

Female Empowerment as a Core Driver of Democratic Development: A Dynamic Panel Model from 1980 to 2005

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Summary. — We investigated the causal effects of female empowerment (female educational attainment, female labor force participation, and total fertility rates) on democratic development for 97 countries from 1980 to 2005. Using Polity IV as an indicator of levels of democracy, our results show that female empowerment was strongly associated with democratic development over this period. The effect of female education increased with lags of 5 and 10 years, suggesting that democracy is more likely to occur in nations with a history of educating girls and a longer experience of the social and economic conditions that have occurred because of this investment.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the latter part of the 20th century many countries moved away from autocratic rule toward more democratic regimes. During this period women's economic and social rights also improved, with greater access to education (Barro & Lee, 2010) and employment (UN, 2000), and a world wide fall in fertility rates (World Bank, 2011). The general presumption has been that democracy leads to improvements in these aspects of gender equality. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the possibility that a causal relationship may operate in the opposite direction. Hence, the absence of empirical studies investigating the role played by improvements in women's rights in advancing democracy is a significant gap in the research literature. Existing literature on the social and economic determinants of democracy has tended to focus on income and factors closely associated with it, such as mass education and urbanization (Barro, 1999; Bollen, 1979; Epstein, Bates, Goldstone, Kristensen, & O'Halloran, 2006; Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shleifer, 2007; Lipset, 1994; Londregan & Poole, 1996; Papaioannou & Siourounis, 2008). However, there are still many wealthy countries that have not become democratic, particularly throughout the Middle-East. This challenges the assumption that wealth automatically leads to more democratic regimes, and suggests a possible role for gender equality and female empowerment in advancing democracy.

While we recognize that there are many factors that contribute to the democratic development process, the purpose of this paper is to address the “gender lacuna” (Baldez, 2010) or gender gap in comparative politics and to incorporate a gendered perspective into democratic development theory. Specifically, this cross-national study investigates the causal relationship between female empowerment and democratic development from 1980 to 2005 for countries that began the period as non-democratic. Democracy is measured on a continuum using the Polity IV dataset and democratic development refers to a country's temporal movement toward democracy. Three indicators representing the empowerment of women are female educational attainment, fertility rates, and female labor force participation, and they reflect the interplay between women's productive and reproductive activities. A dynamic panel model with a System Generalized Method of Moments (GMM)

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estimator is employed to account for the possibility that the relationship between female empowerment and democratic development is influenced by endogeneity and autocorrelation.

Our results show that improvements in female empowerment were associated with democratic development over this period, with female education and female labor force participation having a significant positive and causal effect on these movements. The magnitude of the effect of female education increased with lags of 5 and 10 years, suggesting that democracy is more likely to occur in countries with a history of educating girls and possibly a longer experience of the social and economic conditions that have occurred because of this investment. Moreover, it appears that all three empowerment indicators were requisites for democracy to occur, with deficits in any area hindering democratic development. This highlights the importance of recognizing the interplay between women's productive and reproductive activities for advancing democracy.

2. THE DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRACY

With countries moving away from autocracy toward more democratic regimes in the latter part of the 20th century many scholars have sought to understand the preconditions required for democracy to emerge and be sustained. According to the modernization theory democracy is more likely to occur in affluent and educated societies (Lipset, 1959, 1994). Lipset (1959) conceptualized modernization as changes in the factors of industrialization, urbanization, wealth, and education which are so closely interrelated as to form one common factor. The positive association between income and democracy (Barro, 1999; Bollen, 1979; Epstein, Bates, Goldstone, Kristensen, & O'Halloran, 2006; Glaeser *et al.*, 2007; Lipset, 1994; Londregan & Poole, 1996; Papaioannou & Siourounis, 2008), and a country's average education level and democracy (Barro, 1999; Feng & Zak, 1999; Glaeser *et al.*, 2007; Lutz, Cuaresma, & Abbasi-Shavazi 2010; Papaioannou & Siourounis, 2008; Persson & Tabellini, 2009) is an empirical regularity in the democratization literature. However, the effect of urbanization on democratization appears to be negligible or negative (Barro, 1999; Epstein *et al.*, 2006; Ross, 2001), except when established democracies are removed from the analyses (Castelló-Climent, 2008), then urbanization has a positive effect.¹

Despite strong evidence supporting the modernization theory, others argue that income and education have no *causal* effect on democracy. Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, and Yared (2005, 2008) found no evidence of a *causal* relationship between income and democracy or between total education and democracy, once country fixed effects were controlled for. However, others questioned their statistical methods and argued that the Blundell–Bond system GMM estimator was more appropriate to use when variables were highly persistent, rather than the Arellano–Bond first difference GMM estimator (Bobba & Coviello, 2007; Castelló-Climent, 2008). In doing so, these authors found that total education was causally related to democracy. Moreover, in a seminal piece of work Przeworski and Limongi (1996) argued that the main effect of income on political change was to sustain democracies once they transitioned via other means.² However, subsequent critiques of Przeworski *et al.*'s findings and further analyses by Boix and Stokes (2003) and Epstein *et al.* (2006) showed that the modernization theory still held. Hadenius and Teorell (2005) found that while income had a positive effect among the more democratic countries and countries still in transition, their results showed that income had no significant effect on regime change in fully autocratic countries. This suggests that other factors over and above eco-

nomic development are required for democratic development to occur in these countries.

Recent studies suggest that in countries where total increases in wealth results in a more equal distribution of education and or income, democracy is more likely to emerge (Boix & Stokes, 2003; Castelló-Climent, 2008; Muller, 1995). Moreover, a study by Lutz *et al.* (2010) showed that while total education attainment was significant, increases in female education was also a core driver of democracy. Thus, while total levels of income and education are associated with higher levels of democracy, it appears that transitions out of autocracy may require a more equal distribution of economic and social resources between socio-economic groups and between genders. This suggests a possible role for gender equality and female empowerment in advancing democracy.

3. GENDER EQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY

Inglehart and Baker (2000) and Inglehart and Welzel (2009, 2010) make an important contribution to the democratization literature by attempting to explain the causal mechanism through which modernization creates the desire or demand for democracy. They propose that gains in economic security and development shift people's focus from survival to self-expression values, such as trust, tolerance, political activism, support for gender equality, and emphasis on freedom of expression. Rather than being a consequence of democratic transition, these authors suggest that gender equality is an important part of the broad cultural changes taking place that supports the spread of democracy (Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2002). Implicit in these studies is the presumption that both gender equality and democratic development occur as a consequence of economic development. However, others have argued that economic development does not always improve the status of women (Boserup, 1970; Marchand & Parpart, 1995), particularly where patriarchal institutions still exist and where cultural norms, laws, and traditions restrict women's access to resources (Morrisson & Jütting, 2005).

Studies which test these assumptions are scarce. Using cross-sectional data to examine the causal link between Islam and authoritarianism, Fish (2002) identified the subordinate status of women as a factor contributing to the democratic deficit in Muslim countries. Specifically, gender literacy gaps, sex ratio imbalances (more males than females in the population), low percentages of women in government and a low gender empowerment score (GEM)³ were significantly correlated with more authoritarian regimes. Moreover, all these factors reduced the association between Islam and authoritarianism. Donno and Russett (2004) first replicated and then expanded Fish's study (Fish, 2002), using a more sophisticated model to test the causal link between women's status and democracy. They found that the indicators of women's rights (excluding the proportion of women in government) had no causal or independent effect on regime type. Additionally, their results showed that the negative impact of Islam on democracy was attributed to being an Arab country, rather than being an Islamic country. Both studies include democratic and nondemocratic countries and thus have difficulty (as Fish concedes) in identifying the direction of causation between gender equality and democracy. Donno and Russett's findings are further limited to the period of time toward the end of the 1990s and many of the countries included in their sample were already democratic prior to this period. Finally, studies linking modernization, democracy, and gender equality (Beer, 2009; Donno and Russett (2004), Fish, 2002; Inglehart *et al.*, 2002) are further complicated by the lack of consensus over the mean-

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