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WOMEN AND PROGRESS

2023 REPORT

Moving Closer to Gender Equality?

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Abstract

This report accomplishes two things. First, it updates readers about key changes in the composition of the Gender Disparity Index (GDI). The first section of the report discusses the inclusion of a new variable and explains why other variables have been dropped. It also discusses the new GDI scores and rankings for the 165 countries included in Economic Freedom of the World: 2022 Annual Report (EFW report) as well as the overall global trend from 1970 to 2020. This first section concludes by highlighting the dramatic changes in women's access to economic rights that have taken place in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates between 2018 and 2020. In keeping with previous Women and Progress reports, the second section of this report depicts the empirical relationships between economic freedom and several development outcomes that are of particular importance to women.





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Between 2018 and 2020, 13 countries improved their Gender Disparity Index score by relaxing restrictions on women's economic rights.

1.0

Introduction

For people to have the ability to flourish, it is essential for them to be able to direct the course of their own lives. Economic freedom refers to the set of institutions (or rules) that allow us to choose for ourselves where to live, who to interact with, what type of occupation to pursue, who to conduct business with, and how to spend our time. These rules protect a person's ability to engage in voluntary agreements with others, to earn an income, acquire property, and choose how to manage or trade the resources they acquire. In many countries across the world, women face additional legal barriers that limit their ability to exercise the same economic rights as men. These limitations on women's economic rights have consequences not just for women, but for everyone who misses out on the benefits that these women could have created through their economic contributions.

Since 2017, the Women & Progress project has been using data from the World Bank to track the extent to which men and women have equal access to key economic rights. The primary reason for tracking this information is to use it to adjust the index published in Economic Freedom of the World to account for differences in the economic rights of the genders that may exist in some countries. While the gender disparity data are briefly discussed in Economic Freedom of the World (Gwartney, Lawson, Hall, and Murphy, 2022), here we provide an in-depth discussion of the Gender Disparity Index and the relationship between economic freedom and women's ability to flourish.

The remainder of this report proceeds as follows. The rest of section one updates readers about key changes in the composition of the Gender Disparity Index (GDI). Section two presents the new GDI scores and rankings for the 165 countries included in Economic Freedom of the World: 2022 Annual Report (EFW report) as well as the overall global trend from 1970 to 2020. It concludes by highlighting two countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, where dramatic improvements in women's access to economic rights occurred between 2018 and 2020. The third section examines some of

the empirical relationships between economic freedom and measures of women's well-being. The final section of the report identifies some overarching themes and concludes by discussing the implications of these findings.

Changes in calculating the Gender Disparity Index

Since the last Women and Progress report was released (Fike 2020), there have been some notable changes in how the Gender Disparity Index is calculated. The World Bank modified the Women, Business, and the Law dataset, which necessitated changes in the composition of the Gender Disparity Index (GDI). First, the World Bank no longer includes separate variables measuring the legal rights of married and unmarried women. This change alone significantly reduced the number of components used to construct the GDI. In addition, several questions about industry-specific restrictions on women's labor have been dropped from the GDI calculation so that labor-market restrictions were not over-represented in the index. There are still four subcomponents included that capture labor-market barriers for women that apply broadly across all industries.

The World Bank has also added new variables to the Women, Business, and the Law database, including a question that asks whether married couples have equal administrative rights over their shared assets. The incorporation of this component in the GDI can help us understand if men and women are treated equally when it comes to property rights. In addition, the World Bank has begun to update its data on an annual basis instead of every other year and has extended the data availability for each country back to 1970. This allows us to create a GDI that is measured in a consistent manner, for all countries included, across all years in the dataset. This ultimately provides a more complete picture of gender equality under the law and how it has changed over the last 50 years.

As a result of these changes, there are now only 17 questions used to calculate the Gender Disparity Index. Each question captures an aspect of economic freedom that falls into one of four categories: Freedom of Movement, Freedom to Work, Property Rights, and Legal Status.

While the Women, Business, and the Law dataset also tracks gender-equality mandates and other forms of positive entitlements, none of those variables are used to construct this index. All of the subcomponents are consistent with a negative conception of economic freedom (Berlin, 1969).

The following list shows the 17 questions used to construct the Gender Disparity Index. The first 16 questions are identical to components in previous versions of the GDI; question 17 is a new addition.

The method for calculating the gender-adjustment score for each country remains unchanged. For each question, if the written law treats men and women equally that country receives a “1” for that question and a “0” if women face additional restrictions that men do not face. The overall gender disparity measure is a simple average of a country’s score for each of these 17 questions.

1. Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man?
2. Can a woman travel outside the country in the same way as a man?
3. Can a woman travel outside her home in the same way as a man?
4. Can a woman choose where to live in the same way as a man?
5. Can a woman get a job in the same way as a man?
6. Can a woman work at night in the same way as a man?
7. Can a woman work in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man?
8. Can a woman work in an industrial job in the same way as a man?
9. Is there no legal provision that requires a married woman to obey her husband?¹
10. Can a woman be head of household in the same way as a man?
11. Can a woman sign a contract in the same way as a man?
12. Can a woman register a business in the same way as a man?
13. Can a woman open a bank account in the same way as a man?
14. Do men and women have equal ownership rights to immovable property?
15. Do sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit assets from their parents?
16. Do male and female surviving spouses have equal rights to inherit assets?
17. Does the law grant spouses equal administrative authority over assets during marriage?

¹ In previous iterations of Women, Business, and the Law, this question was worded differently but was included in the original GDI calculations.

The Four Categories of the Gender Disparity Index

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Freedom of Movement allows people to choose where to travel and where to live based on their own preferences, plans, and priorities. If women are prevented from moving freely, they may miss out on potentially lucrative career paths and other opportunities to flourish. They may also be prevented from leaving a situation that is undesirable.

FREEDOM TO WORK

Freedom to Work represents another key channel through which a woman might be able to make choices to improve her well-being. Restrictions on the types of employment women are permitted to pursue are common across the world, and they limit the set of options women have when it comes to making a living. A dangerous occupation may not be attractive to many women, but it may represent the best option of some. Limiting women's occupational choices restricts their ability to make choices that may improve their life.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Property Rights are perhaps the most basic form of individual economic rights. If women do not have the right to own or inherit property, they have little incentive to contribute their talents and ideas to the market. What is the point of working outside of the home when the fruits of your labor are legally considered the property of another? What incentive do people have to accumulate wealth for all of their children, if their daughters are not able to inherit it? The ability to own property, improve upon it, receive income from it, or trade it with others is essential for human flourishing.

LEGAL STATUS

Legal Status refers to the way in which women and men are seen as competent, autonomous individuals capable of making independent decisions. Can both women and men serve as legal head of household? Do women legally have to obey the will of their husbands or fathers, or can they make decisions on their own without fear of legal retribution? Can they enter into contracts or open their own bank accounts without the permission of someone else? If the answer to any of these questions is no, then women do not have the same legal status as men which limits their ability to direct the course of their own life.

In the least free economies, only 7.42% of women aged 25 and older have completed post-secondary education or training. In the most economically free societies, however, 40.84% of women have completed post-secondary education.

2.0

The Gender Disparity Index for 2020 and *Economic Freedom of the World*

Countries with no gender disparity under the Law

The Gender Disparity Index (GDI) is used in the index published in *Economic Freedom of the World* to provide a gender adjustment to Area 2: Legal System and Property Rights. Countries with a GDI score of 1 do not receive any downward adjustment to their rule-of-law score. Countries with gender disparity in the formal legal code regarding any aspect of economic rights will see a downward adjustment to their score for Area 2. The more severe the gender disparity is, the more pronounced the downward adjustment to their EFW score will be. The next section discusses the GDI scores for 165 countries for the year 2020 and the impact the gender-adjustment process has on the overall EFW scores and rankings of each country.

Out of the 165 countries that are tracked in the 2022 edition of the *Economic Freedom of the World*, 62 of them treat men and women equally under the law. These countries are listed in table 2.1 below. It is important to note that, just because a country receives a GDI score of 1, this does not mean that country can be considered economically free. A GDI score of 1 simply means that men and women are treated equally according to the formal laws and regulations for that country. Whether men and women are equally free or equally unfree is determined by a country's overall score on the EFW Index.



TABLE 2.1

Countries with No Gender Disparity under the Formal Law, 2020

1	Albania	17	Ecuador	33	Lithuania	49	Serbia
2	Armenia	18	El Salvador	34	Luxembourg	50	Singapore
3	Australia	19	Estonia	35	Mauritius	51	Slovak Republic
4	Austria	20	Finland	36	Mexico	52	South Africa
5	Bahamas, The	21	France	37	Moldova	53	Spain
6	Belgium	22	Georgia	38	Mongolia	54	Sweden
7	Bolivia	23	Germany	39	Netherlands	55	Switzerland
8	Brazil	24	Greece	40	New Zealand	56	Taiwan
9	Bulgaria	25	Hong Kong SAR, China	41	Nicaragua	57	Timor-Leste
10	Cabo Verde	26	Hungary	42	Norway	58	Togo
11	Cambodia	27	Iceland	43	Paraguay	59	United Kingdom
12	Canada	28	Ireland	44	Peru	60	United States
13	Croatia	29	Italy	45	Poland	61	Venezuela, RB
14	Czech Republic	30	Lao PDR	46	Portugal	62	Zimbabwe
15	Denmark	31	Latvia	47	Romania		
16	Dominican Republic	32	Liberia	48	Raw		

Countries with high levels of gender disparity

On the other hand, there were 35 countries in the EFW index that had a gender-disparity score well below the 2020 global average of 0.8704, indicating severe gender inequality under the law. These countries are listed in table 2.2. Most countries that place additional restrictions on the economic rights of women are located in two regions of the world: the Middle East and North African region (MENA) has 15 countries on this list and the Sub-Saharan African region has 16 countries represented. The remaining four countries are located in South Asia (Bangladesh, and Pakistan) and East Asia (Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia). Sudan has a score of 0.2941, the lowest GDI score of all 165 countries in this report.

TABLE 2.2

Countries with Gender Disparity Scores Below 0.8

Bangladesh	0.7647	Chad	0.5294
Central African Rep.	0.7647	Eswatini	0.5294
Congo, Dem. Rep.	0.7647	Niger	0.5294
Madagascar	0.7647	Qatar	0.5294
Morocco	0.7647	Cameroon	0.4706
Algeria	0.7059	Iraq	0.4706
Brunei Darussalam	0.7059	Jordan	0.4706
Comoros	0.7059	Kuwait	0.4706
Libya	0.7059	Mauritania	0.4706
Pakistan	0.7059	Oman	0.4706
Tunisia	0.7059	Syrian Arab Rep.	0.4706
Djibouti	0.6471	Egypt, Arab Rep.	0.4118
Malaysia	0.6471	Gabon	0.4118
Mali	0.6471	Guinea-Bissau	0.4118
Senegal	0.6471	Iran, Islamic Rep.	0.4118
Somalia	0.6471	Yemen, Rep.	0.4118
Congo, Rep.	0.5882	Sudan	0.2941
Bahrain	0.5294		

In addition, there were 68 countries with GDI scores less than 1 but above 0.80, indicating a relatively moderate level of gender disparity under the law. These countries (table 2.3) are largely located in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the sources of gender disparity for countries in this list are the gender-based labor-market restrictions that prevent women from having the freedom to choose which occupation they want to pursue and which hours they want to work.

TABLE 2.3

Countries with Gender Disparity Index Scores Below 1.0 but Above 0.8

Bhutan	0.9412	Botswana	0.8824
Colombia	0.9412	China	0.8824
Costa Rica	0.9412	Cote d'Ivoire	0.8824
Fiji	0.9412	Cyprus	0.8824
Ghana	0.9412	Ethiopia	0.8824
Guatemala	0.94 12	Gambia, The	0.8824
Guyana	0.9412	India	0.8824
Honduras	0.9412	Israel	0.8824
Jamaica	0.9412	Kazakhstan	0.8824
Japan	0.9412	Kenya	0.8824
Lesotho	0.9412	Korea, Rep.	0.8824
Malta	0.9412	Kyrgyz Republic	0.8824
Montenegro	0.9412	Malawi	0.8824
Mozambique	0.9412	Myanmar	0.8824
Namibia	0.9412	Russian Federation	0.8824
Nepal	0.9412	Saudi Arabia	0.8824
North Macedonia	0.9412	Sri Lanka	0.8824
Panama	0.9412	Tajikistan	0.8824
Seychelles	0.9412	Tanzania	0.8824
Sierra Leone	0.9412	United Arab Emirates	0.8824
Slovenia	0.9412	Azerbaijan	0.8235
Suriname	0.9412	Benin	0.8235
Thailand	0.9412	Burkina Faso	0.8235
Trinidad and Tobago	0.9412	Burundi	0.8235
Turkey	0.9412	Chile	0.8235
Uruguay	0.9412	Guinea	0.8235
Vietnam	0.9412	Haiti	0.8235
Zambia	0.9412	Indonesia	0.8235
Angola	0.8824	Lebanon	0.8235
Argentina	0.8824	Nigeria	0.8235
Barbados	0.8824	Papua New Guinea	0.8235
Belarus	0.8824	Philippines	0.8235
Belize	0.8824	Uganda	0.8235
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.8824	Ukraine	0.8235

Countries with large decreases in economic-freedom score as a result of the gender adjustment

The set of countries shown in table 2.4 experienced the largest downward adjustment to overall economic freedom once gender disparity under the law was taken into consideration. There is significant overlap between the countries appearing in table 2.2 and those in table 2.4. Again, most of these countries are in the MENA region and in sub-Saharan Africa. Sudan experienced the largest percentage decrease in EFW score after the adjustment for gender disparity, 6.60%, followed by Iran (5.64%), Oman (5.39%), Egypt (5.11%), and Kuwait (5.06%).

TABLE 2.4

Countries with the Largest Percentage Decrease in EFW Score After Adjustment, 2020

Country	% Decrease in Score	Country	% Decrease in Score
Sudan	6.60%	Niger	3.64 %
Iran, Islamic Rep.	5.64%	Cameroon	3.33%
Oman	5.39%	Malaysia	3.31 %
Egypt, Arab Rep.	5.11%	Senegal	3.00%
Kuwait	5.06%	Congo, Rep.	2.96%
Qatar	4.56%	Chad	2.90%
Syrian Arab Republic	4.47%	Tunisia	2.79%
Jordan	4.20%	Djibouti	2.73%
Guinea-Bissau	4.01%	Algeria	2.71%
Mauritania	3.95%	Mali	2.51%
Eswatini	3.93%	Libya	2.35%
Bahrain	3.89%	Brunei Darussalam	2.34%
Yemen, Rep.	3.88%	Morocco	2.28%
Iraq	3.83%	Pakistan	2.12%
Gabon	3.79%		

Countries with decreases in their economic-freedom ranking as a result of the gender adjustment

Poor quality economic institutions, like weak property rights protection and a burdensome regulatory environment makes a country less attractive for people to conduct business, visit, or live. Countries that experience a large downward adjustment for gender disparity look like a much riskier investment opportunity. After adjusting the EFW score for gender disparity, 42 countries fall in the relative rankings. Table 2.5 shows the complete list of these countries and the magnitude of their decline in rank as a result of the gender adjustment. Six countries drop significantly, by 15 positions or more: Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Malaysia, and Oman.

TABLE 2.5

Countries with a Decrease in Rankings Due to Gender Adjustment, 2020

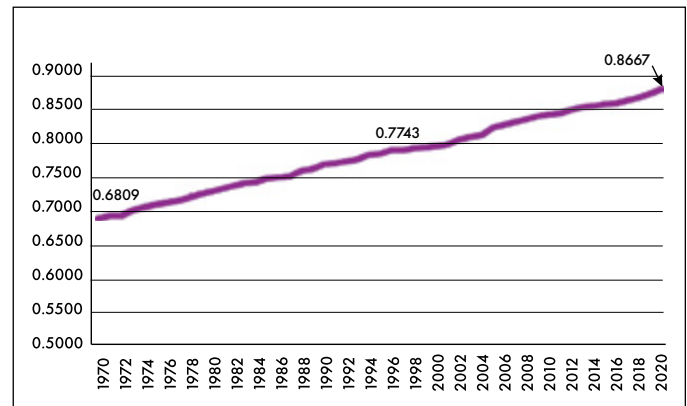
Bahrain	-23	Malta	-3
Jordan	-21	Botswana	-3
Qatar	-19	Indonesia	-3
Kuwait	-17	Bhutan	-3
Malaysia	-15	Turkey	-3
Oman	-15	Japan	-2
Mauritania	-9	Korea, Rep.	-2
Niger	-8	Israel	-2
Chile	-7	Philippines	-2
Brunei Darussalam	-7	Barbados	-2
Eswatini	-7	Ghana	-2
Benin	-6	Guinea-Bissau	-2
Tunisia	-6	Iraq	-2
Morocco	-5	Costa Rica	-1
Senegal	-5	Cyprus	-1
Egypt, Arab Rep.	-5	Saudi Arabia	-1
United Arab Emirates	-4	Tanzania	-1
Djibouti	-4	Comoros	-1
Mali	-4	Yemen, Rep.	-1
Cameroon	-4	Iran, Islamic Rep.	-1
Gabon	-4	Sudan	-1

Global trends in gender disparity under the law from 1970 to 2020

One of the benefits of the updated method for calculating the Gender Disparity Index is that we now have data for all countries, for all variables going back to the 1970s. With this complete set of data, we can be more confident that the patterns we observe over time reflect actual changes in gender equality under the law and are not an artefact of gaps in the availability of data for certain components in earlier years.

When examining the changes in gender disparity under the formal law over time, there is reason to be optimistic. Figure 2.1 depicts the trend in the global average GDI scores from 1970 to 2020. This shows that there was a steady increase in the average GDI score throughout this entire period. Throughout the entire period there was not a single year in which the global average declined. In 1970, the global average GDI score was 0.6809. This rises to 0.7743 in 1995 and by 2020, the global average GDI score reaches 0.8667. This means that, at least on paper, women and men are being treated more equally on average in 2020 than they were in previous years.

Figure 1: Global Average GDI Score



Despite the decline in overall economic freedom in this set of countries in 2020,² gender parity under the law continued its upward trend. This does not mean that women were “better off” than men in 2020. Instead, this indicates that some of the economic restrictions that women had previously faced were eliminated and that, when other economic rights were newly restricted in 2020, these rules applied to men and women equally.

2 See Gwartney, Lawson, Hall, and Murphy, 2022 for a discussion of the impact of COVID-19 mitigation policies on the average level of economic freedom.

Notable changes in the status of women between 2018 and 2020

All in all, between 2018 and 2020, there were 13 countries that improved their gender disparity scores by relaxing several key legal restrictions that affected women’s access to economic rights. Table 2.6 provides this full list of countries. At the same time, there were no countries that experienced a decrease in their overall scores on the Gender Disparity Index.³

One country that stands out as making drastic improvements in the formal economic rights of women during the past few years is Saudi Arabia. From 2018 to 2019, Saudi Arabia relaxed formal restrictions on women’s rights in several key areas, primarily giving women more freedom of mobility and granting them legal status that equals that of men. This resulted in a very large increase in GDI score from 0.3529 to 0.7059. Between 2019 and 2020, Saudi Arabia relaxed a few additional restrictions on women’s occupational choices. This further increased its GDI score from 0.7059 to 0.8824.

³ This is, of course, keeping in mind that the data here do not reflect any changes in the legal rights of women that occurred after 2020. In addition, it only measures formal economic rights and does not capture informal gender norms.

Saudi Arabia went from a “No” in 2018, to a “Yes” in 2019 in the following categories:

- *Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman travel outside the country in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman travel outside her home in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman choose where to live in the same way as a man?*
- *Is there no legal provision that requires a married woman to obey her husband?*
- *Can a woman be head of household in the same way as a man?*

Saudi Arabia went from a “No” in 2019, to a “Yes” in 2020 in the following categories:

- *Can a woman work at night in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman work in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman work in an industrial job in the same way as a man?*

TABLE 2.6

Countries with Notable Improvements in GDI Scores Between 2018 and 2020

Country	Gender Disparity Adjustment Score, 2018	Gender Disparity Adjustment Score, 2019	Gender Disparity Adjustment Score, 2020	Change between 2018 and 2019	Change between 2019 and 2020	Change between 2018 and 2020
Saudi Arabia	0.3529	0.7059	0.8824	0.3529	0.1765	0.5294
United Arab Emirates	0.3529	0.5882	0.8824	0.2353	0.2941	0.5294
Guinea	0.6471	0.8235	0.8235	0.1765	0.0000	0.1765
Cote d’Ivoire	0.7647	0.8824	0.8824	0.1176	0.0000	0.1176
Montenegro	0.8235	0.8235	0.9412	0.0000	0.1176	0.1176
Jordan	0.3529	0.4118	0.4706	0.0588	0.0588	0.1176
Bahrain	0.4706	0.4706	0.5294	0.0000	0.0588	0.0588
Benin	0.7647	0.7647	0.8235	0.0000	0.0588	0.0588
Costa Rica	0.8824	0.8824	0.9412	0.0000	0.0588	0.0588
Fiji	0.8824	0.8824	0.9412	0.0000	0.0588	0.0588
Pakistan	0.6471	0.6471	0.7059	0.0000	0.0588	0.0588
Uganda	0.7647	0.8235	0.8235	0.0588	0.0000	0.0588
Vietnam	0.8824	0.8824	0.9412	0.0000	0.0588	0.0588

These changes in women's economic rights have already started to exert a significant impact on women's well-being. Since 2018, women's labor-force participation rate in Saudi Arabia has increased from 21.91% to 30.94% in 2021, an increase of 41.2% (World Bank, 2023). Certainly, not all aspects of life for women in Saudi Arabia are going to change drastically or overnight just because of the improvements in their formal economic rights. However, the massive increase in women's labor-force participation suggests that many women are benefitting from this increased access to economic freedom.

The United Arab Emirates also experienced a major improvement in gender equality under the law between 2018 and 2020. In 2018, the UAE had a Gender Disparity Index score of 0.3529. In 2019, their GDI score had increased to 0.5882, and by 2020 it reached 0.8824. In 2019, the improvement in the GDI score was due to relaxing restrictions on women's occupational choices and granting women the ability to be declared head of household. In 2020, however, the improvement in their GDI score was largely due to increasing women's freedom of movement. Importantly, in 2020 the UAE also removed the law requiring a married woman to obey her husband.

The UAE went from a "No" in 2018, to a "Yes" in 2019 in the following categories:

- *Can a woman work at night in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman work in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman work in an industrial job in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman be head of household in the same way as a man?*

The UAE went from a "No" in 2019, to a "Yes" in 2020 in the following categories:

- *Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman travel outside the country in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman travel outside her home in the same way as a man?*
- *Can a woman choose where to live in the same way as a man?*
- *Is there no legal provision that requires a married woman to obey her husband?*

While Saudi Arabia's improved GDI score was followed by an increase in the labor-force participation rate of women, in the UAE the increased GDI score was followed by a decrease in women's labor-force participation rates, which fell from 48.95% in 2018 to 46.54% in 2021 (World Bank, 2023). The UAE's experience, however, is more consistent with the overall global trend in average labor-force participation rate for women, which decreased from 51.60% in 2018 to 50.5% in 2021. Nevertheless, these two countries have taken significant steps toward improving the rule of law and reducing gender inequality in access to economic rights. Relaxing the formal constraints to women's participation in the economy will undoubtedly provide women living in these countries with an expanded set of options for their lives.

3.0

Economic Freedom and Measures of Women's Well-being

This section examines the relationship between economic freedom and a variety of variables measuring different aspects of women's well-being. Several development indicators are included for each of three categories: labor-market outcomes, health outcomes, and educational outcomes. When possible, the data for both women and men are included to provide a relevant comparison. All outcome variables examined in this section have been obtained from the World Bank's Development Indicators (2023). Unless otherwise noted, the data are from the year 2020.

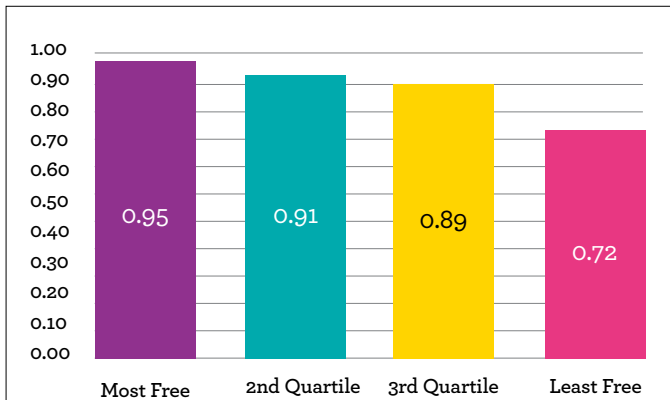


The average labor force participation rate for women is only 48.59% in the least free economies, while it is 68.05% in the most economically free societies.

Economic freedom and gender equality under the law

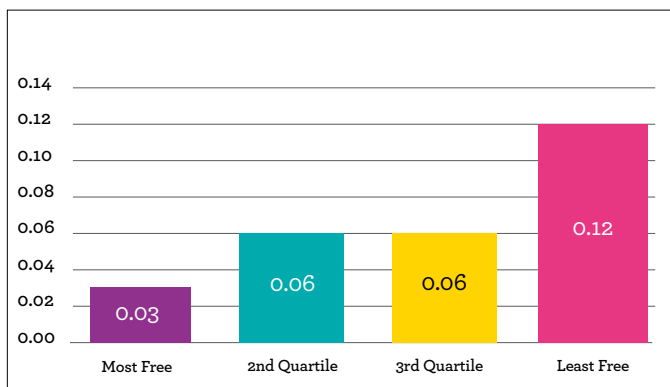
Figure 3.1 depicts the relationship between economic freedom (not adjusted for gender parity) and overall GDI score. The average GDI scores decline as the level of economic freedom declines. The average GDI score for countries in the most free quartile is 0.95 while the average score for the least free countries is only 0.72.

Figure 3.1: Gender Disparity Index Score, 2020



The difference between adjusted and unadjusted EFW scores is depicted for each quartile in figure 3.2. A large difference between these two numbers indicates that there is pervasive gender disparity in the formal legal code. The average difference for countries that are in the most free quartile is only 0.03 points, but for the least free economies, that difference increases to 0.12 points.

Figure 3.2: Difference Between Adjusted and Unadjusted EFW Scores, 2020



Taken together, these two graphs suggest that countries that adopt formal institutions that are consistent with the concept of economic freedom, are more likely to grant economic rights to women, and less likely to have legal barriers to women's economic participation that men do not have to face.

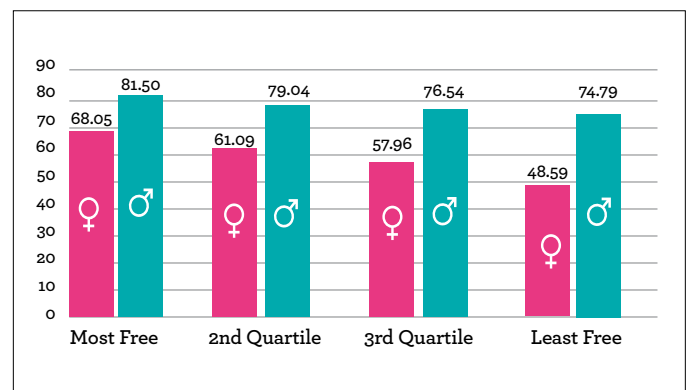
Labor market and financial outcomes

Economic freedom for women is associated with improvements in a variety of women's labor-market outcomes.

Labor-force participation rate (ages 15–64)

Figure 3.3 depicts the average labor-force participation rate in 2020 for both women and men across each economic-freedom quartile. For both groups, labor-force participation rates are the lowest in countries that are the least economically free. The average labor-force participation rates also increase as economic freedom increases. For women, the labor-force participation rate increases from 48.59% in the least free countries to 68.05% in the most economically free countries. For men, the increase in labor-force participation is less pronounced, moving from 74.79% in the least free countries and 81.50% in the most economically free countries. While labor-force participation rates for men are always higher than those of women, the gap between the labor-force participation rates of men and women declines as economic freedom increases. In the least free countries, the gap in labor-force participation is 26.2 percentage points, but this decreases to 13.45 percentage points in the freest countries.

Figure 3.3: Labor Force Participation Rates (15–64)

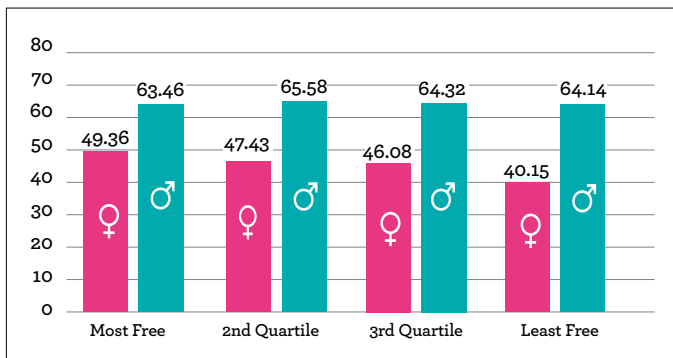


Employment-to-population ratio

The employment-to-population ratio in 2020 for both men and women is depicted in Figure 3.4. Once again, there is a clear pattern in which women's employment-to-population ratio steadily increases as you move from the least free economies to the most economically free. In the least economically free countries, the employment-to-population ratio for women is only 40.15%, while in the freest economies, it is 49.36%. Interestingly, the level of economic freedom has no observable relationship with the employment-to-population ratio for men, as it stays

constant across all quartiles. The gap between the ratios for women and men are also largest in the least free countries, at just under 24 percentage points, and this gender gap falls to slightly over 14 percentage points for the most economically free countries.

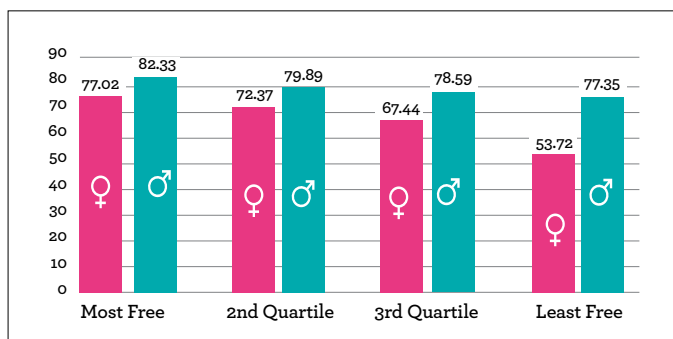
Figure 3.4: Employment-to-Population Ratio



Share of labor force with advanced education

Figure 3.5 presents the percentage of the male and female labor force that had advanced education in 2020. Advanced education is any post-secondary education ranging from attending a community college or technical school to obtaining a doctoral degree. In the least economically free countries, only 53.72% of the female labor force had completed some level of post-secondary training, while in the most free countries the share rises to 77.02%. The share of the male labor force with similar training ranges from 77.35% in the least free countries to 82.33% in the most free. The gender gap for this variable is just over 24 percentage points in the least free countries, but only 5.3 percentage points in the freest economies. Once again, this shows that the percentage of female workers with advanced education fluctuates much more dramatically than the percentage of male workers when the level of economic freedom changes.

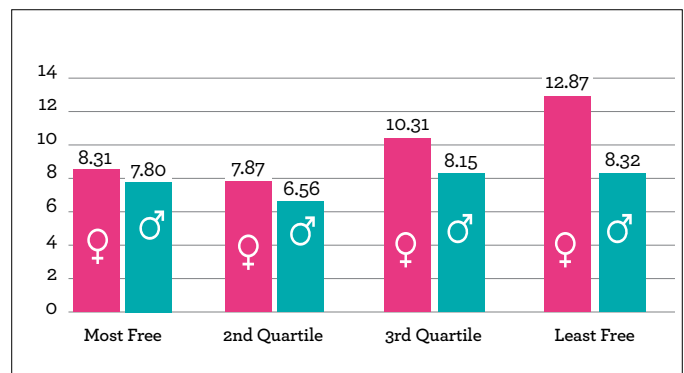
Figure 3.5: Share of Labor Force with Advanced Education



Unemployment rate, 2020

The relationship between economic freedom and the 2020 unemployment rates for men and women is depicted in figure 3.6. The clear relationship observed for the other labor-market outcomes does not quite hold here. It is obvious that the unemployment rates for men and women are much lower in the most free countries than it is in the least free countries. In the freest economies, only 8.31% of women and 7.80% of men are unemployed, while in the least free economies, 12.87% of women and 8.32% of men are unemployed. The gender gap in unemployment rates is also narrowest in the freest economies (0.51 percentage points higher for women) and widest in the least free economies (4.55 percentage points higher for women). However, it is the second economic freedom quartile that seems to have the lowest unemployment rates for both men and women. Since this data is looking at the year 2020, this may reflect the fact that the most free countries are also largely more developed nations and these nations were more likely to provide generous unemployment insurance benefits to citizens during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

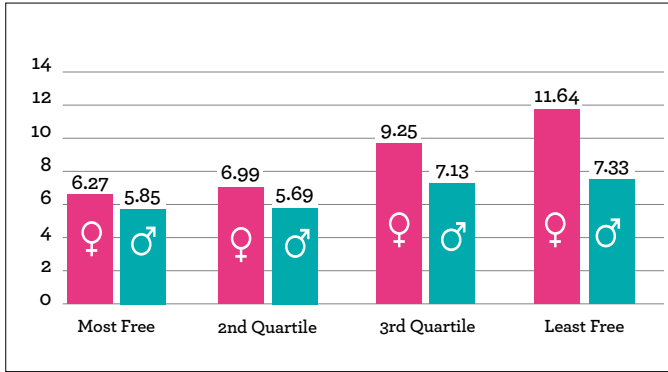
Figure 3.6: Unemployment Rates, 2020



Unemployment rate, 2019

Because 2020 is such an outlier when it comes to unemployment, we also examined the unemployment rates for men and women in 2019 (figure 3.7), prior to the global onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the clear relationship between higher levels of economic freedom and improvements in women's labor-market outcomes reappears. The average unemployment rate for women is lowest in the most economically free countries at 6.27%, and highest in the least free economies at 11.64%. For men, the average unemployment rate increases from 5.85% in the most free economies to 7.33% in the least free. The gender gap is also widest in the least free economies, at 4.31 percentage points, and narrowest in the most free countries at 0.42 percentage points.

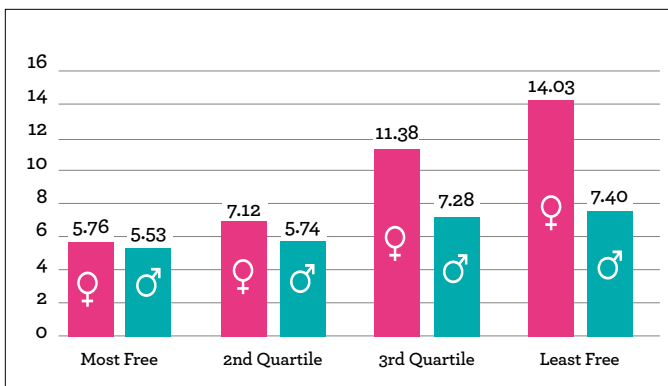
Figure 3.7: Unemployment Rates, 2019



Unemployment rate for workers with advanced education

Figure 3.8 examines the unemployment rates of a particular subset of workers, those who have completed some form of post-secondary educational training. Once again, the same relationship between economic freedom and women’s well-being emerges. Both women and men with advanced education fare better in the most economically free societies, with unemployment rates of 5.76% for women and 5.53% for men. The difference in unemployment rates for highly skilled men and women is negligible at 0.23 percentage points. On the other hand, in the least economically free economies, the unemployment rates for these highly skilled workers are significantly higher at 14.03% for women and 7.40% for men. In these economically unfree economies, highly skilled female workers are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their male counterparts.

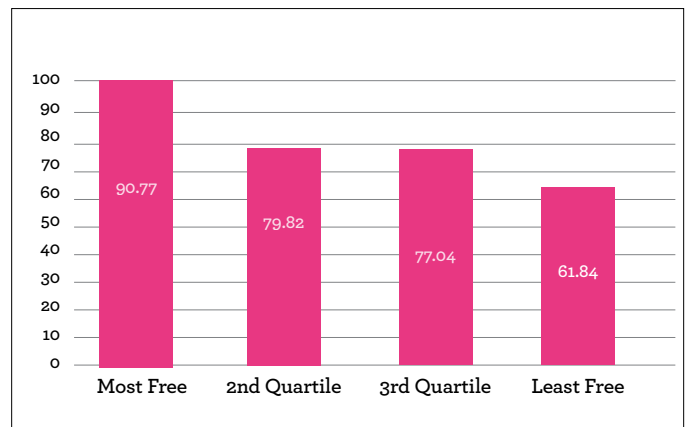
Figure 3.8: Unemployment rate for workers with advanced education



Women, business, and the law index score

As mentioned previously, the Women, Business, and the Law 2020 report includes many questions that capture positive economic rights and entitlement programs as well as some key outcome variables that are of importance to feminists. The World Bank uses the entire dataset to create the Women, Business, and the Law Index across several categories (Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets and Pension), with 100 representing the highest possible score. The relationship between economic freedom (not adjusted for gender disparity) and the overall Women, Business, and the Law Index is depicted in figure 3.9. In the least economically free countries, the average score is only 61.84 while this rises to 90.77 in the most economically free economies. This means that whether you care about providing negative economic rights to women or granting them positive economic rights, women living in more economically free countries are more likely to have both.

Figure 3.9: Women, Business, and the Law Index Score



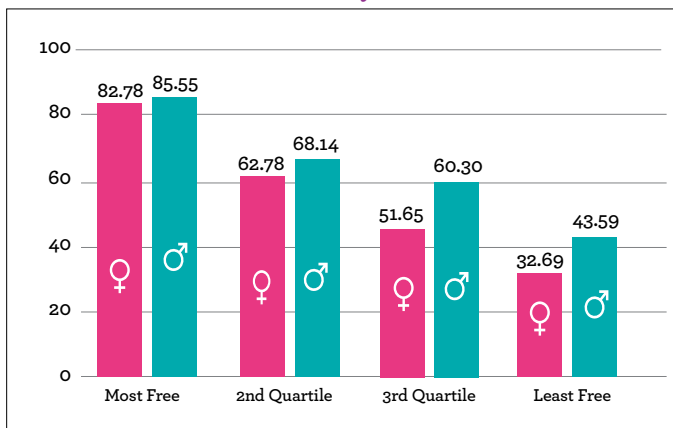
Ownership of an account at a financial Institution or mobile-money service provider

Figure 3.10 depicts our final measure of women’s labor-market well-being, the percentage of the population with a bank account. A bank account in your own name is a source of financial independence for women that is crucial, though often underrated. A woman with a bank account in her own name can save for emergencies and conserve resources where others have no access. Financial independence leaves women less

vulnerable to certain forms of abuse, like financial, when a person’s access to financial assets is deliberately restricted in order to keep them dependent and prevent them from exiting the situation. In the least economically free countries, only 32.69% of women have bank accounts while 42.59% of men have them, a gender gap of 10.10 percentage points. On the other hand, in the most economically free societies, 82.78% of women and 85.55% of men have bank accounts, a much smaller gender difference of only 2.77 percentage points.

Examining all of these relationships together, the overwhelming message is that labor market outcomes for both women and men are better in economically free countries than they are in economically unfree countries. This makes sense, as economically free countries have a greater scope of the market which presents people with more opportunities to divide labor more extensively. This means there will be more opportunities to gain from exchanging with one another, and the rewards to participating in the labor market are going to be much higher. A labor market with fewer restrictions on the career choices that people are permitted to make should result in a more efficient labor market with fewer people remaining involuntarily unemployed.

Figure 3.10: Account Ownership at a Financial Institution or Mobile-Money Service Provider



Health outcomes

While labor-market outcomes are important markers of women’s well-being, they do not tell us everything about women’s overall quality of life. For a more complete picture of how economic freedom affects women’s lives, we need to also examine the relationship between economic freedom and a number of variables capturing different health outcomes.

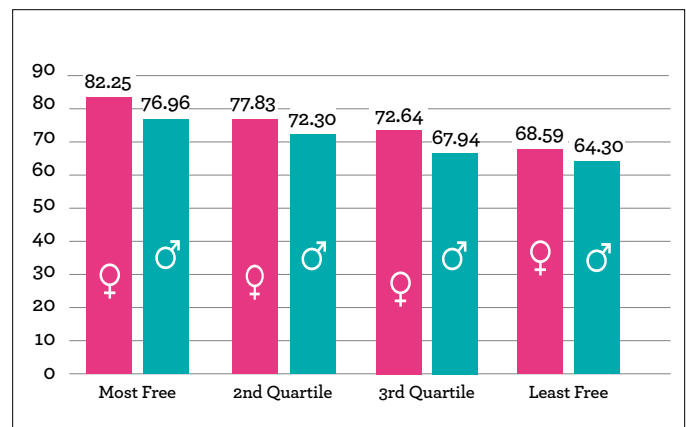
It is important to note that there is a well-documented positive, causal relationship between economic freedom and per-capita income levels (Dawson, 2003; Hall and Lawson, 2014). With

higher incomes and higher levels of development come improved access to medicine, clean water, food security, and other factors that can improve the outcomes examined in this section. Thus, the relationships discussed below should not be interpreted as a direct causal relationships, but instead as relationships derived indirectly through the channel of higher incomes.

Life expectancy at birth

Figure 3.11 shows the relationship between the average person’s life expectancy at birth and their country’s overall level of economic freedom. In the least economically free countries, women are expected to live to 68.59 years on average, and men 64.30 years on average; women are expected to live 4.29 years longer. In the most economically free countries, however, women are expected to live until 82.25 years old and men to about 76.96 years. In the freest economies, women will live about 5.29 years longer than men. For both women and men, being born in one of the freest societies instead of one of the least free means that life expectancy grows significantly. In the most free countries, women on average can expect to live about 13.66 years longer, while men can expect to live about 12.66 years longer.

Figure 3.11: Life Expectancy at Birth

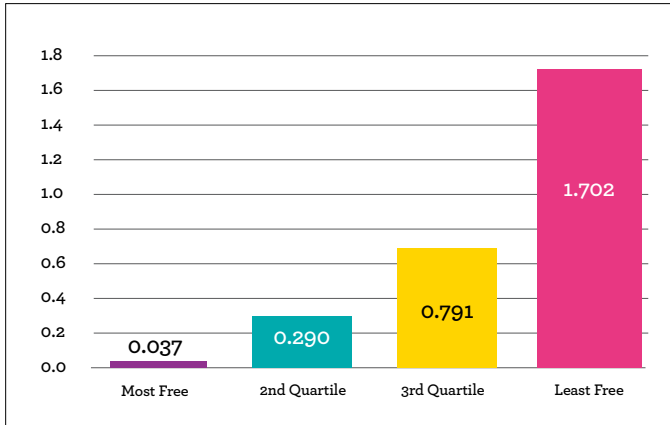


Lifetime risk of maternal death

While modern medicine has drastically reduced the likelihood that an individual will die because of pregnancy or giving birth, there is still a chance of losing one’s life while attempting to bring a child into the world. Figure 3.12 shows a person’s lifetime risk of maternal death and how that varies with economic freedom. In the most free economies, the lifetime chance of maternal death is 0.037% while in the least free economies, this risk is significantly higher at 1.702%. More intuitively, this means that in the most

economically free countries, one out of every 2,701 women are expected to die of childbirth or pregnancy-related causes. In the least economically free countries, these odds increase to one out of every 57 women.

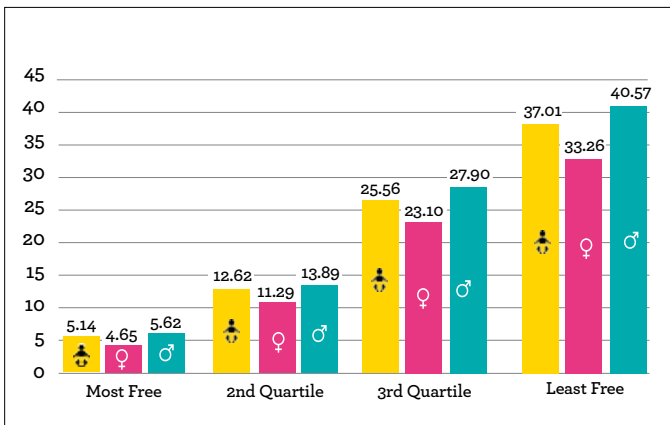
Figure 3.12: Lifetime Risk of Maternal Death



Infant mortality rates

In addition to maternal health, it is important to understand the relationship between economic freedom and children’s health. The overall infant mortality rate and the infant mortality rates for males and females are all depicted in figure 3.13. The overall number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births increases drastically when moving from the most free economies (5.14) to the least free (37.01). In the countries with the lowest levels of economic freedom, the infant mortality rate of females is 33.26 deaths per 1,000 births and 40.57 deaths per 1,000 births for males. This number falls to 4.65 for females and 5.62 for males when looking at the most economically free countries.

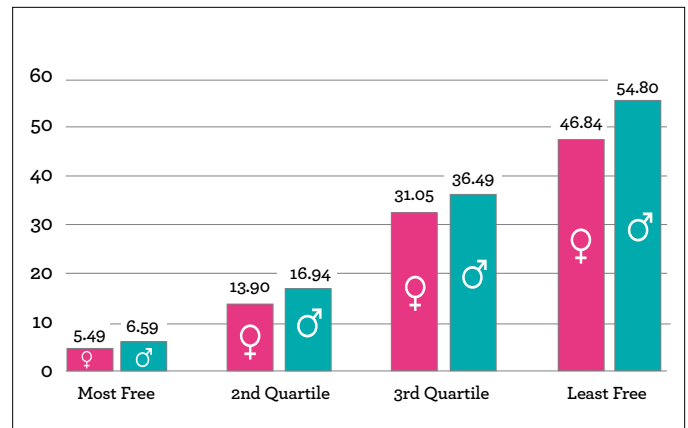
Figure 3.13: Infant Mortality Rates, per 1000 live births



Mortality rates for children under 5 years

Figure 3.14 examines how the mortality rates for children under the age of 5 vary with the level of economic freedom. The childhood mortality rates for females and males once again indicate that children are far less likely to die at a young age in countries that are economically free than they are in the least free countries. In the least free countries, the childhood mortality rate for females is 46.84 deaths per 1,000 births and for males it is 54.80. In the most free economies, this falls to 5.49 deaths per 1,000 births for females and 6.59 for males.

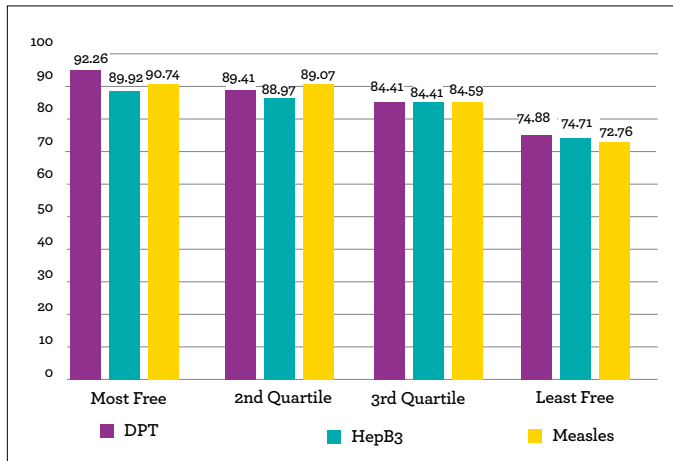
Figure 3.14: Child Mortality Rates



Childhood immunization rates

Access to health care, such as vaccinations, can help avoid preventable diseases that may result in severe illness and even death. Figure 3.15 shows the childhood immunization rates for three common sets of inoculations: diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT), hepatitis B, and the measles. For all three vaccinations, immunization rates increase dramatically when moving from the least free to the most free economies. The least free economies had immunization rates of 74.88% for DPT, 74.71% for hepatitis B, and 72.76% for the measles. In the most economically free societies, the immunization rates increase to 92.26% for DPT, 89.92% for hepatitis B, and 90.74% for the measles.

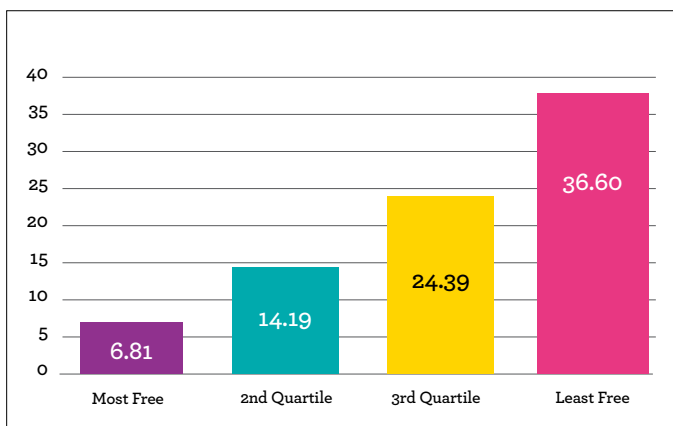
Figure 3.15: Child Immunization Rates



Death from preventable causes

Given the information presented in figure 3.15, it ought to be no surprise to find that countries that severely restrict economic freedom have a much larger percentage of deaths that are due to preventable conditions such as communicable diseases, nutritional conditions, or a lack of maternal or prenatal care. Figure 3.16 depicts the relationship between economic freedom and the percentage of total deaths from a preventable cause. In the least free economies, 36.60% of all deaths can be attributed to some preventable condition that access to better health care could have avoided. In the most free economies, however, only 6.81% of deaths can be attributed to these causes.

Figure 3.16: Cause of Death, by Communicable Diseases and Maternal, Prenatal and Nutrition Conditions (% of total)

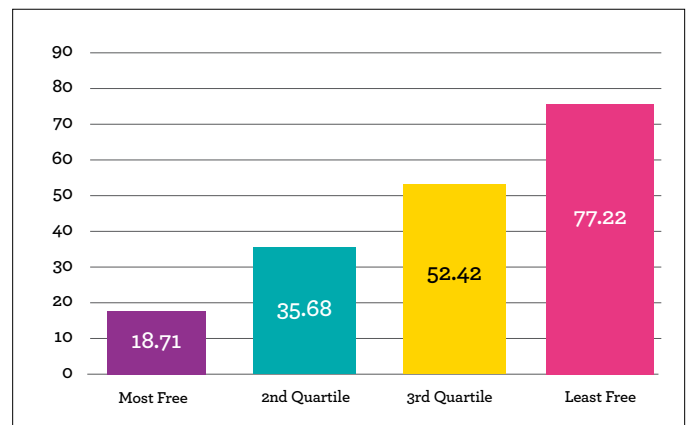


Adolescent fertility rate

The final health outcome examined is the adolescent fertility rate, or the number of births that occur for every 1,000 females aged 15 to 19 years old. In the least free economies, there are 77.22 births for every 1,000 adolescent girls (figure 3.17). In the most free economies, these adolescent births are far less common at 18.79 births per 1,000 adolescent girls. There are many reasons that this might be the case. As mentioned earlier, access to health care tends to grow along with a country's living standards. This is likely also the case for access to the contraceptives that would prevent teen pregnancy. In addition, in countries that are economically free, the job market prospects for women are more promising than they are in places where the scope of the market is more restricted. In this way, economic freedom can raise the opportunity cost of having a child at a young age.

The overarching patterns in the data suggest the women (and men) living in economically free countries enjoy longer lives, have lower rates of adolescent pregnancy, and more children receive vaccinations. There are far fewer preventable deaths in economically free countries as well as lower rates of maternal, infant, and childhood mortality.

Figure 3.17: Adolescent Fertility Rate (Births per 1,000 Women Ages 15-19)



Educational outcomes

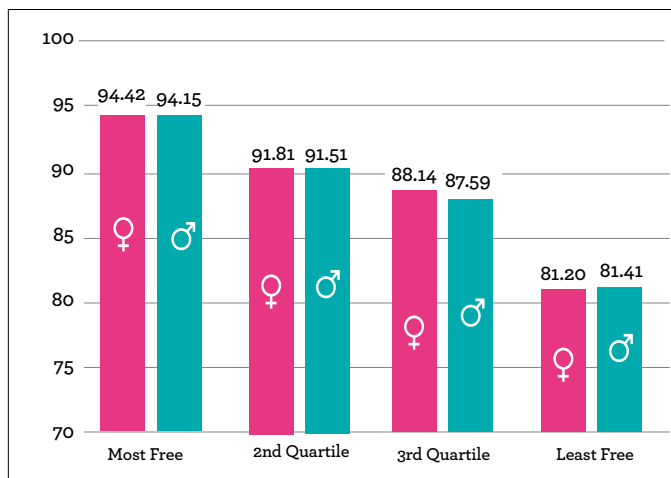
The final set of development measures explored in this section are educational outcomes. When individuals are economically free, they have access to wider market with better labor-market prospects that require more specialized human capital. As a result, we would expect that individuals living in more

economically free economies have a stronger incentive to invest in their education and professional training, especially beyond the secondary level. This being the case, we should see higher rates of enrollment and completion at all levels of education. A variety of education outcomes are examined capturing enrollment and educational attainment from primary school through the post-secondary level.

Enrollment in primary school

Enrollment in primary school captures the extent to which parents are willing and able to send their children to acquire basic reading and mathematics skills. Many countries across the world have compulsory education laws that require children to attend this level of schooling. Even still, there is some variation in primary school enrollment across countries. Figure 3.18 shows that rates of enrollment in primary school for boys and girls increase as economic freedom increases. In the least economically free countries, the primary-school enrollment rates are 81.20% for girls and 81.41% for boys. In the most economically free societies, the enrollment rates are 94.41% for girls and 94.15% for boys. There is not much of a gender gap in primary school enrollment rates but it is worth noting that enrollment rates are slightly higher for boys in the least free economies, but slightly higher for girls in the most economically free societies.

Figure 3.18: Enrollment Rates for Primary School

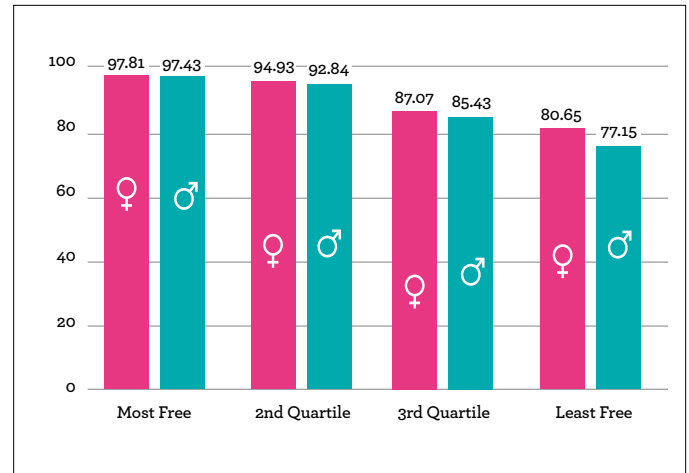


Persistence to grade 5

Enrollment in primary school is useful, but it does not capture the extent to which the enrolled students complete primary school. Figure 3.19 shows the percentage of boys and girls that persist to the fifth grade or complete their primary education. In the least free economies, 80.65% of girls persist to the fifth grade while only 77.15% of boys make it that far. In the countries with

the highest economic freedom scores, the rate of persistence to the fifth grade increases to 97.81% of girls and 97.43% of boys; the gender gap entirely disappears when looking at the freest economies.

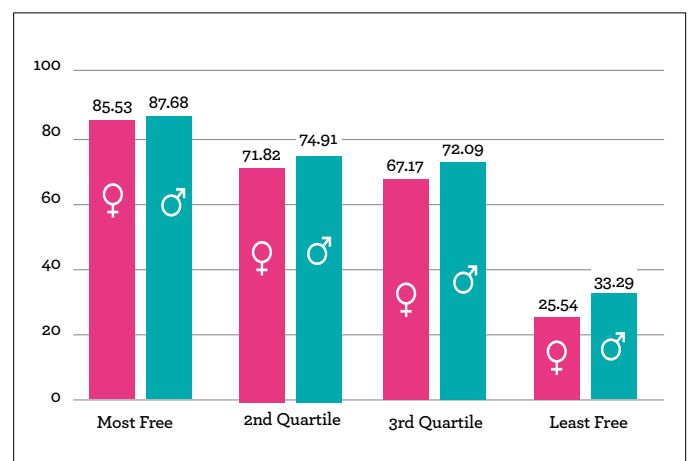
Figure 3.19: Persistence to Grade 5



Completion of lower-secondary education

Figure 3.20 examines the percentage of a country's population 25 years or older that has completed lower secondary schooling. In theory, increasing the scope of the market through economic freedom should generate more career opportunities that require specialized human capital. There is a stark difference in the secondary-school completion rates of the least free economies and of those that are the most economically free. In the least free societies, only 25.54% of women and 33.29% of men aged 25 and older have completed their lower secondary education. In the freest economies, 85.53% of women and 87.68% of men 25 years and older have completed this level of schooling.

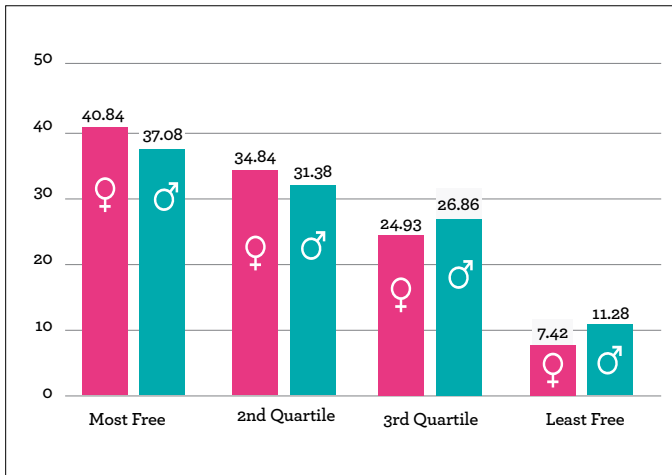
Figure 3.20: Completion of Lower Secondary Education (Percentage of Population Aged 25+)



Completion of post-secondary education

Figure 3.21 shows the percentage of the population aged 25 and older that has completed some form of college or professional technical training beyond secondary school. It is at this higher level of educational attainment that we can see the most variation in completion rates across different economic-freedom quartiles. In the least free economies, only 7.42% of women and 11.28% of men ages 25 and older have completed post-secondary schooling. In the freest economies, however, the share of women over 25 who have completed higher education is 40.84%, and of men over 25, 37.08%. While the post-secondary educational attainment rates of men are higher than women in the two least free quartiles, the completion rate of women exceeds that of men in the top two economic freedom quartiles.

Figure 3.21 Completion of Post-Secondary Education (Percentage of Population Aged 25+)

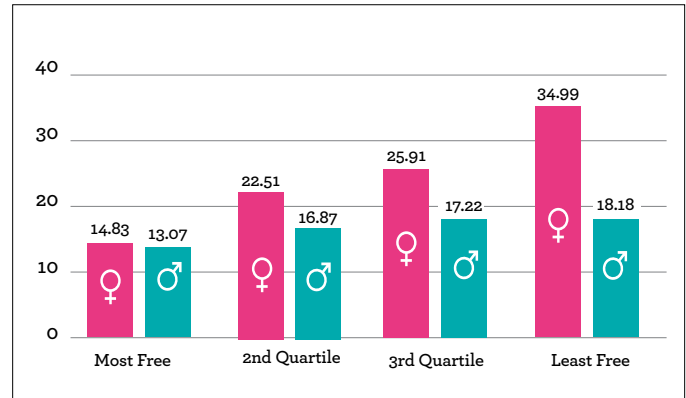


Share of youth (ages 15–24) not in education, employment, or training

In figure 3.22, we see the percentage of the population of both men and women between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not either enrolled in some form of education, training, or employment. In all four economic-freedom quartiles, there is a larger percentage of young women than young men who are not receiving any formal human-capital training. However, the gap between men and women narrows significantly as you move from the least free to most free economies. In the least free economies, 34.99% of young women are not receiving any human capital training while only 18.18% of men are not. This is a difference of 16.81 percentage points. In the freest economies, however, only 14.83% of young women and 13.07% of young men are not engaged in formal human-capital formation. The

gender difference in the freest economies amounts to only 1.76 percentage points.

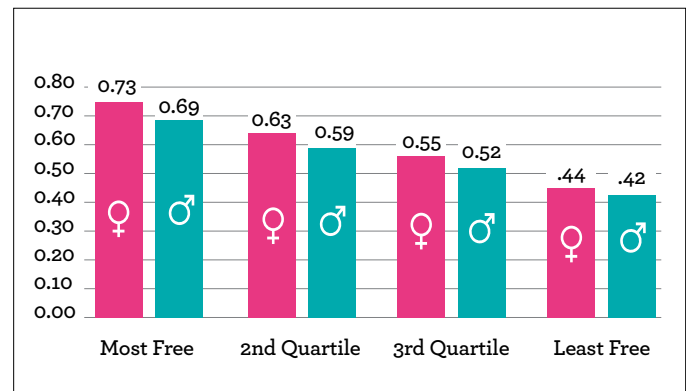
Figure 3.21 Share of Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (Percentage of Population)



Scores on the Human Capital Index

Figure 3.23 depicts the variation across economic-freedom quartiles for our final education outcomes measure, the World Bank’s Human Capital Index (Gatti and Kraay, 2018). This index measures the future labor-market potential of child born today by examining that child’s likelihood of survival, the number of years of schooling expected (adjusted for quality), and expected health status (accounting for rates of stunting and other developmental health problems). Scores closer to 0 indicate that a lack of access to quality education and health care is likely to have a negative impact on the productivity of the average worker in that country. In the most economically free societies, the scores on the Human Capital Index for women are 0.73 and for men, 0.69. The scores fall to 0.44 for women and 0.42 for men in the least economically free countries. This indicates that workers

Figure 3.23: Human Capital Index Scores



in the least free societies are likely to be less productive than workers in more free societies as a result of insufficient education and poor health keeping them from reaching their potential.

Overall, the data support the idea that women living in countries that embrace economic freedom, on average, have higher levels of educational attainment and build more human capital than women living in countries where economic rights are restricted. The same can be said for men, in most cases. There are particularly stark differences between the outcomes for secondary and post-secondary education in the freest economies and the outcomes in the least free economies. This supports the idea that market-oriented societies generate outcomes that raise the returns to building highly specialized human capital.





4.0

Concluding Remarks

This edition of Women and Progress gives us much to be optimistic about regarding the degree to which women and men are starting to have more equal treatment under the formal law across the world. First, the global trend of increasing gender equality under the law persisted through 2020 despite the decline in overall economic freedom that occurred globally in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, the relationship between economic freedom and women's well-being that has been explored in previous reports is reinforced with the newly updated data. We examined eight labor-market outcomes, seven health outcomes, and six educational outcomes. All of the patterns in these data indicated that women living in economically free societies are more likely to flourish relative to their counterparts living in economically unfree societies. Where possible, the outcomes for women were compared to that of men and the patterns in the data also suggest that gender gaps in most outcomes narrow as economic freedom increases. Economically free societies have populations that are healthier, better educated, and more productive.

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Appendix

Table A.1 depicts the Gender Adjustment Index Summary Score for all 165 countries listed in decreasing order according to overall GDI score.

Table A.1: List of Countries, Gender Disparity Index Scores and Rankings for 2020

Country	GDI Score	GDI Rank	Country	GDI Score	GDI Rank
Albania	1	1	Luxembourg	1	1
Armenia	1	1	Mauritius	1	1
Australia	1	1	Mexico	1	1
Austria	1	1	Moldova	1	1
Bahamas, The	1	1	Mongolia	1	1
Belgium	1	1	Netherlands	1	1
Bolivia	1	1	New Zealand	1	1
Brazil	1	1	Nicaragua	1	1
Bulgaria	1	1	Norway	1	1
Cabo Verde	1	1	Paraguay	1	1
Cambodia	1	1	Peru	1	1
Canada	1	1	Poland	1	1
Croatia	1	1	Portugal	1	1
Czech Republic	1	1	Romania	1	1
Denmark	1	1	Rwanda	1	1
Dominican Republic	1	1	Serbia	1	1
Ecuador	1	1	Singapore	1	1
El Salvador	1	1	Slovak Republic	1	1
Estonia	1	1	South Africa	1	1
Finland	1	1	Spain	1	1
France	1	1	Sweden	1	1
Georgia	1	1	Switzerland	1	1
Germany	1	1	Taiwan	1	1
Greece	1	1	Timor-Leste	1	1
Hong Kong SAR, China	1	1	Togo	1	1
Hungary	1	1	United Kingdom	1	1
Iceland	1	1	United States	1	1
Ireland	1	1	Venezuela, RB	1	1
Italy	1	1	Zimbabwe	1	1
Lao PDR	1	1	Bhutan	0.9412	63
Latvia	1	1	Colombia	0.9412	63
Liberia	1	1	Costa Rica	0.9412	63
Lithuania	1	1	Fiji	0.9412	63

Table A.1 Continued: List of Countries, Gender Disparity Index Scores and Rankings for 2020 continued

Country	GDI Score	GDI Rank	Country	GDI Score	GDI Rank
Ghana	0.9412	63	Cyprus	0.8824	91
Guatemala	0.9412	63	Ethiopia	0.8824	91
Guyana	0.9412	63	Gambia, The	0.8824	91
Honduras	0.9412	63	India	0.8824	91
Jamaica	0.9412	63	Israel	0.8824	91
Japan	0.9412	63	Kazakhstan	0.8824	91
Lesotho	0.9412	63	Kenya	0.8824	91
Malta	0.9412	63	Korea, Rep.	0.8824	91
Montenegro	0.9412	63	Kyrgyz Republic	0.8824	91
Mozambique	0.9412	63	Malawi	0.8824	91
Namibia	0.9412	63	Myanmar	0.8824	91
Nepal	0.9412	63	Russian Federation	0.8824	91
North Macedonia	0.9412	63	Saudi Arabia	0.8824	91
Panama	0.9412	63	Sri Lanka	0.8824	91
Seychelles	0.9412	63	Tajikistan	0.8824	91
Sierra Leone	0.9412	63	Tanzania	0.8824	91
Slovenia	0.9412	63	United Arab Emirates	0.8824	91
Suriname	0.9412	63	Azerbaijan	0.8235	91
Thailand	0.9412	63	Benin	0.8235	91
Trinidad and Tobago	0.9412	63	Burkina Faso	0.8235	91
Turkey	0.9412	63	Burundi	0.8235	91
Uruguay	0.9412	63	Chile	0.8235	91
Vietnam	0.9412	63	Guinea	0.8235	91
Zambia	0.9412	63	Haiti	0.8235	91
Angola	0.8824	91	Indonesia	0.8235	91
Argentina	0.8824	91	Lebanon	0.8235	91
Barbados	0.8824	91	Nigeria	0.8235	91
Belarus	0.8824	91	Papua New Guinea	0.8235	91
Belize	0.8824	91	Philippines	0.8235	91
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.8824	91	Uganda	0.8235	91
Botswana	0.8824	91	Ukraine	0.8235	91
China	0.8824	91	Bangladesh	0.7647	131
Cote d'Ivoire	0.8824	91	Central African Republic	0.7647	131

Table A.1 Continued: List of Countries, Gender Disparity Index Scores and Rankings for 2020

Country	GDI Score	GDI Rank
Congo, Dem. Rep.	0.7647	131
Madagascar	0.7647	131
Morocco	0.7647	131
Algeria	0.7059	136
Brunei Darussalam	0.7059	136
Comoros	0.7059	136
Libya	0.7059	136
Pakistan	0.7059	136
Tunisia	0.7059	136
Djibouti	0.6471	142
Malaysia	0.6471	142
Mali	0.6471	142
Senegal	0.6471	142
Somalia	0.6471	142
Congo, Rep.	0.5882	147
Bahrain	0.5294	148
Chad	0.5294	148
Eswatini	0.5294	148
Niger	0.5294	148
Qatar	0.5294	148
Cameroon	0.4706	153
Iraq	0.4706	153
Jordan	0.4706	153
Kuwait	0.4706	153
Mauritania	0.4706	153
Oman	0.4706	153
Syrian Arab Republic	0.4706	153
Egypt, Arab Rep.	0.4118	160
Gabon	0.4118	160
Guinea-Bissau	0.4118	160
Iran, Islamic Rep.	0.4118	160
Yemen, Rep.	0.4118	160
Sudan	0.2941	165



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