

Exploring the drivers of gender egalitarianism in Middle Eastern, Muslim majority countries by analyzing survey data (cumulative dissertation)

Abstract: There is a perception in Western countries that gender inequality in the Muslim majority countries of the Middle East is simply the result of Islamic belief. The reality is more complex as Muslim countries are not as homogeneous as they are often assumed to be, while other cultural, political and socioeconomic factors, as well as accidents of history, have played a significant part in the defining the rights of women in the region. This research investigates whether religious belief is a cause of gender discrimination in the Middle East by comparing the values of the citizens of three such countries, Egypt, Iran and Turkey, relating to both gender equality and personal religiosity, segmented by gender and age group, and considering how these values changed over time. This is done by using results from the World Values Survey over the period from 2000 to 2020 via data visualisation and regression analysis.

All of the component papers found that women are more gender egalitarian than men and the young are more gender egalitarian than the old. The first paper also found that values vary between countries and provinces, with urban provinces being more gender egalitarian than rural ones and unmarried women in those provinces being the most egalitarian. The second paper found that Iranian women became more gender egalitarian over time and those with a higher level of education, and more educated mothers, were the most gender egalitarian, as well as that young, egalitarian women were stronger adopters of social media. The third paper found women to be more religious than men, but the young less religious than the old, and demonstrated that personal religiosity is not the best predictor of gender egalitarianism, that different aspects of religiosity predicting gender egalitarianism to different extents and that citizens can see religion as important but become less personally religious themselves. The research concludes that religiosity is not a homogeneous concept, but multifaceted, and challenges the idea that Muslim countries are homogeneous by showing significant variations between the three studied. It provides important insights into the reasons why gender inequality has persisted in the region and shows that its women desire greater gender equality, with better education and social media amplifying this desire while also providing young women with better ways to demand equality.

The implication of this research is that Muslims citizens are able to reconcile their religious beliefs with gender equality by redefining their personal model of religiosity, and the way they observe it, when permitted to do so by the authorities. This is most true for young, unmarried, urban women, but occurs to differing degrees throughout society.

References of the published articles:

- 1) Alexander, A. C., & **Parhizkari, S.** (2018). A multilevel study of gender egalitarian values across Muslim-majority provinces: The role of women and urban spaces. *International Review of Sociology*, 28(3), 474–491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2018.1473124>
- 2) **Parhizkari, S.** (2024). Exploring the role of female egalitarian values in the 2022 protests in Iran, using data from the World Values Survey. *International Review of Sociology*, 34(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2024.2316510>
- 3) **Parhizkari, S.** (2024). Gender Egalitarianism and Religiosity in Egypt, Iran and Turkey: A 20-Year Overview. *World Values Research* 16(1), 1-28. <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSPublicationsPapers.jsp>

Dissertation outline:

1. Introduction
 - 1.1. Research gap: the relationship between personal religiosity and gender egalitarian values and how it varies by country and over time
 - 1.2. Research data: World Values Survey results for Egypt, Iran and Turkey, 2000-2020
 - 1.3. Research design: combining previous research, contemporary accounts, data visualization and regression analysis, presented in an accessible form
2. Place: analyzing differences in gender egalitarian values by country, province and demographic (Publication 1)
3. Politics: a case study of what caused young women to lead the 2022 protests in Iran (Publication 2)
4. Time: analyzing how the relationship between gender egalitarian values and personal religiosity changed between 2000 and 2020 (Publication 3)
5. Summary and conclusions
 - 5.1. Research results: considering the conclusions from the three papers and relationships between them
 - 5.2. Discussion: what do these results tell us about the impact of personal religiosity on gender egalitarian values, as opposed to socioeconomic factors, politics and organized religion
 - 5.3. Research opportunities: further research ideas prompted by this work
 - 5.4. Research conclusions: the implications of these results for Muslim majority societies in the Middle East
6. References
7. Appendix: unpublished research findings