Women's Property Ownership and Empowerment in Latin America

Anna Calasanti

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WOMEN’S PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

BY

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DISSERTATION

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For Ramona.
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ABSTRACT

One of the ways that women have been disadvantaged throughout much of the world is through unequal access to property. This includes land and housing, the ownership of which has been linked to crucial human development outcomes. Scholars have theorized the importance of women’s land ownership, yet empirical studies have been limited, leaving much unanswered. Does property ownership improve women’s lives? If so, how? This dissertation builds on previous work, leveraging individual-level survey data to explore women’s property ownership across three indicators of empowerment: participation in household decision-making; experiences of intimate partner violence; and level of marital control exerted by her husband. These indicators are explored across three cases in Latin America: Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras. I find that the relationship between property ownership and empowerment outcomes varies based on the type of property owned, as well as how it is held. I find that these relationships work differently for more marginalized women. This dissertation provides a better understanding of what relationship property holdings have on women’s daily lives.
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CHAPTER 1: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WOMEN OWN PROPERTY?

Introduction

Women are disadvantaged in numerous ways throughout much of the world, from political representation and participation in policymaking to wage gaps, overrepresentation in the informal economy, and patriarchal social norms. One area where women are at a clear disadvantage globally is access to property, including land. According to the World Bank’s 2021 Women, Business, and the Law report, 40% of the world’s countries currently limit property rights for women. In 19 countries, women do not have equal ownership rights, in 43, they do not have equal inheritance rights, and in 10, husbands maintain complete administrative control over all assets within a marriage (World Bank 2021).

These numbers, while clearly showcasing ongoing disparity, in fact represent a significant improvement, due in large part to an international push for improving women’s land rights spearheaded by the World Bank and the United Nations. This push for legislative change has been accompanied by a range of interventions at the local and national level, many of which have been the product of partnerships between larger organizations, such as USAID, and local NGOs. While there are important differences across these diverse efforts, they are prompted by a similar reasoning—that greater access to land will help to empower women.

There is evidence in the literature that supports the idea that women’s increased access to land may be beneficial. For example, scholars have found that the presence of strong land and inheritance rights benefit women economically (Peterman 2011). Research has also found that when women own land, their households spend more money on education (Doss 2006), and that children are less likely to be sick (Menon, van der Melon Rodgers, and Nguyen 2014) or severely underweight (Allendorf 2007). However, whether or not there is a connection between women’s ownership of land and empowerment is a more complicated relationship, which has yet to be fully unpacked.
Taking advantage of previous scholars’ calls for comparable, large-N data on women’s ownership of land, this dissertation uses individual-level survey data from three different cases in Latin America: Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras. Latin America is an ideal region of focus for a study of this kind as it represents the forefront of policy reforms establishing women’s equity in asset ownership. At the same time, many countries in the region have a similar colonial legacy and subsequent legal framework. These regional similarities provide an ideal backdrop for case selection given the nature of the study, per the recommendations of Koivu and Hinze (2017). From this foundation, we can ask broader questions about the relationship between women’s property ownership and a variety of possible outcomes (many of which have been explicitly theorized by entities that have pushed for policy reforms specific to women’s property ownership, but for which there is a dearth of empirical evidence). For example: Does property ownership empower women? When women have greater access to and control over land, do they also have greater decision-making power? Are they less likely to suffer from intimate partner violence? If they own or co-own a home with their spouse, do they have greater autonomy and freedom of movement within the marriage?

**Women, Land, and Disadvantage**

Numerous studies have found that women are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to accessing and controlling land, particularly throughout Africa and Latin America (Doss et al. 2015; Meinzen-Dick et al. 1997; Place 1995; Walker 2002; Ygnstrom 2002). Similar findings have shown that women face a similar disadvantage in controlling the natural resources on the land (Pehu, Lambrou, and Hartl 2009). Globally, men are not only more likely to secure land, women have been found to be at a disadvantage when it comes to purchasing land on the open market, as well as acquiring land through state distribution programs (Deere and León 2003, Lewis 2002). Studies in Latin America have found that women obtain land primarily through

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1 More explicit detail about the specific cases, and why they were selected from the population of Latin America as a whole, follows in Chapter 2.

2 This distinction is important as, land ownership does not always equate to subsurface rights, an issue that has created conflict between Indigenous communities and the state in countries across Latin America (FAO 2002).
inheritance; which can often be problematic, as local expectations about property within a marriage\(^3\) can limit, if not erase, women’s right to this land within the marriage, and even after a marriage ends (Deere and León 2001c; Baranyi, Deere, and Morales 2004).

Indeed, traditional norms and expectations, many of which vary by locality, may present a notable challenge for women’s land ownership. For example, there is a general consensus in the field that women are at a particular disadvantage in places where customary systems—pre-colonial systems of landownership—persist (Lastarria-Cornhiel and García-Frias 2005; Otsuka et al. 2003; Place 1995). This includes places where more gender-equitable policies have been enacted nationally, yet customary systems are retained in practice at the local level (Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhamagi 2014; Knight 2010; Lambrecht 2016). However, some work disputes this, suggesting that customary systems can provide support for women in land-related disputes because they can be more flexible (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003). Others argue that the multi-tenured, flexible approach to land rights seen in some customary systems benefit women in ways that are at odds with male-centric privatization reforms (Kingston-Mann 2019). Yet these arguments, while not without merit, likely apply to very specific cases, and may not be broadly generalizable. Critically, they also require those in power locally to choose to support women on an ad-hoc basis, which is an insecure form of women’s rights, and may vary even within the same locality depending on the individual in power.

Another site of potential disadvantage is the process of formal titling. While some argue that formal titling programs have the potential to improve women’s share of land holdings (Ali, Deininger, and Goldstein 2011; Holden, Deininger, and Ghebru 2011), there is significant debate over whether this is true for both joint titling programs and individual titling programs. Some argue that joint titling can be sufficient in shifting the power dynamics within households (Walker 2002). Others argue that joint titling programs have some problems, but can be successful in promoting empowerment (Deere and León 2001a; Baranyi, Deere, and Morales 2004). Yet there is also a strong contingent of scholars that maintain that individual titling programs are a necessary condition for women’s empowerment (Agarwal 1994; Varley 2007).

\(^3\) For example, an expectation of dowry or bride price—irrespective of the legal institutions surrounding such practices—may contribute to the understanding that women’s inherited property will become the property of her in-laws upon marriage, regardless of who owns the property on paper.
This scholarship clearly establishes many ways in which women are disadvantaged in land ownership, as well as the importance of owning land. Bias in the marketplace and in state distribution programs, the influence of customary norms and practices, and patriarchal expectations of property inheritance all limit women’s ability to acquire and control land. While titling programs have been shown to unilaterally benefit men by securing their tenure, significant debate remains as to whether and how titling programs might benefit women. Similarly, while land ownership has been found to increase economic security and provide important capital for men, this connection has not been firmly established for women. There is reason to suspect that women’s participation in economic and financial markets may be limited by social norms, both within and outside the household, and it is unclear where—if at all—property ownership might fit in to this dynamic. Further, given the complexity of the interactions between social norms and institutions, it is likely that these relationships (alongside the norms and institutions themselves) vary across cases. This begs for a better understanding of how household bargaining and negotiation within a marriage occurs, and what influence property ownership may or may not have on distribution of power.

Policy Change and Development Interventions

There is an established literature that examines the impact of property rights on household welfare, within which property usually means fixed assets, conceptualized as a combination of land and dwelling. The concept of rights in this context typically refers to a series of interconnected rights, including the ability to sell, transfer, use, allow or restrict use of the property. These rights are institutionalized through some combination of policies, laws, regulations, and social norms, although norms and laws are not always in alignment.

The predominant argument in this literature is that more secure property rights will lead to an increase in ownership, which will lead to greater investment and productivity, particularly in rural areas (Brasselle, Gaspart, and Platteau 2002; Besley and Ghatak 2009; Deininger and Jin 2006). In the case of women’s land

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4 The relationship between norms and legal institutions over time is one that is currently under investigation, although recent research (see e.g., Htun and Jensenius 2022) finds that a shift in legal institutions, even when the new policies are weakly enforced, can be sufficient to produce a change in norms. While such a relationship is not the focus of this dissertation, it is important to keep these concerns in mind.
rights, the assumption is that more secure land rights for women would follow a similar path, increasing women’s share of property ownership, and subsequently, financial holdings. However, a number of criticisms have been raised over the strength of this relationship (Jacoby and Minten 2007), the confounding influence of overlapping rights (Deininger and Ali 2008), as well as the importance of context and specific policies (Place 2009; Fenske 2011). There are also concerns that this relationship may in fact reinforce inequality by protecting wealthier households while leaving poorer households more vulnerable (Baland et al. 1999; Vendryes 2011).

Despite these concerns, securing women’s property rights has become a mainstreamed development goal, with the expectation that it will reduce poverty, increase food security, and level the global playing field.

The prioritization of women’s property rights in international development circles can be traced back to 1985, at the Third UN Conference on Women in Nairobi, where a previous focus on women’s legal equality was combined with an emphasis on access to resources (Tinker and Jaquette 1987). This laid the groundwork for the incorporation of gender in the language of development-focused government documents, as well as the rise of many important women’s movements and networks. Today, this legacy is reflected in influential international organization policies, such as the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals. Once established, gender-equal land rights are thought to increase women’s land holdings, subsequently reducing poverty, improving education, health, and economic outcomes, while increasing women’s empowerment, independence, and security.

Many of these policies make explicit their foundation in the assumption that when women have access to land, they will turn it into capital that they can use to improve their families’ economic standing. For example, in 2019, the World Bank, in coalition with a diverse group of organizations, unveiled the “Stand for Her Land” campaign. In framing the goals of the enterprise, the coalition claimed: “Research has shown that when women

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5 Deere and León (2001, 112-113) argue that in this context gender, defined as “women plus men,” was a politically palatable way for Latin American governments to incorporate what was previously understood only as “women’s issues” into development policy. However, this was done in such a way that prioritized women’s economic potential, while leaving more progressive initiatives to women’s movements and NGOs.

6 As of April 2022, the global steering committee is comprised of: the World Bank, Habitat for Humanity, Landesa Rural Development Institute, the Huairou Commission, the Global Land Tool Network, and the Rights and Resources Initiative, with financial support from the United States Secretary of State’s Office of Global Women’s Issues, Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.
have secure rights to land, it is more likely that opportunities will emerge to break the cycle of poverty and improve the lives of women, their families, and whole communities” (Stand for Her Land 2022). While this language makes the expected outcomes from these policies quite clear, the evidence in both the academic literature and development agency reports is less harmonious. These divergent findings highlight the complexity of the issue, and includes approaches that may not adequately incorporate intricate and diverse land rights regimes, an understanding of gender roles and norms, and measurement issues that do not account for household dynamics. Additionally, the majority of studies have been focused on SubSaharan Africa (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019), which may not translate well to other contexts, both because of policy, regime, cultural, and other local differences, but also the specific legacy of development interventions on women and land in Africa.

Findings from Previous Scholarship and Interventions

A growing body of literature examines the importance of women’s ownership of land in the context of poverty reduction, finding strong evidence for economic outcomes (e.g., human capital investment) but only weak evidence, including where there is theoretical agreement, on many non-economic outcomes (e.g., domestic violence) (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019). Newer research in this area focuses on individual-level ownership, rather than at the household level,\(^7\) and is primarily comprised of observational studies in Africa and Asia (e.g., Palacios-Lopez, Christiaensen, and Kilic 2017), although similar arguments have been hypothesized in the context of Latin America (Bose 2017; Deere, Alvarado, and Twyman 2012, Deere and Doss 2006). Some of these studies have found that women land holders are more resilient to climate shocks (Asfaw and Maggio 2017), and that communities where widows inherit are also more likely to adopt agricultural technologies that boost productivity (Dillon and Voena 2017).

There is some evidence that land ownership may help women gain access to credit through informal mechanisms (see e.g., Persha et al. 2017), but a systematic review of the broader literature finds that while the

\(^7\) Titles at the household level can list household members in different ways (e.g., Mr. and Mrs. Smith vs. The Smiths) which can be a less secure form of titling for women, particularly in cases of divorce, but also when a woman is widowed. Individual titles spell out which property belongs to the individual woman, and are arguably more secure rights. See e.g. Bose 2017; Deere, Alvarado, and Twyman 2012; Deere and Doss 2006; Palacios-Lopez, Christiaensen, and Kilic 2017; Quisumbing and Maluccio 2003.
argument that formal land rights eventually lead to lines of credit which can then be used to alleviate poverty has been broadly accepted (De Soto 2000), there is little evidence to support this when rights are disaggregated by gender (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019). This suggests that the impact of property and legal institutions on poverty outcomes for women are attenuated, if not outweighed, by gender-biased social norms. This may also have implications for the impact of property ownership on women’s economic empowerment. For example, when the norm is that men control the labor of all household members, that expectation can limit how and when women can work their own plot of land, even when they have the ability to decide what to plant (see e.g., Flora 2001). Put differently, this means that even when women have decision-making ability over an asset such as land, the gendered expectations of the division of labor within the household can dictate their ability to exercise that agency (i.e., if they spend the bulk of their day preparing food, caring for children, and cleaning or doing laundry, they may have very little time and energy left to devote to agricultural work).

Some scholars argue that land ownership can provide women with bargaining power, which they can leverage within a marriage. Here, the idea is that ownership increases women’s relative “worth,” while providing economic freedom and the ability to “exit” in cases of violence (see e.g., Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019; Agarwal 1994; Peterman et al. 2017). The idea that land ownership provides women with bargaining power is popular in work that looks at property and domestic violence, but it has also been used in work looking at human capital investment, intergenerational transfers, and consumption choices (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019) as well as family planning and healthcare choices (Behrman 2017).

Evidence from recent development interventions, such as the prominent and locally-focused projects co-sponsored by USAID, similarly show a range of outcomes. For example, a five-year program in Tanzania helped villages and district land offices demarcate land parcels, registering more than 60,000 land certificates. This project increased the percentage of female-headed households who held a certificate of land from 10% to 88% yet found no change in access to credit in the treatment group, who continued to face gender disparity in

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8 Most recently, many of the projects sponsored by USAID with the expressed goal of increasing women’s share of land holdings have been targeted interventions that focus not only a single country, but on a specific sub-region or locality (e.g., a series of villages in the same valley). These projects are often tied to a specific industry, such as potato or cocoa farming, and typically incorporate co-sponsorship from local NGOs or, increasingly, corporations, such as PepsiCo (owner of FritoLay) or Hershey.
banking (Persha and Patterson-Stein 2021). An intervention in the cocoa industry in Ghana, co-sponsored by USAID and ECOM (an agroindustrial corporation) and implemented by the Integrated Land and Resource Governance (ILRG) program was able to increase the percentage of married women whose named appeared on land titles, sometimes along with their husband’s, and sometimes solely (USAID 2021).

However, even women with sole titles deferred to their husbands when it came to decision-making over the cocoa production, particularly sales and negotiation. In the few households where women participated in decision-making, the husbands retained the final say. Regardless of the land titling changes, women’s unpaid work did not decrease, so while both husband and wife would farm during the day, at night, husbands would socialize and relax, while wives would spend the evening conducting household and family tasks. In addition, intimate partner violence increased during this time, and husbands were observed inflicting physical, verbal, emotional, and economic forms of violence, which the report notes went unreported despite policies that prohibit such violence (USAID 2021). Finally, a report from a collaboration between USAID and PepsiCo in West Bangladesh describes the impact of training over one thousand women in potato agronomy and sustainable farming practices as one of economic empowerment. At the conclusion of the two-year program, the team described the women farmers as exhibiting improved confidence and self-image, an increased acceptance by family and community members, as well as increased brand loyalty to PepsiCo (USAID 2022).

Overall, these findings raise at least as many questions as they answer. In part, this may be due to the inconsistencies in findings across large-N studies that attempt to replicate qualitative case studies more broadly, although the local-level case studies also indicate that generalization may be not be possible. There are also a number of problematic expectations within the literature, such as arguments that assume that women are more likely than men to use profits from agricultural production to benefit their children, which imply a monolithic, gendered preference that is far from substantiated. Similarly, many of the arguments premised on the belief that formal titling will have the same impact on women that it has had for men (i.e., that having one’s name on a title will lead to poverty alleviation) do not include an exploration of existing gender inequalities that may mitigate this impact. For example, scholars have found that women’s ownership of land does not automatically imply control (see e.g., Flora 2001), as gendered norms surrounding household
division of labor may negate much of the benefit a woman may otherwise derive from ownership—as illustrated quite well in the intervention in Ghana described above.

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) Data

The data used for this study comes from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) questionnaire focused on women at the household level. The questions used are nestled within a larger public health survey, which provides both advantages and limitations. For example, the age range of those surveyed are all women of reproductive age, defined by the survey administrators as between 15 and 49, which works well for the larger public health questions, but serve as a limitation for the current study.

For example, the women included in this study are currently partnered women of reproductive age in heterosexual relationships (either legally married or a common-law marriage or recognized civil union). Yet it is likely that women over the age of 49 have very different experiences of empowerment along the lines discussed here, not least because the likelihood of being widowed or divorced increases with age, but also because household dynamics undoubtedly shift. From the outset, then, any examination of women’s empowerment is limited by this more narrowly defined sample population, and any findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

The asset ownership module captures the number of women age 15-49 who own housing (alone, jointly, alone and jointly, do not own a house) and the number of women age 15-49 who own land (alone, jointly, alone and jointly, do not own a house). These indicators comprise the primary explanatory variable, although models for each section also include several covariates, such as urban/rural, socioeconomic status, education level, and age.

Contributions of this Dissertation

The majority of scholarly research on women and land has been qualitative, and primarily focused on cases in Africa (e.g., Englert 2003; Englert and Daley 2008; Lastarria-Cornhiel 1997; Mackenzie 1990; Manji 1998; Meinzen-Dick et al. 1997; Tsikata 2003; Whitehead and Tsikata 2003), although there have also been a
handful of important case studies conducted in Asia (e.g., Agarwal 1994) and Latin America (e.g., Baranyi et al. 2004; Deere and León 2001a, b). There are many avenues of research in this area that have yet to be explored, in part because of an initial lack of data. Many of the scholars who pioneered the first big wave of qualitative research in this area have been instrumental in pushing for broader data collection (see e.g., Deere and León 2001), and there are now a number of possibilities for quantitative, cross-national comparisons, through which to explore lingering, important questions.

For example: Does property ownership empower women? When women have greater access to and control over land, do they also have greater decision-making power? Are they less likely to suffer from intimate partner violence? If they own or co-own a home with their spouse, do they have greater autonomy and freedom of movement within the marriage?

While work has clearly been done to theorize the impact of women’s land ownership, empirical studies have been more limited, and existing results show a clear lack of consensus. This dissertation builds on this previous work through a cross-sectional analysis of the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and three indicators of empowerment: participation in household decision-making; experiences of intimate partner violence; and level of marital control exerted by her husband. These indicators are explored across three different cases in Latin America: Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras, using data collected via USAID’s Demographic and Health Surveys. Narrowing the scope to a handful of cases in the same region allows for a closer examination of issues that would otherwise be difficult to generalize globally, due to extreme variations in both norms and policy diffusion. Exploring the connection between property ownership and empowerment across these three cases, while examining different types of property (i.e., land and housing) and different types of ownership (i.e., joint and solo), helps to provide a better understand of what relationship—if any—property holdings have on women’s daily lives.

In light of this previous research, and given the limitation of the available data, this dissertation makes several important contributions. First, it highlights that women’s ownership of housing and of land have distinct relationships with possible empowerment outcomes, as do women’s joint versus sole property ownership. Second, it argues that a better understanding of the dynamics of home ownership (which has been
understudied in the literature on women’s property ownership, as the bulk of previous work has focused either explicitly on land, or on a bundle of assets, in which home ownership is included but not often disaggregated) may provide critical insights into women’s empowerment. Third, it finds that women’s property ownership may have an empowering effect in some areas, but it can also produce a backlash effect, pointing to a need for future research to better understand this observed multifinality in empowerment outcomes, as well as an examination of potential causal mechanisms. Finally, it locates several points at which the examined relationships differ significantly given variation in women’s identity (which in this analysis is limited to Indigeneity and women who live in rural versus urban areas). While the limitations of the DHS data make it difficult to undertake a truly intersectional approach, these findings should be viewed as preliminary results that call attention to the importance of future, more detailed, work in this area. Taken together, these elements illustrate this dissertation’s clear and compelling contribution to the broader literature, while also showing several points at which this dissertation serves as a springboard for future research.

Organization of the Chapters

The chapters of this dissertation are organized as follows. Chapter Two explains why Latin America is an ideal region of focus for an examination of this kind. It then provides an overview of the dissertation’s three cases: Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras, including relevant details on property regimes and family law, as well as descriptive statistics about women’s ownership of housing and land. Following this, three empirical chapters analyze the relationship between women’s ownership of property and three distinct, non-economic

9 With origins in Black feminist thought (e.g., Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1993), intersectionality focuses on interlocking systems of power, highlighting inadequacies in singular or additive approaches in describing the burdens and experiences of multiply marginalized communities.

10 For example, the range of historical circumstances—such as different interactions with the state and experiences of marginalization—across Indigenous groups (including different experiences across cases for communities with similar cultural backgrounds), an analysis that combines women into the simplified categories of “Indigenous” and “non-Indigenous” is far from ideal. Similarly, the lack of an explicit examination of AfroDescendant and AfroIndigenous women is a significant limitation of this analysis. These concessions have been made because of limitations, not for theoretical reasons. Even with these caveats and limitations, this portion of the analysis is important, as it emphasizes the importance of better understanding women’s experiences along multiple axes of marginalization.
indicators of empowerment. Chapter Three examines the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and their ability to participate in household decision-making. This includes decisions about large household purchases, women's own healthcare decisions, and decisions about family visitation. Chapter Four analyzes the relationship between women’s property ownership and experiences of intimate partner violence, divided into three categories of violence: physical, sexual, and emotional. Chapter Five examines the relationship between women’s property ownership and the degree of marital control she experiences, measured on a scale specific for each country. Finally, Chapter Six summarizes the findings from the three empirical chapters, discusses the similarities and differences across countries and indicators, and concludes by highlight important areas of future research.
CHAPTER 2: THE CASES

Introduction

Women remain at a significant disadvantage when it comes to owning property globally (Doss, Summerfield, and Tsikata 2014), but particularly in Latin America, where they face discrimination acquiring land both on the open market and through state distribution programs (Deere and León 2003; Lewis 2002). When women do obtain land, it is often through inheritance, and assumptions about communal property can limit, if not erase, women’s right to this land within and after a marriage (Deere and León 2001c; Baranyi et al. 2004). As will be discussed in more detail below, this disadvantage persists even as Latin America is considered to be one of the most progressive regions in terms of women’s formal land rights (Deere and León 2001a; Baranyi et al. 2004), particularly when compared with policies in Southeast Asia and SubSaharan Africa, where women’s land rights have received a significant level of attention, but have not been formalized in the same way.

This dissertation is focused on the relationship between women’s property ownership and different empowerment outcomes, not evaluating the policies or predicting their effectiveness or impact directly, it is important to understand the context in which women own property. Examining women’s property ownership in this context allows for a closer examination of other factors which may influence the relationship with different empowerment outcomes. As with any study, which cases are selected and why can have important ramifications for the study’s findings, as well as any subsequent generalizations, even in the absence of a causally-focused examination. Similarly, qualitative case knowledge is vital to unpacking the observed relationships, and deriving any theoretical conclusions about meaning.

This chapter functions as a backdrop to the following three empirical chapters, first giving an overview of the methodological and theoretical considerations that went into case selection, and then highlighting relevant information about the DHS surveys. This is followed by a general explanation of the trajectory of policies in the region, and more detailed information for each of the three cases selected, including an initial
examination of women’s property ownership in each country. The chapter concludes with a brief synthesis of the three cases, setting the stage for the three empirical chapters which follow.

Case Selection

The distinct features of gender-equitable formal land rights in Latin America (Deere and León 2001a; Baranyi et al. 2004) make it an ideal region of focus for this study. Unique policies include requirements that state distribution and titling programs register land in the name of both couple members (Deere and León 2001a; b); that land be distributed individually to both members; affirmative action measures that give priority to female-headed households; and a gender quota policy for land shares\textsuperscript{11} (Deere 2003). Although there is variation in these policies across the region, there are overarching similarities in trajectory and implementation. These, in addition to the conceptual homogeneity and temporal boundaries derived from the DHS surveys, form the basis of clear scope conditions, establishing external validity.

The case selection strategy employed for this analysis goes against the grain of many quantitative studies, as cases are not selected randomly—though neither are they selected on the dependent variable, avoiding the validity pitfalls identified in Geddes (2003). Instead, I used two complementary strategies, one inadvertently, and one intentionally. The first, inadvertent, strategy came as a result of an initial analysis, which included the entire population of cases (i.e., every country in which the DHS VI or 7\textsuperscript{12} had been conducted). Results from this global analysis clearly exemplified a causally complex world, “characterized by path dependence, tipping points, interaction effects, strategic interaction, two-directional causality or feedback loops”\textsuperscript{13} (Bennett and Elman 2006, 456).

\textsuperscript{11} Although this policy exists on paper, it has not been implemented.

\textsuperscript{12} These are the two iterations of the DHS survey data that contain all of the variables of interest which were available at the time; more detail on the various iterations of the DHS surveys is provided below.

\textsuperscript{13} Such a qualitative extrapolation from the results of a quantitative study are admittedly not the most conventional approach, but I would argue that they are highly appropriate given both the circumstances of the initial analysis, and the subsequent shift to a qualitatively-informed selection technique, which produced more
Given the messy findings, which could indicate either “equifinality (many different paths to the same outcome) or multifinality (many different outcomes from the same value of an independent variable, depending on context)” (Bennett and Elman 2006, 456), it was clear that a different strategy was needed in order to derive meaningful results. Within the noise, however, there were some regional patterns, which suggested that an analysis focused on a more parsimonious sample of cases from within the same region may be a productive path forward.

From this point, I made the strategic decision (similar to those described in Koivu and Hintze 2017) to focus on Latin America, as it was one of the two regions which I knew the most about already. From there, I used this existing qualitative case knowledge to establish scope conditions, following in the tradition of Goertz and Mahoney (2009), which set some “empirical and theoretical limits on the extent to which an inference can be generalized” (307), thus indicating external validity. Given this, my scope conditions for the population of cases became: countries in Latin America with a Spanish colonial heritage (and subsequent policy environment), where the DHS survey (VI or 7) had been conducted within five years of each other (between 2011 and 2016).

This left me with five possible cases: Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru. The Dominican Republic and Peru were eliminated after further analysis, as a combination of missing data and coding mismatch raised some concerns about conceptual homogeneity (Goertz and Mahoney 2009, 312), particularly in regard to measurement stability, calling into question whether these data were appropriate for comparison.

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14 The other region was the Middle East and North Africa, and while I was tempted to pursue that region instead, I had already identified some issues with the quality of the data in some of the country cases—such as a total lack of ethnic Palestinians in the sample from Jordan—which, coupled with an even smaller number of regional countries in which the relevant surveys had been administered, dissuaded me from pursuing this option.

15 To be clear, these concerns were with how the DHS coded the survey results before public release. While the coding schema is purportedly designed to allow for ready cross-country comparison, it is clear that this should not be taken at face value. This also highlights a clear advantage of incorporating insights from qualitative case selection, as thinking through and establishing these criteria gave me an advantage in evaluating the validity of these data prior to the quantitative analysis.
In summary, selecting cases from a region with similar policy environment, at a similar point in time, using a highly comparable survey instrument, creates an analysis that can be reasonably expected to have a high degree of external validity. While there are clearly elements of circumstantial and strategic case selection based on the availability of data, background knowledge of the specific region was vital in selecting cases that would be viable for comparison. Further, although this analysis does not focus on a direct connection between the specific policies and the percentage of women who own property, a qualitative understanding of the trajectory of the policies within each country (alongside other relevant country conditions) is a crucial component to unpacking the results of the quantitative analysis.

Data

Reliable and large-n individual-level data on asset ownership is a relatively new phenomenon, and previous scholarship focused primarily on household-level data. This includes examinations of gendered asset ownership, where comparisons would be made between female-headed and male-headed households; criticisms of this practice included calls for more individual-level analysis (see e.g., Deere, Alvarado, and Twyman 2012). Initial quantitative analyses on women’s ownership of assets in Latin America found that the percentage of women who owned a home were likely much higher than previously found in qualitative studies (Deere and León 2001; Deere, Alvarado, and Twyman 2012). This study also found a significant disparity between women’s rural and urban home ownership (Deere, Alvarado, and Twyman 2012), which the authors considered to be potential evidence of male bias in land inheritance, theorized to persist in spite of gender-neutral inheritance legislation (see e.g., Deere and León). Previous surveys on land ownership in the region also tended to record only one owner for the property, which was typically the (male) household head (Deere, Alvarado, and Twyman 2012).

The USAID’s Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), were originally designed as public health initiatives that were an extension of previous projects such as the World Fertility Survey, iterations of which were conducted in 43 countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Since it was first established in 1984, there have been eight versions of the survey, conducted 350 times in overlapping five-year phases, across 90 countries. These
surveys “are designed to collect data on marriage, fertility, mortality, family planning, reproductive health, child health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS,” and are focused on women of reproductive age, defined here as 15-49 (DHSProgram 2019). Each iteration of the survey includes at least two questionnaires—one at the household level, and one at the individual level for women only.

Although there are some small variations between countries and individual surveys, the same sampling strategy is used, a two-stage cluster procedure, which covers 100% of the target population in-country, coupled with a multi-level stratification technique. This ensures a representative sample of the target population, and reduces sampling errors, but also requires the use of provided sampling weights at both the household and individual level.

Information about asset ownership was officially added to the DHS survey in the seventh iteration, referred to as DHS-7, although it was added as an optional module to some applications of DHS-VI. The questions remain the same across both the pilot versions issued in DHS-VI and those adopted officially in DHS-7. This module asks women if they own a house and if they own land as separate questions, and provides at least three possible categories for ownership: sole ownership, joint ownership with a husband or partner, and no ownership. In some instances, a fourth category is included: both sole ownership and joint ownership (i.e., two separate properties, one held alone, and one held jointly). In some iterations, information about whether or not the woman has a formal title is also included.

The countries in this analysis are limited in the level detail of in the data provided, so three types of ownership are used, and there is no information about titles. This analysis uses the most recent survey conducted for each country. In Colombia and Guatemala, this was an iteration of DHS-7, carried out in 2015 and 2014-2015, respectively. In Honduras, this was an iteration of DHS-VI with the optional asset module, carried out in 2011-2012. The total sample of women interviewed for each survey was 38,718 in Colombia, 25,914 in Guatemala, and 22,747 in Honduras.

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16 This is a departure from previous naming conventions, as iterations one through six all use Roman numerals.
17 When this information is included, it can either be recorded dichotomously (i.e., yes or no), or it can contain more detailed information about the title, and what names are recorded legally.
A Brief Overview of Land Reform and Women’s Property Rights in Latin America

Land reform

Land reform in Latin America has generally been understood to mean the state-led redistribution of land in rural areas that swept through the region in the twentieth century, but can also include complementary reforms such as access to credit, or provisions for groups based on class, gender, or ethnicity. With a peak in the 1960s, much of this redistribution was influenced by the geopolitics of the time, such as the Cuban Revolution of 1959; the competing, Cold War-era interests of the United States and Russia; and later, neoliberal norm diffusion via international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These forces, combined with internal pressures such as resistance from the landlord class (Kay 2002) managed to disrupt the trajectory of reform in many countries, alternatively delaying, halting, or reversing policy enactment and implementation.

The end of the twentieth century in Latin America saw a number of circumstances that would prove to be advantageous to women’s land and property rights. A wave of agrarian reforms coincided with increased interest in gender-equitable language, which created a platform from which to assert more progressive policies. This included policies that prioritized female-headed households, mandated joint titling for property acquired within a marriage, and focused attention on vulnerable groups such as rural women and Indigenous communities. The growth of women’s organizations, including a number of influential rural groups, helped to keep the issue of women’s asset ownership on the agenda, while the relative strength of the organizations helped to push policies in a more progressive direction.

Throughout this time period, land reforms ranked as a high priority in many parts of the world, not just Latin America, although researchers have traced patterns that are distinct to specific regions, comparing Latin America with Southeast Asia and SubSaharan Africa in particular (see e.g., Kay 2002; King 1977; Tai 1974). Some of the policies that have been identified as unique to Latin America include requirements that state distribution and titling programs register land in the name of both members of a couple, including those in civil unions or common-law marriages (Deere and León 2001a; b), equal property distribution to both parties
upon the dissolution of a marriage, and affirmative action measures in state-sponsored programs that give
priority to female-headed households (Deere 2003).

Some of the variation in land reform policy (both within and across regions) can be attributed to
differences in the percentage of land held under existing customary land tenure systems, which are most
prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, although they remain relevant (albeit to differing degree) in Latin America
and parts of Asia (Barraclough 1999). While the specifics of these systems vary, they tend to follow a system of
communal ownership with individual rights to cultivation, and have persisted despite contradictory formal
legislation. This contradiction has created tension between the communal land holders and the state, which has
ultimately been replicated by international organizations and NGOs. For example, the state-led narrative
regarding many communities that function within a customary system has often been one of backwardness and
resistance to modernization—a refrain which has been echoed in many international organizations. NGOs and
locally-organized rural communities, however, have pushed for reforms that recognize customary rights and
that include restitution for expropriated land (Barraclough 1999; Cotula, Toulon, and Quan 2006).

Women’s property rights

Women’s property rights, as derived from the marital and inheritance regimes within a country’s civil
code, can vary at a number of points: whether and how property can be acquired, how it can be used or
disposed of both within a marriage and after one or both partners die, or if the marriage ends in divorce. In
Latin America, the evolution of these civil codes are tied to that of the former colonial power, as legal regimes
differed in Spanish versus Portuguese colonies, even where there were similarities due to their common pre-
colonial origins. Variation in policy across the Spanish Empire was extended when the former colonies enacted
their own civil codes in the 19th century, and then began to integrate gender equity in the 20th century. One
crucial difference between the marital regimes of former Spanish and Portuguese colonies is the codification of
community property, in which the Spanish tradition was partial community property, while the Portuguese was
full community property (Socolow 2000). In a regime of partial community property, only property acquired
during the marriage was considered communal, whereas under full community property, any assets brought into
the marriage were considered communal. Should the marriage dissolve, only communally-held property would be divided.

Whether and how the wave of neoliberal reforms in the 19th century influenced women’s property ownership in the region is a matter of some debate, although, as studies such as those in Costa Rica (Rodríguez Sáenz 2005) and Mexico (Arrom 1985) find, the most plausible outcome is mixed, in which some aspects of women’s property ownership are strengthened and others weakened, ultimately hinging on the extent of gender equality, as well as class and ethnicity (Dore 2000) within a given country. Critical areas of difference in these reforms included if, when, and how the traditional dowry system was reformed (see e.g., Zeberio 2005 for an analysis of Argentina; Nazzari 1991 for an analysis of Brazil; and Hunefeldt 2005 for an analysis of Peru), the rights of widows to asset ownership (Hunefeldt 2005; O’Connor 2002; Shelton 2010), inheritance (Rodríguez Sáenz 2005; Zeberio 2005), and civil marriage and divorce (Deere and León 2005; Rengifo 2011; Rodríguez Sáenz 2002). There is some evidence that suggests that the 19th century reforms in Mexico and Central America followed a very different path than those in South America (Deere and León 2005), with the former moving further away from the colonial-era legislation than the latter.

The twentieth century saw additional reforms which strengthened women’s property rights and established equality within in the household, including control over earnings (Cocker Gonzalez 2000; Htun 2003), consensual unions (Arvey 2010; Deere and León 2001a), and the legalization of divorce (Htun 2003). As Friedemann-Sánchez (2012) finds, however, the presence of a gender-equitable legal regime in Colombia may not be enough to counter inequality in property ownership, as women continue to have a low legal literacy, while facing high transactional costs and ingrained social norms.

Indeed, of the three cases, discussed in more detail below, Colombia is considered to be among the most progressive countries in terms of land ownership reforms, as is Honduras, as both countries were quick to enact legislation that explicitly established gender equality, and allowed for joint titling of couples (Deere and León 2001b, c). However, the countries initially differed on how joint titles were issued, with Colombia having mandatory joint titling while it was optional in Honduras until 2000. Colombia’s legislation also prioritized female-headed households, while Honduras’ did not. Deere and León (2001c) argue that mandating joint titling
in legislation is “crucial for the empowerment of women...[because] it reinforces the provision of civil codes that husband and wife are jointly responsible for the administration of household assets... adds legal muscle to the requirement that they must be in agreement to sell, mortgage or otherwise dispose of their property...[and] safeguards women’s ownership rights in case of separation, divorce or widowhood (443).” Reform in Guatemala was more circuitous, with initial reforms in the 1940s and 1950s reversed after the 1954 coup (Melville and Melville 1971). Given this, gender-related land policies, alongside policies to protect Indigenous communities, lagged behind those implemented in Colombia and Honduras.

Other important considerations

It is important to also highlight here two additional components of Latin American history, which vary across the region, and have undoubtedly influenced the trajectory of (gender-equitable) land reforms and women’s property ownership: the influence of external political actors, and violent conflict. The importance of geopolitical concerns on the trajectory of land reform in the region is well-documented, and although there are disagreements about the extent to which (and how) forces like the Alliance for Progress and American concerns about the spread of communism following the Cuban Revolution influenced policy. While these debates reside predominantly outside the scope of this dissertation, it interesting to note that American interests and involvement in land reform in Latin America were distinct from foreign policy in Asia (see e.g., Olson 1974; Stratton 1998).

Similarly, many countries in Latin America experienced significant violence from a range of sources, including civil wars, state-sponsored repression, CIA-backed interventions, guerrilla insurgencies, organized crime (particularly drug cartels), and paramilitary groups. Again, the full history of violence in Latin America — even just that of the twentieth century—is too complex to be done justice in the limited context of this dissertation. Having said that, it is important to note at least in general terms the significance of the violence that has impacted Latin America as a region, and the cases in this analysis—indeed, two of the countries in this analysis (Colombia and Guatemala) have experienced (or continue to experience) extreme levels of violence, which have undoubtedly shaped several of the variables under study here, such as land tenure and
experiences of intimate partner violence. While the atrocities that have taken place in Guatemala and Colombia may seem overwhelming in comparison, it should be noted that Honduras has not been untouched by violence, and events such as the 2009 coup have also had a profound impact on the country. Where relevant, these issues are touched upon very lightly in the country details below.

**Colombia**

*Background*

As a country with a staggering history of violent conflict, Colombia stands out even in a region that has seen more than its fair share of conflict. Unsurprisingly, this history is quite complex, and has been evolving since *La Violencia*, the ten-year civil war which lasted from 1948 to 1958. Some of the key actors in the ongoing violence have been the Colombian government, far-left guerrilla insurgents like the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), far-right paramilitary organizations, and drug cartels.\(^\text{18}\) The relevance of the drug trade in this conflict—particularly the production of cocaine, but also heroin—can be seen in the sustained nature of the conflict through power drug cartels (who became increasingly tied with paramilitary organizations, leading some to coin the term “narcoparamilitaries”—see Tate 2012 for an analysis). The drug trade can also be seen in the deforestation and disruption of the countryside. Indeed, much of the violence has taken place in rural areas, which has led to extremely high levels of displacement—since 1985, Colombia has registered the world’s second-highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), although the exact numbers of internally displaced persons is hard to discern.\(^\text{19}\) This conflict-related displacement has fueled rapid urbanization that has over-burdened existing infrastructure, such that both urban and rural housing and land tenure are deeply insecure. Women are especially at risk of forced displacement—particularly women-headed households, as well as AfroColombian and Indigenous women—as well as gender-based violence and sexual

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\(^{18}\) This is not a comprehensive list, but identifies some of the conflict’s key components and interests.

\(^{19}\) Estimates range from 4.9 million (NRC 2020) to 5.6 million (IMDC 2019) to 5.7 million (UNHCR 2015) to 8 million (Borgen Project 2019) IDPs in Colombia since 1985. Even at the low end of the estimates, Colombia remains firmly in second place behind Syria for the country with the highest number of IDPs.
abuses. Taken together, it is easy to see how this might influence land tenure, urban residences, and women’s rights.

Since 1994, the government of Colombia has implemented a series of land distribution programs designed to benefit rural women, female headed households, AfroColombian women, and Indigenous women, but much like with the market-based program established in 1994, the intended benefits have been limited by cultural norms, inheritance practices, the market, and financial institutions. For example, the law does not prohibit gender discrimination in access to credit, so a woman displaced by the conflict who is trying to take advantage of a policy which offers up to a 70% subsidy to purchase a parcel of land may be denied a line of credit explicitly because of gender-based assumptions about her credit worthiness. It’s also not clear that much energy has been expended in helping displaced women regain or be compensated for land lost in the conflict.

Women in Colombia can legally own land, and both men and women have equal land rights. The law also allows for joint adjudication and titling for couples, although this is not a requirement for married couples acquiring land (Deere and León 2001). Property acquired within a marriage is communal, and is legally required to be split equally between man and woman upon divorce. However, the woman is often required to bring a series of documents to court to confirm the union and her entitlement to any assets, including a notarized letter from her former partner, records of any children that resulted from the union, and testimonies of support from friends and neighbors (USAID 2016) all of which can represent a significant burden. In the case of a husband’s demise, inheritance laws also favor children, with the widow receiving a conjugal portion, and the remaining property going to any children, regardless of legitimacy (UN-Habitat 2005).

Given the context of the violence, in combination with some of the limitations in the implementation of these policies as described above, it is easy to see how women in Colombia continue to be at a disadvantage in obtaining and controlling property. While the focus of this dissertation is on the relationship between women’s

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20 These programs and policies include a market-based distribution program from 1994 that prioritized low-income and female-headed households; a 1998 decree granting benefits to rural women for land titling; a 2002 law establishing a fund for the advancement of rural women known as FOMMUR (Ley 31, Art. 10); and 2007’s Estatuto de Desarrollo Rural (Ley 1152) which prioritized AfroColombian and Indigenous communities. The recent Peace Accords, signed in 2016, also include land-related agreements, which were incorporated into the National Development Plan.
property ownership and possible empowerment outcomes, it is still important to keep this understanding of women’s disadvantage in property ownership in mind.

**Sample Characteristics**

Table 1, below, provides descriptive statistics on women’s land and home ownership in Colombia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>2,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7.12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>5,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13.95%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>1,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>2,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5.82%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25.09%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>4,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11.01%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations (assets)</strong></td>
<td><strong>38,718</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, the DHS survey data shows that women are far more likely to own a home than land: a total of 10,571 women, or 27.3% own a home, while 5,117, or 13.22% own land. For both types of property, they are more likely to own jointly than alone. Interestingly, while they are more than twice as likely to own a home jointly than alone, they are only slightly more likely to own a land jointly than they are alone. There are far more women in the sample that reside in urban areas, as only 25% of the sample reside in rural areas. In combination with the lower percentage of land ownership, this makes sense given the high levels of rural displacement in the country. There are also 4,264 women in the sample that identify as Indigenous, which on the Colombian survey was its own catch-all category. At 11%, this is the country with the smallest percentage of Indigenous women in the sample out of the three cases.
**Guatemala**

*Background*

Land rights and land tenure in Guatemala are highly unequal; historically, much of the land has been a site of significant conflict. Indeed, the civil war which consumed the country for 36 years was intimately tied to land, and has left a lasting impact of migration, forced abandonment, and dispossession. The legacy of the violence in Guatemala is particularly salient in regards to the Indigenous population, where a counterinsurgency campaign targeted Indigenous communities, and the Guatemalan military perpetuated some of the worst human rights violations on record (Schirmer 1998). Land tenure is highly concentrated: 1.86% of the population owns 56.59% of arable land (USAID 2015). This makes land tenure in Guatemala the most inequitable in Central America. This combination of conflict and unequal land distribution contribute to the high level of poverty in the country (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2004).

With earlier attempts at reform from the Arbenz government undone following the US-backed coup in 1954, a less-radical version of agrarian reform was implemented in 1962. This included a provision in the Law of Agrarian Transformation that stipulated land parcels would be distributed as *patrimonio agrarian familiar*. This placed women at a disadvantage upon widowhood, as they were not considered to be agriculturalists, so the land would typically go to any sons instead (Fundación Arias-Tierra Viva 1993, 73-4; Deere and León 2001b, 80-1). This provision dramatically decreased the rate at which women obtained land in Guatemala. Joint titling was also stymied—even as late as the 1990s, it “had not even been raised as a possibility,” according to government employees and NGO workers at the time (Deere and León 2001). Joint titling is also not mentioned in the 1996 Peace Accords, despite the expressed intention to secure women’s rights to property and resources.

Instead, it was women refugees who were members of rural women’s organizations that jumpstarted the process of formalizing joint titling from exile. Working from refugee camps in Mexico, with support from Mexican feminists and the UNHCR, an agreement was finally reached in 1996 that gave equal rights to property for both members of a couple, either married or in a consensual union (Deere and León 2001b). It was this hard work that laid the groundwork for the gender-equitable distribution seen in FONTIERRAS, or the
Fondo de Tierras, legislation which was designed to increase secure land tenure (Decreto Ley 24-99). In spite of these successes, both activists and scholars have expressed concern over the viability of gender-progressive land policies in Guatemala, citing the influence of international organizations and a lack of political will within the country to adequately fund and implement reform (Deere and León 2001b, 223).

Women and Indigenous peoples continue to be particularly marginalized when it comes to land in Guatemala. Nationally, the legal framework recognizes gender equality, and the Civil Code includes provisions for women’s inheritance of property and the distribution of marital property. In the case of spousal death, under the régimen de comunidad absoluta (Código Civil Art. 122, Dec. 218), wives tend to inherit only if there are no surviving children. Similarly, patriarchal norms tend to favor sons, and daughters seldom inherit; when they do, they often receive a much smaller portion than their brothers. The comunidad de gananciales (Código Civil Art. 9, Dec. 218) dictates that both parties retain the assets they had upon entering a marriage, while any assets acquired during the marriage are to be divided in half should the union be dissolved. Crucially, women’s ability to get a divorce in Guatemala is also limited, and they are not able to file for dissolution as readily as a man (Código Civil Art. 155, Dec. 5).

Women continue to face structural, cultural, and institutional barriers in both agrarian reform programs and the open market. For example, gender-based discrimination in access to credit has led to misunderstandings regarding women’s right to land—when applying for a loan, women are asked if they have a husband, and are denied if they say no (Deere and León 2001b, 81). In this way, FONTIERRAS paved the way for joint ownership after a long-fought battle spearheaded by rural women’s groups and international NGOs. However, while FONTIERRAS allows for joint ownership as well as sole ownership, it is not required. Instead,

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21 FONTIERRAS, the common reference to Ley del Fondo de Tierras, created via Decree No, 24-99, was one of several policy reforms stemming from the Peace Accords which signaled the close of the Civil War. Functioning autonomously as a decentralized state body with national scope, FONTIERRAS is the mechanism through which campesinos (the agricultural class, also referred to as peasants) legally access land. These campesino beneficiaries can be both men and women except for beneficiary families with a single parent (man or woman) as household head. While this language is very gender-equitable, the ability of FONTIERRAS to issue land in a gender-equitable fashion has been called into question, with critics pointing to a lack of leadership and inadequate funding in the the Oficina Nacional de la Mujer (the national office tasked with representing women), and the ineffectiveness of the National Women’s Forum, established to hold up the state’s end in terms of gender, per the Accords. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Deere and León (2001a).
the titling program focuses on head of household, which is usually man (Hatcher, Meggiolare, and Santonico Ferrer 2005).

Indigenous populations in Guatemala have faced systemic land discrimination, from colonization through the 21st century, including discrimination from the state that is in blatant disregard of provisions in the peace accords. For example, the Spanish-language requirement initially written into FONTIERRAS was exclusionary for those who speak only an Indigenous language, or who cannot afford someone to translate or negotiate on their behalf. It was this requirement, alongside a number of additional concerns, that lead to the successful petitioning of the Guatemalan government by the Maya Q’eqchi’ Agua Caliente community via the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR 2017).

Joined by other Indigenous communities, this decades-long battle between the Agua Caliente community continues at the level of the IACHR, as a 2011 Guatemalan Constitutional Court ruling in the community’s favor remains unenforced (Taracena 2022). Customary norms for many Indigenous women also mean a reliance on traditional authority structures that are male-dominated, with women excluded from community-level decision-making. Tenure insecurity remains prevalent, and Indigenous populations continue to be over-represented in the percentage of the landless population overall (Gould 2006; Ybarra 2008).

Sample Characteristics

The DHS survey data shows that women in Guatemala are far more likely to own a home than land: a total of 7,980 women, or 30.81% own a home, while 3,884, or 15% own land. However, while they are almost three times as likely to own a home jointly then they are alone, yet they are more likely to own land alone than they are jointly. See Table 2, below, for more detail.
With the exception of joint land ownership, where there is only a slight difference between the two countries, it is interesting to note that a greater percentage of women in Guatemala own property than women in Colombia. Although an analysis of policy effectiveness is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is worth highlighting that the country (Colombia) with the more progressive policies does not also have the higher percentage of women’s land ownership. This speaks to the complexity of the relationship between policy enactment, implementation, and social norms—as well as the entrenched nature of women’s disadvantage in asset ownership.

There are far more women in the sample that reside in rural areas, as reflected in the 58.54% of the sample reside in rural areas. There are also 9,898 women in the sample that identify as Indigenous, which on the Guatemala survey included several distinct categories, including Maya, Garifuna, and Xinca. At 38.2%, Guatemala is the country with the largest percentage of Indigenous women in the sample across the three cases.

This percentage is comparable to the results reported in the 2002 census, but low when compared to the 2018 census; however, these official statistics have been challenged on numerous fronts, including from Indigenous rights organizations (IWGIA 2020). Some of these discrepancies may be due to the self-reporting
nature of identity (both in terms of the census but also the DHS surveys). However, as the DHS sampling strategy is derived from official statistics, it is important to highlight that the survey may have under-sampled Indigenous women.

Honduras

Background

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Overall, land distribution is highly unequal, with 15% of landowners owning 50% of arable land, and only 20% of arable land held in small allotments by agricultural households (USAID 2017). While the majority of Honduran live in rural areas, it is also very mountainous, and only a limited portion of the land is suitable for cultivation— making the inequality in distribution of arable land especially stark. Much like in Colombia and Guatemala, land tenure insecurity remains a significant source of conflict and poverty.

Despite having had equal rights to land under the law for decades, only a small percentage of women in Honduras own land. The marital property regime delineated in 1984 initially allowed couples to decide whether to combine assets acquired during the marriage or keep them separate, with the latter as the default. In the early 1990s, joint titling legislation in Honduras shifted to allow for an optional joint titling for married couples, although this required that the couples to make the request explicit. This policy was then revised in 2000 to mandatory joint titling for newly issued titled (Lastarria-Cornheil et al. 2003). While both men and women have equal rights to inherit, the Civil Code in Honduras favors inheritance for children (not restricted to gender), with a spouse inheriting only after parents and siblings. Unless the husband left a will, a wife is not entitled to inherit a conjugal portion (Roquas 2002).

Although women’s right to property, including that obtained within a marriage, are legally recognized, this is often not carried over into practice. Men continue to be privileged as head of household, the gendered division of labor limits women’s ability to make agricultural decisions, and it is common for husbands to make decisions about property— including land owned by their wives— without their wives knowledge or consent.
(Roquas 2002; Lastarria-Cornhiel et al. 2003). In other words, the gender-neutral nature of language in titling legislation leaves space for implementation that upholds cultural norms that favor men as head of household.

Indigenous populations also face extreme discrimination, and their rights to both land and sub-surface natural resources are under threat, including from government elites and powerful business interests (USAID 2015). These communities are diverse in culture and history, and it would be problematic to make generalizations along those lines simply because they are Indigenous. Where Indigenous groups hold land communally, however, they face a high level of tenure insecurity, which has led to direct expropriation from a variety of sources. This insecurity stems from the lack of a clear title to communally-held land, and is exacerbated by incomplete or absent cadastre (property records which indicate clear boundaries for land on a map, as well as the value of the land itself). This created an avenue through which enterprising landless farmers from outside the Indigenous communities, multinational corporations interested in mining resources, and government agencies have been able to directly expropriate the land (USAID 2015), even when it is occupied by the Indigenous community.\footnote{A number of Indigenous groups have united and are actively organized against these practices, although prominent leaders face ongoing violence and intimidation (see, e.g., the assassination of Bertha Cáceres in 2016).}

While Honduras avoided much of the violence experienced by its neighbors in the twentieth century, it was also forced to play host to outside forces, primarily from the United States, who used the country as a training ground and springboard for clandestine operations, perhaps most notably in Guatemala and Nicaragua. This has shifted in the twenty-first century—the US-backed coup in 2011 which uprooted the democratically-elected Zelaya presidency, and the political assassination of Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres in 2016 serve as two glaring examples. Both of these acts of violence also have ramifications for land ownership and tenure security, particularly for women and Indigenous communities. Overthrowing the Zelaya administration also overturned more progressive land reforms and policies intended to address gender inequality (Mowforth 2014; Coles 2020), while Berta Cáceres was actively—and prominently—struggling for Indigenous land rights against the Honduran government and multinational corporations. While clearly very different than the legacy of violence in Colombia and in Guatemala, these events likely have an impact on land ownership in
Honduras, as well as the country’s high rate of poverty, all of which should be kept in mind when analyzing findings in the empirical chapters.

**Sample Characteristics**

The DHS survey data shows that women are far more likely to own a home than land: a total of 8,564 women, or 38% own a home, while 3,073, or 13.55% own land. However, much like in Guatemala, women are twice as likely to own a home jointly then they are alone. Joint ownership of land is far more prevalent than sole ownership. See Table 3, below, for more detail. Interestingly, the sample of women from Honduras report a comparatively high level of home ownership in comparison with home ownership in the rest of the sample, while the percentage of land ownership is comparable to or lower than that observed in the other countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>2,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>5,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>1,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>1,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.06%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>3,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17.34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (assets)</td>
<td>22,747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The women in the sample are also largely rural, with 58.06% residing in rural areas, a percentage comparable to that observed in Guatemala. There are also 3,946 women in the sample that identify as Indigenous, which on the Honduras survey included Lenca, Pech, Miskito, Tolupán, Chortí, Tawahka, Nahua, and Garifuna. At 11%, this is the country with the smallest percentage of Indigenous women in the sample.

Unfortunately, given the limitations within the data, it is not possible to ascertain much about these populations when disaggregated, in part because of the small size within the sample, but also because of the lack of detailed information about property ownership. Having said that, it is possible to make a very general distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, and some of the discrimination that is faced (or not faced) based on those general categories. Still, this serves as a good reminder that more plentiful, detailed data about property ownership and Indigenous populations, would be valuable for future research.

**Formal Titling and Tenure Security**

The DHS sample includes ownership regardless of title, meaning that women may own the land, but it may be a traditional form of ownership that does not include a title, the land may be titled officially, or it may be titled improperly. A lack of a title should not be construed with an illegitimate claim—a significant percentage of land in many countries in Latin America remains untitled. For example, in Honduras, around 80% of privately-owned land is either untitled or improperly titled (USAID 2017). This is often particularly true in rural areas—for example, in Colombia, 48% of rural land parcels are registered but not titled, while an unknown number of parcels remain unregistered (USAID 2016). In 1998, the World Bank initiated a project to title half the property in Guatemala by 2013. At the time, only 30% of the total property in the country was titled, most of which was urban, as 95% of rural property was untitled (World Bank 2016).

There are many reasons for this, including poorly understood and implemented formalization policies, a lack of capacity for registration and titling programs, as well as an absence of policies to account for different types of land tenure. For example, Guatemala’s lack of procedures for the formal registration of communal land made Indigenous communities particularly vulnerable to land grabs. Some communities have been able to register communally-held land as a municipal property, whereas some converted communal land into individual
privatized parcels (Lastarria-Cornheil 2004). Indigenous communities that are not formally registered face land grabs from corporations and private individuals via the 1880 Law of Supplementary Titles, which grants titles in disregard of customary law and Indigenous claims. Despite the suspension of this law during the Peace Accords, 8,852 supplementary title claims were made between 2000 and 2003 alone (Amnesty 2006). This pervasive informality in land ownership is a significant problem, for the state but more so for those living and relying on the informally-held land. Unsurprisingly, tenure insecurity remains one of the biggest drivers of poverty and conflict in the region.

It is important to understand this background when interpreting the DHS data. While a lack of title does not imply illegitimate ownership, it does convey a lack of tenure security. Some of the relationships observed here may be attenuated by this insecurity, and not knowing whether or not the property is formally registered or titled is certainly a limitation of the DHS data. Having said that, this also provides an interesting level of nuance to the data itself. Given the way the questions are asked, women who report that they own property likely have a very strong reason for making this claim. Similarly, those who report that they own it themselves or who report that they own it jointly with their husbands clearly have a reason for making this distinction. While this may not tell us about the relationship between their property ownership and the state, it certainly tells us something about the women’s perception of their property ownership. In the particular context of Latin America, using women’s self-reported joint ownership also overrides some of the problems identified in previous work (see e.g., Deere and León 2001b, c) where the legal documents record only the husband as head of household, even when the wife is legally entitled to joint ownership per legislation.

Looking Across the Three Cases

There are many important similarities across the three countries in this study. For example, all have highly unequal land distribution, and extreme tenure insecurity. They all also have explicitly written gender equity into law, and all have embedded patriarchal norms that privilege men as head-of-household. The percentage of women who own a home or land in the DHS data remains very low. Overall, women in Honduras
own the highest percentile: 36.62% own a home, and 13.5% own land, which women in Colombia own the lowest: 21.07% own a home, and 10.72% own land.

When it comes to home ownership, women across all three countries are much more likely to own a home jointly than alone— in Guatemala, they are almost three times more likely; in Colombia and Honduras, twice as likely. Women are also more likely to own a house than land overall. In Guatemala and Honduras, women are more likely to own land alone than they are jointly; in Colombia, they are slightly more likely to own land jointly than alone. However, the percentage of women who own land jointly is consistent across the three countries— while the percentage of women who own land alone is a lower in Colombia than in the Central American countries.

Importantly, ownership of housing has a very low correlation with ownership of land across the three countries. This means that most women in the sample that own property own either land or a home, but not both. One of the major limitations in the DHS data is that it doesn’t provide information on when or how property was acquired. However, evidence from previous studies shows that most land is acquired through inheritance, and that when a acquires an inheritance, this is often held in her name alone— even when it controlled by her husband or her husband’s family (see e.g., Deere and León 2001; Lastarria-Cornhiel et al. 2003). Similarly, land titling legislation indicates that joint titling is often likely to be property acquired during the marriage— it would be quite onerous for a couple to go and register property that one party owned previously into both parties names, making this an unlikely scenario. So, while this should not be interpreted definitively, it is helpful to keep this contextual knowledge about what the different types of ownership are likely to indicate about how the property and when the property was acquired when analyzing the relationship between ownership and various empowerment outcomes in the upcoming chapters.
CHAPTER 3: PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

Introduction

The household is site of cooperation and contestation (Bernard et al. 2020). The bulk of daily and family life takes place in the household, and the gendered interactions in the home, such as the division of labor, both replicate and reinforce societal power structures. This is not a new idea—indeed, there is a long tradition of history and political theory that has shed light on the idea of the household as a site of women’s disadvantage. As Susan Okin (1989, 6) argued, the expectations of the gendered division of labor structures behavior within the household such that they serve as the “linchpin” of all gender inequality in society.

As a society changes—through policy adaptations, development interventions, or broader norm shifts—the household has the potential to be a site of transformation, but it can also remain a site of stubborn recalcitrance. For example, Blumberg (1984, 48) argues that when women’s relative economic power increases, so does their level of control over their own lives. Conceptualizing the (heteronormative) household as the “most micro nesting level” of society, she suggests that economic power within the household not only increases women’s ability to make decisions within the household, such as what groceries to purchase for the week, but also to larger decisions regarding her fertility and sexuality.

Yet while this is not a universal finding, there are multiple examples from recent scholarship that find that when women’s relative worth increases, she can experience violent backlash from her husband (see e.g., Cools and Kotsadam 2017). More subtle outcomes have also been observed. For example, researchers working over several decades in rural Bangladesh noted a shift in many social norms regarding women, as over time it became increasingly acceptable for them to move more freely within their daily lives, as well as participate in economic decisions at the household level. One older man interviewed about changes in his relationship with his wife over the decades stated: “She does the book-keeping and she is good at it. She suggests ways that we can
keep our expenses down, and how we can best maintain our family. She always gives me good ideas and suggestions’” (Schuler, Islam, and Rottach 2010, 10).

This quote highlights both the complexity and importance of interactions at the household level, particularly the stubborn nature of the gendered hierarchy. While it is clear that the man has come to appreciate his wife’s contributions, and has a high opinion of her abilities, it is also clear that she is not seen as an equal. Her opinions and work are taken into consideration, but he retains his place as head of household, and continues to assume his absolute right as final decision-maker. So where does women’s ownership of housing and land fit into this? When women own property, does this increase their economic power in the household, and subsequently, increase their ability to make decisions about their daily lives? Or is this relationship more complicated?

Women’s Decision-making in the Development Literature

The importance of the household has been explored in much of the literature on gender and development, with an emphasis on women’s participation in decision-making. This has most frequently meant financial choices, which have been used as an indicator of women’s empowerment (see e.g., Kishor and Subaiya 2008; Jennings et al. 2014). In this literature, women’s household decision-making has been used extensively as an explanatory variable, leading to arguments that when women have greater decision-making power, it leads to better family and community outcomes, such as improved sanitation (Hirai, Graham, and Sandberg 2016; Lee 2017); child health (Allendorf 2007; Duflo 2003), dietary choices (Amugsi et al. 2016); maternal health (Behrman 2017); and experiences of intimate partner violence (Agarwal 1997). Women’s decision-making has also been explored as an outcome of interest in and of itself; this literature is often heavily focused on how decision-making is conceptualized and measured, and whether or not it can be compared across different contexts (see e.g., Malhotra et al. 2002; Bernard et al. 2020; Peterman and Seymour 2020).

Given the wide-ranging interest in the indicator, questions about household decision-making are now frequently included as part of a dedicated module within large-N survey questionnaires, particularly those interested in women’s empowerment. Indeed, the module in the DHS on women’s household decision-making
was developed as part of a concerted effort to include indicators that would show evidence of women’s empowerment (Kishor and Subaiya 2008).

However, the specific questions have changed over time in ways that better shape our understanding of decision-making and empowerment. For example, the original set of questions included a focus on decisions about food, with the expectation that this would be an area in which women across cultures would have decision-making authority. Yet researchers found that there was no variation on this indicator, and subsequently, no analytical value. Similarly, an initial question about daily purchases (which remained in the standard DHS module for some time after the food question was removed) also revealed little variation across countries. These findings reveal some important: what’s empowering isn’t the participation in decisions (or at least, not solely), but participation in specific types of decisions. In most contexts, there is a certain category of decisions—perhaps menial or mundane—that are considered to be “women’s work.” These types of decisions, such as what to make for dinner, may be made by women, but in ways that do not connote power—for example, when a woman makes a meal based on her husband’s preferences. Even if that is a strategic choice on her part—say, she chooses to make something to please him so that he will be less likely to beat her—it is still a choice that centers him and his preferences.

Recent scholarship has shifted to a focus not only on household financial decisions (seen as more important and more traditionally masculine) but also “life option” decisions, such as health and bodily autonomy (see e.g., Bradshaw 2013; Behrman 2017). This naturally includes decisions about family planning (from contraceptive use to abortion), which can be contentious, particularly in contexts where women’s worth is inextricably linked with fertility. Yet it also includes non-reproductive healthcare decisions, including allocation of family resources. Additional questions about visitation, such as those in the DHS, are often used as a proxy measure of women’s freedom of movement—for example, if she is able to participate in decisions to visit family or friends.

23 For example, whether (and how much) to spend on medicine or surgical interventions; expenses related to travel to a hospital or specialist over a local, less skilled option. In heavily patriarchal societies it is not uncommon for doctors to consult with a woman’s husband (either in addition to or rather than her) on treatment options.
**Property Ownership, Decision-Making, and Empowerment**

Several small-n and single case studies have found evidence to suggest that women’s ownership of land is empowering; these have been used as the basis of larger, and broadly persuasive, theoretical arguments. These arguments have also been carried into the international development sphere, where they have served as the foundation for a number of initiatives aimed at increasing women’s share of land holdings, explicitly as a mechanism of empowerment.

Much of this literature is built on the idea that the mechanism through which land rights empower women is the transference of greater bargaining power within the household (e.g., Agarwal 1994), typically operationalized as participation in household decision-making (e.g., Deere and León 2001a). However, this causal chain from land rights to decision-making has been extrapolated to a variety of different outcomes. For example, research has found that land rights increase women’s decision-making power, leading to increased expenditure on food, health care, and education of children (Agarwal 1994; Allendorf 2007; Doss 2013; Katz and Chamorro 2002; Mishra and Sam 2016; Panda and Agarwal 2005), which subsequently improves the welfare of women, children, and the household (Deere and Doss 2005; Fafchamps 2001; Menon et al. 2014). Some scholars have argued that women’s increased decision-making expands agricultural productivity (Goldstein and Udry 2008; Holden and Bezabih 2008) while others have found it boosts household income from non-farm sources (Deere et al. 2003).

Although there are some similarities across studies, there have been distinct regional and subregional findings as well. For example, Akter et al. (2017) find that structural elements within Southeast Asian farming systems are distinct from those in Sub-Saharan African norms, which influences both the regional norms in women’s access to land and decision-making control over household income. Similarly, policy implementation may have an initial influence initially, but there is evidence that it may not counter existing norms in the long term. Wiig (2013) finds that women in areas of Peru where PETT (Special Land Titling and Cadaster Project—a joint property titling program) was implemented saw increased percentage of women’s participation in household decision-making, with a stronger effect in agricultural settings. However, this may be a one-
generation finding, as inheritance norms within the country still favors sons, partners are not likely to be included on the title deed, and these results are not likely to be generalizable to other contexts.

The Question of Endogeneity

As with any study of this nature, there are obvious endogeneity questions. Are women with greater decision-making ability more likely to own property? Are there unaccounted for forces exerting influence over both property ownership and decision-making ability? Previous studies on women’s ownership of land and decision-making have dealt with these concerns in different ways, from the theoretical to the statistical.

Theoretically, there are a number of arguments that support a potential causal direction leading from women’s property ownership (most often land in particular) to an increase in women’s ability to participate in household decisions. In the economics literature, theoretical frameworks to better understand mechanisms of household bargaining (specifically between a husband and a wife) stretch back to Manser and Brown (1980), which argued that each party has a distinct utility function. Under this framework, any property or assets a wife owned (whether sole or joint) becomes leverage which she can use to negotiate her preferences within the marriage, using the threat of divorce (and subsequent removal of her assets) if her husband did not acquiesce. Later theoretical models built upon this framework, such as Lundberg and Pollak (1993), who argued that wives with assets used a threat of noncooperation (i.e., not sharing resources), rather than divorce. Bina Agarwal’s well-known work draws from these earlier frameworks, such as her 1994 argument that women’s land ownership is a crucial condition of women’s increased household bargaining power. Agarwal (1997) further develops this argument by detailing the ways in which not owning land—as continues to be the case for the majority of women—leads to vulnerability and a decreased ability to bargain within a marriage. Haddad et al. (1997) additionally find evidence of a gendered difference in spending preferences, which can create conflict, as these differences in preferences shed light on decision-making power.

These intra-household bargaining models are a marked departure from previous understandings of the household as a unitary actor, which had been prevalent in the economics literature previously.
More recent scholarship has continued to make strong arguments for a similar direction, including several clear causal arguments. For example, Mishra and Sam (2016) find that an increase in women’s land ownership in Nepal increased women’s household decision-making in health care and household purchases. Wiig’s (2013) exogenous natural experiment of the Special Land Titling and Cadaster Project (PETT) in Peru finds a significant and positive increase in women’s decision-making power. Similar causal findings have been obtained for Vietnam (Menon et al. 2014), India (Mookerjee 2017) and Kenya (Harari 2018). Interestingly, studies that have included complex modeling techniques to account for potential endogeneity, such as Mishra and Sam’s (2016) longitudinal analysis, has similar findings across adjusted and non-adjusted models.

Questions and Analysis

This analysis examines the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and their ability to participate in three dimensions of household decision-making: large household purchases, her own healthcare, and family visitation. Because the data used in this analysis is cross-sectional, I do not make a causal argument, but instead focus on whether a relationship exists, and if so, what it might indicate. Unpacking these dynamics provides an important foundation for future research.

I argue that the ability to participate in household decisions is the vehicle through which women secure access to (current and future) material, social, and human resources within the family unit. As such, I operationalize resource choices as decision-making, measured as women’s participation in household decisions regarding large purchases, own healthcare choices, and family visitation. Including types of decision-making that are both economic and non-economic strengthens this measure, as it provides a gauge of household decision-making power that is not directly tied to income level. Including the ability to make reproductive healthcare choices is particularly important as there are very few decisions that are more heavily critiqued and controlled across the world than women’s bodily autonomy, and subsequent control over health and reproduction. Decisions on visitation provide an additional measure of women’s ability to make choices that impact her everyday life, in this case providing insight on freedom of movement via on her ability to socialize and interact with family and community.
Broadly speaking, the analysis is broken down into three sections. The first considers women’s ownership of land and women’s ownership of housing, and how these types of ownership relate to participation in household decision-making. The second takes this comparison a step further, examining how types of ownership—sole versus joint—relate to decision-making ability. Finally, I examine two conditions under which property ownership may function differently—Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, and rural versus urban areas. All three of these categories are presented in the context of relevant existing literature, highlighting where findings and hypotheses are inconsistent, and where the current analysis can contribute to our broader understanding.

**Land ownership versus housing ownership**

Is there a difference between the relationship between home ownership and women’s participation in decision-making and that of land ownership? Previous literature has also focused either exclusively on the relationship between land ownership and women’s decision-making (e.g., Behrman 2017) or has collapsed home and land ownership into one “asset ownership” variable (e.g., Peterman et al. 2019). Some of the theoretical reasoning for this has been due to a focus on rural women, and related assumptions that land will be a more valuable asset in that context. However, this is not something that has been explored in depth in the literature. One clear advantage to the DHS literature is that it allows us to compare women’s land ownership and housing ownership and decision-making ability in the same sample. Land ownership and home ownership are not highly correlated in any of the countries within this study, so we can include both types of ownership within the same model. Interestingly, women in all three countries are significantly more likely to own a house than they are to own land.

**Sole versus joint ownership**

Some studies have found that women’s joint ownership of land has a negative association with empowerment outcomes (e.g., Behrman 2017), and have hypothesized that this could be an indicator of a backlash effect. Yet scholars have also found that when women’s status is greater than their partner’s, the subsequent imbalance can also trigger a backlash (Atkinson et al. 2005; Cools and Kotsadam 2017). Still others
have argued that women’s sole ownership of land is more likely to be empowering (e.g., Deere and Doss 2005), building on literature that finds that joint ownership may not indicate joint control (e.g., Flora 2001). These findings would lead us to expect that when women own property alone, they may be more likely to experience positive empowerment outcomes, but they may also experience backlash effect. Similarly, previous scholarship would lead us to expect either that joint ownership may not be sufficient to produce empowerment outcomes, or it may increase women’s negotiating or bargaining power, thus increasing their relative power within the household. Given these divergent findings, it becomes even more relevant to examine these relationships across different empowerment outcomes, as this may reveal important information about both the types of ownership and the empowerment outcomes themselves. For example, there may be a higher “bar” for some empowerment outcomes than others, particularly when the outcome in question presents a greater challenge to establish norms of masculinity, gender roles, and the traditional balance of power within the household.

**Indigeneity and rurality**

Finally, there are a number of conditions under which women’s ownership of property may be shaped differentially. Numerous studies have focused on rural women in particular— in part because they are more likely to be disadvantaged in multiple ways...but also because the of the prevalence of theories hypothesizing that land rights (and subsequently, ownership) is important for rural women in particular. This includes a large contribution from studies focused on SubSaharan Africa (e.g., Anderson, Reynolds, and Gugerty 2017; Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhagi 2014; Peterman 2011; Tsikata and Yaro 2014) and Asia (Kabeer 2011; Wood et al. 2018). There are also several important studies that focus on rural women across Latin America (e.g., Bose 2017; Kay, Vergara-Camus, and Deere 2012), as well as single-case studies in Peru (Wiig 2013) and Nicaragua (Bradshaw 2013). Many of these studies highlight the importance of land to rural women, which would suggest that land ownership may have a particular influence on participation in decision-making for rural women.

In the context of Latin America, Indigeneity has been identified as an important factor in understanding women’s empowerment in general. Evidence further suggests that Indigeneity is particularly relevant for ownership of property, especially ownership of land, as experiences and understandings of ownership function
differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Relevant scholarship includes important case studies in Ecuador (Radcliffe 2014) and Guatemala (Briggs, Stedman, and Krasny 2019), as well as comparative studies across the region (e.g., Bose 2017; Deere and León 2001). The inclusion of data on Indigeneity in the DHS data, even if it is available comparatively only as a dichotomous indicator, provides an important opportunity to examine this relationship in more detail.

Methods and Data

Data

The data used for this study comes from DHS questionnaires in Colombia (2015-16), Guatemala (2015), and Honduras (2012), all of which enlisted a randomly selected representative sample. Information on the indicators of women’s property ownership is provided in detail in Chapter Two. The module on women’s participation in household decision-making is focused on married or partnered women of reproductive age (defined here as 15-49). Although there are some small variations between countries and individual surveys, the same sampling strategy is used, a two-stage cluster procedure, which covers 100% of the target population in-country, coupled with a multi-level stratification technique. This ensures a representative sample of the target population, and reduces sampling errors, but also requires the use of provided sampling weights at both the household and individual level. For this analysis, all models are weighted using the women’s individual sampling weight provided by the DHS.

Decision-making indicators

The DHS questionnaire’s decision-making module asks currently married or partnered women age 15-49 which person usually makes decisions about: (1) the women’s own health care; (2) large household purchases; and (3) household visits to family or relatives. Initially, these questions were asked of both married and unmarried women, but since 2004, they have been asked only of currently married or partnered women. Previous questions have also been dropped, including a question about daily purchases, which was removed in
2014. Women’s responses to these questions are grouped into the following categories: (1) the respondent alone; (2) the respondent and her husband or partner; (3) the husband or partner; (4) someone else; and (5) other.

Previously, a common practice has been to interpret these responses linearly, measuring more or less empowerment along discrete categories, with “respondent alone” being considered the most empowered category. However, this has been increasingly criticized for a number of reasons, particularly in a comparative context (see e.g., Peterman et al. 2015; Seymour and Peterman 2018; Bernard et al. 2020). Peterman and Seymour (2018) argue that small changes in how questions were asked created variation women’s answers on decision-making variables in their comparative analysis of Ghana and Bangladesh — specifically differences in understanding over joint versus autonomous decision-making. These differences may be tied to how the women connect their decision-making ability to their personal level of autonomy; the authors find evidence of contextual differences in women’s interpretations of decision-making that urge caution in the linear use of this indicator. Bernard et al. (2020) similarly argue that is difficult to parse out levels of empowerment from joint versus sole decision-making, as it does not account for differences in preferences and ability.

Given this, I follow Seymour and Peterman’s (2018) in recoding the responses into a dichotomous variable, such that women either have some level of participation in household decision-making (categories 1 and 2), or none (categories 3 and 4). Anything else (including both the “other” category and any missing values) was not included in the analysis. Theoretically, this means that I am conceptualizing women who have some ability to participate in household decision-making as being more empowered than women who report that they have no ability to participate. Methodologically, this means that my dependent variables for this chapter are dichotomous, so I conduct a logistic regression analysis of the relationship between women’s ownership of property and their ability to participate in household decision-making.

**Indicator and control variables**

Across the three countries in this analysis, the DHS questionnaire records women’s ownership categorically, recording both women aged 15-49 a house (alone, jointly with their husband/partner, do not own a house) and the number of women age 15-49 who own land (alone, jointly, do not own land). I include women
who own each type of property, alone or jointly, as separate indicators, with women who do not own property as the reference category. I also include several important covariates and control variables. Following Kabeer (1999) and Allendorf (2007), I control for the women’s level of education, which is an ordinal variable that includes six categories: no education; incomplete primary; complete primary; incomplete secondary; complete secondary; and higher. I also control for age (Behrman 2017), Indigeneity, and rural/urban (Kabeer 1999; Kishor and Gupta 2004; Trommleroua et al. 2015). I also follow Rutstein and Johnson (2004) in constructing a wealth index based on household assets, rather than income, which the DHS does not record. Finally, I include an index recording women’s attitudes about the acceptability of physical violence.

Limitations

This analysis is limited in important ways by the parameters of the available data—including ways which limit the ability to tease out some of potential endogeneity concerns. For example, the data do not

25 While there is an additional category capturing women who own property both alone and jointly, it is excluded from this analysis, as it does not exist consistently across all three countries and categories (i.e., it exists in Colombia, exists only for land in Honduras, and does not exist at all in Guatemala). In addition to the inconsistency in where this category exists, the lack of information about how and when property is acquired, as well as what it is used for and what it is worth, makes the “alone and joint” category particularly difficult to interpret. Unpacking and examining this category would make an interesting contribution in future research, even if it is outside the scope of the current analysis.

26 This is recoded into a dichotomous variable for each country; unfortunately the DHS does not ask this question consistently across all countries. For example, in Colombia, the DHS data only includes “Indigenous” as a category with a broader ethnicity variable, but does not disaggregate further. However, in Honduras, the data records specific groups rather than one catch-all category.

27 The wealth index is constructed using data from the DHS’ Household Questionnaire, and includes information about a range of assets, including the ownership of consumer goods such as a television; source of drinking water; and access to improved sanitation. Each asset is assigned a weight through a principal component analysis, standardized relative to a normal distribution with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, and ultimately broken into a quintile from lowest to highest. Given the specifics of the analysis at hand, some assets that would typically be included in similar wealth indices, such as home ownership, were excluded.

28 This index is derived from a series of five questions posed to the individual woman respondent, asking whether she felt it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she: neglected the children; burnt the food; argued with him; refused to have sex; or went out without asking permission.
contain information on when or how property was acquired. This makes it impossible to know if a woman who owns property came into the marriage with said property, or if it was obtained during the marriage. Similarly, there is no way of knowing if the property was acquired on the open market or via inheritance. Crucially, this study uses cross-sectional data, and does not attempt to make a causal argument. Rather, it focuses on what relationship, if any, exists between women’s level of ownership of land and their ability to participate in household decision-making.

Sample Characteristics: Women’s Participation in Household Decision-making

There are some important differences in women’s participation in household decision-making across the three countries. There is notable variation in the percentage of women who report they can participate in decisions about large purchases, ranging from a low of 59.87% in Colombia to a high of 82.54% in Guatemala. When it comes to decisions about women’s health care, however, Guatemala represents the low end of the range of the percentage of women with decision-making ability at 75.27%, with Honduras at the high end at 80.88%. For decisions about family visitation—an indicator which measures women’s ability to make decisions that reflect a freedom of movement—Honduras is again at the high end of the range at 89.15%, and Colombia is at the low end, at 75.17%. For more detail on the descriptive variation in women’s participation in decision-making across the three cases, see Table 1, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large purchases</td>
<td>23,048</td>
<td>12,363</td>
<td>9,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(59.87%)</td>
<td>(82.54%)</td>
<td>(70.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own healthcare</td>
<td>30,495</td>
<td>11,275</td>
<td>10,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(78.84%)</td>
<td>(75.27%)</td>
<td>(80.88%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family visitation</td>
<td>28,463</td>
<td>13,158</td>
<td>11,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(75.17%)</td>
<td>(87.88%)</td>
<td>(89.15%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>38,718</td>
<td>14,979</td>
<td>22,747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interestingly, some of the variation does not track with differences in national policies which may influence women’s ability to make decisions. For example, while women’s healthcare decisions encompass more than fertility, the bulk of this indicator is still comprised of decisions about reproductive healthcare. However, of the three countries in the study, nationwide restrictions on abortion do not directly match the range in variation seen here. For example, the most restrictive abortion policies exist in Honduras, where abortion is unilaterally banned. Indeed, even in the present-day context, in which many countries in the region are relaxing abortion restrictions, Honduras has reinforced its anti-abortion commitment, as it recently passed a constitutional amendment that is designed to block any liberalization attempts, including for victims of rape (McDonnell and Linthicom 2021).

Yet women in Honduras report a high level of participation in decisions about their own healthcare. On the other hand, in Colombia, where women report the lowest level of healthcare participation, abortion has recently been decriminalized up to 24 weeks (Corte Constitucional de Colombia 2021). Prior to this, including at the time when the survey was administered, Colombia’s abortion policy relied on a 2006 ruling which allowed for abortion when the life of the mother was at stake, if a physician declared the fetus to be unviable, or in cases of incest and rape—making Colombia’s policy far more permissive than Honduras’ even prior to the 2021 ruling. Policies about abortion in Guatemala continue to rely on provisions from 1973, which require prison time for both the woman and the provider (of varying lengths, depending on the circumstances) with the exception of therapeutic abortion, wherein multiple doctors have determined that the procedure is necessary to save the life of the mother (Código Penal, Dec. No. 17-73, Art. 133-140).

Results

Primary analysis

Findings from the primary analysis are clear and consistent, with numerous significant and positive relationships across all three countries and decision-making categories, as well as different types of property and ownership. This indicates that when women own property, they are more likely to report that they are able to participate in household decision-making.
These results are especially strong for women who own a home. In Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras, women who own a home alone are significantly more likely to participate in decisions about large purchases and decisions about family visitation, while the same can be said for decisions about women’s healthcare in Colombia and Guatemala. Similarly, women who own a home jointly with their husbands are significantly more likely to be able to participate in decisions about family visitation in all three countries; in decisions about large purchases in Colombia and Guatemala; and in decisions about their own healthcare in Honduras.

For women who own land, while there were no significant relationships observed for owning land alone, owning land jointly was significant and positive for women in Colombia and Honduras’ ability to participate in decisions about large purchases. For more detail, see Tables 2-4, below.

29 The relationship between sole home ownership and decisions about healthcare is significant at p < 0.1 in Honduras.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>0.706***</td>
<td>0.681***</td>
<td>0.565***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.109)</td>
<td>(0.140)</td>
<td>(0.187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>0.294***</td>
<td>0.0595</td>
<td>0.407***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0964)</td>
<td>(0.0996)</td>
<td>(0.0962)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>0.0616</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
<td>(0.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>0.239**</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>0.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.121)</td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
<td>(0.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.133***</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
<td>0.150***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00258)</td>
<td>(0.00441)</td>
<td>(0.00379)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.226***</td>
<td>0.505***</td>
<td>0.312***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0185)</td>
<td>(0.0227)</td>
<td>(0.0212)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.427***</td>
<td>-0.209***</td>
<td>-0.363***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0607)</td>
<td>(0.0633)</td>
<td>(0.0630)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.187***</td>
<td>-0.322***</td>
<td>-0.226***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0670)</td>
<td>(0.0734)</td>
<td>(0.0684)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>0.222***</td>
<td>0.129***</td>
<td>0.183***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0206)</td>
<td>(0.0229)</td>
<td>(0.0223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>-0.0432**</td>
<td>-0.0212</td>
<td>-0.0695***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0193)</td>
<td>(0.0213)</td>
<td>(0.0240)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-4.626***</td>
<td>-4.672***</td>
<td>-4.240***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.122)</td>
<td>(0.143)</td>
<td>(0.133)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>37,661</td>
<td>37,836</td>
<td>37,033</td>
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Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) Large purchases</th>
<th>(2) Own healthcare</th>
<th>(3) Family visitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>0.386***</td>
<td>0.206**</td>
<td>0.375***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0963)</td>
<td>(0.0854)</td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>0.379***</td>
<td>0.0771</td>
<td>0.388***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0628)</td>
<td>(0.0556)</td>
<td>(0.0736)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>-0.0113</td>
<td>-0.141*</td>
<td>-0.168*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0889)</td>
<td>(0.0785)</td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>-0.167*</td>
<td>-0.0932</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0922)</td>
<td>(0.0805)</td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00688**</td>
<td>-0.00140</td>
<td>0.0149***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00332)</td>
<td>(0.00294)</td>
<td>(0.00392)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.133***</td>
<td>0.165***</td>
<td>0.217***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0260)</td>
<td>(0.0228)</td>
<td>(0.0318)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.0809</td>
<td>0.0591</td>
<td>-0.0276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0649)</td>
<td>(0.0578)</td>
<td>(0.0794)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.492***</td>
<td>-0.638***</td>
<td>-0.634***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0554)</td>
<td>(0.0497)</td>
<td>(0.0629)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>0.173***</td>
<td>0.147***</td>
<td>0.229***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0261)</td>
<td>(0.0237)</td>
<td>(0.0317)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>-0.143***</td>
<td>-0.154***</td>
<td>-0.160***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0209)</td>
<td>(0.0206)</td>
<td>(0.0231)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.760***</td>
<td>0.667***</td>
<td>0.731***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.144)</td>
<td>(0.129)</td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>14,734</td>
<td>14,734</td>
<td>14,728</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) Large purchases</th>
<th>(2) Own healthcare</th>
<th>(3) Family visitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>0.243***</td>
<td>0.169*</td>
<td>0.267**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0871)</td>
<td>(0.0946)</td>
<td>(0.124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>0.0367</td>
<td>0.136**</td>
<td>0.188**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0585)</td>
<td>(0.0646)</td>
<td>(0.0852)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>-0.0546</td>
<td>-0.0452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0912)</td>
<td>(0.0968)</td>
<td>(0.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.00530</td>
<td>0.0832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0937)</td>
<td>(0.108)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00958***</td>
<td>-0.00961***</td>
<td>0.0154***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00312)</td>
<td>(0.00358)</td>
<td>(0.00465)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.263***</td>
<td>0.312***</td>
<td>0.288***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0284)</td>
<td>(0.0303)</td>
<td>(0.0466)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.349***</td>
<td>-0.254***</td>
<td>-0.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0714)</td>
<td>(0.0788)</td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.196***</td>
<td>0.0348</td>
<td>-0.0664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0725)</td>
<td>(0.0790)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>0.173***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
<td>0.180***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0252)</td>
<td>(0.0290)</td>
<td>(0.0369)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>-0.134***</td>
<td>-0.142***</td>
<td>-0.105***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0226)</td>
<td>(0.0230)</td>
<td>(0.0279)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.180</td>
<td>0.982***</td>
<td>0.591**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
<td>(0.236)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 12,262 12,264 12,265

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Overall, owning a home—whether alone or jointly—was predominantly associated with women’s increased ability to participate in decisions about large purchases and family visitation, and often associated with an increased ability to participate in decisions about women’s healthcare. Joint land ownership was significantly and positively associated with women’s ability to participate in decisions about large purchases in Colombia and Honduras, but otherwise, land ownership had no significant relationship with decision-making ability.

Secondary Analysis: Interaction Effects

Indigenous and non-Indigenous women

The secondary analysis highlighted a number of significant interaction effects for Indigenous women versus non-Indigenous women. For example, in Guatemala, there was a significant and positive effect for Indigenous women who own a home jointly and participation in decisions about large purchases. There was also a significant and positive effect for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women who own a home jointly and decisions about family visitation. For a descriptive representation of which interaction effects were significant, see Table 5, below. The interaction graphs are for all of the significant relationships reported below are available in Appendix A; see Figures 1-8.
In Colombia, there were significant and positive effects for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women who own a home alone on decisions about large purchases, as well as on decisions about family visitation. There were also significant, positive effects for non-Indigenous women who own a home alone on decisions about health care. There were significant and positive effects for non-Indigenous women who own a home jointly on both decisions about large purchases and on decisions about family visitation. Finally, there were significant and positive effects for non-Indigenous women who own land jointly on decisions over large purchases.
Altogether, this indicates that although home ownership was more universally associated with a significant boost to women’s decision-making ability, there are important differences in effects for Indigenous versus non-Indigenous women based on type of ownership. These differences may also be very context-specific, as Indigenous communities in each country have differing traditions surrounding property ownership. Joint ownership, for example, clearly works very differently for non-Indigenous women than it does for Indigenous women in Colombia, but there is no evidence of a difference in Honduras, and only a slight difference in Guatemala. A deeper analysis of the differences in these communities is outside the scope of this analysis, in part because the data on Indigeneity is not detailed enough for a more in-depth comparative analysis. However, this finding is important, and indicates a clear path for future research.

*Rural versus Urban*

The secondary analysis also presented a series of important interaction effects for rural versus urban women. In Guatemala, for example, there was a significant, positive effect for rural women who own a home jointly on participation in decisions about large purchases. In Colombia, there were significant, positive effects for rural and urban women who own a home alone on decision-making about decisions on large purchases, women’s healthcare, and family visitation. For women who own a home jointly, however, the only significant effect was for urban women and decisions over family visitation, which was also positive. Finally, there was also a significant and positive effect for rural women who own land jointly and decision-making over large purchases. For a descriptive representation of which interaction effects were significant, see Table 6, below.
Overall, this demonstrates that there are important differences in Colombia between women’s ownership in urban and rural contexts particularly when women own a home alone, and to a lesser extent when they own a home or land jointly. However, in Guatemala, the only observed effect is for rural women who own a home jointly and decisions about large purchases, and there is again no significant effect for women in Honduras. The interaction graphs for the significant findings presented above are available in Appendix A; see Figures 9-14.

Some of these findings may be due to differences in population distribution, as both Guatemala and Honduras have a higher rural concentration, whereas the population in Colombia is significantly more urban. It is also important to unpack some of the differences in rural and urban spaces in regard to how the property is (or can be) used. For example, are rural women who own land jointly less likely to report that they have a say in decisions about large purchases when the land is uncultivated? What about urban homes that are used to generate income, such as by renting out a room? If a woman owns such a property alone, does this income stream create tension in the marriage? Although controlling for income, as was done in this analysis, captures a component of this (i.e., variation in relative wealth), a more granular understanding of how property is used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home alone</strong></td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for rural &amp; urban for large purchases and healthcare; significant &amp; positive for rural and visitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home jointly</strong></td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for urban for large purchases</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for rural for large purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land jointly</strong></td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for rural for large purchases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would undoubtedly be an important contribution in better understanding how ownership relates to decision-making.

**Conclusion**

This analysis has provided a number of important insights that can be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and their ability to participate in household decision-making.

One of the clearest contributions to the existing literature is the findings about home ownership. Overall, owning a home—whether alone or jointly—was predominantly associated with women’s increased ability to participate in household decision-making. This relationship was especially clear in regards to decisions about large purchases and family visitation, and often associated with an increased ability to participate in decisions about women’s healthcare. Taken together, these findings indicate that when women own a home, whether alone or jointly with their husband, they are more able to participate in decision-making. Theoretically, this could be extrapolated to mean that women homeowners have more negotiating power within their partnerships—which is an empowerment indicator in and of itself, but may also have implications for other aspects of their daily lives.

When it comes to women’s ownership of land, the results are less consistent. Joint land ownership was significantly and positively associated with women’s ability to participate in decisions about large purchases in Colombia and Honduras, but otherwise, land ownership had no significant relationship with decision-making ability. Taken in combination with the findings about home ownership, it becomes possible to draw several important, if provisional, conclusions. First, there are clear differences between women’s property ownership and participation across the three types of decisions. It is clear that there is a strong relationship between women’s property ownership and decisions about large purchases—although it is not clear if participation in decisions about large purchases may be more accessible for women that own property specifically because it is a financial decision that more directly correlates to asset ownership. However, the strong observed relationship between women’s home ownership and decisions about family visitation lends support to the idea that women’s
ownership has the potential to empower women outside of financial decisions. This is also supported, albeit to a lesser extent, by the weaker but still present findings between women’s home ownership and participation in decisions about healthcare. Indeed, the lack of any “backlash” findings here, in particular for healthcare decisions, is notable, as it runs counter to previous findings (e.g., Behrman 2017).

Finally, there is some evidence of a particular importance of property ownership for rural women and their ability to participate in decision-making, but it is not restricted to land ownership, nor is it important in all three countries. In Colombia, home ownership was also clearly important for urban women. Due to the limitations of the data, it is difficult to extrapolate much more from these findings, but it is clear that this is an area where future work would be fruitful. Similarly, there is a clear difference in the effect of property ownership and a relationship with participation in household decision-making for Indigenous versus non-Indigenous women in Colombia and Guatemala. Again, given the limitations of the data, further conclusions are outside of the scope of this study. What these findings do make clear, however, is that the effect of property ownership is often different for rural women as well as for Indigenous women. Moreover, these findings can be used to inform future work examining potential causal mechanisms between women’s property ownership and participation in household decision-making.
Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) is a social and public health concern that impacts society on multiple levels. According to the United Nations, VAW includes “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN 1993). One of the most widespread forms of VAW is intimate partner violence (IPV), which includes physical, sexual, and emotional manifestations of violence. Global analyses conducted by the World Health Organization find that IPV occurs “in all settings and among all socioeconomic, religious and cultural groups,” and is overwhelmingly directed at women (Garcia-Moreno, Guedes, and Knerr 2012).

Intimate partner violence has serious consequences for the women who experience it. In addition to the physical harm cause by the violence itself, women exposed to IPV are more likely to experience depression and contract sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Pregnant women who experience IPV are more likely to give birth to a low-birth-weight baby. According to the WHO’s latest estimates, thirty-eight percent of femicides globally are committed by women’s intimate partners (WHO 2021). While there are factors that may influence the risk of intimate partner violence, IPV remains an endemic concern, and is experienced by women across the globe.

One of the largest contributions to the literature on the importance of women’s access to land—and a substantial portion of the reasoning for the push to reform land rights legislation in the international development sector— has been the theorized connection between women’s land ownership and her experience of violence. This theory stems from the idea that land ownership increases women’s ability to bargain or negotiate within the household, while also providing her with an “out” if and when violence becomes a problem in her
marriage. However, there is much we do not yet know about this relationship—indeed, it is not yet clear if there is a potential relationship. What relationship does women’s ownership of property have with their experiences of violence? Are women property holders more able to exit from violent partnerships? Does this vary based on the type of property owned, or in how the property is held? Or across types of violence? What does this relationship look like across different contexts and conditions?

**Previous Findings: Economic Empowerment and Violence**

As a well-studied area, there is a wealth of information about VAW and IPV across a variety of scenarios; as an extremely complicated and context-specific issue, there are also a lot of competing theories and contradictory findings. The relationship between women’s employment and her experiences of violence is a good example of a place where there are different theories and findings—in large part because of how the relationship is conceptualized and measured. For instance, some of the earlier literature based in North America argued that when women are employed, they are at a lower risk of violence because they are less dependent on their partner financially (Kalmuss and Straus 1990; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980; Strube and Barbour 1983). Yet others argued that working outside the home increased women’s risk of violence due to their partner’s need to reassert their power, which they can no longer do through economic means (Allen and Straus 1980; Goode 1971).

More recent work has expanded this literature in interesting ways, although there continue to be important divergences in theoretical approaches and findings. For example, Villarreal’s (2007) study in Mexico convincingly argues that both women’s employment and experiences of violence are driven by a third factor, opening the door for a complete reconceptualization of the relationship. Other studies comparing multiple, non-Western countries found that income generated from women’s employment outside of the home can reduce IPV (Abramsky et al. 2011; Hindin, Kishor, and Ansara 2008), but that this can also increase the risk of IPV via a backlash effect, especially in cases where abuse is more socially acceptable (Cools and Kotsadam 2017), or where women’s employment is a response to their husband’s job loss (Krishnan et al. 2010). A longitudinal
study by Raj et al. (2018) found both women’s income generation and control over those earnings had no impact on her experiences of IPV, while inclusion in decision-making over her partner’s income did.

A related section of the literature examines a bundle of economic empowerment that incorporates more than just whether or not the women is employed. For example, Stöckl et al. (2021) examine the influence of economic empowerment on the prevalence of physical and sexual IPV in Sub-Saharan Africa, including indicators such as household income, education, decision-making regarding women’s income, and employment, they find that when overall education and income is higher, IPV decreases, except for when women’s income is higher than her husband’s, in which case IPV increases. This is consistent with similar examinations, such as Cools and Kotsadam (2017). Overall, these findings indicate that household resources have a complicated relationship with intimate partner violence.

**Land Rights as Protection from Abuse**

One of the primary drivers that scholars have theorized for the causal mechanism between women’s property ownership and empowerment outcomes is increased bargaining power within the household (Deere and León 2001a). From this, several scholars have argued that increased household bargaining power has the potential to make women less vulnerable in their relationships with men, which may decrease experiences of intimate partner violence (see e.g., Agarwal 1994). Indeed, it is this line of reasoning that has been used at the international level to encourage a push for increasing women’s land rights.

Early qualitative case studies in Latin America found that women landowners have greater bargaining power within marriages, greater participation in household decision-making, and greater security in old age due to the bargaining power that landholdings give them over their children (see e.g., Deere and León 2001a), though these findings have not been replicated more broadly. This has been extended to posit that women property holders are less likely to suffer domestic violence by providing women with a voice in resource allocation decision-making (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006). Women have also been found to be more likely to experience abuse when property ownership is dominated by men, as gender roles and power imbalances are reinforced (Deere and León 2001a).
However, the relationship between property ownership and intimate partner violence is likely to be a complicated causal story—something that is easily illustrated in the qualitative single-case studies. For example, Friedemann-Sánchez’s (2006) ethnographic work in Colombia finds that wage earnings and social capital likely play a significant role, even when housing and land ownership are important. In their analysis of a recent development intervention in Ghana, Bessa, Mesfin, and Tobbin Osei (2021) find that newly-landed women cocoa farmers faced an increase in intimate partner violence. This included observed instances of physical, verbal, emotional, and economic forms of violence, some of which was directly attributed to the time cost of the woman’s farming duties—for example, if she did not cook or was late cooking dinner after a long day farming. The authors reported that these instances went un-reported despite legislation that criminalizes these forms of violence in Ghana, which they ascribed to community acceptance, lack of knowledge of the legislation, and the women’s lack of resources.

This last finding is particularly intriguing in light of the recent work from Htun and Jensenius (2022), which explores the expressive power of anti-violence legislation in Mexico, specifically the General Law Guaranteeing Women a Life Free From Violence, which was passed in 2007. Htun and Jensenius argue that even when anti-VAW legislation is not strongly enforced, it can still have a positive impact on society. They find that in the time since the legislation was passed, there was a shift in attitudes about the acceptability of violence, women’s knowledge of their rights increased, and their experiences of violence decreased. In contrast, similar legislation was passed in Ghana—the Domestic Violence Act—in 2007 as well. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of the current study, future work would benefit from a more detailed exploration of Bessa, Mesfin, and Tobbin Osei (2021) in light of Htun and Jensenius (2022). If the Ghana case study findings regarding attitudes about violence and knowledge of legislation extend beyond the cocoa farmers, it would be interesting to unpack the differences between the two countries.

Quantitative work comparing multiple countries also shows complex findings. Cools and Kotsadam’s (2017) cross-national study in SubSaharan Africa finds that more resources do not protect women from abuse, and working outside of the home may increase abuse in some cases. Peterman et al. (2017) found mixed

30 For a fuller account of this legislation in Ghana, including an analysis of the difficulties of passing and implementing the legislation, see Morris (2012).
results: property ownership had a positive influence on intimate partner violence in Egypt, Jordan, Mali, Nepal, and Burkina Faso, a negative association in Honduras, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Pakistan, and no relationship in the global study’s remaining 20 countries. These conflicting results suggest that factors at the country or regional level may mediate the relationship.

Questions and Analysis

This analysis examines the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and experiences of three types of intimate partner violence: physical, emotional, and sexual. Because the data used in this analysis is cross-sectional, I do not make a causal argument, but instead focus on whether a relationship exists, and if so, what it might indicate. Unpacking these dynamics provides an important foundation for future research.

In the literature on women’s ownership of land and experiences of violence, results on the significance and direction of any relationship have been mixed. I argue that some of the disagreement in previous studies may be resolved by looking at both the differences in types of property (i.e., land and housing) and types of ownership (i.e., sole and joint). Since neither ownership of land and ownership housing nor sole ownership and joint ownership are highly correlated across the three countries, it should be possible to observe any difference in relationship between the disaggregated property ownership indicators and experiences of IPV. If there is a clear difference, this may account for some of the mixed results found in previous studies of asset ownership and IPV, including those that use the DHS data and collapse both types of ownership into one category of “asset ownership” (e.g., Peterman et al. 2017).

Broadly speaking, the analysis is broken down into three sections. The first considers women’s ownership of land and women’s ownership of housing, and how these types of ownership relate to women’s experiences of physical, emotional, and sexual intimate partner violence. The second takes this comparison a step further, examining how types of ownership—sole versus joint—relate to women’s experiences of violence. Finally, I examine two conditions under which property ownership may function differently within this relationship—Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, and rural versus urban areas. All three of these categories are presented
in the context of relevant existing literature, highlighting where findings and hypotheses are inconsistent, and where the current analysis can contribute to our broader understanding.

**Land ownership versus housing ownership**

Is there a difference between the relationship between home ownership and women’s experiences of violence and that of land ownership? Previous literature has focused either exclusively on the relationship between land ownership and women’s experiences of violence (e.g., Agarwal 2007) or has collapsed home and land ownership into one “asset ownership” variable (e.g., Peterman et al. 2019) or bundle of resources (e.g., Cools and Kotsadam 2017). One clear advantage to the DHS literature is that it allows us to compare women’s land ownership and housing ownership and experiences of violence in the same sample. Land ownership and home ownership are not highly correlated in any of the countries within this study, so we can include both types of ownership within the same model. Similarities across the three cases—such as a greater prevalence of women’s home ownership as opposed to land highlights another advantage to the DHS— the ability to compare across the within-region cases.

**Sole versus joint ownership**

Some studies have found that women’s joint ownership of land has a negative association with empowerment outcomes (e.g., Behrman 2017), and have hypothesized that this could be an indicator of a backlash effect. Yet scholars have also found that when women’s status is greater than their partner’s, the subsequent imbalance can also trigger a backlash (Atkinson et al. 2005; Cools and Kotsadam 2017). Still others have argued that women’s sole ownership of land is more likely to be empowering (e.g., Deere and Doss 2005), building on literature that finds that joint ownership may not indicate joint control (e.g., Flora 2001). While some of these findings would lead us to expect that when women own property alone, they may be less likely to experience violence, many studies also highlight the potential for a backlash effect. Yet while previous scholarship also supports the idea that joint ownership may be insufficient to reduce violence, it may also increase women’s negotiating or bargaining power, as the joint ownership increases women’s value in the
household. Of course, this would require women’s joint property ownership to have sufficient weight, so in contexts where men are regularly able to exert complete control over their wives’ assets, joint ownership may have little to no empowerment effect.

**Indigeneity and rurality**

Finally, there are a number of conditions under which women’s ownership of property may be shaped differentially. Several important studies have focused on rural women, empowerment, and intimate partner violence globally (Heise and Kotsadam 2018; Karim and Swahnberg 2021; Koenig et al. 2003; Raj et al. 2018) as well as a number in Latin America, including Ecuador (Friederic 2014) and Colombia (Friedemann-Sanchez 2006). Many of these studies highlight the importance of land to rural women, which would suggest that land ownership may have a particular influence on participation in decision-making for rural women.

Indigeneity has been identified as an important factor in understanding women’s empowerment in Latin America. Evidence further suggests that Indigeneity is particularly relevant for ownership of property, especially ownership of land, as experiences and understandings of ownership function differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Relevant scholarship includes important case studies in Ecuador (Radcliffe 2014) and Guatemala (Briggs, Stedman, and Krasny 2019), as well as comparative studies across the region (e.g., Bose 2017; Deere and León 2001). The inclusion of data on Indigeneity in the DHS data, even if it is available comparatively only as a dichotomous indicator, provides an important opportunity to examine this relationship in more detail.

**Methods and Data**

**Data**

The data used here come from the DHS module on domestic violence, which is an optional section, the origin of which is rooted in the WHO’s 2001 guidelines on “Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women.” As such, it is only administered in countries where survey administrators have assessed that at least a base level of safety can be assumed for
respondents. In countries where this is not the case, the module is either modified or eliminated completely. For the countries in this analysis, the full module was employed in Guatemala and Honduras, whereas a modified version was used in Colombia. From the women who participated in the broader DHS survey, only a subset of women, aged 15-49, are selected for the module. Of the women who are selected for this series of questions, only those who are able to be interviewed in privacy are asked any questions. Given all of these factors, the percentage of the overall n of women who participate in the larger survey who also participate in the domestic violence module fluctuates across countries.

Given the context of the broader questions about empowerment and asset ownership, and the focus on the household, this study is focused on the women in households that are in partnership—and any subsequent violence occurs within an intimate partner setting (referred to in much of the literature as Intimate Partner Violence, or IPV). Accordingly, in the few cases where never-married women were included in the original sample, they have been excluded from this analysis—while the violence these never-married women have experienced is no less important, it is necessary to narrow the scope for this analysis.

This analysis is also limited to violence committed by partners, with responses about violence committed by others (such as other family members, in-laws, teachers, and police officers) excluded. While violence committed by many of those categories of perpetrator are important and may yield some insight into women’s broader empowerment, and should be pursued in future research, exploring the violence committed by intimate partners in this context is a necessary first step.

Violence indicators: Physical, emotional, and sexual IPV

The module is lengthy, and not all questions in the formal version are administered identically across all countries. Given this, responses about experiences are grouped into three categories—physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional violence—and coded dichotomously as either “have experienced” or “have not experienced.” For all countries, the violence experienced is from her current husband or partner.

Forms of intimate partner violence under the category of physical violence include whether the respondent has ever been: pushed, shaken, or had something thrown at her; slapped; arm twisted or hair
pulled; punched with fists or an object; kicked or dragged; strangled or burnt; threatened with a knife, gun, or other weapon by her husband or partner. Across countries, the responses included frequency categories such as “often,” or “sometimes,” in some cases and “often or sometimes,” in others. Further, there was variation across countries in how these questions were asked or grouped (e.g., “less severe” vs. “more severe” types of physical violence) that makes it difficult to compare disaggregated forms of physical violence. Given this, responses were collapsed for this analysis into a dichotomous variable that captures either “experienced spousal physical violence” or “did not experience this.”

Forms of intimate partner violence under the category of sexual violence include whether the respondent has ever been physically forced into unwanted sex, or forced to perform unwanted sexual acts by her husband or partner. The way in which these questions have been asked in the DHS module has changed over the years, which makes it difficult to track changes in responses over time. These changes have included shifts in timeline and perpetrators (e.g., when the violence occurred) but the possible responses remain limited. For example, ever-married women can report up to three perpetrators (current partner, former partner, and a perpetrator outside of the household), while never-married women can report only one perpetrator, and only the first time. In addition to these limitations, the questionnaire only asks about unwanted sex that has been physically forced, and does not include a clear definition of what counts as sex, or what counts as unwanted sexual acts. Given this, alongside norms that stigmatize any discussion or reporting of sexual violence (not to mention discrepant views on whether sex can be forced within a marriage), it is likely these indicators significantly undercount this type of violence. For this analysis, responses were coded into a dichotomous variable of “experienced spousal sexual violence” or “did not experience this.”

Forms of intimate partner violence under the category of emotional violence include whether the respondent’s husband or partner has ever: humiliated her in front of others; threatened to harm her or someone she cared about; insulted her or made her feel bad about herself. For this analysis, all possible types of emotional violence were coded into a dichotomous variable of “experienced spousal emotional violence” or “did not experience this.”

66
**Indicator and control variables**

Across the three countries in this analysis, the DHS questionnaire records women’s ownership categorically, recording both women aged 15-49 a house (alone, jointly with their husband/partner, do not own a house) and the number of women who own land (alone, jointly, do not own land). I include women who own each type of property, alone or jointly, as separate indicators, with women who do not own property as the reference category.

I also include several important covariates and control variables. Following Kabeer (1999) and Allendorf (2007), I control for women’s level of education, which is an ordinal variable that includes six categories: no education; incomplete primary; complete primary; incomplete secondary; complete secondary; and higher. I also control for age (Behrman 2017), Indigeneity, and rural/urban (Kabeer 1999; Kishor and Gupta 2004; Trommleroua et al. 2015). I also follow Rutstein and Johnson (2004) in constructing a wealth index based on household assets, rather than income, which the DHS does not record. Finally, I include an index recording women’s attitudes about the acceptability of physical violence.

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31 If it were possible, I would have also included the educational attainment of the women’s partners, as previous research has indicated that this is an important predictor of IPV. While the data across the three countries did not allow for this, future research would benefit from including this, as well as other indicators that might show an attainment gap (educational, financial, or other type of social status) between husband and wife (see e.g., Cools and Kotsadam 2017 for a comprehensive example).

32 This is recoded into a dichotomous variable for each country; unfortunately the DHS does not ask this question consistently across all countries. For example, in Colombia, the DHS data only includes “Indigenous” as a category with a broader ethnicity variable, but does not disaggregate further. However, in Honduras, the data records specific groups rather than one catch-all category.

33 The wealth index is constructed using data from the DHS’ Household Questionnaire, and includes information about a range of assets, including the ownership of consumer goods such as a television; source of drinking water; and access to improved sanitation. Each asset is assigned a weight through a principal component analysis, standardized relative to a normal distribution with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, and ultimately broken into a quintile from lowest to highest. Given the specifics of the analysis at hand, some assets that would typically be included in similar wealth indices, such as home ownership, were excluded.

34 This index is derived from a series of five questions posed to the individual woman respondent, asking whether she felt it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she: neglected the children; burnt the food; argued with him; refused to have sex; or went out without asking permission.
Limitations

This analysis is limited in important ways by the parameters of the available data—including ways which limit the ability to tease out some of potential endogeneity concerns. For example, the data do not contain information on when or how property was acquired. This makes it impossible to know if a woman who owns property came into the marriage with said property, or if it was obtained during the marriage. Similarly, there is no way of knowing if the property was acquired on the open market or via inheritance. Crucially, this study uses cross-sectional data, and does not attempt to make a causal argument. Rather, it focuses on what relationship, if any, exists between women’s level of ownership of land and their ability to participate in household decision-making.

Sample Characteristics: Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras

Across the three countries, there is a good amount of variation in the percentage of women who report that they experience intimate partner violence. For physical violence, Guatemala has the lowest percentage, with 4.22%, while 21.67% of women in Colombia report they have experienced physical IPV at the hands of her current husband or partner.

Emotional violence is most prevalent form of IPV experienced overall, with 23.7% of women in Guatemala and 29.81% of women in Honduras reporting they have experienced this from her current husband or partner. Finally, sexual violence ranges from 5.19% in Guatemala to 7.98% in Colombia. In both Honduras and Colombia, a higher percentage of women reported physical forms of violence than sexual violence, but interestingly, in Guatemala, the opposite was observed. For more detail on women’s experiences of IPV, see Table 1, below.

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35 Emotional IPV is not included in the Colombia survey.
This variation is striking, as sexual violence is often severely under-reported. This is especially interesting in the context of a country with a history of violence, as the ongoing violence Colombia has been hypothesized to increase women’s experiences of IPV, especially sexual violence, while decreasing their likelihood of reporting violent experiences (Svallfors 2021). It may stand to reason that the legacy of the violence from Guatemala’s civil war continues today—seen in the norms of masculinity perpetuated by the men who commit acts of sexual violence (see e.g., Cohen 2017) and in a desensitization to physical violence as a consequence of war (see e.g., Wood 2014) that may result in under-reporting.

Another interesting finding here comes from comparing the experiences of the three types of IPV descriptively across the categories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, as seen in Table 2, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>2,758</td>
<td>2,515</td>
<td>2,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.12%)</td>
<td>(9.71%)</td>
<td>(12.58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>5,401</td>
<td>5,465</td>
<td>5,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13.95%)</td>
<td>(21.09%)</td>
<td>(24.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>1,899</td>
<td>2,361</td>
<td>1,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.9%)</td>
<td>(9.11%)</td>
<td>(8.59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>2,254</td>
<td>1,523</td>
<td>1,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.82%)</td>
<td>(5.88%)</td>
<td>(4.91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Violence</td>
<td>8,390</td>
<td>1,093</td>
<td>2,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21.67%)</td>
<td>(4.22%)</td>
<td>(10.37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Violence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,543</td>
<td>3,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(23.7%)</td>
<td>(29.81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Violence</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.98%)</td>
<td>(5.19%)</td>
<td>(6.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9,715</td>
<td>14,469</td>
<td>12,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25.09%)</td>
<td>(58.54%)</td>
<td>(58.06%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>4,264</td>
<td>9,898</td>
<td>3,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11.01%)</td>
<td>(38.2%)</td>
<td>(17.34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (assets)</td>
<td>38,718</td>
<td>25,914</td>
<td>22,747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the differences are not drastic, in all three countries, Indigenous women report that they experience physical violence at a lower rate than non-Indigenous women. In Guatemala and Honduras, Indigenous women also report that they experience emotional violence at a lower rate than non-Indigenous women. However, in both Colombia and Honduras, Indigenous women report that they experience sexual violence at a higher rate than non-Indigenous, while the opposite is seen in Guatemala.

These findings are important for a number of reasons. Given the history of civil conflicts in Colombia and Guatemala—such as the disproportionate levels of violence, especially sexual, experienced by Indigenous Guatemalans; the ongoing, high rate of violence and displacement experienced by Indigenous Colombians—as well as the extreme structural inequalities that Indigenous women in all three countries face—we might expect that they would experience higher rates of all types of IPV. Of course, the violence experienced as a direct result of civil conflict was not intimate partner violence, but it is noteworthy that while other studies point to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical IPV (total)</td>
<td>21.67%</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
<td>10.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo IPV (total)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>29.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual IPV (total)</td>
<td>7.98%</td>
<td>5.19%</td>
<td>6.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical IPV (Indigenous)</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>4.01%</td>
<td>9.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo IPV (Indigenous)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>29.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual IPV (Indigenous)</td>
<td>8.13%</td>
<td>5.14%</td>
<td>6.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical IPV (non-Indig)</td>
<td>22.98%</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
<td>10.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo IPV (non-Indig)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.02%</td>
<td>29.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual IPV (non-Indig)</td>
<td>7.95%</td>
<td>5.21%</td>
<td>6.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>38,087</td>
<td>8,595</td>
<td>13,178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
an increase in IPV in countries with recent or ongoing civil conflict, such as Colombia (e.g., Svalfors 2021),
this may not unfold in the same way across different populations. The variation in sexual violence for
Indigenous and non-Indigenous women—in combination with the lower numbers in Guatemala overall—may
also lead support to theories of underreporting as a result of desensitization, something which should certainly
be explored further.

Results

*Land ownership versus home ownership*

First, there is a clear difference in the relationship between ownership of housing versus land and
experiences of all three types of intimate partner violence (IPV). The relationship between home ownership and
experiences of IPV was frequently significant, while the relationship between land ownership and experiences of
IPV was rarely significant. For example, in Guatemala and Honduras, I found no significant relationship
between *land ownership* and experiences of violence, and found only one in Colombia, between joint land
ownership and experiences of sexual violence. For more details, see Tables 3-5, below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
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<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>0.00522</td>
<td>0.341**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0864)</td>
<td>(0.152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>-0.205**</td>
<td>-0.577***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0888)</td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>0.00475</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0902)</td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>0.176*</td>
<td>-0.388**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.103)</td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.0583***</td>
<td>0.0439***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00189)</td>
<td>(0.00462)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.109***</td>
<td>-0.0937***</td>
</tr>
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<td>(0.0260)</td>
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<td>Rural</td>
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<td>-0.449***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0625)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.147**</td>
<td>-0.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0721)</td>
<td>(0.130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>0.160***</td>
<td>0.167***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0224)</td>
<td>(0.0367)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>-0.00484</td>
<td>0.0189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0178)</td>
<td>(0.0275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-3.961***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(0.249)</td>
</tr>
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Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
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<th>(2) Emotional</th>
<th>(3) Sexual</th>
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<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.131)</td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
<td>(0.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>-0.268**</td>
<td>-0.376***</td>
<td>-0.374**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.118)</td>
<td>(0.0992)</td>
<td>(0.189)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td>(0.116)</td>
<td>(0.207)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>0.0733</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>-0.538*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.181)</td>
<td>(0.157)</td>
<td>(0.295)</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.0186***</td>
<td>0.0341***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.00480)</td>
<td>(0.00487)</td>
<td>(0.00929)</td>
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<td>-0.143***</td>
<td>0.00160</td>
<td>-0.112</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.0382)</td>
<td>(0.0337)</td>
<td>(0.0715)</td>
</tr>
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<td>-0.280***</td>
<td>-0.337***</td>
<td>-0.466***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td>(0.0972)</td>
<td>(0.175)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.193**</td>
<td>-0.274***</td>
<td>-0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0967)</td>
<td>(0.0886)</td>
<td>(0.154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>-0.0401</td>
<td>-0.0207</td>
<td>-0.0782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0398)</td>
<td>(0.0385)</td>
<td>(0.0645)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>0.0510</td>
<td>0.0525</td>
<td>0.159***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0350)</td>
<td>(0.0352)</td>
<td>(0.0519)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.899***</td>
<td>-1.353***</td>
<td>-3.207***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.219)</td>
<td>(0.213)</td>
<td>(0.404)</td>
</tr>
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<td>8,479</td>
<td>6,431</td>
<td>6,431</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Sexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>0.307***</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>-0.0503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0970)</td>
<td>(0.0807)</td>
<td>(0.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>-0.152*</td>
<td>-0.330***</td>
<td>-0.589***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0798)</td>
<td>(0.0669)</td>
<td>(0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>-0.0997</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
<td>(0.0911)</td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>-0.0854</td>
<td>-0.164</td>
<td>-0.536**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.141)</td>
<td>(0.122)</td>
<td>(0.271)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.0409***</td>
<td>0.00839**</td>
<td>0.0453***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00344)</td>
<td>(0.00337)</td>
<td>(0.00645)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.221***</td>
<td>-0.0928***</td>
<td>-0.102**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0311)</td>
<td>(0.0271)</td>
<td>(0.0476)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.321***</td>
<td>-0.360***</td>
<td>-0.245*</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.0895)</td>
<td>(0.0758)</td>
<td>(0.143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.0420</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0938)</td>
<td>(0.0819)</td>
<td>(0.151)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>0.0133</td>
<td>-0.0133</td>
<td>-0.105*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0339)</td>
<td>(0.0293)</td>
<td>(0.0570)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>0.0555**</td>
<td>0.0537*</td>
<td>0.0397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0278)</td>
<td>(0.0291)</td>
<td>(0.0457)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.441***</td>
<td>-0.533***</td>
<td>-3.378***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.176)</td>
<td>(0.157)</td>
<td>(0.290)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>14,810</td>
<td>11,736</td>
<td>11,734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Significant relationships between home ownership and experiences of violence, on the other hand, were plentiful. In all three countries, there was a significant relationship between joint home ownership and experiences of sexual violence, and in Colombia, there was a significant relationship between solo home ownership and experiences of sexual violence. In Colombia and Guatemala, there was a significant relationship between joint home ownership and experiences of physical violence, while in Honduras there was a significant relationship between solo home ownership and experiences of physical violence. Finally, in both countries where it was possible to test this relationship, Guatemala and Honduras, there was a significant relationship between joint land ownership and experiences of emotional violence.36

While the presence or absence of a significant relationship is clearly not fully explanatory, this pattern identifies the clear importance of home ownership versus land ownership on women’s experiences of intimate partner violence.

*Sole ownership versus joint ownership*

The direction of these significant relationships also varies in critical ways, further highlighting an important distinction between types of ownership. Here, the distinction lies between whether women own property alone or jointly with their husbands.37

In all cases where there is a significant relationship between joint ownership (whether land or housing) and experiences of violence (physical, emotional, and sexual), the relationship is negative. This means that when women own housing or land jointly with their husbands, they are less likely to experience any type of intimate partner violence. This finding holds with much of the qualitative literature, and provides some support for the theory that ownership increases negotiating power within the household. Overall, the analysis finds that women who own housing jointly with their husbands report that they experience less physical violence in

---

36 Questions about experiences of emotional violence were not included in the Colombia survey.

37 To be very clear: this means that a woman owns a house or land alone OR jointly with her husband, not both. Also, in all cases, the woman owns this property *within* the marriage.
Colombia and Guatemala,\textsuperscript{38} less emotional violence in Guatemala and Honduras, and less sexual violence in all three countries. In Colombia, women who own land jointly with their husbands are also less likely to experience sexual violence. For the purposes of this analysis, I refer to this finding as an \textit{empowerment effect}, meaning that the property ownership is observed to have a significant relationship with an outcome (in this case, intimate partner violence) that benefits, or empowers, women in a non-economic way.

However, in all of the instances where there is significant relationship for women who own housing alone, the opposite is true — the relationship is positive, indicating that they are \textit{more} likely to experience intimate partner violence. This finding is in line with other studies that find evidence of what is often referred to as a \textit{backlash effect}, in which women are more likely to experience violence when they gain additional resources, particularly when their gain creates a disparity in which their resources outweigh those of their husbands (see e.g., Cools and Kotsadam 2017). This finding also challenges the theory raised in some of the qualitative literature (e.g., Deere and León 2001) that joint ownership is likely to be less empowering than sole ownership.\textsuperscript{39}

This significant relationship between sole ownership and experiences of violence is observed far less frequently than instances of a significant relationship between joint ownership and experiences of violence. Overall, it is only observed twice, and only for home ownership — in Colombia, women who own a home alone are more likely to experience sexual violence, and in Honduras, women who own a home alone are more likely to experience physical violence. However, the direction of these significant relationships point to a very clear pattern, with women who own property jointly experiencing a decreased likelihood of violence—an \textit{empowerment effect}—and women who own a home alone experiencing an increased likelihood of violence—a \textit{backlash effect}.

\textsuperscript{38} The findings here for Honduras, while not significant at $p<0.05$, are close—significant at $p<0.10$—and in the same direction.

\textsuperscript{39} This argument is based on the premise that joint titling would be insufficient to produce empowerment outcomes, as including a woman’s name on a title for a piece of property might not translate directly to increasing her standing within the household (Deere and León 2001).
Secondary Analysis: Interaction Effects

*The relationship between ownership and experiences of violence is different for Indigenous women*

Across all three countries, I find a clear pattern of difference in the relationship between property ownership and experiences of violence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. In Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras, there is a significant effect in joint home ownership and decreased experience of violence for non-Indigenous that is frequently absent for Indigenous women. In Colombia, this can be seen in the relationship between joint home ownership and sexual violence; in Guatemala between joint home ownership and both physical and emotional violence; and in Honduras between joint home ownership and emotional violence. Only in Honduras, for the relationship between joint home ownership and sexual violence, is there a significant effect for BOTH Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. This means that in these instances, this effect is typically greater for non-Indigenous women. For a descriptive accounting of these interaction effects, see Table 6, below.

### Table 6: Interactions with Significant Effects: Violence and Indigeneity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Colombia</th>
<th>(2) Guatemala</th>
<th>(3) Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home alone</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for non-Indigenous &amp; sexual violence</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for Indigenous &amp; emotional violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home jointly</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for non-Indigenous &amp; sexual violence</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for non-Indigenous &amp; physical and emotional violence; Significant &amp; negative for Indigenous &amp; sexual violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, I found evidence of a distinction between the effect of sole home ownership and experiences of violence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. In Colombia, the effect of the relationship between
sole home ownership and experiences of sexual violence is also significant for non-Indigenous women, but not for Indigenous women. Taken together, these findings indicate that home ownership is likely more influential for non-Indigenous women’s experiences of intimate partner violence. This suggests that property ownership in general may function differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, particularly in regard to empowerment outcomes, as has been suggested in literature on land titling and customary traditions. Interaction graphs for the significant relationships found are available in Appendix B; see Figures 1-6.

**Conclusion**

This analysis has provided several important insights that can be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and their experiences of intimate partner violence.

First, there is a clear relationship between home ownership and experiences of intimate partner violence. Owning a home—either alone or jointly—is significantly associated with women’s experiences of violence. For joint ownership, this relationship is clear across all three types of intimate partner violence (physical, emotional, and sexual), and in all three countries. For home ownership, this relationship is less frequent, and is seen only in Colombia and Honduras. Taken together, these findings indicate that women’s home ownership has an important relationship with experiences of intimate partner violence.

Crucially, while the significance of the relationship is evident for both sole and joint ownership, the direction of the relationship is not the same. In all cases, when women own a home jointly with their husbands, they are less likely to experience any form of intimate partner violence. However, in the instances where there is a significant relationship for women own a home alone, the direction shows that they are more likely to experience intimate partner violence.

Theoretically, this could be extrapolated to mean that when women own a home jointly with their husbands, they may have more negotiating power within their partnership, or possibly an additional type of worth that disincentivizes violence. This would align with many of the arguments about the benefits of women’s land ownership and violence (e.g., Agarwal 1997). Conversely, when women own a home alone and...
their experiences of violence increase, this could be a symptom of backlash, which, as argued by scholars such as Cools and Kotsadam (2017) can occur when there is an inequality in resources that favors the woman in the partnership. That this effect is seen in only some cases may speak to the complexity of this relationship—such as different cultural expectations around masculinity—as well as unknowns in the data, such as variation in where women’s ownership equates to control.

When it comes to women’s ownership of land, the results are far less significant. Only in Colombia is there a significant relationship, between joint land ownership and experiences of sexual violence. As with joint home ownership, the direction of the relationship signifies that joint land ownership is associated with a decrease in women’s experiences of sexual violence. This supports the idea that joint ownership may increase women’s standing within a household, while indicating that home ownership may be more powerful in terms of women’s empowerment outcomes.

While the analysis does not show any differences for rural versus urban women, there are several places where the effect of the relationship is different for Indigenous versus non-Indigenous women. In most instances, the effect observed between women’s home ownership and experiences of violence exists only for non-Indigenous women; in the few instances where the effect can be seen for both groups, the effect size appears smaller for Indigenous women. Crucially, this is observed in significant relationships in both directions, which may indicate a difference in the influence of ownership for Indigenous women, rather than a difference in experiences of violence. This is further supported by the finding that the percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women who report that they experience intimate partner violence is fairly similar across the three countries.

Overall, the finding that not only does home ownership more frequently have a significant relationship with experiences of violence when compared with land ownership, but that there is a difference in direction depending on how the home is owned is crucial. This underscores the multifaceted household nature of the household, which can act as an important site of cooperation, but also contestation. In many respects, the home may symbolize the household in a way that land does not.

Having said that, it is important also to highlight that the percentage of women who own land in this sample is much smaller than those who own housing. While this does not eradicate the importance of the
findings on home ownership, it should not be discounted that an increase in women’s land holdings may also
shift the frequency of significant relationships between land ownership and experiences of violence.
CHAPTER 5: PROPERTY OWNERSHIP, MARITAL CONTROL, AND WOMEN’S AUTONOMY

Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous two chapters, as it ties together an understanding of relevant aspects of both decision-making and experiences of intimate partner violence. Previous literature would lead us to suspect that women’s experiences of marital control are highly correlated with their ability to participate in household decision-making as well as experiences of violence. While it is not possible, given the limitations in the data, to analyze either decision-making or intimate partner violence on an ordered scale, here, we can examine the extent of marital control a woman experiences. Examining the relationship between women’s property ownership and the scope of marital control will likely yield additional analytical leverage that is complementary to the prior analysis.

In large part, this is because the marital control indicator measures something similar to decision-making, but from the opposite angle. As opposed to focusing on the extent to which a woman can participate in the household, the emphasis is on the extent to which she is restricted from making choices. This may provide better insight into the household power dynamics, including in areas where decision-making is heavily influenced by the preferences of extended family/in-laws, and where sticky norms regarding the gendered division of labor persist.

This analysis examines the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and their experiences of marital control, measured on a scale unique to each country. As the data used in this analysis is cross-sectional, there is no causal argument, but rather a focus on whether a significant relationship exists, and what it looks like. Unpacking these dynamics provides an important foundation for future research.
Marital Control

Many of the legislative changes discussed in Chapter 2, such as the updates in the Civil Codes that included the language of gender-equity—even where the legislation is more gender-neutral than progressive—are a step away from the previous legal reliance on the Napoleonic Code. As former colonies of Spain, Portugal, and France, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean adapted the French Civil Code to their own specifications upon independence, albeit with varying degrees of faithfulness to the original (for a full discussion of this variation, see Mirow 2005).

In family law, the Napoleonic Code established rights and duties within a marriage, including the codification that a husband must protect his wife, while a wife must behave obediently to her husband—thus codifying her subservience and inability to behave independently of her husband’s desires. These ideas became so culturally entrenched that even after repealing these stipulations, many of the assumptions regarding a gendered hierarchy—particularly in the household—remained. Given this, much of what the marital control indicator is measuring is the extent to which the woman remains in a marriage—in a household—that continues to be mired in a centuries-old system designed to her perpetual disadvantage. For a more extensive discussion and explanation of the influence of the Napoleonic Code on civil codes throughout the region, and the legacy this has on norms surrounding marital control, see Htun (2003, chap. 2).

Marital Control and Women’s Autonomy

There are numerous definitions of women’s autonomy in the literature, much of which is centered in public health, particularly in the global South. Earlier definitions focus on education and the ability to obtain the information necessary to make decisions (e.g., Dyson and Moore 1983), which evolved into a focus on freedom of movement and capacity to make reproductive decisions (e.g., Basu 1994). It is not uncommon for studies about women’s autonomy to focus on women’s choices in respect to the family unit (e.g., Mason 1995) particularly when it comes to reproductive health care (Bloom, Wypij, and Das Gupta 2001; Rahman, Mostofa, and Hoque 2014; Thapa and Niehof 2013; Upadhyay and Hindin 2005).
For the purposes of this study, I am using marital control as a measure of one dimension of women’s autonomy, which is both tied to and builds from the previous analyses of decision-making and intimate partner violence. For example, the decision-making chapter captures women’s ability to participate in household decisions, but it does not give any indication of the extent to which her preferences are or are not taken into account. Being able to participate in household decisions is important—and is an empowerment outcome in its own right—but it is difficult to equate this with a direct measure of autonomy. At least within the limitations of the data in this study, it is not possible to untangle what it means for a woman to self-report that she can participate in household decision-making. All this indicator can really tell us is if she feels like she has a voice, not whether or not it is considered, or if it and how it has altered her negotiating ability within the marriage.

Marital control also has important ties with women’s experiences of intimate partner violence. Scholars argue that some men use violence as a way of asserting control within the marriage (Finkelhor 1983), that a desire for control can be the primary motivation behind violence (Stets 1988; Stets and Pirog-Good 1987), or that specific types of violence are a direct consequence of coercive control (Macmillan and Gartner 1999). Yet that does not mean that violence and control are the same, or that one is a necessary condition of the other. Indeed, marital control can exist without the use of violence, with the use of some types of violence but not others (e.g., emotional but not physical; physical but not sexual), or with all types of violence. Given this, while it is important to discuss and explore both control and violence, it is equally important to treat them as separate phenomena that may—or may not—be interrelated. In this context, exploring the relationship between women’s property ownership and the extent of marital control she experiences can provide us with additional analytical leverage than exploring relationships with decision-making and intimate partner violence alone.

Questions and Analysis

This analysis examines the relationship between women’s ownership of housing and land and their experiences of marital control, measured on a scale unique to each country. As the data used in this analysis is
cross-sectional, there is no causal argument, but rather a focus on whether a significant relationship exists, and what it looks like. Unpacking these dynamics provides an important foundation for future research.

This chapter builds on the previous two chapters, as the indicator of marital control ties in some aspects of both decision-making and experiences of intimate partner violence. Previous literature would lead us to suspect that women’s experiences of marital control are highly correlated with their ability to participate in household decision-making as well as experiences of violence. While it is not possible, given the limitations in the data, to analyze either decision-making or intimate partner violence on an ordered scale, here, we can examine the extent of marital control a woman experiences. Examining the relationship between women’s property ownership and the scope of marital control will likely yield additional analytical leverage that is complementary to the prior analysis.

In some respects, the marital control indicator measures something similar to decision-making, but from the opposite angle. Rather than examining the extent to which a woman can participate, the emphasis is on the extent to which she is restricted from making choices. This may give us a better insight into power dynamics within the household, including in areas where decision-making is heavily influenced by the preferences of extended family/in-laws. Similarly, as discussed more fully in the literature review above, previous scholarship has shown a strong connection between marital control and intimate partner violence. Research on the relationship between marital control and women’s employment is particularly instructive here. While there is a possibility for endogeneity, as we do not know when or how property was acquired, an examination of the relationship between women’s property ownership and level of marital control experienced can still be insightful.

The following analysis is broken down into three sections. The first considers how women’s ownership of land and women’s ownership of housing relate to the extent of marital control she experiences. Next, I extend this by examining how types of ownership—sole versus joint—relate to levels of marital control. Finally, I examine the extent to which the relationship between women’s property ownership and her experiences of marital control are conditioned by Indigeneity and rurality. All three categories are presented in the context of
relevant existing literature, highlighting where findings and hypotheses are inconsistent, and where the current analysis can contribute to our broader understanding.

Land ownership versus housing ownership

In the previous analyses, there has been a clear difference between women’s ownership of housing versus land, in relation to both decision-making and experiences of intimate partner violence. There is reason to suspect that the same will also be found for women’s property ownership and extent of marital control. This may be particularly important in real areas, where land in particular may carry a different significance. The DHS data allows for a direct comparison of women’s land ownership and women’s housing ownership, and any relationship with the level of marital control experienced, in the same sample. As land ownership and home ownership are not highly correlated in any of the countries within this study, they can both be included within the same model.

Sole versus joint ownership

Previous scholarship is divided on the question of whether joint or sole ownership of property is likely to be more empowering for women. Much of this has to do with the idea of a backlash effect. For example, Behrman (2017) finds that women’s joint ownership of land has a negative association with empowerment outcomes, which she argues could be an indicator of a backlash effect. However, scholars have also found that when women’s status is greater than their partner’s, the subsequent imbalance can also trigger a backlash (Atkinson et al. 2005; Cools and Kotsadam 2017). This line of reasoning could be extended to include women’s sole ownership of property as grounds for a disparity that increases the risk of backlash. Still others have argued that women’s sole ownership of land is more likely to be empowering (e.g., Deere and Doss 2005), building on literature that finds that joint ownership may not indicate joint control (e.g., Flora 2001). The diversity of findings in the literature on control and women’s employment suggest that this line of inquiry may be particularly relevant to the relationship between women’s property ownership and levels of marital control.
Finally, there are two important conditions which may shape the relationship between women’s ownership of property and her experiences of marital control—Indigeneity and rurality. Previous studies have emphasized rural women in part because they are more likely to be disadvantaged in multiple ways, but also because of the prevalence of theories hypothesizing that land rights (and subsequently, ownership) are particularly important for rural women. This includes a large contribution from studies focused on Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Anderson, Reynolds, and Gugerty 2017; Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhagi 2014; Peterman 2011; Tsikata and Yaro 2014) and Asia (Kabeer 2011; Wood et al. 2018). There are also several important studies that focus on rural women across Latin America (e.g., Bose 2017; Kay, Vergara-Camus, and Deere 2012), as well as single-case studies in Peru (Wiig 2013) and Nicaragua (Bradshaw 2013). Many of these studies highlight the importance of land to rural women, which would suggest that land ownership may have a particular influence on participation in decision-making for rural women.

In Latin America, Indigeneity has been identified as an important factor in understanding women’s empowerment in general. Evidence further suggests that Indigeneity is particularly relevant for ownership of property, especially ownership of land, as experiences and understandings of ownership function differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Relevant scholarship includes important case studies in Ecuador (Radcliffe 2014) and Guatemala (Briggs, Stedman, and Krasny 2019), as well as comparative studies across the region (e.g., Bose 2017; Deere and León 2001). The inclusion of data on Indigeneity in the DHS data, even if it is available comparatively only as a dichotomous indicator, provides an important opportunity to examine this relationship in more detail.

Methods and Data

DHS on Marital Control

The measure of marital control used here is a scale which calculates a score for each respondent based on how many times she responds “yes” to a series of questions regarding her husband’s behavior. These questions are part of the domestic violence module, and vary slightly across each country. However, each
country contains the same five core questions, all of which capture different ways in which a husband might constrain the respondent’s behavior, limiting where she can go and with whom she can interact. These core questions ask each woman if her husband: is jealous or angry if she talks with other men; frequently accuses her of being unfaithful; does not permit her to meet her female friends; tries to limit her contact with her family; and insists on knowing where she is at all times. Additional questions, asked in some but not all countries, include whether the husband: trusts her with money; ignores her; requests her opinion on family or social gatherings; and requests her opinion on important family matters. For more, see Table 1, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>(1) Colombia</th>
<th>(2) Guatemala</th>
<th>(3) Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband jealous if wife talks with other men</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband accuses respondent of unfaithfulness</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband does not permit respondent to meet female friends</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband tries to limit respondent’s contact with family</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband insists on knowing where respondent is at all times</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband doesn’t trust respondent with money</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband ignores respondent</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband doesn’t request her opinion on family or social gatherings</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband doesn’t request her opinion on important family matters</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indicator and control variables

The DHS questionnaire records women’s ownership categorically in all three countries in the analysis, recording both women aged 15-49 a house (alone, jointly with their husband/partner, do not own a house) and the number of women age 15-49 who own land (alone, jointly, do not own land). I include women who own each type of property, alone or jointly, as separate indicators, with women who do not own property as the reference category.\textsuperscript{40} I also include several important covariates and control variables. Following Kabeer (1999) and Allendorf (2007), I control for women’s level of education, which is an ordinal variable that includes six categories: no education; incomplete primary; complete primary; incomplete secondary; complete secondary; and higher. I also control for age (Behrman 2017), Indigeneity,\textsuperscript{41} and rural/urban (Kabeer 1999; Kishor and Gupta 2004; Trommleronou et al. 2015). I also follow Rutstein and Johnson (2004) in constructing a wealth index\textsuperscript{42} based on household assets, rather than income, which the DHS does not record. Finally, I include an index recording women’s attitudes about the acceptability of physical violence.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} While there is an additional category capturing women who own property both alone and jointly, it is excluded from this analysis, as it does not exist consistently across all three countries and categories (i.e., it exists in Colombia, exists only for land in Honduras, and does not exist at all in Guatemala). In addition to the inconsistency in where this category exists, the lack of information about how and when property is acquired, as well as what it is used for and what it is worth, makes the “alone and joint” category particularly difficult to interpret. Unpacking and examining this category would make an interesting contribution in future research, even if it is outside the scope of the current analysis.

\textsuperscript{41} This is recoded into a dichotomous variable for each country; unfortunately the DHS does not ask this question consistently across all countries. For example, in Colombia, the DHS data only includes “Indigenous” as a category with a broader ethnicity variable, but does not disaggregate further. However, in Honduras, the data records specific groups rather than one catch-all category.

\textsuperscript{42} The wealth index is constructed using data from the DHS’ Household Questionnaire, and includes information about a range of assets, including the ownership of consumer goods such as a television; source of drinking water; and access to improved sanitation. Each asset is assigned a weight through a principal component analysis, standardized relative to a normal distribution with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, and ultimately broken into a quintile from lowest to highest. Given the specifics of the analysis at hand, some assets that would typically be included in similar wealth indices, such as home ownership, were excluded.

\textsuperscript{43} This index is derived from a series of five questions posed to the individual woman respondent, asking whether she felt it was acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she: neglected the children; burnt the food; argued with him; refused to have sex; or went out without asking permission.
Marital Control: Sample Characteristics

Because the exact makeup of questions differs across each country, the percentages presented below in Table 2 are not directly comparable by level, although some valuable insights can be gleaned. For example, in all countries, a majority of women experience one or more indicator of marital control. Interestingly, level zero shows that 34.9% of women in Honduras and 37.81% of women in Colombia do not experience any form of marital control, while 48.85% of women in Guatemala report the same.44 For more detail, see Table 2, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of control indicators to which woman says “yes”</th>
<th>(1) Colombia</th>
<th>(2) Guatemala</th>
<th>(3) Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.81% (9,410)</td>
<td>48.85% (3,181)</td>
<td>34.9% (4,360)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13.5% (3,359)</td>
<td>18.66% (1,215)</td>
<td>24.41% (3,050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.61% (2,889)</td>
<td>11.41% (743)</td>
<td>17.29% (2,160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.32% (2,568)</td>
<td>7.37% (480)</td>
<td>10.08% (1,259)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.08% (2,012)</td>
<td>6.05% (394)</td>
<td>7.35% (918)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>18.69% (4,652)</td>
<td>7.66% (499)</td>
<td>5.98% (747)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 24,890 (Colombia), 6,512 (Guatemala), 12,494 (Honduras)

44 For more on the construction of the marital control scale, see Table 1.
Results

There was a clear pattern for women who own a home jointly with their husbands and experiences of marital control, as there was a significant and negative relationship in all three countries. This means that in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras, women who own a house jointly with their husband experienced a lower level of marital control. Additionally, in Colombia and Honduras, women who own land jointly with their husbands also experienced a significantly lower level of marital control. On the other hand, sole ownership of any type of property (i.e., land or housing) was not significantly associated with women’s experiences of marital control. For more detail, see Table 3, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owns home alone</td>
<td>0.0463</td>
<td>0.0966</td>
<td>0.0176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0420)</td>
<td>(0.0590)</td>
<td>(0.0336)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns home jointly</td>
<td>-0.248***</td>
<td>-0.272***</td>
<td>-0.250***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0508)</td>
<td>(0.0504)</td>
<td>(0.0275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land alone</td>
<td>0.0388</td>
<td>0.00617</td>
<td>0.0365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0484)</td>
<td>(0.0646)</td>
<td>(0.0388)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns land jointly</td>
<td>-0.211***</td>
<td>-0.0882</td>
<td>-0.117**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0514)</td>
<td>(0.0831)</td>
<td>(0.0508)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.000964</td>
<td>0.00827***</td>
<td>-0.00150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00130)</td>
<td>(0.00251)</td>
<td>(0.00142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.0434***</td>
<td>-0.0718***</td>
<td>-0.120***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00949)</td>
<td>(0.0186)</td>
<td>(0.0122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.202***</td>
<td>-0.135***</td>
<td>-0.151***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0333)</td>
<td>(0.0489)</td>
<td>(0.0307)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>-0.0570</td>
<td>-0.0370</td>
<td>0.0782**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0411)</td>
<td>(0.0442)</td>
<td>(0.0347)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth index</td>
<td>0.0145</td>
<td>-0.0477**</td>
<td>-0.0576***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0127)</td>
<td>(0.0203)</td>
<td>(0.0115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV attitudes</td>
<td>-0.0100</td>
<td>0.0681***</td>
<td>0.0827***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0103)</td>
<td>(0.0163)</td>
<td>(0.00846)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.952***</td>
<td>0.417***</td>
<td>0.998***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0777)</td>
<td>(0.107)</td>
<td>(0.0631)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>24,786</td>
<td>6,432</td>
<td>11,736</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
As previously stated, one of the benefits to using the marital control indicator for this analysis is that it allows us to see an additional level of detail in the relationship along the dependent variable. Here, the Poisson regression estimate tells us that for every one-unit increase in joint home ownership in Colombia, there would be a 0.248 unit decrease in marital control, holding the rest of the model constant. In Honduras, we see a similar effect size, with a 0.25 unit decrease, while in Guatemala the effect size is slightly larger, with a 0.272 unit decrease. Even with the slightly larger figure in Guatemala, the overall difference in the logs of estimated counts for joint home ownership is fairly consistent across the three countries.

However, the numbers for joint land ownership show a much greater range in variation across the three countries. In Colombia, we see the greatest estimated difference: for each one-unit increase joint land ownership, there would be a corresponding 0.221-unit decrease in marital control. In Honduras, the estimated effect size is cut almost in half; for each one-until increase in joint land ownership, there would be a corresponding 0.117-unit decrease in marital control. In Guatemala, there is no significant relationship between joint land ownership and marital control. Overall, this shows that not only does joint home ownership more consistently have a significant relationship with marital control than joint land ownership, the effect size is greater.

Secondary Analysis: Interaction Effects

Indigenous and non-Indigenous women

There was a significant and negative effect of joint home ownership on marital control for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in Guatemala and Honduras. For a descriptive representation of these interactions, see Table 4, below.
In Colombia, there was a significant and negative effect of joint land ownership on marital control for Indigenous women. This suggests that not only does the effect of ownership on marital control work differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, but that this effect also differs across type of property (i.e., housing vs. land) and country. Interaction graphs for the significant findings are available in Appendix C; see Figures 1-5.

**Rural women and urban women**

There was a clear and consistent effect for rural and urban women who own property jointly and experiences of marital control. For a descriptive representation of these interactions, see Table 5, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home alone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant &amp;</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for Indigenous</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for non-Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home jointly</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant &amp;</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for both Indigenous &amp; non-Indigenous</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for both Indigenous &amp; non-Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative for both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous &amp; non-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land jointly</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative for both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous &amp; non-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In all three countries, there was a significant and negative effect for rural women who own a home jointly with their husbands and the level of marital control they experience. The same was also found for women who own land jointly. In Colombia and Honduras, there was also a significant and negative effect for urban women who own land jointly, and in Colombia there was a significant and negative effect for urban women who own a home jointly. This demonstrates a clear effect of joint ownership of both types of property on the extent of marital control for rural women across all three countries, as well as for urban women in Colombia, and for urban women who own land in Honduras.

Taken together, these findings make a strong case for the importance of joint property ownership on women’s experiences of marital control, with women who own either land or housing jointly with their husbands experiencing significantly lower levels of marital control. There is evidence that this effect works differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, and that it further varies based on property type and country. Finally, the effect of joint property ownership on the extent of marital control is particularly important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Colombia</th>
<th>(2) Guatemala</th>
<th>(3) Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home alone</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for rural</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for rural</td>
<td>Significant &amp; positive for rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home jointly</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for both rural &amp; urban</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for rural</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land jointly</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for both rural &amp; urban</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for rural</td>
<td>Significant &amp; negative for both rural &amp; urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all three countries, there was a significant and negative effect for rural women who own a home jointly with their husbands and the level of marital control they experience. The same was also found for women who own land jointly. In Colombia and Honduras, there was also a significant and negative effect for urban women who own land jointly, and in Colombia there was a significant and negative effect for urban women who own a home jointly. This demonstrates a clear effect of joint ownership of both types of property on the extent of marital control for rural women across all three countries, as well as for urban women in Colombia, and for urban women who own land in Honduras.

Taken together, these findings make a strong case for the importance of joint property ownership on women’s experiences of marital control, with women who own either land or housing jointly with their husbands experiencing significantly lower levels of marital control. There is evidence that this effect works differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, and that it further varies based on property type and country. Finally, the effect of joint property ownership on the extent of marital control is particularly important

93
for rural women across all countries and property types, as well as urban women in Colombia and urban
landowners in Honduras. Interaction graphs for these significant relationships are provided in Appendix C; see
Figures 6-14.

Conclusion

This analysis has provided additional insights that help to further our understanding of the relationship
between women’s ownership of housing and land and her experiences of marital control.

First, there is a clear relationship between joint home ownership and experiences of marital control
across all three countries. In this relationship, owning a home jointly is associated with a decrease in marital
control, meaning that women who own a home jointly with their husbands report that they experience a lower
level of marital control. However, there is no significant relationship between sole home ownership and
experience of marital control.

In Colombia and Honduras, there is also a significant relationship between joint land ownership and
experiences of marital control, with women who own land jointly reporting that they experience a lower level of
marital control. In all three countries, there is no relationship between sole land ownership and experiences of
marital control.

These findings emphasize the importance of joint ownership in particular. Overall, joint home ownership
is significant in all three countries while joint land ownership is significant in two. When examined in
combination with the differences in the estimated effect per unit increase, this indicates that joint home
ownership may be more important than joint land ownership in decreasing women’s experiences of marital
control. However, this finding should be interpreted cautiously, as the overall percentage of women who own
land jointly remains very low, even in comparison to the fairly low percentage of women who own a home
jointly.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the debate on joint ownership. In this instance, they lend
support to the argument that joint ownership increases women’s bargaining power, and thus, standing, within a
relationship (e.g., Agarwal 1997), and may refute arguments that joint ownership is insufficient to achieve many
women’s empowerment goals (e.g., Deere and León 2001). However, given the lack of a causal relationship, these results should be interpreted cautiously. It is still possible, for example, that both could be true. For example, it may be that joint land ownership increases women’s standing in Colombia and Honduras, but is insufficient in Guatemala. In fact, comparing these cases in such a way that can unpack causal mechanisms may well be useful in future research, contributing to our understanding of how joint ownership may function in bringing about different women’s empowerment outcomes.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The preceding analyses have provided valuable insights, expanding our understanding of the importance of women’s property ownership in relation to participation in household decision-making, experiences of intimate partner violence, and marital control. Several of the biggest contributions from this analysis stem from the examination of disaggregated property ownership, both in reference to the type of property (i.e., housing versus land) as well as type of ownership (i.e., joint versus sole). Examining women’s property ownership in this way has highlighted crucial differences in the relationship between ownership of housing and land across all three empowerment outcomes. This has also expanded our knowledge of the relationship between women’s joint ownership and women’s sole ownership and empowerment outcomes, both challenging and adding nuance to previous findings in the literature while emphasizing the importance of the household as a pivotal site for women’s empowerment. Our understanding has been further refined through the additional examination of conditional variation across subcategories of women, such as rural women versus urban women, and Indigenous versus non-Indigenous women.

The Importance of Home Ownership Versus Land Ownership

First, there is a clear difference in the relationship between women’s ownership of housing as opposed to land and their experiences across all three empowerment indicators. There is a significant relationship between home ownership across all countries and at least one sub-category of the analysis’ empowerment indicator. For example, in the analysis on property ownership and decision-making, home ownership is positively associated with women’s participation in all three types of decisions at least once in all three countries. In the analysis on property ownership and intimate partner violence, home ownership is significantly related, in one way or the other, to all available types of violence across all three countries. Finally, in the examination of property
ownership and marital control, home ownership is significantly associated with a decrease in women’s experiences of marital control in all three countries.

This has also uncovered several significant relationships between land ownership and the three empowerment outcomes, but they were fewer in number and lower in intensity than the findings for home ownership. For example, in the analysis on property ownership and decision-making, land ownership is positively associated with women’s participation in decisions about large purchases in Colombia and Honduras. In the analysis on property ownership and intimate partner violence, land ownership is significantly related with a decreased experience of sexual violence in Colombia. Finally, in the examination of property ownership and marital control, land ownership is significantly associated with a decrease in women’s experiences of marital control in Colombia and Honduras. There were no significant relationships between land ownership and any of the empowerment outcomes in Guatemala, although the percentage of women who own land is similar across all three countries.

The strength of the relationships between home ownership and the various empowerment outcomes, in comparison to the weaker relationships between land ownership and the empowerment outcomes, is an interesting finding. While some of this might be due to a smaller n in the percentage of women’s land ownership, the clear importance of the household as both a symbolic and a literal site that produces and reproduces gender dynamics should not be discounted. It may be that the home, as the physical site of the household—where the family eats, sleeps, raises children—has the ability to mean something for women’s empowerment that land cannot, or at least, may not as readily. For example, the relationship between women’s land ownership and decision-making ability is one of the few examples where there is a strong land-related empowerment outcome—it’s interesting that this relationship is an economic choice, and not a choice about women’s health and fertility. This makes it seem like there is something about land ownership that isn’t quite enough to get over the bar towards empowerment for outcomes that are more intimately tied to a hierarchical system of gender relations with roots in the Napoleonic Code—i.e., areas in which men are more likely to assume absolute power and control. If that’s the case, then this might imply that any policies designed to
achieve women’s equality need to be aimed at or at least incorporate the household rather than at the local or national level.

**The Importance of Joint Ownership Versus Sole Ownership**

Another important contribution of this dissertation is the lighting the differences in the relationships between property ownership and the various empowerment outcomes given how the types of property are held (i.e., sole or joint). In the analysis on the relationship between property ownership and women’s participation in decision-making, sole home ownership is positively associated with all three types of decisions in Colombia and Guatemala, and decisions over large purchases and family visitation in Honduras. Joint home ownership, on the other hand, is positively associated with decisions over large purchases and family visitation in Colombia and Guatemala, and decisions over healthcare and visitation in Honduras. On the other hand, there are several occasions in which there is evidence of a backlash effect when women own a home alone and their relationship with intimate partner violence. This is seen in a higher percentage of women reporting that they experience physical (Honduras) or sexual (Colombia) forms violence. Yet, when it comes to household decision-making, owning a home alone has the same positive relationship on outcomes as joint home ownership, increasing women’s ability to participate.

These findings clearly indicate a strong relationship between women’s joint property ownership with their husbands across multiple empowerment outcomes. This is not enough, however, to clearly refute the arguments that joint ownership may be an insufficient type of ownership—wherein women’s ownership is secondary to their husbands, or the wives names are automatically added due to a policy—as the data do not provide enough information on when and how the property was acquired. However, the fact that the way the data was acquired necessitated a woman declaring the joint ownership as a reflection of her perception, rather than what may or may not be written down, may actually be instructive here. That the woman feels that she owns the property jointly may be reflective of an element of her marriage that we cannot see or easily measure—her sense of entitlement, both to the property but more importantly to the partnership—which may in fact
translate more directly to negotiating power. At the same time, the backlash findings related to sole home ownership may indicate again the centrality of the home and the household.

However, this may also speak to the intractability of violence, as this relationship was observed in regard to sole ownership and intimate partner violence, but not in regard to decision-making or marital control. Instead, this may suggest something specific about masculinity — or a particular performance of masculinity— in which there is a lashing out against the perception of a very specific type of threat or power imbalance. Again, given some of the limitations in the data, it’s not possible to unpack this further, but it is definitely an area that merits further research.

**Crucial Conditions: Indigeneity, Rurality**

The secondary analyses from each chapter, which examined some of the conditions under which women’s property ownership relates with each of the three empowerment outcomes, identified two crucial conditions which should be studied further: Indigeneity and Rurality. Across all three chapters, albeit to different extents within each country, it was clear that women’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities were important conditions when examining their experiences of property ownership and empowerment outcomes. In many respects, it is likely that ownership functions differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. While the DHS data only captures individual ownership, it is possible that some Indigenous communities maintain communal ownership in practice even when the property is held individually for official purposes. It is also possible that much of what is captured in these interactions is the extreme disadvantage that Indigenous communities, and particularly Indigenous women, continue to experience.

These analyses also highlighted several important findings regarding both rural and urban women. The findings that highlight the clear significance of ownership for rural women are perhaps not surprising, as they have been heavily theorized, but it is nonetheless helpful to have empirical evidence to support the theory. The findings for urban women, however, particularly in Colombia, are particularly intriguing. These likely speak to the high levels of urban tenure insecurity, driven in large part by the high levels of rural conflict-related displacement. However, these findings also make a strong case for more research on property ownership for
urban women, as this is an under-studied and under-theorized relationship. Assuming urbanization trends continue—and not just through internally displaced persons, but also through cross-border refugees—women living in tenure-insecure urban settings will likely increase. This may stretch existing infrastructure even further, increasing the relative disparity for urban women and exacerbating existing inequalities.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This analysis is limited in important ways by the parameters of the available data—including ways which limit the ability to tease out some of potential endogeneity concerns. For example, the data do not contain information on when or how property was acquired. This makes it impossible to know if a woman who owns property came into the marriage with said property, or if it was obtained during the marriage. Similarly, there is no way of knowing if the property was acquired on the open market or via inheritance.

While these findings may indicate that home ownership is more important for empowerment outcomes than land ownership, given these limitations within the data, it is important to interpret this with caution. We also do not know how much of either type of property is owned, what the property is worth, and how it is used.

This analysis has also presented a wealth of possibilities for future research, which in many cases is tied to the limitations with the current study. One of the most obvious invitations from the research at hand is the pursuit of causal mechanisms—something which will likely require longitudinal data. This could be a fruitful pursuit for many reasons, not least that it could answer many of the questions raised in this analysis as possible drivers behind observed relationships. Another obvious suggestion is one of generalizability—both to other countries with Latin America, as well as in comparison with other parts of the world—which could also deepen our understanding of many of these relationships.

Other future directions could involve a more in-depth analysis of the three cases presented here, which could also be extremely valuable. For example, a more detailed analysis of variation across ethnic groups, particularly AfroIndigenous, Indigenous, AfroColombians, and other non-Indigenous AfroDescendants, would likely yield some important insights. Many of the limitations within the DHS data also stem from a lack of information which, if more details could be procured, would go a long way towards expanding this analysis.
This includes information on the property women own—when and how it was acquired, what the property is used for, its relative worth, what the formal documentation does or does not look like. More comprehensive data on the outcome variables—particularly decision-making and experiences of intimate partner violence—would also be a valuable addition to the analysis.
APPENDIX A: INTERACTION GRAPHS FOR CHAPTER 3 ON DECISION-MAKING OUTCOMES

Interactions: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Women and Decision-making Outcomes

The figures which follow below show the significant interactions for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras who own property (either a house or land) alone or jointly with their husbands on one of three decision-making outcomes: decisions over large purchases; decisions about women’s healthcare; and decisions over family visitation. These graphs are explained in more detail within the secondary analysis section of Chapter 3.

Figure 1: Sole home ownership and decisions over large purchases in Colombia

Predictive Margins of home_alone#indigenous with 95% CIs

owns house alone 0=no 1=yes

Pr(Decision_Largepurchase)
Figure 2: Sole home ownership and decisions over healthcare in Colombia

![Graph showing predictive margins of home_alone # indigenous with 95% CIs]  
Pr(Decision Health) vs ownership

Figure 3: Sole home ownership and decisions over visitation in Colombia

![Graph showing predictive margins of home_alone # indigenous with 95% CIs]  
Pr(Decision Visit) vs ownership
Figure 4: Joint home ownership and decisions over large purchases in Colombia

Predictive Margins of home_jointly\#indigenous with 95% CIs

Figure 5: Joint home ownership and decisions over visitation in Colombia

Predictive Margins of home_jointly\#indigenous with 95% CIs
Figure 6: Joint land ownership and decisions over large purchases in Colombia

Figure 7: Joint home ownership and decisions over large purchases in Guatemala
Figure 8: Joint home ownership and decisions over visitation in Guatemala

Predictive Margins of home_jointly#indigenous with 95% CIs

Pr(Decision_Visit) vs. owns house jointly 0=no 1=yes

- indigenous=0
- indigenous=1
Interactions: Rural and Urban Women and Decision-making Outcomes

The figures which follow below show the significant interactions for rural and urban women in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras who own property (either a house or land) alone or jointly with their husbands on one of three decision-making outcomes: decisions over large purchases; decisions about women’s healthcare; and decisions over family visitation. These graphs are explained in more detail within the secondary analysis section of Chapter 3.

Figure 9: Sole home ownership and decisions over large purchases in Colombia

Predictive Margins of home_alone#rural with 95% CIs
Figure 10: Sole home ownership and decisions over healthcare in Colombia

Predictive Margins of home_alone#rural with 95% CIs

Figure 11: Sole home ownership and decisions over visitation in Colombia

Predictive Margins of home_alone#rural with 95% CIs
Figure 12: Joint home ownership and decisions over large purchases in Colombia

Figure 13: Joint land ownership and decisions over large purchases in Colombia
Figure 14: Joint home ownership and decisions over large purchases in Guatemala
APPENDIX B: INTERACTION GRAPHS FOR CHAPTER 4 ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Interactions: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Women and Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence

The figures which follow below show the significant interactions for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras who own property (either a house or land) alone or jointly with their husbands on experiences of one of three types of intimate partner violence: sexual, physical, or emotional (with the exception that there are no observations for emotional violence in Colombia). These graphs are explained in more detail within the secondary analysis section of Chapter 4.

Figure 1: Joint home ownership and experiences of sexual violence in Colombia
Figure 2: Sole home ownership and experiences of sexual violence in Colombia

![Graph showing predictive margins of home_alone#indigenous with 95% CIs](image)

Figure 3: Joint home ownership and experiences of emotional violence in Guatemala

![Graph showing predictive margins of home_jointly#indigenous with 95% CIs](image)
Figure 4: Joint home ownership and experiences of physical violence in Guatemala

Figure 5: Joint home ownership and experiences of emotional violence in Honduras
Figure 6: Joint home ownership and experiences of sexual violence in Honduras

Predictive Margins of home_jointly#indigenous with 95% CIs

Pr(Sexual_Violence) vs. owns house jointly 0=no 1=yes

- indigenous=0
- indigenous=1
APPENDIX C: INTERACTION GRAPHS FOR CHAPTER 5 ON MARITAL CONTROL

Interactions: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Women and Marital Control

The figures which follow below show the significant interactions for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras who own property (either a house or land) alone or jointly with their husbands and their experiences of marital control (i.e., the extent to which their husbands exert control over their physical autonomy). These graphs are explained in more detail within the secondary analysis section of Chapter 5.

Figure 1: Joint land ownership and experiences of marital control in Colombia
Figure 2: Sole home ownership and experiences of marital control in Guatemala

Predictive Margins of home_alone#indigenous with 95% CIs

Figure 3: Joint home ownership and experiences of marital control in Guatemala

Predictive Margins of home_jointly#indigenous with 95% CIs
Figure 4: Sole home ownership and experiences of marital control in Honduras

Figure 5: Joint home ownership and experiences of marital control in Honduras
Interactions: Rural and Urban Women and Marital Control

The figures which follow below show the significant interactions for rural and urban women in Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras who own property (either a house or land) alone or jointly with their husbands and their experiences of marital control (i.e., the extent to which their husbands exert control over their physical autonomy). These graphs are explained in more detail within the secondary analysis section of Chapter 5.
Figure 7: Sole home ownership and experiences of marital control in Colombia

![Predictive Margins of home_alone#rural with 95% CIs](image)

Figure 8: Joint land ownership and experiences of marital control in Colombia

![Predictive Margins of land_jointly#rural with 95% CIs](image)
Figure 9: Sole home ownership and experiences of marital control in Guatemala

Predictive Margins of home_alone#rural with 95% CIs

Figure 10: Joint home ownership and experiences of marital control in Guatemala

Predictive Margins of home_jointly#rural with 95% CIs
Figure 11: Joint land ownership and experiences of marital control in Guatemala

Figure 12: Sole home ownership and experiences of marital control in Honduras
Figure 13: Joint home ownership and experiences of marital control in Honduras

Figure 14: Joint land ownership and experiences of marital control in Honduras
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