

COURSEWORK COVER SHEET

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Module: Investigating the Social World
Article of choice: Ross, Michael. 2008. "Oil, Islam, and Women." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 102(1): 107-123.
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Question 1

What is the main research question? State the research question in your own words, and then briefly describe the methods used in the article and explain the underlying epistemological and/or ontological stances (positivism and/or constructivism/interpretivism).

In this article Ross investigates the extent to which oil production affects the representation of women in politics and the wider workforce. They seek to explain the interaction between the extraction of oil and broader social structures that limit or allow women to express themselves and be seen in the public spheres. Ross looks specifically at representation within economic and political spheres as an implied metric for broader gender equality.

Ross analyses economic and employment data for all countries (with a population of over 200,000 in 2000) between 1960 and 2002. Ross models the effects of oil production and the representation of women in the total labour force and halls of political power. The variable used to represent women's economic representation is the percentage of the labour force made up by women; variables used for political representation are the percentage of women as members of parliament, and ministers in government. Each of these analyses controlled for many variables suggested through the literature, including controlling for the presumed non-linear relationship between women's representation and average income. This alone, Ross admits, is not enough to suggest causality, therefore Ross also provides case studies of countries who have shared geography and history but differing oil reserves in order to illustrate their point.

Ross approaches this topic through a positivist lens, carrying the assumptions that a social phenomenon (women's representation in the public sphere) can firstly be observed directly through empirical data, and secondly that this link can be causal. Ross establishes their intentions to establish a causal relationship from the start, framing their theory around 'causes', 'effects' and 'consequences', and stating the study suggests that women are underrepresented '*because of oil*'. The positivist underpinning also explains the enormity of the dataset, including every country in the world. The scope condition is ontologically consistent with using all available nation-state examples in order to form a cogent explanatory theory that can be used to predict trends over time and space. The use of the positivist lens, more likely to create valid explanatory conclusions. This has utility within this data as all of the countries are engaging with global capitalistic models of exchange and therefore these economic models will be similar enough to compare.

Question 2

Summarize the key theoretical claims in your own words. Identify and explain the nature of these claims (i.e., paradigm and/or approach), as well as the alignment between the theory and empirics (i.e., induction, deduction, and/or abduction) in the article.

Broadly Ross treats theory as paradigm, and deductively seeks confirmation of hypotheses built from theory established through a literature review. Despite predominantly being deductive in their own research, Ross does pose their article and results as a response to received wisdom about both international development and perceptions of Islam.

Ross' predominant theoretical claim is ecologically determinist in nature, namely that the resources that a state has access to and is subsequently able to export directly influences the social structures of that state. Ross builds this theoretical framework for their findings in their literature review, pulling from other social science as well as economic literature.

Ross' theoretical claims include:

A structuralist claim that all cultures have similar social systems that can be directly compared.

The assertion that economic conditions influence the social and material conditions of women within a state, and women's presence in the labour force increases their political power.

The presence of oil and other minerals within a nation leads to an emphasis on extractive heavy industry which in turn reduces the number of women in the workplace.

Oil-producing states' patriarchal norms persist due to women's lack of political influence.

Much of Ross' theoretical claims are derived from classical economic theory, namely assumptions that individual agents are rational and income maximizing i.e the implication that states with women who have a higher unearned income from partners would not enter the workforce. This reduction of agency to a single plane does not take into account other motivations for action or structures outside of ecology that shape and constrain actions.

To an extent the article erupts as a challenge to paradigm. The first is the neoliberal consensus that all economic development correlates with gender equality; Ross problematizes this through looking at a specific path of economic development and its effect on women in those states. The second paradigm is the prevailing discourse of the Islamic Other in the Western political and social spheres in the preceding decades. Ross addresses that there has been an assertion of Islam's effect on women's status, especially within the Middle East. Recently to the article this discourse had been used to justify war and policing of borders and bodies. Ross does not address this paradigm as fully as the previous but is clearly writing with this in mind. They allude to it in their initial paragraph, by naming Islam explicitly in the title of the article, and stating outright that the significant effect comes from oil, rather than Islam.

Question 3

Are the findings valid and/or significant? What is the scope condition? Can/should the authors extend their findings to a different case, such as a country or a city? Why or why not?

The negative statistical relation between oil production and the representation of women in both the workforce and political sphere is significant. Both the hypotheses can be accepted insofar as they can be measured using the data available. Through their regressions Ross consistently found there to be a negative correlation between oil rents and representation of women, and notably when Islam was controlled for. This is consistent with their assertions that the extraction of oil has a greater effect on women's representation than Islam, and their challenge of the rote acceptance that all economic development is positive for gender equality. The scope condition is the entire world, which is epistemologically consistent. The scope condition cannot be extended due to the maximal nature of the data.

Ross' hypotheses centre around representation. They look to make broader conclusions of women's status in these countries. The variables of political representation are a blunt instrument to speak to women's place within a society, though their use is understandable with the positivist lens of the research and the limitations of historic data sets. Ross looks to use their findings to draw broad correlations that can predict effects on nation states and their social structure. However, to distill entire states of people to a causal ecological relationship with oil reserves flattens the agency of those millions as well as social institutions and structures that could affect women's participation in public life. There is limited validity in positivist attempts to draw correlations between single variables and multifactorial, meaning-laden structures of gendered equality and power within a society. The reduction of the effect of patriarchy to single measures flattens and removes the experience and agency of women within these structures. This is especially true as Ross intends to make assertions about the causes of patriarchal norms, the persistence of which implies active creation by social agents.

There is a recognition from Ross in their conclusion that there are other structures that can account for influence of women's status, for example government influence and intention. An alternate study could take this further, using the states brought by Ross as case studies as the sites of investigation of how women in these countries feel their lives are shaped by

these social agents, i.e religion, politics, economy. I would suggest ethnography or depth interviews, following or interviewing women who are actively engaged in public life in these countries. This would draw out a deeper understanding of the power relations that shape and structure women's ability to exist in the political sphere and wider economy. A study done more recently could also investigate the influence of western neoimperial actions in the Middle East and the effect on both oil rents and representation of women.

FINAL GRADE

68/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Q1: Good job! 75

Q2: You did a good job when you tried to summarize the claims made by Ross, but some of the words you put seem unnecessary and can undermine the clarity of your review. For one thing – is it necessary to say the claim is “ecologically deterministic?” In general, you should articulate the summary without creating a label on others as it may sound a bit abrupt and judgmental. Also, I am not sure why there are some one-sentence paragraphs as you should aim to come up with a cogent discussion. 67

Q3: You provided a very nice discussion on why the Ross article is important but saying “the scope condition is the entire world” is a bit misleading (and perhaps requires a different formulation). Indeed, his findings and the main argument can travel across cultural boundaries, but it is very clear he focuses on gender politics in oil- or resource-rich countries. His data are also quite limited, in fact. Conducting cross-national comparison does not necessarily mean the scope condition is universal. 63

PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4
