

# Public Opinion of Women's Rights and Democratic Values<sup>(1)</sup>

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How do opinions of gender equality affect perceptions of democracy? Much has been written linking procedural democracy with underlying democratic values; in essence, the argument is that without a general support for democratic values, systems of democratic governance may erode and decline.

Democratic values/attitudes are often defined as support for inclusive political and civil freedoms, as well as the institutional safeguards which guarantee them. Opinions towards women's rights can be considered part and parcel of democratic values. Thus, in this paper, we ask whether opinions of gender equality can help predict democratic, or anti-democratic, sentiment. Essentially, we seek to address the question: can one profess a belief in democracy while simultaneously holding misogynistic views and excluding women?.

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Democratic values/attitudes are often defined as support for inclusive political and civil freedoms, as well as the institutional safeguards which guarantee them.<sup>(3)</sup> Alternatively, those with "authoritarian" attitudes or personalities often value security and order above personal freedoms. This commonly manifests itself in increased desire for subordination

of others, particularly "minority or non-traditional groups."<sup>(4)</sup>

Women can be considered such a "non-traditional group," especially since women have been historically excluded from power. This is especially the case in the Arab region. The region has also recently undergone anti-democratic upheavals – some of which were publically supported (such as in the case of the coup overthrowing President Mohammad Morsi in Egypt). Thus, this paper asks whether opinions of gender equality can help predict democratic, or anti-democratic, sentiment. Essentially, it seeks to address the question: can one profess a belief in democracy while simultaneously holding misogynistic views and excluding women?

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Ryan Carlin and Mason Moseley, "Good Democrats, Bad Targets: Democratic Values and Clientelistic Vote Buying," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (January 2015): 14 - 26. This article utilizes a definition of citizen "democrats" to test particular implications, using statistical methods.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Merrotsy, "Authoritarian Personality," in *SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*, edited by Fathali Moghaddam (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017).

## Data

Since 2011, the Arab Opinion Index has asked a varying battery of questions related to female participation in politics as well as social issues, such as domestic violence. They have also been asked about democratic sentiment. This is measured in a variety of ways such as asking questions on whether democracy is good for security and public safety, whether democracy is incompatible with Islam, etc. Finally, the index enjoys a variety of demographic indicators, including age group, educational level, income, urban/rural distinctions, and more. These three categories of questions combined can help address the main question while also controlling for confounding variables such as socioeconomic status.

Beginning with female political participation respondents are first asked if they would support a woman ascending to the prime minister position/president position. This question had four possible answers, in descending order: 1 being “very strongly support,” and 4 being “do not support at all.” To look at whether this question had an effect on a general sentiment towards democracy, respondents were asked if they agree with the following statement: **Democracy has its problems, but it is the best system.** Those who agreed with this statement were given a score of 1, and those who disagreed were given a score of 0.

We then looked at the simple correlation between scores on these two questions, using data from 2011 to 2017 / 2018. The two questions are weakly negatively correlated at -0.045; this means that as opposition to a female prime minister goes up, support for democracy (as the best possible option) goes down to some degree.

A simple regression analysis also shows the same relationship. A logistic regression given that the dependent variable (“democracy is best”) is a binary variable was used, with 0 being opposition to this statement and 1 being support for this statement. With a regression, other variables which may affect opinions on gender and democracy, such as socioeconomic indicators can be controlled for. This model includes the year the survey was run, urban versus rural distinction, gender, age group, education level, and family income. Support for democracy is strongly correlated with opposition to a female prime

minister. Again, as the lack of support for a female prime minister goes up, the support for democracy goes down.

Another indicator of attitudes toward democracy can be measured by a question on whether democracy is incompatible with Islam. Predictably, when testing the correlation between this question and support for a female prime minister, a positive relationship is found between opposition to a female prime minister and the idea that democracy is incompatible with Islam. Again, the relationship is weakly positive (at 0.023), but nevertheless in the correct direction.

A regression analysis with the control variables listed above shows the same relationship. Lack of support for a female prime minister and the idea that democracy is incompatible with Islam are positively correlated and highly significant. This comes despite controlling for socioeconomic status, which means the relationship cannot be explained by income level, gender, age group, or any other control variable included. To ascertain opinions of gender equality using a different example, respondents are also asked about whether or not all forms of domestic violence should be prohibited by law. Those who strongly agree or agree that it should be prohibited, are given a score of 1. Those who disagree or strongly disagree with this statement, are scored 0.

A statistically significant negative correlation is found between opposition to a prohibition on domestic violence, and the notion that democracy is best. Interestingly in this analysis, the urban/rural distinction is not significant. This means that both people with urban backgrounds and rural backgrounds exhibit this dynamic; as opposition to the prohibition of domestic violence decreases, the notion that democracy is best increases amongst both populations.

Finally, to avoid any loaded connotation with the word “democracy,” the questions try to gauge people’s acceptance of different components of democracy instead. For instance, instead of asking directly about democracy, as described above, the respondent is asked about their opinion on elections and political parties. In the elections question, they are asked to choose which of the following two statements they most agree with:

<b>Model 1: "Democracy is best"</b>	
<b>Opposition to woman prime minister</b>	-0.118*** (0.008)
<b>Country</b>	-0.003 (0.002)
<b>year of the survey</b>	-0.0001 (0.006)
<b>urban/rural</b>	-0.087*** (0.018)
<b>Gender</b>	0.029 (0.018)
<b>age group</b>	0.031*** (0.006)
<b>Education level</b>	0.019*** (0.006)
<b>Family income</b>	-0.058*** (0.007)
<b>(N)</b>	79,148

<b>Model 1: "Democracy is incompatible with Islam"</b>	
<b>Opposition to woman prime minister</b>	0.051*** (0.007)
<b>Country</b>	-0.026*** (0.002)
<b>year of the survey</b>	0.015** (0.006)
<b>urban/rural</b>	0.061*** (0.018)
<b>Gender</b>	-0.077*** (0.017)
<b>age group</b>	0.005 (0.003)
<b>Education level</b>	-0.067*** (0.008)
<b>Family income</b>	0.029*** (0.007)
<b>(N)</b>	77,715

<b>Model 1:</b> <b>"Democracy is best"</b>	
<b>Opposition to prohibition of domestic violence</b>	-0.941*** (0.037)
<b>Country</b>	-0.001 (0.002)
<b>year of the survey</b>	-0.129*** (0.022)
<b>urban/rural</b>	0.020 (0.023)
<b>Gender</b>	0.056** (0.022)
<b>age group</b>	-0.058*** (0.003)
<b>Education level</b>	-0.023** (0.010)
<b>Family income</b>	0.077*** (0.009)
<b>(N)</b>	29,312

	<b>Model 1:</b> <b>Elections</b>	<b>Model 2:</b> <b>Political Parties</b>
<b>Opposition to Woman Prime Minister</b>	0.057*** (0.009)	0.039*** (0.008)
<b>country</b>	-0.036*** (0.002)	0.032*** (0.002)
<b>year of the survey</b>	0.050*** (0.012)	0.053*** (0.0109)
<b>urban/rural</b>	-0.039* (0.021)	0.087*** (0.0185)
<b>gender</b>	0.060*** (0.198)	0.063*** (0.0178)
<b>age group</b>	-0.017** (0.007)	-0.004 (0.006)
<b>Education level</b>	-0.074*** (0.010)	-0.044*** (0.009)
<b>Family income</b>	0.045*** (0.008)	0.005 (0.007)
<b>(N)</b>	48,634	48,634

- “We must choose political leadership through fair and free elections.”
- “Given that elections can sometimes lead to negative consequences, we should utilize other methods for choosing political leadership.”

Those who agreed with the first statement were scored 1, and those who agreed with the second statement were scored 2. In the political parties question, they are asked to choose which of the following two statements they most agree with:

- "Political parties create polarization and tension, therefore it is not necessary to have many political parties in your country."
- "There is a need for a variety of political parties to guarantee a wide range of choices for citizens to choose who will lead them."

## Conclusion

All in all, these data show that anti-women/misogynistic views also often imply anti-democratic sentiment. This makes sense given how democratic values are understood as meaning support for inclusive political and civil freedoms as well as the institutional safeguards which guarantee them. Those with authoritarian tendencies are likely to disregard these freedoms, and have a negative opinion of minority or non-traditional/non-dominant groups. This bears out in the Arab Opinion Index data described above, even while controlling for socioeconomic factors. Although some cognitive dissonance on this subject – i.e. people may profess a belief in democracy

Once again, those who agreed with the first statement were scored 1, and those who agreed with the second statement were scored 2.

We test the variable regarding opposition to the idea of a woman prime minister with independent variables capturing the components of democracy (i.e. elections, or political parties) described above. There is a statistically significant positive correlation for opposition to a woman prime minister, and elections. The same is true of the relationship between opposition to a woman prime minister, and political parties. This means that not only are the trends regarding the direct assessment of democracy accurate, but also that people who profess misogynistic/anti-women views are fundamentally anti-democratic. They are more likely to have a problem with the concept of elections, as well as the presence of political parties.

while simultaneously holding anti-woman views – it is expected the data is in fact quite clear about the direction of this relationship. All of the variations examined were also highly statistically significant.

Of course, more work is needed to elucidate the causal mechanisms behind this association. For the time being, however, this data implies it is indeed unlikely that a person profess a belief in democratic values while simultaneously holding misogynistic views and excluding women. This is not only the case in terms of the cognitive dissonance involved with such a belief; the empirical record of public opinion bears this out as well.