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Spring 4-6-2014

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Political Religiosity and Gender Inequality Within the Arab World

Damara Kristin Simpson Political Science, University of Montana

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءِدَةُ سَبَّتْ
بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قَتَلْتِ



Introduction

There are often stories of gender inequality and lack of women's rights in the Arab World. The pervasiveness of gender inequality has been noted as a detriment to not only the quality of life for women, a significant percentage of the population, but as a detriment to the nations themselves. This is seen as failure to tap into the economic, political and knowledge resource pool that women provide, as well as failure to protect the dignity, psychological and physical well-being of half their population. Although much research points to Islam as a factor in gender inequality – there have been few studies on directly measuring political religiosity and its relationship with gender inequality in Arab countries. There seems to be a general consensus that Arab nations' politics and societies are Islamic and that there is gender inequality, but there is not a question of *how* Islamic (or not) and *how* much gender equality exists and if the former has a strong influence on the latter. This study seeks to uncover the answer to this question.

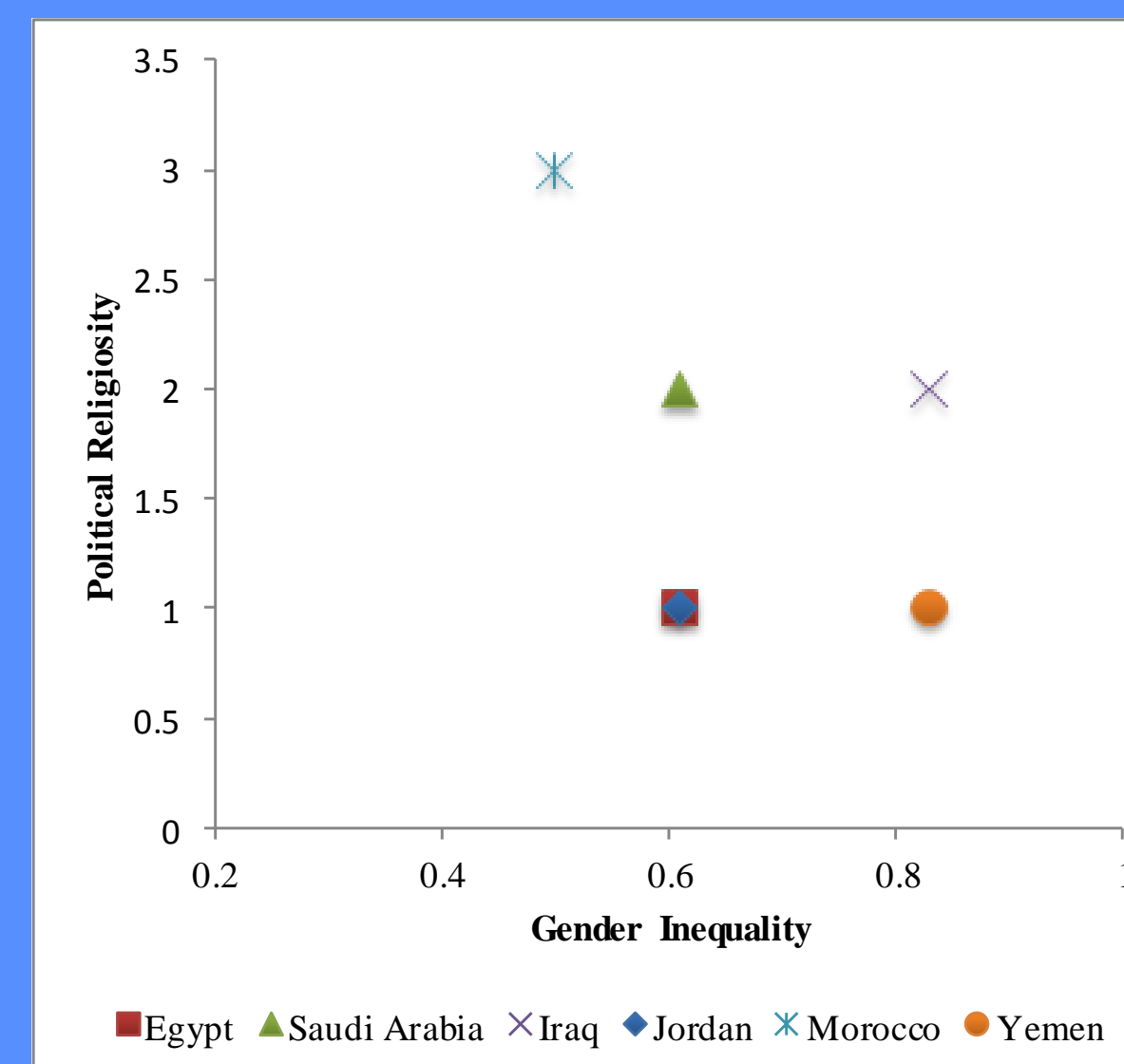
Method

My cases will be: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Yemen. To operationalize the dependent variable, gender inequality, several measures will be used: economic participation, political empowerment, educational attainment. Measures for the independent variable of political religiosity will be: religious-based political parties and political organizations, political powers and public support of religious leaders, religious influence on legal codes and tendencies in public attitudes on religion's role in politics. The data on the dependent variable will be arranged on two separate tables. Table 1 contains the data on the subsets of each sequence. Table 2 contains the compiled data on each case from each sequence, and the mean (μ) of the measure's assigned numbers will be calculated and indicated in the last column. Table 3 is the same as Table 2 entered with data on the independent variable. In order to calculate the μ numerically, each "I" will be changed to a "1", and each "O" will be changed with a "0". The μ from both the independent and dependent variables from each case will then be entered as coordinates on a table. Scores from the independent variable (political religiosity) will be placed on the Y axis, and the scores from the dependent variable (gender inequality) will be placed on the X axis.

Abstract

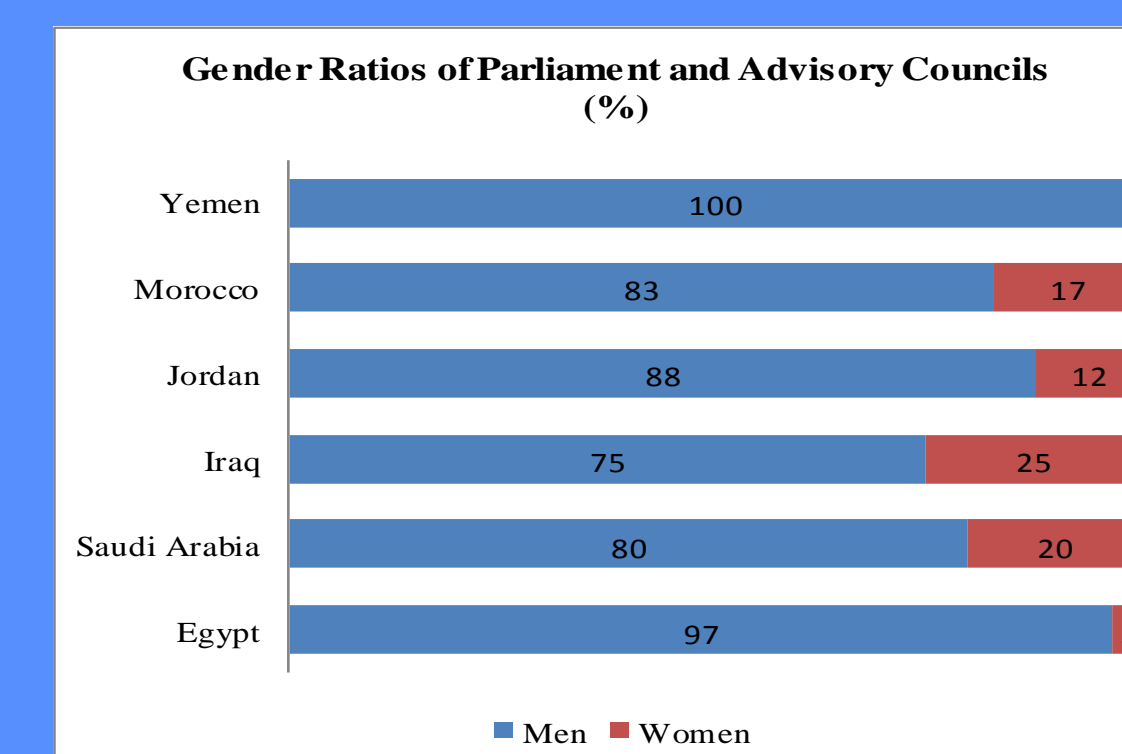
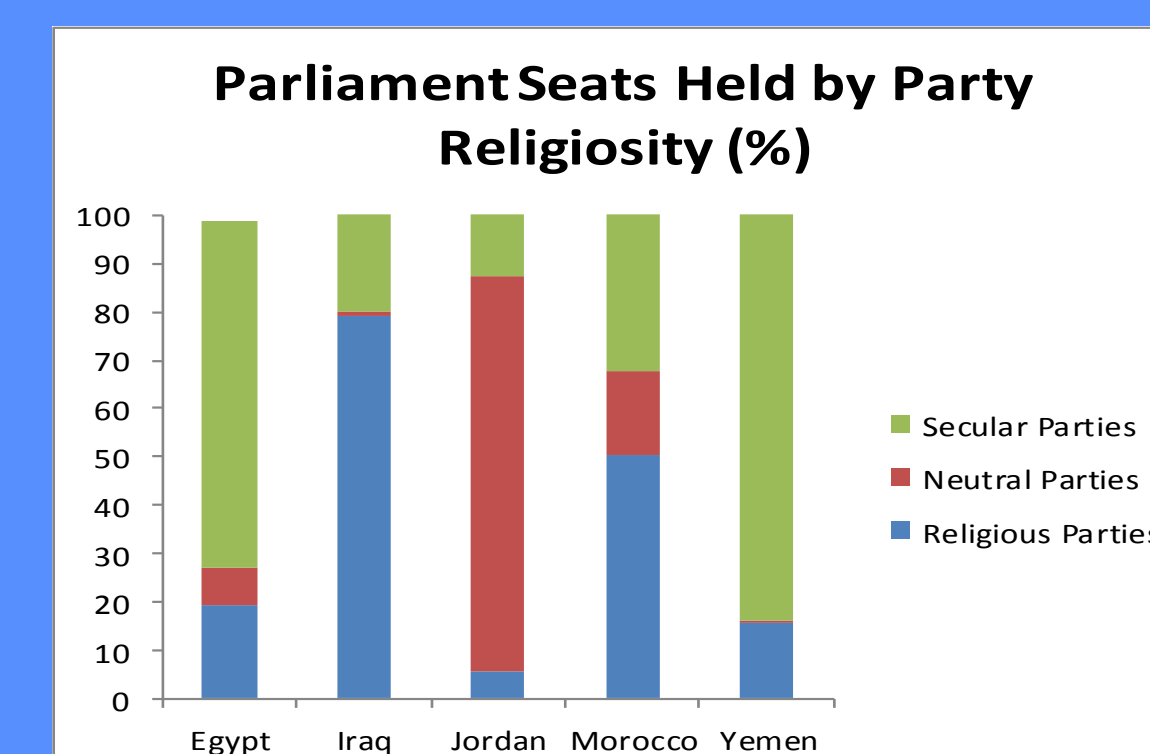
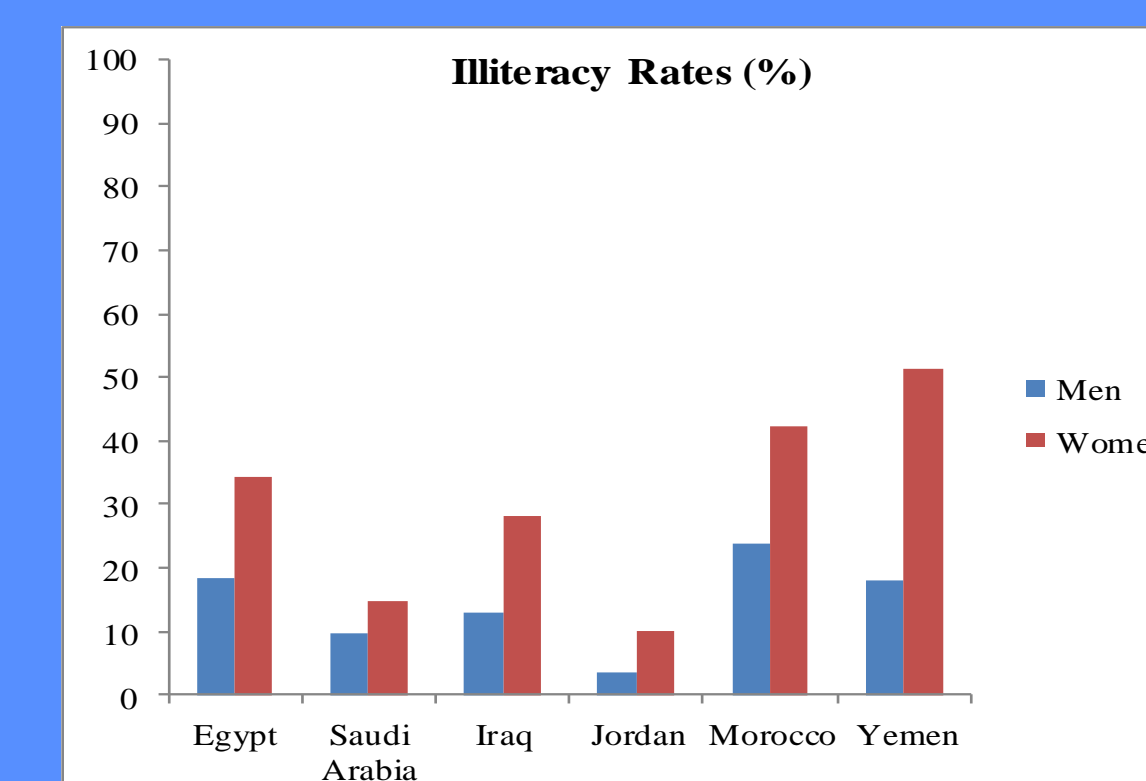
Typically, studies on gender inequality in the Arab World points towards Islam as a major contributing factor. The purpose of this project is to test this assumption and determine if the political influence of Islam is linked to gender inequality. I hypothesized that the level of political religiosity of Arab countries is directly linked to gender inequality. The dependent variable for my research project is gender inequality, and the independent variable is political religiosity. My hypothesis was tested by rating six sample countries in terms of political religiosity and gender inequality and comparing these two data sets graphically. According to the data, the hypothesis was unsupported. The graphs indicate that political religiosity and gender inequality are not linked. This indicates that other factors need to be investigated as a cause of gender inequality within the Arab World, and any effort to reduce that inequality should incorporate other factors such as culture and tradition.

Results



	Labor Force (%)		Unemployment (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Egypt	77.4	22.6	8.9	22.7
Saudi Arabia	84.6	15.4	2.7	21.3
Iraq	72	13	7	13
Jordan	81.6	18.4	11	21.2
Morocco	74.3*	26.4*	8.4	10.2
Yemen	88.5	11.5	11	39.5

Source: League of Arab States "Arab States Figures and Indicators" 2013
*percentages adjusted due to misgender per gender



	Z ₁	Z ₂	Z ₃	Z ₄	Z ₅	Z ₆	Z ₇
Egypt	I	I	O	I	I	O	O
Saudi Arabia	I	I	O	I	I	O	O
Iraq	I	I	O	I	I	I	I
Jordan	I	I	O	I	I	O	O
Morocco	O	O	O	I	I	I	I
Yemen	I	I	O	I	I	I	I

	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	μ
Egypt	1	.5	.33	0.61
Saudi Arabia	1	.5	.33	0.61
Iraq	1	.5	1	0.83
Jordan	1	.5	.33	0.61
Morocco	0	.5	1	0.5
Yemen	1	.5	1	0.83

	Y ₁	Y ₂	Y ₃	Y ₄	μ
Egypt	0	1	0	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	1	1	-	2
Iraq	1	0	1	0	2
Jordan	0	0	0	1	1
Morocco	1	0	1	1	3
Yemen	0	0	1	0	1

Discussion and Conclusions

- The results did not support the hypothesis. A link between political religiosity and gender inequality within the sample countries was not established. Whereas Iraq and Yemen ranked highest in gender inequality, Yemen scored low in political religiosity and Iraq scored in the middle. Morocco scored low in gender inequality while high in political religiosity. Therefore, the influence of Islam on politics cannot be definitively linked to gender inequality.
- Although political Islam may continue to be a factor in Arab countries, it cannot alone be attributed towards the gender inequality. If gender inequality is to be addressed, other underlying factors such as cultural traditions, colonialism, and economics must be first examined.
 - Future projects should take into account:
 - The Arab world is not homogenous. Each country has different challenges and expressions of gender inequality. Thus a solution must be tailored to each country that addresses each unique set of circumstances each face.
 - Islam acknowledges the biological differences between men and women, and assign social duties for each. Thus, attitudes towards gender equality and inequality within the Arab World and Islamic countries differ from a "Western" perspective.
 - This is mainly reflected within the Personal Status codes within Arab countries, wherein the most gender inequality is evident

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to Professor Christopher Muste for all his guidance and expertise
Thank you to the Davidson Honors College staff at the University of Montana