Improving Women's Freedom of Dress:
A Combination of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches

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MESA 495
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December 14, 2018

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I. Introduction

The ability to choose what article of clothing to wear seems like a simple and trivial choice. However, the freedom to choose how to dress, or the lack thereof, has great implications on society as a whole. When women are unable to choose for themselves what to wear in public spaces, they are less likely to be given additional freedoms like the right to vote, work, or make decisions in the home.[1] In societies where women are free to choose their dress, they are more confident and enabled; therefore, they are able to obtain additional freedoms. Limiting women's freedom of dress is a mechanism of repression to control women and keep them in their 'traditional' or 'rightful' place. Giving women the ability to choose how they dress is a mechanism for freedom to allow women to progress and close the gender equality gap.

In 2008, the Women Stats Office created a map that portrays required dress codes for women in the Islamic world. The map shows that Islamic countries constitute an area of the world that has low freedoms of dress. In fact, many Islamic states have strict dress code laws that limit women's ability to choose how to dress in public spaces. That map is now a decade old. Many of these states have experienced a great deal of political and social change over the last ten years; therefore, there have been both positive and negative shifts in dress code freedoms in the region.

Legend:
🟩	No dress code laws enforced/Most Freedoms of Dress
🟩	No specific laws requiring certain garments, but several public places impose certain dress.
🟨	Specific garments may be required
🟧	Specific garments required, or specific garments banned.
🟥	Dress codes required. Violence and/or Legal Prosecution for Violation

Country	2008 Color	2018 Color
Bangladesh	🟨	🟩
Jordan	🟨	🟩
Egypt	🟨	🟧
Syria	🟩	🟥
Saudi Arabia	🟥	🟥

[2]

Why are there positive and negative shifts in women's dress code freedoms in this region? What causes laws to change? What does this mean for women's rights in general and how do the answers to these questions help societies close the gender equality gap?

Previous research suggests four variables that might explain these shifts: revolutions, the rise of extremism and Islamism, governments with women empowerment agendas, and activism and civil society. To explore their effect on dress code laws, and in order to discuss the positive and negative changes that have occurred between 2008 and 2018, this paper discusses five different cases:

- Case with the most improvement in dress code freedoms: Bangladesh
- Case with some improvement in dress code freedoms: Jordan
- Case with some decrease in dress code freedoms: Egypt
- Case with the largest decrease in dress code freedoms: Syria
- Control case, or case with no change: Saudi Arabia

Evidence from these cases show that revolutions and the rise of extremism and Islamism have individual effects on some cases. However, these two variables are not conclusive in determining dress code laws across Islamic states. Compelling evidence indicates that activism and civil society as well as governments with women empowerment agendas are more conclusive in describing changes across all cases. When these last two variables are combined, it allows for the most progress in increasing freedoms of dress. Therefore, when government and

civil society take initiatives and work in tandem, there is a positive change in dress code laws and overall freedom for women. Conversely, when government and civil society have clashing agendas, there is a negative shift in dress code laws and overall freedom for women decreases.

To understand the variation across time and space for each case, a context section will give background on the differences between the 2008 map and a 2018 map. Following, a theory section will outline the various independent variables using existing research. Each of these variables will be analyzed and critiqued pertaining to its effect on the dependent variable—dress code freedom. Then, a new theory will be presented and its mechanisms will be explained. Evidence from each case will be presented to verify and validate the proposed hypothesis. Lastly, a conclusion will include implications of this paper and possible solutions moving forward.

II.   Context

Bangladesh

In 2008, Bangladesh was classified as a Yellow country. Therefore, women in some areas were required to wear certain garments like the headscarf. Today, Bangladesh would rise to the Dark Green category—no dress code laws enforced. In 2010, the Bangladeshi Supreme Court declared illegal "the imposition of face veils for women…in the workplace and in schools."[3] Previous to this ruling, there was a large push to force all females to wear the veil in a college in the northern part of the country. The court ordered all schools and colleges not to force women to wear the burqa.[4] It even declared that "wearing religious attire should be the personal choice of the students or the employees. No one can be forced to wear them."[5] This is a huge step for Bangladesh, as women now face no penal pressure to wear certain garments.

Jordan

Jordan in 2008 was classified as a Yellow country. Women felt pressure or were required by law to wear certain garments. Now, Jordan would fall under the Light Green category—there are no specific laws requiring certain garments; however, several public places impose certain dress. In Jordan, there is no law in the constitution or the penal code that requires veiling. However, many women face discrimination in public places if they are not dressed a certain way. One woman lost her job at a bank because she refused to wear a veil. The Jordan Dubai Islamic Bank required all female employees to wear a head cover as part of their dress code.[6] Many Jordanians are outraged because the bank imposed a dress code that "contravenes the Jordanian constitution and international covenants which the country has signed;" furthermore, Christian employees are not required to wear the head scarf.[7] One working woman in Jordan also mentioned that women who do not wear the hijab are less likely to be hired.[8] Jordan has improved slightly as there are no laws regarding a certain dress code. However, other organizations have implemented dress codes that violate women's freedom of dress.

Egypt

Egypt was also a Yellow country in 2008; however, unlike Bangladesh and Jordan, Egypt has not seen improvements. In fact, today Egypt would fall under the Orange category. Before 2011, there were no restrictions on women's freedom of dress.[9] In the last few years, Egypt has started to enact laws that ban certain clothes—thus limiting women's freedom of dress. Since 2015, Egypt has banned children from wearing hijabs in school.[10] The Egyptian parliament also drafted a law that bans women from wearing the niqab in public places and government institutions.[11] In fact, during the national election that took place in October 2015, women wearing the niqab were told that they needed to remove it if they wanted to vote.[12] Laws in Egypt do not require women to wear certain garments, but they do prohibit certain garments.

When laws prohibit women from wearing religious garb, it also takes away their freedom to choose how they dress. Therefore, Egypt has declined when it comes to dress code freedoms.

Syria

In 2008, Syria was one of the best countries when it came to dress code freedoms. Syria was classified as a Light Green country. Today, it is difficult to assign Syria one color because the civil war has caused several divides. There is no central authority that has power over the whole state; thus, different groups in power have enacted different dress code laws. Therefore, geography determines the dress code that women must abide by.[13] In Idlib, women are required to wear the abaya. Women groups even patrol the city and surrounding areas to warn women who are not wearing an abaya or some type of veil.[14] Regime held areas are trying to break away from tradition and use Western style of dress to portray that Syria is "free from Islamic militancy and close to secularism."[15] However, opposition factions have started to impose dress codes based on sharia law in order to conserve the Syrian society and reform what the regime has corrupted.[16] Also, ISIS-held areas are imposing strict dress code rules on females that limit their ability to perform normal activities.[17] Women in these areas are required to wear the hijab, abaya, gloves, socks and a film of black cloth over their eyes.[18] Those who do not comply with these dress codes will be punished, they will not be allowed to move freely in public, and they will not be allowed to attend school or work outside the home.[19] Although the regime may not be enforcing a strict dress code, most other parts of the country have imposed strict dress code laws that limit women's ability to move freely in public. Therefore, Syria in general has plummeted to the Red category.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia was classified as a Red country in 2008. It had strict dress code laws that required women to wear certain garments. Saudi Arabia has seen little change in the last decade. In fact, Saudi Arabia would still be considered a red-level country. Saudi Arabia has a long history of basing its laws on a strict interpretation of sharia. Therefore, it is one of the only Muslim-majority countries that legally imposes a dress code.[20] All women, foreign or local, are required to wear an abaya, and local women must wear a headscarf.[21] Women who do not abide by this strict dress code are arrested and imprisoned.[22] This strict dress code limits women's ability to enter the workforce. The Saudi Labor ministry fines workers who do not abide by the dress code. Therefore, "Companies don't want to hire women. It is too much of a hassle."[23] Although the crowned prince has made some reforms when it comes to women's rights, he has not yet changed dress code laws.

III.   Theory

Women's empowerment is a vast concept. There are a number of rights and privileges that must be given to women in order for them to be empowered and close the gender equality gap. There are numerous cultural, economic and political variables that would determine whether women are able to attain these privileges or not. Thus, in order to better understand what variables cause these privileges to be granted or further restricted, each right must be examined separately. Each right, examined and understood on its own, can have larger implications and applications for other privileges and rights. This paper will examine the right of freedom of dress and which variables cause this right to be granted or restricted. Previous research indicates that four variables often play a role in determining women's freedom of dress—revolutions, the rise of extremism and Islamism, governments with women empowerment agendas, and activism and civil society.

Revolutions

Many people, both inside and outside MENA countries, saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity for change, progression, and hope for a better future. In 2011, the first uprising in Tunisia sparked a chain of events that led to revolutions in several MENA states. A few countries that participated in the uprisings, like Tunisia and Egypt, were successful in overthrowing their regimes. Thus, many thought that these revolutions would lead to more freedoms—especially for women. These uprisings were proof that "a different kind of gender politics was possible, ushering in greater empowerment for women."[24] However, the status of women has not improved in most Arab Spring states.[25] Women played a critical role during the revolutions in various countries; but ever since, women's voices are not being heard, their agendas are being sidelined and they are being further marginalized. Thus, "women are good for revolutions, but historically revolutions haven't been so good for women."[26] Revolutions are not good for women because as states experience a transition in power, women are marginalized and their rights are sacrificed.[27] Middleton-Dezner and Slutzker describe this occurrence using a cycle of post-revolution marginalization:

Figure 1: Cycle of Post-Revolution Marginalization

[28]
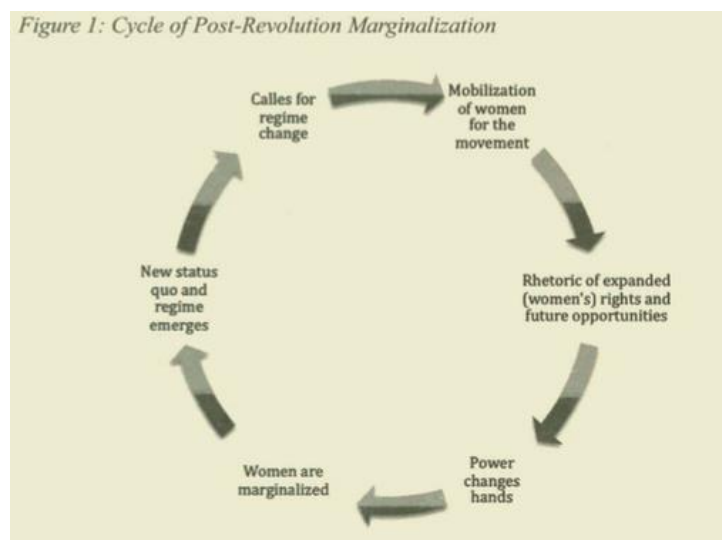
Women were a crucial part of mobilizing for the revolution and overthrowing the regime; but, women were pushed out of the new political space that was created, supposedly, on their behalf.[29] Therefore, women have been unable to obtain more freedoms like freedom of dress.

Almost eight years have passed since the beginning of the uprisings, but gender equity still remains a distant goal.[30] Egyptian politician Amr Hamzawy mentioned that Egypt is now in a worse place in terms of human rights than they were before 2011.[31] In fact, Egypt under President Sisi is more "autocratic and repressive than at any other point in the country's history," and the Sisi regime seems unwilling to reduce repression and violence.[32] Sisi, like many authoritarian leaders before him, clings "tenaciously to power."[33] Those who are in positions of power are reluctant to cede their control. Some, like Mubarak and Ali, were forced to cede their power; thus, a power vacuum was created that allowed for power grabs by any party.[34] Islamists and other autocratic elites vied for power during the void of central control. When rulers cling to power, or when a new ruling power is implemented, they tend to impose strict rules and repression in order to portray and maintain their control. Thus, women are controlled and marginalized. This is what occurred in Iran after the 1979 revolution; the post-revolution state enacted several laws that discriminated against women.[35] Women and their place in society have a serious impact on the society as a whole.[36] When women, who constitute half of the population and nurture the other half of the population, are controlled, it is much easier to control the entire population. Thus, women's rights and empowerment are sidelined during revolutions as political elites vie for power and assert their control.

Revolutions are not successful in gaining women's rights because they are quick changes that result in the marginalization of women. However, revolutions can be an important step toward that goal. Revolutions may eventually lead to more rights for women, but no society can

expect to go from a revolution to full democracy and equal rights. Some would argue that this logic is not true, and that revolutions are successful, in reference to the American, French, or Glorious revolutions. These revolutions were successful in the fact that they were an important step that eventually led to full democracy and equal rights. However, after the American Revolution, the U.S. did not enact full democracy right away. A new government and system of rule had to be invented, which took time. Even when the new system of government was instituted, not everyone had the right to vote, the right to property, or the right to work. It took decades and generations for some of these rights to reach all people. America did not jump from revolution to full democracy and equality; therefore, MENA states cannot be expected to do the same.

The Rise of Extremism and Islamism

A number of other scholars argue that the rise of extremism and Islamism has led to a decline in women's freedoms—including women's freedom of dress. The power vacuum that followed the Arab uprisings in some countries created a power grab that allowed Islamic-based parties to gain power, "since they had spent decades preparing for precisely such an opportunity."[37] In Egypt, the Islamist movement known as the Muslim Brotherhood has dominated politics since the revolution.[38] In 2012, Mohammad Morsi, a long-time member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected president, and the Muslim Brotherhood gained the majority of the seats in parliament.[39] The Muslim Brotherhood is not an extremist group, but they are an Islamist group that desires to implement sharia law in Egypt. This led many Egyptians to believe that Egypt would turn into Iran. Several Egyptians feared that the new Islamist power would curb women's rights, limit their choices, and enforce the veil.[40]

Power vacuums in Libya, Yemen and Syria allowed for the emergence of militant Islamic groups such as ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other Al-Qaeda affiliated organizations. These groups took advantage of the uprisings and the instability that ensued. Many of these groups now occupy territories of Libya, Yemen and Syria, and they are spreading their radical Islamic ideas.[41] These extremist and Islamic groups have instituted more conservative values in society; therefore, many MENA states are more conservative than before the uprisings.[42]

The increase in conservatism, extremism, and Islamism has varying negative effects on women. As mentioned previously, members in power positions control society by controlling women. Thus, according to Abou el Komsan, the secretary general of the National Council for Women in Egypt, "Women's issues are at the core of the Islamist movement."[43] This is why the Taliban closed schools for girls and why Khomeini's first act was to make women wear the hijab. Abou el Komsan said, "Women are an area where you can plant a visible flag. Making women wear the hijab, for example, is easier than dealing with health insurance. It's a very quick change and it has a clear impact."[44] In the longer term, they "control society by controlling women."[45] When women are visibly controlled, it sends a message of power to the rest of the population and the rest of the world. If Islamist groups desire to control a population, the first decision is to enforce conservative Islamic dress such as the headscarf, the niqab or the abaya.

The rise of extremism and Islamism is partly to blame for the decrease in women's rights in the region. This mainly applies to countries that are in part ruled by the Islamic State or other Al-Qaeda affiliated groups. Women in Syria, Libya and Yemen are more oppressed, repressed and controlled since the rise of these extremist groups. Egypt experienced an increase in Islamism due to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood; therefore, many feared that they would be forced to veil.[46] Yet, dress code laws did not change until Fattah el-Sisi was elected.

Furthermore, some countries do experience acts of terrorism, such as Jordan and Bangladesh, but they are not limiting dress code freedoms. On the other hand, countries like Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Niger and Chad have banned certain religious garb due to acts of extremism. Clearly extremism plays a role in determining dress code laws, but this is only part of the picture.

Governments With Women Empowerment Agendas

Other authors argue that Islam itself is a barrier to gender equality; thus, states that are based off Islamic law or beliefs limit women's rights. However, these arguments are contradictory to the "progress being made in other Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Senegal."[47] Women can gain more rights and freedoms under any government, regardless of religion. If women are to obtain more freedoms, the government must be involved. The key is that the government must decide to pursue women's empowerment; any government can understand the benefits of including women, no matter what religion is in power. Most governments, however, will only involve women if there is some benefit to them or the state and if this inclusion will not threaten their power. Thus, it is best to take an economic approach to women's empowerment. When women are included in the workforce, the overall economy will increase. According to the OECD, only 24% of women in MENA countries are employed. In OECD countries, 60% of women are employed. Therefore,

> Gender-based discrimination in laws and social norms costs the region USD 575 billion a year according to the OECD Development Centre's SIGI gender index. Failing to harness the talent of working-age women means lost economic potential and less inclusive growth. It is estimated that raising women's participation in the labour force to the same level as men could boost global GDP by USD 12 trillion, or 26%, by 2025.[48]

When women are included in the workforce, the entire economy benefits. Several Islamic countries struggle economically; if they were able to increase the number of women in the workforce, they would greatly improve their economy. In fact, according to the IMF, "if women and men had more equality at work, it would increase GDP in…Egypt by 34%."[49] Women will be more inclined to enter the workforce if they feel welcomed in public spaces; thus, they must be free to choose their style of dress. In order to increase women's rights and dress code freedoms, the government must be involved. Islam is not the barrier. Governments of any kind simply need to understand the economic benefits of giving women more freedoms and welcoming them into public spaces—regardless of their dress.

Activism and Civil Society

According to several authors, activism and civil society are the key to women's empowerment and closing the gender equality gap. Activist and civil society groups are what bring women's agenda to light. Women's rights activists are at the "forefront of efforts to advance gender equality; they were the first to push authorities to take women's rights seriously, advocate for public awareness of violence against women, introduce refuges and crisis centres…and initiate activities to enable women and girls to understand and feel empowered to claim their rights."[50] These types of initiatives are critical in advancing gender equality and empowering women.[51] Without women's organizations, governments would never realize the plight of women or understand how to assist them. When women's groups fight for social justice, these movements create lasting changes that governments and development initiatives simply could not create alone.[52] Women in all societies know what must change in order to close the gender equality gap; thus, efforts to create modifications must come from them. Grassroot efforts are a key component to creating the kind of change that women need to progress.

Women's organizations are powerful in creating this kind of change not only because they bring women's agenda to light, but also because they are able to influence the government and its decisions. In fact, globally, "the most important factor influencing government responses to violence against women is the presence of a strong, autonomous feminist movement."[53] One study evaluated the effect of women's organizations pressuring the government to permit more rights for women. The authors of this study argue that "women's rights international non-governmental organizations can be powerful actors in advancing women's status."[54] Their findings suggest that when governments face pressure from activist groups, they are more inclined to promote and enforce women's rights; however, they are only inclined to promote rights that do not threaten their political power—such as social and economic rights.[55] Thus, women activists groups are unable to completely change women's status in society; however, they are critical in advancing women's social and economic rights and being a catalyst for further progress and development.

Empowering women is key to the entire development of a country. Women constitute half of the population; when half the population is ignored or oppressed, it stunts the progress of the whole nation. The Australian Council for International Development argues that "Given the catalytic role gender equality plays in advancing sustainable development and the crucial role women's rights groups play in achieving gender equality, all development actors should be focusing more on women's rights activists, organizations and movements."[56] One of the Sustainable Development Goals addresses gender equality as a fundamental human right. This goal drives progress across all 17 goals.[57] It is becoming clear that in countries that limit women's rights, development and progress is undermined.[58] To advance the economic, social

and political development of a country, women's freedom must first be addressed. The best way to accomplish this is to support women activists, advocacy groups and organizations.

Activism and civil society organizations are key to improving women's rights. However, civil society will not produce any gains unless the government allows them. Some governments, like Jordan, place several restrictions on the formation of civil society organizations and their initiatives.[59] Therefore, it is difficult for these types of groups to promote and institute change. Reducing legal and political restrictions on civil society will allow NGO's to make citizens more aware of their rights, connect the voices of minorities and positively influence society in general.

Furthermore, women and their initiatives will never make gains unless men permit them to, because men hold the power. This is evident in the recent movie *Hidden Figures.* In this movie, the US is trying to beat Russia in the space race. NASA is trying to figure out how to launch an astronaut into orbit, but it requires difficult math. Katherine Johnson is an African American mathematician that is brought on to the project. She tries her best to perform the math and find a solution, but she is not permitted to see most of the files or attend any of the meetings. Katherine is the most capable of the mathematicians but she is the most limited because she is a black woman. She has to fight and persist to obtain her place at NASA. She is not able to gain access to the files or attend the meetings until the NASA head—Al Harrison—allows her to. In the end, she finds the solution that allows for a full orbit. She would not have been able to do this unless a man in power allowed her to. This is the same for women's rights everywhere. No woman will make any progress until the men in power can see the benefit of allowing progress.

A New Theory

All of these variables are important in explaining how to help women obtain more rights. However, these variables play a larger role when they are examined all together. Therefore, my

hypothesis takes all of these variables and combines them together. I argue that when the government and civil society take initiatives and work in tandem, there is a positive change in dress code laws and overall freedom for women because these initiatives are slow changes that will be long-lasting and sustainable. Civil society allows for women's rights to be recognized—in this case, freedom of dress. Civil society can also pressure the government to take women's agendas seriously. When governments are given a good reason to pursue women's empowerment, the government will take more initiative. If governments desire to improve their economy, they will seek to include women in the workforce. Including women in the workforce requires granting women freedom of dress. When civil society and the government work in tandem, positive changes will occur in dress code freedoms and women's overall freedom.

IV.   Evidence

The following table will examine the effect of different variables on dress code laws. In an ideal world, each variable would be isolated to understand its effect. However, as this is impossible in the real world, each table will portray what the estimated effect would be if each variable was isolated. Thus, the "2008 Color" column will portray the 2008 map color and the "2018 Expected Color Based Off X" column will portray what the color would be today if the effect of just that variable was evaluated—Revolutions, Extremism and Islamism, Governments with Women Empowerment Agendas, or Activism and Civil Society. The "2018 Actual Color" column will portray the actual color on the 2018 map when all the variables are combined. The changes will be portrayed using the colors from the 2008 map. Dark green represents the most freedoms, followed by light green, yellow, orange and red as the least freedoms.

Legend:

🟩	No dress code laws enforced/Most Freedoms of Dress
🟩	No specific laws requiring certain garments, but several public places impose certain dress.
🟨	Specific garments may be required
🟧	Specific garments required, or specific garments banned.
🟥	Dress codes required. Violence and/or Legal Prosecution for Violation

Country	2008 Color	2018 Expected Color Based Off Revolutions	2018 Expected Color Based Off Extremism and Islamism	2018 Expected Color Based Off Governments w/ Women Empowerment Agendas	2018 Expected Color Based Off Activism and Civil Society	2018 Actual Color
Bangladesh	🟨	🟨	🟨	⬆️🟢	⬆️🟩	⬆️🟢
Jordan	🟨	🟨	🟨	⬆️🟩	⬆️🟩	⬆️🟩
Egypt	🟨	⬇️🟧	🟨	⬇️🟧	⬇️🟧	⬇️🟧
Syria	🟩	⬇️🟧	⬇️🟥	⬇️🟧	🟩	⬇️🟥
Saudi Arabia	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥	🟥

The evidence from each variable presents a piece of the puzzle, but the last two variables are more conclusive in describing the overall change between the 2008 and 2018 dress code colors. The "Governments with Women Empowerment Agendas" column is the only column where each country other than the control state, Saudi Arabia, experienced a change. Countries with governments that are committed to women's empowerment experienced an improvement in dress code freedoms. Countries that are not committed to women's empowerment experienced a decline in dress code freedoms. What would cause a government to pursue a women's empowerment agenda? The last variable, Activism and Civil Society, completes the puzzle.

Activists and civil society organizations are able to pressure the government or convince them of why they should adopt a women's empowerment agenda. Thus, when the last two tables are combined, it explains the overall change.

Bangladesh is the best-case scenario. Civil society organizations, such as Grameen Bank and BRAC, in tandem with recent initiatives by the government to educate girls, include women in the workforce, and give women a greater voice in the public and private sphere, have greatly improved women's rights.[60] Thus, freedom of dress has improved, life expectancy has increased, more women are working outside the home, more women are educated, and GDP has increased.

Jordan, although not at the same rate as Bangladesh, is also improving when it comes to women's rights. Organizations like SADAQA and Arab Women Organization of Jordan have pressured the government and Jordanian society to give women more rights. Therefore, more domestic violence centers have been built, several discriminatory laws have been abolished, more daycares have been instituted in businesses, and more women are graduating from college. However, the government distrusts these organizations as corrupt and threatening; thus, the government has placed several restrictions on the formation and implementation of civil society organizations, so progress has been slowed.[61] Therefore, Jordan has started to improve women's rights and dress code freedoms; but, in order for real change to occur, the government must appeal these restrictions.

Activism and civil society organizations were quite common in Egypt both during and after the Arab Spring. However, these agendas have been sidelined as Egypt remained autocratic, despite toppling the old regime. Revolutions are partly to blame for the decline in dress code freedoms in Egypt; however, this is because the newly formed government is not committed to women's empowerment. Egypt also witnessed an increase in Islamism; however, there was no

change to dress code laws after the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, despite fears that enforced veils would be the reality. Furthermore, many NGOs have been banned, so it is difficult for civil society to enact change. The current government seeks to come across as championing women's rights, but in return, the government demands full loyalty from these women for the government's political course.[62] Therefore, the government is not actually committed to a women's empowerment agenda.

Revolutions are also partly to blame for the decrease in dress code freedoms in Syria, because the Arab Uprisings led to civil war and instability. Furthermore, the revolution in Syria allowed the Islamic State to seize power and impose strict dress code laws. Syria is unable to make any progress in closing the gender equality gap because there is no stable government. Thus, the government cannot adopt a women's empowerment agenda. Therefore, civil society organizations nor the government can enact any changes until stability is restored; thus, women's dress code freedoms will continue to decline.

Saudi Arabia has made few advancements since 2008. There are several activist and civil society initiatives; however, they have not been successful in initiating change because the government is not committed to increasing women's rights. Just like in *Hidden Figures,* these initiatives will not be successful until the men in government allow them to be.

V.   Conclusion

Media and rhetoric lead us to believe that revolutions, extremism and Islamism determine women's rights in Islamic States. Therefore, many would argue that these variables must be addressed in order to close the gender equality gap in Islamic states. However, the data proves that to improve women's freedom of dress and close the gender equality gap, civil society groups and government initiatives must be supported. To achieve the most improvements, civil society

groups and governments need to have matching agendas, and they must work together towards a similar goal.

Civil society and activist groups consist of bottom-up approaches. Citizens at the grassroot level of society attempt to change laws and practices that have been implemented from the top-down. Government initiatives consist of top-down approaches. Politicians and people in power positions attempt to change laws and practices in order to please the people. When both bottom-up and top-down approaches are implemented, change is more likely to occur. If only one or the other is seeking to create change, they will run into restrictions, clashes and ineffectiveness. Thus, when the government and civil society take initiatives and work in tandem, there is positive change. If governments and civil society organizations are pursuing women's rights agendas, dress code laws will improve. When people from all facets of society are included in pursuing change in dress code freedoms, change will be slow. However, slow change will be more sustainable and long-lasting because no party will be caught off guard, and everyone can slowly adapt to and accept the change.

This logic can be applied in other countries in relation to other variables of women empowerment. If there is a desire to change gender discriminatory laws on violence, increase education empowerment, increase women in the workforce or decrease child marriage, this logic must be applied. Both sides of the equation need to be involved to create lasting change from the grassroots to the heads of the state. It can also be applied to other minority groups or other desired changes. If LGBTQ individuals, immigrants or racial minorities desire more equality, both the government and civil society need to work in tandem.

However, a big question remains—How can governments be convinced that this is a necessary change? Previously, this study discussed why governments would want to change their

dress code laws or empower women. When women are free to express their identity through the way that they dress, they will be empowered. If women are empowered, the whole country will be empowered. When women are empowered, feel secure and are included in the workforce, GDP increases and overall security increases. How can governments understand this and be convinced that changes need to be made? Several government officials may feel threatened by empowering women, so governments must be shown a different frame of reference. They need to understand that empowering women and improving society will not threaten their power, but will actually support and strengthen their power. When society improves, citizens will be more satisfied with their government; thus, government's power will be strengthened. If governments realize that the state can progress economically and socially without undermining their power, they will be convinced to adopt an agenda of women's empowerment. The people best capable of helping governments realize these truths are civil society and activist groups. They know what problems exist and how to fix them. If these groups can pressure and convince the government, both sides can work together to create lasting change.

Bangladesh has started to master this art. Women's empowerment has become a core focus of both civil society organizations and government initiatives, and they are working in a collaborative fashion. [63][64] Thus, women's empowerment is improving and the gender equality gap is closing. In 2008, Bangladesh was ranked 90th on the Global Gender Gap Report.[65] In 2017, Bangladesh rose to 47th.[66] Thus, the entire country is improving economically and socially. Bangladesh still has much to improve, but if they remain on the path they have started, they are certain to continue to progress—even if the change is slow.

The logic of this argument has large implications on women and the future of gender equality. The freedom to choose how one dresses is one of the ultimate signs of freedom. If

women are able to choose for themselves what they want to wear, they will be more confident and more enabled. Therefore, they will be more likely to push for and be given additional freedoms. Furthermore, women can attain more complicated rights by utilizing the same tactic— pressuring the government to give them more freedoms that will improve the economy and society of the whole nation. Giving women the freedom to choose how they dress is the first step to obtaining other rights. Thus, dress freedom is a mechanism that allows women to progress, succeed and close the gender equality gap.

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