

## Chapter 53

# Are Women in the MENA Region Really That Different From Women in Europe?

### Globalization, Conservative Values, and Female Labor Market Participation

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter compares women in the MENA region with women in Europe as to how globalization affects their conservatism, and, thereby, their labor market participation. Conservative values are defined as both religious values and socio-political attitudes. Using micro data from the World Values Survey 1981-2014 from 80 countries, we employ various indicators of globalization that reflect, first, international trade and, second, global flows of information. In pre-1994 Western Europe, economic globalization appears to weaken those conservative secular values that pertain to female employment, while all remaining secular-conservative values erode after 1994. The MENA region of today resembles pre-cold war Western Europe, with post-cold-war Western Europe possibly predicting changes to come in the MENA region. In the MENA region, women respond to intensifying economic globalization with deeper religiosity, possibly as form of self-protection. Global exchange of information, however, weakens all kinds of conservative values in general in either region.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6912-1.ch053

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization is a multi-faceted phenomenon whose dynamics and impact on the economy and particularly on society are still not fully understood. Globalization exerts effects not only on the economy and the environment, but also on cultures, social and political systems, and human well-being. Although the debate has focused on mostly economic effects such as unemployment, growth, and income inequality, the impact of globalization on values and cultural attitudes is very important and has broader economic and social consequences. In our contribution, we draw a distinction between economic integration, the integration of a country into world markets for goods, and informational integration, the integration into world ‘markets’ for information.

This chapter aims to make a contribution to our understanding of the social effects of globalization through the values channel. People’s values are shaped by a number of factors including customs, traditions, and the importance one attaches to religion. First, the chapter aims to investigate how globalization affects women’s conservative religious values (religious belief and religiosity) and conservative socio-political attitudes. We then investigate how conservative values affect female employment. In this way, we aim to contribute to the existing literature by extending the discussion on religion/values-female employment nexus to the role of globalization as a transmission mechanism. Specifically, we aim to answer the following questions in the empirical analysis:

1. Does globalization change women’s values, specifically their degree of conservatism?
2. Through this value change, does globalization impact female employment? That is, do these values and attitudes impact women’s labor market participation decisions?

Second, the chapter aims to answer the question whether women in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), who are mostly Muslims, are different from women in Europe, who are mostly Christians, in their reactions to the forces of globalization. The empirical analysis is based on 428,000 responses from the World Values Survey (WVS), conducted in over 80 countries between 1981 and 2014.

In general, it appears that those societal changes globalization triggers currently in the MENA countries resemble the changes that Western Europe underwent during the Cold War period prior to 1995. In light of this finding, the developments in Western Europe observed from 1995 on might predict future societal changes in the MENA countries in the years to come. It also becomes apparent that Eastern Europe, shaped by Communism and the resurgence of Orthodox-Christianity, is very much distinct from Western Europe and the MENA region, likewise.

Specifically, economic globalization that occurs in the MENA region tends to foster adherence to conservative-religious values, and socio-political conservative values, in general. Only conservative values directly pertaining to labor market participation (e.g., girls’ education and importance of family) are weakened as MENA countries economically globalize, possibly reflecting an adjustment of women’s values to the transforming forces of economic integration and the new economic necessities that arise in the region. While a similar development of weakening of these secular conservative values alone is also observable for Western Europe prior to 1995, from 1995 on, it appears that economic globalization has been destructive also to all remaining tested facets of women’s secular conservatism in Western Europe. Overall, the destruction of conservative and traditional values appears contagious.

Globalization of information through media and the internet tends to make people more critical toward religion-based and secular conservative values – this is observable in both regions and all time periods

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