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The Effect the Arab Spring had on Female Labor Force Participation Rates in the Middle East and North Africa

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In this project, I examined the effect the Arab Spring, which began in the Spring of 2011, had on the female labor force participation rates in Islamic Middle East and North African (MENA) countries. There are many studies that examine the cultural effect of the Arab Spring on governmental and political structures. However, there is a lack of research on the Arab Spring's influence on the economic systems of MENA countries.

To bridge the gap in research, I conducted a preliminary difference-in-difference study, a quasi-experiment used to examine causal inferences, and a country specific fixed-effects regression. I examined the female labor force participation rates of countries who experienced a complete government structural change as a result of the Arab Spring, countries who had uprisings but no structural changes to the government, and countries that did not experience any uprisings or changes in governmental structure. The overall research question of this study was "Did the Arab Spring have a causal effect on the female labor force participation rates in Arab Middle East and North African Countries?"

There were two key findings that resulted from the analyses; The Arab Spring led to a decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in countries that experienced an Arab Spring and Arab Spring countries experienced decreases in female labor force participation rates (LFPR). Results from the analyses also showed that Arab Spring countries already had lower female LFPRs before the

Arab Spring. The second result, which was a conclusion from the fixed-effects regression, shows a decrease in female LFPRs following the Arab Spring. Both results were found to be statistically significant.

Through a literature review it was found that the instability that plagued Arab Spring countries in the years after the uprisings led to economic downturn: rising unemployment, GDP, and low welfare levels.¹ Historically, economic downturn results in the decrease of female labor force participation rates. Austerity policies that are implemented in economic recessions negatively impact female participation in the workforce.²

As a result of the statistical analysis and literature review conducted, it was determined that the Arab Spring led to a decrease in GDP and female LFPRs in Arab Spring countries. Based on the statistical significance of the data analysis and the corroboration from the literature review, my advisor and I feel confident in our results. We plan to continue our work on the project and potentially publish this research in an economic journal.

¹ Murat Beser, and Nazife Ozge Kilic. 2017. "The Influence of Arab Spring Effect on Economic Growth in the Middle East Countries: Structural Break Panel Data Analysis." *Eurasian Journal of Economics and Finance*, no. 3: 133. doi:10.15604/ejef.2017.05.03.010.

² Rubbery, Jill, and Anthony Rafferty. "Women and Recession Revisited." *Work, Employment, and Society* 27, no. 3 (2013): 415. Accessed July 17, 2019. doi:10.1177/0950017012460314.