacy studies—natural experiments with survey dates—into the literature on gender and politics (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020; Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Matush 2021). Unlike other observational studies and survey experiments, this approach allows us to achieve a crucial balance between internal (i.e., causal identification) and external validity (i.e., analysis of real-world events). In doing so, we also expand the scope of public diplomacy studies to women’s rights issues.

International Award as a Credible Symbol

Contemporary women’s rights activists—or, more broadly, norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)—face problems that are different but similarly difficult as those of earlier activists. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) state in the case of suffragists in the 19th and 20th centuries, the main obstacles for earlier activists were the lack of public information, popular interests, and civil organizations. Therefore, earlier activists needed to disseminate information, cultivate popular support, and create organizational platforms. In contrast, the present world is characterized by the influx of (mis)information and the abundance of diverse women’s rights organizations. Almost every country has multiple, and often numerous, women’s rights groups (Murdie and

Peksen 2015), and the Internet and social media provide immense information about feminism, women's rights, and women's organizations.

The abundance of information and organizations creates the problem of adverse selection. Even if people wish to support a women's rights movement, they are uncertain whether a given activist is the one they would like to support. The activist can be too extreme (e.g., anarchist feminist), dissembling a feminist for other political objectives (e.g., communism), or even just a scam. Even worse, conservative opponents can spread misinformation and label the activist as a "radical feminist" or "femspeak" (Bloomfield 2016; Sanders 2018). With this uncertainty, people may consider that the self-claimed "women's rights activist" may not be the one that they would like to support. For instance, in the World Value Survey (2022), 18,986 respondents chose gender discrimination as the most or second most serious issue in their countries, but only 20% of them had the highest trust in women's organizations, and over one-third of them expressed low or the lowest trust. Without additional measures,⁴ people cannot easily trust women's rights activists.

We argue that prestigious international awards, such as the Nobel Peace Prize, credibly and symbolically signal the reliability of women's rights activists to people across the world, thus addressing the problem of adverse selection.⁵ As theories of rational updates suggest (Little 2022),

⁴ Self-claiming a "women's rights activist" constitutes a cheap talk. Costly signaling may not always work as well. Because extreme and dissembling activists can also initiate a demonstration, the demonstration will not send a credible signal.

⁵ A "reliable" activist refers to an activist whose objective (e.g., women's rights) and stance (e.g., mainstream or extreme) align with those of a given citizen. Because we are interested in average citizens who support women's rights, we consider mainstream women's rights groups as their

the prize should boost people's trust in recipient women's rights activists. The Nobel Committee spends substantial money, time, and effort to select winners. The Nobel Committee would bear these costs only if they seriously intend to honor women's rights activists (costly signaling; Fearon 1997). Moreover, even though the Nobel Peace Prizes have been controversial sometimes and their reputation has been occasionally tarnished (e.g., Abiy Ahmed in 2019), the committee also cares about its own reputation and, thus, is incentivized to award only reliable activists. With these incentives, the prize credibly signals the reliability of a recipient women's rights group.

Null Hypothesis

However, this does not mean that people receive those signals or update their beliefs. People may not be informed of or interested in the prize. Moreover, rational people (i.e., those who follow the Bayesian updates) should not hastily generalize the Nobel Peace Prize to the broader population of women's rights activists. In fact, the "sample size" is too small; the prize is awarded to only one or a few activists. Given the abundance of women's rights activists, people cannot make definite inferences about a population based on one or a few observations. More importantly, the Nobel Committee "cherry-picks" prominent activists (see the case section for details of the selection process). This means that the sample is not just small but biased; the Nobel laureates are systematically different from other women's rights activists; thus, people cannot make valid inferences about the population. Overall, there are good reasons to believe that the Nobel Peace Prize does not affect people's general confidence in women's rights activists.

reliable activists. This does not deny the possibility that extreme activists are reliable for citizens who take extreme stances.

Psychological Bias

Psychological theories, however, suggest alternative possibilities. Generalization bias refers to the human tendency to hastily generalize from a small or biased sample (Tversky and Kahneman 1971; Kahneman and Tversky 1972). Even when a sample is small or biased, people tend to perceive that the sample is informative and thus make inferences about a population. From this perspective, people can hastily generalize the Nobel Peace Prize to a broader population, regardless of the sample size or selection biases.

Indeed, previous studies have found that women politicians are role models for women, reduce gender stereotypes (Dasgupta and Asgari 2004), increase both women's and men's political efficacy (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Reingold and Harrell 2010; Fridkin and Kenney 2014), and thus induce various political activities such as political discussion (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Mariani, Marshall, and Mathews-Schultz 2015), electoral participation (Broockman 2014; Gilardi 2015; Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018), and demonstrations (Barnes and Burchard 2013). In other words, a single prominent figure can change people's general beliefs about gender. By extending this logic, we can hypothesize that the Nobel Peace Prize provides a role model of a women's rights activist (not only a woman; an activist can be male) and thus increases people's trust in women's rights activists in general.

Collective Action: Opportunity and Backlash

These cognitive changes can alter the dynamics of collective actions. One possibility—what we call the *opportunity effect*—is that the Nobel Peace Prize provides opportunities for collective actions (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The prize can encourage victims to speak up, and the media to broadcast women's rights issues. Even though people might otherwise hesitate to join a women's rights movement, the Nobel Prize removes such mental barriers. The prize also provides

a focal point for collective action and a psychological cue for mass mobilization. Women's rights activists, for instance, can use the prize to mobilize people. Although the prize may affect only a handful of people, the change can quickly snowball into a large-scale demonstration (Kuran 1991; Chenoweth and Belgioioso 2019).

By contrast, potential perpetrators (e.g., a husband attacking his wife; a government and rebels in more organized violence) can perceive those opportunities for the women's rights movement as challenges to their traditional gender values.⁶ They may even display an emotional backlash and use violence to reinforce their gender values or vent their frustration (known as a backlash effect in social psychology; Hornung, McCullough, and Sugimoto 1981; see also Krebs 2009; Snyder 2020). Perpetrators may also carry out gender violence to signal their commitment to traditional gender values, intimidate victims and activists, and thus wreck opportunities. Overall, the opportunity effect suggests that awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to women's rights activists increases both women's rights protests and gender violence.

Strategic Interaction: Selection and Lull

However, the Nobel Peace Prize has another effect: the *selection effect*. Because the prize draws public attention to gender issues and encourages victims to share their experiences, potential perpetrators could face greater risks of women's rights protests if they would use violence. As being a target of women's protests is socially and politically costly, potential perpetrators can refrain from using violence. The prize can also directly change the minds of potential perpetrators.

⁶ Our theory can be applied to violence against women by individuals (e.g., domestic violence) and groups (e.g., violence during armed conflicts). We leave it an empirical question whether the prize similarly affects the different types of violence.

These changes, in turn, lessen the causes and motivation for organizing and joining women’s rights protests, thus temporally quelling the situation. Thus, although the prize may not stop ongoing protests, it can reduce the onset of new protests, especially those related to sexual violence. However, once public attention wanes (i.e., people forget about the prize), perpetrators resume violence, and the situation reverts to the previous course. Hence, the selection effect suggests that if the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to women’s rights activists, it lulls violence against women and women’s rights demonstrations, but the effect dissipates sooner or later. Table 1 summarizes these predictions. Because opportunity and selection effects can coexist and their relative sizes are theoretically indeterminate, we empirically analyze which effect outweighs the other.

Table 1. Predicted Effects of International Awards

		People’s confidence in women’s orgs.	Women’s rights protests	Violence against women
No or rational update	Null effect	0	0	0
Biased update	Opportunity effect	+	+	+
	Selection effect	+	–	–

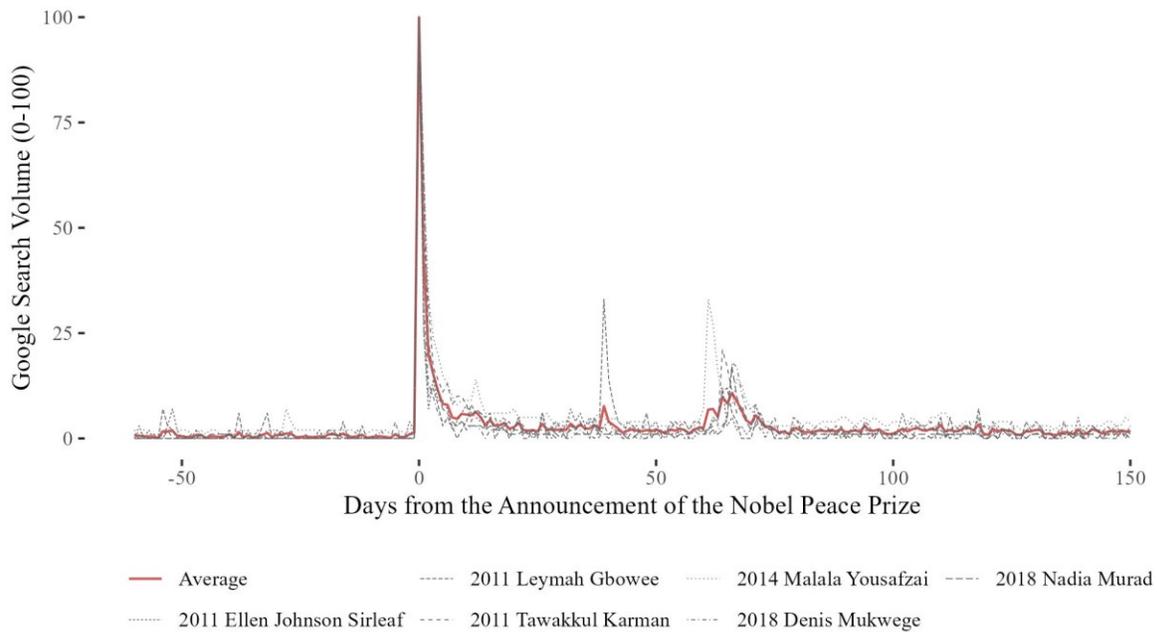
0, +, and – refer to no change, increase and decrease, respectively.

Case: The Nobel Peace Prize

The Nobel Peace Prize is the most distinguished among many international awards, making it the most likely case for testing the predictions. Indeed, global and local media broadcast the winners of the prize every year, and the names of the laureates are extensively tweeted and googled. It is estimated that over 350 million households in 80–120 countries watch the prize ceremony (Johnsen 2014). Baram-Tsabari and Segev (2015) also show that the Nobel Peace Prize gains immediate and the most durable attention among all Nobel Prizes; the global volumes of Google searches and online news reach their peaks immediately after the announcement of the prize, and

it takes 16 and 137 days until the volumes are halved from their peaks, respectively. Figure 1 presents the volume of Google searches for each day from the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to women’s rights activists between 2010 and 2020 (global; 0-100 scale).⁷ The announcements of the prizes elicited immediate attention, which, however, dissipated within a month. The attention regrew two months after the announcement, reflecting the award ceremonies. These results suggest that the Nobel Peace Prize is substantively relevant at least in a short term.

Figure 1. Google Search Volume Before and After the Nobel Peace Prizes



Moreover, the selection process for the Nobel Peace Prize provides plausibly exogenous, if not completely random, variation. That is, even though the award is selective and potentially biased (Krebs 2009; Heffermehl 2010), it is difficult to precisely predict the winners. For instance, while the director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) has shortlisted possible winners

⁷ <https://trends.google.com/trends> (accessed on 2023-6-17). The data for the 2004 or earlier prizes are not available.

since 2015, only two out of eight included the actual winners of a given year.⁸ This implies that even the director of the PRIO, who should have in-depth knowledge, cannot predict the Nobel Peace Prize accurately. Thus, even though the Nobel Peace Prize reflects real-world changes and can potentially be biased, it usually comes with a surprise.

The unexpectedness stems, in part, from its secret process. The selection is delegated to the Nobel Committee comprising five members. The committee members are appointed by the Norwegian parliament and are usually composed of former ministers and parliamentary members (Johnsen 2014). From September to the end of January, the Nobel Committee accepts nominations from qualified individuals, such as members of the Norwegian parliament and government, international organizations, university professors, and former laureates. For the next three months, the committee narrows down the nominees from over 300 to 20-30 candidates. After an intensive discussion and adviser review from April to August, the committee decides the winners through a majority vote at the beginning of October. The winners of the Nobel Peace Prize are publicly announced on the first Friday of October. The ceremony takes place on 10 December, and the winners receive 10 million Swedish kronor (approximately 1 million US dollars).

This year-long process and the majority votes by five members make it difficult to accurately predict the winners, ensuring the unexpectedness of the award. However, this does not mean that the award would be randomly assigned. The Nobel Peace Prize is intended to award people who have advanced “fellowship among nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and the establishment and promotion of peace congresses” (The Nobel Prize 2022). Although human rights issues were not initially considered, their scope has expanded since the

⁸ PRIO. <https://www.prio.org/nobelshortlist> (accessed on 2022-12-16).

1990s (Krebs 2009; Heffermehl 2010). In the following analyses, we leverage the unexpectedness of the Nobel Peace Prize, while statistically accounting for the non-random selection of winners.

Survey Analysis: Research Design

We test the predictions by conducting two sets of analyses: survey and event data analyses. In the survey analysis, we analyze the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize on citizens' general confidence in women's rights groups. To this end, we exploit two features: the unexpectedness of the Nobel Peace Prize outlined above, and, more importantly, the as-if random coincidence of survey interviews with the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno, and Hernández 2020). Because the dates of the survey interviews are predetermined and unlikely to be affected by the Nobel prizes, we can assume that respondents are as-if randomly assigned to interviews before or after the announcement of the prize. This as-if randomness, combined with the unexpectedness of the prize, allows us to identify causality.

However, some problems remain. The Nobel Peace Prize is announced a few days after the other Nobel prizes. Moreover, the Nobel Peace Prize is always announced on the first Friday of October. These features make it difficult to isolate the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize from those of other Nobel prizes and days of the week.

We address these problems using the difference-in-differences (DiD). That is, we compare the changes in the outcome variable after the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to women's rights activists, to the baseline changes after the prize is awarded to other groups. Because we compare the differences across Nobel Peace Prizes, the confounding effects of the other Nobel prizes are canceled out. Moreover, because the prize is always announced on Fridays, the day-of-the-week effects are canceled out.

Sample and Unit

The unit of analysis is respondent i interviewed within h_{WVS} days before or after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize k . We use data from the World Value Survey (WVS, 2022). To the best of our knowledge, the WVS is the only dataset that tracks people’s confidence in women’s organizations over a long period. Other surveys, such as Afrobarometer and Gallup World Poll, have questions about women’s rights but do not ask questions about women’s rights *groups*. Given our theoretical focus, we use the WVS as the main sample.

The sample includes respondents who answered the fifth to seventh waves of the WVS within h_{WVS} days before/after a Nobel Prize between 2006 and 2020.⁹ We do not limit the sample to respondents living in the laureates’ original countries, as the effect of the prize is unlikely to be limited to those countries.¹⁰ Because respondents are as-if randomly assigned *within* each survey, we drop a country-wave if all respondents are interviewed either before or after a Nobel Peace Prize.¹¹ The time window h_{WVS} ranges from 1 to 35 days.¹² The resultant sample includes 2,676

⁹ The first to fourth waves of the WVS (1981–2004) contain very few respondents around the announcements of the Nobel Peace Prize.

¹⁰ The sample does not contain any of the laureates’ countries as no interviews were conducted before and after the announcements of the Nobel Peace Prizes.

¹¹ Because the survey periods are orthogonal to the announcement of the prize, the sampling is random and thus representative, though there can be small-sample biases.

¹² Larger time windows do not add any changes. Note that the automatic bandwidth selection that is widely used in the regression discontinuity design cannot be used, as the running variable is discrete (Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Matush 2021; Imbens and Kalyanaraman 2012).

($h_{WVS} = 1$) to 17,996 ($h_{WVS} = 35$) respondents in 14 countries between 30 September 2006 and 19 October 2020.¹³ Summary statistics are provided in Appendix A1.

Outcome Variable

The outcome variable Y_i is respondent i 's answer to a question: “could you tell me how much confidence you have in [Women’s organizations]: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?” (World Value Survey 2022).¹⁴ Following Goldsmith et al. (2021), we create separate dummies for each response (including non-response as a separate outcome).¹⁵ We use parametric models such as ordered probit in a robustness check.¹⁶

Treatment Variables

The first treatment variable D_{ik} takes 1 if respondent i is interviewed after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize k (including the announcement date). The second treatment variable R_k takes 1 if at least one of the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize k is a women’s rights activist. For the survey period (2006–2020), we identify three prizes given to women’s rights activists: Ellen

¹³ The countries include Armenia, Canada, China, Cyprus, Greece, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Pakistan, Romania, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Uruguay.

¹⁴ Because the question refers to women’s organizations while the Nobel laureates are individual women’s rights activists, it is less likely that respondents would misinterpret the question as one about the Nobel laureates.

¹⁵ Although “a great deal” and “quite a lot” might sound similar in English, they sound different in other languages. The WVS uses “muchă” and “băstănte” in Spanish, “tamamen” and “biraz” in Turkish, and “foarte multă” and “destul de multă” in Romanian.

¹⁶ The linear model does not impose strong assumptions as all predictors are dichotomous.

Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkul Karman in 2011; Malala Yousafzai in 2014; and Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad in 2018.¹⁷ Approximately one-third of the respondents answered the surveys in those years.

Specification

With these variables, we estimate the average treatment effect local to respondents who answered the survey question within the time window h_{WVS} , by using a regression model:¹⁸

$$Y_i = \alpha_{ck} + \beta D_{ik} + \delta D_{ik} R_k \quad \forall i: \text{abs}(T_i) \leq h_{WVS}. \quad \text{Eq.1}$$

As the respondents are as-if randomly assigned *within* each wave, the model includes a fixed effect for country-year α_{ck} (Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Matush 2021). The country-year fixed effect also accounts for the non-random selection of the Nobel Peace Prize. Even though the treatment assignment probabilities may vary across countries and years, the fixed effect accounts for country-level heterogeneity and time trends. On par with the regression discontinuity design, we use triangular weights so that respondents near the announcement day have larger weights.

The quantity of interest is δ , which represents the effect of awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to women's rights activists on people's general confidence in women's organizations. T_i is the number of days from/to the Nobel Peace Prize announcement. The sample includes

¹⁷ Our coding is based on the Nobel Committee's press release (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes>; accessed on 6 September 2022). We do not include the 2006 prize for Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank because the press release did not mention women's rights.

¹⁸ The lower term R_k is omitted due to its perfect collinearity with α_{ck} .

respondents who answered the survey interviews within $h_{WVS} \in \{1, \dots, 35\}$ days before or after the announcement of the prize.¹⁹

Survey Analysis: Results

Figure 2 shows the estimate $\hat{\delta}$ for each time window $h_{WVS} \in \{1, \dots, 35\}$. In most time windows, the Nobel Peace Prize significantly increases the most positive attitudes (fourth row of Figure 2). It appears that the respondents move from the most negative (first row of Figure 2) and somewhat positive (third row of Figure 2) responses to the most positive response, although the changes are not statistically significant. Substantively, the Nobel Peace Prize increases the most positive answers by 4 percentage points at $h_{WVS} = 14$. Because 11% of the respondents have chosen the most positive answer, the effect is equivalent to a 36% increase from the sample average.²⁰

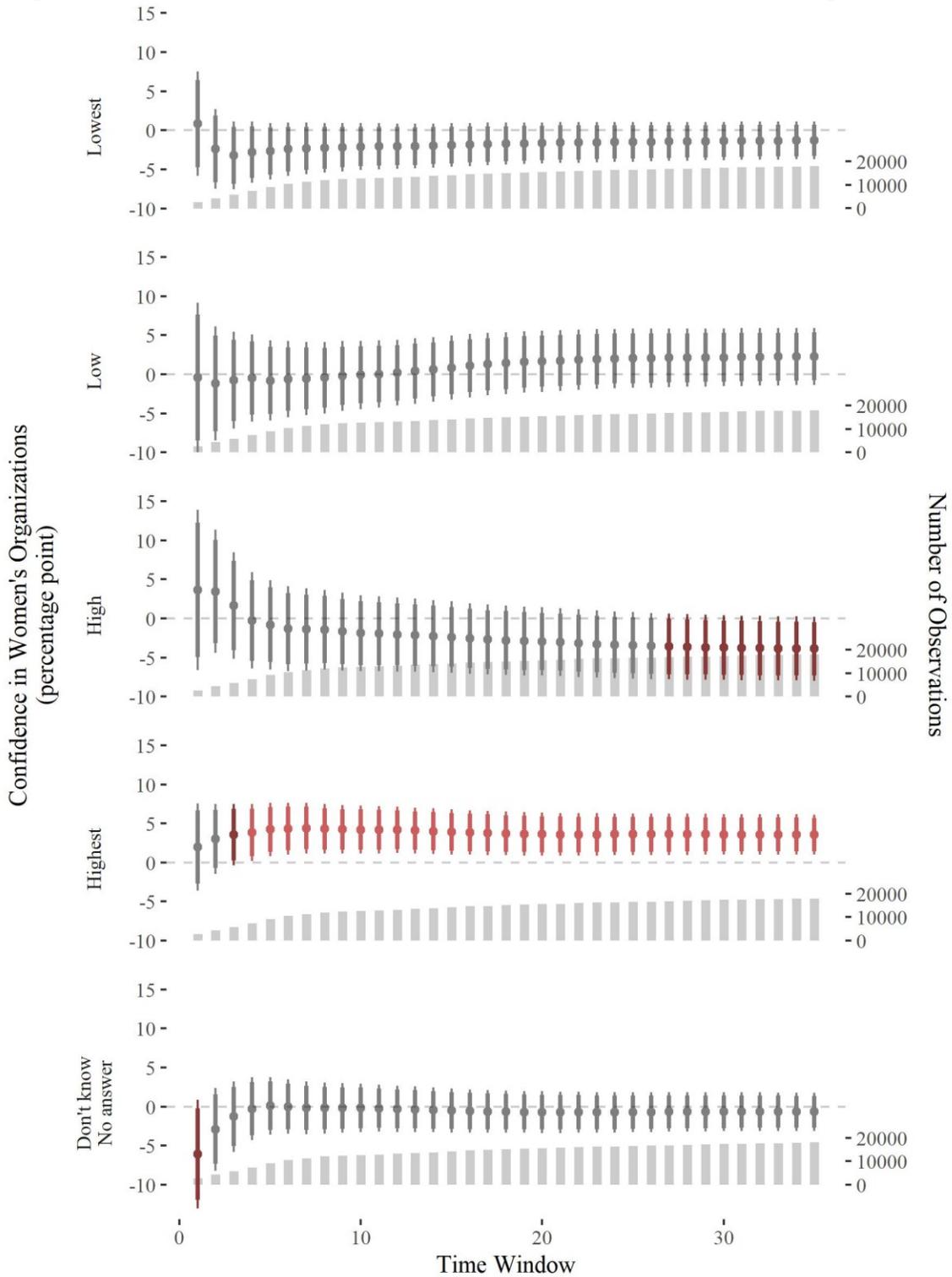
In contrast, we do not find meaningful changes in the moderately negative answers (second row of Figure 2) or non-responses (last row of Figure 2). In our setup, the treatment can increase or decrease the number of those moderate answers. For instance, the treatment induces the respondents who would otherwise choose the most negative answer (“Lowest”) to choose the moderately negative answer (“Low”), but it also induces the respondents who would otherwise choose the moderately negative answer (“Low”) to choose the moderately positive answer (“High”). This may explain why we find inconclusive results for the moderate answers.²¹

¹⁹ See footnote 12.

²⁰ This analysis cannot identify the long-term effects as we restrict the sample to the cases in which survey periods coincide with the Nobel Peace Prize announcement (and most of the survey periods are less than a month).

²¹ In a robustness check, we also use the ordered probit model to account for those possibilities.

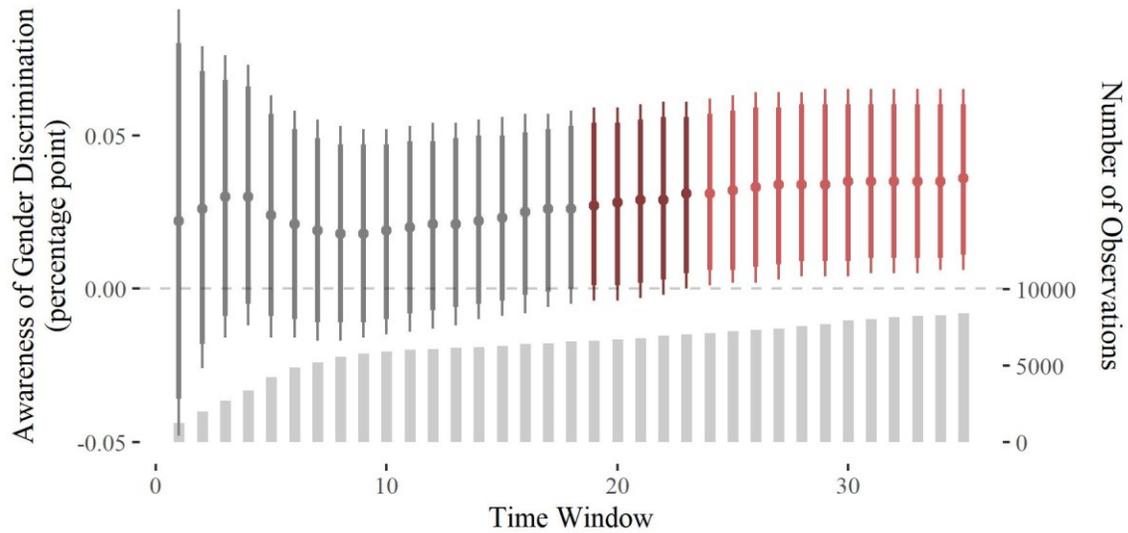
Figure 2. Effect of the Nobel Peace Prize on Confidence in Women's Organizations



The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are robust to heteroscedasticity. The vertical bars show the number of observations. $n = 2,676$ for $h_{WVS} = 1$ and $n = 17,996$ for $h_{WVS} = 35$.

In Figure 3, we also analyze the effect on public attention to gender issues. The outcome variable takes 1 if a respondent chooses “discrimination against girls and women” as the most or second most serious issue in the world. As seen in Figure 5, even though the confidence intervals are large (this item has a larger number of missing values), the Nobel Peace Prize raises public awareness of gender discrimination.

Figure 3. Effect of the Nobel Peace Prize on Gender Awareness



The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are robust to heteroscedasticity. The vertical bars show the number of observations. $n = 1,228$ for $h_{WVS} = 1$ and $n = 8,393$ for $h_{WVS} = 35$.

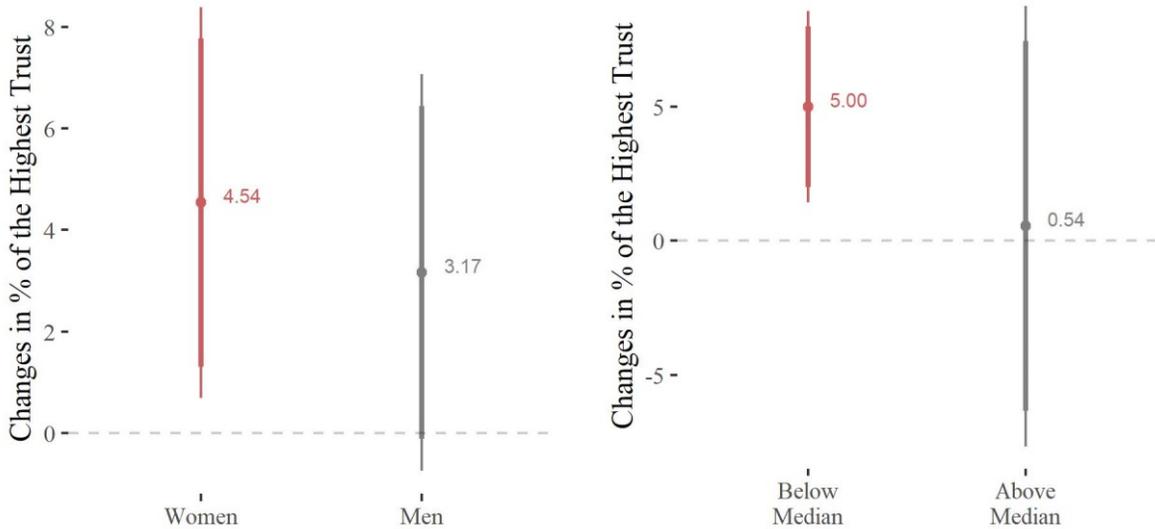
Effect Heterogeneity

In Figure 4, we break down the main findings in Figure 2 by respondents’ gender (left) and women’s political empowerment at the country level (right).²² Women tend to be more responsive to the Nobel Peace Prize; the point estimates are 143% larger than those for men. The effect is also

²² The genders are those self-reported in the WVS, which allows only a binary choice. For simplicity, the figure only shows the results of the most positive answer for $h_{WVS} = 14$. The women’s political empowerment index comes from the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2021).

pronounced in countries with lower levels of women’s political empowerment. These results suggest that vulnerable individuals are more receptive to the prize.

Figure 4. Effect Heterogeneity by Gender and Empowerment
 Respondents’ Gender Women’s Political Empowerment (V-Dem)

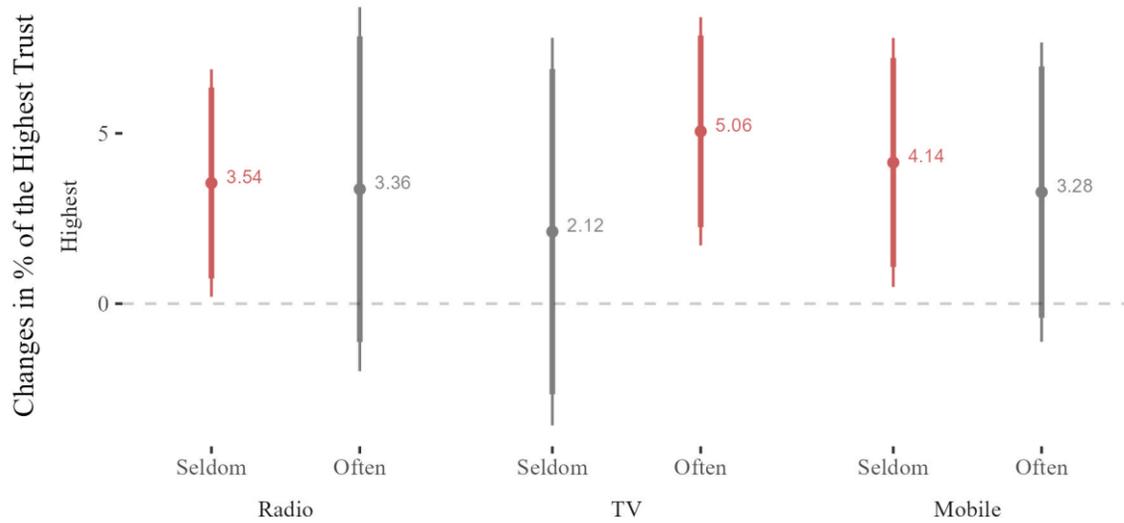


The figure shows the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize for women’s rights activists on the confidence in women’s organizations. The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are robust heteroscedasticity. The genders are those self-reported in the WVS, which allows only a binary choice. $n = 13,725$, $h_{WVS} = 14$.

In Figure 5, we assess the effect heterogeneity by media usage. Although there is no clear heterogeneity due to radio or mobile usage, the effect is larger for people who frequently watch television. Televisions provide visual information, and unlike other media, many viewers are exposed to similar content such as the news of the Nobel Peace Prize. These features can make television especially effective in shaping public opinion.²³ However, we warn readers that the effect heterogeneities are under-identified; we cannot exclude alternative possibilities (e.g., age may correlate with media usage and effect sizes).

²³ Effect heterogeneity by other covariates is reported in Appendix A2. In a later robustness check, we also drop countries with severe censorship.

Figure 5. Effect Heterogeneity by Media Usage



The figure shows the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize for women’s rights activists on the confidence in women’s organizations. The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are robust to heteroscedasticity. $n = 12,648$, $h_{WVS} = 14$.

Additional Analyses

Finally, we conduct additional analyses, which are summarized in Table 2 and detailed in the appendix. First, because the treatment (whether laureates are women’s rights activists) perfectly correlates with the gender composition of laureates,²⁴ we cannot isolate the treatment effect from the effects of laureates’ gender. We address this problem by analyzing whether awarding a Nobel Prize in Literature to women would have similar effects.²⁵ If the laureates’ gender is the real cause, the placebo should also increase people’s confidence in women’s organizations. However, we do

²⁴ In our sample, whenever the prize was awarded to women’s rights activists, one of the laureates were women. All women laureates in our sample are women’s rights activists.

²⁵ The literary prize has the largest number of women laureates next to the peace prize. By contrast, only a very few women have won the other Nobel prizes (i.e., medicine, physics, chemistry, and economics). This makes the models unidentifiable due to multicollinearity.

not find any such effects (Appendix A3). Next, we analyze whether the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize spill over on the confidence in other groups (Appendix A4). We also check the core assumptions—the as-if random coincidences of survey interviews and the Nobel Peace Prize—by checking the covariate balance and density (Appendix A5 and A6). We also conduct an event study to check the pretreatment trends of the outcome variables (Appendix A7). Finally, the results are robust to the use of an alternative dataset, removal of countries under severe censorship (in which people are unlikely to know about the Nobel Peace Prize), additional control variables, removal of pre-treatment trends (Goodman-Bacon 2021), fixed effects, different calculations of the standard errors, and sample composition. Overall, our empirical findings provide robust support for the psychological explanation. In the following sections, we use event data to quantify the opportunity and selection effects.

Table 2. Additional Analyses (Survey)

		Appx.
Placebo test (literary prize awarded to women)	✓	Fig. A3-1
Spillover effects on confidence in other organizations	✓	Fig. A4-1
Balance check	✓	Tab. A5-1
Density check	✓	Fig. A6-1
Event study	✓	Fig. A7-1
Comparison of the treatment and baseline changes	✓	Fig. A8-1
Alternative dataset (Afrobarometer)	✓	Fig. A9-1
Removing countries with severe censorship	+ [†]	Fig. A10-1
Ordered Probit	+ [*]	Tab. A10-1
Controlling for demographic covariates	+ [*]	Fig. A10-2
Removing the pre-treatment trends	+ [*]	Fig. A10-3
No fixed effect	+ [*]	Fig. A10-4
Year, month, week, day, and day-of-the-week FEs	+ [*]	Fig. A10-5
SE clustered by country	+ [*]	Fig. A10-6
SE clustered by year	+ [*]	Fig. A10-7
SE two-way clustered by country and year	+ [*]	Fig. A10-8
Leave-one-country-out tests	+ ^{*1}	Fig. A10-9

* $p < 0.05$, [†] $p < 0.1$. Note 1: Only significant at a 10% level in 1 out of 14 cases.

Event Data Analysis: Research Design

In the event data analysis, we analyze the effects of the Nobel Peace Prize on violence against women and women’s rights demonstrations. The basic design is similar to that of the survey analysis; we use the DiD by comparing changes before and after the announcements of the Nobel Peace Prizes for women’s rights activists and those for other groups. A caveat is that we can no longer use the as-if randomness of survey timing, and thus, the design relies on the DiD and its core assumption—the common trend assumption. That is, if it were not for the Nobel Peace Prize given to women’s rights activists, the treated and control groups should have similar trends in their outcome variables. With this assumption, any change after the treatment is plausibly attributed to the Nobel Peace Prize.

The unexpectedness of Nobel Peace Prize winners, detailed in the case section, provides a basis for the common trend assumption. Because people cannot precisely predict the winners, they can hardly make anticipatory behaviors. Although women’s rights activists are more or less likely to receive the award in some years (e.g., 2018) or countries (e.g., Iran), we compare the *changes* before and after the prize announcement. Finally, even though the Nobel Peace Prize is always announced on Fridays after the announcements of the other Nobel prizes, the DiD accounts for these confounding features (see the research design section of the survey analysis).

Sample and Unit

We use a couple of different samples for the event data analysis. In the first analysis, we use a country-day as a unit of analysis, and examine daily changes in the probability of events. The main data are the ICEWS dataset, which machine-codes more than 38 million multilingual news sources. Metternich et al. (2013) even accredit it as “the current gold standard for event data” (901), though its quality is still disputed (Wang et al. 2016; Ward et al. 2013). Therefore, we conduct analyses

with the ACLED in a robustness check.²⁶ The ICEWS sample includes 195 countries h_{ICEWS} days before and after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1995–2019. The time window h_{ICEWS} ranges from 1 to 60 days.²⁷ The sample includes 14,433 and 582,131 observations for $h_{ICEWS} = 1$ and 60 respectively. Summary statistics are provided in Appendix A11.

The second sample is based on individual-level surveys about domestic violence. Data are obtained from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the most comprehensive surveys on demography, health, and households (USAID 2022). We use the data of all women who were asked questions about domestic violence within h_{DHS} days before or after the Nobel Peace Prize announcement.²⁸ For the reasons we mention ahead, we use relatively large time windows: $h_{DHS} \in \{7, 14, \dots, 364\}$.²⁹ The sample contains 29,378 ($h_{DHS} = 7$) to 1,462,199 ($h_{DHS} = 364$) respondents in 55 countries between 2 December 2003 and 7 May 2021. Summary statistics are provided in Appendix A17.

²⁶ Because the ACLED is only available for Africa except for a few recent years, we use it in a robustness check. The other datasets do not serve the analytical purpose of this study. The Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD; Hendrix and Salehyan 2013) and the Mass Mobilization dataset (Clark and Regan 2021) do not include the gender identities of initiators. The Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO; Chenoweth, Pinckney, and Lewis 2018) dataset is available only up to 2011.

²⁷ Larger time windows do not add any changes. See footnote 12.

²⁸ The DHS does not ask male respondents about domestic violence.

²⁹ Larger time windows do not add any changes. See footnote 12.

Outcome Variables

For the ICEWS dataset, the outcome variable Z_{ctk} is the daily incidence of violence against women or women’s demonstrations in country c on t day after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize k .³⁰ If the ICEWS classifies an event as a demonstration and the names of the initiators contain the word “women,” the event is considered a women’s demonstration. Ideally, we would like to include all women’s rights demonstrations regardless of the initiators’ identity; the ICEWS does not code the demand of the protestors, and thus we use the group names. We also use a similar approach to violence against women; if an event is classified as coercion, repression, or assault and the names of the targets contain the word “women,” the event is considered violence against women. We also check the robustness using the ACLED.

For the DHS data, we use three dichotomous variables W_i that take 1 if respondent i answers “yes” to ever experiencing any emotional (e.g., humiliation), physical (e.g., beating), or sexual (e.g., forced intercourse) violence.³¹ Thus, unlike the WVS, this item is not an opinion. Moreover, unlike the ICEWS, the DHS variables are *retrospective* reports of events without explicit event dates. Given these features, it is unlikely that the Nobel Peace Prize would immediately change W_i ; it would take several weeks or months until changes in the real world are reflected in the respondents’ retrospective answers. Therefore, we use relatively large time windows for h_{DHS} .

³⁰ In a later robustness check, we also use the event count.

³¹ The baseline category $W_i = 0$ includes “no” and “don’t know.” Only a few respondents have chosen “don’t know” (3.5 to 4.7%), and dropping those respondents does not change the results.

Although both of the outcome variables are based on media or victim reports and thus subject to reporting biases, “as long as the measurement error is uncorrelated with the independent variables, measurement error in the dependent variable is not particularly problematic in a standard regression framework other than increasing the uncertainty around the estimates we obtain” (Weidmann 2016, 208). One possibility is that awarding women’s rights activists may draw attention to gender issues and thus increase media reports of women’s rights demonstrations. The award may also encourage women to publicize their experiences. It turns out, however, that our results are *inconsistent* with those predictions, and thus reporting biases, if any, would make our estimates conservative. To be sure, we also use another item in the DHS to explore reporting biases.

Treatment Variables

The treatment variables are identical to those used in the survey analysis. The first treatment variable D_{tk} or D_{ik} takes 1 if day t or the interview date of a respondent i is after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize k . The second treatment variable R_k takes 1 if at least one of the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize k is a women’s rights activist. As the periods of analysis are longer than those in the survey analysis, the sample includes two additional awards for women’s rights activists: Shirin Ebadi in 2003 and Wangari Muta Maathai in 2004.

Specification

The regression models are similar to those in the survey analysis. For the ICEWS dataset, we use:³²

$$Z_{ctk} = \mu_{ck} + \gamma D_{tk} + \rho D_{tk} R_k \quad \forall t: \text{abs}(t) \leq h_{ICEWS}. \quad \text{Eq.2}$$

For the DHS, we use:

$$W_i = u_{ck} + r D_{ik} + p D_{ik} R_k \quad \forall i: \text{abs}(T_i) \leq h_{DHS}. \quad \text{Eq.3}$$

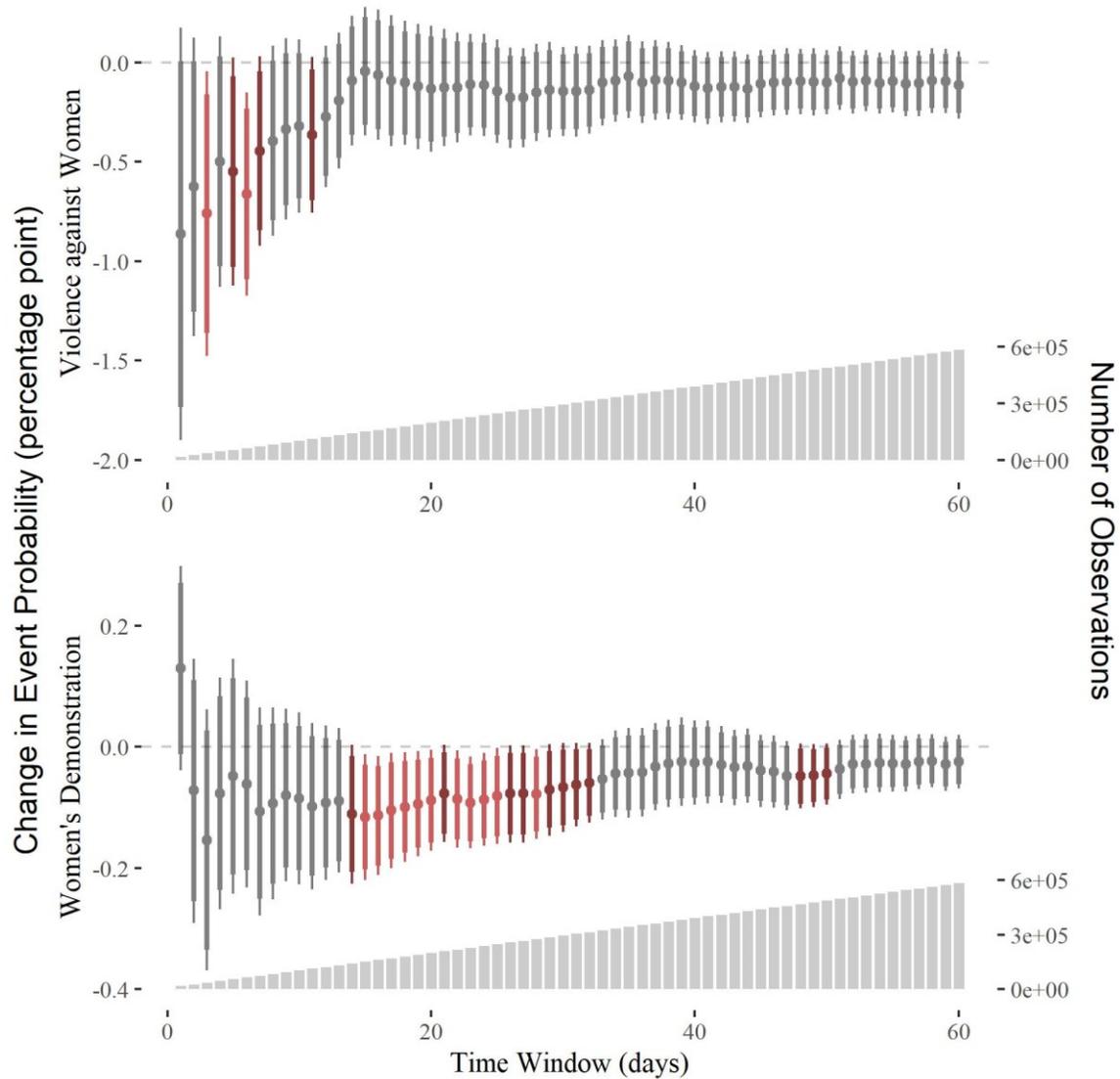
³² The lower term R_k is omitted due to its perfect collinearity with the fixed effects.

The models include the country-year fixed effects μ_{ck} and u_{ck} to analyze the variation within each country and the Nobel Peace Prize. The quantities of interest are ρ and p , which represent the causal effects of awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to women's rights activists on the outcome variables. We conduct the analyses with different values of the time windows: $h_{ICEWS} \in [1,60]$ and $h_{DHS} \in \{7, 14, \dots, 364\}$. Because the same countries are repeatedly observed in the event data analysis, we cluster the standard errors by country.

Event Data Analysis: Results

Figure 6 shows the results for the ICEWS dataset. The figure plots the estimates ρ for each time window $h_{ICEWS} \in \{7,14, \dots,364\}$. The announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize for women's rights activists immediately decreases violence against women (top pane of Figure 6). This precedes a decline in the likelihood of women's demonstrations (bottom pane of Figure 6). While women's demonstrations increase immediately after the Nobel Peace Prize, probably reflecting celebrations and related gatherings, they become less frequent afterward. Substantively, the largest and statistically significant change occurs 3 days (violence) and 15 days (demonstrations) after the prize. These correspond to 101% and 56% declines, respectively, from the sample averages. However, these changes do not last long. The changes in violence against women revert to zero in two weeks, and the changes in women's demonstrations return to zero in two months. These results are consistent with the selection effect: perpetrators refrain from using violence, which in turn temporarily reduces the causes and motivations for women's protests.

Figure 6. Effect of the Nobel Peace Prize on Gender Violence and Women’s Protests

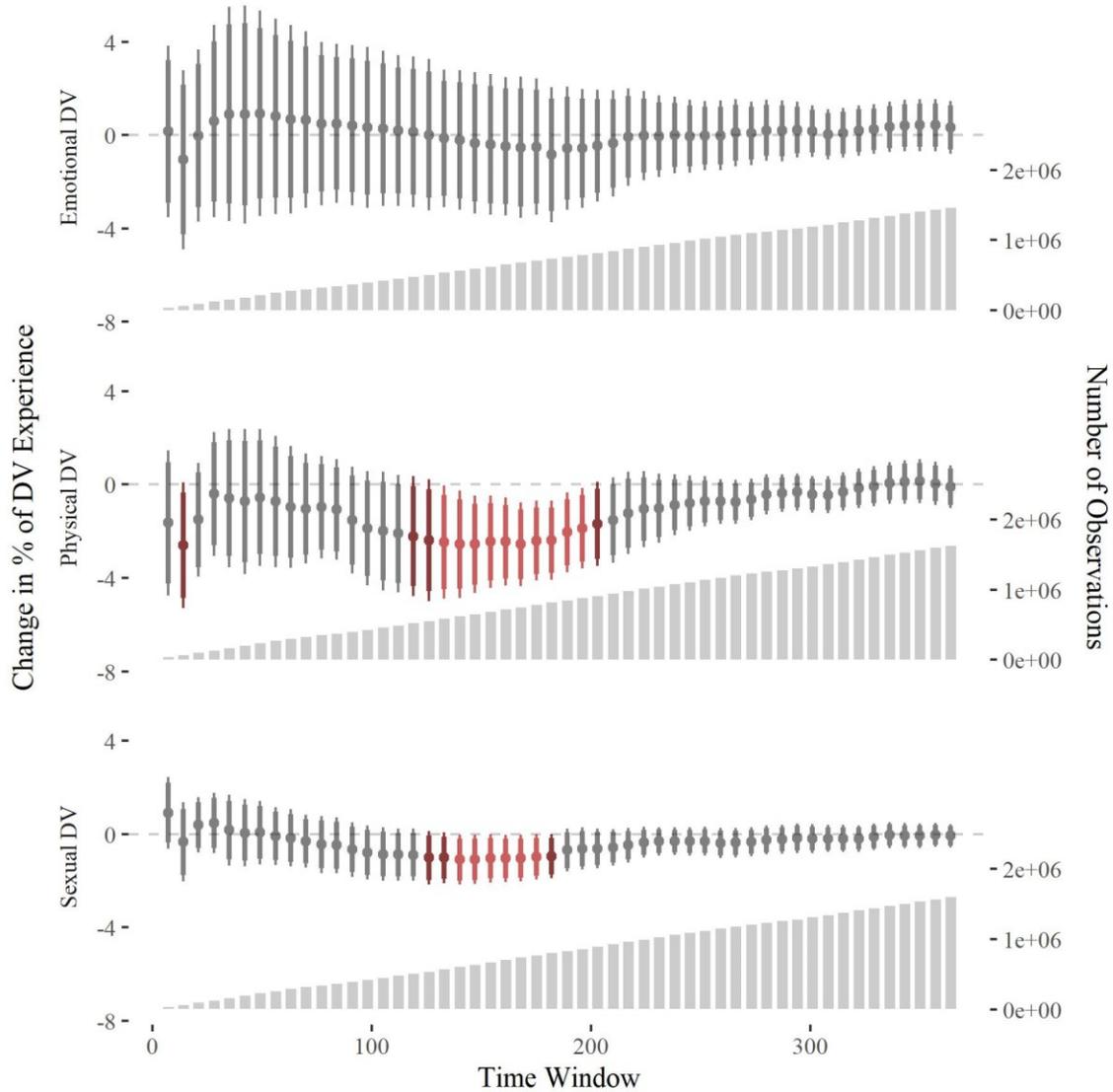


The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are clustered by countries. The vertical bars show the number of observations. $n = 14,433$ for $h_{ICEWS} = 1$ and $n = 582,131$ for $h_{ICEWS} = 60$.

The results for the DHS dataset are reported in Figure 7. Awarding women’s rights activists also decreases physical and sexual domestic violence, although there are no observable changes in emotional violence. The effects become the largest 147 days after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize (as we mentioned, this does not mean that the actual number of domestic violence incidences decreased on those days. The outcome variables are *retrospective* reports of violence).

These correspond to 6% and 7% decreases from the sample averages, indicating that the prize saved 27,000 and 9,400 women in the sample from physical and sexual violence, respectively. The effect sizes can be understated due to the difficulty of self-reporting violence and the resultant attenuation biases. However, the changes are short-lived. The estimates become indistinguishable from zero within one year. Finally, the null results for emotional violence imply that the prize does not deter less obtrusive violence.

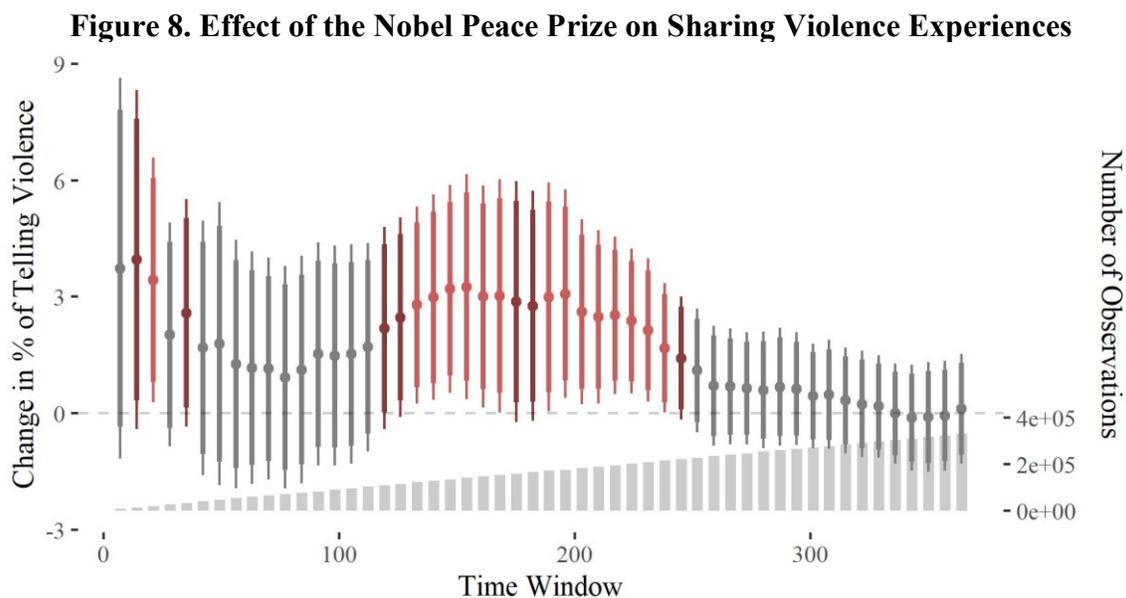
Figure 7. The Effect of the Nobel Peace Prize on Domestic Violence



Because the outcome variables are measured retrospectively, the analyses do not identify the exact timing of the effects (they do not imply that the effects are lagged for more than 100 days). The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are clustered by countries. The vertical bars show the number of observations. $n = 29,378$ for $h_{DHS} = 7$ and $n = 1,462,199$ for $h_{DHS} = 364$.

The Nobel Peace Prize for women’s rights activists also encourages women to share their experiences with others. We use an item about whether a respondent had ever told anyone about the violence (this measure is also retrospective, and thus, we cannot identify the exact timing of

the effects).³³ As seen in Figure 8, the point estimates are positive for most time windows and statistically significant for four to seven months after the Nobel Peace Prize announcement. This provides additional support for our argument that the Nobel Peace Prize increases the costs of violence by encouraging women to raise their voices. The results also suggest that reporting biases, if any, should make the main findings in Figure 7 conservative; even though the Nobel Peace Prize encourages women to share their experiences, *fewer* women reported physical and sexual violence.



The thick and thin vertical lines show the 90% and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The standard errors are clustered by countries. The vertical bars show the number of observations. $n = 6,247$ for $h_{DHS} = 7$ and $n = 329,088$ for $h_{DHS} = 364$.

Additional Analyses

We also conduct additional analyses, which are summarized in Table 3 and detailed in the appendix. First, we check the possibility that the gender composition of the laureates, instead of their profiles as women’s rights activists, would drive the results.³⁴ As in the survey analysis, we use the Nobel

³³ This question was asked to women who had experienced physical or sexual violence.

³⁴ See footnote 24.

Prize in Literature awarded to women as a placebo and find null results.³⁵ We also check the common trend assumption by conducting placebo tests with demonstrations and violence unrelated to women, event studies, and balance checks. Moreover, with a few caveats, the results are robust to the aggregation of units, removal of countries under severe censorship, different measurements of the outcome, removal of the pre-treatment trends (Goodman-Bacon 2021), additional control variables and fixed effects, different calculations of standard errors, and sample composition.

For the DHS data, the results change only when we include time-fixed effects. Because the data contain longer time periods, the time-fixed effects absorb much of the temporal variation including the treatment effect itself and thus induce biases toward zero. Because the DiD accounts for temporal confounders (see the design section), the time-fixed effects unnecessarily lower the power of analysis. The point estimates are similar to those in the main specification.

For the ICEWS data, the results for violence against women are less stable. Because the effect emerges immediately after the Nobel Peace Prize, the time window and corresponding sample size are small. This makes the results sensitive to measurement and standard error calculations. Similarly, the confidence intervals become larger with the ACLED. Because the ACLED reports a smaller number of events and covers only Africa, the power of the analysis becomes weaker. However, aside from the larger confidence intervals, the results are quite similar to those in Figure 6 (see Figure A16-1). Overall, the results of the ICEWS data are largely robust but less robust than those of the survey analysis or the DHS data. To be sure, we further investigate the robustness by applying recent refinement of panel data methods (see Appendix 16 for details).³⁶

³⁵ See footnote 25.

³⁶ Most of the methods are not applicable to repeated cross-sections and thus not used for the DHS.

Table 3. Additional Analyses (Event Data)

ICEWS	Vio.	Demo.	Appx.
Placebo tests (literary prize awarded to women)		✓	Tab. A12-1
Placebo tests (events unrelated to women)		✓	Fig. A13-1
Event study		✓	Fig. A14-1
Comparison of the treatment and baseline change		✓	Fig. A15-1
Aggregation to Nobel-day	—*	—*	Tab. A16-1
Removing countries with severe censorship	—*	—†	Tab. A16-2
Alternative dataset (ACLED)	—	—	Fig. A16-1
Event count as outcome	—	—*	Tab. A16-3
Removing the pre-treatment trends	—*	—*	Tab. A16-4
No fixed effect	—*	—*	Tab. A16-5
Year, month, week, day, and day-of-the-week FEs	—†	—*	Tab. A16-6
SE not clustered	—*	—*	Tab. A16-7
SE clustered by year	—	—*	Tab. A16-8
SE two-way clustered by country and year	—	—*	Tab. A16-8
Leave-one-country-out tests	—*1	—*2	Fig. A16-2
Recent panel data methods	—*3	—*4	Fig. A16-3

DHS	Emo.	Phys.	Sex.	Appx.
Placebo tests (literary prize awarded to women)		✓		Tab. A19-1
Balance check		✓		Tab. A20-1
Density check		✓		Fig. A21-1
Event study		✓		Fig. A22-1
Comparison of the treatment and baseline change		✓		Tab. A23-1
Removing countries with severe censorship	—	—*	—*	Tab. A24-1
Controlling for demographic covariates	—	—*	—*	Tab. A24-2
Removing the pre-treatment trends	—†	—*	—*	Tab. A24-3
No fixed effect	—†	—*	—*	Tab. A24-4
Year, month, week, day, and day-of-the-week FEs	+	—†	—	Tab. A24-5
SE not clustered	—	—*	—*	Tab. A24-6
SE clustered by year	—	—*	—*	Tab. A24-7
SE two-way clustered by country and year	—	—*	—*	Tab. A24-8
Leave-one-country-out tests	—5	—*6	—*7	Fig. A24-1

* $p < 0.05$, † $p < 0.1$. Note 1: Significant at a 10% level in 11 out of 195 cases (5.64%). Note 2: Significant at a 10% level in 2 out of 195 cases (1.03%). Note 3: Three methods are not implemented due to the lack of sufficient observations. Null in 1 out of 6 cases. Note 4: Null in 2 out of 9 cases. Note 5: Significant at a 10% level in 1 out of 55 cases. Note 6: Significant at a 10% level in 2 out of 55 cases. Note 7: Significant at a 10% level in 9 out of 55 cases, and null in 3 out of 55 cases.

Discussion

In this paper, we have argued that international awards promote human rights norms by signaling the presence of reliable human rights activists, encouraging people to raise their voices, and thus

detering violence. The analyses of individual-level surveys and event data have shown that when women's rights activists receive the Nobel Peace Prize, it increases people's trust in women's organizations in general and decreases violence against women and women's rights protests. However, these changes are short-lived.

These findings provide a balanced view of the roles of international awards, and more broadly, symbolic actions in international relations (Edelman 2013; Linklater 2019). Recent quantitative studies have tended to focus on short-term changes and emphasize the effects of symbolic actions, giving the impression that symbolic actions could change the world. Recent quantitative studies about public diplomacy, for instance, have examined changes in public opinions in a week or month (Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Matush 2021). However, these findings do not necessarily imply that symbolic actions result in durable changes. As we have shown in this study, the effects may fade away, and the status quo can persist.

This does not mean that symbolic actions can be dismissed. International awards are not merely cheap talk. They can bring about real-world changes, such that human rights issues gain public attention, people put more trust in human rights groups, and the situation is temporarily stabilized. Importantly, these effects differ from those of "naming and shaming." While negative symbolic actions also increase public awareness about human rights (Davis, Murdie, and Steinmetz 2012), they prompt both policy changes (Murdie and Davis 2012; Kim 2013) and backlashes (Hafner-Burton 2008; Gruffydd-Jones 2019; Snyder 2020). It appears that while "naming and shaming" disturb the status quo and catalyze progressive or reactionary changes, "prize and praise" temporarily lull the situation without changing the structure. Future studies should compare the roles of positive and negative symbolic actions in international relations.

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