

The Effect of Arab Spring on Opinions of Women Empowerment in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan

By xxx

Project purpose

I am evaluating how revolutions towards democratization affect women empowerment in the Middle East. My research question is: What was the effect of the Arab Spring on the perception of women's empowerment in Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine? In my research, I hope to find out how people's perception of women changed as a result of the Arab Spring. I hope to create a better understanding of the history of women in the Middle East and how social movements affect them.

Project Importance

The Arab Spring was a central and foundational movement in the Middle East that must be understood to correctly understand the politics and culture of the Middle East. While there are many studies of the Arab Spring and its effect on government, there is limited research on its effect on women's empowerment. Research and raw data are sparse in the Middle East because there are limited resources and a strong patriarchal culture which impacts women even more in the data gap. While there is some survey data in places like the Arab Barometer and World Values Survey, the analysis of the effect of the Arab Spring on women is lacking. Understanding women's current status in the Middle East is reliant on understanding the effect of the Arab Spring because of the governmental changes it brought to women.

Project Overview

The Middle East is full of rich history and culture that is too often subject to inappropriate assumptions. This creates a dangerous space where people make baseless assumptions on a group of people, specifically women. Evaluating their roles in the Arab Spring will help us understand Arab women worldwide. The method of this process is included below.

First, I will conduct a quantitative analysis of the changing of opinions in the Middle East. I will do this through analyzing questions from the Arab Barometer. I will evaluate the same questions from a time period right before arab spring (2006-2007), during/right after (2011-2012), a couple years after (2014-2016), and present day. I will evaluate the following questions listed below:

The following questions are your personal opinions about the principles that should determine the behavior and situation of women in our society. For each of the statements listed below, please indicate whether you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly.

- *A woman can be a president or prime minister of a Muslim country*
- *A married woman can work outside of the home if she wishes*
- *On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do*
- *A university education is more important for a boy than a girl*
- *Men and women should have equal job opportunities and wages*
- *Men and women should receive equal wages and salaries*
- *A woman can travel abroad by herself if she wishes*

I will conduct my analysis through STATA using OLS and control variables to determine the change over time and regressions to see correlation with other independent variables.

Following my quantitative analysis, I will conduct a set of semi-structured interviews in Jordan in Arabic. I will gain participants through local connections through the Qasid institute and the parks around Jordan. I will be conducting at least 20 interviews, but if these are not sufficient I will conduct more. I will hold these interviews at the Qasid institute. I have completed a class in qualitative methods and will use my known methods and practice of conducting semi-structured interviews to complete this analysis. I will continue to work with several professors in Jordan to assure that I am asking the right questions in the right way. I will conduct these interviews to widen my knowledge of the culture of the Middle East and also try to find the logical process that will eventually lead to my results.

I am conducting both Qualitative and Quantitative analysis because they are able to compliment each other to paint a larger picture. The quantitative analysis is able to look into the causal relationship of the Arab Spring and opinions of women empowerment, while the qualitative analysis is able to evaluate this relationship in a real-world scenario. The strengths of one analysis is able to supplement the weakness of the other.

Following both quantitative and qualitative analysis, I will write my results and submit my report.

The following information is the preliminary draft to begin my Thesis.

Theory

Data suggests that the Arab Spring increased female involvement in the community and enabled women to participate in mass protests, not solely for the rights of the majority but also the rights of women (Demeritt 2014). I hypothesize that this female participation created a *lasting* space for women to have responsibilities and become empowered in ways that were previously limited. Haala Hweio said, “A strong presence of women in the Arab revolutions...shifted the understanding of women’s traditional role in those societies to another dimension” (Hweio .

2016). Women's involvement included: peaceful protests, volunteering in hospitals, arranging aid projects, and organizing civil society programs. In places like Libya, some women even smuggled weapons and went to the front lines. Referring to women's efforts in Libya, Hweio says that, "women were the real power behind the start of the revolution, an essential component in it" (2016).

Thus, I expect that the Arab Spring created a space for women that was not previously there. This phenomenon of established space is supported by social movement theory, which shows that many social movements originate from social strains and the requirement for a change in structure (Stekelenburg & Klandermans 2009). Women's roles were difficult to remove after the revolutions and created a social movement for women. This seems supported by initial data, but there is more research to be done. For example, after the Arab Spring, there was an increase in quotas and other laws in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. These laws created a space for women to be involved. The changing of laws to support women "display(ed) stronger support for increased female participation" (Teigen & Karlsen 2020; Fernandez & Valiente 2021).

The American Revolution provides evidence of social movement theory at work. Women made clothes with symbols of the revolution. Women helped enable boycotts, helped heal and aid the wounded, and acted as spies. Some of these roles highlighted the traditional female place in the home, but many expanded women's roles. After the American revolution, there is evidence of women fighting for the freedoms that they had in the revolution. Abigail Adams told her husband, one of the founders of the new government, to "remember the ladies" (Ellet 2020; Martin 1976; Wani 2014). The revolution created some foundational members of the feminist movement in early America: including Judith Sargent Murray (Murraay 1995). While the place of women did not drastically change after the American Revolution, it did create a space for change. The American revolution follows the patterns of social movement theory (Ellet 2020; Wani 2014).

The Libyan revolution during the Arab Spring shows similar trends relating to social movement theory. The role played by women during the revolution created a space for women and "helped empower the new political and social status of women in society" (Hweio 2018). However, some of the gains taken by women were removed because of the disorder that followed the revolution (Hweio 2018). Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine could have followed the same patterns as the Libyan and American revolutions and created physical change and more support for the idea of women empowerment.

Literature Review/Background

In 2011 Mohamed Bouazizi burned himself protesting against police brutality. This act of protest led to others shifting the political arena of the Middle East. Marc Lynch describes that people demanded in public protest more "Karama," meaning dignity, from the government (2014).

Mohamed Bouazizi's burning started a revolution in Tunisia but led to other protests throughout the Middle East, leading to the Arab Spring. While the protests between Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine did not lead to the same dramatic changes in leadership as others (like Egypt), the Arab Spring influenced their laws and opinions of the people.

Jordan, under a constitutional monarchy, reached independence in 1946. Located in the center of the Middle East, it is home to many immigrants from other Middle East countries. During the Arab Spring, Jordan maintained its government structure, a constitutional monarchy (Ryan 2018; About Jordan). How did Jordan maintain this government while so many were falling apart around them? Sarah Tobin argues that the large immigrant middle class created many divided groups, suppressing the national sentiment of Jordanian people influencing the lack of foundational changes to the constitution. Other countries had to change more substantially because a significant amount of the population united and sought change. In a region with many divided groups, unity was difficult (Tobin 2012). Jordan's written changes include new Political Parties, an increase in the female quota, and more free general elections (Yesilyurt 2014).

Lebanon, or officially the Republic of Lebanon, is on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It established its independence in 1943 but has been a victim of violence within its borders since then (Country Report Lebanon January 2022; Lebanon). During the Arab Spring, the Lebanese government completely collapsed due to the retirement of ten of the government's leaders. Many large-scale protests insisted on governmental reform. During 2010-2012, there were not many protests, but following the Arab Spring, there were several waves of violence. These waves of violence led to several governmental changes (Fakhoury 2014; Rosiny 2018).

Palestine during the Arab Spring was under occupation and exile. The state of Palestine seemed to be in constant danger of survival; hence, most people were concerned about self-preservation. Ideas of self-preservation led to limited change within the organization of Palestine because challenging the organization could hurt its survival—which is what the residents of Palestine were fighting for (Philip 2015). The current state of Palestine is a result of aid from other Arab Nations. The Arab Spring was a wave of revolutions across most Arab nations. Because Palestine is tied to Arab Nations, the Arab Spring had an effect, but it was limited in Palestine because of self-preservation. Some authors argue that the Arab Spring helped unite the Arab people, while others say it drove Arab people apart as they tested authoritarian leadership. Either way, the Arab Spring did have an impact on the people within Palestine, and it will be curious to see the extent of this impact on women's rights (Philip 2015).

Men hold most of the political power in the Middle East. This pattern of male power has led to the dangerous treatment of women including increased sexual violence and discrimination. Women have fought for their rights while fighting for the preservation of their culture. Some western ideals of feminism attack the culture of the Middle East that women hold dear. There is a

strange dichotomy between the western ideals of feminism and the feminist ideas held by women in the Middle East (Claire 2020). As women in the Middle East often fought against the western ideal of feminism, they created Islamic feminism to create a fight for equality that still included their culture (Kharazmi Motahari and Kharazmi 2020). Islamic feminism can empower women in the spheres that they are in (Doaa Al-Dajani and Nikolaos 2022; Kharazmi Motahari and Kharazmi 2020).

Women participated actively in mass revolutions throughout the Middle East. These revolutions started as organizations against the government, however throughout the Arab Spring Women's rights came to be a prominent topic. Women were necessary during the Arab spring as they stood beside men at protests and in other acts. Akman states that "In the course of these revolutionary uprisings, women came out as individual protestors, organizers, supporters and followers of demonstrations, strategists and the reporters of events" women demanded freedom, equality, and social justice for all (2015). Their involvement was "visible and vocal" (Cundiff 2017). One prominent example is the participation of women in Tahrir Square. This scene of equality in relationships between men and women was repeated in Change Square in Yemen and Pearl Square in Bahrain (Cundiff 2017). These revolutions and demonstrations enabled women to "transcend the physical and social barriers between men and women in the public sphere." It gave them a voice because the revolution was fighting for human rights, and women's rights are inherently that (Cundiff 2017).

One specific female Arab Spring leader, Tawakkul Karman won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. She was a Yemeni journalist that led several protests and called for democracy, and founded "Women Journalists without chains." Despite being imprisoned for her efforts, she continued to unite groups toward democracy eventually leading to her receiving the Nobel Peace prize. She believes that, "Islam is not an obstacle to the full acceptance of women in every sphere of society." This idea is formally known as Muslim Feminism—which grew during Arab Spring (Khamis; The Nobel Peace Prize 2011). Nawara Negm, another female leader in Arab Spring, recorded events through her blogs and was a leader in the Egyptian revolution (Khamis). The strain on society during the revolution created a space for women's leadership, as described in Social Movement theory. There was a space that needed to be filled, and women filled it while also spreading ideas of Muslim Feminism.

The processes were not always smooth sailing. One example of opposition to these "feminist" movements was the failed International Womens Day march in Tahrir Square in March 2011. Nawal Al Saadawi (an Egyptian feminist) created a womens march in Tahrir Square in Egypt, emphasizing a need for women rights especially in a time of change. Some people saw this as an improper time for women's rights. A march that was supposed to attract a million women only got around 500 women to the square (Khamis 2011). Additionally, women in some spaces became a target for increased sexual assault and rape. In Egypt, the regime was determined to

shame women by sexually harassing them. To have the state groping you sends a clear sign to women about their worth. The state would often force women to take virginity tests.

In 2012 there was a religious festival in which women were targeted. The police were present and watched this assault and did nothing. The state denied that these events took place but bloggers exposed the truth. In Tunisia, women became victims of security forces. The government used this to dissuade women from participating. In Libya, hundreds of women were raped and kidnapped. This was used not only to humiliate women but also to humiliate the male enemy by compromising his honor (Cundiff 2017).

There are still several current barriers to women after the Arab Spring. During the Arab Spring women in Jordan took action against nationality laws, but restrictions still exist for women. Currently, only Jordanian males are able to pass on citizenship. Women cannot guarantee citizenship for their offspring (Cundiff 2017). Despite efforts of women to change this law and become more prominent, it has not been successful. Women are still struggling to participate economically. Entrepreneurship and employment are significantly low in the Middle East compared to the rest of the world (Viiu and Kavitha 2010; Patel 2019). Women face barriers in the workforce because of societal norms and a lack of government backing. Women still suffer from sexual assault, which is especially hard to protect against within the walls of marriage. Marriages are consistent among women children increasing the difficulty of protecting women against this domestic violence (Patel 2019).

However, there are some changed quotas in the regions of Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. The gender quota database shows us that in Jordan the lower house has 15 out of 45 seats reserved for women and 30% of the municipal council seats; however, there are no legislated or party quotas (2020). The Gender quotas database has no data on Lebanon because they have no quotas. The Lebanese parliament passed a domestic violence case in 2014. This law includes restraining orders and policing, and court reforms. While this is a large step in the right direction, it is important to note that marital rape is still a problem. The Lebanese government created the Ministry of Women's Affairs. This ministry was created with good intentions but is mostly seen as symbolic because the first director was male (Clair 2020). However, women are still advocating for rights in Lebanon. In 2019 there were several large protests by women, which eventually led to the retirement of the minister (Nassar 2019).

Palestine is also taking several steps towards equality. In local councils, just over 20% are female. 17% of the judges are female, and civil sector general managers are just 11% female. While these are much better than no women in government and are better than other countries, there is a lot of work to be done. There are still 61% of women who experience domestic violence. These percentages are terrifying, but there was an effort to help women following the Arab Spring. In 2014 Palestine ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); however, there has been a lack of national laws to support this. In Palestine, women have the legal right to own land and property and have equal rights to inheritance. The populace rarely enacts these laws being it is expensive to involve the court, and the cultural barriers are demotivating (UNESCO 2019; Richter-Devroe 2011; WCLAC 2020; Baseline Study etc. 2013). Finally, in 2013 there was an advocacy/ support campaign run for women to create this equality in inheritance. While there are several blockades there are still organizations fighting against such blocks (Baseline study etc 2013).

In conclusion, after the Arab Spring, there were several implemented quotas and other laws that promoted women's rights. Some of these occurred during Arab Spring, and some happened several years after. While there are more laws and quotas enacted, the Middle East is still the country with the highest domestic violence rates and has some of the lowest rates of female employment. This shows that while we are hoping to see a change in attitude, it could be very slight because the changing laws is slow. Additionally, while there is significant research in the field relating to the quotas and individual women's movements, there is limited research on the perception of women following the Arab Spring.

Project Timeline

I am going to do most of the data analysis early fall. This will be done through STATA on my computer and allow me to edit the information I want to gather from informal interviews. I will then be conducting the informal interviews in the month of November. This is because it will allow me to have enough time in Jordan to ensure that my Arabic is fluent enough to complete an interview. I will record, transcribe and code them. I will organize them based on differing levels of support for female empowerment, dissupport, and aggressive support or dissupport. I will then finish analysis and create my draft during December and January and submit my thesis by March.

IRB Approval

I am currently working on my submission to IRB and hoping to get it in within the next week.

Funding

Include other sources of funding that will be used

In order to complete the informal interviews it is necessary for me to travel to Jordan to conduct them. I will be doing this through Arabic intensive study abroad. The program will cost close to \$7000 not including airfare. I am using some College of Humanities funding and the Gillman scholarship to pay for about \$5500 of the trip. I then plan to use the \$1200 from Honors to supplement the airfare and if possible the other portions of the trip. Any other expense, including the individual expenses in Jordan to travel to interviews and eat, will be covered from my own

savings. I am not planning on paying the participants so this funding will help with other charges.

This trip is necessary for my project because it enables me to evaluate the mechanisms behind the quantitative data. Additionally, it would be difficult, expensive and not thorough to conduct informal interviews in the US. Conducting them there enables more privacy with identity (by creating less paper trails without the required phone calls or emails that would be necessary if conducted here), enables a more diverse crowd to be interviewed (not just those that you can contact online, those online would have different responses than people there. For example, if I interviewed people who want to practice their English online because they will be traveling or moving their perceptions of the western world would differ from other people living there) and a reading of nonverbal communication (much communication happens without words which is easier to see if they are done in person).

It also helps me see the real enactment of women's empowerment or lack of it in the Middle East. To create a document about the Middle East without understanding of the culture and environment would create a document that ignores a central contributor to women empowerment. Too many papers rely on data without accounting for and understanding local culture. I hope to understand the culture and also discover the reasoning behind the data which will strengthen my answers.

Culminating Experience

I would like to publicize my Thesis after its completion and publication. I am passionate about this work and motivated to get it out there. I am currently looking for conferences where I could attend or send my work but do not have any by name that I would like to apply to.

Conclusion (optional)

In conclusion I am excited to complete my research and learn more about women in the Middle East. I am passionate about this subject matter and the research I am doing. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at maryoharris11@gmail.com

Committee Members:

Advisor: Joshua Gubler. Professor Gubler is qualified to be my advisor because he has studied Arabic and Near Eastern Studies at BYU, Middle Eastern studies at the University of Utah, and Political Science from the University of Michigan. His work covers topics of Political Science and Middle East studies (specifically, intergroup cooperation and conflict, political psychology, and the Middle East). This is helpful because my topic is a conglomerate of Middle East politics and Arabic. Additionally, Professor Gubler was my teacher in the Middle East politics class. During and following that semester, I worked with him to improve my writing. When deciding

on a topic for my thesis, I met with Professor Gubler. I chose him as my advisor because he is knowledgeable about this area of study, and is familiar with me and my writing style.

Reader: Spencer Scoville. Professor Scoville has a bachelor's degree in comparative literature, a masters in Arab studies from Georgetown, and a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies/ Arabic literature from the University of Michigan. Most of his work is related to Arab literature and translation theory (he also does work with Russian-Arabic relations). I chose Profesor Scoville because I need specific guidance with my work in Jordan interviewing. I know that Professor Scoville will help me prepare and read my thesis with a more Middle Eastern/Arabic lense. I took several Arabic classes from Professor Scoville and have spent many hours in his office working on my Arabic. This has allowed him to become more familiar with my work ethic and style.

Honors Coordinator: Ethan Busby. Professor Busby has a bachelor's, masters, and Ph.D. in Political Science. As the Honors coordinator, he has helped me connect with other professors. He is familiar with the Honors criteria and has helped measure that my work is organized the way it is meant to be. I met Professor Busby when I was looking for narrow Research questions. I was able to meet with him and get ideas for what I wanted to research; this is why I am glad to have him as my Honors coordinator.

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APPENDIX

Anticipated Interview Questions: (to be revised with professors in Jordan)

Generic demographic:

- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- How long have you lived here?
- What do you do for a living?

Participation in arab spring (independent variable)

- Tell me how women participated in the Arab Spring? How did this change perceptions of women thereafter?

How participation affected

- Are there any organizations in the community that advocate for women empowerment? Were these present before the Arab spring?
- What do you think about the changes to gender quotas that happened after Arab Spring
- What are your thoughts around womens' autonomy?

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