WHAT EXPLAINS PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDES? THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE

By Lindsay J. Benstead

Religion and culture are often seen as the primary driving force in the MENA region behind strongly patriarchal practices such as guardianship, which makes women minors throughout their lives and requires the permission of a male relative to marry, travel abroad, or enter the labor force.[171] These patriarchal norms are, in turn, often treated as a static social environment. Existing research unpacks the role that political, economic, and structural factors—principally oil—play in inhibiting women's labor force participation and presence in the legislature.[172] Yet we know little about how women's labor force participation affects social attitudes. Studies of patriarchal attitudes miss the crucial contribution that women's labor force participation plays in increasing feminist views in society. The MENA region has the lowest women's labor force participation in the world—26 percent compared to 54 percent globally.[173] But in countries like Tunisia, women's labor force participation as a result of government policies, including gender quotas for management in state-run enterprises, has helped foster a more egalitarian society.

In a recent book chapter,[174] I show empirically that women's employment fosters more egalitarian views both for them as well as for their male household members. Using Arab Barometer data from six countries (Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, and Yemen),[175] I evaluate two employment-based mechanisms of attitudes change drawn from American sociological studies. First, I look at *exposure-based* mechanisms, which posit that

when women work, they are exposed to new roles and experience discrimination, and this leads them and their spouses to develop more feminist views. Second, I look at an *interest-based* mechanism, which suggests that women's employment gives them and their male household members an interest in ensuring that women are paid the same as men for equal work.

The findings reveal that women's employment is a missing variable in attitudes toward gender relations. Husbands of employed wives exhibit greater egalitarianism than single men and husbands of nonworking wives. Moreover, the effect of religiosity on attitudes depends intersectionally on the gender of the respondent. Indicative of the Islamic feminist ideology that is present in the women's rights movement in Morocco[176] and other countries,[177] female supporters of Shari'a are less accepting of inequality than religious men because they are more likely to see patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law as originating from influences outside of Islam.

What Do We Know about the Determinants of Egalitarian Attitudes?

Most existing literature sees social and economic modernization as a driver of egalitarian attitudes. Arab women are, unsurprisingly, more egalitarian in their outlooks than men.[178] Moreover, younger citizens and those with more formal education tend to hold less patriarchal views, although some studies find that education can also ossify traditional views like patriarchal attitudes and support for authoritarianism.[179] The role that younger age and high formal education play in reducing support for gender inequality is highly significant because it suggests that if current trends continue, social attitudes may look very different in the decades to come.

The MENA region countries have younger populations than other regions—60% are under 25 years[180]—and youth are the fastest-growing segment of the population. They also have high primary and secondary enrollment rates[181]—and this means that egalitarian views are likely to increase, particularly among women, who are especially likely to go to college or university in the Arab world.[182] More religious respondents also tend to answer in a less egalitarian way across several studies, but there are real limitations in how religion has been treated in the studies.

Yet while we know a great deal about the role that modernization and religion may play—and women's employment has been linked to their *political* power—most existing studies of attitudes miss political economic factors such as employment-based mechanisms. Two mechanisms of attitudes change—interest- and exposure-based theories—are useful for explaining micro-level attitudes change.

Interest-based theories of attitudinal change argue that, when "a person's defined interests benefit from an ideology of gender equity, then that individual should be more likely to hold feminist attitudes."[183] Wives, husbands, children, and other family members experience economic benefits of women's employment, which alters their calculations of interests and the outcomes of family negotiations relating to women's workforce participation.[184] This approach suggests that women tend to have more feminist views than men[185] because they gain directly from their own employment. However, female employment, whether that of a spouse, daughter, or other female relatives, also benefits male family members,[186] leads to an increase in support for equality among men who benefit indirectly from their spouse's employment. This leads to greater acceptance of egalitarianism among husbands and other male family members of employed women.

Interest-based mechanisms also explain why women may retain traditional views. Women who stay at home arguably have an incentive to maintain traditionalism because they benefit from women's exclusion from the paid workforce through their husband's improved employment opportunities.[187] Consistent with this theoretical expectation, Lisa Blaydes and Drew Linzer found evidence for an economic basis of support for fundamentalist views.[188] They argue that poor job and educational opportunities for women lead to higher returns for conservative views in the marriage market than secular views in the job market.

Exposure-based theories, in contrast, argue that as women enter the labor force, they, their husbands, and others in society develop more egalitarian attitudes as a result of being exposed to women in new roles. "Individuals," Catherine Bolzendahl and Daniel Myers argue, "develop or change their understanding of women's place in society and attitudes toward feminist issues when they encounter ideas and situations that resonate with feminist ideals."[189] Exposure to women's employment shapes women's and men's attitudes through five mechanisms. Importantly, cross-generational effects of women's employment occur as a result of socialization, as children are raised in a home with two breadwinners.[190] Changes to attitudes, arising from exposure to women in the workplace, occur over a life course, as well as across generations, leading to a substantial shift in attitudes as women's employment increases and women enter higher paying and male-dominated fields.

Data Analysis

Existing survey data, while not without limitations, allows us to test the implications of interest and exposure-based theories on attitudes toward gender issues. Using Arab Barometer data, I created a continuous dependent variable by scaling support for gender equality using four items: (1) work and equal wages, (2) women's mobility (i.e., ability to travel), (3) preference for sons' over daughters' education, and (4) women's suitability as political leaders (Figure 1).[191] These items are highly correlated measures of support for public rights.[192] This allowed me to explain variation in attitudes using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

Figure 1. Support for Egalitarianism in Six Countries in the Arab Barometer
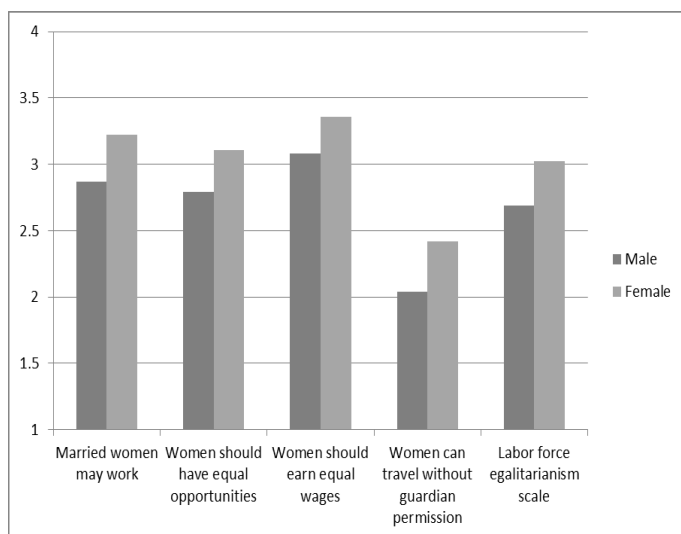
Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 1.

To conduct my analysis I pooled the data from the six countries and ran separate models for men and women. First, I included only controls (i.e., age) and religious factors (i.e., personal prayer, support for Shari'a law, and religion/religious sect). (See the chapter for full models and for the testing of other hypotheses drawn from social and economic modernization). Second, I added modernization factors including following the news, higher education, and more income. Finally, I added household and employment factors including marital status, employment status, and the employment status of female adults in the household. To test interest- and exposure-based theories, I proposed two working hypotheses:

H1: Women who are employed will be more likely than those who are unemployed to support equality in the workforce.

H2: Men with an employed spouse will be more likely to support equality in the workforce than those who are single or married to a nonworking wife.

Findings

The results diverge from traditional theories about Islam and social attitudes. While beliefs about the role of Shari'a law strongly predicted whether an individual believes that women should have equality in the workplace, personal religious observance (i.e., prayer) did not. But there were confessional differences. Christians tended to hold more egalitarian views than Druze and Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.[193] Moreover, the effects of religious factors are larger for males than females. This suggests that females interpret religious teachings in a more egalitarian way, consistently with Islamist feminism, or of the belief that patriarchal norms do not reflect the true teachings of Islam but rather stem from non-Islamic influences on Shari'a law during it codification.[194]

The addition of economic modernization also improved the explanation of the results. In most models, the size of the effect is as

substantial as cultural factors, suggesting that economic development promotes egalitarian attitudes. The impact of religious identity and orientations, as well as economic modernization, on attitudes appears to have a more substantial effect for males than females. This suggests that women hold more egalitarian interpretations of Islam and higher levels of egalitarianism than men, even at similar, low levels of income and education.

Yet women's employment also played an important role in explaining attitudes. Husbands of employed wives exhibit greater egalitarianism than single men and husbands of nonworking wives. On average, women are more egalitarian than men, but it depends on their marital status and family status. Among male respondents, having a wife who is employed is a larger predictor of attitudes than his own employment or level of modernization (e.g., following the news, having higher education or income, or being employed).

Married women who did not work also tended to hold less egalitarian views than women who do. Some married women, in particular, may see women's exclusion from the workforce as good for their own interests, helping to explain high levels of patriarchal attitudes among women in the Arab world.[195] Married women who are not employed may benefit indirectly from less egalitarianism in the workforce, and may also be exposed to fewer opportunities to see women as capable members of different professions or discrimination. They may socialize their children to hold similar views.

Conclusions and Implications

This study has limitations, but it allows us to begin to better understand the relationship between the low levels of female labor force participation and social attitudes in the region. First, the study is observational, not experimental and has many of the limitations of public opinion studies, including the possibility of reverse causation. Like many social processes, these mechanisms are likely mutually reinforcing.

Second, the data do not allow us to distinguish between the exposure and interest-based mechanisms or explore fine-grained household-level dynamics. Third, the data does not allow us to know whether interests or exposure or both are at work. Surveys should include questions tapping these mechanisms, as well as the employment status of mothers, wives, and adult children. Longitudinal studies or qualitative life histories are needed to better understand how attitudes change for women, their family members, and others in society as a result of women's increased workforce participation. Experimental studies may also use vignettes to understand how interests affect attitudes or how attitudes are affected by images of competent men and women leaders.

Yet the implications of the findings for theory and social policy are profound. Efforts to explain attitudes focus on Islam and modernization, but miss employment-based mechanisms developed in sociology that should be included in future studies. Women's employment is not just an economic imperative and a matter of gender justice, but it also contributes to social change by developing feminist viewpoints among women and their male family members.

Moreover, because governments can make policies that increase women's access to employment, the evidence is heartening. For instance, governments can enact quotas for female employees in the public and private

sectors, increasing demand for female workers and reducing the negative gender gap in educational attainment that contributes to wage discrimination. Particularly in Gulf countries, subsidy structures should be altered to benefit both sexes equally and support childcare for families with two working parents. Further, laws ensuring equal pay, abolishing existing legal structures that exclude women from certain jobs, and banning employment discrimination based on gender or other group identities are essential.

The results are therefore encouraging because they suggest the potential for profound intergenerational change in attitudes as women's labor force participation increases. This suggests specific mechanisms by which the Middle East may develop different social attitudes in the decades to come.

Lindsay J. Benstead, Portland State University, benstead@pdx.edu

A CASE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN GENDER STUDIES AND THE MIDDLE EAST*

By Nermin Allam

Why is a community engaged research approach important in the field of gender politics and the Middle East? As I looked over my half-filled lecture notebook from the spring of 2020, I was overwhelmed with a sense of grief and reminded of the value of a community engaged research approach that embraces reciprocity between academic research and community needs. For the past two years, I have designed my gender politics and the Middle East course in partnership with a domestic violence organization which serves women from Middle Eastern

communities in the United States. Through volunteering at the organization, students identify the diverse structures that enable gender inequalities, and how as members of society they can challenge them. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, the carefully planned community engagement course had to be remodeled, and its community engaged component had to be dropped all together. The organization had to close its doors and moved to remotely delivering some of its services due to the ongoing health crisis. While I grieved the lost opportunity to introduce students to a meaningful experience, more intensely I grieved what the move meant for women who relied on the organization for shelter, refuge, and safety. The women are victims and survivors of domestic violence, some are undocumented and many face language and cultural barriers.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, governments and organizations have been reporting an increase in the number of domestic violence cases. The National Domestic Violence Hotline in the United States reported a 9% increase in calls between March 16 to May 16, 2020.[196] France reported a 30% increase in domestic violence reports and/or calls as of April 2020;[197] and the United Kingdom experienced a 65% rise in calls to the national abuse hotlines over a single weekend in March 2020.[198] In the Middle East, the systematic tracking of domestic violence cases is largely absent in many countries, however women's rights groups and domestic violence hotlines reported an increase in the number of domestic violence reports and calls in Egypt,[199] Iraq,[200] Iran,[201] Lebanon,[202] Palestine,[203] Saudi Arabia,[204] Tunisia,[205] and Turkey.[206] The rise in domestic violence cases is not simply an unfortunate consequence of the pandemic. It reflects the failure to take into account how race, gender

[152] Stereotyping is the assignment of "identical characteristics to any person in a group regardless of the actual variation among members of that group" (Aronson 2004, 244).

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[161] Marwa Shalaby. (2019). "Support for Gender Quotas and Perceived Corruption in Developing Democracies: Evidence from Lebanon." In *Corruption and Informal Practices in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Ina Kubbe and Aiysha Varriach, *Routledge Corruption and Anti-Corruption Studies.*

[162] Morocco introduced a voluntary party quota in the lower chamber since 2002. The number of women hovered at around 11 percent in 2007. In 2012, the number of reserved seats for women increased to 60, or about 17 percent as a result of the constitutional amendments in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Women currently constitute about 20 percent of the lower chamber.

[163] Dolan, "The Impact of Gender Stereotyped Evaluations on Support for Women Candidates."

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[170] These variables are statistically significant at the *0.01 level.*

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