Does Islamic Rule Really Empower Women?

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Abstract

This paper investigates whether Islamic political control empowers women socially and economically. In particular, we investigate whether Islamic rule affects female education and labor force participation. In an influential paper, Meyersson (2014) found that Islamic rule, following the 1994 election in Turkey, increased female high school education using a regression discontinuity framework. We extend his paper by investigating the underlying mechanisms of his implications and the effect on education of 1989 election in which Islamic parties won almost ten percent of the total votes. Although Meyersson (2014) finds that the Islamic mayors of the 1994 election encouraged girls to attend school overall, we find that the Islamic mayors of the 1989 election failed to have any such effect on education and his results could be alternatively explained by: (i) too wide bandwidth selection, (ii) 1995 general elections in which the central government opens substantial amount of religious high schools and (iii) the raise in compulsory schooling laws in 1997.

Keywords: regression discontinuity, education, elections