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# Family Law Reform, Employment and Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia

## *Abstract*

*Research showing that there is strong correlation between increased female labor force participation and women's political participation is essentially based on empirical data from Western, democratic and developed contexts. In this paper, we discuss whether these conclusions hold for non-Western, non-democratic and developing settings too. Through a study of Ethiopian women's employment and political agency, we find that employment is actually not significantly related to the level of women's participation in local political meetings, and is negatively related to their interest in politics.*

## **1. Introduction**

Do legal changes intended to promote women's agency produce their intended effects? In Ethiopia, the revision of the family law in the year 2000 eradicated the legal obstacles for women's employment outside the home. After this legal change, more women entered the workforce (CSA 2017, Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2015). In other contexts, the rise in women's employment has produced an increase in women's participation in politics. This paper analyses the relationship between employment and political participation and interest in present-day Ethiopia. We ask: Are employed Ethiopian women more active in the political domain as compared to those not employed? The answer to this question constitutes critical input into what we can expect from legal changes intended to empower women.

There is a strong expectation in the literature that employment will bring about changes in women's agency in multiple arenas of life, particularly by enabling and motivating them to participate politically. With employment, women's role even in traditional societies is no longer restricted to that of a wife and mother. Access to income, experience and status of their employment will give women a stronger position in the household through enhanced bargaining power in decision-making vis-à-vis her partner (Duflo 2012, Kabeer 2005). In addition, employment and stronger position may make women more informed about their interests, and more capable of acting on them (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008).

Research from Western, democratic countries shows that there is a strong correlation between increased female labor force participation and women's participation in voting (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1999), organizations and networks (Ross 2008), and general interest in political issues (Schlozman et al. 1999, Caudillo 2016). Historically, women who entered the formal economy have developed common interests and have seen the use of organizations representing their interests (Akchurin and Lee 2013, Paxton 1997). An increasing number of women working outside the home may also imply a cultural shift towards gender equality and women's democratic participation (Inglehart et al. 2003).

A growing body of literature on developing, and/or authoritarian contexts presents a slightly different picture. In general, the factors driving women's political participation in developing nations are much less clear than in the developed world (Viterna, Fallon and Beckfield 2008,

Matland 1998), and the evidence is mixed, and scarce (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2010, Desposato and Norrander 2009, Isaksson et al. 2014). In contrast to Western societies, where employment and income levels are strong determinants of participation, researches from Sub-Saharan Africa show that poor, less educated citizens may participate on an equal level as others (Booth and Segilson 2008, Bratton 1999, Isaksson 2014).

Both cross-national and case studies from authoritarian contexts show that participation could be less a consequence of individual factors and behavior than in democracies. Instead, it could be a result of regime-directed mobilization (Bahry and Silver 1990), where participation is deliberately used to strengthen authoritarian rule instead of giving citizens the chance to influence decision making (Aalen and Muriaas 2018, Benton 2016, Burnet 2008, Fallon et.al 2012). Clientelism, when resources and positions are given in return for political support, may also play a role in determining participation in democratizing or non-democratic settings (Isaksson et al. 2014).

In this paper, we ask whether the experiences from other authoritarian and developing contexts also can be generalized to Ethiopia. As an authoritarian state with one of the fastest growing economies in the world and a huge industrial expansion, the Ethiopian case provides us with a unique opportunity to shed light on the determinants of women's political participation in a developing and non-democratic context. By studying the relationship between Ethiopian women's employment and political agency, we provide input to the question of how the increased legal and actual possibilities for employment may have influenced women's political interest and participation.

Our quantitative analysis was conducted on data from a sample of 1618 women who were applying for a job in the manufacturing industries in five regions in Ethiopia in 2016 and 2017. In order to assess how employment is associated with political agency, a comprehensive survey was administered to the sample that included a module on political participation and political interests. The survey instrument also included information about their employment experiences as well as demographic and background variables, including education, income, and other socio-economic variables. This enables us to quantitatively assess the interlinkages between employment, political interest and political participation.

Although we cannot identify the link between family law change and employment directly, others have found that the legal change in Ethiopia indeed induced more woman to become employed (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo, 2015). Our aim is to conduct a careful assessment of the association between employment and political participation. By comparing women who have employment experience in the last year with those who have no such experience, we are able to identify the patterns of political participation across employment experience for various sub-groups of female job applicants.

We find that employment is actually not significantly related to the level of women's participation in local political meetings, and is negatively related to their interest in politics. The implications of the findings from Ethiopia can in one way be seen as encouraging. The fact that there is little difference in participation between those who have been active in the labor market and those who have not could suggest that there is a fairly broad-based political participation in the country. Our results show that independent of individual endowments, such as education and employment experience, women participated politically, and half of the women had participated in a local meeting at least once last year.

The distinction between participation and interest reflects patterns seen in other authoritarian contexts, where participation can be a result of regime mobilization and/or clientelism more than a personal conviction or an individual desire to influence decision-making, while political interest is determined more by individuals' political engagement. This is contrary to experiences from the West, where attending meetings is seen as expression of political interest. Indeed, supplementary qualitative interviews by our team indicate that time use may be an important factor in explaining our results and that employed women were perceived as less involved in community service because of their physical absence. Our data show that employed women have significantly less leisure time. Without time to engage in political activities, interest is likely to fall.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section describes the family law reform, while Section 3 presents the literature and the theoretical foundations of the study. Section 4 describes the Ethiopian context, while section 5 discuss measurement issues and display the data. Section 6 presents the results and Section 7 concludes.

## **2. Family law reform in Ethiopia**

As pointed out by Htun, Jensenius and Nunez (in this issue, 2018), there is a clear correlation between the existence of gender discriminatory laws and levels of women's agency, including labor force participation, around the world. Comparative studies of the relationship between gender-based legal restrictions and labor force participation show that less legal discrimination against women is strongly associated with higher female labor force participation (Gonzales et al. 2015). Still, there is a great variation in this, as countries with similar legal framework may have very different outcomes. This underlines the importance of studying laws and implementation in context within single countries – how legal change can translate into social change in specific settings (Htun, Jensenius and Tønnessen, in this issue, 2018).

The restriction on employment for married women has been removed in most countries around the world during the last fifty years, but persist in Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia more than in other regions (Gonzales et.al 2015). Ethiopia is a relatively progressive exception in Sub-Saharan Africa, in terms of removing major legal constraints to women's labor force participation. The most significant of these removals was the revision of the family law in 2000, which most importantly granted the rights of women to pursue a profession. The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000 replaced the 1960 Civil Code, and changed women's legal age of marriage from 15 to 18 years. While the old Civil Code stated that the husband was the head of the family, and that the wife owed him obedience in all lawful things he ordered, the new family law ensured that both spouses owe each other respect, support and assistance, and that the spouses should have equal rights in the management of the family. Divorce became a matter of mutual consent, and common property was to be managed jointly by the spouses – also upon divorce. Personal property and the income thereof should however be administered by each spouse respectively. The removal of spouses' ability to control the other spouse from pursuing a trade or profession granted the right to the women to decide themselves if they want to take a job outside the home.

This kind of revision is generally expected to have an immediate effect on labor force participation (Gonzales et.al 2015). Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo (2015) demonstrate that

the new law actually had such an effect in the Ethiopian context. By using data from representative household surveys just before the reform was initiated, and five years after, and comparing regional states that had introduced the law with those which had not, they estimate the impact of the legal change, to assess the empirical effect the change in family law had on women.<sup>1</sup> They found that women were much more likely to be employed in fulltime jobs in those states where the new family code had been enacted, controlling for time and location effects. The effect on increasing the women's participation in paid fulltime employment was strongest for married women, while for single women the law also had an effect on age of marriage (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2015).

### **3. Literature and the Links between Employment and Women's Political Participation**

Considering Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo's findings, and the fact that women's employment generally has increased over the last couple of years in Ethiopia (CSA 2017), existing perspectives predict that women in Ethiopia will be increasingly politically active since the removal of the legal restrictions to employment.

Existing theories on political participation clearly state that women who work for wages in public sphere tend to be more politically active than those who stay at home. Moreover, Iversen and Rosenbluth (2008) demonstrate how female representation in the world's legislatures has increased in tandem with the rise of women in the labor force. Based on US data, they show how attitudes towards women's roles has liberalized as women joined the workforce. Wage labor increases the status of women, which again influences women's effectiveness in garnering power in other realms of society, including politics. Context may also have an influence, and we may expect aggregate effects of individual changes: once a sufficient number of women have entered into paid labor, this will stimulate female political participation (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008, Ross 2008), both through changed gender norms about participation and more interest and awareness about women's organizations.

The theories also suggest that the causality may run in the opposite direction. Women's political participation may reduce the gender gap in the labor market. Women's increased participation in the labor force and in political arenas may, again in line with conventional theory, have a positive effect on democratization processes by giving new and previously marginalized groups in society (women) a say in decision-making processes. These groups are likely to work to secure their own interests, and removing barriers against their equal participation in work life may be high on such an agenda. In that case the causality goes from political participation leading to more women in the labor market. Political participation is generally highly unequal among citizens in all societies. If such participation is important for political decisions, this may reinforce initial economic and social inequalities. If those who have a job participate more, this may further strengthen their position compared to those without a job (also in terms of social

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<sup>1</sup> The difference in difference comparison of changes was made possible by the fact that the law was implemented first in a subset of Ethiopia's regional states (the two chartered cities of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and the three regional states of Amhara, Tigray and Oromia). By comparing these with the regional states that had not adopted the new law, they were able to control for regional characteristics to sort out the relative contribution of the reform from other changes.

benefits, pensions, health care for employees, etc.). Political participation is therefore important not only for a functioning democracy, but also for balancing inequalities (Isaksson et al. 2014).

One question being raised in the analysis of employment and political participation is whether it is this type of work in general, or particular aspects of it, that influence political engagement. Research from the US show that there are specific aspects of employment that have more impact on women's individual participation than others, and these tend to be linked to high level jobs and fulltime employment more than part time and low level jobs (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1999). This, they argue, explains why men, who are more likely to be full time employed and have higher positions, are more politically active (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1999). This is confirmed in other studies, explaining that it is not the overall labor force participation that decides the level of political participation of women in a society, but more specific measures of labor force participation, such as percentages of women in professional and managerial jobs (Kunovich and Paxton 2005). An implication of this is that we may expect less participatory effects of short term, low-level jobs that require little or no education, such as manual factory work. This may be particularly relevant in a developing context, where women often are confined to low-wage, low-skilled jobs (Matland 1998).

The question remains, however, how these theories from western societies fit with developing, non-democratic contexts. Analyses based on data from the global south is scarce, and the findings are less conclusive, although a few points relevant to our study stands out. The link between employment and political participation is weaker in these contexts (Booth and Segilson 2008, Bratton 1999, Isaksson 2014), and in Africa, employment and income has different effects on different kinds of participation (Isaksson 2014). While income seems to be unrelated to voting, poorer people are more likely to attend community meetings. Older citizens participate more than younger ones, and rural citizens are more active than those who live in towns. The individual resource endowment play a role in determining women's political participation also in these settings. Macro and context patterns may also be important.

In examining gender differences in political participation across Sub-Saharan Africa, Coffe and Bolzendahl (2010) show that there is substantial cross-national difference within the region. This substantiates the importance of a more fine-grained examination of the variation across the countries in the region. Case studies from Zambia, for instance, show that economic decline and a deteriorating economic security has catalyzed a growing flexibility in gender division of labour, leading women to take jobs that are traditionally seen as men's. This has in turn led to a change in gender beliefs and gender stereotypes, paving the way for women's political participation in Zambia (Evans 2016). This shows that gender stereotypes about types of employment, more than the employment itself, may be decisive upon women's political participation.

### *Political Participation in Emerging Democracies and Autocracies*

The fact that individual resource endowment has weaker explanatory power in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) makes it important to look for other determinants of political participation here. Many countries in SSA are young and evolving democracies (at best), so we may have to look for contextual determinants linked to this. One issue is clientelism, political support that is rewarded by material incentives and personal favours from those in power. Isaksson et al. (2014) explore whether clientelism may induce political participation. They suggest that clientelistic networks are more directed towards men than women, and therefore, that increased

clientelism can be associated with lower female political participation than male participation. Still, the reliance on clientelistic networks may be higher among those with low income and without jobs, indicating that there could be a negative relationship between employment and clientelism. So women without a job may be attracted to clientelism, which would show up as a negative correlation between getting a job and political participation.

Another matter worth looking into is the restriction on civil liberties common in evolving democracies and autocracies. Potentially, voter intimidation and fear of violence if engaging in politics could have a larger effect on women than men – thereby increasing the gender gap in participation (Isaksson et al. 2014). Still, experiences from autocratic regimes in Latin America shows that women have been more active in unconventional political networks than men. This was due to the fact that women's activism was seen as less dangerous and powerful than that of men by the regimes, and women were therefore under less intimidation and violence compared to men (Bosco 2010).

Participation in authoritarian regimes may be expressions of different kind of motivations than in democracies. Attending a meeting or voting in an authoritarian regime, where there are few or no possibilities of choosing between political alternatives, may express obedience, subjugation or a quest for benefits from public officials more than a desire to influence decision-making processes. In authoritarian settings, participatory institutions can also be used to channel citizens' demands and to incorporate citizens into authoritarian systems, thereby strengthening authoritarian rule (Aalen and Muriaas 2018, Benton 2016). Women's political participation in these contexts can be seen as particularly useful for authoritarian consolidation, as women are viewed as loyal subordinates of the party. As studies from Rwanda and Uganda show, the dramatic increase in women's participation in public life and representation in governance has happened in parallel with the increasing authoritarianism of these states (Burnet 2008, Tripp 2006). Other cross-national studies demonstrate that countries with Marxist-Leninist inspired autocratic governments, who are committed to gender equality through their ideology, may promote women's political participation to a significantly larger degree than in liberal democracies (Kenworthy and Malami 1999). This finding contributes to weaken the relationship between the level of democracy and women's political participation (Kunovick and Paxton 2005, Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012).

Some nuances in this are still worth mentioning. Studies from the autocratic Soviet Union show that despite the regime's emphasis on universal participation and public involvement, people could still choose whether to participate, evade or dissent (Bahry and Silver 1990). Individuals could respond to the regime's pressures differently, often dependent on socio-economic status. Satisfaction with one's material quality of life – housing, job, standard of living – gave people a tangible stake in the system – thus fostering political participation. Conventional participation in the Soviet Union had many forms, some considered more political than others. Election work and involvement in citizens' militia and comrades' courts were considered more critical, and could potentially give more personal payoffs than other activities. Other types of activities, such as participation in the residential or neighborhood associations were considered as more 'social' forms of activism, and thereby seen as less 'political'. Being simply a member in networks did not mean that people had an interest in politics. This points to the theory that in autocracies, participation and political interests are expressions of two different phenomenon.

*Theoretical Expectations and Research Question for the Ethiopian case*

Based on the theoretical deliberations and findings in the previous literature, it is an open question what impact women's employment would have for their political participation in a context like Ethiopia. Knowledge from Western democracies predicts that as the legal and practical hindrances to female employment are removed, and as women actually start working outside the home, women will on an increasing level take part in various political activities.

The literature on developing and/or authoritarian contexts envisage a different story. Several cross-national analyses from the developing world find limited support for a significant and positive relationship between women's labour force participation and women's political representation (Fallon, Swiss and Viterna 2012). The lack of basic political and civil rights in authoritarian states, and the push for participation from a dominant ruling party, may level out the differences between those women who stay at home and those who work outside (Burnet 2008). In the Ethiopian context, we may even expect that because employed women will spend less time in their community, they will be under less pressure from above to participate in local affairs, and may therefore have lower participation rates than housewives. In an authoritarian context, where participation often is a result of obedience, the non-participation of the employed women should not necessarily be interpreted as a sign of non-agency. Instead, the work outside the home may enable them to actively disengage from the regime dominated political field in their local communities.

The following question is therefore guiding our exploration of the relationship between employment and political participation: Is individual employment associated with higher or lower political participation? We also explore whether areas with high female employment have higher or lower political participation.

#### **4. The Ethiopian Context**

Ethiopia has long been and is still one of the poorest countries in the world. Since 2000, however, the country has had the third highest annual economic growth rate globally (IMF 2017). The government, led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) since 1991, aims for structural change of the largely agricultural economy. The plan is to make industry to be the leading sector by 2020, making Ethiopia a middle-income level economy by 2025. To this end, the government sees the potential of entry of women in the formal economy, stating that 'unleashing the power of girls and women will have profound effect on the speed, equity and sustainability of Ethiopian growth and development' (FDRE 2010). They are thereby reflecting the global financial institutions' argument that the mobilization of women into the labor force is 'smart economics' (Dollar and Gatti 1999).

Since 2010, the EPRDF government has invested USD one billion annually in industrial parks, which amounts to almost one third of the total net foreign aid received by the country (Getahun and Villanger 2018b). The Ethiopian efforts are fuelled by rising labor costs in Asia, and Asian firms starting to relocate elsewhere. In particular, millions of jobs are expected to leave China due to higher wages and a declining population for manufacturing. For example, one of the world's largest shoe manufacturers, Huajian, has moved some of their production to Ethiopia and is continuing to increase their scales of operations in the country.

A recent review finds that Ethiopia stands out as a site for further expansion of manufacturing (Ramachandran et al 2017). Factors that attract investors to Ethiopia are first of all that the labor



costs are low, and the labor force is cheap and trainable. In addition, Ethiopia has duty and quota free market access to the US under the African Growth and Opportunity Act and to the European Union under the Everything but Arms initiative, allowing duty free import of goods from Ethiopia to enter EU member countries markets. Another attraction is the government's investment friendly policies of providing land, infrastructure (industrial parks), tax holidays, and customs exemptions for foreign investors.

Ethiopia's relative stability in the conflict-full Horn of Africa region is also seen as an asset in the efforts to attract foreign direct investment. The EPRDF's consolidated position as a dominant ruling party, and its relatively good control of its population, at least until the waves of popular protests started in 2015, has provided a predictable policy environment for the investors. In one way, it could be argued that the authoritarian nature of the regime is a favorable context for foreign investment. Opposition and independent press have been pacified since the controversial 2005-elections, and the NGO law of 2009, which prevented particularly rights organizations to receive financial support from abroad, has placated civil society. In this way, both the government and the investors are free to carry out their plans and deal with the workforce without having to take into account the pressure from interest groups.

Labor unions exist and have a legal mandate in the labor law, but are practically hindered from establishing themselves in the factories. Many of the investors come from contexts where they have experienced labor unions as disruptive, so they do not want them in the factories in Ethiopia either. Investors and factory owners clearly express their resistance to labor unions in interview with the authors, in industrial parks in Southern Region, Addis Ababa and Oromia (Hawassa, Bole Lemi and Eastern Zone). Because of this, the workers are rejected collective agreements, and contractual regulations of working hours and hire and fire procedures are lacking. This gives the factory owners a large degree of flexibility towards the workers. Our supplementary qualitative interviews with workers have revealed that overtime often is compulsory, as working hours are decided by production targets and the time it takes to reach them. There is no minimum wage, and attendance bonuses are lost with first day of absence.

A recent revision of the labor law have legalized some of these practices, by making probation period longer and allowing contracts to be terminated unilaterally by an employer after issuing only one warning letter to an employee, provided that the worker is late to his/her work for two days in a month's time, or for five days in a six-month period (The Reporter 2017). It is therefore doubtful whether the industrial policies facilitate for the establishment of *decent work* as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO 2017) for the Ethiopian people, as labor conditions are tough and labor rights are limited. It is still certain that the influx of foreign investment creates many new manufacturing jobs for women in Ethiopia, opportunities that in the other end may bring new opportunities for female empowerment in other arenas of their lives.

Ethiopia is described as an inclusive autocracy, an authoritarian regime that is mobilizing for mass-participation in local government to sustain the regime's power base and control of the population (Aalen and Muriaas 2018). Since 2005, the number of members in the local government councils has increased dramatically. A finely-masked network of 'development teams' has been established at the grassroots, presented as a way of deepening development efforts, but in practice also used for regime mobilization and control. This implies that there is an active push from the government and the ruling party also for women to participate in local

affairs. Both political and governmental offices have ‘women’s empowerment’ high on their agendas, and want women to engage in Women’s Associations and Women’s Development Teams. For the last decade, the ruling party and the local administrations have made efforts to organize women into groups of five households, the so-called 1:5 networks, as a way of promoting development on the ground (Emmenegger 2016). This authoritarian push is fundamental for understanding participation in the Ethiopian context. It is clear that political engagement may not simply be an expression of a desire or ability to influence local decision-making as we see in a democratic context. It could instead be seen as a sign of compliance and submission. Still, participation in local meetings gives access to resources and networks, which could on the other end enhance women’s status and position.

## 5. Data and measurement

### *How we Measured Political Participation and Interest in Ethiopia*

Conventionally defined, political participation consists of ‘those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take’ (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978: 46). This is considered as an important part of women’s political empowerment defined as ‘a process of increasing capacity for women, leading to greater choice, agency and participation in societal decision-making’ (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang and Lindberg 2015: 4). One part of the literature on women’s political participation equals participation with representation, that is the descriptive presence in formal political positions and that women have an equal share in the distribution of power. For the purpose of this study, we include a wider definition, incorporating women’s activities also outside the formal political bodies. Since we know that both formal and informal channels of participation are important in an Ethiopian context (Teshome et al. 2014), as it is in other African countries (Bratton 1999), we include participation in meetings as an outcome variable. This represent the common interests of the members and reflect the real life opportunities for women to participate in community affairs in an authoritarian context.

### *The Data*

We use a sample of 1618 women applying for jobs in the manufacturing industries in five industrial parks in Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup> We collaborated with 18 different companies that informed us whenever they were hiring new batches of workers. The companies determined the job eligibility of the applicants and then provided us with a list of all women applicants that were qualified for a job. Then all women on this list were interviewed by highly qualified and trained enumerators using a structured survey instrument. The interviews were conducted in private interview settings in locations around their workplace in the period from April 2017 to September 2018. The companies were mainly shoes and garment factories, in five different regional states of the Ethiopian federation: Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), and Dire Dawa. While our data is not representative of women in Ethiopia in general, the data is ideal for investigating the relationship between employment and political participation. In particular, the data assures that

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<sup>2</sup> Only married women and women living with a partner were selected since we also study household decisions.

the women are similar to each other in other aspects apart from employment as they are all applying for jobs.

Our employment variable is whether or not the respondent was engaged in income generating activities during the last 12 months, and for simplicity we refer to this group as “employed”. Our data includes characteristics of the area the women live, as well as detailed information about the respondent and her household. We included women’s education level since we were interested in exploring how the findings from the established literature, that education increases political participation, may be played out in the Ethiopian context. We also measured the respondents’ age and took into account the possible difference between age cohorts in the relationship between employment and participation. Additionally we include three variables that may be affected by employment. These are household income of the other members of the household, partners’ employment status, and number of children. As these variables may themselves be affected by employment we will present results both with and without including them. In order to analyze women’s interest in politics beyond the participation in meetings, we have also measured interest in politics. We originally included questions also about what is defined as unconventional political participation through extra-institutional means, such as protest activities like demonstrations (Desposato and Norrander 2009, Melo and Stockemer 2014). Due to political circumstances in Ethiopia, these questions had to be deleted from the questionnaire. After protests against the regime erupted in two of the regional states (Amhara and Oromia) in 2015, a state of emergency was in force from October 2016 to August 2017. In this period, it became illegal to take part in and even to gather or spread information about protests. In order to avoid letting the enumerators and the respondents into immediate danger, we deleted the questions from the survey. The state of emergency had otherwise no immediate practical effect on the ability to conduct the survey, but it is likely that the strained political situation also strained the women’s willingness to answer what could be interpreted as sensitive questions, increasing the social desirability bias.

In constructing the survey questions, however, we made efforts to reduce the social desirability bias by asking factual, and not normative/attitude questions about the respondents’ political participation and interest. In a context like Ethiopia, where there is limited freedom of speech and where non-compliance and opposition to ideas and policies promoted by the government may have serious consequences, people may skew their answers in accordance with what they believe is politically correct or according to what they see as socially accepted (Mattes and Teka 2016, Østebø et al. 2017). Our questions focused therefore on women’s factual participation in meetings. We deliberately avoided questions about their political opinions and attitudes, for example, what they thought about political issues, parties or politicians. Our respondents included both women who were employed and those who were not, in order to identify the association between employment and political participation. To our comfort, it is likely that the social desirability bias was equally distributed among the women interviewed, independent of whether they were employed or not - and that the bias should therefore not affect the relationship between employment status and level of participation.

The quantitative data we present in this paper focus on recipients actual attendance in local meetings and their expressed political interest. The data on attending meetings were obtained by asking the respondents whether they attended a community meeting last year, and if yes,

how often. Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics for our data. It is evident that 49 percent of our sample attended a meeting last year. The data on political interest were obtained by asking the question “How interested would you say you are in politics and government?”, and fixed responses in four categories according to degree of interest.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 shows that 37 percent of our sample indicated that they were interested in politics. We also see that 45 percent were employed last year, that average age was close to 25 years and that they had an average of 9.4 years of education. The average household income during the last 6 months of the other people in the household is around 15,650 Birr. The table also shows that 99 percent of the husbands in our sample are employed, and the women have 1.2 children on average. The contextual variable in Table 1 indicates that 60 percent of all women in the sample live in areas where many women were employed (many is defined as more than 37 percent of the women in the local area being employed). We only calculate this share in areas where there are at least five other women. With the exception of partner employment status, we have very few missing values on our variables.

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics.*

	<b>All</b>			<b>Employed women</b>	<b>Non-employed women</b>
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Mean
<i>Dependent variables</i>					
Attend meeting last year	1,618	0,49	0,5	0,50	0,48
Interested in politics	1,617	0,37	0,48	0,33	0,41***
<i>Independent variables</i>					
Employed last year	1,618	0,45	0,5		
Years of education	1,618	9,43	3,03	8,75	9,97***
Age	1,618	24,77	5,8	25,85	23,89***
Household income (in 1000s)	1,618	15,65	13,01	13,71	17,21***
Partner employed last year	1,569	0,99	0,11	0,98	0,99**
Number of children	1,618	1,21	1,25	1,26	1,18
<i>Contextual variable</i>					
High share of employed women	1,601	0,6	0,49	0,62	0,59

Note: Differences between employed and non-employed women are tested by t-tests and the statistical significance of the differences are indicated by stars: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

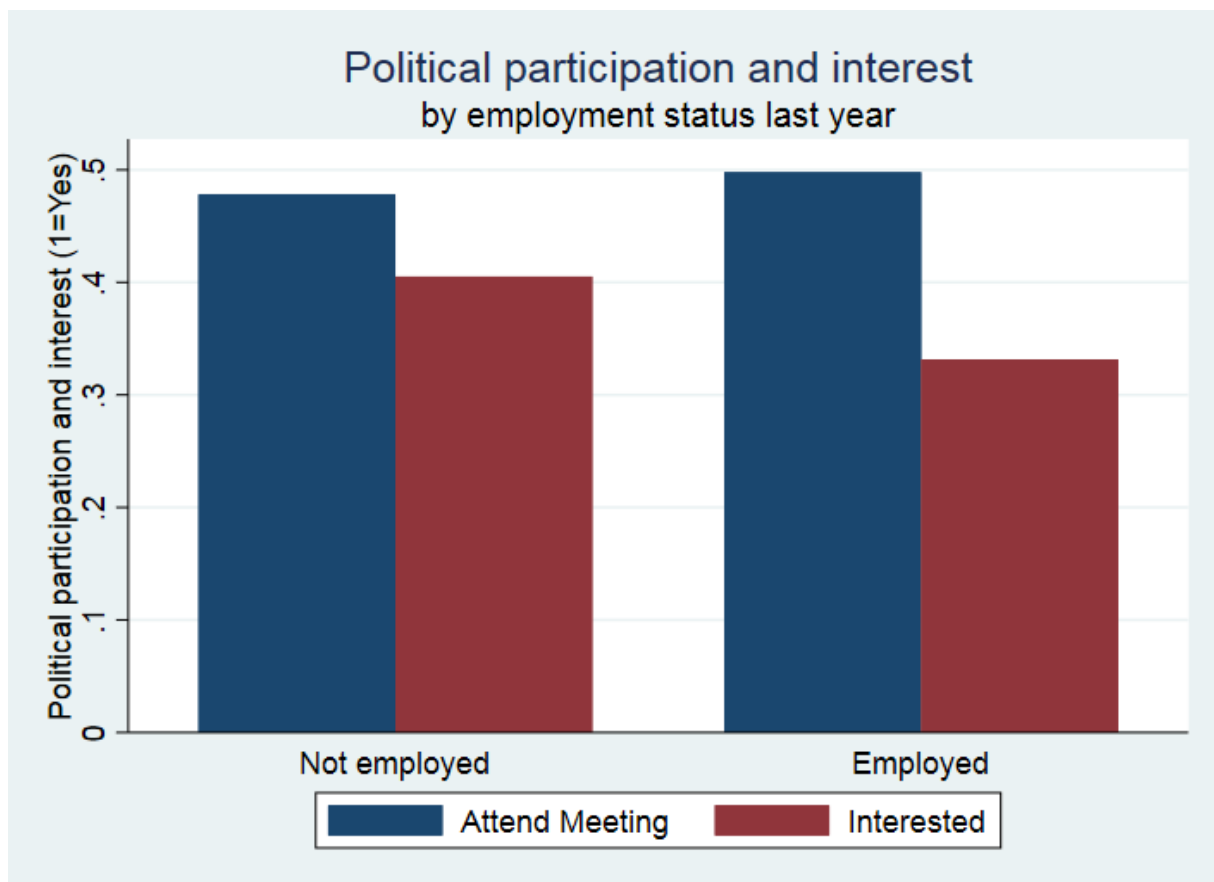
We also conducted qualitative interviews, collected by our research team from May to November 2017 in the industrial parks in Hawassa, Dukem (Eastern Industrial Park) and Mekelle. We randomly selected 20 women from our quantitative sample from each of the three locations and conducted in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. The supplement of qualitative data with survey data made it possible to go deeper into individual experiences as well as contextual issues, and to get a thicker description of the mechanisms that decide the relationship between female labor force participation and political participation.

<sup>3</sup> The categories were “very much interested”, “somewhat interested”, “not very interested”, “not at all interested”, and we coded the first two as a “Yes” to the answer, and the two latter as “No”.

## 6. Results

We find that those who were employed during the last 12 months were equally likely to attend local meetings and less interested in politics than those who did not engage in such activities. Figure 1 shows that for both groups, around 50 percent of our sample, had attended a community meeting last year (48 and 50 percent). However, only 33 percent of the employed women indicated that they were very much or somewhat interested in politics and government, while 41 percent of those who were not employed indicated the same.

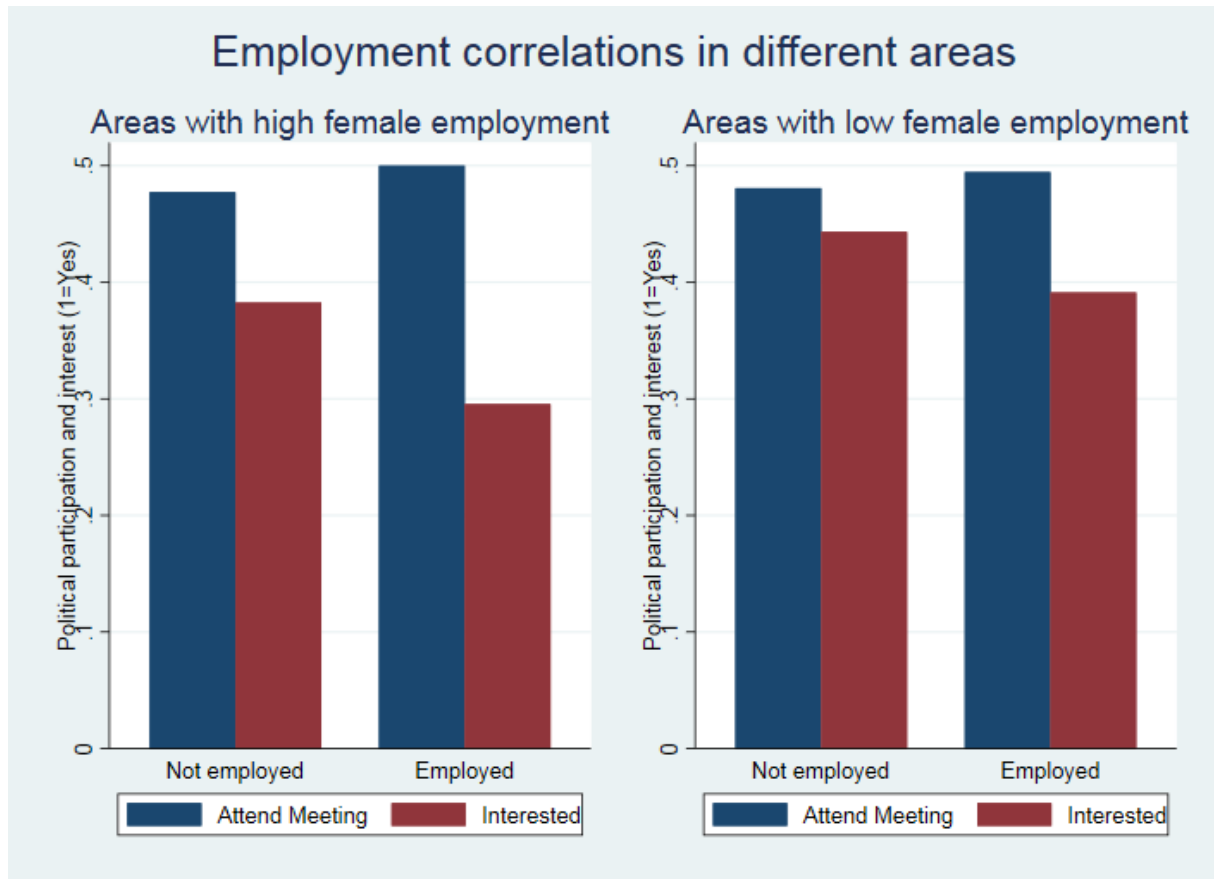
Figure 1. Political interest and community meeting participation (n=1618).



Note: “Employed” indicates that the respondent had been engaged in income generating activities during the last 12 months, “Not employed” that she had not.

Similarly, Figure 2 shows that the share of women attending meetings was similar for employed women as for the others, irrespective of whether they were residing in areas with high female employment or in areas with low female employment. However, we see that fewer employed women were interested in politics compared to those not employed, especially in areas with high density of female employment. There is also such a difference in areas with low female employment, although smaller in magnitude. We also note that fewer women are interested in politics in areas with high female employment and that those employed are significantly less interested than the others.

Figure 2. Political interest and community meeting participation, by employment status and type of area. (n=1618)



Note: “Employed” indicates that the respondent had been engaged in income generating activities during the last 12 months, “Not employed” that she had not. The density of women workers is defined by the median of the different factory areas where they were interviewed.

In Table 2 we investigate the patterns more systematically in regression analyses. More specifically, we estimate linear probability models (LPM), i.e., linear regression models. We estimate LPM models for several reasons, first of all since they are easier to interpret and secondly because we will later include interaction terms, rendering non-linear models problematic (Mood 2010). In any case, we show in Online Appendix Table A1 that the interpretation of the results is similar if we use probit or logit and if we retain the multivalued codings of the variables and run ordered probit or ordered logit models.

We see in column 1 of Panel A that the correlation between employment and political participation is not statistically significant. In column 1 of Panel B we see that employment and political interest is negatively correlated. In columns 2 of both panels we add controls and we note that this does not change the results much. As some of these controls are likely affected by the employment of the woman in the household we also present regressions with only exogenous controls in Online Appendix Table A2. These results are very similar. In columns 3 of both panels we include whether the women live in areas with high female employment and we see that this is also uncorrelated with meeting participation but negatively correlated with

political interest. In columns 4 and 5 we split the sample in areas with high and low female employment and we note that the correlation between being employed and political participation/interest is similar in the different types of areas. We also note that the R-squared is very low, and in particular that employment status alone explains very little of the variation in our dependent variables.

*Table 2: Regression tables for political participation and interest.*

Panel A: Attend meeting last year (incl. by area: high/low female employment)					
VARIABLES	(1) Meeting	(2) Meeting	(3) Meeting	(4) High female employment	(5) Low female employment
Employed last year	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)
Years of education		0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Age		0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)
Household income		0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Partner employed last year		-0.02 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.12)	0.04 (0.14)	-0.13 (0.24)
Number of children		0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.05* (0.03)
High share of employed women			0.01 (0.03)		
Observations	1,618	1,569	1,552	930	622
R-squared	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.02
Mean for non-employed	0.48	0.48	0.41	0.47	0.48

Panel B: Interested in politics (incl. by area: high/low female employment)					
VARIABLES	(1) Interested	(2) Interested	(3) Interested	(4) High female employment	(5) High female employment
Employed last year	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.04* (0.03)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)
Years of education		0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
Age		0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)
Household income		0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Partner employed last year		-0.16 (0.11)	-0.15 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.13)	-0.19 (0.23)
Number of children		-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.03)
High share of employed women			-0.05* (0.03)		
Observations	1,617	1,568	1,551	930	621
R-squared	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.00
Mean for non-employed	0.41	0.41	0.41	0.39	0.44

*Robust standard errors in parentheses*

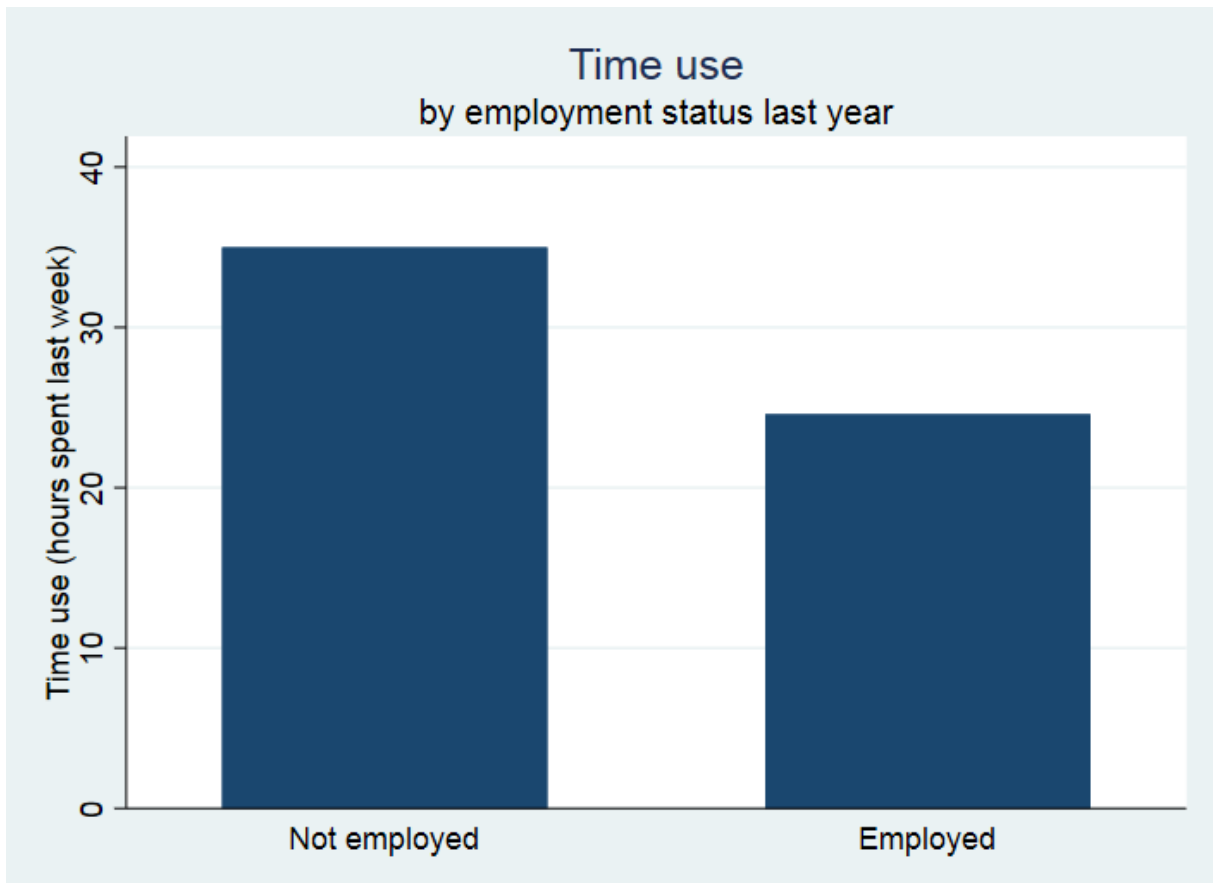
\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

The finding that there does not seem to be a positive correlation between employment and participation in local meetings contradicts with conventional theory and the findings of similar studies in a Western and developed context. It illustrates that employment may have a different and lesser effect in a poorer and non-democratic context than in a developed one, and that there may be other, more important determinants of political participation. They conform, however with findings from other Sub-Saharan African countries (Isaksson 2014), where there is no statistically significant correlation between full time employment and willingness to take part in meetings.

The complementary qualitative interviews from our study points at some reasons why employment is not positively correlated with meeting attendance in an Ethiopian setting. Employed women interviewed expressed that they had no time for attending meetings. Many reported that they were not called for meetings by the local community leaders either, as the local leaders knew that they were busy. Overtime contributed to their time constraints; many workers explained that they often had to work overtime in order to reach production targets. In one industrial park, workers tell of twelve hours working days, six days a week, and shorter working hours on Sundays. This was also confirmed by the local Labor and Social Affairs offices. Similarly, married women in rural Ethiopia have many time-taking responsibilities within the household and for maintaining social relations (Getahun and Villanger 2018a). Figure 3 shows that women who had a job had around 10 hours less of leisure per week than the others.

*Figure 3. Hours of leisure, by employment status (n=1618)*





*Note: “Employed” indicates that the respondent had been engaged in income generating activities during the last 12 months, “Not employed” that she had not.*

It is of particular interest to see how different sub-groups of women participate in local meetings, and especially whether there are differences associated with their employment status. If we look across sub-groups, we see some interesting differences by education and age.

## ***7. Concluding Discussion***

The revision of the Family Code in year 2000 made it possible for women to take jobs outside the home, something they do on an increasing level. New job opportunities have opened up especially in the manufacturing industries, where women constitute the majority of the workforce. But these jobs, supported by a recent revision in the Labor Code, does not seem to be associated with a growth of women’s political participation. This is an illustration of what Htun, Jensensius and Tønnesen (2018 in this volume) have pointed out as a paradox in many contexts of legal change: how the often contradictory ways that different legal changes have shaped patterns of agency for women.

One of our main findings is that there is not a significant correlation between employment and political participation. This resonates with the literature from other developing countries, and may be important for understanding the political processes in poor non-democratic countries such as Ethiopia. Our second main finding is that political interest is actually negatively

correlated with employment. Both of our main findings are robust to controlling for age and education, factors we show to be correlated with political activity and interest.

An important reason why women who are not employed are equally active in meetings and more interested in politics could be that those who stay at home may be under more pressure to participate than those who are working away from their community most of the day. We know from studies of the Ethiopian political context that there is an active push from the government and the ruling party for women to participate in Women's Associations and Women's Development Teams (Aalen and Muriaas 2018, Emmenegger 2016). Our supplementary qualitative interviews with local female community leaders express that few of their members were employed, and most of them were housewives. They expressed that it was difficult to mobilise factory workers, as they were never at home.

Taking the qualitative results back to the quantitative data we show that women's time use is correlated with employment. In particular, employed women have much less leisure time. Our results may thereby suggest that legal changes to spur female employment may not lead to increased political participation and interest. If women become time poor from being employed, their interest in politics may decrease and theories from the developed world can not be directly transported to the developing world where time burdens for women may be different.

Another implication of our findings is that non-participation and disinterest in politics should not necessarily be seen as an expression of disempowerment in an authoritarian context. We can think of a scenario where employment is not simply a time thief that is depriving the women of the chance of engaging politically. In a setting where the regime pressure to participate is seen as a burden, the time spent at the workplace may actually become a resource, enabling women to resist the pressure to participate. This opportunity to resist and evade is reduced for women who stay at home all day. In this way, employed women may actually have a better chance of avoiding the sham participation that the authoritarian regime provides. Whether this is the case for the Ethiopian factory workers needs more research. Still, it points to the importance of understanding women's participation and agency in its specific context.

Although work outside the home may enable women to resist pressure to participate and therefore provide some kind of empowerment, the nature of the employment that Ethiopian women are offered may work in the opposite direction, and may not have an empowering effect. Research from the US shows that there are specific aspects of employment that have more impact on women's participation than others, and these tend to be linked to high level jobs and fulltime employment more than part time and low level jobs (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005). The jobs offered to women in manufacturing industries in Ethiopia are low paid, do not require much education or skills, and although they may be full time, are often not regulated by contracts. These kinds of jobs may therefore be less empowering than managerial or supervisory jobs, which require more education and personal skills, which deduce more participatory assets than low-level jobs. In addition, the tasks they perform in the factories are not challenging the traditional gender division of labour. While male factory workers tend to take supervisory roles or do heavy physical work, female employees do menial and repetitive operations. This contrasts with the situation in Zambia, where economic deterioration has led women to take what have been perceived as men's jobs, thereby challenging gender stereotypes and paving the way for women to participate in politics (Evans 2016).

The qualitative interviews from our study show that factory owners prefer to recruit and train low or unskilled women. The low-skilled women are perceived to be loyal and honest, as opposed to educated and experienced ones, who may be more demanding and unruly. This is also confirmed by government officials, who deal with recruitment of women to the factories: ‘The Chinese do not need educated [workers]. They want obedient people’ (Labor and Social Affairs official, Oromia). In the new industrial parks, workers are given short time on-the-job training, and their working tasks in the operation lines are of a menial nature. So in practice, there is little technology transfer through employment. Instead of hard-skill training, workers are given so-called soft skill training. This training is about how to behave in an industrial setting, how to manage time, personal hygiene, and respect for managers. In essence, this is a disciplining more than empowering experience. Although the women may, through their work experience, develop common interests and see the need for organizing, there are few chances of organizing in the factories, especially when labor unions are actively worked against by factory owners. In order to deal with labor conflicts, factory owners select labor representatives, which they call for meetings. In case of strikes and walkouts, a common reaction is to fire the protesters (interviews with workers and government officials).

The findings from our study of employment and participation in Ethiopia have therefore larger implications for the understanding of political agency in a non-democratic and developing context. Our study has shown that in an authoritarian setting like Ethiopia, regime mobilization accounts for much of the political participation taking place in local communities. This corresponds with studies of women’s political participation in other African autocracies, such as Rwanda and Uganda (Burnet 2012, Tripp 2006). This means that individual resource endowments, such as income and job status, seem to have a lesser impact here than in advanced democracies. In order to understand political agency in an authoritarian context, it is therefore necessary to incorporate analyses of the wider political conditions, in addition to variables connected to individual characteristics of the women under scrutiny.

A second implication of our study is that the analysis of employment and political participation in growing economies with expansion of large-scale export oriented industries needs to account for the nature of the work that is offered to women. Our study has demonstrated that the characteristics of employment offered to women in Ethiopia’s manufacturing industries – the lack of labor rights, menial work tasks, and long working hours - seems to be less empowering than what we would expect from more advanced jobs, or jobs that are traditionally performed by men. This corresponds with findings from both developed and developing contexts, and reminds us that jobs’ empowering effect may be highly dependent on the characteristics of the job, and not necessarily the job in itself.

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