

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL STATUS, RELIGION, AND SECULARIZATION ON
ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY AMONG IRANIANS

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This dissertation evolved from a simple question that I had growing up in Iran. Why was gender equality slow to take effect in Iran? I have tried to understand the answer to this question for a long time. My desire to have a better understanding of gender equality in Iran prompted me to research this question. I have received great support and assistance throughout writing this dissertation. I am grateful for my dissertation committee members Dr. Philip Yang and Dr. Paul Bones who supported me. I am especially grateful for my committee chair, Dr. Celia Lo, who supported me throughout my research. Her expertise, feedback, encouragement, and tireless support helped me to complete this work. I would like to thank Dr. Yang for his helpful comments that contributed significantly to my dissertation. His expertise in methodology helped me prepare for my dissertation. I would like to thank Dr. Bones for his feedback and comments that helped me to further my research.

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ABSTRACT

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This study used empirical evidence and theories to provide a better understanding of the attitudes toward gender equality in Iran. It examined whether social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization affect attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. It also assessed whether gender had a moderating role in the associations between these three sets of factors and the attitudes toward gender equality. Feminist standpoint theory and Davis and Robinson's (1991) model of consciousness served as the theoretical framework of this study. Feminist standpoint theory refers to the collective consciousness of women as a subordinate group. Further, Davis and Robinson's model of consciousness suggests that gender inequality makes subordinate groups aware of their disadvantages and gain consciousness.

I used data collected in Iran during Wave 7 of the World Values Survey that was conducted from 2017-2021. The final sample consisted of 1469 Iranians (716 men and 688 women) aged 18 years or older. Multiple regression and logistic regression models were developed to explain their attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. The results of the study indicated that social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization were associated with attitudes toward

gender equality in employment, education, and politics. Some of these associations were in line with the literature, whereas others were unexpected. Women, educated, younger, unmarried, and secular individuals displayed more positive attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. I also found evidence to show that gender had a moderating role in explaining the outcome variables' associations. In line with our expectation, older respondents showed less support for gender equality in employment, and this relationship was stronger among women. Notably, respondents with higher income were less likely to support gender equality in education and politics, and these associations were stronger for female participants. Men and women showed distinct attitudes toward gender equality, which were explained by social mechanisms. The three factors affected gender differently. Finally, the results of this study provide implications for future research in the area of gender equality in Iran.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality refers to the equal consideration of the behavior, aspirations, and needs of women and men (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2010). Women have fewer opportunities than men; they have traditionally been under-represented and subordinate to their fathers, brothers, husbands, and adult sons. In general, men still hold power over women worldwide (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2010). There is a conflict between the Islamic world and the West concerning gender equality and sexual liberalization (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). Some scholars believe that secularism is the answer to the issue of gender inequality, whereas others believe that both traditional values and modernity have resulted in the marginalization of women (Yılmaz 2015).

On the other hand, non-western feminist scholars have different perspectives. Some of them argue that the patriarchal nature of Islamic laws makes it difficult for women to achieve gender equality within the Islamic framework (Bahi 2011; Kazemi 2000). Prior studies show that the Islamic world is less supportive of equal rights for women; they are also less permissive towards abortion and divorce compared to western democratic countries (Rizzo et al. 2007; Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel 2002). The Islamic world lacks political involvement and support for individual autonomy and democracy. Individual autonomy or human value starts in early childhood when a child wants to do things independently. Unless they are totally dehumanized, individuals are resentful if their autonomy is not respected. If they become aware of their autonomy and enjoy it,

they will not want to lose it again (Pendlebury 2004). Democracy is a system of government that values citizen autonomy (Pendlebury 2004). Gender equality is a sign of tolerance and the key to freedom. However, there are cultural barriers to democracy in the Muslim world (Rizzo et al. 2007).

Women's roles in the United States have changed in recent decades due to the gender equality movement (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). The increased presence of women in the workforce, shifting parenthood demographics, and laws concerning birth control and abortion contributed to the liberalization of attitudes toward gender roles (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). These attitudinal changes affect individuals' behaviors and impact the functioning of society (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). In the United States, women's legal status was the same as that of children; their social status was derived from that of their fathers and/or their husbands (Lorber 2001). During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, first-wave feminism fought for women's rights regardless of their social class, race, ethnicity, and religion (Lorber 2001). These rights included owning property, borrowing money, inheriting, initiating a divorce, obtaining children's custody, arguing cases in court, and serving as a jury member in court (Lorber 2001). Feminists in the nineteenth century embraced liberal political philosophy, which proposed that all men should be equal under the law. In the US Constitution, equality excluded enslaved men and all women, as they were not free citizens (Lorber 2001). The goal of first-wave feminism was to obtain equal rights for women, which included voting rights (Lorber 2001). Second-wave feminism originated in 1949 in France, after the

publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. Western women believed that men set norms and values, and that men were actors, whereas women were reactors. This rendered men the “first sex” and women the “second sex.” Second-wave feminism focused on women’s social disadvantages, which resulted from the sexual oppression that they experienced, and proposed political solutions (Lorber 2001). Until 1920, women in the United States were not permitted to vote. In European countries, women won the right to vote after World War I in return for their efforts during the war (Lorber 2001). Gender inequality exists worldwide, especially in the areas of education, income, economic security, and gender-based violence, and this has led various institutions to criticize gender stratification (Seguino 2011).

In recent decades, attitudes toward women’s roles in the United States have changed greatly through strong women’s movements for gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). In Europe, gender equality has been a highly debated concept (Krzaklewska 2014). In the past decades, the progress of gender equality in Europe has been constant, but there is still a long way to go for it to be realized (Profeta 2020).

Iran’s undemocratic government has been an obstacle to gender equality. Any dissent against the conservative wing is suppressed by the government (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). However, Iranian women have argued that gender equality can be achieved within an Islamic framework (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010).

Scholars have different perspectives on how to achieve gender equality. There is disagreement between the Islamic world and the West regarding gender equality and sexual liberalization (Rizzo et al. 2007). Some non-western feminists believe that the

western idea of gender equality resembles a masculine woman who has lost her female identity; they argue that gender equality is simply the sharing of social roles and equality in tasks (Singa and Goker 2017; Yilmaz 2015). They suggested that approaching justice and eliminating the oppression of women while recognizing the differences between human beings is another way to achieve gender equality (Yilmaz 2015).

The study of gender equality can explore various dimensions, such as rights, attitudes, practices, and the distribution of resources (Krzaklewska 2014). Since attitudes serve as a predictor of behavior (Fazio 1986), I chose to study Iranians' attitudes toward gender equality.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Gender equality involves the recognition of women being different from men in terms of their biological abilities and the socially constructed disadvantages they experience compared to men (Kabeer 1999; Subrahmanian 2005). Although cultures and women's roles differ around the world, men universally have more power than women (Roshandel, Sadeghi, and Tadrissi 2019). In contemporary Iranian society, women experience discriminatory laws and customs such as unequal inheritance, biased divorce/custody laws, polygamy, and child marriage (Mohamadi 2016; Tohidi 2016). Furthermore, women lack access to powerful governmental positions in Iran (Yaish and Stier 2009).

Due to the lack of studies concerning the attitudes toward gender equality in the Middle East, the present study aims to examine the same within Iran. According to the 2017 World Economic Forum report, Iran ranked 140th among 144 countries in terms of

its gender gap (Roshandel et al. 2019). The report demanded that Iran's policy makers work toward the development of gender equality. However, this process would not be possible without the Iranian government's involvement (Roshandel et al. 2019). Although Iran has signed a human rights agreement that pledges to not discriminate, the agreement has not been enforced (Roshandel et al. 2019). Based on Iran's significant gender gap, I wanted to examine the effects of factors related to social status, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization on Iranians' attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. Gender equality is a multidimensional concept and it is not easy to measure gender equality at the individual level (Lomazzi, Israel, and Crespi 2019)

This study used Wave 7 of the World Values Survey to examine the effects of social status factors, religious-spiritual involvement, and secularization on attitudes towards gender equality in employment, education, and politics among Iranians. Furthermore, this study also evaluated the moderating role of gender on Iranians' attitudes toward gender equality and its link to social status, religious/spiritual involvement, and secular values.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are some studies on gender equality in western countries (Andersen and Collins 2015; Blau and Kahn 2000; Charles and Grusky 2007; England 2006; Gorman and Kmec 2009; Gupta et al. 2019; Petersen and Morgan 1995; Tam 1997; Wernet 2016). Additionally, there have been studies on women's rights and feminist movements in Iran (Tohidi 2016), women in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Moghadam 1988), Islam and

secular feminism (Bahi 2011), revolution and gender politics (Moghadam 1999), and the obligatory hijab in Iran (Basiri 2018). However, research regarding the attitudes toward gender equality in Iran remains lacking.

This study makes four significant contributions to the literature. First, this is the first study to directly assess the effects of social status, religious/spiritual involvement, and secular values on Iranians' attitude toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. Second, this study acknowledges the distinctions between men and women's attitudes toward gender equality; it separately evaluates their attitudes and their link to social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. Third, this study contributes to existing literature by examining the possible moderating role of gender in association with the attitudes toward gender equality and its link to social status, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. This study evaluates whether gender interacts with social status factors, religious-spiritual involvement, and secularization to explain the attitudes towards gender equality among Iranians. Finally, this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions. It uses two theories—Davis and Robinson's model of consciousness and feminist standpoint theory—to understand the attitudes of Iranians regarding gender equality. These theories focus on the major aspects of gender equality. This study is important at a practical level due to the everyday struggles of Iranian women in the face of discriminatory laws. It is essential for western and Iranian feminists to understand each other's perspectives and help each other work toward equitable policies.

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 presents the research problem and the significance of this study. Chapter 2 reviews existing studies pertaining to attitudes toward gender equality. It focuses on the historical background of Iran—starting from the Reza Khan era—and the gender inequality that Iranian women experience. Further, it posits attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. Chapter 2 presents a review of research concerning social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. It also focuses on ethnic minority groups in Iranian society and their struggles. In Chapter 3, the study’s theoretical framework is used to understand the effects of social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization on Iranians’ attitudes toward gender equality. Moreover, Davis and Robinson’s model of consciousness and feminist standpoint theory were applied to understand the moderating role of gender in association with the three factors and outcome variables. Chapter 4 proposes the methods utilized to examine the hypotheses. Chapter 5 includes the results of our data analysis, which included descriptive and multivariate regression analyses. In Chapter 6, the findings and implications of this study are discussed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The status of women in Iran has been affected by various factors in Iranian history, such as the nation's patriarchal culture and secular and religious factors. Other influences include the state's policies and ideologies regarding the status of women (Povey and Rostami-Povey 2012; Tohidi 2016). According to Tohidi (2016), western imperial intervention affected state policies and gender issues in Iran.

In recent years, globalization, international human rights and women's rights, feminist activism, the internet, and social media have also influenced the conditions of Iranian women (Povey and Rostami-Povey 2012; Tohidi 2016). In this chapter, I present the historical background of the study and literature concerning the effects of social status, religious/spiritual involvement, and secular values on Iranians' attitudes toward gender equality.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Also known as Persia, Iran has thousands of years of history. Iran is a land with diverse art, architecture, languages, literature, and culture (Katouzian 2013). Persian is one of the languages spoken in Iran. The other languages spoken include Kurdish, Pashto, Turkish, and Arabic languages (Katouzian 2013). Iran is one of the most important countries in the Middle East. It contains approximately 10% of the world's oil reserves and the second largest deposit of natural gas (Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri 1991). Iran

also has one of the largest populations in the Middle East, and its location is of geopolitical importance to the superpowers (Goldstone et al. 1991).

In 1925, a commander of the Iranian Cossack Brigade named Reza Khan assumed power and became the Shah (i.e., the Iranian king). Under Reza Shah's reign, Iran declared its neutrality during World War II; however, it was invaded by the Allied countries (Goldstone et al. 1991). Reza Shah left the country, and his son—Mohammad Reza Pahlavi—became the next Shah of Iran. His reign commenced unstably due to foreign interference within Iran after the war (Goldstone et al. 1991). The 1953 coup against the liberal-nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, which was supported by Britain and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), facilitated the consolidation of the Shah's power (Goldstone et al. 1991). Although Iran was never colonized, the influences of Russia and Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in the emergence of anti-imperialistic attitudes and an anti-American sentiment among Iranians, who favored democracy and modernism (Tohidi 2016). The Iranian constitutional movement from 1905 to 1911 aimed to combat the monarchy and imperial supporters (Tohidi 2016). The Shah relied on the United States for political and military support; he purchased non-nuclear weapons from the United States despite being criticized for wasting Iran's wealth on weapons. The United States sent \$765 million in economic aid to Iran in 1967, and Iran bought \$790 million worth of military weapons from the United States (Goldstone et al. 1991; Wormser 1981). Iran also provided certain exemptions to U.S. military personnel, permitted the United States to establish listening

posts in Iran in order to spy on the Soviet Union, and supported U.S. foreign policy (Goldstone et al. 1991).

The sale of Iranian economic interests to the United States by the Shah was opposed by Mossadegh, who pushed for economic nationalism, along with far-right Iranians in the Pan-Iran Secular Nationalist Party and Ayatollah Khomeini (Goldstone et al. 1991). Ayatollah Khomeini—Iran’s religious leader—was also critical of the Shah’s dependence on foreign governments. He believed that Iranians should rely on the Quran, eliminate bureaucracy, and break free of foreign domination and oppression (Algar 1980; Goldstone et al. 1991). Under the Shah’s reign, the Iranian economy was restructured, but authoritarianism was maintained. Iranian elites lost their traditional and political support and were attacked by the state (Goldstone et al. 1991). The Iranian government’s political dependency on the United States and Iranian economic policies alienated nationalist elites, which resulted in high inflation (Goldstone et al. 1991). The economic crisis of the late 1970s harmed the working class and the urban poor. The alienated elites resultantly mobilized the working class to oppose the Shah, who responded with violence. However, the Shah left Iran once the protests grew larger, and the revolutionary opposition seized power (Goldstone et al. 1991).

The victory of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in 1979 was a turning point in contemporary Iran. Some of the conditions that had led to the revolution included the competition for resources among domestic groups, the position of elites, the competition among superpowers, and changes in global economic interactions (Goldstone et al. 1991). The Iranian Revolution was a result of liberal, socialist, and religious movements. The

liberal movement was led by the National Front under the leadership of Mossadegh, the religious liberal movement was led by Mehdi Bazargan—an Iranian scholar and activist, and the socialist parties were represented by intellectuals and working-class groups (Goldstone et al. 1991). According to Brandis (2009), the Islamic Revolution was a “popularly supported revolution” that was a consequence of widespread “socioeconomic disagreements in the society” (Basiri 2018:1). Brandis (2009) asserted that the ideological justification for the Islamic Revolution, which was presented by Ayatollah Khomeini—the revolution’s mastermind—had its roots in Shi’ism (Basiri 2018).

A few months after assuming power, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the compulsory wearing of hijabs and enforced other rules that restricted Iranian women’s lives and bodies. These included restrictions related to the jobs that women could pursue and subjects that they were permitted to study (Basiri 2018; Esfandiari 1997). In 1983, a correction was added to the Iranian Constitution, which stated that women who damaged “public purity” by not wearing a hijab would be subject to 74 lashes (Basiri 2018). Another correction indicated that women who wore makeup and violated dress codes would be subject to arrest and punishment because they were in violation of religious laws and caused corruption (Basiri 2018). The veil became a sign to distinguish Muslim women from “Western dolls.” Women’s bodies were controlled through the hijab, which was forced upon Iranian women by Ayatollah Khomeini (Basiri 2018).

The public and domestic laws under the IRI were controlled by religious leaders. The Family Protection Law was repealed and replaced with laws from the 1930s and 1940s. Laws from pre-modern tribal societies such as *Qisas* (eye for an eye) and *Hudud*

(stoning) viewed women as subhuman (Tohidi 2016). This discrimination and unequal treatment led to protests by women. The Iranian women's movement targeted the state's discriminatory laws that adversely impacted women, ethnic minorities, and religious minorities (Tohidi 2016).

After the rise of the IRI, Iranian women were ascribed a new identity. The new Muslim woman was positioned at the intersection of tradition and modernity, which rendered them paradoxical (Mehran 2003). The new Muslim woman was expected to have strong family bonds at home and simultaneously serve as an Islamized and politicized wife and mother (Mehran 2003). This idea presented the Iranian woman as one who obeys the laws of the Iranian government in order to be a good citizen, despite the fact that some of these laws restrict her bodily autonomy; however, she simultaneously resists the laws that discriminate against her gender, which gives her a double consciousness.

Iranian Women's Movement

The history of the women's rights movement dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the formation of the modern social movement for constitutionalism. The women's movement and feminism are the by-products of modernity and capitalism, and some Iranians associate them with western intrusion and colonialism (Tohidi 2016). Shirin Ebadi—the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and an Iranian human rights activist—stated in her speech, “Inside Iran, a woman is required by law to wear the hijab so I wear it. However, as I mentioned, I believe that with a more progressive interpretation of Islam, we can change this. I believe that it is up to individual

women to decide whether they want to wear the hijab or not” (Basiri 2018:51). She also stated that she believed that Iranian women could decide to wear or not to wear hijab and that the dress code restricts the autonomy of Muslim and non-Muslim Iranian women have of their bodies (Basiri 2018).

In Iran, women’s rights movements often try to illustrate their independence and distance from outsiders in order to prove their loyalty to their country (Tohidi 2016). They are trying to carefully navigate between politics and culture while preserving their authenticity and fighting for equality and human rights (Tohidi 2016). Some of the discriminatory laws that the Iranian women’s movement is fighting against include child marriage, unequal inheritance, biased divorce laws, child custody, polygamy, and Sigheh or temporary marriages (Tohidi 2016). A particularly grave incident of discrimination and violence against women and children was the killing of Arian Golashni in 1998. She was a nine-year-old Iranian girl who was in the custody of her drug addicted father and her stepbrother. Her mother’s requests to receive custody were repeatedly denied, and the child was killed by her father in the meanwhile. Her death led to a national outcry for change. Iranian feminists requested that Iran’s child custody laws be changed, which led to the 2002 custody law that allowed mothers to keep control of their children until the age of seven (Tohidi 2016).

Many Iranian women have demanded legal reforms and equal rights from the IRI. In 2006, women’s activists gathered in Tehran’s Haft-e Tir Square for peaceful demonstrations (Mohamadi 2016). This was not the first women’s demonstration in Iran but served as a continuation of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution that demanded gender

equality in Iran, which involved a ban on polygamy, equal divorce rights, joint custody of children, equal marriage rights, and increasing the legal marriage age for girls to 18 years (Mohamadi 2016). These protests were violently silenced, but they became a catalyst for the One Million Signatures Campaign in 2006, which was founded by Parvin Ardalan—a women’s rights activist and journalist (Mohamadi 2016). Many Iranian women joined the Iranian women’s movement. For example, Jamileh Kadivar questioned the “fegh” wisdom of men on divorcing their wives, and Ashraf Geramizadegan, who was the editor of *Zan-e Ruz* and later became director and editor of the journal *Hoquq-e Zanan*, joined the movement (Mir-Hosseini 1999). Masih Alinejad—a women’s rights activist—initiated a campaign called “My Stealthy Freedom” on her Facebook page in April 2016. The campaign supported the struggles of Iranian women in the face of compulsory veiling policies (Seddighi and Tafakori 2016). According to Article 638 of Iran’s Islamic Penal Code, “Women who appear in public places and roads without wearing an Islamic hijab shall be sentenced to ten days to two months imprisonment or a fine of five hundred to fifty thousand rials” (Seddighi and Tafakori 2016:926). As a result, women have been monitored in public places by the morality police to ensure that they follow the dress code (Seddighi and Tafakori 2016).

While women played a major role in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the obligatory hijab policy has become a threat to Iranian women’s bodily autonomy (Mohanty et al. 1991). Many Iranian women have criticized and challenged the patriarchal and discriminatory laws of the IRI. However, they have been consequently labeled as inauthentic, anti-Islamic, and imperialist apologists (Batmanghelichi and Mouri 2017).

Attitudes Toward Gender Equality

The existing literature contains studies concerning attitudes toward gender equality and the different factors that affect it. Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) studied feminist attitudes toward gender equality and examined the trends in men and women's attitudes from 1974 to 1998. They examined attitudes toward gender equality with items that represented opinions on abortion, sexual behavior, gender roles in the public sphere, and family responsibilities (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). They found that women's participation in the public sphere and family responsibilities have been liberalized (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Moreover, among married couples, the labor force of the wives affected their attitudes toward gender equality and was positively related to men's increased feminism (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). They also found that educated individuals, especially educated women, were more supportive of gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004).

Ekvall (2014) studied the relationship between norms on gender equality and the level of gender equality in the political and socioeconomic spheres. She also measured attitudes toward gender equality in the political, economic, educational, and health spheres (Ekvall 2014). She found a significant association between attitudes toward gender equality and socioeconomic levels (Ekvall 2014).

Jakobsson and Kotsadam (2010) studied attitudes toward gender equality in Norway and Sweden. Despite the large differences between the chores that men and women performed, they found that these countries are moving toward a more egalitarian division of tasks (Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010).

Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman (2011) studied the trends in attitudes toward gender roles from 1977 to 2008. They found that education was related to progressive gender attitudes and more liberal social attitudes (Cotter et al. 2011). Lomazzi et al. (2019) studied the effect of work-family balance policies on attitudes toward gender roles. Younger individuals were more egalitarian. Among men, household composition did not affect attitudes toward gender equality. Compared to married men, single men were more supportive of gender equality (Lomazzi et al. 2019). In general, women and educated people displayed more positive attitudes toward gender equality (Lomazzi et al. 2019).

Diehl, Koenig, and Ruckdeschel (2009) examined the effects of religiosity on gender equality by comparing natives and Muslim immigrants in Germany. They measured gender role attitudes by dividing tasks between couples. Among both Germans and Turks, religious individuals had more conservative attitudes regarding gender role attitudes in comparison to individuals with secular values (Diehl et al. 2009). Religious commitment did not affect the division of tasks among German couples, but it affected Turkish couples (Diehl et al. 2009).

Kostenko, Kuzmichev, and Ponarian (2016) studied the attitudes toward gender equality and the perception of democracy in the Arab world. They measured attitudes toward gender equality in both the private and public spheres (Kostenko et al. 2016). They found that older people in Arab countries are more supportive of gender equality, whereas younger individuals are more conservative (Kostenko et al. 2016). A possible explanation for this phenomenon might be due to the anti-colonial movement that

occurred from the 1950s until the 1960s, which had secular leaders who espoused a pan-Arabism ideology (Kostenko et al. 2016). People who were teenagers then constitute the older Arab population today (Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991; Halliday 1987; Kostenko et al. 2016). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the conservative ideologies of the United States and its conservative allies, which were sponsored by the Middle Eastern monarchies, proliferated rapidly through the media (Colton 2010; Kostenko et al. 2016; Meneley 2000).

In 2003, the Iranian parliament ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, the Guardian Council vetoed the ratification (UNICEF 2011). The following are some of the ways in which women have been discriminated against in modern Iran. First, a woman's testimony is considered worth half of a man's and is sometimes not accepted (UNICEF 2011). Second, Iranian women who married a foreign man could not pass on their Iranian nationality to their children. Instead, the child had to adopt their father's nationality. However, Iranian men who marry a foreign women could always pass on their nationality to their child (UNICEF 2011). Third, divorce rights in Iran privilege Iranian men over women. Men can file for divorce through a family court, whereas women can only do so under certain circumstances and with the consent of their husbands (UNICEF 2011). Custody is granted to the mother only until her children reach the age of seven, after which the father becomes the lawful guardian. If the father dies, custody of the children passes to the grandfather (UNICEF 2011). Fourth, Iranian women need their husbands' consent to receive a passport and travel abroad. Additionally, there is sex segregation in public

places, which further restricts women's freedom of movement (UNICEF 2011). This emphasizes the importance of examining women's issues in Iran from within and not from an outsider's point of view (Farganis 2000).

Gender equality in employment. There is considerable gender-based income inequality worldwide. In the United States, paying unequal wages based on gender has been considered job discrimination since 1963, as per the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (England 2006). However, some jobs are dominated by either men or women. Female-dominated jobs are paid less than male-dominated jobs; for example, nurses and legal secretaries earn \$9,120 and \$7,288 less per year than mechanics, respectively (England 2006). Some argue that women's jobs pay less because their work is culturally devalued (Tam 1997). Prior studies have attributed the gender wage gap to occupation-establishment segregation, which accounts for 40 percent of the wage gap (Petersen and Morgan 1995).

The gender gap in job authority is associated with a lack of access to powerful positions and gender discriminatory processes in the labor force (Yaish and Stier 2009). Yaish and Stier (2009) examined gender equality in job authority across 26 countries. Their results indicated that women have an inferior position in the labor market, which is related to their familial responsibilities. Scholars have been interested in understanding how work-family imbalance can be solved through policies and work arrangements (Yaish and Stier 2009). They found that due to the high family demands placed on women, having a family friendly environment at work is necessary (Yaish and Stier 2009). The inequality at the workplace between men and women with respect to access to

positions of authority will lead to gender inequality in society. Hence, understanding job authority and gender inequality in the labor force provides a better understanding of society (Yaish and Stier 2009).

Percheski (2008) studied cohort differences in professional women's employment rates from 1960 to 2005. She found that the employment rates of Generation X women with young children were higher and women in younger cohorts were working longer hours compared to older women (Percheski 2008).

Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) studied the effects of motherhood on employment. They found that employers discriminated against mothers and that mothers had certain disadvantages in the paid labor market (Correll et al. 2007). This was due to cultural beliefs about motherhood and mothers not being able to perform as an "ideal worker" or the "glass ceiling" that prevented women from climbing the career ladder (Correll et al. 2007).

Despite the enforcement of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in which the U.S. Congress outlawed intentional discrimination, many American women still experience discrimination in the workplace. This is due to subconscious categorizing and stereotyping, which compels individuals to favor those in their own group to "others" and practice acts of discrimination on a micro level (Reskin 2011).

Some scholars believe that the absence of women from powerful positions is due to their lower human capital. Men work longer hours and acquire more training than women, while women are constrained by familial responsibilities. This consequently leads to less investment in human capital and the economy (Yaish and Stier 2009).

According to Becker (1985), a household is an economic unit in which the wife specializes in childcare, whereas the husband works at the workplace (Yaish and Stier 2009). Many scholars have concluded that division of labor is the solution to facilitating a growth in human capital. Men and women compete for paid work in the job market, but couples must bargain over unpaid work when they enter marriage. In other words, the division of labor within families is subject to bargaining (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). Gender equality in employment may also increase women's bargaining power within their families, benefitting both men and women and leading to greater savings for families (Klasen and Lamanna 2009). In particular, childbearing and child rearing are disadvantages for women when they compete with men in the job market (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). Young women build up assets for their careers, such as education and employment, but they lose most of these upon bearing children. Hence, mothers are disadvantaged women. Employers are more likely to invest in training male employees than female employees (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). Women are underrepresented in top positions and experience more obstacles compared to men in moving up in the organizational hierarchy, even when they perform as well as their male counterparts (Gorman and Kmec 2009). Some employers believe that men have a stereotypically masculine ability that women lack and display in-group favoritism toward men during the hiring process (Gorman and Kmec 2009).

Gender equality in education. Some earlier studies concluded that gender inequality contributed to economic growth, but more recent studies have found the opposite (Klasen and Lamanna 2009). Studies on gender inequality and education have

shown that women's education impacts fertility and the next generation of human capital; decreasing the gender gap would increase economic development (Klasen and Lamanna 2009). Women's education leads to lower fertility, decreased child mortality levels, and increased education for the next generation. On the other hand, women must be educated in order to be competitive in the job market (Klasen and Lamanna 2009; Moheyuddin 2005). Furthermore, Klasen and Lamanna have argued that gender inequality in education and gender inequality in employment are interrelated; less education leads to less employment, because employers prefer hiring educated individuals (Klasen and Lamanna 2009). Cooray and Potrafke (2011) studied the effects of political institutions on gender equality in education. They found no evidence of a relationship between political institutions and discrimination in women's education. On the other hand, they found that culture and religion affected gender inequality in education. They stated that modernization leads to democratization, which consequently results in cultural change and gender equality (Cooray and Potrafke 2011; Moheyuddin 2005).

Moheyuddin (2005) studied the causes of gender equality in education and their impact on economic growth and development. He found that gender equality in education is related to religious preferences (Moheyuddin 2005). Some parents invest less in their daughters' schooling due to inequality in the labor force; in contrast, they invest in their sons' education because this is viewed as a better economic choice. Another reason is the idea that sons provide for their parents as they age, while daughters leave the family after they marry. Some cultures and traditions prefer educating sons over daughters (Moheyuddin 2005).

In Iran, the rights of women were severely curbed after the IRI assumed power. Some educated women, including female judges, lost their job. Iranian women's bodies became a weapon of anti-colonial and anti-imperialism, and women were forced to show their loyalty to their nation by distancing themselves from foreign powers (Tohidi 2016).

Gender equality in politics. Lombardo and Meier (2006) studied European Union policies, which included European Council resolutions, European Commission decisions, and European Parliament reports. They argued that some steps needed to be taken to achieve gender mainstreaming, which is a broader term for gender equality (Lombardo and Meier 2006). The policy-making process should target the patriarchal system by addressing the causes of inequality in family, work, politics, and culture. The policies should have a gender-based focus and should be inclusive of all genders. This perspective, which is intended to be incorporated into politics, espouses that all gender issues and differences should be considered and addressed in policies (Lombardo and Meier 2006). The representation of women and men in politics should be equal, at least in numbers; however, this will not by itself lead to a shift in power, since it is based on existing norms and values that were determined by men (Lombardo and Meier 2006).

In the 1970s, women in European countries and the United States changed their voting behavior and tended to vote more to the left than men. Earlier, women were considered protectors of family and religious values who voted to the right (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). The phenomenon of women running for high-visibility positions in office leads to greater political interest, efficacy, and participation of women in politics (Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012).

Social Status Factors and Gender Equality

Many American couples believe that financial security, job stability, home ownership, and the absence of debt lead to a successful marriage (Usdansky 2011). Couples with a higher socioeconomic status (SES) can afford to follow the traditional division of labor in which the woman leaves the labor force and the man is the primary earner. Individuals with a higher SES express more positive attitudes toward gender equality, while couples with a lower SES adopt a more egalitarian behavior compared to their high-SES counterparts (Usdansky 2011). Lomazzi et al. (2019) studied the effect of work-family balance policies on attitudes toward gender roles. Younger individuals were found to be more egalitarian.

Policies influence individuals' agency, and institutions affect their behavior through rewards and costs (Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010). Gender equality is most commonly observed among the following demographics: childless couples, employed women, couples in which the woman earns more, educated individuals, women, younger people, single men or separated fathers, non-religious individuals (Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010), and urban residents (Levtov et al. 2014; Lomazzi et al. 2019).

Conversely, lower support for gender equality has been observed among religious people (Kostenko et al. 2016), lower-income countries (Levtov et al. 2014), and individuals with anti-immigrant perspectives (Levtov et al. 2014). In Arab countries, the study results have been inconsistent with findings from other countries. Older individuals in Arabic countries have been found to be more supportive of gender equality, whereas younger people were less supportive and more conservative (Kostenko et al. 2016).

Religious/spiritual Involvement

Studies have revealed an association between Judeo-Christian and patriarchal cultures. In traditional societies, religious norms sustained the togetherness of families—which were the main economic units—and supported unequal gender roles, which included women’s roles as housekeepers and mothers (Voicu 2009). As a result of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, the importance of religion decreased in Europe and it gradually lost its influence on politics, morality, and sexuality because people felt free to choose and build their own belief systems (Giorgi 2016). In most religious traditions, there are different gendered and sexual practices. In the United States, debates about abortion, the use of contraceptives, same-sex marriage, and the division of labor in households are influenced by religious affiliation (Avishai et al. 2015; Voicu 2009). Research in Islamic countries indicated that there was dissatisfaction with patriarchal interpretations of Islam and women’s roles, which implied that gender equality was far from being a reality in Islamic countries (Syed et al. 2009).

Research has shown that religious institutions shape the social rules and cultural norms that influence attitudes toward gender equality (Seguino 2011). Since the 1980s, the United States has been under the control of a political coalition that conservative, evangelical Protestants have been an important part of. This coalition is operated and supported by the Republican Party and has been instrumental in passing conservative policies that place gender- and sexuality-based restrictions, such as restricting women’s reproductive freedom and encouraging male-led families as an ideal model (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010; Seguino 2011). Conservatism has negatively affected gender equality

both in the United States and globally; these effects have mostly been felt among women that have a lower SES and women of color (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010). This makes one think that removing religion from American politics would lead to gender equality. Bernstein and Jakobsen (2010) have argued that a feminist alliance should target the Protestant dominance in U.S. policies and promote religious diversity.

Some scholars reasoned that individuals' religiousness affects their views on gender roles because religions reflect the sexual division of labor (Thompson 1991). In the West, the division of labor has led to gendered institutions with a male-dominated organizational hierarchy (Thompson 1991). Thus, individuals with less religious/spiritual involvement are more likely to support gender equality (Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010). Religious involvement is related to gender roles and patriarchal cultures where women's roles consist of housekeeping and childcare (Avishai et al. 2015; Klingorová and Havlíček 2015; Voicu 2009) while men hold the positions of power.

Studies have shown that people with religious affiliation are more likely to support unequal gender roles (Voicu 2009). Klingorová and Havlíček (2015) studied the relationship between religion and gender inequality. They found that gender inequality was higher in religious countries and concluded that this could be attributable to religious teachers advocating for a patriarchal system (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015). Their study illustrated that the highest levels of gender inequality can be found in nations in which the population adheres to Islam or Hinduism (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015).

Some feminists believe that religion is a factor in subordination and that Sharia—the Islamic law—is incompatible with gender equality and human rights. Val Moghadam

(1988) has argued that, if we focus on theological arguments rather than the socioeconomic and political disadvantages that women experience, it will be difficult for Muslim women to reform Islam and improve their situation within the Islamic framework (Bahi 2011).

Haideh Moghissi, the founder of the Iranian National Union of Women, asserted that Islamic feminism provides women with only one identity and tries to silence any voices against Islamification. Furthermore, since Islam is a religion based on a gender hierarchy, it cannot be adopted as a framework for gender equality and women's rights (Bahi 2011). According to Fatima Mernissi, Moroccan feminist and sociologist, Islam provides a model of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality while portraying the subservience of women as sacred (Bahi 2011). Muslim female scholars have challenged Islam's hegemony and extremism, arguing that the liberation of Muslim women must be reformulated within Islam. They also challenged the definitions of feminism in western and secular countries and advocate for women within the Islamic framework (Bahi 2011).

Furthermore, there have been discussions among feminists about the Islamic veil and whether it is a sign of oppression. Sirma Bilge, sociologist and researcher, stated that it could generate a false consciousness, which makes women unable to recognize oppression or the subversive use of the Islamic veil (Giorgi 2016). The relationship between Islam and gender has been controversial among scholars. This is due to women's lower status and inferior legal rights in the Middle East. A lack of democracy in Islamic countries has resulted in a lack of political involvement and support for individual autonomy (Kazemi 2000). Studies have shown that the Muslim world is less supportive

of gender equality, women's rights, homosexuals, and abortion compared to democratic countries (Inglehart et al. 2002).

Gender equality and women's emancipation are factors that economically, socially, and democratically affect the world and thus the development of human society as a whole (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015). Some studies have shown that religion can be abused by men as a way to control women (Macey 1999). Although the role of religion in gender equality is complex, religious systems influence social norms and preserve the dominance of men in society (Renzetti et al. 2012; Young 1987).

Shia Muslims and Sunni Muslims. According to the Iranian constitution, Sharia is its source of legislation (UNICEF 2011). Most Iranians are Shiite Muslims, whereas Sunni Muslims are a minority. These two groups differ in some of their beliefs, and their school of Sharia law differs in some respects, such as with respect to inheritance (UNICEF 2011).

After Prophet Muhammad passed away, Muslims were divided into two sections: Shia and Sunni (Ameli and Molaei 2012). These two groups agree on the three fundamental principles of Islam: *Tawhid* (monotheism), *Qiyamah* (Day of Judgment), and *Nubuwwah* (prophethood), but differ with respect to certain beliefs, rituals, and practices (Ameli and Molaei 2012). Sunnis believe that the Prophet did not nominate his successor and that his followers should elect his successor, which led to the election of Abu-Bakr (Ameli and Molaei 2012). Shia followers believe that Imam Ali, Mohammad's cousin, was nominated as his successor in the Farewell Pilgrimage to Mecca. Therefore, Imam Ali was the rightful political and spiritual leader (Ameli and Molaei 2012;

Campbell 2008; Sanders 1992). Shiites believe that the 12th imam (Al-Mahdi) went into occultation (*ghayba*) and that the Messiah would return at the end of time (Mervin et al. 2013). One of the main conflicts between Shia and Sunni is regarding the figure of the imam, whom Shia religious scholars have attributed more rights and privileges to over time (Mervin et al. 2013).

In November 1979, the IRI adopted its constitution. In the constitution, religious minority groups such as Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims were recognized, while other religious minorities such as Baha'i were not (Hassan 2007). The IRI constitution restricted the freedom of religion, ethnic and religious minorities, and women (Hassan 2007). Approximately 89 percent of Iranians are Shia Muslims, while Baha'i, Christians, Zoroastrians, Sunni Muslims, and Jews represent the remaining 11 percent of the population. Religious minorities suffer from discrimination in education, employment, and housing (Hassan 2007).

According to the 2006 Human Rights Report released by the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, religious freedom was restricted by the Iranian government (Hassan 2007). There have been reports of intimidation, harassment, imprisonment, and discrimination due to religious beliefs, with Baha'is and Sufi Muslims facing the brunt of such discrimination. Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews have also been harassed and discriminated against by the Iranian government, albeit to a lesser degree (Hassan 2007). Sunni Muslims are the largest religious minority in Iran. Their main complaint is that the Iranian state prohibits the construction of Sunni mosques and the display of Sunni religion and culture (Hassan 2007).

Syed et al. (2009) studied the relationship between gender equality and religious and secular ideologies in Turkey and Pakistan. They found that gender equality was influenced by deeply ingrained institutional practices, some of which were gender discriminatory. Syed et al. (2009) argued that national laws exert the most coercive pressure on gender equality. Policymaking and the enforcement of anti-discriminatory laws enable women to have equal rights. Establishing egalitarian structures is essential to gender diversity, and egalitarian principles such as social justice, equality, and inclusion serve as the foundation of gender equality. These will only be effective simultaneously at the macro-national, meso-organizational, and micro-individual levels (Syed et al. 2009).

Secularization

There is no single definition of secularization; some define it as dissociation from religious norms and beliefs, whereas others view it as the differentiation of religious and nonreligious institutions (Gorski and Altınordu 2008). Secularization theorists argue that secularization is a multidimensional process with supra-individual levels (Gorski and Altınordu 2008). Some scholars define it as a decline in religious authority and the influence of religious leaders and institutions (Chaves 1994; Gorski and Altınordu 2008).

Dobbelaere—the Belgian sociologist—stated that secularization is a process that involves the functional differentiation of societal subsystems, emergence of competitive religious markets, and privatization of religious practices (Dobbelaere 1981; Gorski and Altınordu 2008). Casanova (2011) proposes that secularization consists of three separate hypotheses: differentiation, privatization, and decline (Casanova 2011; Gorski and Altınordu 2008).

For three centuries, scholars have predicted the end of religion and that human beings would outgrow the need for a supernatural existence (Stark 1999). Thomas Woolsten was the first to speculate that modernity would win over faith. In 1710, he wrote that Christianity would wane in the 1900s (Stark 1999). Modernization theories universally agree that religiosity will decrease as industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization increase (Stark 1999).

Despite their disagreements on the mechanisms of social change, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim believed that religion would fade as societies became industrialized and rationalized, with an established division of labor (Avishai et al. 2015). In Europe and North America, a cultural shift took place over half a century, including a change in gender roles and secularization (Inglehart 2018; Voicu 2009). A higher SES affected people's religious beliefs and gender views. Industrialization, urbanization, and modernization have led to secularization and a decline in religious values (Inglehart 2018; Voicu 2009). Some scholars believe that industrialization freed women from gender relationships and post-industrialization created equality among the sexes (Inglehart et al. 2002; Voicu 2009). Research has shown that states in which the majority of inhabitants are non-religious have the lowest gender inequality (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015).

Secularization is “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (Berger 2011:107). Secular values affect the prevailing views on gender equality since secularism is a transition from traditional to secular-rational values (Norris and Inglehart 2011), which are linked to

gender equality. Thus, secular individuals display greater support for gender equality than those who are religious. Iranian secular feminists and women's rights activists have protested against state discriminatory laws, which led to their arrest and imprisonment (United Nations [UN] 2019). For example, human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 30 years in prison and 148 lashes; prior to her arrest, she defended imprisoned women who protested Iran's enforcement of the obligatory hijab (Goodfellow 2020; Higashizawa 2019). Narges Mohammadi—an Iranian human rights activist—was arrested and imprisoned in 2011 because she documented human rights violations, provided human rights education, engaged in advocacy, and supported victims of human rights violations (UN 2019).

In the past few centuries, the importance of religion has declined in Europe due to industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. Secularization results from the differences between institutions, which become independent from each other and set their own policies and rules that are separate from religious norms (Dobbelaere 1981; Voicu 2009). In secular states, education, healthcare, and leisure are separated from religious institutions, and individuals are free to choose their own belief system, which can come from one or multiple traditions. Religion has lost its influence on politics, morality, and sexuality under secularism (Dobbelaere 1981; Giorgi 2016; Voicu 2009). Hofstede (1984) classified countries into two types: those with a masculine culture and those with a feminine culture. The latter were more likely to be secularized than the former (Hofstede and Minkov 2005; Voicu 2009).

Karakoç and Başkan (2012) studied the factors that affect secular attitudes toward politics. They found that inequality decreased secular attitudes toward politics in all income groups and that individuals with lower incomes had fewer secular values (Karakoç and Başkan 2012). High levels of inequality exist in developing countries; therefore, there were fewer secular values in such nations. This is also the case in the Middle East, where social inequality is high; thus, secular and democratic movements have not been successful in this region. Karakoç and Başkan (2012) argued that Muslim countries can also have democratic governments. Indeed, such governments have been established in the past in both Catholic and Muslim majority countries. In societies with high inequality, religious groups act as welfare providers that aid the poor and provide political and religious messages to them (Karakoç and Başkan 2012).

Some scholars oppose the idea that secularism is related to gender equality. These include Özkazanç-Pan (2015), who studied the effects of secular and Islamic feminism on gender equality in entrepreneurship. She found that both secular and Islamic feminist practices were positively related to gender equality, although they had different ways of achieving gender equality through changing gender norms, policies, and women's empowerment (Özkazanç-Pan 2015).

Gender inequality is an issue for women worldwide, who are considered subordinate to men (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2010). Some feminists have argued that the patriarchal nature of Islam makes it difficult for women to achieve gender equality under the Islamic framework (Bahi 2011; Kazemi 2000; Moghadam 1992). Although some believe that secularism is the solution to the issue of gender inequality, others believe that

both traditional values and modernity have resulted in the oppression of women (Yılmaz 2015) and that secularism is not the only path to gender equality.

Ethnic Groups

With its population of approximately 69 million people, Iran is home to different ethnic groups, languages, and religions (Hassan 2007; Rezaei, Latifi and Nematzadeh 2017). Iran's official religion is Shia Islam, its official language is Persian, and Persians are its majority ethnic group. However, millions of Iranians belong to ethnic and religious minority groups. The ethnic minority groups include Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, and Arabs, whereas the religious minority groups include Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, and Sunni Muslims (Hassan 2007).

Although the Iranian constitution ensures the rights of religious minorities, the government's emphasis is on Persians and Shia Islam. Religious minorities face discrimination in different areas, such as employment, education, and housing (Hassan 2007). According to Iranian state, *ahl al-kitab*—the followers of a recognized religion, which include Christians, Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, have the right to practice their religion. They can also vote for their own deputies. However, Iranian elites prevent any non-Muslim and non-Shia from becoming a member of the polity, which demonstrates the subordination of religious minorities (Tohidi 2009). According to Article 19 of Iran's constitution, "the people of Iran, regardless of ethnic and tribal origin, enjoy equal rights. Color, race, language, and the like will not be cause for privilege" (Tohidi 2009:4). This precludes any discrimination based on race and ethnicity, but there is no mention of gender and religion, which makes women and religious minorities

vulnerable to discrimination (Tohidi 2009). After the Iranian Revolution, being Iranian or *irani* and *hamvatan* (fellow countrymen or women) was replaced with “Muslim brothers and sisters,” which indicated the institutional othering of religious minorities (Tohidi 2009). Despite the statements that deny any ethnic problems, Iran is a country with a population that is differentiated by socioeconomic status, gender, cultural practices, ethnicity, and politics (Tohidi 2009).

In 2016, the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee expressed concerns about the situation of religious and ethnic minority groups, women, and children in Iran, and called on the Iranian government to respect the rights of these groups and to stop discrimination and violence against them (Hassan 2007). Amnesty International expressed concern about the violation of the rights of ethnic minorities such as Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, and Arabs. This followed the detention and execution of Kurdish rights activists and the arrest of a Baluchi for a bomb explosion on February 14, 2007; he was executed five days later (Hassan 2007).

Azeris are an ethnic minority group that comprise one quarter of Iran’s population. Iran’s foreign policies and international relations have caused protests among ethnic minorities. In May 2006, a state-owned newspaper published a cartoon that was derogatory toward Azeris and their language, which caused demonstrations in Tabriz, Ardabil, Urumiyeh, and Zanjan. The protests shifted to sociopolitical issues, and several Turkish language journalists were arrested. Although Iran is concerned about threats to its territorial integrity and labels ethnic activists as “secessionists,” most ethnic group activists have said that they are against secessionism (Tohidi 2006, 2009).

Kurds are a Muslim ethnic group with approximately 18 million members living in the Middle East. The majority live in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Kurds identify themselves as descendants of Medes, who moved from Central Asia to the Iranian plateau in the second millennium; however, Kurds never had an independent country of Kurdistan. Kurdish acculturation into Iran in the pre-revolution era was the glorification of the Persian Empire and contributions of Kurds to the monarchy, which facilitated unity between Kurds and Persians. After the Iranian Revolution, unity became the main channel of acculturation (Entessar 1984). The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims; there have been conflicts between Sunni Kurds and Shia religious leaders, mostly over political matters that affect Kurds (Entessar 1984).

Minority politics in Iran are influenced by geopolitical changes in the Middle East, including the breakup of the Soviet Union and the independent Azerbaijan Republic and Turkmenistan Republic, which have cross-border ethnic kin in Iran (Tohidi 2006). On the other hand, Tehran-centered development and the unequal distribution of resources between Tehran and other cities have increased social inequality (Tohidi 2006). Many ethnic minority activists employ secular language. During Khatami's presidency, the emphasis was on inclusiveness, pluralism, and multiculturalism, which changed during Ahmadinejad's administration to exclusionary dialog against Shia Muslims. Iranian reformists have moved from Shia-homogenized and secular Aryan-centered identities to democratization with a pluralistic approach that recognizes multiethnic and multidimensional identities (Tohidi 2009). The theocratic state of the IRI, which is based on Shia Islam, places religious minorities in a subordinate position. The subordination

and struggles of ethnic and religious minorities and women are linked and can only be resolved by reforming the constitution (Tohidi 2006).

Race, class, and gender interconnect (Yang 2000) and affect individuals' experiences in employment and education. In the United States, racial minorities experience disadvantages that lead to lower class and income outcomes. Black women hold mainly blue-collar jobs, whereas white women take white-collar jobs. In Iran, Persians are the majority group, and non-Persians are considered minorities. Non-Persian Iranians experience a different set of disadvantages compared to Persians. Non-Persians may become conscious of the inequality and disadvantages experienced by them and other groups; therefore, they become more supportive of gender equality. However, race, class, and gender alone cannot explain the inequality of minorities in the United States and other countries (Yang 2000).

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The theoretical framework used for this study is based on the principles of Davis and Robinson's (1991) model of consciousness and feminist standpoint theory. In this chapter, I explain how these principles relate to gender equality and their relationship to social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. Davis and Robinson's model of consciousness proposes that oppressed groups gain awareness based on their disadvantages. Standpoint theory suggests that the oppression, disadvantages, and experiences of women inform their collective consciousness. Both theories propose that consciousness is attained through the inequality and disadvantages of the oppressed group. I used standpoint theory to explain the moderating role of gender in relation to attitudes toward gender equality and its predictors. At the same time, these theories contribute to understanding attitudes toward gender equality from different perspectives. The important contribution of each theory is illustrated in the remainder of this chapter.

Davis and Robinson's model of consciousness proposes that subordinate groups in society become conscious of their disadvantages and the prevalent inequality. This model further argues that education and age also affect the views on gender equality (Davis and Robinson 1991). This model additionally states that historical background affects individuals' attitudes toward gender equality (Davis and Robinson 1991). I draw from Davis and Robinson's (1991) model of consciousness, which is based on Giddens's models of class awareness, to describe how societal inequality facilitates the emergence

of the consciousness of subordinate groups (Davis and Robinson 1991). In order to explain how women's disadvantages result in the emergence of their collective consciousness, I refer to the *underdog thesis*, which predicts that individuals who are disadvantaged in the distribution of resources and opportunities in a society become more conscious of their situation compared to those who are advantaged (Davis and Robinson 1991). Due to the oppression that Iranian women experience under the religious state of Iran, they become more aware of their disadvantages (Davis and Robinson 1991) and develop a collective consciousness. The empirical evidence for the collective consciousness of Iranian women includes the Iranian women's movement that began in the nineteenth century (Mahdi 2004); under the influence of European capitalism, ideas, and lifestyle, many educated men and women found polygamy and other repressive conditions as problematic and in need of change (Mahdi 2004). From 1910-1932, Iranian women started organizing magazines that addressed Iranian women's issues, such as veiling and education. These publications included *Daanesh*, *Jahaan-e Zanaan*, *Shekoufeh*, *Zabaan-e Zanaan*, *Zanaan-e Iran*, and *Naameh Baanouvaan* (Mahdi 2004).

In addition, according to the underdog thesis, women are more conscious about gender inequality compared to men (Davis and Robinson 1991). Iranian women express their awareness through feminist activism, feminist films, social media, and weblogs (Kurzman 2008; Povey and Rostami-Povey 2012; Rostami-Povey 2007; Tohidi 2009). Even though the patriarchy in Iran is not absolute and women are present in public life and they drive, vote, and serve in Iranian parliament, the nation's laws still favor men. Some of the laws that privilege Iranian men are those that give them power over their

wives with respect to leaving the home, working, and traveling outside the country (Kurzman 2008). Hence, in Iranian society, gender is an important factor due to the subordinate status of Iranian women in comparison to Iranian men.

Moreover, the underdog thesis suggests that individuals with lower income and prestige become more conscious of gender equality and inequality (Davis and Robinson 1991). Studies show that gender inequality and income inequality are related; inequality in pay between men and women and less participation in the labor force by women contribute to higher income inequality (Baloch et al. 2018; Seguino 2002). Income and views on gender equality differ between men and women; married women who have a higher income in the family have more positive views on gender equality compared to women whose husbands are the breadwinners (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). However, married men who earn less money than their wives are less invested in traditional gender roles and have more positive views on gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Consequently, views on gender equality reflect individual income, and gender plays a role in the relation between income and views on gender equality.

Davis and Robinson also used the *threat hypothesis* in their consciousness model. According to the threat hypothesis, men who have less prestigious jobs perceive women as competitors and threats that disadvantage them by taking their jobs. Therefore, these men deny gender inequality and oppose efforts that aim for gender equality (Davis and Robinson 1991). Davis and Robinson further proposed that employment affects views on gender equality. Employed women experience disparities at work and earnings and therefore have a greater interest in gender equality, while unemployed women who

depend on their spouses' wages tend to support traditional gender roles (Davis and Robinson 1991). Employed Iranian women develop more feminist attitudes and become aware of gender inequality in Iranian society; therefore, they support gender equality (Kurzman 2008). Additionally, education affects views on gender equality through the *enlightenment thesis* (Davis and Robinson 1991). The enlightenment thesis proposes that education creates an awareness of inequality when individuals become familiar with the disadvantages that others experience (Davis and Robinson 1991). Education affects attitudes toward gender equality because individuals become aware of their disadvantages and inequality in society, which encourages them to promote equal treatment for everyone (Davis and Robinson 1991; Kurzman 2008).

The *egalitarian zeitgeist thesis* posits that individuals' views on gender equality are affected by the historical context (Davis and Robinson 1991). The Iranian Revolution occurred in 1979, which was a turning point in Iranian history, especially for Iranian women. After the revolution, Iranian women became subject to discriminatory laws such as the obligatory hijab and the dress code (Basiri 2018; Esfandiari 1997). Based on the egalitarian zeitgeist thesis, younger Iranians are more conscious of gender equality than older Iranians (Davis and Robinson 1991) since Iranians who were 20-30 years old in 1979, when the Iranian Revolution happened, now comprise the older generation (i.e., those who are 62-72 years old now). Older Iranians are less likely to be supportive of gender equality in comparison to younger Iranians who reflect the era of Iranian women's movements against the religious state, such as the One Million Signatures Campaign, My Stealthy Freedom, and the Iranian #MeToo movement (Mohamadi 2016; Seddighi and

Tafakori 2016). Iran is an example of a nation where religion has been reshaped and manipulated by its followers for political benefits. Iranian women opposed the interpretations introduced by the Iranian government and presented women-centered interpretations of Islamic laws (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010), which have been major barriers to achieving gender equality. It appears that a democratic state structure is essential to the advancement of gender equality in Iran—a country in which the state and religion have never been separated (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). It appears that religious states tend to become dictatorial and use religious ideologies to suppress dissidents. In such states, women’s movements are repressed, and their voices are censored. Today, the struggles of Iranian women involve standing against a religious state that suppresses freedom of expression and any efforts that contradict the conservative right wing (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010).

Standpoint theory, which borrowed from Marxist theory, discusses the different experiences of women compared to men and the sexual division of labor (Hartsock 1998). Standpoint is a collective identity or consciousness that is achieved and the political achievement of those of subordinate groups (Harding 2004). It starts with a person’s socio-historical position or the experience of collective political struggles (Harding 2004). Marxist feminists argue that the position of women in society is different from that of men; thus, the lived experiences and realities of women distinguish them from men (Hartsock 1998). Marx’s critique of capitalism has helped feminists to examine women’s lives under male supremacy and phallographic institutions (Hartsock 1998). Using the Marxist terms “proletariat” and “bourgeoisie,” Hartsock refers to a proletarian

standpoint: a proletarian man who worked hard for the bourgeoisie but is privileged in comparison to a third person—a woman who fell behind owing to childcare obligations (Hartsock 1998). Based on this theory, a man who belongs to the proletariat is still privileged in comparison to a woman, whose status in society is lower than his.

Furthermore, women's work in society differs from men's as per the sexual division of labor, which expects women to contribute to subsistence and childrearing (Hartsock 1998; Sanday 1974; Seccombe 1974). Women produce wages and produce at home; in other words, they sell their labor at the workplace and produce commodities or goods, while their lives are defined by their production of use-values at home (Hartsock 1998; Sanday 1974; Seccombe 1974). Women work more hours than men during the week, a large portion of their production contributes to use-values at home, and their production is repetitive (De Beauvoir 2010; Hartsock 1998). A man's work in the process of production does not consume his whole life, whereas women are continuously involved in the process of production at work and later at home (French 1985; Hartsock 1998).

Consequently, women who are marginalized and invisible in society become conscious of their oppression and social situation (Harding 2004). Standpoint theory applies to the collective consciousness of Iranian women regarding their social status in Iran. Iranian women have realized the reality regarding the constructed social order that prevails in their nation (Harding 2004). Their awareness about their social status is an achievement, which resulted in the commencement of the women's movement in Iran.

Uma Narayan (1999)—an Indian feminist scholar—stated that women have always been excluded from certain activities and misrepresented, and this applies to Iranian women as well. In some nonwestern cultures, powerful traditions oppress women while simultaneously assigning them traditional and spiritual roles that are appreciated, such as being a mother or wife (Narayan 1999). For example, certain spiritual virtues are linked to Iranian women, such as “heaven is under mothers’ feet,” which signifies that children need to obey their mothers in order to go to heaven. However, they simultaneously lack basic human rights and experience inequality and oppression in Iranian society. Examples of such inequality include biased divorce and child custody laws, unequal inheritance laws, and polygamy (Tohidi 2016).

Iranian women also struggle to clarify the differences between their traditions and western feminism (Narayan 1999). Iranian women experience a *double consciousness*—a concept introduced by W. E. B Du Bois (1903)—as despite having “heaven under their feet,” they lack basic human rights. The oppression of Iranian women differs from that of western women (Narayan 1999; Narayan and Harding 2000). Narayan (1999) stated that oppressed women from different groups may have sympathy for each other, but that they could never fully understand the oppression of another group. The contrast between western and nonwestern cultures is influenced by the superiority of the West and the subordination of nonwestern cultures, which is rooted in colonization (Narayan 1999; Narayan and Harding 2000). The “third world” remains under the economic and political domination of western powers; thus, third-world women are labeled as marginalized and underprivileged, whereas western women are a representation of western cultural

colonization (Narayan 1999; Narayan and Harding 2000). The *Iranian Zan (woman) consciousness* refers to the awareness of Iranian women about their oppression in Iranian society. The theocratic state of Iran politicizes women's bodies and imprisons feminists and women's rights activists when they protest.

Both theories focus on the disadvantages of oppressed groups. The model of consciousness by Davis and Robinson proposes that attitudes toward gender equality are related to the disadvantages that individuals experience. Moreover, standpoint theory specifically addresses the experiences of women and the sexual division of labor. Disadvantages related to social status factors such as lower income, unemployment, gender, lower class, and being an ethnic minority affect attitudes toward gender equality. According to the underdog thesis, individuals who have a lower income and are unemployed gain awareness about their disadvantages and become more supportive of gender equality (Davis and Robinson 1991). Being a member of an ethnic minority group and experiencing discrimination is a disadvantage that minorities experience; therefore, they gain consciousness and become more supportive of gender equality. Based on the threat hypothesis, men who have a lower income or are unemployed do not support gender equality because they view women as their competitors.

Moreover, standpoint theory talks about the consciousness women gain based on their struggles and experiences of being a woman, a wife, a mother, religious, or secular. Having secular values in Iranian society can lead to disadvantages. Iranian secularists and leftists opposed conservative clerics and demanded equal rights for women. Iranian secularists had a pro-women attitude and formed women's organizations. Secularists,

leftists, and liberals hoped to make changes to policies over time; however, in the 1980s, they were eliminated by clerical forces (Kumar and Rehnamol 2017). Iranian secularists are opposed by the nation's religious forces and experience punishment and disadvantages.

According to standpoint theory, women gain collective consciousness, whereas Davis and Robinson's model of consciousness posits that individuals who gain consciousness are more likely to have a positive attitude toward gender equality.

Therefore, consciousness is related to attitudes toward gender equality.

Using both theories enable us to understand the different aspects of gender equality and the consciousness of Iranian women. Based on the aforementioned theories, individuals become aware of their disadvantages in society because of their level of education, employment, marital status, age, religious involvement, and secular values. Gender plays an important role in how these variables affect individual views regarding gender equality.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review, I developed a theoretical model of attitudes toward gender equality in Figure 1. The model illustrates how social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization are associated with gender equality in employment, education, and politics. It also shows the possible moderating role of gender in the dependent variables' associations with the independent variables.

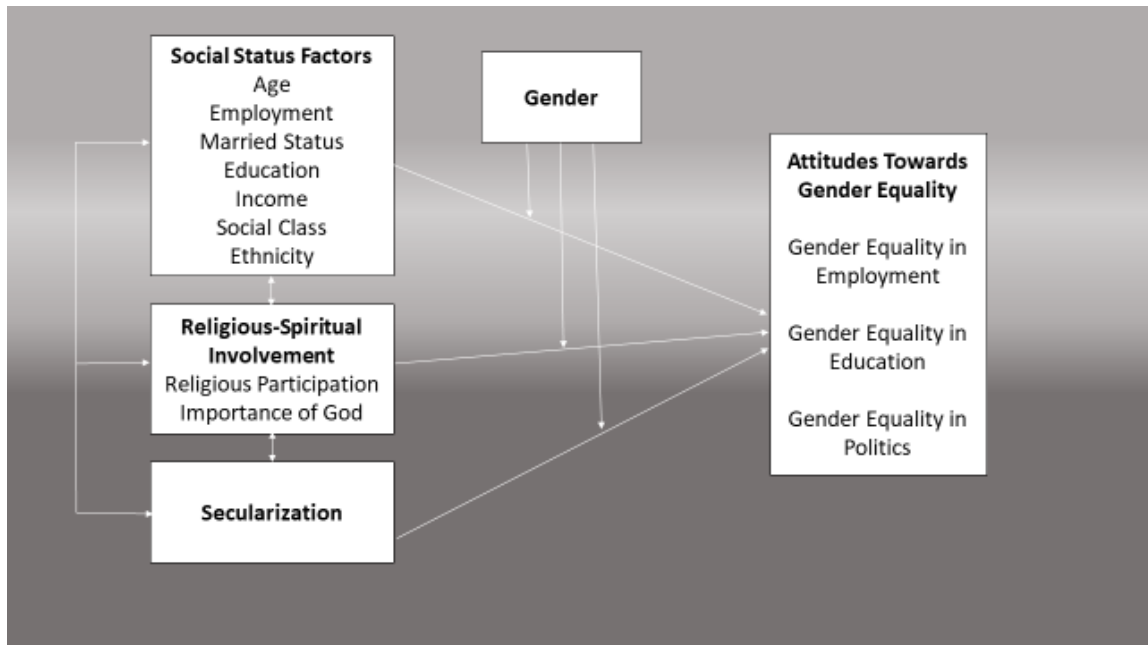


Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Attitudes Toward Gender Equality

Four sets of hypotheses were developed for this study. First, social status factors and attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics are related. I hypothesized that higher-incomed individuals, college graduates, and employed individuals display more supportive attitudes toward gender equality (Breen 2005; Moheyuddin 2005; Usdansky 2011; Wright 2005). Higher education is associated with stronger support for gender equality among both men and women (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Usdansky 2011). Older age is associated with less support for gender equality (Kostenko et al. 2016). Women are more likely to support gender equality than men (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Glas et al. 2018; Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010; Kostenko et al. 2016; Mason and Lu 1988). Married individuals are less likely to support gender equality than unmarried ones (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010). Married individuals have more traditional views and are less involved with

feminist ideas and gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). According to the underdog thesis, women as a disadvantaged group are more aware of gender inequality than men (Davis and Robinson 1991). Additionally, in comparison to Persians, ethnic minorities display more supportive attitudes toward gender equality (Tohidi 2009).

Second, respondents with higher levels of religious/spiritual involvement have less positive attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Diehl et al. 2009; Glas et al. 2018; Hertel and Hughes 1987; Jakobsson and Kotsadam 2010; Klingorová and Havlíček 2015; Peek, Lowe and Williams 1991; Voicu 2009; Wernet 2016). Religious participation was found to be negatively related to attitudes toward gender equality, and the relationship was stronger among women and educated individuals (Glas et al. 2018). Religious salience (importance of God in life) was also found to be related to a less supportive attitude toward gender equality among men, but it was associated with support for gender equality among women (Glas et al. 2018, 2019). Third, secularization levels are positively related to attitudes toward gender equality among Iranians. Studies have indicated that individuals with secular values are more supportive of gender equality (Wernet 2016).

Fourth, gender has a moderating role in the association between attitudes toward gender equality and other social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. Specifically, the study hypothesized that these associations may be different for different gender groups. Educated individuals are more supportive of gender equality and feminism; however, this is stronger among women than men (Bolzendahl

and Myers 2004). Standpoint theory states that women as an oppressed group experience disadvantages relevant to their social status, religion, and secularization values in society. Based on the inequality, they gain a collective consciousness. Thus, women's awareness of their disadvantages influences their attitudes toward gender equality.

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND METHODS

DATA AND SAMPLE

Through an analysis of data from Wave 7 of the World Values Survey (WVS), this study explores whether and how Iranians' attitudes toward gender equality are linked to social status variables, religious/spiritual involvement variables, and secularization. Furthermore, the study examines whether gender moderates the links between attitudes toward gender equality and each of the variables included in the model.

The WVS was launched in 1981 and provides nationally representative surveys by gathering data from numerous nations worldwide. It seeks to understand issues surrounding democratization, economic development, gender equality, science, and trust. As a part of the WVS, face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, postal surveys, and self-administered online surveys were conducted with respondents from different cultures worldwide. Data for the Wave 7 of the WVS that is used in this research was collected from 2017-2021 (World Values Survey Wave 7, 2017-2021). The minimum sample size in most countries was 1,200. In countries with a larger population and diversity, the sample sizes ranged from 1,500 to 5,000. The study's target population was Iranians aged 18 years and older who resided in private households. The present subsample for the final analysis comprised 1,469 Iranians.

Measures

Dependent variables. Three dependent variables for this study include attitudes towards gender equality in employment, attitudes towards gender equality in education, and attitudes towards gender equality in politics. To measure the first dependent variable attitudes towards gender equality in employment among Iranians, I used a 5-item index. The five items included five survey questions asking respondents for the following five questions: “When a mother works for pay, the children suffer;” “When jobs are scarce, men should have priority over women to get a job;” “Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay;” “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do;” and “If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems.” The respondents could answer using a 4-point Likert scale: 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*agree*), 3 (*disagree*), and 4 (*strongly disagree*). A higher value on this index indicates a stronger attitude toward gender equality in employment.

To measure attitudes toward gender equality in education, I used the following question from the WVS, “A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl”; the offered responses are 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*agree*), 3 (*disagree*), and 4 (*strongly disagree*). I wanted to use the following question as well: “Who decides whether girls should go to school: man vs woman” to measure the second dependent variable. The responses range 1–9, 1 (*Men*) means that men decide and 9 (*Women*) means that women decide 5 (*Both Equally*) means that they both decide. However, the low reliability of this two-item index prompted me to use another measure of this second dependent variable. I used only the first question for attitudes towards gender equality in education. *Strongly*

agree and *agree* responses were recoded as 1, whereas *disagree* and *strongly disagree* responses were recoded as 0. Attitudes toward gender equality in education was measured as a dichotomous variable. Since this outcome variable was dichotomous, logistic regression was used for data analysis.

To measure the third dependent variable attitudes towards gender equality in politics, I intended to use the following questions from WVS to develop a 2-item index. The first question asked respondents “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” with offered responses including 1 (*strongly agree*), 2 (*agree*), 3 (*disagree*), and 4 (*strongly disagree*). The second question “Women have equal opportunities to run the office” was offered responses including 1 (*very often*), 2 (*fairly often*), 3 (*not often*), and 4 (*not at all often*). Without achieving relatively higher reliability for this two-item index, I decided to use the first question only. The responses indicating agreement were recoded as 1 and those indicating disagreement and were recoded as 0 in order to measure attitudes toward gender equality in politics as a dichotomous variable.

Independent variables. Independent variables in this study include social status factors (gender, age, employment, married status, education, income, social class, and ethnicity); religious-spiritual involvement (religious services participation, importance of God in life); and secularization factors. For social status factors, Sex, being married, and employment were measured dichotomously. I measured respondent’s sex with “Respondent’s sex (Code respondent’s sex by observation, don’t ask about it!)” from

WVS with the offered responses 1 (male), 2 (female). I recoded the variable with Male = 1, Female = 0, creating a dummy variable.

To measure marital status, I used the question from the WVS about the marital status. The respondents were asked to choose one of the following options: 1 (*Married*), 2 (*Living together as married*), 3 (*Divorced*), 4 (*Separated*), 5 (*Widowed*), and 6 (*Single*) for their marital status. The variable, being married, was recoded to have married = 1 and not-married = 0.

To measure employment, I used the following question from WVS “Are you employed now or not?” The respondents were asked to choose from eight responses. I created a dummy variable employment with 1 indicating those who selected categories including full time employee, part time employee, self-employed; and with 0 indicating otherwise (Retired/pensioned, housewife not otherwise employed, student, unemployed, and other). Age was measured continuously with respondents reporting their age in years in responding to the question “This means you are __ years old.”

Education, income, and social class were also measured continuously. To measure education level, I used the question “What is the highest educational level!” from WVS. The offered responses are 0 (*Early childhood education/no education*), 1 (*Primary education*), 2 (*Lower secondary education*), 3 (*Upper secondary education*), 4 (*Post-secondary non-tertiary education*), 5 (*Short-cycle tertiary education*), 6 (*Bachelor or equivalent*), 7 (*Master or equivalent*), and 8 (*Doctoral or equivalent*). To measure income, I used an income scale from WVS on which 1 indicates lowest income group and 10 highest income group. Respondents were asked to choose an appropriate number on

this 1-10 scale counting all their wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes. Social class was measured with the question “Would you describe yourself as belonging to” one of the following responses: The possible responses were: 1 (*upper class*), 2 (*upper middle class*), 3 (*lower middle class*), 4 (*working class*), or 5 (*lower class*). Reverse coding was required to make higher values represent a higher social class.

To measure respondents’ ethnicity, I used the question asking “Respondent’s ethnic group” from the WVS. The possible responses were: 1 (*Persian*), 2 (*Azeri*), 3 (*Kurd*), 4 (*Arab*), 5 (*Baluch*), 6 (*Lor*), or 7 (*Gilaki*). I created a dummy variable, with 1 indicating respondents who classified themselves as Persian and 0 indicating otherwise.

I used religious service participation and importance of God in life to measure religious-spiritual-involvement. I measured the religious service participation with the question “How often do you attend religious services?” The responses range from 1 to 7 with 1 (*More than once a week*), 2 (*Once a week*), 3 (*Once a month*), 4 (*Only on special holy days*), 5 (*Once a year*), 6 (*Less often*), and 7 (*Never*). I reverse coded the variable so that a higher value indicates more religious service participation. To measure the variable importance of God, I used the question “How important is God in your life?” from the WVS. The offered responses range from 1 (*not important at all*) to 10 (*very important*).

To measure secularization, I used the overall secular values index from the WVS. The measure includes four components: *agnosticism*, *defiance*, *skepticism*, and *relativism*. In accordance with the WVS, the index scores of respondents were based on these four components if they were all available. If one component was missing, the calculation scores involved only three components. Secular values refer to the values that

indicate people's dissociation from external authority (Welzel 2013); this is also a measure of emancipative values (Welzel 2013). The human empowerment framework proposes that secular values and emancipative values are correlated. The disassociation from sacred authority and the internalization of authority over their lives serve as a precursor to emancipative values (Welzel 2013). The secularization index in the WVS is based on four items: "(1) religious authority, (2) patrimonial authority, (3) state authority, and (4) the authority of conformity norms" (Welzel 2013:65).

Agnosticism refers to a lack of religion, faith, and religious participation. To measure agnosticism, three items were measured: if a person described themselves as "religious," if they believed that "faith" is an important factor, and how often they participated in religious services (Welzel 2013).

Defiance is associated with the absence of national pride, rejection of parental authority, and refusal of greater respect. Three items were measured with respect to defiance: how proud a person is of their nationality, how important it is for them to make their parents proud, and if they think that their country needs greater authority (Welzel 2013).

Skepticism refers to low confidence in coercive state institutions and distance from state authority. The items used to measure skepticism were: orientation toward courts, police, and the army. A distant orientation toward these institutions indicates low confidence in state authority (Welzel 2013).

Relativism is the respondents' orientation toward questions concerning conformity to authority, and if they were justified. To measure relativism, the authority of

conformity norms and the orientation of participants with respect to freeriding behavior was measured. Freeriding behaviors include cheating on transport fares, accepting bribes, and tax evasion. The stance of respondents was measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*never justified*) to 10 (*always justified*). The responses were measured dichotomously, and any response higher than 1 was considered an indication of relativism (Welzel 2013).

Data Analysis

I employed linear regression techniques to examine the relationships between attitudes toward gender equality in employment and social status factors, religion, and secularization factors. This was done for the whole sample as well as for the male and female subsamples separately. For the two dichotomous dependent variables, attitudes toward gender equality in education and attitudes toward gender equality in politics, I used logistic regression for the data analysis. To evaluate whether gender moderates the relationships between these factors and each of the dependent variables (whether the relationship between each independent variable and each dependent variable is the same for male and female respondents), I created interaction terms involving gender and each of the independent variables. For each outcome variable, *t*-test statistics were performed to evaluate the interaction involving gender and each of the independent variables and the outcome variable in question. Significant interactions would indicate that gender plays a role in the relationship between one of the three dependent variables and one of the independent variables.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS FOR ALL VARIABLES

Tables 1 and 2 include descriptive statistics and correlations for all included variables. I will describe the results first for the whole sample (see Table 1), then for male and subsamples (see Table 2). The sample size for the whole sample was 1,404, for the male subsample was 716, and for the female subsample was 688. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of all variables used in this data analysis for the whole sample.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Included Variables ($N = 1404$)

DVs and Predictors	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
GE in Employment (1)	1													
GE in Education (2)	.416**	1												
GE in Politics (3)	.401**	.337**	1											
Male (4)	-.098**	-.222**	-.167**	1										
Age (5)	-.130**	-.101**	-.058*	.107**	1									
Employed (6)	0.004	0.003	-0.004	.375**	-0.014	1								
Married (7)	-.169**	-.072**	-.077**	.068*	.447**	.095**	1							
Education (8)	.154**	.195**	.117**	0.032	-.248**	.214**	-.193**	1						
Income (9)	.088**	.092**	.062*	-.076**	-.129**	0.011	-.146**	.294**	1					
Class (10)	.094**	.135**	.066*	-.086**	-.101**	0	-.171**	.357**	.710**	1				
Persian Religious Participation (11)	0.001	-0.035	0.03	-0.04	-0.001	-0.026	-0.043	0.046	0.035	.056*	1			
Spiritual Involvement (12)	-.218**	-.121**	-.140**	.057*	.082**	-0.046	.100**	-.107**	0.002	-0.01	0.021	1		
Secular Values (13)	-.192**	-.101**	-.132**	-.102**	.157**	-.073**	.163**	-.160**	-.089**	-.100**	0.032	.345**	1	
Mean	-0.017	0.523	0.443	0.51	38.8	0.39	0.64	4.02	3.91	2.63	0.49	4.27	9.33	0.26
SD	3.435	0.499	0.496	0.5	14.374	0.488	0.479	1.882	2.209	0.905	0.5	1.704	1.793	0.157

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of All Included Variables for Males ($n = 716$) on Left of and Below the Diagonal and for Females ($n = 688$) on Right of and Above the Diagonal

DVs and Predictors	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	Mean	SD
GE in Employment (1)	1	.401**	.430**	-.206**	.142**	-.212**	.210**	.092*	.093*	0.031	-.241**	-.222**	.250**	0.326	3.504
GE in Education (2)	.412**	1	.296**	-.117**	0.059	-0.067	.185**	0.003	.080*	-0.010	-.112**	-.126**	.086*	0.637	0.481
GE in Politics (3)	.352**	.328**	1	-0.042	.104**	-.084*	.125**	0.021	0.045	0.057	-.112**	-.145**	.111**	0.528	0.500
Age (4)	-0.043	-0.048	-0.041	1	-0.031	.256**	-.261**	-.146**	-.100**	0.024	.075*	.182**	-.135**	37.297	13.512
Employed (5)	-0.036	.123**	0.031	-.080*	1	-.111**	.360**	.083*	.120**	-0.024	-0.071	-.092*	.133**	0.208	0.406
Married (6)	-.112**	-0.051	-0.048	.614**	.228**	1	-.187**	-.119**	-.161**	-0.036	0.062	.143**	-.137**	0.609	0.488
Education (7)	.105**	.229**	.123**	-.246**	.108**	-.204**	1	.251**	.327**	.085*	-.138**	-.154**	.193**	3.962	1.884
Income (8)	0.069	.153**	.083*	-.101**	0.009	-.167**	.347**	1	.690**	0.044	-0.021	-.137**	0.068	4.086	2.307
Class (9)	.080*	.157**	0.061	-.085*	-0.032	-.171**	.394**	.729**	1	.090*	-0.028	-.142**	0.070	2.717	0.909
Persian (10)	-0.037	-.077*	-0.009	-0.015	-0.003	-0.046	0.011	0.020	0.016	1	0.035	0.062	-0.018	0.513	0.500
Religious Participation (11)	-.187**	-.111**	-.152**	.077*	-.075*	.130**	-.082*	0.036	0.018	0.013	1	.282**	-.446**	4.180	1.696
Spiritual Involvement (12)	-.196**	-.131**	-.161**	.164**	-0.007	.197**	-.164**	-0.070	-.088*	0.005	.409**	1	-.406**	9.519	1.494
Secular Values (13)	.174**	.120**	.152**	-.140**	0.011	-.229**	.138**	0.057	.095*	.078*	-.531**	-.523**	1	0.256	0.152
Mean	-0.349	0.415	0.362	40.376	0.574	0.675	4.082	3.750	2.560	0.474	4.376	9.154	0.265		
SD	3.336	0.493	0.481	15.012	0.495	0.469	1.880	2.099	0.896	0.500	1.708	2.025	0.164		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Of the whole sample, 51 percent of participants were males. The average age of respondents was 38.8 years old. Almost 2 in 5 participants (39 percent) were employed and 64 percent of them were married. Respondents on average had a post-secondary nontertiary education (mean = 4.02). The average income of the respondents was 3.91 on a scale of 1-10. Respondents' self-perceived social class was between lower middle class to upper middle class (mean = 2.64). About half (49 percent) of respondents identified themselves as Persian. On average, respondents reported that they only participated in religious services on special holy days. The spiritual involvement of respondents was 9.33 on a scale of 1-10, which indicates a high level of spirituality. The secular values were .26 on a scale of 0-1.

The relationships among gender equality in employment and gender equality in education, and gender equality in politics were positive and significant. The three gender equality variables were found to be significantly and negatively associated with religious participation and spiritual involvement variables. Each of these three outcome variables were found to have an expected positive and significant correlation with secular values.

Table 1 indicates that significant positive relationships were found between education, income, and class and each of the three outcome gender equality variables. Table 1 also shows that males were significantly less likely than females to support gender equality in employment, gender equality in education, and gender equality in politics. Stronger attitudes about gender equality in employment, in education, and in politics were found to be among the younger and not-married Iranians.

Descriptive Analysis of All Variables for Males and Females

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations of all included variables for the male and female subsamples.

The average age for the 716 male participants was 40.4 years old. Also, 57 percent of the male respondents reported that they are employed. About 67 percent of male respondents were married and on average, they had a post-secondary nontertiary education (mean = 4.08). The average reported income of male participants was 3.75 on a scale of 1-10 and their self-perceived social class was somewhere between lower middle class to upper middle class (mean = 2.56). About half (47 percent) of male participants identified themselves as Persian. Male respondents on average participated in religious services only on special holy days (mean = 4.37) and their spiritual involvement was 9.15 on a scale of 1-10 showing their high level of spirituality. The level of secular values was .26 on a scale of 0-1.

Table 2 shows that age, employment, income, and Persian ethnicity had no significant relationship with attitudes towards gender equality in employment. Education, class, and secular values were significant and positively related to attitudes towards gender equality in employment. In turn, married status, religious participation, and spiritual involvement have negative relationships with attitudes towards gender equality in employment.

In regard to attitudes towards gender equality in education, age and married were not significant, however, employment, education, income, class, and secular values were positively related to attitudes towards gender equality in education. In contrast, Persian

ethnicity, religious participation, and spiritual involvement were significant but negatively related to attitudes towards gender equality in education. While Table 1 showed no significant relationship between Persian variable and any of the dependent variables. Persians were found to be less likely to support gender equality in education as compared to their non-Persian counterparts.

One of the dependent variables, attitudes towards gender equality in politics, however, showed no significant relationship with variables such as age, employed, married, class, and Persian. Like previous results, educated male respondents, those with a higher income, and secular values showed to have positive attitudes towards gender equality in politics. By contrast, religious participation and spiritual involvement were significant and negatively associated with gender equality in politics.

The average age for the 688 female respondents was 37.2 years old, which was younger than males. Only 20 percent of female respondents were employed which was significantly lower than male respondents' employment rate (57 percent). Three in five female participants were married and on average, they had a post-secondary nontertiary education (mean = 3.96), which was slightly lower than males' education. Females' average income was 4.08 on a scale of 1-10, which was higher compared to males' self-reported income. The average of females' self-perceived social class was between lower middle class to upper middle class, which mirrored the males' results (mean = 2.71). About half (51 percent) of the female respondents self-identified with Persian ethnicity. On average, they participated in religious services only on special holy days (mean = 4.1) which was slightly lower than males' results. Furthermore, their spiritual involvement

was 9.5 on a scale of 1-10, which was higher than males'. Additionally, the level of secular values was .25 on a scale of 0-1.

Persian ethnicity was not found to be significantly related to any of the three gender equality outcomes. Age, being married, religious participation, and spiritual involvement were significant and negatively associated with attitudes towards gender equality in employment. On the other hand, being employed, higher education, higher income, higher social class, and higher secular values were positively related to the attitudes towards gender equality in employment.

Being employed, being married, income, and Persian ethnicity were not found to be significantly related to these attitudes towards gender equality in employment. Older age was also found to have lower likelihood of attitudes towards gender equality in education. Additionally, education and social class were positively associated with attitudes towards gender equality in education. Finally, religious and participation and spiritual involvement were significant and negatively associated with attitudes towards gender equality in education.

No significant associations were found between attitudes towards gender equality in politics and age, income, class, and Persian. Table 2 reveals that being employed, education and secular values had a significant and positive association with attitudes towards gender equality in politics. Moreover, being married, religious participation, and spiritual involvement were negatively related to the likelihood of attitudes towards gender equality in politics. Based on the results, the male respondents who participated in

religious services were less supportive of gender equality in politics compared to their female equals.

Multivariate Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the ordinary linear regression results predicting attitudes towards gender equality in employment by the social status factors, religious-spiritual involvement and secularization. The model explains about 10 percent of the total variation of the outcome variable, attitudes towards gender equality in employment.

Table 3: Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Employment ($N = 1404$)

Predictor	Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Employment	
	b	Beta
Constant	2.424**	
Male	-0.687**	-0.1
Age	-0.004	-0.019
Employed	0.103	0.015
Married	-0.679**	-0.095
Education	0.152**	0.083
Income	0.036	0.023
Class	0.023	0.006
Persian	-0.056	-0.008
Religious Participation	-0.256**	-0.127
Spiritual Involvement	-0.172**	-0.09
Secular Values	1.496*	0.069
R ²	.103	
F	14.4**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

According to Table 3, attitudes toward gender equality in employment was significantly related to six variables, male gender, being married, education, religious participation, spiritual involvement, and secular values. Specifically, positive attitudes towards gender equality in employment were found to be among females, not-married respondents, and the more educated respondents. While higher level of secularization was associated with positive attitudes towards gender equality in employment, religious participation and spiritual involvement were negatively associated with attitudes towards gender equality.

Table 4 shows the logistic regression results predicting attitudes towards gender equality in education.

Table 4: Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Education ($N = 1404$)

Predictor	Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Education	
	B	Odds Ratio
Male	-1.092**	0.336
Age	-0.003	0.997
Employed	0.264*	1.302
Married	-0.001	0.999
Education	0.183**	1.201
Income	-0.036	0.965
Class	0.192*	1.212
Persian	-0.227*	0.797
Religious Participation	-0.076*	0.927
Spiritual Involvement	-0.085*	0.918
Secular Values	0.156	1.169
Constant	0.749	2.114
-2 Log likelihood	1779.8	
Model χ^2	163.3**	
Pseudo R^2	0.147	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Model χ^2 is statistically significant for this model with a pseudo R² amount to 14.7 percent. The odds ratio for of the independent variable being employed is 1.302, which means that employed respondents were 30.2 percent more likely than unemployed respondents to hold positive attitudes about gender equality in education. In Table 4, the odds ratio of .336 for male means that males were 66.4 percent less likely than females to support gender equality in education than females.

In Table 4, the results show that attitudes toward gender equality in education was significantly related to six variables, male gender, being employed, education, class, Persian ethnicity, religious participation, and spiritual involvement. Secular values coefficient was not significantly related to this outcome variable. The positive attitudes towards gender equality in education was observed among females, the employed, more educated, higher class, and non-Persian respondents. On the other hand, religious-spiritually involved individuals were not supportive of gender equality in education. Interestingly, secular values were not found to be significantly associated with attitudes towards gender equality in education.

Concerning attitudes towards gender equality in politics, Table 5 presents the coefficients and odds ratio of all included variables for all the respondents. The results of this logistic regression analysis show that model χ^2 was statistically significant for this model with a Pseudo R² amount to 9.3 percent.

Table 5: Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Politics ($N = 1404$)

Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Politics		
Predictor	B	Odds Ratio
Male	-0.812**	0.444
Age	0.003	1.003
Employed	0.183	1.201
Married	-0.139	0.87
Education	0.096**	1.1
Income	0.016	1.016
Class	-0.018	0.982
Persian	0.091	1.096
Religious Participation	-0.087*	0.917
Spiritual Involvement	-0.114**	0.892
Secular Values	0.439	1.551
Constant	0.939	2.556
-2 Log likelihood	1827.322	
Model χ^2	100.762**	
Pseudo R ²	0.093	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Stronger attitudes towards gender equality in politics was found to be associated with female gender, more educated respondents, and those who were less involved in religious and spiritual practices. Contrary to my expectation, secular values coefficient was not significantly related to this outcome variable. The study results show that male gender was less likely to have positive attitudes towards gender equality in politics. Additionally, religious participation and spiritual involvement were significant and negatively associated with attitudes towards gender equality in politics.

Regression Results Explaining Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Employment for Males and for Females

Tables 6 through 8 present regression results explaining each of the three outcome variables separately for males and for females. Table 6 presents multiple regression analysis results explaining attitudes towards gender equality in employment for both male and for female respondents.

Table 6: Regression Results Explaining Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Employment for Males and for Females ($N = 1404$)

Predictor	Comparing Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Employment			
	Males		Females	
	B	Beta	B	Beta
Constant	1.476		3.774**	
Age	0.011	0.048	-0.029**	-0.112
Employed	-0.209	-0.031	0.57	0.066
Married	-0.512	-0.072	-0.897**	-0.125
Education	0.102	0.058	0.145	0.078
Income	0.034	0.021	0.032	0.021
Class	0.081	0.022	-0.047	-0.012
Persian	-0.28	-0.042	0.254	0.036
Religious Participation	-0.221**	-0.113	-0.297**	-0.144
Spiritual Involvement	-0.181**	-0.11	-0.206**	-0.088
Secular Values	0.807	0.04	2.174**	0.094
N	716		688	
R ²	.067		.155	
F	5.089**		12.385**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

For male respondents, the results showed that attitudes toward gender equality in employment were stronger for respondents who have lower level of religious participation and lower level of spiritual involvement. The overall regression model was significant ($F = 5.089$). The model (social status factors, religious-spiritual involvement,

and secularization factors) accounted for 6.7 percent of the variance of attitudes towards gender equality in employment.

Among females, positive attitudes towards gender equality in employment was associated with younger age, not married, lower level of religious participation, lower level of spiritual involvement, and higher level of secular values. The overall regression model was significant ($F = 12.385$). The model explained 15.5 percent of the variance of the outcome attitudes towards gender equality in employment.

Using t -test, I examined gender's moderating role in associations between attitudes towards gender equality in employment and each of the explanatory variables. Only one statistically significant interaction was found. Gender played a significant moderating role in attitudes towards gender equality in employment's association with age. Specifically, the relationship between age and attitudes towards gender equality in employment was stronger for females than for males. While younger age was associated with stronger attitudes toward gender equality in employment for females, a significant relationship was not found for males.

Logistic Regression Results Explaining Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Education for Males and for Females

Tables 7 presents logistic regression results explaining attitudes towards gender equality in education for males and for females.

Table 7: Regression Results Explaining Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Education for Males and for Females ($N = 1404$)

Predictor	Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Education			
	Males		Females	
	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
Age	0.007	1.007	-0.01	0.99
Employed	0.51**	1.666	-0.044	0.957
Married	-0.158	0.854	-0.043	0.957
Education	0.199**	1.22	0.17**	1.185
Income	0.06	1.062	-0.117*	0.889
Class	0.113	1.119	0.24	1.272
Persian	-0.379*	0.685	-0.076	0.927
Religious Participation	-0.061	0.941	-0.089	0.915
Spiritual Involvement	-0.057	0.945	-0.165*	0.848
Secular Values	0.533	1.705	-0.172	0.842
Constant	-1.336*	0.263	2.188*	8.921
N	716		688	
-2 Log likelihood	903.516		858.313	
			43.426*	
Model χ^2	68.181**		*	
Pseudo R ²	0.122		0.084	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

For male respondents, the results showed that positive attitudes toward gender equality in education among males were stronger for respondents who were employed, had a higher education, and were non-Persian. Model χ^2 (68.181) was statistically significant for males and Pseudo R² was 12.2 percent.

Among females, positive attitudes towards gender equality in education was found to be associated with higher education, lower income, and lower level of spiritual involvement. Model χ^2 (43.426) was statistically significant for females and Pseudo R² was 8.4 percent.

The t -test result further uncovered the moderating role of gender in the relationship between attitudes towards gender equality in education and income. While

higher income was associated with lower likelihood of attitudes toward gender equality in education for females, the relationship was not found to be statistically significant. The income and attitudes towards gender equality in education relationship was stronger for females than for males.

Logistic Regression Results Explaining Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Politics for Males and for Females

Tables 8 presents logistic regression results explaining attitudes towards gender equality in politics for males and for females.

Table 8: Regression Results Explaining Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Politics for Males and for Females ($N = 1404$)

Predictor	Attitudes Towards Gender Equality in Politics			
	Males		Females	
	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
Age	0.001	1.001	-0.01	0.99
Employed	0.051	1.052	-0.044	0.957
Married	0.037	1.038	-0.043	0.957
Education	0.102*	1.107	0.17**	1.185
Income	0.08	1.083	-0.117*	0.889
Class	-0.089	0.914	0.24	1.272
Persian Religious Participation	-0.061	0.941	-0.076	0.927
Spiritual involvement	-0.108	0.898	-0.089	0.915
Secular Values	-0.081	0.923	-0.165*	0.848
Constant	0.691	1.996	-0.172	0.842
	-0.113	0.893	2.188*	8.921
N	716		688	
-2 Log likelihood	902.068		858.313	
Model χ^2	35.045**		43.426**	
Pseudo R ²	0.065		0.084	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

For male respondents, our results showed that positive attitudes toward gender equality in politics among males were stronger for respondents who were educated. Model χ^2 (35.045) was statistically significant for the male subsample and Pseudo R^2 was 6.5 percent. Notably, the rest of the predictors were not found to be significantly associated with the attitudes towards gender equality in politics.

Among females, positive attitudes towards gender equality in politics was associated with higher education, lower income, and lower level of spiritual involvement. Model χ^2 (43.426) was found to be statistically significant for females and Pseudo R^2 was 8.4 percent. Using a *t*-test, I found that gender played a significant moderating role in the relationship between attitudes towards gender equality in politics and income in this association was stronger for females than for males.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to explain the attitudes toward gender equality among Iranians by examining the relationship between social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization factors and the three outcome variables—attitudes toward gender equality in employment, attitudes toward gender equality in education, and attitudes toward gender equality in politics. I applied standpoint theory and Davis and Robinson’s model of consciousness to explain each of the three outcome variables. Many studies have concerning attitudes toward gender equality have been conducted in the West (Andersen and Collins 2015; Blau and Kahn 2000; Charles and Grusky 2007; England 2006; Gupta et al. 2019; Petersen and Morgan 1995; Tam 1997; Wernet 2016). However, studies on gender equality in Iran are still lacking. Wave 7 of the WVS was used to acquire data for this study, in order to assess the relationships between attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, politics and social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. The data analysis also assessed the moderating role of gender in the associations of each gender equality outcome with social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization. Our results indicate the importance of social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization in explaining the outcomes. However, different social mechanisms were responsible for explaining the different attitudes toward

gender equality. In line with our hypotheses, social status factors influenced attitudes toward gender equality. I found that female, educated, and less religious/spiritual participants displayed more supportive of attitudes toward gender equality. This confirmed the findings of previous studies (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Klingorová and Havlíček 2015; Seguino and Lovinsky 2009). In addition, respondents with higher secular values were more supportive of gender equality in employment (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015). However, secularization did not display any significant influence on individuals' attitudes toward gender equality in education and politics. Although social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization values were found to be important in explaining respondents' attitudes, different patterns were observed for each gender.

Implications of the Findings

Our results have three implications. First, our results support the relationship between social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization factors and attitudes toward gender equality among male and female participants. With respect to social status factors, respondents who were female, more educated, and unmarried were more supportive of gender equality in employment. Women, more educated, non-Persian, and higher-class respondents had more positive attitudes toward gender equality in education. Furthermore, women and more educated participants supported gender equality in politics. In agreement with the enlightenment thesis, education was found to be important in explaining attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics (Davis and Robinson 1991). According to the enlightenment thesis, educated

individuals become aware of people's disadvantages in society and are thus willing to promote equality for everyone (Davis and Robinson 1991; Kurzman 2008). Previous studies show that education and attitudes toward gender equality are related (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004) since educated individuals are likely to be exposed to feminist ideas, which fosters an awareness about gender stereotypes and women's roles. Being exposed to egalitarian ideas means that they are not likely to accept gender stereotypes and myths (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Klingorová and Havlíček 2015; Lomazzi et al. 2019).

Education has been found to exert an indirect impact on attitudes toward gender equality. The education level of mothers is an important factor that affects views on feminist ideas, since mothers are the first female role model and are responsible for the primary socialization of their children (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Lomazzi et al. 2019). Mothers with higher levels of education impact children's lives as they introduce them to feminist ideas and gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). In Iran, women have increasingly gained access to education since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Mehran 2003). The curricula of schools were altered as a result of the Islamization of the education system. It was a massive cultural revolution in which religious teachings were incorporated into classes in elementary schools (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Iranian elites have sought to create ideal Islamized citizens as a role model for younger men and women (Mehran 2003). In other words, the elites constructed and moralized the image of ideal Muslim women to highlight their gender roles and responsibilities within their families and society (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Despite the Islamization of curricula in Iran, the results indicate that educated individuals become conscious of the disadvantages experienced by

others and gender inequality in Iranian society. Even though the changes in the curricula were intended to sustain gender inequality, higher education still successfully generated the consciousness needed to pursue the agenda of gender equality.

The results of this study, which are consistent with those of previous studies, indicate that respondents with higher levels of religious/spiritual involvement were less supportive of gender equality in employment, education, and politics. Religiosity has been associated with the enforcement of traditional views and gender roles (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Gerling, Ash-Houchen, and Lo 2019). Although spirituality and religiosity differ in other countries (Glas et al. 2018), this study found that they are negatively related to Iranians' views on gender equality.

Religion reinforces patriarchal norms. In the Middle East, patriarchy goes beyond religion and spirituality and has undeniable effects on the attitudes toward gender equality (Kazemi 2000). Religious organizational structures are hierarchical, conservative, and reliant on unequal gender norms (Seguino and Lovinsky 2009). These institutions gain access to resources and perpetuate power and control by creating norms; elites hold institutional power and the patriarchal dominance repeats itself in religious institutions (Seguino and Lovinsky 2009). The religious state then hinders any efforts to narrow the gender gap (Seguino and Lovinsky 2009). Patriarchal norms dictate that women should be restricted to household work and unpaid childcare. As a result, individuals who exhibit higher spirituality and religiosity are less supportive of gender equality (Seguino and Lovinsky 2009). Likewise, the Iranian conservative elites are using patriarchal interpretations of Islam, asserting that men and women are fundamentally

“different” and that the gender hierarchy is “natural” (Barlow and Akbarzadeh 2008). They claim that gender differences are God-given and that the subordinate status of women is due to their nature and biology. Therefore, Iranian women are discriminated against and do not enjoy gender equality (Barlow and Akbarzadeh 2008).

Second, this study found that (1) gender differences in attitudes toward gender equality attitudes exist and that (2) social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization affect different genders differently, producing distinctive social dynamics that explain the men and women’s attitudes toward gender equality attitudes. In line with the threat hypothesis, which posits that lower-incomed men view women as competitive threats to their job security (Davis and Robinson 1991), male respondents were found to be less likely to support gender equality in comparison to women. The threat hypothesis proposes that men with lower income perceive women as their competitors who take their jobs and cause disadvantages for them (Davis and Robinson 1991). Therefore, men show less support for gender equality than women do. Gender inequality has been an issue for women who have been disadvantaged in society, while gender issues have not been a concern for many men (Flood 2015). To explain gender differences in attitudes toward gender equality, it is important to understand men and women’s social positions in Iran.

While men have privileges in unequal societies, there is diversity among them (Scambor et al. 2014). Their degree of privilege and their disadvantages are based on their class, race/ethnicity, and dis/ability (Scambor et al. 2014). Although women participate more in higher education and in the labor market, men have more power than

women (Scambor et al. 2014). However, the privileges that men enjoy, such as the freedom to work long hours, inadvertently cause them health problems, stress, and relationship problems (Scambor et al. 2014). The patriarchal government of Iran has negatively affected women's participation in the public sphere, leading to gender inequality. Some examples of such inequality are gender segregation at the workplace and at higher education institutions that restrict women (Farvardin 2020). Even though Iranian women experienced marginalization at the labor force, they still did not leave the public sphere (Farvardin 2020). The Iranian government realized the need to support lower class and rural families; thus, they employed women as nurses and teachers at the segregated schools (Farvardin 2020). On the other hand, many men left the country and were imprisoned or killed during the Iran-Iraq War. Consequently, Iranian women became breadwinners, which improved women's employment during and after the war (Farvardin 2020). Iranian women's education levels increased, and they became more visible in the public sphere. At the same time, women resisted their exclusion from the public sphere and the discrimination against their rights and bodies (Behdad, and Nomani 2012; Farvardin 2020). Between 1976 and 2006, women integrated into the labor force, but their participation was affected by their economic status or skills (Behdad and Nomani 2012). Women who were skilled and came from a higher economic status started their own businesses to resist gender segregation and discrimination (Behdad and Nomani 2012). However, women's occupational choices were influenced by religion and culture. Most of the jobs offered to women were in education or health care. Additionally, they earned only 17 cents for each dollar earned that men earned (Rejali

2016). Economic fluxes, increased unemployment, and inflation might have contributed to the competition between men and women in the labor force (Farvardin 2020).

Consequently, Iranian men and women have different attitudes toward gender equality.

The results show that social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization values did not have a uniform impact on men and women's attitudes toward gender equality. Notably, employed men supported gender equality in education more than unemployed men, whereas employment was not significant for women.

Previous studies have indicated that Iranian men are becoming more educated; in 1996, about 78 percent of Iranian men were literate (Mehran 2003). According to the World Bank, there is a difference between female and male employment that has intensified through economic recessions (Kazemi Najaf Abadi, Takeuchi, and Kiku 2020).

Unemployed men's lower support for gender equality might be associated with the economic recessions in Iran (Kazemi Najaf Abadi et al. 2020). In 2019-2020, the labor force participation was about 44.1 percent and the unemployment rate was 10.7 percent (Kazemi Najaf Abadi et al. 2020). Poverty has increased by more than 40 percent in Iran's urban areas (Assadzadeh and Paul 2004). Given these facts, the competition for access to resources might be why men are less supportive of gender equality in employment and politics. The results showing that employed men are more supportive of gender equality in education despite not being supportive of gender equality in employment and politics might indicate that men do not perceive women's education to be a threat to them.

Among female respondents in my study, married females were found to be less supportive of gender equality in employment compared to non-married women. Family is incredibly significant to Iranians. Iranian families support their members in their relationships, and the family is a center of love, forgiveness, and sacrifice for its members (Tezcür, Azadarmaki, Bahar et al. 2012). The bond between the members of the original family is particularly strong, even after marriage. Iranians retain a close relationship with their parents (Tezcür et al. 2012). Given that married women live in a “traditional” family with defined gender roles (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004), they view their primary role as childcare and household work (Thornton, Alwin and Camburn 1983). Married women have less progressive values because they are less exposed to feminist ideas and gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). After the revolution, a significant paradoxical change in Iranian women’s identity occurred, which was different to the change in the West. The focus changed to being a good mother and a good wife (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Iranian women often experience problems in maintaining their jobs while caring for their young children (Ramazani 1993). In 1985, laws were passed that mandated that women with younger children could only work part-time, have three months of maternity leave, and get two minute nursing breaks (Ramazani 1993). However, these “benefits at work” were insufficient to integrate women into the workforce (Ramazani 1993).

Persian male respondents were less supportive of gender equality in education in comparison to their non-Persian counterparts, but the Persian ethnicity variable was not significant for women. The Iranian religious state favors Persians and Shia Muslims over non-Persians and religious minorities (Hassan 2007). While the Iranian Constitution

prohibits discrimination based on race and ethnicity, women and religious minorities are not part of the protected groups (Tohidi 2009). Since 1979, Iranian religious elites have institutionalized discriminatory laws and policies and cultural practices that have subordinated women (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Based on Yang's definition of majority and minority groups, Persians as the majority group have a dominant position compared to non-Persians (Yang 2000). In contrast, non-Persian Iranians experience disadvantages based on ethnicity and gender, which subsequently makes them conscious of gender inequality. The non-Persians' consciousness of inequality is consistent with the underdog thesis (Davis and Robinson 1991). The underdog thesis suggests that people who are disadvantaged become aware of their unfair treatment (Davis and Robinson 1991). The underdog thesis can help explain why non-Persians are more likely to support gender equality. The underdog thesis can also explain why Iranian women are more aware of the inequality in Iranian society and more supportive of gender equality (Davis and Robinson 1991).

Spiritually involved women were not supportive of gender equality in employment, education, and politics. This reflects women's tendency to participate more in religious services (de Vaus and McAllister 1987; Klingorová and Havlíček 2015) and that all religions uphold male dominance and patriarchal values (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015; Moghadam 1992; Seguino 2011). Although most world religions respect women as mothers and wives, they do not promote gender equality and emancipation (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015). Spiritually involved women's limited support for gender equality might be due to the influence of patriarchal religious norms on them,

which may make them view childcare and household work as their primary responsibility.

In this study, respondents with higher secular values were found to be more supportive of gender equality in employment. This tendency was stronger among females, which supports our hypothesis. The reason women with more secular values are supportive of gender equality might be related to Iran's post-revolution history, when the Family Protection Law of 1967 was repealed and was replaced with Islamic laws (Kian 1997). As a result, the Islamic dress code and Islamic veil became compulsory for women, and a set of laws were reversed and imposed on women (Kian 1997). In addition, secular women were labeled by Ayatollah Khomeini as "corrupt manifestations of the monarchical regime and the West" and they were excluded and dismissed from administrative systems, especially those who remained from the pre-revolutionary period (Kian 1997:77). Secular, Islamist, and reformist women across various occupations, such as professors, economists, sociologists, artists, historians, and movie directors, realized that it was crucial for them to unite and be tolerant of each other's opinions despite their differences in order to move toward gender equality (Kian 1997). This is explained through the concept of the Iranian Zan consciousness, where Iranian women become aware of their oppression and disadvantages under the Iranian state that politicizes their bodies, discriminates against them based on their gender, and imprisons women's rights activists. Simultaneously, Iran's powerful traditions and patriarchal culture assign Iranian women with responsibilities as mothers and wives while treating them differently than men.

Third, this study asserts the moderating role of gender in explaining attitudes toward gender inequality based on income and age. In line with our expectation, older participants were less supportive of gender equality in employment, and this association was stronger for women. Additionally, individuals with higher income were less supportive of gender equality in education and politics, and these associations were stronger for women.

Our results concerning age and attitudes toward gender equality in employment were in accordance with the egalitarian zeitgeist thesis (Davis and Robinson 1991). The egalitarian zeitgeist thesis proposes that people's views on gender equality are affected by the historical context (Davis and Robinson 1991). Older Iranian women were in their 20s when the Iranian Revolution occurred. Today, older Iranian women are less supportive of gender equality in employment, as their main concern is childcare, household, and family (Rezai-Rashti 2015). In most countries, younger educated women are more feminist than older women, and this is also the case in Iran—a religious nation that is against feminist ideas (Kurzman 2008). Iranian women educated under the IRI seek gender equality as much as women in other countries do (Kurzman 2008). Previous studies have shown that many Iranian women support the participation of women in the labor force even after marriage and within their marriages (Kurzman 2008). Young Iranian women reported that they live in egalitarian marriages. Many women have fewer children or become mothers later in their lives (Kurzman 2008). The discriminatory policies of the IRI against women have caused a backlash from people, especially women. Simultaneously, education has resulted in an increase in gender egalitarianism, and economic hardships

have forced women to take more responsibilities and have caused the younger generation to be significantly different from older Iranian women (Kurzman 2008).

The results of this study indicated that respondents with a higher income were less supportive of gender equality in education and politics, and these associations were stronger in the case of women. While these results were inconsistent with the literature and our expectations, they might be explained by the underdog thesis. The underdog thesis proposes that disadvantaged individuals with a lower income become aware of gender inequality (Davis and Robinson 1991). However, individuals with higher income who have not experienced disadvantages might be disconnected from the oppressed groups' experiences. More research needs to be conducted to understand why the association between higher income and attitudes toward gender equality in education and politics was stronger for women.

Limitations

While this study made significant contributions to the literature, it has three limitations. Since I used secondary data, I could not measure all relevant variables and was restricted to the questions provided by the survey. A lack of adequate measures resulted in the use of dichotomous variables to measure the attitudes toward gender equality in education and politics, respectively. I exhausted the questionnaire and found very few questions related to the second and third dependent variables. As I employed a logistic regression analysis to evaluate the second and third dependent variables, I collapsed the variables into dummy variables. Collapsing the variables certainly increased measurement errors, which are part of the limitations of the current study.

However, using three indicators of attitudes toward gender equality (attitudes toward gender equality in employment, attitudes toward gender equality in education, and attitudes toward gender equality in politics) certainly contributed by exploring specific attitudes toward gender equality that have not been found in existing literature.

The cross-sectional nature of the data generated by the WVS meant that I lacked longitudinal data to generate temporal ordering that explained how social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization factors affected attitudes toward gender equality in employment, education, and politics. Due to the small sample size, I was not able to include many smaller ethnic minority groups in this study. Instead, I categorized all ethnic minorities within the non-Persian Persian ethnicity variable.

Conclusion

In Iran, women, educated, and secular individuals were found to display more positive attitudes toward gender equality. In turn, less support for gender equality was found among respondents who were male, married, religious, older, and higher-incomed. Our results show that views on gender equality are affected by social status factors, religious/spiritual involvement, and secularization factors. Furthermore, our results indicate that gender has a moderating role in the relationship between the predictors and outcome variables. Distinct social mechanisms explain the attitudes of men and women. These different attitudes may reflect the fact that Iranian feminists oppose and seek to dismantle discriminatory laws in Iran (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Islamic feminists who are connected to the elites through kinship and marriage criticized the measures of the Iranian state, and some of them were highly critical of the state for neglecting Iranian

women's religious rights (Razavi 2006). Despite the long-term resistance displayed by Iranian feminists, efforts to achieve gender equality in Iran are not supported by the government.

The Iranian government has fought against gender equality, and their arguments are based on religion. Iranian secular feminists believe that the solution to gender inequality in Iran is to separate religion from the state (Barlow and Akbarzadeh 2008) which would go against the constitution. Religious feminists have not been able to make lasting changes to the system (Barlow and Akbarzadeh 2008). Muslim feminists challenged the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts and gender laws through their reinterpretations (Rezai-Rashti 2015). They used and implemented certain western feminist visions, such as forming a women's studies department in Iranian universities (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Islamist women believe that gender rights are not fixed in Islam but are negotiated and produced due to power relations in society (Rezai-Rashti 2015). Scholars have differing opinions on whether gender equality in a religious framework is possible (Moghadam 1988). Iranian secular and Islamic feminists should be included in dialogs with western feminists so that they can understand each other's perspectives (Hirschmann 1998) and work together toward their common goal of gender equality.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

2/21/2021

Texas Woman's University Mail - IRB-FY2021-126 - Initial: Exempt Letter



Jonbita Prost <jprost@twu.edu>

IRB-FY2021-126 - Initial: Exempt Letter

1 message

irb@twu.edu <irb@twu.edu>
To: clo@twu.edu, jprost@twu.edu

Tue, Dec 22, 2020 at 4:37 PM



**Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

irb@twu.edu

<https://www.twu.edu/institutional-review-board-irb/>

December 22, 2020

Jonbita Prost
Sociology

Re: Exempt - IRB-FY2021-126 Effects of Social Status, Religion, and Secularization on Attitudes Towards Gender Equality Among Iranians

Dear Jonbita Prost,

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU IRB - Denton operating under FWA00000178 and was determined to be exempt on December 22, 2020.

Note that any modifications to this study must be submitted for IRB review prior to their implementation, including the submission of any agency approval letters, changes in research personnel, and any changes in study procedures or instruments. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All modification requests, incident reports, and requests to close the file must be submitted through Cayuse.

On December 21, 2021, this approval will expire and the study must be renewed or closed. A reminder will be sent 45 days prior to this date.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the IRB analyst indicated on your application in Cayuse or refer to the IRB website at <http://www.twu.edu/institutional-review-board-irb/>.

Sincerely,

TWU IRB - Denton