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### Controlling the Uses of Our Bodies: A Comparison of Women in Twenty Countries

Jennifer Pence '97

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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# Controlling the Uses of Our Bodies: A Comparison of Women in Twenty Countries

## Abstract

As early as 1871, Elizabeth Cady Stanton recognized that suffrage alone would not guarantee women's emancipation. Rather, she noted that in order for a woman to be a truly equal and independent citizen, she must possess the ability to control her own circumstances. "The pride of every man is that he is free to carve out his own destiny. A woman has no such pride" (DuBois, 1981:140). Through this recognition she acclaimed that women must have the ability to control their own lives, namely the ability to choose and control the uses of their bodies. Yet, in the present world, there exists a dramatic variation from state to state regarding women's control over their bodies in reproductive and marital issues. Why is it that in countries such as Canada and the United States, women are able to prosecute their husbands for rape, yet in countries such as Sudan, females are genitally mutilated with no recourse; in Brazil, violence against women is difficult to prosecute; and in India many woman have no choice concerning their marriage partner? What accounts for this variation? Is the source of this variation rooted in the political participation of women or does the variation stem from socio-economic modernization? Is bodily control determined by the ideological affiliations of parties within the state? This paper seeks to answer these questions using cross-national data drawn from twenty countries.

## Keywords

women's studies

Jennifer Pence

**Controlling the Uses of Our Bodies:**

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As early as 1871, Elizabeth Cady Stanton recognized that suffrage alone would not guarantee women's emancipation. Rather, she noted that in order for a woman to be a truly equal and independent citizen, she must possess the ability to control her own circumstances. "The pride of every man is that he is free to carve out his own destiny. A woman has no such pride" (DuBois, 1981:140). Through this recognition she acclaimed that women must have the ability to control their own lives, namely the ability to choose and control the uses of their bodies.

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**Three Theories on the Status of Women**

For a woman, effective control over her reproductive, bodily and marital choices is a prerequisite for achieving choice in other areas of her life. Due to technological advances, reproductive control is possible. However, for this control to become a reality, women need access to information and medical services. Access to these materials is often obstructed by state policies, ignorance, religious restrictions, economic impediments as well as other factors. For instance, in Ireland abortion and abortion counseling are illegal as a result of a constitutional amendment passed in 1983, whereas in Norway women have uninhibited access to abortion (United Nations, 1989). The degree of control that a woman possesses over her bodily and marital choices varies greatly from one country to another. According to the literature on women in politics and women in development, a number of variables may account for this cross-national variation in levels of control (Bystydzienski, 1995; Haussman, 1992; Hazou, 1992; Kardam, 1991; Leahy, 1986; Meyer, 1987; Scott, 1995). These variables include women's participation, modernization, and ideology.

### **One: The Impact of Participation on Women's Control**

Much research has been conducted on the effect that political participation of women has on state policy. It has been argued that women bring a distinct and important voice into the political world. This voice is more likely to address those issues that directly affect the daily lives of women such as health care, child care, and equality concerns and thus it is essential that women represent women. Several researchers support the idea that an increase in the number of women in national office makes an impact on the governmental policies of that state (Brown, 1988; Bystydzienski, 1995; Duley, 1986; Edwards, 1986; Freeman, 1995; Padgaonkar, 1993)

As Brown notes, politics has traditionally been defined by the absence of women (1988). As a result, women have been considerably disadvantaged in this influential arena. Due to their lack of control and voice in political decision-making, fundamental rights of women have been manipulated and disregarded. Issues of reproduction and familial relationships that directly affect women's lives have often been deemed secondary in relation to the state's interests (i.e., men's interests). At times, reproductive issues have been drawn into the political limelight as a deterrent to other social and political issues. For instance, the Chinese Communist Party has consistently emphasized women's biological "inadequacies" during times of surplus labor. This "biologicalization" of women can be viewed as an effort to push women out of the workplace when abundant labor forces exist. The Chinese government is not concerned with the well-being of women, rather it is concerned with economic well-being and it defines women's roles in terms of that concern. The political use of reproductive, bodily, and marital issues leaves a majority of women in a position of vulnerability.

The number of women directly involved in the political life at the national level varies widely. For instance, in Norway women comprise 35.7% (Nelson, 1994) of the elected representatives whereas in Mexico women comprise 10.8% and in Ireland only 8.7% (Synder, 1992). This demonstrates that there is great cross-national variation in the political participation of women. The question, then, is whether women have greater control over the uses of their bodies in places where women are highly represented.

The literature suggests that the relationship between political representation and policy output is not unidirectional. Many governments have moved to mobilize women for political office. Such mobilization efforts, however, cannot guarantee that the women elected to office will support full reproductive and marital freedom. Much depends on the worldview of women who are recruited to office. Women tend to represent one of two competing positions. The first group consists of those women representing traditional women's organizations (Bystydzienski, 1995). These groups tend to define

their goals in terms of the preservation and reinforcement of the status quo, including traditional patriarchal family relations. The second group consists of “the new feminists.” This group defines its goals in terms of feminist beliefs, supporting the attitudinal and material changes that would allow women greater control. This distinction has been found within women’s movements in countries as diverse as Norway (Bystydzienski, 1995), the United States (Freeman, 1975), Canada (Haussman, 1992), Greece (Papageorgio-Limberes, 1992) and Mexico (Tunon Pablos, 1992). The traditional women involved in the governmental arena may impede and stunt control efforts on behalf of women.

Still, evidence supports the idea that—despite this division—the sheer involvement of women in the political sphere has led to an increase in the attention given to issues that particularly concern women. Women working within parties often give more attention than their male counterparts to issues concerning the status of women and underprivileged groups. And, the involvement of women in the political enterprise has been observed to elevate the salience of reproductive, bodily, and marital issues on the political agenda (Bystydzienski, 1995; Hazou, 1990; Petchesky, 1984 ). Thus, although there is no direct connection between representation of women and direct policy outputs, the presence of women in national office does get women’s issues onto the political agenda (Bystydzienski, 1992; Dahlerup, 1988).

As with the political realm, women have traditionally been excluded from many areas of the economic world. Equality in both the political and economic areas has never been fully achieved. As Adler notes, however, the opportunity to engage in employment outside the home and to earn an independent income has been a major factor in the changing role of women in many parts of the world. The entrance of women into the paid labor force is seen to make a positive impact on the status of women. Despite the fact that many women face the “double burden” and exploitation in the workplace upon entering the labor force, the overall involvement of women in the economic area is seen to have a positive impact on their decision-making power and their control in marital and bodily choices. When women’s economic power increases, power in bodily and marital decisions also increases. The increasing participation of women in the paid labor force has improved the overall status of women (Adler, 1991; Leahy, 1986). When women gain access to the means of production, their voice is likely to increase.

## **Two: The Impact of Modernization on Women’s Control**

Another part of the literature stresses the importance of modernization and development in improving the status and situation of women. Modernity is viewed in opposition to the traditional communities which are characterized as parochial, conservative, religious and antagonistic to change (Scott, 1994).

Modernization theory encompasses a number of variables that may effect the degree to which women are able to control their choices. These variables include education, affluence, and secularization.

High literacy and education rates are qualities which usually contribute to an awareness of social deprivations and to demands for more equal social and legal status with men (Hazou, 1990; Wrigley, 1992). Researchers Asok Mitra and Jessica Silverthorne support the hypothesis that literacy and education positively correlate with control. The education and literacy of females, not just males, constitutes an integral part of a country's development and modernization process. This advancement contributes to an improvement in the quality of female lives that sustains steady fertility reduction (Mitra, 1979). From this one can derive that education and literacy rates are correlated with fertility and thus reproductive and bodily control.

In many of the countries in this study, women have progressed towards equal educational attainment with men. However gaps remain in many areas. Education, like politics and economics, has traditionally been viewed as a male domain. Egyptians, like other Islamic people, believed for a long time that education for girls should not be formal, that is, not taught in schools. Women's education was seen as wasteful in that it would not lead to a career outside the home (Adler, 1977:118). Attitudes such as these still exist, and the existence of these attitudes, measured quantitatively through percentages of women enrolled in universities and percentage of illiterate adult females, are expected to correlate with the overall level of control.

Education is a source of power for women and a stepping stone to recognize and eradicate those inequalities that exist. The opportunity of education must be made available to all women in order to enhance their individual, economic, political, social, and cultural development. As Ballara (1991) notes, "women's literacy is essential to development, which is impossible without the participation of women." The United Nations so firmly recognized the importance of education and literacy in the international developmental process that they promoted a world movement to promote literacy and proclaimed 1990 as "International Literacy Year." Education and literacy can be expected to be linked with the development process and thus bodily and marital control.

Affluence is also a measure of socio-economic development. The most common measure of economic affluence is per capita gross domestic product (GDP). In Africa and other developing regions, low GDP and economic crisis have brought increased hardships to many people, particularly women. Women's rights and social services are often seen as excessive and fundamentally unnecessary when compared with other developmental problems. In addition, since economic programs often rely heavily on cuts in government spending, women have been disproportionately forced out of

public sector employment (United Nations, 1991). Such action significantly affects women and trivializes their role in the economy and public sphere. Also, services such as health, child care, family planning and education are often significantly decreased or eliminated. This, too, inevitably impedes the fight for equality and freedom by women.

The level of affluence in a country is also correlated with the amount of breakdown in the traditional agrarian society. This breakdown of traditionalism is integral in the developmental process. As industrialization has increased, women have moved into the paid labor force. The involvement of women in this labor force has been viewed as an advancement and a step toward equality and economic independence. Women's conditions in a country are influenced by the level and growth of economic output (Kardam, 1991; United Nations, 1991).

Secularization is another important element of modernization. Studies show that women's control is directly and indirectly affected by the level of religiosity in a particular country (Hawley, 1994; Marnissi, 1991; Ramet, 1990; Sharma, 1994). Strong adherence to religious beliefs demonstrates a commitment to traditional and conservative worldviews. In terms of modernization, the less secular or the more religious a country is, the less it is to be considered "modern" or socially developed. A brief examination of various religious doctrine will demonstrate the commitment to traditionalism found in various faiths.

Catholic doctrine holds women's primary functions as maternity, nurture and sacrifice (Iglitzin, 1986). In marriage, in which divorce is prohibited, the husband prevails over the wife and obedience is expected from her. Woman is to man, as the church is to God, and should therefore serve him accordingly (86). All forms of artificial contraception and abortion are vehemently prohibited. These reproductive control restrictions have greater practical effect on women than on men. Women are greatly limited in their marital, bodily and reproductive choices when a society strictly adheres to the Catholic principles. As in the case of Catholics, the Protestant faith is also theologically conservative, and the majority are conservative on the question of women in leadership positions. The idea of women attaining leadership positions socially is not widely accepted. This attitude, as well as other conservative beliefs, affects women's control.

Although Islamic beliefs are different than the more-Western, Catholic doctrine, this faith holds women to a similar and equally dependent position. Islamic fundamentalism is often viewed as anti-modern and regressive, especially when concerning women. Islam, essentially asserts the right and obligation of kinsmen to remain in charge of their women (Iglitzin, 1985). Like Catholicism, Islamic beliefs greatly affect women in the areas of marriage, divorce, and other personal control issues.

Although other religions exist, the discussion of these three clearly indicates how religion can repress women, especially in the area of bodily control. The role religion plays can often be limited or exaggerated according to state policies. The level of religiosity can fluctuate from state to state depending on the degree of church influence and the nature of church-state relations. Religious fundamentalism and the lack of state promotion of secular policies has been viewed as a deterrent to female liberalization. Ranging from the practices of veiling, confinement to the home, the threat of polygamy to restrictions on contraception and abortion, religion has often limited the freedom of choice for women (Hazou, 1991).

Religion is a strong component and reflection of a culture. Religion pervades the home. Thus, in countries with highly religious populations, such as Sudan, and India, there is an inability of the government to enforce women's rights especially in the rural areas. Repressive religious traditions are still practiced and upheld. Strong adherence to fundamentalist religious doctrine ultimately impedes the advancement of women and slows progress in the area of women's rights.

### **Three: The Impact of Ideology on Women's Control**

Finally, another division within the literature emphasizes the importance of political beliefs and the dominant ideology of the state. This can be measured in terms of the ideology of the political party in power and in terms of the dominant ideology of the society. In both cases, the expectation is that ideologies of the right would tend to promote a conservative role for women. Parties holding a rightist ideology, like the French National Front, typically combine an appeal to vigorous state authority and paternalism in the family with an endorsement of free market capitalism in the economy (Kitschelt, 1995). From this it is logical to assume that the stronger the right's presence in government, the stronger the call for paternalism in familial matters, and thus the less control a woman will possess. Thus, the typical rightist party would be expected to call for less control of a woman's decisions than the typical leftist party.

According to Kitschelt, "authoritarian" and "libertarian" ideological labels can be applied to right and left-wing governments respectively and tied to issues such as a woman's right to an abortion and the role of women in the economy. Decisions relating to these areas inevitably affect all citizens in a given society, but especially women (Kitschelt, 1995; Meyer, 1987). Right authoritarian parties have a greater tendency to call for the preservation of patriarchal family and social relations in which women perform more traditional roles. Left libertarian parties are more inclined to support the emancipation of women. The theoretical base for many leftist parties is often Marxist-Leninist ideology; however, this ideology fails to recognize women's



dual roles in production and reproduction. Despite the failure of socialism to eradicate gender inequities in practical application, a substantial body of literature demonstrates the relevance of ideology.

The ideological affiliation of a party may determine how far it will back women candidates (Inter-Parliamentary, 1997). Studies on the subject show that left-wing and alternative parties generally invest more in female candidates than right-wing or center parties. The Hungarian Democratic Forum which is assuredly not left-wing does have relatively high election rates for women. However, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Overall, left-wing women candidates stand a greater electoral chance than women from other parties.

Studies also demonstrate that the existence of left-wing parties and a powerful left presence in society (usually measured in terms of unionization) facilitates the import of specific women's issues and interests into established politics (Bystdzienski, 1995; Phillips, 1991; Skejeie, 1995). This importation of women's issues makes an impact in the decision-making arena. Therefore, bodily control is more likely to be favored when the governing parties and/or society embrace a leftist ideology; that is, an ideology that favors changes in traditional patriarchal social relations.

## **Research Design & Measurement**

### **I. Case Selection**

In order to test the direction, strength, and importance of the various explanations suggested in the literature, it is necessary to compare women's control over their bodies across a range of countries. In an attempt to recognize the present diversity of women, the countries selected and sampled are from a wide range of geographical, economic, cultural, and religious regions. This study examines the factors that lead to differing levels of control in twenty countries. The countries included are: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sudan, Thailand, and the United States. Due to the diversity within Europe itself, this area is over-sampled. The countries have been broken down into low, moderate, and high control groups. See Table 1. The research reported here follows a comparative, cross-national research design.

**Table 1**  
**Countries by Control Group**

**Low Control Countires**  
**(DVScale=0,1,2,3)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Exact Country Code</b>
Brazil	3
China	0
Egypt	3
India	3
Ireland	2
Kenya	2
Mexico	3
Sudan	0

**Moderate Control Countries**  
**(DVScale=4,5,6,7)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Exact Country Code</b>
Argentina	4
Greece	7
Hungary	6
Poland	4
Romania	5
Spain	5
Thailand	4

**High Control Countires**  
**(DVScale=8,9,10,11)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Exact Country Code</b>
Canada	11
France	10
Italy	8
Norway	11
U.S.A.	11

## II. Dependent Variable: Bodily Control

The dependent variable of the study is the relative control that women possess over the use of their bodies. This variable consists of a summation of five separate variables. It is measured in terms of a scale (DVScale) that ranges from 0 (no control) to 11 (highest control). This scale is based on five measures including abortion, availability of contraception, marital rape, bride price, and female genital mutilation. Thus, the DVScale is an additive scale of these five variables.

The abortion variable is coded as a scale that ranges from 0 to 3. The concern here is with the relative accessibility of abortion in each country. A code of 0 represents a country where abortion is permitted only to save a woman's life, a 1 is given to a country where abortion is allowed only in some narrowly defined circumstances (such as, rape, incest, fetal defects, and threat to a woman's physical health), a 2 represents a country where abortion is available for social and socio-medical reasons only, and a code of 3 represents a country where abortion is available on request in the first trimester.<sup>1</sup>

The second dependent variable measure is a coded scale representing the level of availability of contraception. This scale ranges from 0 to 3 with a code of 0 representing a country where contraception is neither widely available nor encouraged, a 1 representing a country where contraception is not widely available but is encouraged, a 2 representing a country where contraception is widely available but discouraged, and a code of 3 representing a country in which contraception is widely available and use is encouraged.<sup>2</sup>

The third component of the control scale is the extent to which marital rape is considered rape. This scale ranges from 0 to 3 as well. It follows that a code of 0 represents a country where marital rape is not recognized by law and it is impossible for a husband to be accused of raping his wife. A 1 represents a country where marriage rape is rarely recognized by law. A code of 2 represents a country where marital rape is illegal, but is difficult to prosecute, and a code of 3 would be given to a country where marital rape is defined by law as sexual assault/violence and a wife is free to prosecute.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth variable in the scale captures the degree to which a woman has the freedom to choose whether (and to whom) she will marry. Therefore, bride price is coded on a dichotomous scale of 0 to 1. A code of 0 represents a country in which the practice of dowry payments and arranged marriages is prevalent. A 1 represents a country where the practice of bride price (dowry payments) is illegal, prosecuted under the law, and rare.<sup>4</sup>

The last variable is a dichotomous variable for female genital mutilation. A 0 represents a country where this cultural practice is prevalent and difficult to prosecute under the law. A code of 1 represents a country where laws exist that prohibit all forms of female genital mutilation (sunna, excision, and

infibulation) and where this act would be prosecuted as aggravated sexual abuse.<sup>5</sup>

### III. Independent Variables

Eight independent variables are included in this study. These eight variables are used as indicators for the three areas of literature discussed previously: women's participation, modernization, and ideology. The first of the participation variables is the percent of female employers/own-account workers. An employer or own-account worker is a person who operates her own economic enterprise or is engaged independently in a profession or trade. The data classifies all economically active people for the time period of 1980-1987.<sup>6</sup> The second independent indicator of participation is the percent of women occupying seats in the lower or single house of their country's legislature. This data is from the election year closest to 1990.<sup>7</sup>

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth independent variables are measures of modernization. The third variable measures the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in a country. This figure is measured in US dollars (millions) at current and constant 1990 prices for the year of 1990. GDP is used as a measure of affluence in a country.<sup>8</sup> The fourth independent variable is the percent of illiterate females aged 15 and over. The United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined literacy as the ability to read and write simple sentences. In some countries, people who have never attended school are considered illiterate. With very few exceptions, illiteracy is higher among females. The data reported for this study is for the period 1987-1992.<sup>9</sup>

The fifth independent variable is the percent of female students enrolled in all third-level institutions, such as universities and equivalent institutions. Admission at the third level requires as a minimum condition the successful completion of education at the second level or proof of equivalent knowledge or experience. The types of institutions in which third-level education may be obtained include universities, teacher-training institution, and technical institutions. The data reported is from the latest year for which data on female enrollment is available ranging from 1975-1991.<sup>10</sup> The sixth independent variable is the percent of the total population that attends religious services at least once a week. This variable is used to measure the strength of religiosity in a given country. The data used is from the period of 1990-1993.<sup>11</sup>

The seventh and eighth independent variables are measures of ideology in society and in government. To indicate the degree of leftist ideology in society, the total population that belongs to trade unions is used, with the expectation that as unionization increases (left in society increases), control will increase. The percent of union membership is from the years of 1990-1993.<sup>12</sup> The presence of left in government is measured by looking at the

ideology of the political party in power. On a scale of 0 to 3 (0 representing rightist ideology, 1 representing center-right, a code of 2 representing center-left and 3 representing leftist ideology), the ideology of the dominant political party is coded. The dominant party is that which won the majority of the seats (or highest percentage of seats) in the legislature or equivalent house. The election year closest to 1990 was used to code this variable.<sup>13</sup> In order to test if these eight variables are significantly correlated with bodily control, it is necessary to consider the expected direction of correlation.

#### IV. Hypotheses

##### Set 1: Participation

A first set of hypotheses is concerned with women's participation in political and economic life. Participation is measured by way of two independent variables.

*Hypothesis 1:* The first measure of participation is the percent of women in employer/own-account positions. As the percent of women in employer positions increases, women's control will increase.

women employers----->control

*Hypothesis 2:* The second measure of participation is the percent of women in the lower house of the legislature (unicameral when appropriate). As the percent of women in the legislature increases, control will increase.

women legislators----->control

##### Set 2: Modernization

A second set of hypotheses is concerned with the relationship between a woman's control and modernization variables. The issue addressed is whether modernization is positively correlated with bodily control. The level of modernization is determined by the measurement of three separate variables.

*Hypothesis 3:* The first measure of modernization is per capita GDP. GDP is used as a measure of the affluence in a country and consequently as a measure of development or modernization. As affluence increases, a woman's control will also increase.

affluence----->control

*Hypothesis 4:* The first of these independent variables is female illiteracy. As the percent of illiterate female adults (aged 15 and over) increases, a woman's control in her reproductive, marital, and bodily decisions will decrease.

higher rates of illiteracy ----->decrease in control

*Hypothesis 5:* The third measure of modernization is the percent of females enrolled in universities or equivalent third level institutions. As the

percent of females enrolled in universities and equivalent third-level institutions increases, control will also increase.

education----->control

*Hypothesis 6:* The fourth measure of modernization is the percent of the population that attends religious services at least once a week. This variable is used as an indicator of the religiosity level in a given country. As the percent of those attending religious services once a week or more increases, a woman's control will decrease.

increased religiosity----->decrease in control

### Set 3: Ideology

The third set of hypothesis addresses the question of whether a correlation exists between leftist influence and a woman's control. The amount of left is measured by two variables.

*Hypothesis 7:* The first measure of leftist influence is the percent of unionization. Union membership is used as an indicator of left in society. As union membership increases (left in society increases), women's control will also increase.

union membership----->control

*Hypothesis 8:* The second measure of leftist influence is the ideology of party in power. It is hypothesized that as the more leftist the ideology of the political party in power, the more control a woman will possess

left in Party----->control

By comparing data in twenty countries, it will also be possible to test the null hypothesis of no relationship between control and the variables associated with participation, modernization, and ideology.

### Analyses and Findings

This section reports results from the empirical analyses. Bi-variate correlation tables which test the strength and statistical significance of the relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable were used. The main findings of this study are consistent with the postulated hypotheses.

To begin with, the data clearly support the hypotheses that economic and political participation are positively correlated with control. Table 2 shows that the percent of women employers and control is positively correlated (.5934) with a statistical significance of .004. As hypothesized, an increase in women's political representation leads to an increase in control. This participation variable is positively correlated with bodily control (.4050) with a statistical significance below the .05 level.

Two countries stand as exceptions to this rule. Mexico and China are both low control countries with a high percent of women in the legislature.

In Mexico, women compromise 10.8% of the legislature, yet this relatively high percent of political participation does not secure high control for Mexican women. Two factors may account for this discrepancy. First, according to

**Table 2**  
**Variables Associated with Participation**

% women employers	$r=.5934$	$p=.004^*$
% women legislators	$r=.4050$	$p=.038^{**}$

\*significant at or < .01 level

\*\*significant at or < .05 level

the coding, Mexico is on the borderline of high control.<sup>14</sup> Second, the Mexican government follows the authoritarian-presidential model (Leahy, 1986). Thus in decision-making proceedings, the legislature has very little real control. If the legislature has very little real control, the women in this institution posses very little genuine representational power.

China also provides an example of a low control country with a high percentage of women in the legislature. Women compromise 21.3% of the Chinese legislature. Due to the Chinese Communist Party's ideological commitment to women's emancipation, women have been recruited into political office. However, these women are primarily "token" women, possessing very little real power. In this party-controlled state, the legislature has little decision-making ability. The use of women's bodies is considered a state concern as opposed to an individual decision. Both the Mexican and Chinese states provide interesting insights into the nature of women's participation in the political arena. That is, the presence of women in a legislature where representation is primarily symbolic does not improve women's status. Representation must be genuine to accomplish any real gains.

The data also clearly lend support to the modernization hypotheses. The strongest correlation is between affluence and bodily control. This measure is highly and positively correlated with control at a perfect statistical significance. We can also reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between body control and illiteracy. As Table 3 clearly shows, illiteracy is strongly, significantly, and negatively correlated with control. As illiteracy rates among women increase, control over body decreases. Moreover, the movement of women into higher education enjoys a significant, positive correlation with control.

Ireland, however, appears to defy the expectation of the modernization hypotheses. While Ireland is a low control country, it has high literacy rates among women (98.5 percent of women are literate). This country also has a high level of GDP. To explain this deviation, one can look to Ireland’s high strength in religiosity (80.8% of the population attends religious services at least once a week). This high degree of religiosity is one area where Ireland

**Table 3**  
**Variables Associated with Modernization**

GDP: per capita	$r=.8647$	$p=.000^*$
illiteracy	$r=-.6220$	$p=.002^*$
% women in higher education	$r=.5410$	$p=.007^*$
religious attendance	$r=.2814$	$p=.155$

\*significant at or < .01 level

does conform to a modernization approach. While Ireland, a low control country, is both affluent and literate, it is not secularized. The teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the religion of 95 percent of the population, have strongly influenced familial relations and state policies. This strong religiosity appears to negatively affect control.

While religious attendance, on the whole, is negatively correlated with control, Italy and the United States offer examples of high control countries which display high levels of religiosity. Italy also has a high percent of the population (37.9%) attending religious services at least once a week. However, unlike Ireland, there exists a strong anti-clerical movement in Italy. The Italian state has experienced cleavages reflecting the struggle between the Catholic Church on the one side, and the secular liberal ruling class which built modern Italy on the other (Hine, 1993). This cleavage has eliminated the creation of strong Church influences within the state. To succeed, the parties—primarily the Christian Democrats (DC)—within the state have been forced to balance the opposing ideals. This balance has contributed to a more secular view in Italian policies. The United States also is an example of a high control country with a relatively high amount of religiosity. Two primary factors contribute to the lack of Church influence within the state. First, historically there has been a legal commitment to the separation of church and state. This



commitment for the most part has been followed through. Also, the American population is religiously heterogeneous. The lack of one dominate religious view has contributed to the formation of a more secular state.

Table 4 lends support to theories that emphasize the importance of ideas and beliefs in a society. Both the percent of union membership (left in society) and the ideology of the political party in power are positively correlated with control. As the strength of the left in society increases, control also increases. And the presence of left party in government is also strongly correlated (.5375) with body control.

**Table 4**  
**Variables Associated with Ideology**

% union membership	r=.5212	p=.034**
party ideology	r=.5375	p=.007*

\*\*significant at or < .05 level

\*significant at or < .01 level

China provides a prominent exception. The leftist Chinese Communist Party has significantly inhibited women’s control. Given its mandatory, pro-natalist policies, women’s control is deemed secondary to state interests. Thus, the leftist ideology governs the state’s well-being, not the individuals that reside within it. Italy also provides a confounding case. While the center-right party, the Christian Democrats (DC), has dominated the political life, Italy still allows a relatively high degree of control through its legal framework. By managing to avoid too close an identification with the Catholic Church’s hierarchy, this party has—especially in areas of divorce and abortion—successfully spanned the religious/secular divide (Hine, 1993).

In sum, all of the independent variables are correlated with control in the expected direction and at highly significant levels. This study demonstrates that several factors are correlated with control and contribute to the existence of the cross-national variation. The question that remains is how much the different variables contribute to the explanation. A linear, multiple regression can offer interesting insights into the relationship between the independent variables and control. Due to the small number of cases, however, the model is overdetermined. Nonetheless, taking one variable from each area within the literature can help to explain women’s control. For example, the percent of women employers (participation), GDP (modernization), and percent of union membership (ideology) if taken together account for 84% of the

variation in the dependent variable (adjusted R Square=.84924). See Table 5 for the breakdown.

**Table 5**  
**The Aggregate Impact of Three Key Variables**

	B	SE	B	Beta T	SigT
GDP	3.09465	5.0134	.777978	6.173	.0003
Unions	.022790	.037191	.079948	.613	.5570
Economic	.212307	.064392	.401133	3.297	.0109

Participation and modernization are more influential than ideology. Table 5 shows that GDP accounts for the majority of correlation.<sup>15</sup> GDP is indicative of affluence in a country and therefore it is clear that the more affluent a country, the more control women will posses. As Table 6 shows, the five high control countries also have the five highest per capita GDPs in the study.

**Table 6**  
**GDP and High Control Countries**

Country	GDP	Exact Control Rating
Canada	\$21,376.00	11
France	\$21,020.00	10
Italy	\$18,986.00	10
Norway	\$24,853.00	11
U.S.A	\$21,961.00	11

Though clearly each school of literature contributes to our understanding of women’s control, the variables associated with modernization have the most power. GDP in particular demonstrates a strong correlation with control, yet wealth and secularization best explain high levels of control. Figure 1 demonstrates that very few countries deviate from the expected pattern. The majority of high control countries have high GDP and low levels of religiosity. Together, religiosity and GDP appear to be strong, influential factors of control. Ireland, Italy, and the United States are exceptional cases. Their circumstances have been explained above. Poland is a moderate control country with low GDP and high religiosity. However, Poland is a borderline case, and could easily be considered a low control country.

**Figure 1**  
**The Impact of GDP and Religiosity on Body Control Cross Nationally**

GDP per capita		
	High	Low
High	<b>total number=3</b>  <b>control</b> 0—1 1—0 2—2 (Italy, USA)	<b>total number=3</b>  <b>control</b> 0—2 1—1 (Poland) 2—0
Low	<b>total number=5</b>  <b>control</b> 0—0 1—1 2—3	<b>total number=3</b>  <b>control</b> 0—2 1—3 2—0

In conclusion, the findings presented in this work are consistent with the hypotheses. Modernization, measured in terms of affluence and secularization, appears to have the strongest correlation with control. However, significant relationships exist between control and all the independent variables specified. The level of control a woman will possess over her bodily choices is therefore an issue that will be determined by several factors. Identifying these factors can aid in the process of increasing control.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For the data source, see Stanley K. Henshaw, "Induced Abortion: A World Review, 1990." *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 22, No.2 (March/April 1990):77

<sup>2</sup> For the data sources, see United Nations, *Population Studies, World Population Policies* (Vols. I, II, and III). New York, 1990 and United Nations, *Population Studies, Levels and Trends in Contraceptive Use*. New York, 1989. For France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Spain, see Paula Synder, *The European Women's Almanac*. Colombia University Press. New York, 1992. Due to its extreme mandatory anti-natalist policies, China has been coded as a 0 control country.

<sup>3</sup> For data source, see Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. Doubleday. New York, 1984. Although

- this source is from 1984, due to the persistence in patriarchal attitudes in society it is still considered a competent and pertinent source.
- <sup>4</sup> Data sources for this variable are Winnie Hazou, *The Social and Legal Status of Women: A Global Perspective*. Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. New York, 1990 and Leonore Loeb Adler, *Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Greenwood Publishing, Inc. New York, 1991.
- <sup>5</sup> The sources for this scale are from Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa* and Adler, *Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective*.
- <sup>6</sup> For the data source, see *Statistical Record of Women Worldwide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
- <sup>7</sup> For the data source, see *Women and Politics Worldwide* ed. Barbara Nelson & Najma Chowdhury. For Ireland and Romania, see Paula Synder, *The European Women's Almanac*. For Mexico, see United Nations, *World's Women Trends and Statistics 1970-1990*. For Thailand, see *Profile of Women in Thailand*.
- <sup>8</sup> For the data source, see United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook*. Fortieth Issue 1995. New York.
- <sup>9</sup> For the data source, see *Statistical Record of Women Worldwide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
- <sup>10</sup> For the data source, see *Statistical Record of Women Worldwide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
- <sup>11</sup> For the data source, see *World Values Survey*. Data was unavailable for Egypt, Greece, Kenya, Sudan, and Thailand.
- <sup>12</sup> For the data source, see *World Values Survey*. Data was unavailable for Egypt, India, Kenya, Poland, Sudan, and Thailand.
- <sup>13</sup> For the data sources, see George E. Delury, *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties*, Thomas Mackie, *The International Almanac of Electoral History*, Richard Rose, *The International Yearbook and Statesmen's Who's Who 38<sup>th</sup> Edition*, and *The Statesman's Yearbook 127<sup>th</sup> Edition* ed. John Paxton.
- <sup>14</sup> 10% and above was used to indicate a high percentage of women.
- <sup>15</sup> In a stepwise regression, GDP alone accounted for 68% of the variance.

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