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Women's Rights and Representation in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey: The Patriarchal Domination of Religious Interpretations

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Women's Rights and Representation in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey: The Patriarchal Domination of Religious Interpretations

Roumaissaa Rose Tailassane
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Submitted to the faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for Distinguished Honors in International Relations
Abstract

This research paper is divided into three case studies: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. The main focus of the paper is to examine barriers to women’s economic and political participation as well as the limits on their rights within the family and society. All three case studies are Muslim-majority countries. The paper argues that the subordination of women is not intrinsic to Islam but stems from patriarchal interpretations of Islam by religious authorities working in conjunction with autocratic political leaders. Furthermore, the paper analyzes cultural, political, and economic explanations for limits on women’s rights in these Muslim-majority countries and shows how each of these explanations apply to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. Despite variations within and among the pluralistic societies of the region as well as the distinct histories of each country, patriarchal cultures developed by and for male religious and political elites lead to restrictions on women’s economic and political participation. Recommendations include increasing the number of women in religious bureaucracies and in government.
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Introduction

In this research paper, I examine the progression of women’s rights and presentation in three Muslim-majority countries: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey. I selected Muslim-majority countries because it is argued that Islam, promotes gender inequality. I strongly reject the religious argument that Islam promotes gender inequality; and hence, I study the cultural, political, and economic sectors of the three selected countries to determine what has caused the delayed progression of women’s rights. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that throughout the years, countries and regions have progressed women’s rights due to the findings of the positive impacts that are associated with gender equality. The Middle East and North Africa region, which is a Muslim-majority region, demonstrates that the authority figures and societies of the region are not progressing towards gender equality and the benefits that arise from it within the pace of other regions. Without comparing the Muslim-majority region with the non-Muslim majority region, I search for an explanation of what has caused the authority and society to not progress towards gender equality as quickly. I find that the authority is mainly to blame due to its approaches of strict patriarchal interpretations of the religion. Furthermore, I find that while members of the society may push for gender equality, the patriarchal and authoritarian hold on the bureaucracies does not always allow for the rapid achievement of gender equality.

The Importance of Women’s Rights

The role and success of women in terms of economic empowerment and financial inclusion has been found to lead to economic prosperity and growth, as recognized by leading institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, Organization for Economic Cooperation and De-
development, and the World Bank. The United Nations has supported women’s rights through multiple measures such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all UN Member States in 2015.

Governments throughout the world have committed themselves to respecting and promoting women’s rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1996, declares that governments must work to ensure the economic, social, and cultural rights recognized in the covenant, including labor rights, right to health, education, and an adequate standard of living, are extended equally to men and women (UN Human Rights). Similarly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. The treaty is fully focused on women’s rights and is often described as an international bill of rights for women. It has been ratified by 189 states to date. The treaty legally obligates signatories to respect, protect and fulfill women’s rights and clearly defines discrimination against women as:

"...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (UN 1988, art. 3)

Sustainable Development Goal 5, a central commitment of the 2030 Agenda adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, calls on governments to empower women and girls and work to achieve gender equality. It recognizes that gender inequality continues to deprive women and
girls of basic rights and opportunities and pushes governments to address unfair social norms and attitudes and promote equality between men and women (UN General Assembly 2015). It also recognizes the connection between women’s rights and economic development as well as the importance of equal access to financial services, natural resources, technology, and equality in property ownership and inheritance (Vogelstein 1).

Official studies demonstrate that women’s rights are linked to national prosperity. According to a 2012 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, an increase of women, in the labor force results in faster economic growth (UN Women 2017). A study conducted by the International Monetary Fund demonstrated that greater gender equality enhances economic productivity, improves developmental outcomes, and can change policy choices to make institutions more representative (International Monetary Fund 2018). Improvements in women’s health and education can not only improve women’s well-being but are also linked to better outcomes for their children (Davidson et al. 2011).

Women’s participation in the formal economy has been linked to their rights more generally. In an analysis of variations in the status and treatment of women as shown by differences in population sex ration, Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argues that there is a strong association between the proportion of women who are gainfully employed outside the home and life expectancy ratios of women to men. Sen argues that women who earn an outside income are seen as doing “productive” work not only gain economic independence and power but they also enjoy greater legal protection and social respect (Sen 2002). Similarly, Elaheh Rostami-Povey, an expert on women in Afghanistan, Iran and the Middle East who teaches at University College London, argues that women who have access to the formal economy and the political system have more bargaining power (Povey & Rostami-Povey 2016: 2).
Progress and Barriers to Realizing Gender Equality

Conditions for women around the world have in fact improved. For instance, in some countries more girls are enrolling in school; whereas, women are working, getting elected and assuming leadership positions in others. Increasingly, public action has been taken to address violence against women and girls and legal changes are being adopted to enable women to access employment, own and inherit property and get married and divorced on the same terms as men (UN Women 2015). However, despite the fact that empowering women and girls allows for so much progress for societies as a whole, women’s rights remain controversial. In fact, out of the 189 countries that were surveyed by the World Bank’s 2018 report on women, business and the law, 90 percent of countries have at least one regulation that impedes women’s economic opportunities (The World Bank 2018). Despite increased awareness of the importance of women’s rights, women are much less likely than men to be in the paid labor force. They are much more likely to work in family businesses without any direct pay and do about two and a half times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men (UN Women 2015). In short, women are paid less for work of equal value and are less likely than men to receive a pension; globally, women’s earnings are 24% less than men’s, which translates into large income inequalities throughout their lives.

According to the United Nations Decade for Women study, as of 2014, 143 out of 195 countries have guaranteed equality between women and men in their constitutions; however, an alarming level of direct and indirect discrimination against women still exists (United Nations 2016). Women continue to be discriminated against based on law and policies, gender-based stereotypes, and social norms and practices. In Saudi Arabia women are not allowed to leave the
house without a male guardian. Other socio-religious factors affect women’s ability to work in a setting with the opposite sex or receive a fair and similar education to men. Such discriminatory treatment is justified by reference to national laws, traditions, religion and culture that are posited to be incongruent with the principles of international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), leading signatory states to adopt the convention with reservations that limit its implementation.

For instance, Article 10 in CEDAW states that countries must ensure women have equal rights to educational opportunities from primary to higher education. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have ratified Article 10; however, they did so while formally reserving the right to ensure that educational opportunities for girls and boys do not contradict Islamic principles. As discussed more fully in this paper, this has allowed unequal educational outcomes to continue, including lower literacy rates for women compared to men (See Table1) (Brotman, et al., 2008). Similarly, Article 16 of CEDAW, which focuses on marriage and family life, was only accepted with reservations since countries in the MENA region consider family to be the “basic unit of social organization and socio-economic activities.” Thus, these countries claim the right to disregard the terms of the convention in case of conflict with family codes that are justified on religious and cultural grounds (Brotman, et al., 2008).
**Table 1: Male and Female Literacy Rates in MENA countries (2018)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>FEMALE LITERACY RATE (Female/Male)</th>
<th>MALE LITERACY RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>80.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such formal guarantees of gender equality do not necessarily translate into substantive equality. As stated in a study by UN Women of the progress of women’s rights as of 2015-2016:

While numerical parity in access to education, employment or social protection is an important goal, it does not mean concrete enjoyment of rights or substantive equality. Rather than simply absorbing more girls into underfunded educational systems, schools must provide quality education and a safe learning environment for girls and boys and should also contribute to the promotion of equality through progressive curricula and well-trained teachers (UN Women 2015: 4)

Thus, even when women’s rights are formally protected by law, social institutions and cultural beliefs may impede the actual realization of gender equality.

Progress towards gender equality has been especially difficult in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). According to a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Muslim majority countries have the second-lowest percentage in women’s rights (Sabbagh 1997). According to the World Economic Forum’s 2017 Gender Global Gap report, the Middle East and North Africa region “continues to rank last globally on the overall Index, behind South Asia. On Economic Participation and Opportunity, it ranks ahead only of South Asia. On Educational Attainment, it ranks ahead of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and on Health and Survival it surpasses South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific.” (World Economic Forum 2018: 24).

In addition to remaining obstacles to achieving substantive gender equality in education and social relations, the MENA region stands out for having the lowest levels of women’s labor force participation. As indicated in Figure 1, only 22% of working-age women are in the labor force, compared to a global average of 50% for working-age women (International Labor Organization 2005). This translates into the largest gender gap in the world since 77% of working-age men in the MENA region are employed (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Global Gender Gap in Labor Force Participation Rate, 1990-2013


Interestingly, the MENA region has the lowest gender gap pay – 14% compared to a global average of 24%. Therefore, the problem in the MENA region is not so much that women are paid substantially less than men for work of equal worth (although this is true to an extent), but so few women are able to access jobs in the formal economy to begin with. Therefore, we
find that the MENA region has the largest labor force participation gap by sex and region as compared to the rest of the world (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Global Gender Pay Gap by Region, 2015-2016.


The disconnection between education and employment levels and the MENA region having the largest labor force participation gap by sex and region as compared to the rest of the world leaves us to ponder what causes the disparity. In rejecting the religious argument it is important to first analyze the religion.
Interpretations and Commitments of Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion that was slowly revealed to Mohammad, who is understood in Islamic tradition as the last Prophet of Allah. Muslims, followers of Islam, live their lives according to the Qur’an and the way that the Prophet lived his life. The Qur’an was revealed to and recited by the Prophet Mohammad. Muslims asked the Prophet about advice on how they should live their lives and be pious believers. It was after the Prophet passed away that Muslims were confronted with the question of who would lead the believers, answer questions, and guarantee the truth. Following the death of the Prophet, the caliphs (the religious ruler and chief of Muslim communities) became the leaders of Muslims according to the majority Sunni view of Islam. Whereas, the Shi’i believed that Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law and cousin should become the caliph and leader of Muslims. The Shi’i believe that there were twelve Imams after the Prophet’s death that would lead Muslims; Ali was one of the first and following him there were eleven other Imams. Therefore, Imams are dominantly important within the Shi’i sect of Islam; Imams are leaders, individuals that lead the prayers in mosques, and individuals that clarify Qur’anic verses and the teaching of the Prophet to believers.

The Qur’an is relatively difficult for the regular believer to understand on their own. (Basis: the need for stability and continuity in the Islamic community compelled the formation of religious authorities who could determine belief and practice.) Therefore, there are individuals that read, understand, and interpret the Qur’anic verses to the believers. Nabil Mouline and Ethan S. Rundell in their study, “The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia,” explain that, “Texts are never authorities in themselves.” (Mouline & Rundell 2014: 7). Mouline and Rundell further explain that the Qur’an is gathered, authenticated, and linguistically and symbolically interpreted by ulamas. Therefore, the ulama build a coherent system
of beliefs and representations in regard to the sociopolitical organization of the community. Moulin and Rundell argue that this allows religions to acquire an ideological dimension.

The interpretations and ideological dimension of Islam allowed for multiple schools of thought to form based on the religion. Islam began to be articulated in light of local customs and understandings causing an internal diversity of Islam. The *shari’a* became the legal code and *fatwas* became the system of interpretations that were based on rulings (Hughes 2016:1). The multiple Sunni Islam schools of thought have been reduced to four main schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali. Each school of thought is associated with a specific region in the world and with its own distinct interpretation of Islamic law. Some schools of thought, such as the Hanbali, may be referred to as being more conservative than others. Under Shi’ism there are three main schools of thought: Isma’ilism, Jafri, and Zaidiyyah. Table 2 demonstrates the various schools of thoughts under the various branches of Islam. Therefore, it is not plausible to refer to Islam and *shari’a* as stable entities because there are many legal and local variations of Islam produced due to different interpretations of the religion demonstrating the internal diversity of Islam. (Hughes 2016:2).
Table 2: The Branches of Islam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branches of Islam</th>
<th>Islam</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahmadiyya</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunni</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shia</td>
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<td>Khawarij</td>
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<td>Hanafi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hanbali</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maliki</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shafi'i</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Schools of law (Madh'hab)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bareli</td>
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<td>Deoband movement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Isma'ili</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jafari</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Zaidiyyah</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ibadiyya</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extinct Khawarij sects:</td>
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<td>Azaqi</td>
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<td>Haruriyya</td>
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<td>Musta'li</td>
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<td>‘Alawi</td>
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<td>Alevi</td>
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<td>Qarimi</td>
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<td>Druze*</td>
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<td>Tayyibi</td>
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<td>Akbari</td>
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<td>Usuli</td>
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<td>Shaykhi</td>
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<td>Bohras</td>
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<td>Dawoodi Bohras</td>
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<td>Jafari Bohras</td>
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<td>Sulaimani Bohras</td>
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<td>Alevi Bohras</td>
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<td>Alba' I Malak Bohras</td>
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<td>Progressive Dawoodi Bohras</td>
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<td>Orders (Tariqah)</td>
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<td>Bektashi</td>
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<td>Chishti</td>
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<td>Naqshbandi</td>
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<td>Qadiriyyah</td>
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<td>Suhrawardiyya</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tijaniyyah</td>
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<td>Mureddiya</td>
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<td>Shadhil</td>
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<td>Universal Sulism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* The Qarimi sect is now extinct
** The Druze are not always considered Muslim


The Meaning Behind Qur’anic Passages

Due to the various interpretations that are held within Muslim majority countries it is important to recall that the Qur’an was slowly revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Pervez Hoodbhoy in his article, “Islam and Pluralism in The Modern Muslim State,” explains that it is im-
important to understand that the Qur’anic passages and verses that were recited to the Prophet Muhammad, were all for a specific reason. Passages in the Qur’an have various *asbab al-nuzul* (historical circumstances for the specific revelation). Hoodbhoy refers to the Islamic scholar, Fazal-ur-Rahman who argues that any verse in the Qur’an should be examined based on the *asbab al-nuzul*. Fazal-ur-Rahman argues that historical Islam and normative Islam should be separated. He states, Muslims must recognize the “essential feature in the revelation in which is meant not only for the specific context in which it was revealed but is intended by the Creator to outflow through and beyond that given context of history” (Hoodbhoy 2011: 3). Ur-Rahman and Hoodbhoy argue that the Qur’an must be revived from the old traditions, precedents, and culture of the past (Hoodbhoy 2011: 5).

It is important to remember *asbab al-nuzul* due when seeking an understanding of passages that may seem patriarchal. For instance, verse [4:3] allows Muslim men to practice polygyny, granting them up to four wives. Today, that is argued to be a demonstration that men are superior to women; however, the *asbab al-nuzul* for the verse is due to the intention that at one point in history there will be more women than men alive. Similarly, the passage was not a form of patriarchal dominance but a passage that would grant assistance to those who have been widowed, divorced, or uncared for. The passage seeks to assist women who may not be able to support for themselves. The verse demonstrates that men who would like to get married more than once must be able to uphold for all of his wives equally. Today, we can view the verse as dominantly patriarchal as men marry young women who do not need assistance and do not ensure that they are capable of upholding each of his four wives lives equally.
THE CASES OF SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN AND TURKEY

Although some general trends can be noted for countries in the MENA region, it is important to recognize that the region is heterogeneous in terms of institutions, laws, and income and the notable differences in language and culture. While a majority of people living in the region are Arab, there are many cultural differences and linguistic differences within Arabs. The Arabic language has over eight dialects that are spread within the region. The region also includes Iran and its ethnically Persian population which speaks Farsi and Turkey, a majority Muslim population which identifies as Turkish rather than Middle Eastern. While Turkey is classified as a MENA country in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Report 2018, other organizations do not necessarily include Turkey in the MENA region (World Economic Forum 2018:16). Therefore, the pluralistic societies of the MENA region do not come as a surprise.

The focus of this paper is to understand and explain what has caused the distinctive pattern of gender inequality in Muslim-majority countries. This analysis focuses on women’s economic rights in the following three influential case studies: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey. These three countries share important cultural similarities as well as notable differences (see Table 2). All three countries have populations that are majority Muslim. Islam is often the explanation used to explain why countries have fallen behind in achieving women’s rights; however, this paper demonstrates that Islam is not the reason for persistent gender inequality in Muslim-majority countries. Experiences within Muslim societies vary considerably. Indonesia, the most populous country in the world with a Muslim majority, ranks relatively high in terms of global gender gap rankings; at #85, it is slightly behind Greece (#78) and well ahead of Japan (#110) (World
Economic Forum 2018: 11). Even within countries that rank quite low, there can be notable variation across different measures of gender inequality. As shown in Table 2, Saudi Arabia and Iran score very close to the bottom of all countries in terms of economic participation and opportunities for women as well as women’s political empowerment; however, women’s educational opportunities in these countries ranks much higher. In Turkey, indicators of women’s health and survival are quite strong. The paper aims to identify the explanatory variable for the persistent gender inequality in Muslim-majority countries.

In an analysis of variations in the status and treatment of women as shown by differences in population sex ration, Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argues that there is a strong association between the proportion of women that are gainfully employed outside the home and life expectancy ratios of women to men. Sen argues that women who earn an outside income are seen as doing “productive” work, and they gain economic independence and power but they also enjoy greater legal protection and social respect (Sen 2002). Similarly, Elaheh Rostami-Povey, an expert on women in Afghanistan, Iran and the Middle East who teaches at University College London, argues that women who have access to the formal economy and the political system have more bargaining power (Povey & Rostami-Povey 2016: 2).

Islam is an overly simplistic explanation for gender inequality in Muslim countries. Similarly, a country’s level of economic development does not offer a persuasive explanation for women’s inequality. Saudi Arabia is a much wealthier country than either Iran or Turkey; however, Saudi Arabian women are extremely limited in their ability to find economic employment outside the home and just as unlikely to hold independent assets. Some studies focus on oil-exporting countries, noting that oil rents are associated with low rates of female labor force partici-
pation (Ross 2008). While Saudi Arabia’s oil-based economy might appear to demonstrate an explanation for this, other oil-exporting countries such as Norway have very high levels of gender equality. Similarly, a World Bank study of Egypt and Indonesia, countries with similar oil reserves, diversification in exports, and potential for employing women, Egypt’s female labor force participating rate was half that of Indonesia. In this case, we have to use some other variables rather than religion or oil while explaining the gender inequality or gender gap in MENA region (Kucuk 2013: 78).

Other explanations point to political factors to explain differences in women’s equality and inequality, associating authoritarianism with restrictions on women’s rights. Authoritarianism in the MENA region has been associated with the lack of individual rights, which extends to women’s rights. However, the autocratic nature of politics in a number of countries, both within and outside of the MENA region, fails to account for variations in achieving gender equality. Indeed, while many of the countries that rank at the top of global rankings on gender equality are liberal democracies, autocratic countries such as Nicaragua and Rwanda also rank very high. While Nicaragua comes in fifth place on the World Economic Forum’s ranking of countries based on gender equality, it rates a “not free” score of 32/100 from Freedom House in its 2019 Freedom in the World study; Rwanda ranks sixth in the 2018 Global Gender Report but only scores 23/100 from Freedom House.

Instead of focusing on any one of these factors, this paper will demonstrate how a combination of cultural, economic and political factors shape women’s opportunities for higher education and paid employment, resulting in important differences in women’s rights in the case study countries. While women’s rights are limited in all three countries, the expansion of women’s education in Turkey and post-revolutionary Iran has created stronger, albeit still restricted,
women’s rights in comparison to Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia’s high levels of oil rents per capital enable the country to restrict economic opportunities for women to a much greater degree than in the other two countries.

In conclusion, I argue that the limits on women’s education, women’s economic empowerment, women’s political representation, and women’s mobility is linked to the patriarchal interpretations that have dominated the governance, culture, and society in Muslim majority countries. I argue that the patriarchal interpretations may be applied to all three case studies as well as other Muslim majority countries.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Chapter 1 explains women’s rights based on the three explanations of: cultural, political, and economic. Chapter 2 focuses on the case study of Saudi Arabia, Chapter 3 focuses on the case study of Iran, and Chapter 4 focuses on the case study of Turkey. Finally, Chapter 5 highlights women’s mobilization and empowerment in the three case studies.

**Table 3: Basic Indicators and Global Gender Gap Rankings in Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iran (millions, 2017 estimate)</th>
<th>Saudi Arabia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (Muslim)</td>
<td>99.4 (90-95% Shia and 5-10% Sunni)</td>
<td>99.9 (85-90% Sunni and 10-15% Shia)</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>83.5%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population sex ratio</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP/capita (2017 estimate)</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$55,300</td>
<td>$26,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political regime</strong></td>
<td>Theocratic republic</td>
<td>Absolute monarchy</td>
<td>Parliamentary republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom House ranking (most free = 100)</strong></td>
<td>18/100 (not free)</td>
<td>7/100 (not free)</td>
<td>31/100 (not free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global gender gap rank (2018, out of 149)</strong></td>
<td>147</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic participation</strong></td>
<td>143</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational attainment</strong></td>
<td>103</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political empowerment rank (2017)</strong></td>
<td>141</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In order to explain these differences, this paper will closely examine women’s rights and their economic, cultural, political, and educational opportunities in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. The case studies will analyze the role of religion in each country; how religion has interacted with political power, the structure of the economy and available opportunities for women’s employment, as well as government policies on women and girls’ education and literacy. In doing so, this paper will demonstrate that religion is not the reason for the lack of progression in
terms of women’s rights. Instead, the paper will demonstrate that there is a combination of economic and political factors that have shaped women’s opportunities for higher education and paid employment; resulting in important differences in women’s rights in the three countries. In addition, Saudi Arabia’s status as a rentier state enables the country to restrict economic opportunities for women to a much greater degree than in the other two countries. Iran’s post-revolutionary transformation allowed women to receive some legitimacy from the government as a form of gratitude for assisting with the revolution. In Turkey, the Kemalist regime recognized that economic and political advancements would only successfully occur with women’s advancements.
Chapter 1. Explaining Women’s Rights

Scholars have written extensively on the factors that influence women’s rights and have broadly distinguished among three different types of explanations: cultural explanations, political explanations, and structural explanations. Cultural explanations focus on values, beliefs, attitudes and norms as the main determinants of behavior; the extent of gender equality or inequality in a country is therefore posited to reflect prevailing values and customs, including the prevalence of egalitarian or traditional attitudes regarding gender roles. Political explanations focus on the impact of different political systems, including the level of democratization as well as the strength and stability of political institutions. Finally, structural explanations focus on the relationship between a country’s level of socioeconomic development and expanding educational, economic and political opportunities for women (Norris & Inglehart, 2001: 129-132). Because modernization and economic development have not necessarily produced gender equality, more specific arguments have also been advanced that examine the effect of particular economic factors – such as a high level of oil rents or access to information and communications technology - on women’s rights.

Cultural Explanations

Cultural explanations of women’s rights are particularly common in analyses of gender in Muslim-majority countries. Political scientists Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart find that egalitarian attitudes regarding women’s rights are strongly correlated with women’s political success and they conclude that “deep-rooted traditional beliefs about gender roles” constitute a key barrier to women’s empowerment (Norris & Inglehart 2001: 137). A number of scholars focus more
particularly on the role of Islam, often blaming it for women’s subordination. For example, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart point to “strict Islamic traditions” as a primary reason why a number of Muslim countries rank at the bottom of the list in terms of women’s political leadership (Norris & Inglehart 2001: 131). In a separate working paper, Norris argues that the key predictors of attitudes on gender equality are: individual Muslim identities, living in an Islamic society, and the strength of religiosity; of these, living in a Muslim society proved to be most important in determining attitudes regarding women’s rights. As Norris comments, “what appears to matter is where you live more than your type of faith or your adherence to religious practices” (Norris 2011: 10). Norris draws on the argument that culture has more of a significance than religion in determining the way that individuals live choose to live their lives. Norris concludes that religious traditions have lasting effects on attitudes about women’s proper role in society; however, she also argues that cultures can and do change. Cultural barriers to women’s equality can gradually be overcome through social modernization and through effective implementation of institutional reforms, although this requires a willingness on the part of governmental authorities to adopt such reforms.

Eastern Mediterranean University economist Nezahat Kucuk critiques empirical studies that test for a possible correlation between Islam and the subordinate status of women in Muslim countries, noting that such studies tend to treat Islam as a dummy variable, lumping together all countries whose population is 75% Muslim or higher (Kucuk 2013: 82). Kucuk argues that this fails to acknowledge significant differences between countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, both Muslim-majority countries but countries where the social regulation of religion is quite different. As discussed more fully below, Kucuk concludes that when there are other variables to consider other having a higher Muslim population has no impact (Kucuk 2013: 85).
Nonetheless, given common perceptions that Islamic principles mandate women’s subordination, it is important to distinguish between Islamic law and the cultural traditions that developed in Muslim societies. Research into Islamic tradition reveals that the practice of excluding women in the Middle East is a relatively recent phenomenon. Dating back to the beginning of the Islamic teachings, Muslim women participated in political, social, and economic life. Scholar Shakir Ahmed Al Saleh, a health researcher at King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia, argues Islam does not promote inequality between men and women; Islam states that men and women are the children of one man (Adam) and one woman (Eve); therefore, humanity shares the same lineage and rights. Al Saleh further notes that Islamic law does not prevent women from seeking employment and guarantees a woman her economic independence; furthermore, Muslim women are equal before the law, have the right to maintain their own property, should have equal access to education, and are entitled to be part of the political process (Al Saleh 2011: 124-125).

Amani Hamdan, a leading scholar whose research focuses on Muslim women’s identity and education, points to the transformation of women’s role in Saudi Arabia and argues that limitations do not stem from traditional beliefs and practices but in conservative reaction to critical social and political events in Saudi Arabia’s relatively short history as an independent nation (Hamdan 2005:46-47). Hamdan argues that historically, Muslim Arab women have participated in all aspects of life politically, socially, and economically. Therefore, the seclusion of Arab Muslim women is a recent phenomenon (Hamdan 2005: 45). Hamdan, draws on the “glass ceiling” argument made by Dorothy Smith explaining that the Saudi society, similar to that of Western societies, ensures that any training and education that a woman receives is “inferior and
Hamdan explains that not even women’s education could change the patriarchal nature of the Saudi Arabia society. Women in all fields continue to be subordinate to men. In an effort to explain how to combat gender inequality, Hamdan agrees with the argument made by Dorothy Smith, stating that Saudi women, as all women in any given society, differ in their class, race, and cultural background and for them to challenge gender inequalities they must come together and ignore their cultural and class differences (Smith 1987: 35). Hamdan also states that the Saudi society must be ready for changes and that must include the conservative religious scholars and those who uphold old traditions. Without the agreement of conservative religious scholars and old traditions, women’s rights will always be in conflict between modernity and tradition.

Mahmood Monshipouri, professor of international relations at San Francisco State University, highlights the fact that the Qur’an and the sunnah (teachings and traditions that follow from the sayings and conduct of the prophet, as codified in hadith texts) improved women’s role and status compared to the period prior to Islam (Monshipouri 1998: 299). The Shari’a, which is the Islamic law, based on the teachings of the Qur’an and Prophet, “proscribed female infanticide, terminated women’s status as chattel” and went further to “mandate that the wife directly receive the dower, enjoined that a woman retain control and use her property and maiden name after marriage, guaranteed financial maintenance by her husband, granted her the right to privacy, and prevented a woman’s eviction from the house after divorce” (Monshipouri 1998: 300).
Monshipouri explains that other Islamic scholars do not agree that the Qur’an supports equality of the sexes, citing passages from the Qur’an that suggest that men should have superiority over women. He also notes that “in matters relating to divorce, inheritance, litigation, and criminal defense, Islam stresses differentiation, with men having a more favorable status than women (Monshipouri 1998: 301). Nonetheless, Monshipouri indicates that civil law has almost entirely replaced Islamic law in recognition of the fact that “the socio-economic and cultural contexts within which those Qur'anic verses were first presented have substantially changed, [so that] the legal grounds on which such laws were based are no longer valid” (Monshipouri 1998: 301). Monshipouri, concludes that the suppression of women is due to the patriarchal and societal norms that govern many Muslim communities, which in turn reflect prevailing social, economic, and political structures.

An example of a possible contradictory Qur’anic passages is verse [4:34] in the Qur’an. The Qur’anic verse [4:34] translated into English states, “concerning those women from whom you fear nushuz (disobedience / rebellion), admonish them, and / or abandon them in bed, and / or wa-dribuhunna (hit them)” (Chaudhry 2013: 2). This verse may be used by some Islamic scholars to argue that the male guardian and husband has greater control of Muslim women. Ayesha Chaudhry, in her study, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law and the Muslim Discourse on Gender*, explains that the verse [4:34] is contradictory because it may be interpreted in a harsh way that would deter the Muslim woman from the rights that Islam grants her. Chaudhry like Monshipouri argues that “Islam has given women all sorts of rights they did not have before Islam, and which the Western world only recently gave to women, such as the right to own property, to be a witness, or to inherit” (Chaudhry 2013: 3). Therefore, this verse should not be interpreted to cause the subordination of women because Islam grants
women rights; it is instead the historical patriarchy of the Islamic scholars that have caused the interpretations to become subordinate.

It should be pointed out that the indigenous socio-economic and political conditions of each Muslim community have affected the ways in which the Shari'a has been monitored. The status of women's rights in Islamic societies, as elsewhere, is a function of the realities of these societies. It appears that gender equality, regardless of its status according to the Qur'an, has been and continues to be manipulated in vague and discretionary ways within the exclusive power and jurisdiction of the State (Monshipouri 1998: 302).

In a similar argument regarding cultural traditions and patriarchy, Catherine Polisi argues that the subordination of women in Hindu and Islamic culture does not reflect the original interpretations of Hindu or Islamic religious texts but subsequent male interpretations (Polisi 2004:41). Polisi states, “Hindu and Islamic societies claim that their religions dictate that women should be subordinated to men, and they attempt to justify the aforementioned human rights violations on these ground…Yet, with closer examination of the original words written in the central Hindu and Islamic scriptures, it is clear that women were not intended to be subjugated to men” (Polisi 2004: 42). Polisi’s argument about human rights violations clearly explains that religion does not push for the subordination of women nor does it strip them of their human rights. Instead, cultural traditions and interpretations have restricted women from rights that are provided to them by the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Therefore, we can conclude that religious tradition in general, and Islam in particular, are projects of interpretation. When Islamic tradition is rendered into patriarchal religious interpretations, it can look as if the patriarchal restrictions of women are Islamic. Islamic tradition, however, claims within it the existential equality of human beings that can also be brought to support
women’s equality. The fundamentally interpretative nature of religious tradition means that Islamic tradition cannot be collapsed into a single patriarchal interpretation, but remains open to multiple interpretations, including those that support women’s humanity and full social, political, economic, and cultural participation (Wadud 2006).

Although cultural explanations are not convincing if they reduce culture to overly broad categories such as “Islam” and “the West,” cultural analyses are helpful when they are used to examine the influence of different narratives about particular groups (such as women) or behaviors (such as veiling). For example, John Bowen (2007) analyzes the power of the dominant French Republican narrative to frame the debate over Islamic headscarves, showing how the scarves came to stand for fears over the threat of communalism, international “Islamism,” and sexism to French values (Bowen 2007: 4-5). Public schools became the critical ground for defending French values, as schools represented a critical tool for inculcating values and defending the dominant narrative. As with Bowen’s analysis, this paper will focus on societal and political narratives about Islam and women’s rights in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, especially as they influence educational policy.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, it is important to examine the peculiarities of Saudi “religious nationalism” and “the power of the Saudi state to shape both the ideologies pertaining to the position of women in Saudi society and the material conditions of their existence.” (Al-Rasheed 2013). Religious and ideological appeals to piety and public propriety go hand in hand with laws on marriage and employment and a segregated educational system. Although this system controls Saudi women and limits their public role, Madawi Al-Rasheed notes that elite women help support it because of the special privileges that they enjoy (Al-Rasheed 2013).
Political Explanations

Comparative studies on women’s rights have also forwarded political explanations, especially focusing on the connection between autocratic regimes and gender inequality. For example, Steven Fish (2002) analyzed the impact of Islam on literacy, sex ratio, women’s political participation and gender equality more generally, finding that the inferior status of women in Muslim-majority countries was more clearly associated with the lack of democracy than with Islam. According to Fish, “the regression coefficient of the Islam variable diminishes in each regression when the measures for female status are included … Treatment and station of women may be conditioned by regime type, with more democratic regimes providing the basis for better treatment of and higher status for women and girls” (Fish 2002: 29). Fish also considers the possibility that the direction of causation may well run in the opposite direction, such that women’s inequality reinforces authoritarian rule:

“Several leading writers have argued that the repressiveness and unquestioned dominance of the father in the family and of the male in relations between men and women replicate themselves in broader society, creating a culture of domination, intolerance, and dependency in social and political life … Individuals who are more accustomed to rigidly hierarchical relations in their personal lives may be less prone to resist such patterns of authority in politics. The generalization applies to the wielders of authority as much as to the objects. One of Martin Luther King’s favorite sayings was that in order to hold a man down, one needed to stay down there with him. One might reformulate the adage as, in order to hold women down, a man needed to stay down there with them—meaning, of course, that oppression as a habit of life blocks the oppressor’s own advancement and freedom.” (Fish 2002: 30).

More recent gender scholarship points to a negative relationship between women’s rights and democratization. Denise Walsh (2012) argues that the quality of democracy, including open and inclusive debate conditions, are advancing equality for women and other marginalized groups. She argues women’s rights will be better protected when women have access, voice, and
capacity for contestation in the leading institutions in the public sphere, thus enabling them to pressure political elites into advancing gender equality measures (Walsh 2012: 1344).

In Saudi Arabia, “the ban on independent associations, mobilization, and weak organizational potential, still observed today, prevented women from developing into a pressure group to push for greater equality and an end to exclusion at a time [in the 1970s] when Saudi Arabia was just beginning to enjoy the benefits of sudden wealth” (Al Rasheed 2013: 2). Although women in Saudi Arabia started to mobilize in protest against their mobilization more recently, the lack of democracy and political freedom helps explain continued limits on women’s rights. In its survey of Freedom in the World 2019, Freedom House notes that Saudi Arabia’s absolute monarchy restricts almost all political rights and civil liberties. No national officials are elected, as the king is chosen by his predecessor from among male descendants of the country’s founder and rules for life. The cabinet, which is appointed by the king, passes legislation that becomes law once ratified by royal decree. Political parties are forbidden and dissent is effectively criminalized (Freedom House 2019).

Unlike Saudi Arabia, where the house of ibn Saud enjoys hegemonic control, Iran’s Islamic Republic has experienced struggles between theologians and reformers, between those who want to preserve the power of conservative religious elites and others who advocate for a more democratic and modern Islam. Debates over women’s issues and women’s rights have been part of this struggle, so that even though conservative and patriarchal traditions within Islam have been used to justify the unequal treatment of Iranian women, a number of reformists have challenged conservative interpretations of Islam and engaged in struggle for gender equality (Povey & Rostami-Povey 2016: 3-6). Moreover, even conservative Islamists saw the utility in encouraging Islamist women’s political activism to strengthen opposition to the Shah and build
support for an Islamist regime (Kian 1998: 76-77). In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini endorsed women’s political rights as a religious duty as activism increased. Khomeini stated, “Women have the right to intervene in politics. It is their duty…Islam is a political religion. In Islam, everything, even prayer, is political” (Kian 1998: 76-77). Therefore, there was a significant political change in terms of women’s rights. The transition to encourage Islamist women’s activism in the public sphere was a political strategy to receive the allegiance from the activists to the Islamic regime (Kian 1998: 77).

Similarly, in Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Mustapha Kemal Ataturk introduced a new role for the Turkish woman. The Kemalist regime promoted gender equality and the emancipation of women; however, the introduction of women’s rights but only to the same degree as the women in the West, who were still viewed to be the “second sex” (Arat 2008). Zehra Arat argues that the Kemalist push for women’s education and enhancement of employment abilities was justified as a means to make them into better housewives and mothers, thereby strengthening their contribution to the Republican. Therefore, the Kemalist regime demonstrates a political will for the focus of increasing women’s education and contribution to the overall patriarchal system of Turkey (Arat 2008).

**Economic Explanations**

The World Development Indicators of 2012 reports that the percentage of women in education has increased in the Middle East and North Africa region. The report indicates that women in the region are increasingly receiving an education and delaying marriage (McLoughlin 2013: 8). However, there is a lack of transmission between education and women’s participation in
economic life. The World Bank refers to this delay in transmission as the MENA paradox (McLoughlin 2013: 8). Jordan is a country to which the MENA paradox applies, women’s educational attainment was steadily increasing in Jordan but the level of women in the economy remained the same. It was concluded that the conservative social and cultural norms about gender roles in society (such as the norm for women to leave the economic sector post marriage) and economic and policy-related factors, reduce the prospects for female employment in Jordan (McLoughlin 2013: 9). The type of employment that is available in a country may also reduce the level of women in the economic sector. For example, in Jordan, women that participate in the economic sector will mostly be found in education, health, or public administration roles due to the cultural perceptions of “women’s careers (McLoughlin 2013: 11).

In a similar argument, Michael Ross, professor of political science at the University of California Los Angeles, argues that oil is the reason for the underrepresentation of women in the Middle East. In his article titled, “Oil, Islam, and Women,” Ross states that oil and minerals explain the lack of representation for women in countries in the Middle East, and even in countries such as Chile, Nigeria, and Russia. He argues that oil production affects gender relations because it “reduces the number of women in the labor force, which in turn reduces their political influence. As a result, oil-producing states are left with atypically strong patriarchal norms, laws, and political institutions” (Ross 2008: 107). Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship between oil production and the decrease in women’s political influence.
Figure 1.1: Oil Production and the Decrease in Women’s Political Influence


Ross explains that the manual jobs in the mining, extraction, refining and production of mineral resources are heavily male dominated, in contrast to service-sector economies. The lack of women joining the nonagricultural labor force in these countries leads to many consequences such as: higher fertility rates, less education for girls, and less female influence within the society and family (Ross 2008: 117). There are also political consequences as when women do not work outside the home, they are unable to exchange political information, less likely to mobilize politically, and less willing to try and achieve an expansion of rights. Women’s low rate of labor force participation and low level of engagement in formal and informal networks reduces women’s representation in government and limits government’s incentive to take women’s interests into account. (Ross 2008: 118).
However, when women are introduced into the labor force their participation allows them to contribute to household income resulting in greater investment in women’s health and education. Women’s participation also incentivizes women to delay parenthood which ultimately reduces the fertility rates. There seems to be a direct correlation between women entering the workforce and women becoming politically active and aware. On the individual level, employment outside the home allows women to search for their own political views and identities, while on the social level, women’s participation in the labor force allows them to share information and increases the likelihood that they will form political ties. In addition, women’s labor force participation increases their economic importance, which forces the government to take their interests more seriously (Ross 2008: 118).

While scholars such as Ross have argued that petroleum is to blame for the lack of gender equality in oil-rich countries, other scholars such as Pippa Norris point out that non-Islamic oil-exporting states display much more egalitarian gender attitudes and liberal sexual mores than Islamic oil-exporting states (Norris 2011: 12).

Other scholars focus on female employment as a critical determinant of women’s rights more broadly. In an analysis of variations in the status and treatment of women as shown by differences in population sex ratio, Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argues that there is a strong association between the proportion of women who are gainfully employed in work outside the home and life expectancy ratios of women to men. Sen argues that women who earn an outside income and are seen to be doing “productive” work not only gain economic independence and power but they also enjoy greater legal protection and social respect (Sen 2002). Similarly, Elaheh Rostami-Povey, an expert on women in Afghanistan, Iran and the Middle East who
Tailassane teaches at University College London, argues that women who have access to the formal economy and the political system have more bargaining power (Povey & Rostami-Povey 2016: 2).

It is important to notice that there may not always be a set reason for the lack of women’s economic advancement; Safaa Fouad Rajkhan from the University of Washington Bothell, studies the Status, Rights and Limitations of women in Saudi Arabia. In an attempt to understand the increasing levels of women’s unemployment rate, Rajkhan argues that the traditional role that women have in society, the lack of mobility due to the ban on driving, the lack of knowledge in regard to the rights that women have, and the introduction of unemployment benefits have caused the economics representation of women to remain low (Rajkhan 2014: 28).

As stated earlier, Muslim majority countries have pluralistic societies and Islam has been challenged since the death of the Prophet Muhammad. There have been various interpretations, cultural norms, traditions, and government agencies that have constructed the meaning of Islam in various ways. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that there is no one overall Islamic teaching that all Muslims abide too. Furthermore, due to the challenges and interpretations found within each country it is necessary to emphasize that each country has developed their own meaning to gender norms. It is important to study the history of the countries within the MENA region and the challenges that they have undergone to completely understand the reason why there remains to be gender inequality in Muslim majority countries. The “subordination” view that the non-Muslim majority countries may have of women in Muslim majority countries of women is not solely due to the religion of Islam but due to patriarchal interpretations of the Qur’an, traditional norms emphasized by patriarchal standards, economic limits, educational limits, and limitations on mobility. I argue that the patriarchal interpretations argument can be applied to each Muslim majority country in explaining gender inequality. Furthermore, I believe it
is necessary to emphasize that I am solely studying the gender inequality in the case studies and the role of religion and not comparing the Muslim majority countries with non-Muslim majority countries.
Chapter 2. Saudi Arabia

Representations of women in Saudi Arabia conjure up contradictory images: “they are either excluded, heavily veiled victims of their own religion and society, or wealthy, glamorous, cosmopolitan entrepreneurs benefiting from inherited wealth and state education” (Al-Rasheed 2013: 2). Overall, Saudi Arabia appears to be an extreme case of gender inequality, as the country has consistently ranked below most other countries in the world in terms of gender equality. In 2006, Saudi Arabia was ranked 114th out of 115 countries in its Global Gender Gap score, coming in dead last in terms of economic participation and opportunity as well as political empowerment. In 2017, Saudi Arabia climbed several spots and improved most of its scores; however, it still ranked 141st out of 149 countries in the world (see Table 2.1). Whereas 81.6% of working-age Saudi men are formally employed, only 23.4% of Saudi women are. This translates into marked differences in earned income for men and women: $81,279 and $17,664 respectively. Men make up over 94% of all legislators, senior officials and managers and over 76% of professional and technical workers. (World Economic Forum 2018: 237). Women who do have paid employment may not work in a setting with the opposite sex.

Laws and social customs have made Saudi Arabia one of the most gender-segregated nations in the world. Gorney Women are not to wear unreligious clothing or make-up and they are prohibited from wearing clothing other than an abaya (long black dress and head covering) outside of the home. Saudi Arabia requires every adult female to live under strict supervision of a legally recognized male guardian, who may be her father, husband, or a close family member and Saudi women are not allowed to leave the house without a male guardian (Gorney 2016). A
female adult may not be granted a passport, legal documents, or bank accounts without the approval of a legal male guardian and until recently, Saudi law prohibited women from driving, a law that reinforced the prohibition against women leaving the home unattended. On December 14 of 2014, two women were arrested and brought in front of a terror court in Saudi Arabia, accused of conspiring with foreign governments for defying the ban on women driving (Ziv 2014). This is represented as a terror because the patriarchy fears women’s mobilization because it is a change to the patriarchal society that they have built. Although the ban was lifted in June 2018, several activists who had campaigned for women’s right to drive remain in custody, presumably because the leadership seeks to discourage independent activism and does not want civil society to share credit for any reforms (Freedom House 2019).

Although political rights are curtailed for all Saudi citizens, women face additional obstacles to participation and are mostly excluded from leadership positions in government. Members of Saudi Arabia’s national legislative body, the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council), are appointed by the king and serve in an advisory capacity only; some 30 women now serve on the 150-member council. In 2015, women were allowed to vote and run as candidates for the first time for municipal advisory councils; women secured about 1 percent of the seats that were up for election. A woman was appointed in February 2018 as deputy minister of labor and social development to promote women’s employment opportunities (Freedom House 2019).
Table 2.1 Gender Gap Indicators, Saudi Arabia (2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Rank</td>
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<td>141 (out of 149)</td>
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<td>Educational Attainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global ranking</td>
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<td>93 (out of 149)</td>
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<td>Score</td>
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<td>0.949</td>
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<td>Literacy (female/male)</td>
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<td>Primary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
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<td>Tertiary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
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<td>Health and Survival</td>
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<td>Score</td>
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<td>Sex ratio at birth (female/male)</td>
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<td>Healthy life expectancy (female/male)</td>
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<td>Economic Participation and Opportunity</td>
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<td>Wage equality for similar work (female/male)</td>
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<td>Estimated earned income, PPP, $US (female/male)</td>
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<td>Legislators, senior official and managers (female/male)</td>
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<td>Professional and technical workers (female/male)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global ranking</td>
<td>115 (out of 115)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Score</td>
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<td>Women in parliament (female/male)</td>
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<td>Women in ministerial positions (female/male)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years with female head of state (out of 50)</td>
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Religious Bureaucracy of Saudi Arabia

As discussed in the religion section of this paper, there are distinct schools of thought in Islam that have been shaped by the ulama in the region. Saudi Arabia’s socioreligious space is dominated by the Hanbali-Wahhabi juridico-theological school of thought. The Hanbali is an orthodox school of Islam, followers believe that they are the “heirs, guardians, and transmitters of orthodoxy and orthopraxy” the Hanbali ulama view themselves to be the guardians of the “True Religion” (Mouline 2014: 8). In 1744, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud, formed and consolidated a close alliance between the political and religious authorities which eventually led to the rise of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Therefore, the political authorities offered the ulama the necessary ability to promote Hanbali-Wahhabi ideologies and the ulama mobilized symbolic and ideological resources to assist the political authorities in the ruling family. The relationship between the political authorities and the ulama, as well as the fact that the kingdom contained two of Islam’s most holy sites, built the legitimacy, prestige, and credit that the ruling family and ulama sought. As Mouline and Rundell argue, the Hanbali ulama viewed politics as a tool to maintain their religious projects and juridico-religious duties.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia, unlike the majority of Arab-Islamic nation-states was never colonized, this allowed Islamic superiority to remain and be untouched by non-Islamic influences. Therefore, the ulama who sought themselves as guardians of the religious tradition were never questioned based on other religious or cultural influences in Saudi Arabia (Mouline 2014: 12). Finally, an important aspect of the Saudi religious bureaucracy is it has always been able to remain a patrimonial kingdom. As argued by Max Weber, the patrimonial history allowed for
nepotism, clannishness, and clientelism to spread in all levels of the Saudi state (Mouline 2014:12).

Today, Saudi Arabia is still ruled as an absolute monarchy; the king is responsible for the legislative, executive, and judicial functions and resides over the Council of Ministers known as the Majlis al-Wuzara. The Qur’an remains the holy book and the basis of the shari’ā, which serves as the constitution. The Al-Sauds have maintained the close association with the ulama, which provide the ruling family with the religious legitimacy they need. In exchange, the ulama maintain a seat in discussion about decisions made by the senior princes of the Al Saud clan. The Majlis advises the king on foreign and domestic policy, defense, finance, health, and education but does not acquire any legislative powers. Legislation in Saudi Arabia is therefore, formed by the royal family and must follow the guidelines of the Qur’an, Hadith, and Sunnah, as well as the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Political parties, labor unions, professional associations, and non-Islamic religious ceremonies remain forbidden in the Kingdom (Congressional Quarterly 2000: 368).

The Hanabali-Wahhabi Effects

The most well-known argument for Saudi women’s lack of economic and political rights focuses on the fact that the Saudi ruling elite favors a highly patriarchal and literalist interpretation of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism. In discussing religion in Saudi Arabia, it is important to highlight that Saudi Arabia has endorsed Wahhabi interpretations. Wahhabism is an interpretation of Islamic tradition that has taken root in Saudi Arabia due to its alignment with the Saudi ruling family. Wahhabism is relatively radical in its interpretations of the Islamic tradition. Safaa
Fouad Rajkhan argues that the sole religious interpretation of the Quran by Wahhabi clerics, or conservative *ulama*, has made men the primary authoritative figures and women subordinate (Rajkhan 15). Rajkhan argues that this constellation of religious authority silences women’s voices in the name of Islam, although she also notes that Saudi women have been progressively challenging the male legitimacy by studying Islamic ideology to argue for their granted rights in Islam (Rajkhan 15). Nonetheless, restrictive translations remain a problem for women in Saudi Arabia.

The founder of the Saudi state, Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud, consolidated control over the fragmented, diverse tribes on the peninsula over the first several decades of the twentieth century through military campaigns as well as an appeal to religious nationalism, which was used to construct a homogeneous nation. The latter occurred under the banner of Wahhabism, which laid the foundation for stability and obedience to monarchical rule. As Madawi Al-Rasheed explains:

> the invented ‘Saudi’ nation articulated an identity by claiming to apply the *sharia* (Islamic law) in all aspects of life and submitting to a universal Islamic ethos. Wahhabiyya under state patronage was turned into a quasi-nationalist project, the purpose of which was to provide a universal discourse about unity, authenticity, and tradition, deriving its legitimacy from divine sources rather than man-made modern constructions of national identity (Al-Rasheed 2013: 14-15)

Women were singled out as fundamental pillars of this imagined religious community, as Wahhabi religious leaders identified the segregation and exclusion of Saudi women as necessary for the ultimate restoration of a pious religious community:

> Women become boundary markers that visibly and structurally distinguish this pious nation from other ungodly polities. Hence, the obsession with their bodies, appearance, segregation, purity, and sexuality tend to reflect the process whereby women have become signals marking the boundaries of the nation (Al-Rasheed 2013: 17-18).
As opposed to ahistorical arguments that Islam is responsible for the marginal status of women in Saudi Arabia, Al-Rasheed focuses on the cultural and social constructions of gender roles that served to create a national identity and reinforce state control (2013: 15-16).

As the role and status of women are seen to be intimately connected to ideas about piety, the state closely regulates policies related to women and girls. Although the state regulates the role and status of women, it does not regulate the laws that are in place to support women’s mobility. For instance, women in Saudi Arabia now have the right to seek employment without the consent of their male guardian; however, due to the fear of constraining the cultural norms employers still emphasize the approval of male guardians when employing women. Furthermore, most women have a lack of understanding for what rights they are granted, in both the Qur’an and the Saudi laws, that they cannot argue for their right. When the Saudi state introduced girls’ education, “it pledged that this was not meant to change their situation but to confirm their domesticity under the guidance of religious scholars. Girls were therefore introduced to an ideological education co-opted by the state and religious ideologues in order to return women to the tradition of the sahابiat, the early female companions of the Prophet, rather than to challenge their subordination and seek modern solutions to their exclusion” (Al-Rasheed 2013: 17).

A direct quote from the Prophet Mohammed, who is the most respected by Muslims everywhere, presents the importance of education for Muslims of both genders. The Prophet is quoted as stating, “The search of knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female” and “every male and female should seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” (Al Saleh).

Madawi Al-Rasheed analyzes women’s role in Saudi Arabia by examining the Saudi women and their roles in education, consumption, literature, demonstrations, and religious interpretations (DeLong-Bas 651). She focuses on the experiences of Saudi women and the interplay
between gender, religion, tradition, and the state (DeLong-Bas 651). She states that Saudi women are not only impacted by religion but also through capitalism, the state as a patron and patriarch and through social media. Al-Rasheed points to the peculiarities of Saudi “religious nationalism” and “the power of the Saudi state to shape both the ideologies pertaining to the position of women in Saudi society and the material conditions of their existence.”

“The instruments for this process of social and ideological engineering are, inter alia, notions of piety and public propriety, laws around marriage and employment, provision of education, and labor regulatory regimes that make housework a job best suited to migrant laborers. It is the genius of the book that it also provides a persuasive analysis of why so many Saudi women are themselves invested in the maintenance of the rigid system of control in which the women are embedded. She further argues that what ultimately counts—far beyond ideological attachments of the women themselves—is their class location where “wealthy Westernized elite women enjoy far more freedoms than young marginalized divorcees and mothers” (37).

As indicated in Table 2.1, 91.4 percent of Saudi women are literate compared to male literacy rate, which is 96.5 percent. Enrollment in primary education is virtually identical, with 99.6 percent of Saudi girls and 99.8 percent of Saudi boys enrolled in elementary school. As Saudi school children get older, fewer stay in school. 83.5 percent of girls enroll in secondary education as opposed to 86.4 percent of boys, while 66.7 percent of girls and 66.5 percent of boys enroll in tertiary education. Therefore, it is important to understand that once educational reforms in the 1950s allowed girls to go to school, Saudi women had the opportunity to become literate. Nonetheless, under the influence of Wahhabi religious leaders, women’s education was oriented toward becoming good mothers, wives and bearers of “the obedient, homogeneous, and pious nation” (Al-Rasheed 2013: 20).
Women in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to be educated until 1956. Women’s education was completely different from that of men. Women’s education under the shari’a law was presented to prepare women to become good wives, to become nurturers, yet the religious leaders found it culturally unacceptable for women to attend schools or colleges. Girls education was at home to prevent their exposure to society. The only school that girls were allowed to attend were Kutab, religious schools. Therefore, the Saudi government was able to avoid international demands for equal education for girls as well as the words of the Qur’an that allow women and men an equal education system. It was not until the 1950s when a group of educated middle-class men petitioned for the establishment of schools for girls that the government opened the first government-funded school for women in 1960 (Alsuwaida 2016: 112).

The first university for women was established in 1979, Riyadh’s King Saud University. The university offered majors in medicine, nursing, dentistry, education and public administration. It was segregated from the male campus and offered less diverse majors and disciplines than that of the male. The opening of a female university was highly contradictory for politics and specifically the ulama. They feared that the opening of a university contradicted the Wahhabi ideology of power (Alyami 2016: 869). The philosophy of the policies and practices of Saudi Arabia are developed from the Islamic values and principles of the Wahhabi ideology, a specific interpretative approach to the shari’a law (Alyami 2016: 870). The ulama’s therefore, held a strong stance against the education of women and in general wished to prevent it.

Nouf Alsuwaida discusses the historical, political, ideological, and governmental policies of women’s education in Saudi Arabia. When discussing the education of women in Saudi Arabia, Alsuwaida explains that women in Saudi Arabia are unable to pick any university level
major they wish. In particular, women are unable to enter fields of study such as that of engineering or architecture. Alsuwaida drew on a political argument that claims leaders of countries should have the confidence to eliminate the idea that women could never work as architects or engineers. Alsuwaida states that the Saudi government does not clearly recognize the benefits that will come with the education system being gender neutral. In studying the enrollment of women’s education in Saudi Arabia, Alsuwaida discusses the Feminist theory.

In Saudi Arabia, girls’ education is overseen by the Department of Religious Guidance, whereas boys’ education is overseen by the Ministry of Education. The regulation of girls’ education by the Department of Religious Guidance reflects what the government and religious authorities see as the purpose of female education, which is to make women better housewives and mothers and to prepare them for socially acceptable jobs such as teaching and nursing. The General Presidency for Girls’ Education is heavily influenced by religious conservative scholars. The official budget for girls’ educations receive is much smaller than that for boys’ education, and girls’ schools are old and unsafe buildings (Hamdan).

Therefore, in finding that Saudi women are able to receive an education we must analyze if the educational system is equitable. In studying the educational system of Saudi Arabia, it is obvious that there is a separation between the education of men and women. Therefore, we need to analyze if the educational system causes inequality. Schools for girls are overseen by the Department of Religious Guidance whereas schools for boys are overseen by the Ministry of Education. Female education is administered by the Department of Religious Guidance in order to ensure that education is focused on making women better housewives and mothers and preparing them for socially acceptable jobs such as teaching and nursing. The General Presidency for Girls’ Education is heavily influenced by religious conservative scholars. As further evidence
that girls’ education receives lower priority, their budget is much smaller than boys’ educational budgets and girls’ schools are often in old and unsafe buildings (Hamdan).

An example case that shows the inhumane approach to girls’ education happened in March 2002, when a girl’s elementary school was caught on fire resulting in the death of fifteen young girls. Police and firemen were restricted from entering the school to help the girls and teachers because of the possibility that they might not have their hijab on. The March 2002 case, the lower budget granted to girls, the unsafe schools all resulted in a public outcry against the General Presidency for Girls’ Education. However, nothing was achieved because the ulama, conservative religious scholars revolted back stating that they will only allow women’s education if it was maintained under their guidance. Once again, as presented in our Islamic subtopic, the conservative religious scholars in Saudi Arabia are maintaining guidance over women’s rights as they wish.

Furthermore, university level academic concentrations in Saudi Arabia are not gender equal as women are unable to choose specific majors such as engineering or law. Hamdan argues that Saudi women are continually facing limitations and restrictions at both the educational and professional level. Scholars such Alsuwaida will draw on the political argument that leaders should have the confidence to allow women to work in all fields such as, architecture and engineering (Mills 2009). The first public defense for gender equal education systems occurred in May of 2014; the ulama were faced with the Prime Minister of Education, Prince Khalid Bin Faisal, who planned to prohibit the ulama from holding any more significant position in the education sector (Alyami 2016; 870).
Prince Khalid delivered a speech to the media claiming that the leaders have received too much rights into the practices and how Saudi Arabia is run. The extreme leaders, he claims, have killed an approach of moderation within Saudi Arabia. The prince explains that the extreme leaders are the ulama, the followers of the Wahhabi ideology. The prince stated, “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia exists between two severe currents; the power of extremism ideology and the atheistic current. These have flanked the Arab and Islamic region as a whole. There are those who disbelieve the society and those who try to abandon Islam; no doubt these affect us in the Kingdom. This conflict found a vacuum in the Kingdom, because we are all in the arena; we left the arena to them. In schools too, the arena has been left to them.... Islam does not reject urbanization, modernization, systems development, development in the curriculum, development in everyday life, nor any development in construction, urban planning and the reconstruction of all kinds of life. We must build our civilization and our trendy gains on our principles and Islamic rules... to build the future of this country and build the personal youth of this country based on Islamic principles and values, taking advantage of all the achievements of the modern era; this is what we are seeking now in the Ministry of Education” (Alyami 2016; 871).

In an attempt to explain how to mobilize women in Saudi Arabia, Dorothy Smith in, *The Everyday World as Problematic*, discusses the need for the Saudi society women to learn to relate and use each other for knowledge and mobilization in a pluralistic society. Smith explains that Saudi women, just like women in all societies, differ in their class, race, and cultural background and they need to overlook their cultural and class differences in order to unite and mobilize each other (Smith 1987: 35). Smith suggests that the patriarchal interpretations provide men with the ability to exclude women’s voice. She argues that religious ideology is becoming a tool for the Saudi women who are studying Islamic ideology and applying it to women’s rights. Saudi
women are learning the interpretations that allow them to challenge the patriarchal interpretations.

Economic Factors: Oil and Gender Inequality

Economic development remains a high priority of any country. Inclusion of all adults in the employment sector of a country is a high priority of many countries to ensure that the country is able to progress. Saudi Arabia is financially strong, possessing eighteen percent of the world’s petroleum reserves. The oil production in the country has allowed the country to remain one of the wealthiest countries in the world with a GDP of roughly $18 trillion and GDP per capita of $52,549 (World Economic Forum). Article 22 of the Basic Laws of Saudi Arabia state that, “Economic and social development shall be achieved in accordance with a systematic and fair plan” (Rajkhan). While the law states that economic development is to be a fair plan for all, Saudi women have continued to be denied equal economic opportunity.

Saudi Arabia has the lowest female employment rates in the Middle East. Cultural traditions and religious interpretations are a large reason for why women continue to be absent from the workforce. Saudi Arabians believe that a woman who is unemployed is modest and honorable to her family. A woman that has a job is seen as a stigma against the country and goes against their logic that the breadwinner should be a responsibility of men. Article 28 of the Basic Law of governance states, “The state shall provide job opportunities to all able-bodied people and shall enact laws to protect both the employee and the employer” (Rajkhan). This direct quote once again states the any individual has the right to work in Saudi Arabia. However, after examining
Saudi Arabia closely we notice that out of the approximate 8.4 million women in Saudi Arabia who are of working age, only about twenty percent of them are actually employed (Rajkhan). Saudi Arabia has been introduced to new ideas that have influenced change in the society.

The oil-generation in the 1970s is argued to have introduced large changes, for the opening of education for both genders (Hamdan). The economic surplus that came with the oil production allowed Saudis to study abroad in western countries, influencing changes in lifestyles and introducing new ways of living. In the 1970s, with the oil discoveries in Saudi Arabia, the Arabian American Oil Company was established in Dhahran. American presence in Saudi Arabia began to grow as workers moved with their families into Saudi Arabia to work for the company (Hamdan). American women soon began to drive vehicles, shopped without a male guardian, and walked unveiled in the country; this influenced Saudi women to begin to ask for more rights that were similar to those that American women had.

The Saudi government considering women’s mobility until the Mecca uprising that occurred in 1979. The Mecca uprising happened on a regular day, during the prayer call. It lasted for two weeks and hundreds of thousands of people were held hostage by whom a group that would later become Al-Qaeda (Npr). This caused the country to become even stricter in regards to preserving the country’s religious and social traditions, making it harder for women’s rights to advance. The Gulf War of 1990 introduced American presence in the capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. Saudi women were introduced to the presence of American women driving not only regular vehicles but military vehicles, this became a picture of mobilization for Saudi women. Kuwaiti women who fled from the war were also granted rights and were seen as freely driving vehicles by Saudi women (Hamdan).
Religious Nationalism and the Influence of Wahhabism on Education and Gender Roles

Saudi Arabia is known as one of the most gender-segregated nations. Men and women who are not related by blood or marriage are expected to remain separate at all times, including at events, gatherings, and employments (The Changing Face). The cultural structure of Saudi Arabia prohibits women from wearing clothing other than an abayah (long black dress and head-covering) outside of the home. Saudi Arabia is also known as the only culture in the world that requires every adult female to live under strict supervision of a legally recognized male guardian, who may be her father, husband, or a close family member (Changing Face of Saudi). Saudi law states that women are prohibited from driving, a law that reinforces the prohibition of women leaving the home unattended. A female adult may not be granted a passport, legal documents, or bank accounts without the approval of a legal male guardian. Saudi Arabia justifies the prohibition of women from driving and being independent by claiming that these prohibitions are dictated by Islamic principles. However, as stated by scholars such as Hamdan, these rules are not derived from the Islamic textual tradition nor are they supported by it.

Research into the Qur’an demonstrates that the Islamic religion grants women the same rights as males such as the right to keep her last name when she is married. The religion guarantees women their economic independence. Muslim women, single or married, have the right to maintain their own individual property without the interference of anyone, including father, husband, or brother (Alsaleh). Islam also allows women the full right to choose her spouse and to fully approve and accept the marriage contract before it is finalized. Islamic law fully states that both men and women are equal before the law and will receive the same punishment for wrongdoing (Alsaleh). Scholars who have studied the Qur’an, such as Farid Younos, state that the
Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) made it clear that an education is important for all humans by stating “Read, Read, Read.” The prophet Mohammed (pbuh), stated that Islam is a granted equal right for both genders and is mandatory for all Muslims.

While at first glance it may seem that the gender inequality and lack of representation of women in Muslim societies like Saudi Arabia is due to the Islamic religion, this is false. Scholars such as Alsaleh clearly explain that upon studying The Holy Quran, the religious text of Islam which Muslims follow, we are able to recognize that Islam promotes gender equality for both genders. The Holy Quran explicitly states that as human beings, both sexes have the same origin and are therefore granted equal rights (Alsaleh 122). Unlike the preconceptions of Islam, Islam views women as having an integral role in society. According to the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), women are granted the rights that men are, including the right to employment (Alsaleh 122).

Alsalehs’ argument clearly illustrates that the Holy Quran supports and acknowledges women’s rights. However, there are still many arguments that Islam is the reason for the lack of women’s rights. It is here that we must ensure that we are separating culture and religion. As stated by scholars such as Amani Hamdan, cultural customs that deny women’s equality and rights are becoming the norm of Saudi Arabia. The cultural customs have been so engrained in the culture that they are accepted as Islamic foundations. This is a major problem for Muslim women, especially those located in Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, the puzzling question becomes, where did this patriarchal interpretation of Islam come from? I argue that the restrictive interpretations have been made by conservative religious scholars who have impacted women’s rights and abilities (Hamdan). Conservative religious scholars also known as Ulamas are responsible for guiding Muslims in the same path that the prophet Mohammed lived during his lifetime. In modern day, Muslims turn to the Sunna and
the *Hadith* to determine the actions and traditions that the prophet followed. Muslims maintain that the hadiths were remembered from the time when the Prophet Mohammed lived and preached to his followers, however, scholars argue that the Hadiths have changed vastly in tone, becoming more and more sexist (Polisi 44). The main concern with the use of these methods of determining how one should live an Islamic life. Many different interpretations of the prophet’s saying have arisen in the MENA region (Brotman, et al., 2008). Interpretations of the *Qur’an* made by scholars with different commitments to patriarchy and equality generated different interpretations of women’s rights. The words of God in the Qur’an indicate that at no point did God intend for Muslim men to think of women as less than man:

I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you male or female, you are equal to one another. (Sura 3:195)

As for those who lead a righteous life, male or female, while believing, they enter Paradise; without the slightest injustice. (Sura 4:124)

The Qur’anic passages demonstrate that women and men are equal in the eyes of God. It is clear that there is no seclusion between the rights and equality of men and women in regards to the religion. Therefore, I argue that Islam cannot be blamed for the reason why women in Saudi Arabia receive a lack of representation. Instead, I argue that patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and the prophets’ teachings have been used to justify the high rates of inequality for women in the area. In short, religious leaders are seen as charismatic because they are held to such a high standard and are believed to practice the correct teachings of Islam as done by the prophet himself. However, the patriarchal interpretations of Islam become problematic for
women in Saudi Arabia. By supporting patriarchal interpretations of Islam that forbid women from having rights, the Saudi government and society is able to use that to further limit women’s rights. Therefore, in agreement with other scholars, I believe that the religious scholars who interpret the Qur’an in a fuller egalitarian way cooperate and present their interpretations of the Qur’an to benefit women in the society as well as the society in general (Hamdan). Therefore, in response to scholars who argue that Islam is to blame, I argue that the Qur’an can and does support equal rights for both genders, and this comes into view when egalitarian commitments that are based in the Qur’an shape Qur’anic interpretation.

A direct quote from the Prophet Mohammad, who is the most respected by Muslims everywhere, presents the importance of education for Muslims of both genders. The Prophet is quoted as stating, “The search of knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female” and “every male and female should seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” (Alsaleh).

The global gender website reports that 92 percent of Saudi women are literate compared to male literacy rate, which is ninety-seven percent (weforum). Ninety-five percent of Saudi girls receive primary school education as opposed to ninety-eight percent of Saudi boys. However, as we study age groups we notice that as Saudi girls get older the percentage of them attaining an education gets lower. For instance only seventy-nine percent of Saudi girls attend secondary school and only sixty percent of girls pursue a tertiary education (weforum). Therefore, it is important to understand that Saudi women are literate, not as much as men, but do acquire some education. Therefore, if Islam states that both men and women, should be educated, why is there a lack of equality for further education for women in Saudi Arabia?
Women in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to be educated until 1956. Women’s education was completely different from that of men. Women’s education under the Shari’a law was presented to prepare women to become good wives, to become nurturers. The religious leaders found it culturally unacceptable for women to attend schools or colleges. Girls education was at home to prevent their exposure to society. The only school that girls were allowed to attend were Kutab, religious schools. Therefore, the Saudi government was able to avoid the United Nations advocacy for gender equal education systems and to avoid the words of the Qur’an that allow women and men an equal education system. It was not until the 1950s when a group of educated middle-class men petitioned for the establishment of schools for girls that the government opened the first government-funded school for women in 1960 (Alsuwaida 2016; 112).

Furthermore, the Saudi government considering women’s mobility until the Mecca uprising that occurred in 1979. The Mecca uprising happened on a regular day, during the prayer call. It lasted for two weeks and hundreds of thousands of people were held hostage by whom a group that would later become Al-Qaeda (Npr). This caused the country to become even stricter in regards to preserving the country’s religious and social traditions, making it harder for women’s rights to advance. The Gulf War of 1990 introduced American presence in the capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. Saudi women were introduced to the presence of American women driving not only regular vehicles but military vehicles, this became a picture of mobilization for Saudi women. Kuwaiti women who fled from the war were also granted rights and were seen as freely driving vehicles by Saudi women (Hamdan).
Despite the prince’s efforts, Saudi Arabia continued to practice the discriminatory education for two decades. It has remained possible for the ulama’s to silence women’s voices in the name of Islam in Saudi Arabia; as highlighted by the educational system. The ulama’s are wrongfully using the legitimacy of religion to continue to mistreat women.

Recent Changes in Women’s Rights

Now that we have discussed alternative explanations for Saudi women’s historical inequality, we may refer to current day Saudi Arabia. Has Saudi Arabia changed? Has it made progress towards women’s human rights and political representation?

The oil-generation in the 1970s is argued to have changed the attitudes towards education. It introduced large changes that allowed for discussions about the opening of education for both genders (Hamdan). The economic surplus that came with the oil production allowed Saudis to study abroad in western countries, influencing changes in lifestyles and introducing new ways of living. In 1979 due to the oil discoveries in Saudi Arabia, the Arabian American Oil Company was established in Dhahran. American presence in Saudi Arabia began to grow as workers moved with their families into Saudi Arabia to work for the company (Hamdan). American women soon began to drive vehicles, shopped without a male guardian, and walked unveiled in the country; this influenced Saudi women to begin to ask for more rights that were similar to those that American women had.

Saudi women continued to spread awareness and ask for their rights from the Saudi government and culture. While progress in women’s rights has been slow in Saudi Arabia, as of
2015 women were allowed to vote in the municipal election. Women were also running in the election, 978 women registered as candidates alongside 5,938 male candidates. While the numbers are still shocking and low it is a step in progress for Saudi women. For the first election in which the female vote was accounted for roughly 130,000 women registered to vote (“Saudi Arabia’s Women Vote” 2015). However, while it seems appropriate to celebrate this historical achievement for Saudi women we must remember that there are complications for women. For example, while women were allowed to be candidates for the election they were only allowed to speak behind a partition while campaigning or had to have a male represent them during the campaign (“Saudi Arabia’s Women Vote” 2015). The prohibition of women driving vehicles also makes it harder for women to go and vote if their spouse or male guardian does not want to escort them to the ballots.

In conclusion, Saudi women have suffered from lack of rights and representation for a long period of time. While many make the argument that religion is a cause for the lack of rights and representation, my research has proven this statement false. My research is aware that religion has a big importance on Saudi women and argues that Islam promotes women’s rights and for gender equality between the sexes. My research argues that the problem is not due to Islam but do to the long periods in which religious scholars, committed to patriarchy have had greater authority than other Muslims. My research argues that Islam promotes gender equality but interpretations of The Holy Quran and hadiths are the reason for the lack of women’s human rights.

In considering how Saudi Arabia should resolve this issue, I believe that Saudi Arabia needs to implement a system that will allow religion but pushes for egalitarian interpretations of The Holy Qur’an to be made part of public life. The patriarchal domination over interpretations of the Qur’an mixed with the patriarchal domination of the regime has caused severe limitations
on gender equality. The domination of patriarchal interpretations needs to break in order for
Saudi women to be able to understand their rights that are granted to them through both the reli-
gion and the Saudi constitution. Furthermore, I believe that it would be extremely beneficial if
Saudi women received both a formal education as well as an informal, religious education. A
mixture of both educations will allow mobilize women and allow them to demand the rights that
they are granted but will also allow women to be part of the religious conversations about Islam
and the rights it grants both genders.
Chapter 3. Iran

Like in Saudi Arabia, women in Iran suffer considerable gender inequality, as the country has consistently ranked below most other countries in the world in terms of gender equality. In 2006, Iran ranked 113th out of 115 countries in its Global Gender Gap score and in 2018, Iran ranked 142nd out of 149 countries in the world (see Table 3.1). Whereas 75.2 percent of working-age Iranian men are formally employed, only 17.9 percent of Iranian women are. This translates into marked differences in earned income for men and women: $35,715 and $6,003 respectively. Men make up over 81 percent of all legislators, senior officials and managers and over 62 percent of professional and technical workers. (World Economic Forum 2018: 127)

Women in Iran are banned from certain public places, such as sports stadiums, and their freedom of movement is restricted as women can only travel abroad with permission of their fathers or husbands. As in Saudi Arabia, Iranian women are restricted by rules on dress and personal appearance that impose fines and even jail on women who fail to adequately cover their hair and body: In February 2018, 29 women were arrested for publicly removing their hijabs in protest of the law, and at least three were sentenced to jail time for their role in the demonstrations. In June, authorities arrested a prominent human rights lawyer who had defended several women detained for protesting rules that make the hijab compulsory, charging her with “propaganda against the state” and “assembly and collusion” (Freedom House 2019). Women are banned from mixing with unrelated members of the opposite sex and violators can be detained, fined, or sentenced to corporal punishment. Iranian women are denied equal rights in inheritance matters and do not enjoy equal rights in divorce and child custody disputes.
The Islamic Republic of Iran holds elections regularly, but they fall short of democratic standards due in part to the influence of the Guardian Council, an unelected body that disqualifies all candidates it deems insufficiently loyal to the clerical establishment. Ultimate power rests in the hands of the country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the unelected institutions under his control. These institutions, including the security forces and the judiciary, play a major role in the suppression of dissent and other restrictions on civil liberties. Women vote in large numbers in national and local elections and a substantial number of women have sought to run for high office. Nonetheless, Iranian women are significantly underrepresented in politics and government. Only a very small number of women sit in parliament and serve in other posts. No women candidates have been allowed to run for president and only one woman has been appointed as a cabinet minister in the last forty years, as even reform presidents have failed to overcome clerical opposition (Esfandiari 2019).

**Table 3.1 Gender Gap Indicators, Iran (2018)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rank</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>108 (out of 115)</td>
<td>142 (out of 149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global ranking</td>
<td>80 (out of 115)</td>
<td>103 (out of 149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>0.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health and Survival</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global ranking</td>
<td>52 (out of 115)</td>
<td>127 (out of 149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex ratio at birth (female/male)</td>
<td>Healthy life expectancy (female/male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economic Participation and Opportunity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Global ranking</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Labor force participation (female/male)</th>
<th>Wage equality for similar work (female/male)</th>
<th>Estimated earned income, PPP, $US (female/male)</th>
<th>Legislators, senior official and managers (female/male)</th>
<th>Professional and technical workers (female/male)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>113 out of 115</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Political Empowerment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Global ranking</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Women in parliament (female/male)</th>
<th>Women in ministerial positions (female/male)</th>
<th>Years with female head of state (out of 50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>109 (out of 115)</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>141 (out of 149)</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Iranian women are significantly underrepresented in politics and government. In 2017, Rouhani appointed two women among his several vice presidents but failed to name any women as cabinet ministers. Rouhani’s advisor on citizens’ rights, Shahindokht Molaverdi, a champion of women’s empowerment, resigned in November 2018. No women candidates have ever been allowed to run for president.

Iran, previously known as Persia until 1935, became the Islamic Republic in 1979 after the ruling monarchy under the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was forced into exile. Following the Shah’s exile, the clerical force led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a theocratic system of governance with ultimate political authority. Under Khomeini a theocratic form of
government was established with a Supreme Leader who was accountable to the Assembly of Experts (AOE). The United States held fair foreign diplomatic interactions with Iran. In 1979 a group of Iranian students overtook the United States embassy in Tehran holding the embassy personnel as hostages until 1981. The United States proceeded to cut off all diplomatic relations with Iran in 1980. Soon after from 1980 to 1988 Iran began to fight its bloody war with Iraq that eventually expanded into the Persian Gulf leading to increased clashes between the United States Navy and Iranian military forces.

Iran is a predominantly Muslim country split between the two largest branches of Islam, Sunni and Shi’i. Unlike Saudi Arabia, the overwhelming majority of Iranians practice Shi’i Islam. This in turn allows Iran to stand out in contrast to the majority of Middle Eastern countries which are dominantly Sunni. Shi’ite Muslims believe that there are seven pillars of faith; five of the Shi’ite pillars are similar to those of Sunni Muslims: confession of faith, the daily five prayers, Zakat, fasting during the Holy month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Shi’ism adds two more pillars to the original five of the Sunnis; jihad, the struggle to protect Islamic lands, beliefs, and institutions, and the requirement to do good and avoid evil thoughts, words and deeds (Congressional Quarterly 2000: 238). From an outside perspective, it could be perceived that Iran lacks women’s political rights and representation due to its religion, Islam; but dominantly due to the fact that it is a majority practicing Shi’i country.
The Iranian Bureaucracy

The Iranian majority practices Shi’ite Islam, Iran’s Shi’ite sect practices the idea of Twelve Imams which are also known as the Twelvers. The Twelvers are the spiritual leaders of a Muslim community. Shi’ism believes that after the Prophet Mohammad, Ali, a cousin who was married to the Prophet’s daughter, became the rightful successor also known as the imam of the community. After Ali, the role of the community leader, imam, was passed down to eleven other individuals. The role of the imam is crucial in Shi’ism because there have always been spiritual leaders and guardians, the ulama, who have held a prominent role in the development of Islamic traditions (Congressional Quarterly 2000: 238). The highest religious authority is given to the Mujtahids, individual scholars who are given the title of scholar due to their religious studies and virtuous lives as leaders in the community. The mujtahid interprets the religion based on how it applies to the life of an individual (Congressional Quarterly 2000: 239). It is possible for a mujtahid in Shi’ism to receive near-to-total authority over a community becoming the ayatollah.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was an increase in the disapproval of the government of the shah. The Iranian middle-class and urban poor began to oppose the government for the social, economic, and religious pressures that were slowly building; they viewed the shah as introducing western views on the Iranian society. The shah indeed wanted Iran to be among the west and therefore took steps to follow the modernization of Turkey. Women were encouraged to get an education, mix with men freely, and their educational and employment opportunities were greatly enhanced. In 1963, the shah permitted various women’s rights organizations with the ability to vote and be elected into the parliament. Furthermore, in an effort to modernize, the
shah outlawed the hijab from the public sphere and pushed all government employees to adopt Western style dress in an effort to convince the rest of the society to do the same.

Those who opposed the government began to support Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini and religious hierarchies who believed that granting women the right to vote was comparable to prostitution. The religious hierarchies not only opposed the shah but opposed the recent laws under the shah which allowed for women to vote, and the Family Protection Law, they viewed the laws as disobeying Islamic teachings. The shah was also seen as relying on non-Muslim influencers and reducing the traditional influence of the *ulama* on government policy. Iran underwent a Revolution in 1979 that changed the basis of its governance. In 1979, a revolution led by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini ended the thirty-seven year-long rule of the shah.

After the overthrow of the shah, Iran drafted a new constitution. The government became centered under the idea of rule by a single spiritual leader that was seen as the guardian of the community of believers, *velayat-e-faqih*. The supreme leader title, *faqih*, was given to the individual who was seen to have the greatest expertise in religious jurisprudence. The *faqih*, is able to provide binding interpretations of the Islamic laws and principles and is allowed full authority in all aspects of the Iranian government and social policy (Congressional Quarterly 2000: 244). Khomeini believed that the clergy were the most qualified in ruling the community of believers; he believed that Islamic law and the understandings of Islamic law that the clergy had was what qualified them. Khomeini stated, “there is not a single topic of human life for which Islam has not provide instruction and established norms” (Congressional Quarterly 2000: 244). Therefore, the concept of *velayat-e-faqih* allowed Khomeini to become the faqih and hold the decision-making process of Iran as he wished.
Importantly, Ray Takeyh, senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, explains that the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran establishes a set of both elected and unelected institutions, with the latter enjoying both religious legitimacy and political power. The unelected Guardian Council must approve legislation before it passes and ensures that candidates running for office conform to Islamic standards; furthermore, the Guardian Council has been using its constitutional authority to determine which bills are Islamic and which are un-Islamic. The next group is the Assembly of Experts, a clerical body of elderly men, the body designed to choose the supreme religious leader if one were to die. Next is the supreme religious leader, the position that contains most power. The supreme religious leader is able to declare war and peace, command armed forces, and nullify and affirm elections (Takeyh).

Therefore, the Iranian bureaucracy draws on some of the similarities of the Saudi Arabia bureaucracy. The religious setting of the government allows the clergy and the different groups (specifically the non-elected) to emphasize their own foundations and beliefs. Just as in the Saudi Arabia chapter, we view that the bureaucracy is dominated by Muslim men who have their own interpretations and agenda set for the Islamic law. Takeyh also points out that the new generation of Iranian leaders are even more conservative than in previous history. He states, “That new generation is much more religious, and it has a serious problem with the elders of the revolution about their corruption and their passivity toward the imposition of Islamic injunctions” (Takeyh). The new generation as he explains was not formed by the 1979 revolution but by the Iran-Iraq war. He states that Iran is violating and contradicting the patter of evolutionary states, which should have allowed Iran to abandon its patrimony but there is no emphasis of that occurring soon.
Stages of Women’s Movements in Iran

Women’s rights in Iran may be divided into eight periods that highlighted the various strategies, tactics, effectiveness, and achievements of women’s movements. Scholars such as Nayereh Tohidi divide the stages of women’s movements into eight periods. The first era (1905 to 1925) is known as the Constitutional Revolution era. The Constitutional Revolution era emerged as the first generation of women activists who were pro-constitutional and anti-imperialist (Tohidi 2016). This first group of women’s activists demanded access to public education, hygiene, vocational training and criticized gender segregation, polygamy, and domestic violence. This was the first group of women who demanded rights.

The second era is known as the modern nation-state-building (1920s to 1940s) and is associated with increasing literacy and women’s entrance into universities and gradual expansion of women’s associations. During this era the shah forced the adoption of Western attire for both men and women in an attempt to modernize Iran.

The third era is known as the nationalization (1940s to 1950s) era. During this era Iran attempted to nationalize the oil industry and this brought women into the public spotlight and allowed for increased political activism (Tohidi 2016). The spread of egalitarian ideas and reform projects were brought into the public sphere; however, there was no success in bringing legislative reforms concerning women’s suffrage and changes in family law into light.

During the fourth era, modernization and urbanization (1960s to 1970s), caused an increase of women in the modern working and professional fields. At this time the Shah was increasingly moving towards a dictatorship and increasing centralization which led to a top-down process of modernization without democratization but allowed for a dual and polarized society.
The fifth era (1979 to 1997) became the Islamist Revolution which caused a socio-political mobilization of both men and women. The Islamist Revolution quickly turned Iran around as it introduced discriminatory laws and policies against women, required women to begin wearing the hijab, introduced sex segregation, war and violence, political repression, and caused a massive emigration and exile of intellectuals (Tohidi 2016).

The sixth era was the post-Islamist reform and pragmatism (1997 to 2005). Tohidi explains that the era was associated with a socio-political openness, civil society discourse, and neo-liberalistic view. The era introduced the end of civil society organization, free press, feminist press, and economic improvements.

The seventh era (2005 to 2013) is explained as a “neo-conservative and populist backlash under President Ahmadinejad” (Tohidi 2016). The era is associated with Islamist fanatic groups, provocative foreign policy, increased danger of military attacks and war, increased repression of the media and civil society organizations which included women’s groups. The era also introduced anti-women bills and increased corruption. The seventh era demonstrates the hostility that Iran began to enter.

The eighth era (2013 to present), is known as the moderation period. It is associated with shifts in foreign policy and resolution of the nuclear crisis with world powers. However, the openness and improvements in human rights and women’s status continue to be blocked by the religious hierarchies, not allowing the moderate President Rouhani to increase human rights advancements and women’s rights.

The Iranian time line demonstrates the many changes that Iran has undergone. Iran went quickly from under the rule of the shah who wished to modernize the country to Ayatollah Khomeini who wanted to increase the representation of religion in Iran. Therefore, Iran’s women’s
rights have gone from increased representation to a quick decrease and subordination. The role of the bureaucracy and those in power have a patriarchal domination over women’s rights which has caused the reduction in women’s rights and representation.

Political overview of Iran

As Golnar Mehran points out in her study, Iran has undergone three distinct stages since the 1979 revolution. The highlight being the “question of woman,” which she explained as being the understanding of the role and responsibilities of woman in each of the three Iranian stages (Mehran 2006: 11). The first stage which occurred during 1979-1988, focused on the Islamic Republic as the new form of state rule in Iran. The first period was during the Iran-Iraq war which meant it was a period of domestic turmoil, political violence, war, international tension and political isolation. During the first stage Iran was also under a strict ideological command and strict Islamic measures. This led to the primary goal of the Iranian government to be the religious - political leadership which was the Islamization and politicization of society.

In simpler terms, it was a period of politicization which was the governments’ way of transforming Iranians to become “soldiers of the revolution”. Soldiers of the revolution were dedicated to establishing an Islamic society that is loyal to the religious - political ideology (Mehran 2006: 12). This drew the government to view the population as equal and to provide opportunities for the neglected and marginalized sectors of the society that were underrepresented or suppressed. It was a form of building up the trust of the Iranian population together instead of
solely focusing on just a specific part of the population or gender. Therefore, there was a conscious attempt made to Islamize and politicize women who at the time were seen as just mothers. However, the attempt was to focus deeply on mothers who has raised pious Muslim and revolutionary soldiers whom were seeking the revenge / vengeance for their child’s death.

The second stage that was discussed was from 1988 to 1997. This period was known as the reconstruction period because at the time Iran was trying to build itself back up after the eight-year long war that occurred with Iraq. The new Iran was facing a time of liberalization, privatization and increased levels of political exchange as well as reducing isolation in the international arena. It was at this time that the government was heavily invested in economic growth, population control, and specialization. Thus, encouraging women to participate in arenas of social, educational, political, and economic life as well as contribute to post-war reconstruction. This was another way for women to advance in Iran.

Finally, the period from 1997 to the present is known as the reform period in which civil society, political development, tolerance, religious democracy, dialogue of civilizations, citizenship rights and responsibilities, and meritocracy were the main concerns of the country (Mehran 2006: 17). While there are still strict Islamic revolutionary ideologies, that seek domestic and international dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding, the rights-based approach does not view women as just instruments for revolutionary ideology and economic growth (Mehran 2006: 17). Instead, it is devoted to empowering women to seek their own rights and responsibilities which is an example of a participatory egalitarian type of system. The system believes that once women achieve an education they are able to transform the gender relations in society which the Iranian government is set on establishing. During the first stage women were able to benefit from Islamizing and politicizing them and during the second stage they benefited from an
education and employment and during the final stage they were able to be empowered based on meritocracy.

According to Iran, the ideal female citizen was a mixture of the coexistence of tradition and modernity: the New Muslim Woman (Mehran 2006:18). The New Muslim Woman had two duties: one was keeping her traditional values of being a dedicated wife and mother and stability of her family. The other role of the new woman was to be an active leader in the revolutionary society. She was expected to be a “soldier of the revolution,” which meant to be an Islamized and politicized wife and mother. The Iranian revolution began to view the employment of woman as being crucial to the success of their social and economic activities. The push for women to be active members of the 1979 revolution led women to recognize their power and rights and allowed them to understand the diverse social, economic, political, cultural, and family backgrounds that they once did not know of (Mehran 2006:18).

Iranian Education

Unlike Saudi Arabia, Iran saw a recent increase in female enrollment into public universities. Increasing Iranian female enrollment from 27.3 percent in 1990 to 44.1 percent in 1999 (Ghiasi, 2000: 16). Incredibly, during the time period of 2001 to 2002 women comprised 50 percent of university students and 52 percent of those who gained admission into state universities were women (Ministry of Science, 2002: 3, 43). With this came the future disparity in higher education that for once favored women over men. With all the information contained the study indicated that the education system of Iran from 1990 to 2000 increased gender equality at both the
primary and secondary school systems. The Islamic Republic of Iran which is fundamentally ruled by religious – political leaders, led many to believe that it will be a country in which women will experience inequality in terms of their social, political, legal, economic, and educational status in the society. Therefore, the question remains what has caused the progression towards gender equality in the education system in Iran since 1990?

Golnar Mehran, in her Education Report in 2003: *Gender and Education in Iran*, explains what she believes has caused gender equality in the Iranian education system. Mehran explains that a crucial point of understanding the Iranian education system comes from understanding Iran pre and post revolution. Therefore, my research into the changes of education in Iran will use the analysis from Mehran which study both internal and external school factors that explain the increased gender equality in the Iranian education system. I will also analyze the revolution, the status of Iranian women, and the role of political will and demand, in order to address the issue of gender inequality in the pre-revolution education system.

The Iranian revolution adapted an ideology of the Islamic Republic that became based on three pillars of: “Islamization, Politicization, and Equalization” (Mehran 2000). The three components have been able to shape the direction of the education of women in Iran. Islamization and politicization became a way to socialize the young and turn them into pious Muslims who are committed to the revolutionary case. Education became a basic foundation of the Iranian government, especially in primary and secondary education levels. Referring back to the table in the introduction with data about the countries Iran matches with Saudi Arabia in terms of primary education levels but as the education increases up to secondary and tertiary education; Iran
has a higher enrollment of continued tertiary education and especially much higher for women in Iran than in Saudi Arabia.

Further, Iran planned educational opportunities for girls and women to create the New Muslim woman in a variety of ways. For instance, the 1988 General Plan of the System of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, addressed the female education in the following ways: eliminating all forms of discrimination against girls, giving priority to girls in how they distribute resources and opportunities. The increased education rates in Iran was demonstrated by the political will of Iranian leaders to provide educational opportunities for girls (Mehran 2006: 17). An important and increasing factor of girl’s education was determined by the “Islamization,” of education in the post-revolutionary period. The Iranian system implemented specific policies after the 1979 revolution such as: banning co-education at all levels of schooling except at universities; assigning same sex gender teachers to same sex schools; ensuring that textbooks portrayed traditional divisions of labor between men and women; directing education based on “male” or “female” orientalism (Mehran 2006: 18). The presence of women in levels in the public life, especially in terms of higher levels of planning, politics, and administration is most visible acts as an incentive for younger women to continue their education. Female education in Iran can be seen as a form of ruling elites seeking to use Islamization and revolutionary society as a way to generate educated women whom will use it a way to influence society to seek education as a form of attaining equality and empowerment in the country.

While women’s education in Iran had been progressive after the 1979 revolution, the achievements of women’s schooling still has a long way to go. While girls’ education rates have continued to increase and 43 percent of university graduates are women participation of women
in the political and economic sectors continues to be very low (see figure 3.1). However, it is essential to consider factors such as social, political, and cultural obstacles in determining if that has a direct correlation to the low female participation rates. Furthermore, it is clear that in order for women’s education rates to continue to increase there must be an active public presence of women in higher level employments and politics as a form of being a visible way for younger generations of women to view successful women in leadership opportunities and visibly understand that they can reach those heights as well. The increased visibility of women in high ranking employment in the public sphere will help form a sense of interest in the younger generation to also want to become educated. The increased attendance of younger women in education will turn allow for increased pressure towards the government to open opportunities for women that would usually be mostly dominated by men.

**Figure 3.1:** Economic Participation in Iran since 2006.
Iran Economic Factors

Studies currently present that after Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Iran is the world’s third highest country of discriminatory laws against women in the economy. Currently less than 15 percent of Iranian women occupy the labor market (Alikarami 2015). In regard to women’s employment participation in Iran it is crucial to study and understand the economy of Iran and its major productions. Depending on the countries form of production habits we can determine if the economic factors of the country are causing the low active female participation. The question of the Iranian economy is whether it has created a system of disparity between men and women. Recently, due to the difficulty of the economy more and more women have been forced to enter the labor market. Iranian women entering the labor market have been able to find jobs in the service sector, attaining careers such as nursing and teaching. While being able to join the service sector is an improvement it is also difficult because the service sector requires specific qualifications that only some of the women in the society have received through an education. This leads us back to understanding that the Iranian labor market is mostly male-dominated.

It is important to understand the disparity between men and women in Iran in comparison to the rest of the world to attain information in regards to if Iran is actually behind the rest of the world. In the global world about 40 to 45 percent of women compose the labor market (Alikarami 2015). However, in Iran only 15 percent of women are active in the economy. Furthermore, the rate of unemployment for female college graduates is over 50 percent, reaching a high of 65.5 percent of capable female graduates are not able to take part in the nation’s economy.

The question remains why Iran has such a low level of female employment rates. Studies indicate that the discriminatory laws and codes of the country are among the top factors that contribute to limiting the role of women in the home. The countries cultural and regular norms have made men the head of the family which has granted men with the ability to determine how the family would live as well as have full guidance over women in the household. Women must attain the permission of the male of the household in many different situations. The guidance of a man over a woman makes it difficult for some woman to enter the labor market because they must attain the permission of their male guardian when applying or proposing to enter the workforce or attain a specific job. This is one of the few ways that women can become discriminated from specific employment options.

Furthermore, there are diverse gender-based policies that expand the discrimination of women in the nation’s economy. For example, women in Iran are unable to participate in trade unions because that would require them to mix with men in society and that is not allowed. As they believe that men and women should not mix. Other gender discriminatory policies are ones such as employment span. For example, women are only permitted to work between the hours of 8am and 9pm. Work places are also segregated by sex to ensure that men and women do not mix. Recently, in the city of Tehran they have introduced new laws that prohibit men from employing female assistants or typists, in order to ensure that workplaces remain segregated.

Recently in 2014, the Chief of Police announced that there is a new ban on employing women from attaining jobs in places of work such as coffee shops, teahouses and eateries. Furthermore, if a female would like to apply for a license to work in a public area such as a teashop or coffee shop they must prove that there will be a male guardian present with them at the local...
work place. While all of this information presents the argument that the Iranian state has discriminatory laws against women it is also important to note that there were articles added to the constitution to try and decrease the amount of discrimination for women in Iran.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that in order for Iran to be economically egalitarian, it must eliminate the discrimination laws that have been placed by either the fundamental law of the country or the society and cultural norms. The equal economic participation of women and men is essential for economic growth and will also allow women’s participation in politics and institutions to increase.

In studying the overall economy of Iran, it is highly resourceful in oil. Iran receives its wealth from its oil industry. Returning to the argument made by Michael Ross about countries that are highly dependent on the oil industry. As elaborated on in the case study of Saudi Arabia; Ross makes a very distinct argument that governments with oil have a difficult time transitioning to democracy. In his piece, *Does Oil Hinder Democracy*, he also speaks about how Iran is also observed as an oil-rich state and how the oil wealth is hindering the formation of different political groups in the country (Ross).

Furthermore, according to a study concluded by the Human Rights Watch, men and women are acquiring the same type of education. Rates of graduation for men and women are both high and attained from a similar education. However, there are many circumstances placed that are making it quite impossible for women to receive equal employment. A statement made by a 26-year-old woman in the city of Tehran states, “I am a mechanical engineer and I was interviewed for a position in Iran’s oil and gas fields. My contract in the company told me that they really liked me, but that they did not want to hire a woman to go to the field” (Burkova 2017).
According to the Human Rights Watch report, women in Iran are unable to attain high level careers because there are many legal and social barriers that restrict their livelihoods causing unequal economic outcomes. In Iran it is reported that women are over 50 percent of university graduates, however; their labor force participation rate is only at 17 percent (Burkova 2017). Furthermore, Iranian women have presented themselves to be of attaining some of the highest degrees in Iran and being able to seek the highest grades in universities. However, the disparities cause economic hierarchy, which causes women to be severely underrepresented in high position jobs and as private sector managers. The article further argues that the participation gap in the Iranian labor force is a cause of Iranian government authorities who have continued to violate women’s economic and social rights. The government has created and enforced discriminatory laws and regulations that have caused limitations to women’s participation in the job market (Burkova 2017).

The Human Rights Watch report explains that the discrimination against women in the Iranian labor market is also shaped by the political regime that went into office after the Iranian Islamic revolution. They argue that the revolution both viewed and called for women to be perceived in “ideal roles,” which are seen as the role of mothers and wives (Burkova 2017). The article states that the authorities who received power after the 1979 revolution, enforced strict regulation of women’s bodies in society. One of the enforced restrictions was enforcing a dress code as a requirement for women appearing out in public (Burkova 2017). This sounds strictly identical to the restrictions that were viewed in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the article stated a strong and crucial argument by stating, “In the past three decades, authorities have punished women’s rights activists for their efforts to promote gender equality in law and practice, including with imprisonment” (Burkova 2017). This statement explains that the Iranian regime is not only causing
female employment to be highly restrictive but is going as far as to cease any female activists who are demanding to attain their fundamental rights. This presents that Iranian women are still trying to attain their social and economic freedoms in the country and are facing a struggle for political and fundamental rights. This sounds very similar to what we had studied in the case of Saudi Arabia and their discriminatory laws against female employment. While the article has made this argument it is still very important to continue studying the actual regime of the country to understand if the statements made in the article are indeed accurate. Therefore, I will turn to studying the regime’s constitution and overall laws.

The Iranian Revolution and changes to the Constitution

After the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran comprised a new constitution that was established with the purpose guiding a new Iran without the guidance of the Shah. The new constitution was established to uphold cultural, social, political, and economic institutions based on Islamic principles and norms while eliminating the place of the Shah. Upon finding a translated constitution from the Iranian embassy in London, I was able to read some of the key constitutional parts about women in the Iranian society post-revolution. The constitution respected the important role that women had taken during the revolution. Under the section titled, The Wrath of the People, the constitution reads as followed, “The widespread solidarity of men and women of all segments of society and of all political and religious factions, played a clearly determining role in the struggle” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). This direct quote from the constitution gives women the credit of assisting in the revolution to help make it a success for the country. Under the same section in the constitution it also reads, “Especially the
women were actively and massively present in a most conspicuous manner at all stages of this great struggle” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). This second quote clearly and elaborately provides Iranian women with the credit of being a large part in the struggle for the Iranian revolution. This is quite surprising because it seems highly unlikely for a majority Islamic Shia country to publicly thank or recognize the assistance of women.

In recognizing the newly written constitution of Iran in 1979 and following the new guidelines of being an Islamic Republic; it is astounding that the new constitution elaborately recognizes women in the constitution. Under the subtitle, Woman in the Constitution, it provides a full paragraph about the responsibilities and rights of Iranian women in society. It essentially begins by arguing that the new regime follows an Islamic social structure which declares that all of humanity deserves their true identity and foundational human rights. Therefore, it states that women, who all suffered largely under the old regime, must begin to attain and begin to benefit from their natural rights. The constitution declared family as the fundamental unit of society, center for growth, and edification of human beings (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). The constitution further argues that it is the responsibility of Islam and its teachings to ensure that all individuals of both gender are receiving the fundamental rights that they deserve. The women section in the constitution is concluded by giving women the recognition they deserve by stating that “Given the weighty responsibilities that women thus assumes, she is accorded in Islam great value and nobility” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). Once again, this conclusion is not only giving recognition to women but is also recognizing the status of women in terms of the religion of Islam.

Furthermore, under the Rights of the People, in the constitution women are recognized in both Article 20 and Article 21. Under Article 20 which is titled Equality Before Law, it states,
“All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). This section article is powerful because it is discussing the equality of the Iranian society. By clearly stating Iranian women have just as much protection from law for their status and in efforts in the society it demonstrates that women have a large partake in the Iranian government. Additionally, women were also granted in Article 21 titled, Women’s Rights, which mainly discussed, that the new government must ensure and respect all of the women’s rights according to the foundation of Islam. The section also listed five main goals that the government must allow and follow:

1) create [a] favorable environment for the growth of woman's personality and the restoration of her rights, both the material and intellectual; 2) the protection of mothers, particularly during pregnancy and child-rearing, and the protection of children without guardians; 3) establishing competent courts to protect and preserve the family; 4) the provision of special insurance for widows, aged women, and women without support; 5) the awarding of guardianship of children to worthy mothers, in order to protect the interests of the children, in the absence of a legal guardian. (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

Each of these guidelines lists the important aspects that the new regime decided would be part of the criteria that needed to be met to enable women their fundamental and religious rights. This is surprising once again because it is often not assumed that a Shia country would provide essential rights for women in a public governing document such as the constitution. An interesting point that we must keep in mind is understanding if the country as a whole abides by what the constitution declares as rights attainable by women or if they just list them and do not actually follow them. Further research should assist us in understanding if it is rightfully followed or the later.
In conclusion, Iran was on the verge of modernization and enhancing women’s rights; however, under the new leadership of Khomeini and the religious hierarchies the country was unable to continue in its enhancement of women’s rights. As could be found in the case study on Saudi Arabia, the patriarchal domination of both religion and state has caused the gender inequality in Iran. Following the revolution, new laws were in place that abolished family matters. Some of the new laws were: legal marriage age of women was lowered to nine, adultery was punishable by stoning, women were only allowed out when accompanied by a male relative, non-related male contact could result in legal punishment, segregation of sexes was strictly enforced in the public sphere, nurseries were shut as they were seen as a western conspiracy, western clothing was banned, and women had to wear the hijab at all times (Kazim and Bell 2019). The Iranian revolution did not assist women in gaining any greater women’s rights as the constitutional rights that were granted to women are barely practiced. Iranian women that encouraged and assisted Khomeini were left with barely under representation; leaving them to feel betrayed as they had more rights under the shah. The patriarchal domination once again is found to be the reason for the lack of progression in gender equality.
Chapter 4. Turkey

The cases of Saudi Arabia and Iran have indicated that the cultural, political and economic arguments all have a crucial role on the subordination of women in the Middle East due to a patriarchal domination of all three. Unlike Saudi Arabia and Iran, Turkey has a long history as a secular nation. The establishment of the Republic of Turkey after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire introduced a new model of development based on a centralized, authoritarian state that subordinated religion to state authority. The division allowed for the protection of women’s rights, banned polygamy, provided equal rights in divorce, the right to vote, and banned headscarves in public settings. As a result of secularism, women’s rights in Turkey continued to increase.

Yakin Ertürk in her article, Turkey’s Modern Paradoxes: Identity Politics, Women’s Agency, and Universal Rights, argues that the modernizing institutions of the Turkish Republic were mediated by men, leaving women in a more dependent role. She notes that new schools for girls were opened but “regional and gender inequalities in literacy, access to schooling, enrollment rates and educational attainment continued” (Ertürk 2006: 86). Reforms that outlawed polygamy and gave women equal rights to inheritance, divorce and child custody reduced patriarchal power “but the patriarchal nature of the family was preserved as households were deemed male-headed and defined patrilocally” (Ertürk 2006: 86). Finally, Ertürk also describes the central role of the military as the guardian of the Republic and its primary modernizing agent: “given that the military was the primary vehicle through which citizenship expanded to the periphery, women, particularly in rural areas, remained marginal citizens, at best experiencing state membership indirectly via men” (Ertürk 2006: 88). It was not until recently that there became a
noticeable decline of women’s rights in Turkey and a rise of political Islam. Therefore, scholars ask if the rise of political Islam is associated with the decline of women’s rights.

Women in Turkey vary from highly educated and professional women to women who have a limited to no education at all. Given stark differences among Turkish women in terms of employment and social status, it is not surprising that women in Turkey enjoy greater rights than women in Saudi Arabia or Iran but fall considerably short of parity. In 2006, Turkey ranked 105th out of 115 countries in its Global Gender Gap score and 130th out of 149 countries in the world in 2018 (see Table 4.1). Whereas 77.4 percent of working-age Turkish men are formally employed, over twice the number of Turkish women (36.1 percent). This translates into marked differences in earned income for men and women: $37,283 and $16,059 respectively. Men make up over 85 percent of all legislators, senior officials and managers and over 60 percent of professional and technical workers (World Economic Forum 2018:277). Although Turkish law guarantees equal treatment, women still face discrimination and gender inequality in the workplace is common (Freedom House 2019).

**Table 4.1 Gender Gap Indicators, Turkey (2018)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rank</strong></td>
<td>105 (out of 115)</td>
<td>130 (out of 149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>0.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Global ranking</td>
<td>92 (out of 115)</td>
<td>106 (out of 149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td>0.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (female/male)</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Enrollment (female/male)</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health and Survival</td>
<td>Global ranking</td>
<td>Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85 (out of 115)</td>
<td>0.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex ratio at birth (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy life expectancy (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Participation and Opportunity</td>
<td>106 out of 115</td>
<td>0.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force participation (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wage equality for similar work (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated earned income, PPP, $US (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislators, senior official and managers (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional and technical workers (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Empowerment</td>
<td>96 (out of 115)</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament (female/male)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women in ministerial positions (female/male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years with female head of state (out of 50)</td>
<td></td>
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Secular Reforms, Women’s Rights and Kemalism

Under the presidency of army officer and revolutionary nationalist leader Mustafa Kemal, the newly independent state of Turkey adopted reforms aimed at transforming Turkey into a modern nations similar to European states. All Turks were required to choose a surname and Mustafa Kemal chose “Atatürk,” which translates to “Father of all Turks.” Atatürk also moved to create a secular republic, stating that “The religion of Islam will be elevated if it will cease to be
a political instrument, as had been the case in the past” (Atatürk Society). The new form of secularism was supposed to limit the theocratic and religious authority that the Ottoman Empire had implemented. Atatürk highly believed that this was the key to modernizing Turkey to ensure that Turkey would be able to grow and expand economically. The Turkish National Assembly formed on April 23, 1920 was the first form of change from a theocratic regime to a secular form of governance. In 1921, the National Assembly adopted the first form of a constitution in the Republic of Turkey. The constitution established a secular foundation for the country stating, “Sovereignty cannot be transferred to any other authority, including the religious authority” (Atatürk).

Women were part of the westernizing and modernizing project, as Atatürk believed that by becoming secular and granting equal rights to women in politics and social life, Turkey would be able to modernize to the level of the West (Arat 2008). Atatürk believed that an educated woman would contribute both to her family as well as the overall society, declaring that “[Turkey needed a] new woman who would epitomize its ideological shift into a secular nation state” (Arat 2008). Therefore, efforts to integrate women into the social and political sphere began with the expansion of girls’ education, making primary education compulsory and making schools co-educational so that girls could attend the same schools with boys. The newly secular government abolished the headscarf and veil, encouraging women to wear modern clothing. The Shari’a Law was replaced by the Swiss Civil Code which gave equality to men and women, introduced civil marriage, gave equal rights to men and women in matters such as divorce and child custody, and banned polygamy (Arat 2008; Atatürk Society 2013).

The newly adopted civil code allowed women to acquire juridical status of that of a ‘person’ which allowed them to enjoy equal rights similar to men. This was a big step for Turkish women because it allowed them to receive legitimacy through the political sector. By the mid-
1930’s, women in Turkey were granted the right to vote in elections. At the same time that this led to increased economic and political participation by women in Turkey, a notable rural/urban divide emerged: “Tradition was no longer used to designate Ottoman mores versus the West, but those of the urban elite versus villagers and tribesmen” (Ertürk 2006: 90). By 1930 Turkish women were encouraged to vote in local elections and in 1934 Ataturk implemented a quota system that ensured seats in the parliament for women (Arat 2008).

In general, Atatürk was deeply concerned with the role of Turkish women in society and clearly demonstrated his belief that by introducing greater rights for women, the country would be able to modernize. He clearly demonstrated his public support for women’s rights and publicly declared that Turkish women would enjoy free rights, education and any employment position equal to that of men under his rule (Abadan-Unat 1981:11). Atatürk’s changes for the Turkish woman was also political; he believed that an educated woman would assist the Republican patriarchy as well as assist her in becoming a better housewife and mother. By the mid-1930’s, women in Turkey were granted the right to vote in elections, attained equal rights in matters such as divorce and child custody, and prohibited religious attire such as headscarves in the public sphere (Abadan-Unat 1981:11).

Kemalists’ focus on secular government and expansion of women’s rights distinguished Turkey from other countries in the region. Nonetheless, it is important to analyze the limits on women’s rights that continued despite these early constitutional changes. Scholar Ayat argues that Turkish women have rarely changed since the establishment of the secular Republic of Turkey. Ayat argues that education, employment, and advanced rights for women continue to be low in Turkey.
Section on subsequent phases in Turkey’s history

Yakin Ertürk in her piece, *Turkey’s Modern Paradoxes: Identity Politics, Women’s Agency, and Universal Rights*, distinguishes four distinct periods for the public representation of women: 1920s-1960s, 1960s and 1970s, 1980s to mid-1990s, and finally the mid-1995 to present day. Ertürk explains that the 1920s-1960s was the hegemony of the nationalist/modernist paradigm. The nationalist/modernist period consisted of resistance due to religious and ethnic underpinnings. It was the period when the image of women was idealized to the original culture of the Turks before they accepted Islam. Ertürk explains that during this period they viewed the separation of Islam as allowing for the new modern Turkish women which they believed was an integral part of the public landscape (Ertürk 2006: 89). The Turkish women at this time was viewed as being, *Erkek gibi Kadin*, which is translated to mean “manlike woman” which allowed the integration of women into the public sector without “endangering patriarchal gender relations” (Ertürk 2006: 90).

During the 1960s and 1970s, an emergence of the Marxist/socialist paradigm spread the new leftist ideologies which gained strength that emphasized third worldism and calls for economic and social justice. During this period the major focus shifted away from building national institutions and instead towards political discourse. Political mobilization around economic and social justice eventually led to female university students being mobilized by male “comrades” but “like the modern/nationalist women, the revolutionary women also had to submit to a new form of patriarchal domination” (Ertürk 2006: 91). During this period, women’s issues continued to be ignored and the women were still under strict scrutiny of their male counterparts.
From the 1980s to the mid-1990s, the period known as Fragmentation and Diversification of Identities allowed new discourses along religious and ethnic lines, in addition to a strong feminist movement. This was a period of economic liberalism and individual rights. Ertürk explains that there were three main groups during this time: Islamists, Kurdish nationalists, and feminists. The Islamists and Kurdish nationalists both represented alternative masculine ideologies that competed for power (Ertürk 2006: 93). The division between Islamists and secularism and the division between Kurdish and Turkish caused a disparity of women in Turkey. Ertürk explained that the women’s identity remained to be guarded by masculine norms in both the Islamist and Kurdish discourses as well as in both the modernist and socialist discourses (Ertürk 2006: 93).

The third and major discourse, feminism was influencing women’s identities from the 1980s onward. The feminism discourse had its own agenda: first, it sought to “define women’s identities from within women’s own experiences rather than from the political agenda” (Ertürk 2006: 95). The feminists argued that women in Turkey were oppressed by the patriarchal system both in the traditional and modern institutions. While the feminist movement was advocating for all women it remained strained to middle-class women in Istanbul and Ankara. Second, feminism offered critiques on the patriarchal gender order but did not associate the state in order to critic the state directly. Instead, feminists stayed away from the state during this period. Although, the feminism did not associate with higher up powers such as the state; the period eventually was introduced to Western feminist classics which became translated in Turkish. Similarly, Turkish women were introduced to international events such as the UN Conference on Women.

By the mid-1990s, institutionalization was gained and the “establishment of the national machinery for women and women’s centers and academic programs were recognized” (Ertürk
By 1991, women’s issues were brought up during campaigns; however, women candidates were still turned away. By 1993, the Virtue Party was able to bring three women into parliament as part of their party. Women in Turkey today are still advocating and mobilizing for their rights, representation, and for their bodies and choices. The current ruling party, AKP, continues to incorporate patriarchal views.

In conclusion to Ertürk’s study, women in Turkey still have to continue the process of advocating and mobilizing for their rights and representation, even with the long history that they have overcome. The Islamist, nationalist, and secularist orientations have all eroded boundaries for women, maintaining the patriarchal nature in society (Ertürk 2006: 102). It is that patriarchal societal orientation that needs to be changed in order for women’s advancements to occur in Turkey; unfortunately, the bureaucracy and those in power keep maintaining the patriarchal hold.

**Turkish Bureaucracy**

Post-Ottoman Empire Turkey demonstrates the contrast between Turkey and the two previous case studies. In 1923, the Turkish Republic was formed to follow the influence of laicism and nation-state; forming a secular state Turkey. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s Enlightenment Secularist strategy followed a guideline to remove religion from the public sphere and reduce it to a matter of the individuals faith. Ataturk’s agenda consisted not only of removing the religion from the public sphere but also modernizing the state into a modern entity (Gozaydin 2008:217). Istar B. Gozaydin, argues that the Westernization of Turkey under the Republic of Turkey aimed to not only separate religion from the state but to form Presidency of Religious Affairs, *Diyanet*, as a tool that would regulate Islam. Gozaydin explains that the regulation of Islam was intended
to ensure that orthodox Islam was under the control of the state by destroying the influence and power of the ulama within the state, banning unorthodox Sufi orders, and outlawing religious speech used for political purposes (Gozaydin 2008:217). Therefore, the previous influence of Islam within the state were transformed into the secular systems of law and education.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs, Diyanet was formed in 1924 as an official institution that would regulate the Islamic faith and practices in Turkey, enlighten the society about religion and carry out the places of prayer calls (Gozaydin 2008:1). As argued by Gozaydin, the Diyanet turned out to be a way of ensuring the secularity in Turkey for over 80 years. One of the foundations under the Turkish Republic was the dismissal of ministries that managed religious affairs; the secular Turkish Republic preferred to have administrative bureaus manage religious affairs. Under the Kemalist laicite, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was in charge of legislative power, and the Diyanet, under the Prime Ministry, looked over any religious affairs concerning faith and prayer. Therefore, the shari’as as a legal system was completely dismissed and the Diyanet became controlled by individuals loyal to the secular state. In short, the shari’a was replaced by European civil codes and secularism.

Today Turkey’s government is a secular parliamentary representative democratic republic. The Prime Minister is the head of the government and the President is the head of state. The President is elected by the citizens and is able to appoint the Prime Minister. Elections for the Grand National Assembly of Turkey are held every five years. The Assembly is in charge of enacting, amending, and repealing laws. Although Turkey is still considered a secular state; there is a controversy over if Turkey is becoming more Islamic. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a member of the AK Party, pushes for the return of conservative, authoritarian, policies and the return of conservative tradition and the Islamic identity in the public sphere. The pluralistic society
of Turkey causes a division of support for the AK party in parliament due to the division of wanting a secular Turkey versus wanting a more Islamic state. Erdogan repeatedly states that he is not threatening the secularism of Turkey but that there should be expression of religion for Turks who wish to do so.

**Women’s Educational Attainment in Turkey**

Education policy played a particularly important role in the secular republic insofar as the educational system was seen to be vital in spreading modern values, including ideas about women’s rights. Modernizing elites referred to an idealized, original culture of the Turks before they accepted Islam; they argued that Turkish women lost status under Islam and that the founding of a secular Turkish state would offer a return to a more active role for women. At the same time, however, within the context of the nuclear family, women were expected to be homemakers who would demonstrate sexual modesty and uphold their reproductive responsibilities: “These contradictory expectations set the standards by which women’s self-worth and value in society were to be measured. The challenge for the newly created urban elite women was to distinguish themselves both from the traditional backward Turkish women through their professionalism and from Western women through their assumed sexual modesty” (Ertürk 2006: 89).

Furthermore, as Fevziye Saliyan explains, “the national education policy of the republic aimed at establishing a modern intellectual climate and diffusing the official ideology of the regime, with the education of women serving as an important symbol of transformation and detachment from the old regime” (Saliyan, 2008, 248). This led to a number of important reforms, as described above. Nonetheless, girls’ educational attainment continued to lag behind that of
boys, and this has had significant consequences for women’s economic opportunities and their participation in the labor force.

As noted by Fevziye Sayilan, women’s education in Turkey was not only influenced by the republican regime’s commitment to equal opportunities for women; it was also shaped by religious and cultural norms that continued to reflect patriarchal values. Moreover, the reforms had the most significant impact among middle- and upper-class families (Sayilan, 2008, p. 249).

Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution clearly states that education is a basic human need and right that is provided for all Turkish citizens, including both men and women. To ensure that no one is prevented from the right to an education, the primary education level is free and mandatory for both genders (Tan). Education has continued to be one of the main objectives of the women’s movements dating back to the Ottoman Empire but only became stronger after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Secular education became to be known as a central institution of the nation-building process of Turkey. The Turkish Republic under Atatürk sought to create a gender equal secular education system that would become the central institution of the country. The Kemalist regime was able to establish diverse achievements that granted women the access to education, public office and employment opportunities (Tan).

In 1924, the Republic produced the Unification of Education Law, which placed the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in charge of public education, opportunities in education, and the equality of education between sexes (Tan). The National Education Basic Act No. 1739 stated that educational opportunity must be equal for both women and men and that all institutions of education must be open to everyone regardless of their language, religion, race and sex (Tan). This further signifies the secular approach that Turkey adopted, allowing for the enhance-
ment of equal rights for both sexes. The secular approach also allowed Turkey to adopt co-education as its main principle; however, some schools were still allocated as gender specific depending on the type of education, possibilities, and necessities that the school is providing (Tan). Technical and vocational schools were created as an educational alternative for girls and these schools “reinforced the reproduction of the power distribution within patriarchal families and the idea of housewifery.” (Saliyan, 2008, p. 249).

Recently, in 2004 Turkey amended Article 10 of its Constitution to ensure that the government publicly show that discrimination was not acceptable and fully ensure equality in the country. The adoption of the multiple conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), all allowed the literacy rates of women to increase. Literacy rates for women in 1935 was 9.8 percent and by 2004 it reached 81.8 percent (Tan). In the years between 1930 and 2004 the ratio of female students in school increased from 35.6 to 47.8 percent in primary education, and from 23.9 to 43.0 percent in secondary education (Tan). Furthermore, the level of higher education for women increased from 16.3 percent in 1930 to 41.9 percent in 2004 (Tan). These data illustrate that there has been an increase in female education rates in Turkey.

Despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality in education and despite official declarations pledging to eliminate remaining gender differences in education, gender inequality still persists in Turkey. While female education rates have continued to increase, there are complications for some Turkish girls in attaining an education. For instance, women who are from the rural, less developed eastern and south-eastern regions in Turkey have the lowest chances of attaining access to an education, “the most striking illiteracy rate is observed in the Southeast where 39% of women are illiterate, followed by the East and Black Sea regions where rates are 35%
and 21% respectively” (UNICEF, 2003). According to a 2004 report, the ratio of uneducated women in urban areas was 18.3 percent, whereas the ratio of uneducated women in rural areas is 30.5 percent (Tan). According to a 2003 review of gender and education in Turkey conducted by UNICEF, 16.6% of women in urban areas could not read or write and 30.8% of women in rural areas were illiterate, compared to 3.9% of urban and 9% of rural men. The report noted that migration and urbanization carried the problem of female illiteracy to towns as large numbers of rural migrants settle in the squatter areas of many Turkish cities (UNICEF, 2003). Studies have shown that major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Adana also have a high rate of young girls who are not enrolled in school. This may lead to the argument that eastern and rural areas are not the only problem areas for the education sector; however, Turkey overall has had increasing rates of education rates for women.

Some women in Turkey have been able to pursue higher educational opportunities and professional careers, becoming university teachers, joining the medicine fields, dentistry, and even achieving degrees in law (Tan). In 1995, Turkey elected a woman as the Prime Minister of the country and had a female President over its Constitutional Court. As of 2005, the ratio of women completing their residency for medical school was 43.1 percent. Furthermore, more than a quarter of practicing lawyers and judges in Turkey are women (Tan).

Women’s Economic Participation and Opportunities in Turkey

According to the United Nations, Turkey is an emerging, upper middle-income economy (UN Women). Unfortunately, Turkey’s labor market contains low labor force participation (LFP) for women. A study conducted in 2009 found that the LFP for women in Turkey was only
23.5 percent compared to 64 percent LFP for women in the European Union. Turkey has faced changes such as urbanization that have affected women’s employment in the country. Prior to urbanization, women in Turkey were employed in low wage farm jobs in rural areas. Overtime, as individuals continued to move to cities and new opportunities in the service and manufacturing service sector opened up the agricultural industry became less important (Uraz, et. al. 2010). Women in, in urban areas who do not have higher education tend to have access to jobs that have lower wages, require long working hours, and do not provide social security. The low wages offered to women have left them unable to work due to the increased costs of hiring childcare for women with children at home. The cost of receiving childcare can cost as much as the average woman’s salary.

In an effort to increase the rate of women in the employment sector; the Turkish government introduced the Ninth Development Plan. The plan outlines the benefits of introducing more women into the labor market such as: increasing economic independence, women’s self-confidence and social respectability (Uraz, et. al. 2010). The plan states:

a) Higher female employment is instrumental in building capacity for economic growth and poverty reduction.

b) Higher levels of female employment allow government investments in education to be used more efficiently (Uraz, et. al. 2010).

While Turkey has continued to introduce new ways to enhance women’s rights; Turkey continues to find itself finding decreasing female employment rates. Statistics show that the rate of women fell from 34.3 percent in 1988 to 22 percent in 2008 (Uraz, et. al. 2010). In the 1980’s Turkey had similar LFP levels as developed countries such as Austria, Netherlands, and Switzerland; however, these countries and most of the OECD countries increased their female participa-
tion rates as opposed to Turkey (Uraz, et. al. 2010). In 2006, Turkey had the lowest levels of female labor force participation rate as compared to Europe and Central Asia and OECD countries (Uraz, et. al. 2010). Figure 3 located below demonstrates how starting in 2006, Turkey’s female labor force participation rates continued to decrease as compared to other countries.

**Figure 4.1:** Decline in female labor force participation rate, 2006 to 2008, OECD countries, Turkey and Other Select Countries

Source: Other select countries include Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Algeria, Iran, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Source: Dayioglu and Kirclar (2009), WDI, TUIK. OECD Stat Extracs.
Women’s participation rates have continued to decrease in Turkey. A particular argument for Turkey is that young men are becoming increasingly educated allowing them to turn to more professional and manufacturing sectors of the economy and away from rural agricultural areas. The argument concludes that as more men become educated and move to urban areas their female counterparts are moving with them. While the urban areas are high-participation and professional for men they are the opposite for women. Women tend to have higher participation levels in rural areas than urban. In rural environment areas, women have a higher participation rate from participating in the agricultural sector and low education required careers. Unfortunately, in urban areas require higher education levels which tends to discriminate some women from joining the labor force (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011). The lack of educational opportunities in rural areas for women can also cause a lack of female employment in urban areas. While this argument does stand by itself; it does not seem to be fully convincing. I argue that there must be more to the reason behind why there is a low female labor force participation rate (FLFP) in Turkey. Especially because Turkey was able to progress in terms of providing women with educational opportunities and even electing a female Prime Minister back in 1995. Turkey also continues to sign and ratify documents that push forward the enhancement of women’s rights.

In an important comparative study of female labor force participation, political economists Andrew Fraker and Damla Özdemir provide evidence that Turkey’s FLP rate is below what would be expected when observing its economic development but higher than expected for a predominantly Muslim country. Fraker and Özdemir, found that countries with Turkey’s level of economic development generally have higher FLFP rates, while many – but not all – Muslim countries generally have lower FLFP rates, suggesting that income and religion do not adequately explain Turkey’s situation (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011, 3-6). An interesting twist that the
study found was that most of the countries with low rates of FLFP are predominantly Muslim
and countries that are fully Sunni population (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011, 5). However, the authors
also find that there are a number of Sunni-majority countries whose FLFP rate is higher than reli-
gion alone would predict, leading them to consider the effect of relatively moderate religious and
gender view (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011).

When the authors controlled for things such as communism and female education, Tur-
key came back as having a 7.1 percent higher FLFP than what was expected. This means that
Turkey has a higher FLFP rate than is expected for a secular country that is cautious in its reli-
gious explanations (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011). Therefore, the next question proposed is: Does
Turkey indeed have a secular system which protects the rights of women or is it similar to other
MENA countries, which tend to have high gender discrimination levels? According to the study
done by Fraker and Özdemir when controlling for economic, demographic, religion, and educa-
tion and communism; they found that Turkey was the fifth highest difference in actual and pre-
dicted FLFP levels (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011). Therefore, the statistical findings show that Tur-
key’s FLFP rate does not experience pressure from religion; however, that has not allowed it to
increase its FLFP rates. Instead, the paper demonstrates that less developed countries that have
more religious and or sexist views such as Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Malaysia or Morocco have
higher FLFP rates than secular Turkey (Fraker & Özdemir, 2011). The authors conclude with a
similar argument from the researchers of Force Labor stating that FLFP rates may be low due to
factors such as urbanization or industrialization in Turkey.

In conclusion, Turkey has attempted to make progression towards women’s rights and
advancements in the country dating back to the Kemalist regime. While Turkey did introduce a
secularist approach that separated state and religion and signed many international documents to
ensure that women receive the same educational and economical rights as males it has not pro-
gressive much. The puzzling case of Turkey is why the increase in education has not allowed for
greater participation by women in the labor force since women’s education is generally associ-
ated with female employment rates. Higher education is associated with higher levels of partici-
pation; however, the case study of Turkey finds that the majority of women in Turkey still do not
have access to an education.

I agree with the World Bank and State Planning Organization’s report on female labor
force participation rate in Turkey that calls on Turkey to improve its access and quality of em-
ployment for women (Uraz et. al. 2010). The report stated that Turkey needs policy changes on
three important grounds that will assist in improving women’s employment rights in Turkey. The
proposals made by the authors began by stating: Turkey needs to create job opportunities for
first time job seekers: this is a form of intervening to ensure that women who complete their edu-
cation are able to find employment post-graduation (Uraz et. al. 2010). It is also necessary for
women with low education levels to be able to find employment in the formal sector. Introducing
more women into the formal labor force will arguably allow the advancement of women’s mobi-
lization and most importantly political rights. This is similar to the argument drawn upon from
the earlier section by Amartya Sen. Sen argued that as women are introduced into the employ-
ment sector there is an increase in women’s rights that allows for the mobilization of women po-
litically as well as allows women to receive more legitimacy and respect in their country (Sen
2002).

The authors also propose having affordable childcare availability in Turkey for mothers
who would like to enter the labor force. The report proposes possibly being able to do this by
promoting early childhood development programs (Uraz et. al. 2010). This would allow mothers
to have a destination where they are able to take their child for the day while they work. The current problem with mothers and the labor force in Turkey is that women earn such minimum wage that everything they earn in terms of possibly working would need to be paid to the childcare service. This causes a lot of women to begin to believe that joining the labor force would not be worth it in those aspects.

Finally, the authors propose that the government of Turkey *sustain investments on education*; this is purely proposing that the government of Turkey continue to stress the importance of an equal and available education for Turkish women (Uraz et. al. 2010). Specifically, it is important to recognize the importance of investing in Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools for young women. VET schools prepare women with skills that qualify them for good jobs inside of the labor market. VET has shown to help find formal employment for young women, as well as promote gender equality inside the labor market (Madenoglu, 2009). I believe that by implementing the following policies as explained by the World Bank Report it will allow Turkey to enhance FLP rates in Turkey which in turn will enhance and mobilize women in the employment and shortly after in the political sector.
Chapter 5. Women’s Mobilization and Empowerment

The Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia are becoming increasingly vibrant regions of women’s movements groups; however, women’s participation in institutionalized political parties remains lower than that of men (Narli 2007: 73). Nevertheless, women’s movements in the region are confronting the “political sclerosis, cultural rigidities, and patriarchal gender relations” that can be found in many of the countries in the region (Moghadam 2007: 1). Furthermore, women’s movements are questioning the status quo, forming alliances, demanding democratization, and their full participation in economic development (Moghadam 2007: 2). Scholars such as Valentine M. Moghadam, professor of sociology and women’s studies and director of women’s studies program at Purdue University, argues that women’s movement groups today are pushing for the transition from patriarchy to empowerment and women’s empowerment will “accelerate to the transition to modernity, democracy, and social justice” (Moghadam 2007: 2).

Saudi Arabia

Women’s activism and mobilization groups have continued to increase and demand their rights. Since the beginning of this research project, there have been numerous changes to women’s rights. In Saudi Arabia, women have seen a list of monumental shifts. The country passed laws to allow women to drive as of June 2018, women can access basic rights including education and healthcare, women can open their own businesses, women can watch sports in stadiums, women have increasingly joined the private sector, and divorced women have been granted the right of custody over their children. Most importantly, women can now do all of this without a male guardianship’s presence or approval.
The changes have been pushed by the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. Bin Salman since his promotion to crown prince in June 2017 has pushed to “reform” and “modernize” Saudi Arabia. The changes to reform Saudi Arabia and prepare it for the future have benefited Saudi women. While the country seems to be increasing women’s mobilization, Saudi Arabian women are far from achieving equality. Women still need the permission of a male guardian (husband, father, brother or son) to travel, get married, divorced, or even to file a police report (Perper 2018). Women are still required to dress in a long cloak “abaya,” women are not permitted to try clothes on at stores, gender segregation remains in beaches, stadiums, public transport, and pools.

Furthermore, while the media coverage is demonstrating progression and mobilization towards women’s rights from the crown prince; it is important to research deeply into Saudi Arabia’s historic ability to disguise what occurs on Saudi grounds. For instance, Saudi Arabia granted women the right to drive, however during the same week when women were celebrating the ability to drive; women’s activists that pushed for the right to drive were imprisoned by the Saudi Kingdom. This is a contradictory move by the Saudi government as in one way they are showing on media that women can now successfully drive and the government is handing out flowers to women’s drivers in Saudi Arabia; however, in another way it shows a lack of progression because activists are being imprisoned for demanding their rights.

Loujain al-Hathloul, a graduate of the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver Canada, and prominent women’s activist was named as one of the 100 Most Influential People of 2019 by Time Magazine. Today, Loujain is one of the many Saudi women activists that have been imprisoned by the Bin Salman. Bin Salman claims that the activists were involved in “intelligence work against Saudi Arabia” (Coole 2019). There has not been any collected proof
to charge the women of working with other intelligence agencies against the Saudi government. Instead, the only documentation of contact between the foreign intelligence and the activists has been with international journalists, foreign diplomats of Saudi Arabian allies, Saudi human rights activists abroad, and with the international human rights organizations such as the Human Rights Watch (Coyle 2019). This strongly demonstrates that while Salman is portraying progression he is threatening and inhumanely torturing individuals that stand up for their rights.

Furthermore, in October of 2018, a well famous Saudi journalist and critic of the Saudi government, Jamal Khashoggi, was assassinated in Istanbul, Turkey. Khashoggi is strongly believed to have been assassinated by Saudi agents on the orders of the highest levels, pointing directly to Mohammad Bin Salman. Khashoggi who entered the Saudi Consulate in Turkey to retrieve divorce papers never stepped out of the consulate. On November 21st, a Saudi public prosecutor stated that Khashoggi was given a lethal injection and after struggling his body was dismembered inside the consulate (“Jamal Khashoggi” 2018). The assignation of Khashoggi points directly to the crown prince and while there is no evidence that connects him to the assignation there is strong evidence to suggest he ordered the killing based on Khashoggi’s critic of the kingdom.

In conclusion, the imprisonment of the women’s activists in Saudi Arabia followed by the assignation of Khashoggi does not allow one to believe that Saudi Arabia is making clear and concise advancements towards modernization or women’s rights.
Iran

Women in Iran demonstrate an outstanding educational attainment; however, women’s education is not corresponding with women’s employment levels and mobility. Women’s movements in Iran remain to be a controversial subject as the conservative Islamists in government deny the existence of such movements. Furthermore, the Iranian government supports sex segregation and extreme legal and practical discrimination against women (Tohidi 2016). Scholars such as Nayereh Tohidi, argue that it is the patriarchal and patrimonial patterns of the Iranian history that have led to the specific feminist formation stages. The formation stages may be divided into eight historical stages as was discussed in the Iranian chapter above.

Women’s status and rights in contemporary Iran and women’s activism and feminist movements are argued to be paradoxical. The educational levels of Iranian women are found to be increasingly high, even higher than that of men; however, the economic mobility and political representation remains to be at an all-time low. As discussed in the chapter of Iran, the political ideology under the Islamic revolution which dominates Iran, pushed women to adopt “ideal roles” as mothers and wives and spread discriminatory laws towards women in the economic sector (Burkova 2017). In the past three decades, Iran has punished women’s rights activists and those who promote gender equality in law and practice (Burkova 2017).

In August of 2006 in Tehran, a campaign known as The One Million Signatures, was designed to raise awareness and demand changes to discriminatory laws in Iran. The feminist movement demanded the elimination of “ALL legal inequalities against women” (Ebadi 2006). The feminist movement of Iran built itself on the ideology that women’s rights and democracy are related and without equality there will be no democracy in Iran. Furthermore, the Iranian
women believed that their only true victory was to eliminate discriminatory laws; they believed that the rise in power of a few select women, or the election of a few women in the Parliament would not solve their problems.

The One Million Signatures Campaign explained the goals and progression that Iranian women wanted. While the movement hoped to expand to the public on the “streets” of Iran, the movement was mostly confined to conference halls, seminars, and places where the overall audience was already filled with activists. Furthermore, the Campaign and its organizers were subjected to pressures and crackdowns from the government. While women’s movement groups are standing together, there Iran has also seen an increase in individual women stepping into the public to protest the discriminatory laws.

In October of 2018, a young woman took off the hijab in Tehran to protest the requirement of the hijab in Iran. The young woman, Vida Movahed was quickly captured by the police who rushed her away. The public protests against the requirement of the hijab has been slowly increasing in Iran as a widespread movement against the Islamic Republic. The individual act of Movahed has caused a widespread movement called “Girls of Enqelab (Revolution) avenue” (Farda 2018). The hijab requirement is one of the enforcements of the Islamic Republic after the downfall of the Shah.

Taking part in women’s movements and activism continues to be a high risk for Iranian women. Azam Jangravi, another protestor of the hijab requirement stood in Tehran and waved her hijab above her head. Jangravi was quickly arrested, fired from her job, sentenced to three years for promoting indecency and breaking the Islamic law, and was threatened by the court that she would lose her daughter (Wither 2019). Jangravi was one of 39 Iranian women that were arrested for protesting the hijab in 2018. It is reported that another 55 people were also detained for
assisting in women’s rights or advocating for women’s rights. Amnesty’s International re-
searcher, Mansoureh Mills claims that authorities in Iran “go to extreme and absurd lengths to
stop their [women’s activist] campaign. Like searching people’s homes for pin badges that have
‘I am against forced hijab’ written on them” (Wither 2019).

The crackdown on women’s activists in Iran demonstrates that women are mobilizing
against discriminatory laws but are continuously pushed against by the Iranian authorities.
Women are demonstrating that they do not require just representation but demand the rights and
laws to be fixed first. The activism crackdown is similar to that of Saudi Arabia and demon-
strates the authority usage of police and religious police to ensure that women are not publicly
demanding their rights. It is important to recognize here that women in Iran are protesting the Is-
lamic Republic for making the hijab a requirement for all women in Iran; they are not necessarily
protesting the hijab itself, just the ability to choose if they would like to wear the hijab or not.
Turkey

Middle and lower-middle class Turkish women have been mobilizing by Islamist, center-right, and pro-Kurdish political parties; however, women’s participation remains lower than that of men (Narli 2007: 74). Since the rise of the Justice and Development Party also known as the AKP and the presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, women in Turkey have seen a resurgence in their rights. The AKP is a conservative party, rooted in moderate political Islam. The party spreads policies that combine religious conservatism with neoliberal economics (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya 2015). The combination of policies caused a spread of inequalities, social hierarchies, increased polarization, and therefore, also caused consequences for women’s rights and gender relations (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya 2015).

In the study, *New Waves for Old Rights? Women’s Mobilization and Bodily Rights in Turkey and Norway*, the authors Sevil Sümer and Hande Eslen-Ziya analyze the resurgence of women’s movements in Turkey and Norway. The authors explain that Turkey scores low on gender equality indicators (as was explained in the Turkey chapter above). Interestingly, when studying women’s rights in Turkey, they found that even the privileged Turkish women are subjected to restrictions (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya 2015). Furthermore, only 30% of women participate in the labor market and sexual harassment in the work force for those employed remains to be a highly prevalent problem (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya 2015).

Women’s movement reached Turkey in the 1980s, when only a small group of urban, middle-class, well-educated women began to question women’s status in Turkey. The Turkish women’s movement was different than the majority of Turkish women. The women behind the movement wanted a liberation of women through the liberation of the sex, not just their own individual emancipation (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015). Although women had begun to demand their
rights in Turkey; observing Turkey today we find increased backlash against gender equality in Turkey (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015). Under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish government has expressed patriarchal discourse, pushing women into traditional roles and out of the public roles. Erdogan claims that women are expected to have at least three children and be traditional mothers and housewives. The strong push for a “traditional Turkish family,” is further demonstrated in the AKP’s emphasis on anti-abortionist and pro-birth rhetoric (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015).

The AKP essentially took the “pure, honorable, and unreachable women” that was portrayed during the Republican period and made her into a weaker individual that needs the protection of men (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015).

In pushing for conservative and patriarchal ideologies, the AKP initiated an anti-abortion discourse. As if the anti-abortion discourse was not enough, Erdogan openly attacked Caesarean births, declaring “I am a Prime Minister who opposes Caesarean births,” Erdogan then stated, “I see abortion as murder” (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015). Therefore, Erdogan attacked and limited women’s reproductive choices. Women’s organizations and feminist initiatives responded to Erdogan with widespread demonstrations and mobilization (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015). A webpage was made that petitioned “Abortion Can’t Be Banned” and “My Body, My Choice.”

The women’s organization and mobilization were able to slow down the Turkish government’s legislation on anti-abortion which was a success for Turkish feminists; however, state hospitals continue to contact the women’s husband or father when pregnancy is confirmed without her consent, demonstrating that the view of women is still backwards and does not allow her to be independent. Furthermore, abortion operations have been abolished in state hospitals in 2014.
In conclusion, the rise of conservatism and patriarchal views in Turkey has withheld women’s progression and caused challenges to women’s movements in Turkey. Turkish women’s rights are found to be discussed through cultural and religious doctrines with a neoliberal approach which limits women’s rights greatly (Sümer & Eslen-Zyia 2015). I agree with the argument made by Sümer and Eslen-Zyia, I believe that the Turkish state under Erdogan is spreading an “anti-feminism” ideology. This is evidently clear from the public speeches that Erdogan has delivered about women’s bodies. Therefore, women’s mobilization in Turkey has been held-back from its progression and needs to continue to fight the patriarchal teachings of those in power such as Erdogan.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the three case studies highlight the subordination of women’s rights in the Muslim majority countries; however, each case study has a different historical context that explains the role of women’s rights. All three case studies have presented either direct or indirect efforts to change women’s rights; however, the countries still demonstrate a great extent of women’s subordination. After thoroughly examining each of the three case studies and focusing on the cultural, economic and political factors; I argue that the limits on women’s education, women’s economic empowerment, women’s political representation, and women’s mobility is linked to the patriarchal interpretations that have dominated the governance, culture, and society in Muslim majority countries. All three case studies share the same common theme: patriarchal interpretations are linked to women’s struggle for rights. I argue that the patriarchal interpretations may be applied to all three case studies as well as other Muslim majority countries.

My hypothesis at the beginning of the paper stated that the religion, Islam, would be tested to help understand if religion causes the subordination of women. As I found at the beginning of the chapter, Islam supports equal rights for both genders. Furthermore, the Qur’an states that both genders deserve equal rights in terms of education and employment. Therefore, I argue that it is with this knowledge of Islam that women will be able to defend their advancement and rights.

My recommendations focus on how to combat the patriarchal interpretations that I argue have limited women’s empowerment and mobility in Muslim majority countries. First, I recommend that countries devolve religious and political power to women as a dual project and commitment. The representation of women in the religious sector as knowledgeable citizens of the
Qur’an, leaders of prayer at women’s mosques, scholars of Islamic law (ulama), and as interpreters of the hadiths will allow women to learn their rights and be able to defend them according to the Qur’an. The Qur’an does not discriminate against women leading prayers and sermons for women, “Men and women are supporters of each other. They command what is right and forbid what is wrong…” (Al-Tawbah 9:71). Women becoming qualified jurists (faqihah), providing religious opinions (fatawa), and providing khutbahs, will slowly destroy the patriarchal interpretations and Islamic teachings that we find in Muslim majority countries. I argue that the more that Muslim women are able to learn about the Qur’anic teachings and earn their position as guardians of Islam, the more representation and mobility they will be able to hold. The religious representation will turn into a political representation because women will be able to be in the public sphere and can provide their stance on women’s rights. It follows the ideology of the movement made by youth, “You will not discuss us without us.” As argued by Smith, the use of religious ideology by women will allow them to challenge the patriarchal interpretations and apply Islamic ideology to women’s issues. By studying and interpreting the Qur’an, women are able to learn the correct interpretations and language so that they may confront the status quo.

Next, I argue that the Islamic tradition must devolve in an egalitarian fashion. There must be an emphasis on understanding religion for both men and women. The teachings of religion in Muslim-majority countries must be equal for both genders. Women’s empowerment in Muslim majority countries should be emphasized and pushed for through Islamic teachings. Women’s legitimacy and will demonstrate the rights that women have through the Qur’an. The education of women on the Qur’an followed with women’s dominant presence in the religious field through khutbahs, hadiths, and presence as individuals that understanding the Qur’an will break
down the patriarchal interpretations of the Qur’an. Women’s role in the discussion of interpretations and religious sect will allow for women to explain and demand their individual rights but will also cease the patriarchal rights that men have granted themselves.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the struggle for gender equality is not specific to Muslim majority countries. Women in non-Muslim majority countries that are democratic are still facing similar struggle and competing for gender equality in their own society. Therefore, it is important to breakdown the orientalist political myth that Muslim women are backward because of Islam. It is important to not compare women in Muslim majority countries to women in non-Muslim majority countries. It is also important to notice that the pluralistic societies of Muslim majority countries does not allow for the comparison of women due to not only the pluralistic societies but the changing politics of Islam as Islam is not static it is dynamic.

Finally, it is important to understand that we do not need to resolve the “problem” of women’s subordination in Muslim majority countries. Muslim women do not need saving, instead, we need to focus on understanding the egalitarian approach of Islam. Women want greater representation in the public life and equal access to employment and education. While we may not know what a gender equal society looks like yet; we do know that women around the world are still fighting the struggle for gender equality and for mobility.
Future Research

For future research and research ideas, I recommend adding the case study of Egypt and studying its history during the Arab Spring of 2011 which eventually led to a president from the Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, I recommend studying Islam and the history of interpretations and hadiths from the time of the Prophet until modern day. I think it would be both useful and interesting to understand where and how the interpretations became dominantly patriarchal. I also believe that it would be interesting to study Islam and democracy. Finally, I think it would be particularly interesting to study other Muslim-majority monarchies, specifically the role that religious scholars and guardians have in the monarchies (example case studies may be: Morocco, Jordan, and Oman).
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