

**TOLGA BENZER**  
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## AALTO UNIVERSITY

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### **Doctoral Studies:**

Ph.D. in Economics, **Aalto University School of Business**, 2016-present

Expected Completion Date: June 2022

### **References:**

Professor Tuomas Pekkariinen (co-advisor)  
VATT and Aalto University School of Business  
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University of Turku School of Economics  
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### **Pre-Doctoral Studies:**

Master of Arts in Economics and Finance with High Honors, **Bogazici University**, 2015  
Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering, **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville**, 2013  
Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering with Honors, **Istanbul Technical University**, 2013

### **Teaching and Research Fields:**

Primary fields: Development Economics, Political Economy, Applied Microeconomics  
Secondary fields: Cultural Economics, Economic History

### **Working Papers:**

*“Removing Cultural Barriers to Education: State-run Islamic Schools and Girls’ Education in Turkey”*

#### **(Job Market Paper)**

Abstract: This paper studies the impact of access to state-run Islamic schools on girls’ educational attainment, fertility, and labor market participation in Turkey. In contrast to traditional secular schools, Islamic schools in Turkey offered a hybrid curriculum that also included religious instruction, a more conservative school environment, and a more tolerant attitude toward the use of headscarves. Islamic schools expanded rapidly in the mid-1970s, and girl students achieved the legal right to attend these schools after a 1976 Council of State ruling. Exploiting the variation in exposure to Islamic schools across district centers and cohorts, I find that girls exposed to Islamic schools were more likely to complete lower and upper secondary school, while the corresponding effects for boys were small and nonsignificant. Moreover, affected girl cohorts had lower fertility and higher labor force participation during early adulthood. My results suggest that making secular institutions inclusive toward religious conservatives by eliminating cultural barriers to education helped keep girls from religious families in school and integrate them into public life.

## **Work in Progress:**

### *“Islamic Schools and Political Islam”*

Abstract: This paper studies the impact of access to state-run Islamic schools during the 1970s on electoral outcomes in Turkey. I exploit the variation in the availability of Islamic schools across district centers and election years. I find that district centers with an Islamic school voted significantly more for Islamist parties after exposure to Islamic schools. The effect appears after prolonged exposure to Islamic schools, and affected student cohorts came voting age. I also provide evidence that the Islamic brotherhoods, geographic sorting, or economic liberalization were not driving the differential increase in the support for Islamist parties. My findings indicate that policymakers identified with religious affiliations can utilize religious schooling as promotion centers of religious politics to achieve electoral success in secular electoral democracies.

### *“Christian Missions and Political Islam”*

Abstract: I study the long-term impact of Christian missions in colonial Egypt on present-day electoral outcomes. I combine contemporary census and election data at the district level with historical information on the spatial distribution of Christian missionaries and Muslim Brotherhood branches in early twentieth-century Egypt. I document a robust negative association between proximity to historical Christian missions and the support for Muslim Brotherhood in the 2012 Egyptian presidential elections. I do not find any relationship between Christian missions and historical Muslim Brotherhood presence. Finally, I present evidence that missions’ lasting effect is partly explained by increased human capital and local economic development, indicating the existence of education cleavage as an important determinant for the support for Islamist parties.

## **Presentations:**

2021	ASREC Graduate Student Workshop, EEA-ESEM 2021, Helsinki GSE PhD Workshop, Helsinki GSE Lunch Seminar, Turku School of Economics
2020	Helsinki GSE PhD Workshop, Finnish Economic Association Conference
2019	Helsinki GSE PhD Workshop, Helsinki GSE Lunch Seminar

## **Teaching Experience:**

Fall 2017-2020	Aalto University TA for Applied Microeconometrics I (graduate)
Spring 2018, 2019	Aalto University TA for Labor Economics (graduate)
Fall 2018	Aalto University TA for History of Economic Growth and Crises (graduate)
Spring 2020	Aalto University TA for Principles of Empirical Analysis (undergraduate)

## **Grants:**

2021	The Finnish Cultural Foundation PhD Grant
2017-2020	OP Group Research Foundation PhD Grant
2019	HSE Support Foundation Summer School Grant
2016	Foundation for Economic Education PhD Grant

## **Computer Skills:** Stata, QGIS, LaTeX, R (Basic)

## **Language Skills:** Turkish (Native), English (Fluent), Finnish (Intermediate)

## **Personal Information:** Date of Birth: 30/05/1990    Citizenship: Turkish, Finnish (pending)