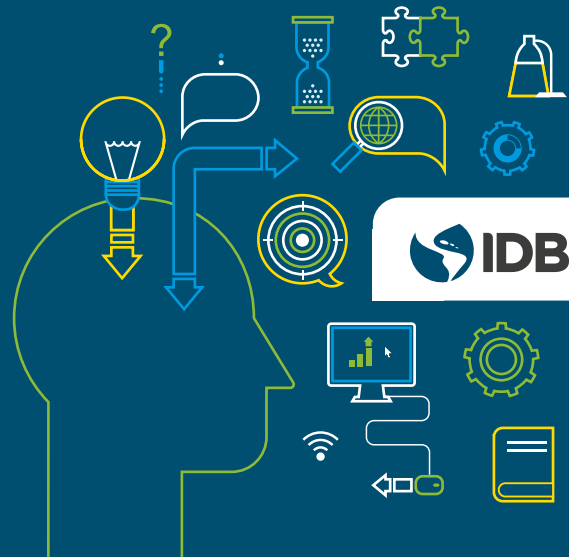


How Can Interviewer Characteristics Skew Survey Responses?

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- ➔ Survey responses on gender norms vary significantly depending on whether the interviewer is male or female.
- ➔ Respondents are more likely to endorse traditional or discriminatory gender views when interviewed by men.
- ➔ Survey firms and researchers should account for interviewer gender in data collection and analysis to avoid biased results.



CONTEXT

Gender equality and attitudes toward gender roles are increasingly measured using surveys, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean.

These surveys inform public discourse and policy decisions on sensitive topics like women's political participation and domestic violence. However, many surveys fail to consider how characteristics of the interviewer, particularly their gender, may affect respondents' answers. If interviewees modify their responses based on perceived social expectations, failing to account for interviewer effects can lead to inaccurate estimates of public opinion and misguided policy conclusions.



PROJECT

This study investigates the “gender-of-interviewer effect” using nearly 200,000 face-to-face interviews from the AmericasBarometer survey conducted across 26 Latin American and Caribbean countries between 2012 and 2018. The analysis focuses on eight gender-related questions, such as attitudes toward gender roles, political leadership, and justification of domestic violence. The authors develop a theoretical model to explain how and why respondents might shift their answers depending on the interviewer's gender and use statistical analysis to measure the effect while controlling for respondent characteristics and interviewer assignment patterns.

Key Concept

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY BIAS



The tendency of respondents to answer questions in a manner they believe will be viewed favorably by others, rather than according to their true beliefs.

RESULTS

The findings reveal a consistent and statistically significant effect: respondents are more likely to express discriminatory or traditional views when interviewed by men. For example, they are 4.5 percentage points more likely to agree that men are better political leaders and more than 5 percentage points more likely to justify domestic violence when the interviewer is male. As shown in [Figure 1](#), in some countries the difference in acceptance of domestic violence ranged from 24% (if all interviews were conducted by women) to 59% (if all were conducted by men).

Key Concept

GENDER-OF-INTERVIEWER EFFECT



A form of response bias where a respondent's answers to survey questions are influenced by the gender of the person administering the survey.

Interestingly, the interviewer effect is strongest in questions that involve direct comparisons between men and women or that touch on sensitive topics. Effects are generally smaller or statistically insignificant in questions that do not pit genders against each other. Results also vary significantly by country, highlighting how local social norms shape the effect. For example, male interviewers increased pro-male bias in some countries but had the opposite effect or none at all in others.

Further analysis shows that the gender of the respondent also matters. Both male and female respondents tend to give more traditional answers to male interviewers, though the effect is more pronounced among women. The presence of a spouse during the interview also moderates responses; the interviewer effect diminishes, suggesting that social desirability biases stem not only from interviewer traits but also from perceived household expectations.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study underscores an important and often overlooked risk in gender-related survey research: **bias introduced by the interviewer's gender.** Since public opinion surveys influence both public discourse and policymaking, failing to account for these biases can mislead decisions on critical issues like gender-based violence, representation quotas, or labor market discrimination.

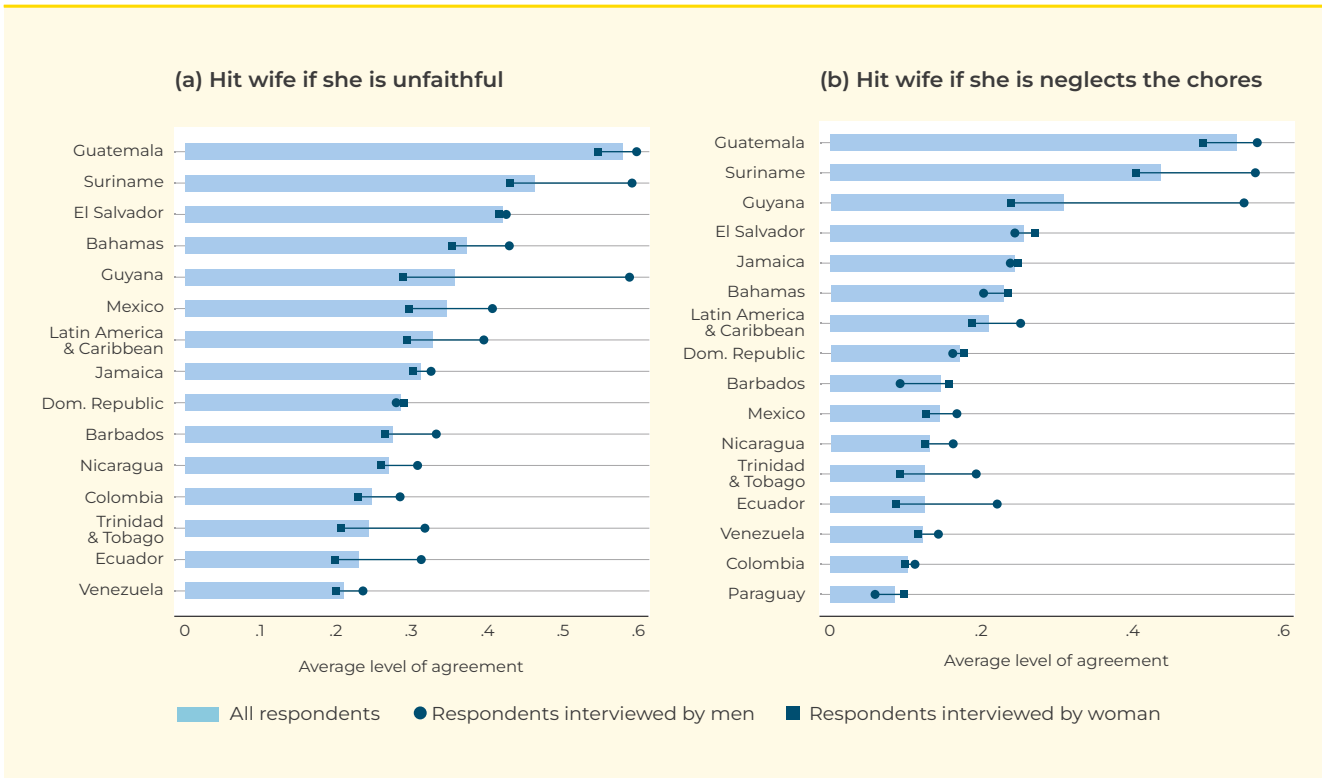
The first recommendation is for survey firms to always record and publicly share interviewer characteristics, especially gender. This information is essential for researchers to evaluate and, when needed, adjust their estimates of public opinion. It also enables transparency and promotes reproducibility in research.

Second, researchers should explicitly test for interviewer effects when analyzing data involving social norms or identity-sensitive issues. This includes considering interactions with respondent characteristics, the presence of others during interviews, and potential non-random assignment of interviewers.

Third, reweighting survey responses based on optimal sampling strategies—as proposed in the theoretical model—can help eliminate or reduce systematic biases. This includes planning interviewer-respondent gender pairings in ways that minimize distortion or correcting responses post hoc using population-weighted adjustments.

Finally, policymakers and development practitioners should interpret public opinion data with caution, especially when the findings support or challenge entrenched social norms. **Apparent attitudes in survey data may reflect social desirability bias rather than genuine beliefs.** Without correcting for these distortions, interventions aimed at shifting norms may be mistargeted or ineffective.

FIGURE 1. Acceptance of Domestic Violence by Interviewer Gender and Country



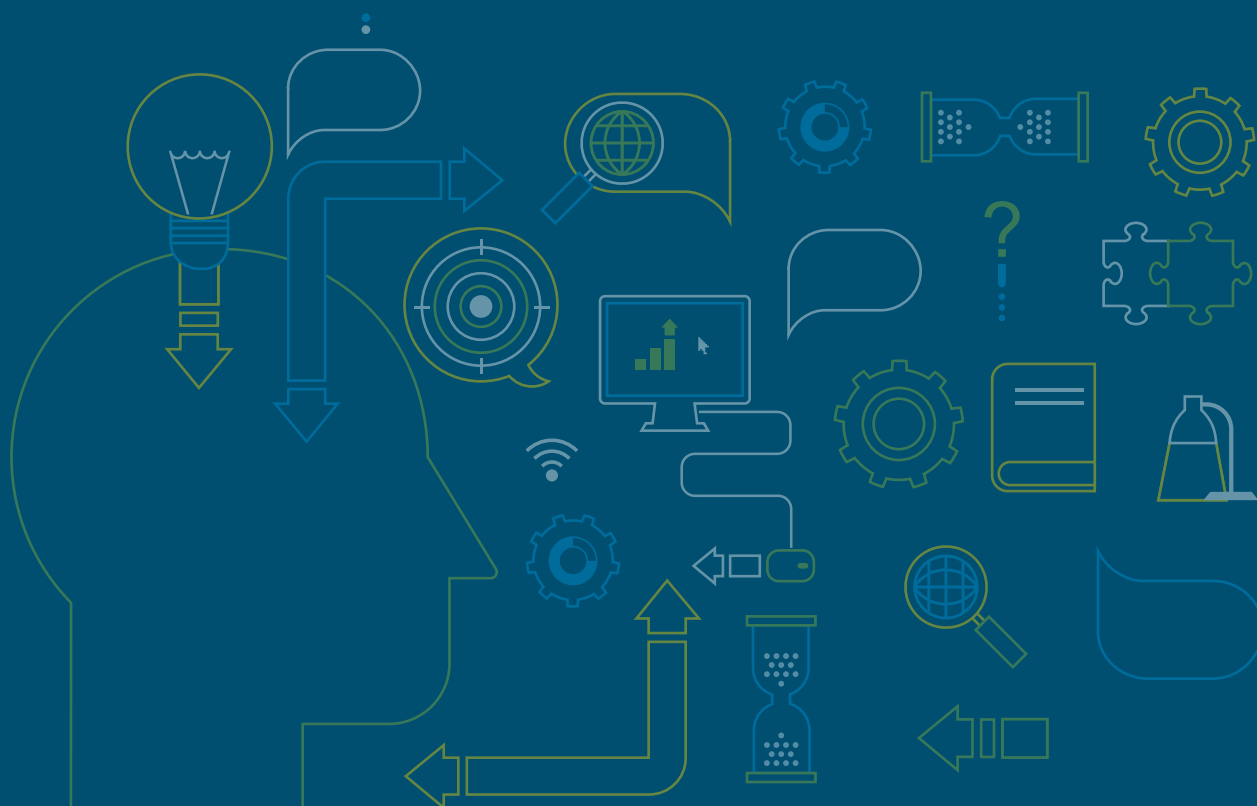
Note: Estimates are produced with probability weights following the survey design. See full study for a description of the questions.

FULL STUDY

Guizzo Altube, Matías, and Carlos Scartascini. 2024. *Gender-Based Research and Interviewer Effects: Evidence for Latin America and the Caribbean*. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank. <https://doi.org/10.18235/0012886>.

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