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Does Democracy in the Home Create Democracy in the Nation?

Aimee Farnsworth

Valerie Hudson

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DOES DEMOCRACY IN THE HOME CREATE DEMOCRACY IN THE NATION?

WomanSTATS
PROJECT



A Preliminary Study by Aimee Farnsworth

Advised by Dr. Valerie M. Hudson

Department of Political Science

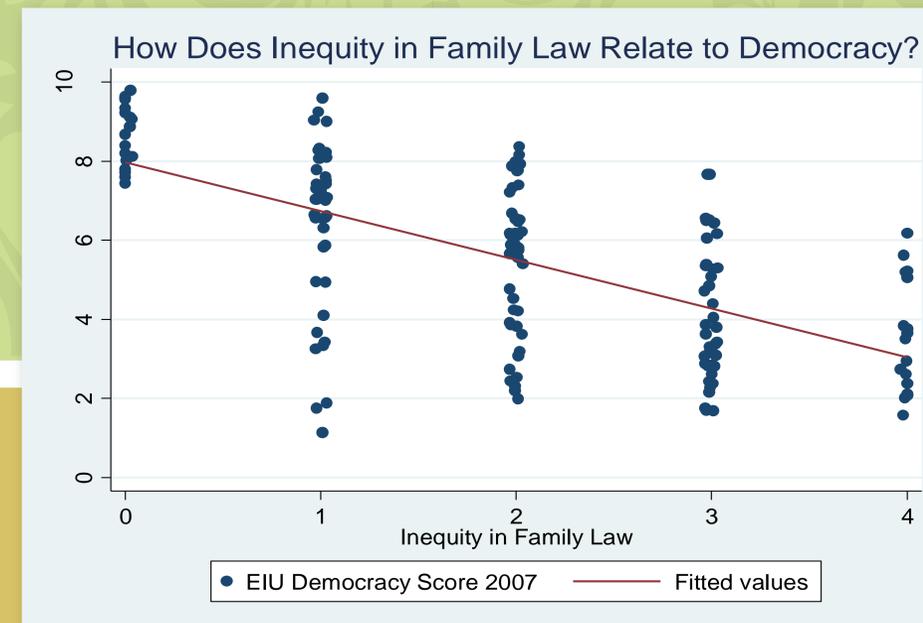
While the rise of liberal democracy has usually been linked to the growth of capitalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie, a fairly new theory claims that democracy in the state began with democracy in the home (Hajnal 1982; Hartman 2004). That is, as the relationship between husband and wife became more equal, a mini-democracy was created in the home which promoted liberal democracy on a larger scale, first in the community, and then the nation. Those promoting democracy might therefore find it beneficial to first, or at least concurrently, promote equality between husband and wife. Increased equality between spouses will not only allow families to flourish, but communities and nations as well. This project is a preliminary examination of the supposed causal relationship between democracy in the home and democracy in the nation.

“There is not a president and vice president in a family. We have co-presidents working together eternally for the good of their family . . . They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward.”

Elder L. Tom Perry, Church News, 10 April 2004, p. 15

Using a dataset of 165 countries, I created a scatterplot, below, that illustrates a clearly negative relationship between democracy in the nation¹ and democracy in the home². That is, as a country scores worse on the Inequity in Family Law scale, it also scores worse on the democratic scale.

After running a few basic statistical tests³ with the dataset, I discovered a strong relationship between democracy in the nation and inequity in family law. With a smaller dataset of 57 observations, I was able to test the relationship of democracy with other possibly influential factors, and found that a country's percentage of women in parliament (IPU 2009) and GDP (Nationmaster 2010) were both significantly correlated with democracy. Therefore, inequity in family law, percentage of women in parliament, and GDP are all possible explanatory factors for democracy, or at least, different aspects of it. However, it should be noted that GDP is not a good predictor of democracy under many circumstances (the high GDP of many oil-producing Gulf States, for example, is quite misleading where democracy is concerned). Therefore, while GDP plays an important role in democracy, it is not necessarily a proxy for inequitable family law, and future research may draw a clearer picture of the different ways in which GDP, percentage of women in parliament, and inequity in family law play into the development of democracy.



Because correlation does not imply causation, more research must be performed before the results of these tests can be considered authoritative. In the future, with more sophisticated statistical models and an improved dataset, we may very well discover a significant causal relationship between democracy in the nation and democracy in the home. In fine, however, the results of this project suggest that to better understand and promote democracy, scholars and policymakers must not overlook the situation and treatment of women in the home.

¹As a measurement of democracy in the nation, I used the 2007 ten point democracy index from the Economist Intelligence Unit, with 1 being the rating for the least democratic nations. This democracy index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture (Kekic 2007).

²As a measurement of democracy in the home, I used the 2007 five point Inequity in Family Law between Men and Women scale from BYU's WomanStats Project Database, with 4 being the rating for countries with the least equitable family law. The Inequity in Family Law scale seeks to capture how inequitable family law is conceptualized according to gender, and the measurements used to determine levels of inequity in family law include factors such as the legal age of marriage, polygyny practices, freedom of women to choose their spouse, right to divorce and knowledge of that right, marital rape law, property inheritance upon divorce or death, and right to abortion (WomanStats Project Database 2010).

³Due to the limitations of the dataset, the most appropriate statistical tests were ordinal measures of association. For each test, I found all four levels of association (Kendall's tau-b, Gamma, Pearson's R, Spearman Correlation) to be statistically significant at the .01 level.

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