

Changing Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Update from the World Values Survey

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Abstract:

For most women the struggle for gender equality and non-discrimination has been an historic struggle, one that is far from won. The proposed study examines that levels and trends in public attitudes towards gender equality by analyzing data extracted from different waves of the World Values Survey (WVS). The WVS is a recurring global survey of nationally representative socio-cultural and political attitudes, carried out in almost 100 countries in the world. It includes questions concerning gender equality, and provides evidence of public attitudes based on agree-disagree responses to a range of statements, such as men make better political and business leaders than women, men have greater rights to employment when jobs are scarce, and similar statements addressing school enrollment, and economic and political participation.

Descriptive analysis of the latest wave of the WVS (Wave 6, 2010-14) shows that public attitudes are most gender equitable across economically diverse countries with respect to women's and men's equal right to higher education, a finding consistent with earlier waves of the WVS. Public attitudes are notably more variable between countries, and by respondent categories (sex, age, education), with regard to men's and women's equal right to employment when jobs are scarce. Public support for gender equality is consistently more modest with regard to women's effectiveness (relative to men's) as leaders in business or politics.

A subset of gender attitude questions has been collected in successive waves of the WVS, enabling trend analysis. For that purpose, we selected countries with data available for at least two points at an interval of at least 5 years, and with evidence of a consistent sampling frame over time. Based on the trend analysis, positive attitudes towards gender equality have been trending upwards in most countries since the mid-1990's, but with high variability between countries (and over time) in support for women's right to employment when jobs are scarce. Levels and trends in public attitudes to gender equality will be disaggregated by a range of other WVS variables, including sex of the respondent, older and younger respondents, educational attainment, and a range of related social and political values. Finally, we will explore the correspondence between attitudes towards gender equality as measured in the WVS and outcomes of direct interest to measuring progress in SDG Goal 5, e.g. women's share of seats in national parliaments, and rates of child marriage.

The paper will illustrate the utility of WVS data in providing evidence of pre-SDG trends and baselines in public attitudes towards women's empowerment across several domains of concern to the Sixth Global Forum, it will define criteria for trend analysis and future use of the WVS, disaggregate these data by a range of social characteristics, and examine the correspondence between WVS responses and outcomes of interest for SDG Goal 5.