Tackling Gender Discriminatory Inheritance Law Privately: Lessons from A Survey Experiment in Tunisia
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**Background**
- Gender discrimination correlates negatively with important developmental outcomes (Duflo 2012, Jayachandran 2015).
- Most Muslim-majority countries apply Islamic inheritance law - historically very progressive but systematically favoring sons over daughters (Sait & Lim 2008).
- Islamic inheritance law has been associated with women’s precariousness in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia (CNDH 2015, Khodary 2018, Tanneur 2020).
- Legal reform may backfire in the presence of sticky social norms (Rosenblum 2015, Roy 2015 and Bhalotra et al. 2020).

**Tunisia**
- Inheritance is the only remaining openly gender discriminatory law in the Tunisian constitution.
- From 2018: social movement demanding gender equality in inheritance.
- Yet, the reform proposal was never voted upon.

**Gifting (“Riba”)**
- Art. 200, XII, Tunisian Code Personal Status: individuals can make gifts pre-mortem.
- If parents make a gift to their daughter while alive, a more gender equitable inheritance split can be reached.

⇒ “Second-best” alternative to legal reform?

**Research Questions**
1. To what extent does gifting represent a private alternative to reform of gender discriminatory inheritance law?
2. Does information on gifting and/or reform support have a causal impact on individual attitudes towards women’s right to inheritance?

**Experimental Design**
- Nationwide phone survey, N=1,505 adults
- 2 survey waves, spaced by 4 weeks
- Baseline survey: demographics, religious conservatism, beliefs about others’ reform support
- T1: information about gifting
- T2: first belief correction (the actual support for legal reform is 35%), then information on gifting

**Outcomes in Endline 1 and 2**
1. Ideal bequest split between daughter and son in a hypothetical scenario;
2. Own support for reform;
3. Willingness to use gifting to reach a more gender equal bequest allocation.

**Hypotheses**
1. T1 and T2 ↑ ideal bequest and gifting.
2. T1 and T2 ↓ reform support if gifting is seen as a substitute to legal reform.
3. Individuals try to comply with the perceived “social norm” ⇒ The belief correction in T2 should affect preferences.

**Results**
- Almost 60% underestimate support for inheritance law reform.
- Only about 1 in 3 Tunisian adults is favorable of legal reform – more than 2 in 3 is favorable of using gifting.
- The “gender gap” is small: women are only about 10 percentage points more likely to support reform than men.
- Gifting is widely used (1 in 4 has some experience with it) but women rarely make gifts.
- Especially older age cohorts, wealthy and religious individuals favor gifting. Female respondents favor reform.
- T1: significantly ↑ ideal bequest.
- T2: no overall effect on respondents’ preferences.
- T2 heterogeneity: respondents with correct beliefs significantly less likely to favor gender equal bequest split and to favor reform.

⇒ Changing the social norm is not effective.

**Why?**
- Individuals who expect low reform support are more likely to hold conservative gender norms themselves.
- Strong political opinions
- Strong political opinions make preferences less responsive to informational treatments (Alesina et al. 2018, Setteile 2022, Haaland & Roth 2023).
- The perceived social norm is not acting as a constraint on individuals’ preferences.

**Conclusions**
- Perceptions of public reform support predict own reform support but correcting perceptions fails to yield the expected effects.
- Individual political preferences are strong. The perceived social norm is not the binding constraint.
- Overall, demand for legal reform is low. By contrast, self-reported willingness to gift to daughters is high.
- The wealthy are relatively more likely to favor gifting. Women are relatively more likely to favor legal reform and in practice, women rarely gift.

⇒ Gifting seems a viable alternative to legal reform but mostly for a relatively wealthy and gender progressive subsample of the population.

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**Figure 1:** According to Islamic inheritance law, a son obtains double the bequest share of a daughter.

[Image of inheritance law chart]

**Figure 2:** Experimental design

**Figure 3:** Perceptions of Tunisians’ support for legal reform (aggregating both genders and pooling respondents of both genders)

**Figure 4:** Outcome means (control group)

**Figure 5:** Predictors of favoring gifting over reform and having made a gift to one’s daughter (marginal effects from a logit model)

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Disclaimer: figure 1 intends to illustrate the legal status quo. There is no intention to make normative statements on gender roles.