

Mining for Equality: The Gendered Implications of Natural Resource Abundance

Cindy Sung, MAIR '23

Abstract

The resource curse literature has primarily focused on uncovering causal mechanisms and conditions related to natural resources that lead to slow economic growth and increased conflict onset and duration. However, there remains a gap in understanding the extent to which the resource curse affects state development, particularly concerning social and humanitarian rights. This paper aims to address this gap by specifically examining the effects of natural resources on gender equality. By introducing a novel pathway causal mechanism that considers gender equality across all types of resources and levels of abundance, this study seeks to overcome limitations in both resource curse and resource-gender literature. The main argument put forth is that the ability of identified natural resources to create opportunities for women to enter the workforce serves as a key explanation for the observed variations in gender equality among countries rich in the same type of resource. Additionally, the study explores the higher levels of gender equality found in resource-scarce and resource-abundant states. Through this analysis, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between natural resources and gender equality.

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Introduction

Natural resources such as oil, minerals and forestry are a critical part of both state and global economies. According to a 2021 UNCTAD report, trade in natural resources made up more than 25 percent of global trade oftentimes over half the total GDP per capita for individual states (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2022). Moreover, approximately half of the world's population live in resource rich states in which extractive sectors play a large role in state economies (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2019). Considering the prevalence of natural resources in both state and global systems, resource endowment should be linked to greater economic and structural development as resources present a unique opportunity for conversion into wealth through the trade of raw and processed goods. However, the relationship between resources and economic growth is unfortunately not that simple. While some states have been able to translate resource endowment into economic and institutional development, many others struggle with poverty and face worse development outcomes, including lower levels of humanitarian (DeMeritt & Young, 2013) and gender rights (Ross, 2008). This puzzling variation in outcome is known as the resource curse and a vast body of literature has attempted to reveal the causal mechanisms and conditions that lead to worse development outcomes in the face of resources that should theoretically cause growth.

Although resource curse literature is abundant, existing literature focuses mainly on understanding the effects of resources on economic development and other salient issues such as conflict. Due to this disproportionate amount of attention directed to more popular topics within the body of international relations literature, recent works have failed to fully explore the scope of the effects of the resource curse on state development. More specifically, the literature fails to consider the puzzling effects that resource abundance has on gender equality. For example,

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Norway, the second largest exporter of petroleum gas in 2021 according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, has been crowned by the UN's Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women as "a haven for gender equality" (United Nations, 2003) and has consistently ranked in the top 5 of the UN's Gender Inequality Index. In contrast, Saudi Arabia, the largest exporter of crude petroleum in 2021 according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, has some of the lowest scores of gender equality in the world. To address why some resource abundant states have higher levels of gender equality than others, scholars have argued that factors such as religion (Sharabi, 1988), regime type (Liou & Musgrave, 2016), and industry specialization (Kotsadam & Tolonen, 2016) affect the direction of the resource-gender relationship. While these explanations are compelling, existing literature regarding this complex relationship is largely limited as the scope of most work focuses on specific case studies or on specific types of natural resources. This limits the generalizability of both the findings and causal mechanisms that link resources to gender equality as most work tailors such explanations directly to the country or type of resource they are studying. Furthermore, existing works have limited their measurements of gender equality to focus only on female labor force participation which is problematic as access to labor and wages constitutes only one aspect of the complex conceptualization of gender equality.

This work seeks to address this gap in the broader resource curse literature by exploring to what extent the resource curse affects state development through the analysis of gender equality. Moreover, in the consideration of existing literature that directly discusses the effects of natural resources on gender equality this work seeks to address specific limitations within extant literature such as limited scope. The resource-gender relationship is marked by little consensus between scholars on the direction of the relationship and whether the effects are consistent across

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resource types. This disagreement is due to the lack of literature that comprehensively considers resource type as an important factor. Additionally, lack of agreement can be due to the fact that gender equality as an outcome is difficult to study as data is lacking and scholars use different proxies to capture this concept. More specifically, this paper seeks to answer the question how does natural resource abundance affect gender equality?

I argue that resource types will have different effects on gender equality outcomes due to their differing abilities to create pathways for female labor. I introduce a novel pathway mechanism that links opportunities for female labor in resource extraction and downstream processing to greater gender equality. Due to classic Dutch Disease theory in addition to the limitations that both oil extraction and processing have on pathways for women to enter the workforce, I hypothesize that oil wealth should result in lower levels of gender equality. In consideration of mineral and forest wealth, I do not deny that extraction is still likely to have negative effects on female pathways to labor for the same reasons as oil, but I argue that non-fuel resource wealth can make up for this in downstream processing. Therefore, I hypothesize that non-fuel resource abundance should have less intense negative effects on gender equality. To account for outliers that pull the distribution of female labor in resource rich countries around the world into more of a U shape, this study also provides insight into how resource scarcity and abundance can lead to gender equality based on diversity of exports which can increase pathways to female employment. This leads to my last hypothesis that export diversity will have a positive effect on gender equality, even in oil wealthy states due to increased opportunities for female employment.

I test my causal mechanisms and hypotheses using data on resource rents per percentage of GDP as well as economic complexity on three dependent variables that attempt to capture

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both economic and social factors of gender equality. These variables include female labor force participation and composite indexes that aggregate factors of gender equality including the UN's Gender Inequality Index as well as the World Health Organization's Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women.

This study makes contributions to existing literature and has implications for policy due to several factors. First, this study is one of the first to consider all resource types in its examination of the gender-resource relationship. Relevant literature has mostly focused on exploring the causal mechanisms behind one specific type of resource, typically oil, or in the case study of one nation. Second, it puts forth a novel pathway causal mechanism that can explain variation of gender equality across not only resource type but also resource availability.

Literature Review

Extant literature on the resource curse has largely neglected to consider the relationship between natural resources and gender, in favor of analyzing links to more salient topics such as conflict and institutional outcomes like conflict intensity and institutional stability. As a result, the state of literature that examines the resource-gender relationship remains underdeveloped and the direction of the relationship remains unclear. Further obscuring the relationship between resources and gender, relevant literature is characterized by a preference for case studies and a consideration of only one type of resource wealth, leading to conclusions that are ungeneralizable to other states that are rich in other types of resources.

Natural resources and gender equality

There have been few works that examine the resource-gender relationship and of these, there has been a disproportionate focus on oil abundance. Ross (2008) examines the effect of oil

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on gender equality, specifically female labor force participation, by analyzing oil rents per capita of GDP. The causal mechanisms behind this relationship are related to supply and demand for female labor. In consideration of classic Dutch Disease theory, Ross asserts that oil booms should increase the demand for male labor and decrease the demand for female labor as traded sectors decline and women face barriers to enter the non-traded sector. Furthermore, oil booms should also reduce the supply of female labor as higher male wages and government transfers increase household income and decrease both incentives and the need for women to seek employment. Ross finds a significant, negative relationship between oil rents and female employment as well as female seats in government positions and expects similar results for mineral economies. While this seminal work provides important and novel insight into the question of how natural resources affect social systems such as gender equality, the discussion of causal mechanisms and the data within the empirical study is limited to oil producing states only. Additionally, Ross' causal mechanisms rely on strict assumptions that women do not have access to work in tradable sectors due to increased contact with men but that is likely only relevant to his discussion of the Middle East. Similarly, Liou and Musgrave (2016) find that oil rents negatively influence a broad range of gender equality measures. Their causal mechanisms argue that oil rich, authoritarian states will purposefully neglect and discourage gender equality through visible and costly policy in order to satisfy their winning coalitions and to insulate autocratic rule. While this relationship is compelling, the generalizability of these causal mechanisms and findings to understand the resource-gender relationship are extremely limited.

Of the even fewer papers that specifically address non-fuel resources and their effect on gender equality, Kotsadam and Tolonen (2016) analyze temporal and geo-spatial effects of mine openings within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and its effect on female labor force participation.

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They assert that due to limited manufacturing sectors in rural SSA and an overrepresentation of women in the service sector, mine openings as a resource boom should not decrease the demand for female labor and in fact should increase as opportunities to shift to a growing service sector increase. Kotsadam and Tolonen find support for this hypothesis; they find a significant, positive correlation between mine opening and female labor in the service sector that wears off with increased distance and time from the mine's opening. While this work provides additional insight into how natural resources can influence female labor due to the added consideration of non-fuel resources, due to the limited focus on both resource type and location, the findings of this paper are still limited in their generalizability to the general resource-gender relationship. Additionally, similar to Ross' above consideration of oil wealth on gender equality, the consideration of only female labor force participation to draw conclusions on broader gender equality fails to provide a broader understanding

Female labor force participation and gender equality

Gender equality refers to the principle of equal rights and treatment regardless of gender. For the purposes of this paper, this discussion considers gender equality as female access to equitable treatment across a range of social, economic, and political structures in proportion to male access. Existing gender equality literature has shown that female labor force participation can act as a gateway for additional improvements of aspects of gender equality as it gives women the opportunity to gain representation. Through supply and demand factors, low levels of female labor can reduce facets of gender equality such as political representation by limiting the supply of women with enough education and experience to enter positions of power (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2019). Similarly, low levels of female representation in the workforce may lead to decreased demand for additional representation within government whereas high levels of female labor

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force participation may increase both demand for female representatives as well as make voters more likely to elect female officials. In an analysis of US attitudes toward women in the workplace, Rindfuss et al. (1996) found that female labor and representation within the working class was the driver for liberalized attitudes toward female employment and not vice versa. Additionally, in the case of South Korea as described by Ross (2008), female labor force participation gave women the opportunity to organize and push for gender equality reform within legislation. Taken together, these two studies imply that basic rights such as a women's right to work acts as a gateway toward better overall gender equality due to opportunity. Labor gives women the opportunity to get their foot in the door in terms of fully integrating into society in the same way as males.

Theoretical Framework

To clarify the relationship between natural resource abundance and gender equality, the following section extends classic theories such as Dutch Disease and introduces a novel pathway mechanism to explain how natural resource abundance, moreover the type of resource, can influence gender equality through female labor force participation. Although I will consider various measures outside of female labor to capture gender equality within my empirical design, I focus on female labor in my theoretical framework as a pathway and prerequisite to broader gender equality for reasons discussed within the literature review.

The link between natural resources and gender equality

Natural resource abundance is likely to have a general, negative effect on gender equality in the form of female labor force participation, and therefore broader gender equality, through several mechanisms. First, both the means of extraction and processing can be extremely labor

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intensive which can construct additional barriers to female labor participation. According to a 2009 World Bank report, most, if not all extractive industries have a female employment rate of less than 10%, leaning closer to 5%. As technology advances and physical strength becomes less of a requirement within oil and mineral extraction, women may still encounter barriers to entry due to general attitudes that women are less suitable for blue collar work (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2019). Second, most positions within resource extraction industries require a high degree of specialization that women may not be able to attain due to general, unequal access to education and therefore a lack of opportunity to gain the necessary skills.

On top of these barriers to entry in resource rich states, resource curse theories such as the theory of Dutch Disease may explain further reductions of female labor force participation. According to the theory of Dutch Disease, natural resource discoveries and/or booms result in a minimization of economic sectors unrelated to natural resource production. This happens through several mechanisms. First, resources and labor following a boom are redirected towards resource extraction and/or processing and away from the production of tradable goods in both manufacturing and agriculture. Second, increased resource rents can result in the appreciation of state currency which can reduce the competitiveness of domestically produced goods and the state's exports in international markets. Appreciation of state currency may provide greater opportunities to import goods that were otherwise too expensive and also raise the price of the state's exports within global trade, causing additional injury to the manufacturing sector. This has general implications as a reduction in manufacturing sectors and an increased reliance on non-renewable resources can lead to unemployment and inflated and unsustainable economic growth. The more specific effects of Dutch Disease on gender equality is two-fold. First, in the case of many resource rich states, most female labor force participation is located within

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agriculture and export manufacturing such as textiles (World Bank, 2022; Baslevent & Onaran, 2004), and the effects of Dutch Disease are likely to further reduce female labor as the sectors that dominantly employ women minimize. Second, the market of resource extraction is similarly dominated by men due to the mechanisms outlined above which include labor intensity and access to education.

Oil wealth and female labor force participation

Although the mechanisms that discourage female labor force participation such as barriers to entry and Dutch Disease are likely to translate across most types of natural resources, oil and petroleum production may present worse outcomes for gender equality due to a more robust link to Dutch Disease and a complete lack of intuitive pathways for female labor. Among all the types of natural resources, oil and petroleum production are unique in the way that they have been consistently linked to lower levels of democracy and worse institutions compared to other resources such as nonfuel minerals whose outcomes have had less agreement (Ross, 2015). Similarly, the link between oil and Dutch Disease seems to be more robust with more agreement on the magnitude and direction of the relationship (Karamelikli et al., 2017). Coupled with this propensity to show symptoms of Dutch Disease, this framework presents a novel mechanism that argues oil exporters are likely to have distinctive lower levels of gender equality due to a lack of pathways for women to enter into oil extraction and processing. As discussed above, not only does oil extraction require high degrees of intensive labor and specialization, oil refineries are likely to demand the same requirements. This should lead to a dramatic reduction of female labor force participation as women face extreme barriers to entry at all points of resource production. This leads to my first hypothesis:

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H1: Dependence on oil/petroleum exports will have a negative effect on gender equality

Non-fuel resource wealth and female labor force participation

On the other hand, non-fuel resources such as minerals and forestry may have less of a pronounced impact on gender equality due to increased opportunities for the creation of pathways for female labor in downstream processing. Although mineral and timber extraction can still reduce female labor due to physical labor demands and a reduction of manufacturing and agriculture sectors, such raw materials present additional, downstream opportunities in the manufacturing sector for female labor which may offset such symptoms of Dutch Disease. An example of this is the implementation of Indonesia's ban on the export of unprocessed mineral ores in 2014. The Indonesian government introduced this ban in order to boost profits of their already robust mineral export industry by requiring said minerals to undergo value adding processes prior to export. This export restriction was considered a success as general unemployment, as well as female unemployment, was at its lowest point within twenty years following implementation of the ban (World Bank, 2021), and the gross value added of the manufacturing sector was nearly five times the industry average value (Tui & Adachi, 2020). This leads me to my second hypothesis:

H2: Dependence on non-oil exports will have a neutral/low effect on gender equality

Export diversity and female labor force participation

In consideration of outliers such as Norway and South Korea, in which resource scarcity and abundance both have led to greater female labor force participation, this study also considers export diversity as a factor that increases pathways to female employment. I argue that despite extreme resource endowment in either direction, states that have well developed and diversified

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export sectors should have better outcomes of gender equality due to greater variation in the types of goods manufactured. For example, states such as Mexico who are relatively rich in oil, which should theoretically lead to lower levels of female labor, still enjoy a higher level of gender equality as their export sectors may be complex enough to still export a larger range of goods that have more intuitive pathways for female labor such as the textile industry. This leads to my third hypothesis:

H3: Resource export diversity will have a positive effect on gender equality

Empirical Design

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is on the country-year level and will examine each year between 1970 and 2014 in terms of both resource dependence and export diversity on the three dependent variables that make up this study's index on gender equality listed below. An examination on yearly national data allows us to study the effects of exports over time as the economies of countries change over time. Unfortunately, there are some limitations to the data when it comes to gender equality which will be discussed below. Since I am using one independent variable across several dependent variables that have different typologies, I will utilize a panel regression model in order to study the effects of each continuous dependent variable.

Dependent Variables

In order to measure the dependent variable, gender equality, I will analyze three measurements that broadly relate to women's access to equal rights and treatment. This empirical

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design employs three separate dependent variables because gender equality is a multifaceted issue and cannot be appropriately studied through the consideration of one aspect. As demonstrated by extant literature, one widely used proxy considers female labor force participation to make conclusions about gender equality. While a core assumption of this study is that female labor force participation is a prerequisite for broader gender equality, there is no reason to limit discussion of the findings to female labor only. The first dependent variable that this study will examine is female labor force participation. I will focus specifically on national estimates of the percentage of female employment of women above the age of 15 as a continuous variable. This data has been published by the World Bank and has data on nearly every country in the world between 1960-2022. My second dependent variable will consider the UN Gender Inequality Index (GII). The GII is a broad and comprehensive metric that considers reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market. Within these three categories, they specifically examine rates of maternal mortality, adolescent birth, secondary education, political office, and labor force participation. In this dataset of over 170 countries, the GII is a continuous variable with 0 being complete equality, and 1 being complete inequality. For my third and final dependent variable, this study will utilize the World Health Organization's Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women. This dataset is a time series look at over 160 countries that captures the prevalence of physical and sexual intimate partner violence measured on a continuous scale as a percentage of all survey respondents.

These three variables will hopefully capture a wider picture of gender equality within naturally resource rich states as it may not be fruitful to examine one proxy. Across these three measures, my study seeks to measure gender equality across data that include a discussion of

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both social and economic factors and therefore provide a broader look into the effects of natural resources on gender equality.

Independent Variables

This study's main independent variable is natural resource dependence, although this consideration is split between oil and non-oil exports. The measurement of this dependence variable employs Sachs and Werner's (1999) strategy of calculating the ratio of natural resource exports to GDP. This data has already been collected and the percentages have been calculated by the World Bank's World Development Indicators. This dataset is a time series look on nearly every country in the world and has figures on total natural resource rent as percentage of GDP as well as denominations of oil, natural gas, coal, mineral, and forest rents. For the purposes of this study, I will aggregate oil and natural gas values in order to create one comprehensive oil wealth variable and then aggregate coal, mineral, and forest rent data to capture non-fuel wealth. In order to capture my second independent variable, export diversity, I will utilize Harvard Growth Lab's Economic Complexity index. This measurement assesses a state's productive knowledge through a consideration of both the total number of exports across types of goods to determine diversity as well as the ubiquity of exports within global markets. This dataset is a time-series examination of nearly every country in the world measured on a continuous scale that ranges from -3 to 3 with higher values associated with greater export diversity.

Control Variables

One of the variables that this study will control for is democracy. Regime type is likely to have an effect on the relationship between natural resources and gender due to the peripheral effects of regime type on both resources and gender equality. Regime type has been a focal point

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in previous resource literature and the most common association is the propensity for oil exporting countries to also be authoritarian in structure (Ulfelder, 2007). Additionally, regime type is associated with gender equality as well, as previous literature has found a link between democracy and higher levels of gender equality (Inglehart et al., 2004). In order to control for this confounding variable, the study will utilize the widely known Polity IV dataset that measures regime type from -10 to 10 with higher levels being associated with higher levels of democracy.

Additional control variables that will be used in this study accounts for the geographic location and religion. These controls are inspired directly by Ross (2008) in his consideration of natural resources, gender, and religion within Middle Eastern countries. Although the relationship between oil and gender equality is not clear, there is an observable link between Middle Eastern countries and low gender equality in which some scholars argue is due to religion (Sharabi 1988). In consideration to this propensity toward lower gender equality in this region, I will control for both geographical location within the Middle East and for religion, more specifically Islamic faith. For location, this study will employ a binary variable that measures whether a country is in the Middle East or not. As usual, 0's will be countries located out of this regions and 1's will be coded for countries such as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. To control for religion, this study will collect census data across countries in order to measure levels of Islamic faith on a continuous scale within the time period of interest, 1970-2014.

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Empirical strategy

In order to empirically test these hypotheses, this study will employ panel data regression to examine the effects of resource dependence and export diversity on a range of gender equality outcomes across time. The panel regression will specifically utilize an OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) model as all three dependent variables are measured on a continuous scale.

Challenges

There are several challenging points to this study in which the most important one is the lack of available data. While the reporting of gendered data such as domestic violence has increased over the years, there is still a lack of comprehensive data on countries before the year 2000. In order to address this, this study utilizes more observable data such as percentage of female labor force participation and it considers composite indexes such as the Gender Inequality Index that allows greater freedom for missing or lacking data since it is an averaged score across points of interest. Another point of challenge is the difficulty in measuring gender equality due to its conceptual nature. There are more direct areas relating to equitable female access in relation to men in economic contexts, but one must also consider social and political factors that are likely to affect equitable access down the line. For the sake of simplicity within this study, I employ several dependent variables including composite data that should be able to capture general gender equality through an examination of both social and economic indicators. With this difficulty in identifying acceptable proxies for gender equality, the use of composite scores such as the Gender Inequality Index makes it harder to conclude specifics about indicators included within the index. This has implications for our findings as they may be too generalized.

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Implications and Conclusion

As an underexplored topic within resource curse literature, this study offers valuable insight into the resource-gender relationship by addressing gaps within extant literature and by contributing a novel causal mechanism that can better explain variations in gender equality in resource abundant states. Previous works have limited their considerations of the resource-gender relationship to national case studies, specific types of resources, and limited considerations of gender equality. These limitations have led to inconsistent findings and extremely specific causal mechanisms that lack generalizability to other nations and to other resource types. To my knowledge, this study is the first to consider resource type as an explanation for variations of gender equality in resource abundant states. Furthermore, due to the consideration of varied resource types and endowment within this study, my novel pathway causal mechanism enjoys greater generalizability in explaining gender equality outcomes across resource types and abundance.

In regard to policy, this study provides insight into the strategies in which resource rich states may influence greater gender equality. For example, mineral abundant states interested in promoting gender equality at home may choose to employ similar export restrictions such as Indonesia in order to foster general job creation and to boost the role of women. Additionally, in consideration to this study, actors that seek to foster gender equality abroad such as the UN may pivot their efforts to provide technical and financial assistance to boost export diversification and therefore influence levels of gender equality. Similarly, other international organizations including regional organizations that seek to influence gender equality may be able to foster this through greater economic cooperation and partnerships.

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Gas in Norway

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