

Date: 31st of March 2023



Module: Investigating the Social World

Article of choice: Ross, Michael. 2008. "Oil, Islam, and Women." *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 107-123

Word count (including all footnotes, references and appendices): 1444

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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).

“What causes women to be marginalised in the Middle East?” is the author's central research question. The main focus of this article is to answer the topic of why women in Middle East have not made more progress towards gender equality. Since Islam is a prevalent religion in the Middle East, several scholars assert that Islam is the primary impediment to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. The author challenges this claim, arguing that Islam has a negligible part in the oppression of women and that another cause is to blame for the disparity between men and women. In fact, the author provides an economic argument to demonstrate that religion is not the main cause for the marginalisation of women in society.

To support his argument in this research, Ross uses a quantitative method as well as a case study to confirm his findings. The author examines oil production and employment data for all countries between 1960 and 2002, as well as employment data for female political participation in 2002. The first estimate is based on a first-differences model with a country fixed-effect and uses cross-national data for all states between 1960 and 2002; the second estimate is based on a cross-national model with a between estimator and focuses on the states in the period 1993-2002. The first-differences model with fixed-effects, which he identifies as having key characteristics, evaluates whether changes in the explanatory variables are associated with changes in the dependent variable.

His analysis suggests that oil production is correlated with female labour participation, but it does not explain why. To answer this question and to support his findings, Ross uses a case study that more closely examines a set of similar countries, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia where the official religion is Islam. These three former French colonies achieved independence in the 1950s and 1960s and promptly extended voting rights to their female citizens.

Then, the author compared the oil-rich Algeria to oil-poor Tunisia and Morocco. While Morocco and Tunisia have produced very little oil, Algeria has been a significant producer since the 1960s. In light of the authors' analysis, it seems likely that women's workforce participation and political clout are diminished by oil and gas exploitation.

The author takes a positivist stance by examining the correlation between women's social exclusion and oil production, favouring a more realism ontology and an empiricist epistemology. He takes Islam out of the equation to demonstrate that it is not to blame for the gender inequality that exists in the Middle East. Instead, he places the responsibility on the oil production industry. He concludes that the oil industry is to blame for the difficulties women face in gaining equality in these nations by documenting, across a large cross-section of nations, the negative impact it has on women's rights and equality. Hence, his cross-national regressions research does provide statistical support for the hypothesis that oil output is linked to female labour and the representation of women in government.

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.

The author argues that oil production, in particular, plays a key role in economic and political gender equality, challenging the popular notion that women's economic and political empowerment in the Middle East is impacted by the region's Islamic traditions. In his study, Ross offers two major theoretical claims:

Initially, he claims that the gender gap in the Middle Eastern paid workforce is rooted in the regional economy's structure. Ross argues that the disparity in pay between men and women is a direct effect of the gender segregation in the workplace. Low-wage export-oriented sectors and agriculture tend to be dominated by women, whereas the non-traded sector, which includes construction and other forms of hard labour, is led by men.

Furthermore, he also suggests a connection between oil output and women's political empowerment. Due in part to the correlation between women's political power and their representation in the workforce, it stands to reason that an increase in women's labour force participation would boost women's political power in a variety of ways. Ross alludes, though obliquely, that the oil industry benefits patriarchal administrations.

The theoretical statements that Ross has made may be considered as a paradigm. The author presents theoretical descriptions to explain why and how oil production in the Middle East is having a significant influence on the marginalisation of women. His argument is supported by statistics on oil production, female labour participation, and female political representation,

and he further supports it by drawing a comparison between oil-rich Algeria and oil-poor Morocco and Tunisia. Ross concludes by asserting that the oil and gas industry tends to reduce women's participation in the labour and their ability to acquire political influence.

The author adopts a deductive approach based on theory verification to streamline the research process, beginning with a theory: women in the Middle East have made less strides towards equality because of the oil industry. Then, he presents his hypothesis, beginning with an analysis of the impact of occupational segregation on the number of jobs available to women, as well as an explanation of the significance of women's labour force participation in terms of, among other things, increased female school enrolment and autonomy, improved gender relations more generally, and increased female political influence.

According to Ross, the production of oil may contribute to an increase in gender inequality in the workplace both when there is gender segregation in the workplace and when the consequences of the Dutch disease model, which shifts away from the trade sector and towards the non-traded sector, are taken into account. In support of this hypothesis, he provides evidence of a robust inverse relationship between oil production and women's participation in the labour force and politics.

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?

Ross draws a conclusion from his study imposing his theory by saying that the oil industry is to blame for the marginalisation of women in the Middle East, while assigning religion very little to no culpability for this issue. His research is really thought provoking; nonetheless, I would add that applying a quantitative approach to the investigation of a cultural problem is rather challenging. His conclusions were supported by a case study, which is insufficient evidence to research gender equality in countries where culture plays a dominant role. The investigation into this complex problem, in my opinion, should use a qualitative approach, with its focus on polling the general population about their views on men's and women's responsibilities in the home, the workplace, and society at large.

Moreover, Islam itself is not to blame for the lack of gender equality in the Middle East; rather, it is the male-dominated society's perception of Islam that is at fault. In my opinion, cultural patriarchy and, more precisely, cultural interpretation, may have far-reaching consequences on women's standing. As the lack of knowledge and the inability to challenge the prevalent religious interpretation and cultural norms are frequently to blame for gender disparity, I attribute it to the preponderance of the male voice and interpretation of Islamic theology.

To return to Ross's research, it is important to note that he limits the scope of his investigation to oil-rich countries. The author acknowledges that there are exceptions, citing New Zealand and Australia as two countries that have produced significant amounts of oil and gas while also

making quicker progress on gender equality. Yet, if we examine a nation like Papua New Guinea, which is wealthy in oil and other resources but where Islam is not the official religion, we can see that the lack of gender equality is directly impacted by cultural norms. These examples may suggest that cultural factors, rather not oil or Islam, are to blame for the absence of gender equality in many nations.

Furthermore, I do not believe that the author should extend his findings because I believe that without a direct qualitative approach, it is difficult to estimate the effect that oil production has on women's marginalisation in comparison to the effects that cultural factors have. Ross imposes his thesis, which indicates that oil production is the source of women's reduced progress toward gender equality, without leaving room for other reasons, such as culture, religious interpretation, and perspectives on women's and men's roles in the community.

To conclude, although I agree that women in the Middle East have made less strides towards gender equality, I also think that an open, focused government and women's organisations may help to minimise this imbalance. In contrast to Ross's conclusions, I believe that a combination of causes is to blame for the lack of gender equality, and that the Muslim countries should strive to empower women since the lack of agency among Muslim women is a major barrier to the development of Muslim economies and communities.



GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

72/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Q1: Good job! (75)

Q2: Two minor issues: (1) Ross presents a theoretical “argument;” saying it is a theoretical “description” sounds very weird and (2) it is not clear how the last two paragraphs were organized – or they were just one paragraph altogether? (70)

Q3: The reflection on using quantitative methods to study culture is very thoughtful (but the use of “problem” in this context is not appropriate). A minor issue: You really do not have to say “I believe,” in particular, you should avoid using them twice in the same sentence. To be fair, taking them out does not change the fact that this is your own work. (70)

Overall: Some minor writing issues but overall a great job!

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