

Education as Liberation?

Schooling and the Empowerment of Young Kenyan Women

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Education, empowerment and democracy

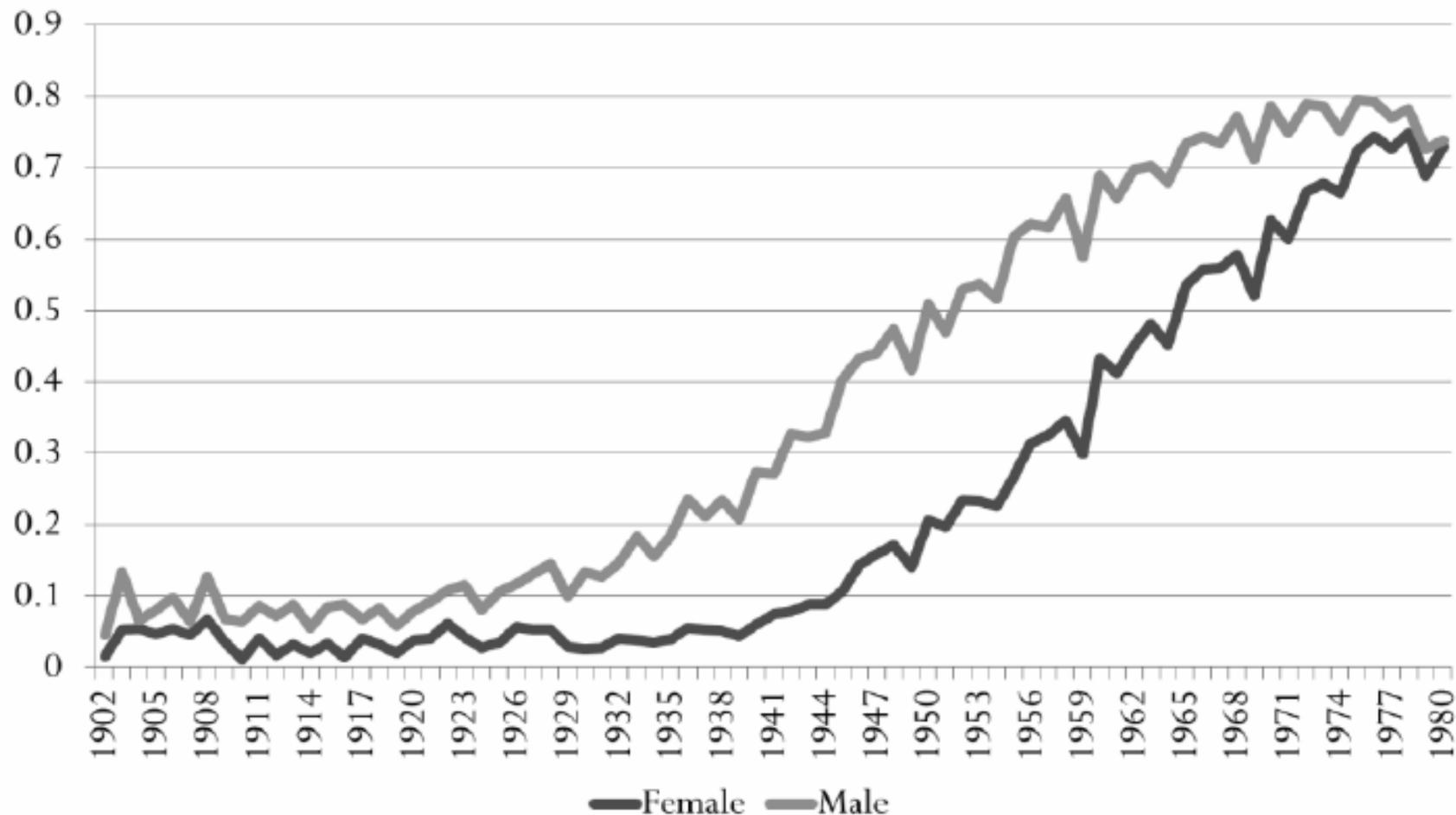
- **Does schooling promote female autonomy within the household, and broader democratic change in society?**

-- Many have claimed that the recent democratic revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa were propelled by increasingly educated youth populations, including women.

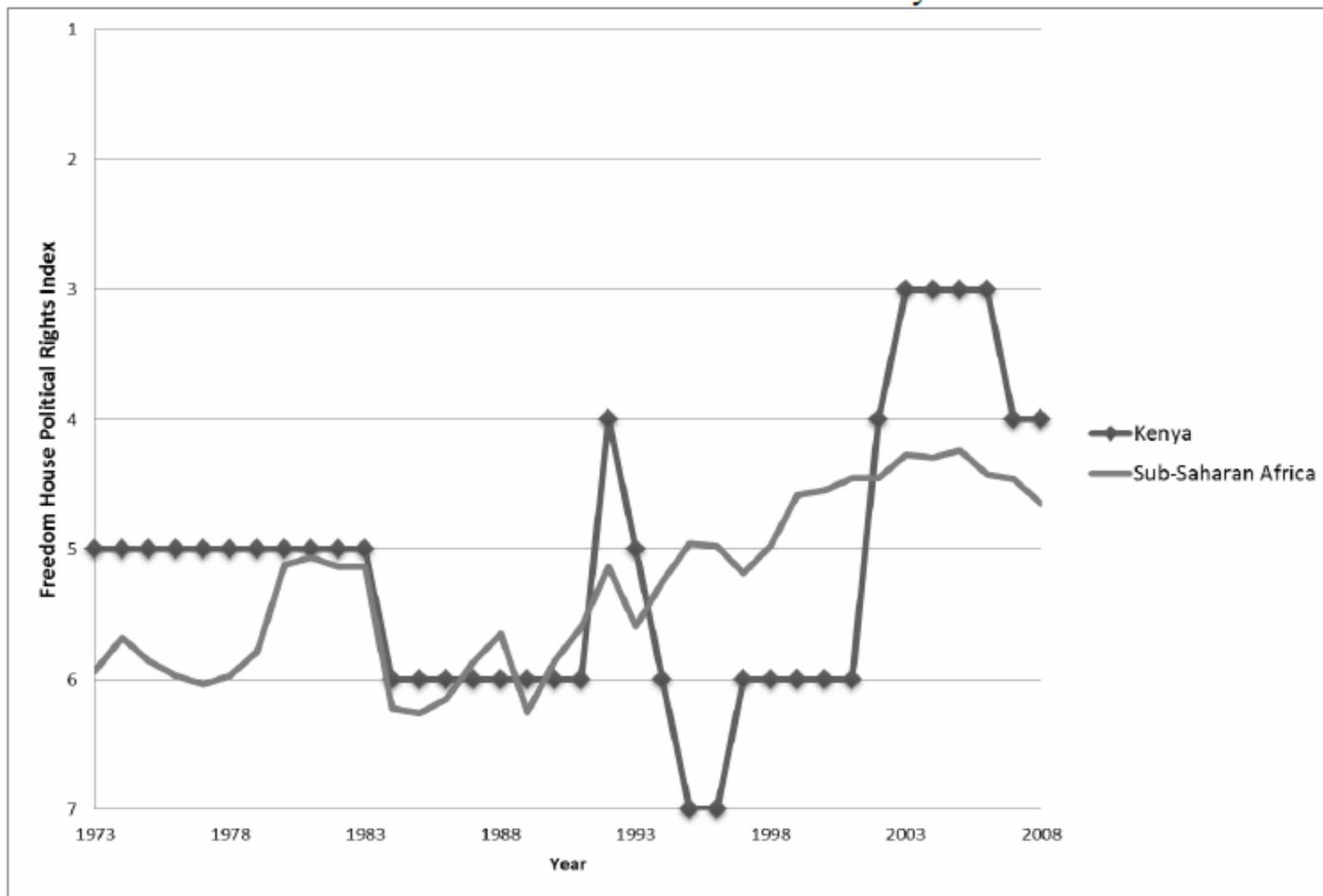
-- As illustrated by our study country of Kenya, there have been massive increases in both education and democracy over the past half century in sub-Saharan Africa, with literacy rising from 32% in 1970 to 87% today, and multiparty democracy taking root.

Figure 1: Schooling and democracy trends in Kenya

Panel A: Proportion of population completing primary schooling in Kenya, by birth cohort and gender (1902-1980 birth cohorts, source: 1999 Kenya Census)



Panel B: Freedom House Political Rights Index in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa (1973-2008), where “1” denotes full democracy



Empowering young women in Kenya?

- **There are many competing theories on how education may transform women's lives in less developed societies.**
 - Does education lead to more “modern”, pro-democratic, secular, non-ethnic, and egalitarian attitudes, including towards gender?
 - Does education reinforce existing patterns of authority? Or does it empower the disadvantaged, leading to greater civic involvement?
 - Does education enhance girls' autonomy within the household, including the freedom to choose one's own spouse?

Empowering women in Kenya

- **Women in Kenya remain disadvantaged in many ways.**
 - Domestic violence is widespread (75% in surveys); parents often play a key role in marriage choice through “bride price” (paid in cattle); there are few female lawmakers or politicians.
 - But here have been important changes over time, as evidenced by the narrowing gender gap in education. Elopement is also increasingly common and accounts for most marriages today.

Education's impact on social, political outcomes

- **We focus on the impact of education on girls in rural Kenya using a randomized experiment that provided scholarships to primary school girls.**
 - What are the social and political impacts of the gains in human capital 4 to 5 years later?
 - Few datasets track adolescents into adulthood.
 - Many earlier studies show strong correlations between education and political attitudes. But these may not be causal relationships (i.e., if children who get more schooling have higher family income, greater cognitive ability, intrinsic motivation, etc.).

Incentives to learn

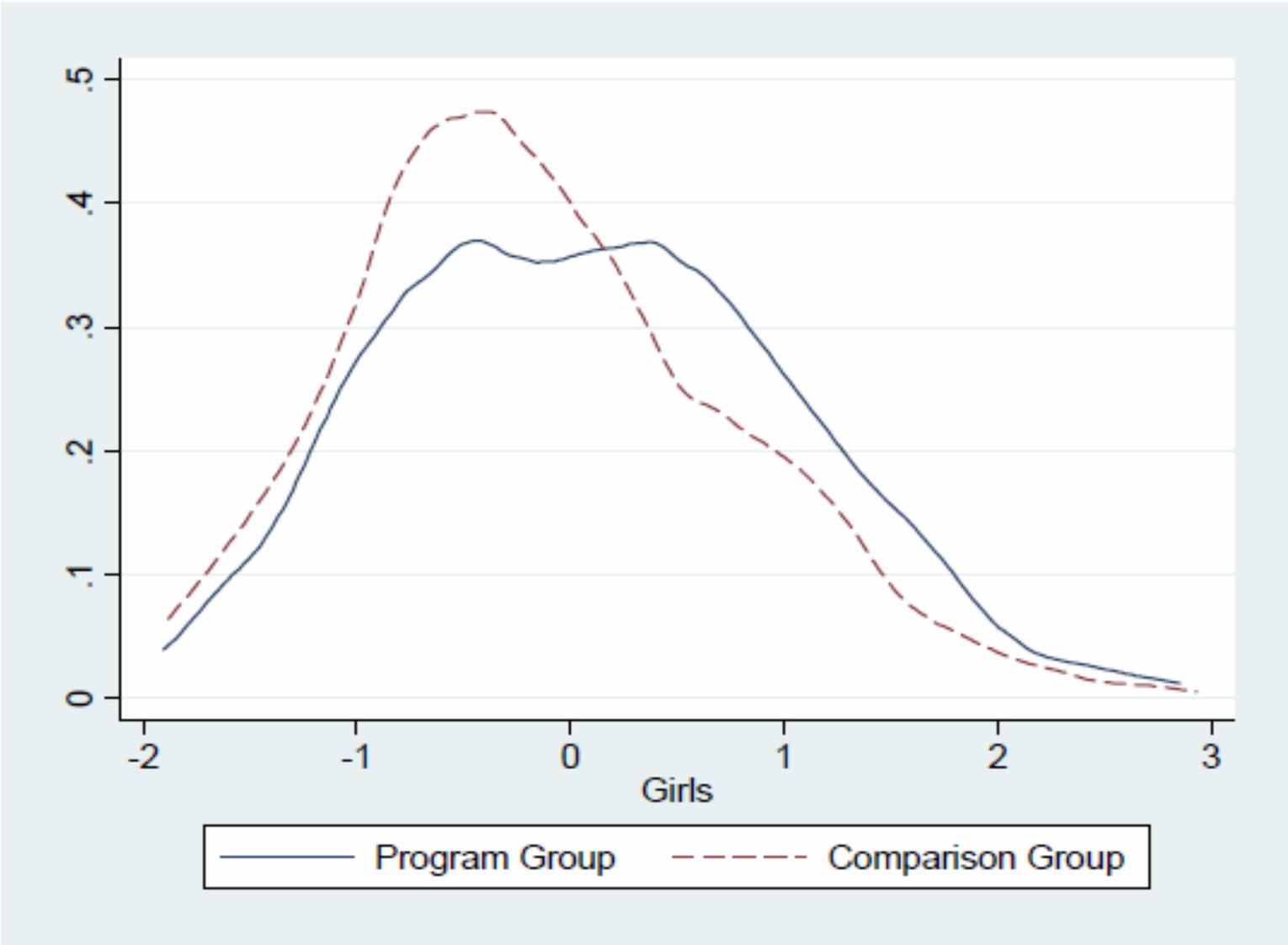
- **The Girls Scholarship Program in Kenya (2001-2002).**
 - 69 primary schools with 3,000 girls in grades 5 and 6 who competed for scholarships worth roughly US\$38 in school fees and a cash prize (over two years). Girls with the top 15% of test scores received the NGO award.
 - A prospective experimental design, where 34 schools were randomly chosen as “treatment” and 35 were the control. Due to the design, on average the “treatment” and “control” groups are similar in all ways but one: the intervention.
 - Large-scale girls scholarship programs have recently been established in many less developed countries, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Pakistan, and West Bengal in India.



Girls merit scholarships in rural Kenya

- **Earlier work: merit scholarships led to higher test scores.**
 - Incentives appear to be a cost-effective way to boost test scores in African schools (Kremer, Miguel and Thornton 2009).
 - Average academic test scores rose by roughly 0.3 standard deviation units in the treatment schools ($p < 0.01$), a large effect in education (roughly equivalent to one third of a grade), with gains across subjects.
 - Gains were found for both high- and low-performing girls (and even for boys, who were ineligible), due to within-classroom “spillovers”, including better teacher and student attendance.

Academic Test Score Distributions: Treatment vs. Control



Assessing impacts on autonomy and politics

- **The GSP tracking survey (2005-2007) data project.**
 - The baseline sample of roughly 1,300 girls were re-surveyed. By the 2005-2007 survey round, most were 17-21 years old.
 - Individuals were “tracked” as they moved throughout Kenya and Uganda. The team regularly updated contact information, often using cell phones. This intensive fieldwork allowed us to track down and survey over 80% of the sample (among those still alive), a high effective tracking rate for a young adult population over a decade.
 - Data was collected on human capital measures (e.g., test scores), life outcomes, social and political attitudes.

Incentive impacts on education

- **The merit scholarship incentives program led to large and persistent educational improvements**
- Five years after the scholarship competition:
 - Test scores: Average test score gain in the treatment group across all subjects is 0.2 standard deviations ($p < 0.05$). A sizeable but “realistic” effect magnitude.
 - Secondary school: Treatment girls 29% more likely to have attended at least some secondary school ($p < 0.05$).
 - Consistent with the medium-run results, the effects are not just concentrated among scholarship winners (the top 15%), but are found even among those with low pre-program test scores who had little chance of winning an award.

Education's impact on female autonomy

- **Education promotes female empowerment in the home.**
 - Gender equality: High levels of support for the statement “Women should have equal rights and receive the same opportunities as men do” in both treatment and control groups; no significant difference.
 - Spousal choice: Parents are significantly less likely to play a role in spouse choice for treatment school girls ($p < 0.10$). Overall marriage rates and fertility timing are unchanged.
 - Domestic violence: Large (28%) reduction in support for “Men can beat their wives and children if they misbehave” ($p < 0.01$).
- **Advocates for girls' education programs in developing countries will be heartened by these findings.**

Impacts on political views and involvement

- Identity: Treatment girls are not any less religious than the control, and if anything, their stated ethnic attachment *rises*, especially for those surveyed in the pre-election years of 2005-06 ($p < 0.05$).
- Democracy: No program impacts on support for democratic institutions when asked if they agreed with statements like “Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” (in 7 separate questions).
- Political involvement: No change in reported political interest or plans to vote in the next election, involvement in local community groups, or in their perceived ability to influence public policy.
- **These patterns are inconsistent with the “modernization” view of education.**

Impacts on political views and involvement

- **Strong evidence that program beneficiaries are more informed, skeptical and dissatisfied.**
 - Information seeking: The girls scholarship program Increases days reading a newspaper in the last week ($p < 0.1$), and a 60% increase in preferences for the capital's elite newspaper, the *Daily Nation* ($p < 0.01$).
 - Political knowledge: Ability to name political leaders rises substantially ($p < 0.05$).
 - Respect and satisfaction for government: Agreement with statements like "We should show more respect for authority" fall by 14% ($p < 0.01$), as does reported satisfaction with Kenya's government, leaders and economy in 5 separate questions.

Education and support for political violence

- **Young women from treatment schools are significantly *more likely to voice support for the use of political violence.***
 - Justification of violence: A moderate 3 percentage point increase (base of 47% in the control group) in support of “It is sometimes necessary to use violence in support of a just cause” ($p < 0.05$).
- **Why? This is likely due to a combination of their:**
 - Heightened political awareness.
 - Reduced satisfaction with existing politics.
 - No increase in the perceived ability to affect change through Kenya’s newly formed democratic institutions.

Education and support for political violence

- **Do program beneficiaries simply hold more *realistic* views about the nature of Kenyan politics?**
 - Violence has been instrumental in driving political reform since the 1950s Mau Mau uprising against the British.
 - More recently, after the rigged 2007 election, the Kenyan opposition only gained some share of political power after resorting to violence.
- **Democratic change was not necessarily driven by more pro-democracy attitudes *per se* (we find no effect on these attitudes).**

Education, empowerment and political change

- **Educating girls can transform a range of important social and political attitudes.**
 - Reduces satisfaction with existing authorities, both within the home (leading to greater marital autonomy) and in the broader political arena (with political leaders).
 - One interpretation: girls with more schooling are less likely to view their powerlessness as a natural, immutable fact about the world.
- **Global policy implications**
 - Education programs in poor countries can play a causal role in driving social change for women (empowerment).
 - Whether the expression of this discontent leads to political violence OR to a more vibrant democracy likely depends on the context → global relevance.

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