

# Educating for Equality

Feb 13th, 2012 | By [Angela Chung](#) | Category: [Child & Family](#), [International Affairs](#), [Law & Justice](#), [Research in Brief](#)  
**[Education as Liberation?](#)**

Willa Friedman, Michael Kremer, Edward Miguel, Rebecca Thornton.  
*National Bureau of Economic Research*. 2011.

This past June, the Federation of Women Lawyers and five other women's lobby groups successfully blocked the swearing-in ceremony for Kenyan Supreme Court judges, signaling a shift in female autonomy within Kenya's court system. The lobbyists cited an imbalance of gender representation among judges and, as a result, **[two female officials](#)** now occupy the seven-member bench.

These judges represent only a slight change from a long-standing patriarchal history in Kenya where girls are still expected to fulfill traditional gender roles. A recent illustration of this tension occurred in Narok South, where girls attending Enkare Nairowua Girls Secondary School were nearly **[abducted](#)** by **[Maasai Morans](#)** who invaded the school in search of wives.

The recent rise in education and democracy in developing countries such as Kenya prompts authors Willa Friedman, Michael Kremer, Edward Miguel, and Rebecca Thornton to explore the relationship between education and gender equality in a **[follow-up study](#)** on a subgroup of the **[Girls Scholarship Program \(GSP\)](#)** in western Kenya. At the time of the study, the participants were 17 to 21 years old, allowing the study to collect information about school attainment, marriage, fertility, migration, and social and political views.

The **[initial GSP study](#)** was conducted in 2001 and was designed to incentivize high-achieving girls to stay in school. The program's incentive was a scholarship of \$38 USD, which was awarded to sixth-grade girls who scored in the top 15% on the government's standardized exam. Overall, the incentive program increased girls' test scores and had a particularly strong effect on lower-achieving girls.

The follow-up study finds that girls in the treatment schools demonstrate a stronger support for female autonomy. They are less likely to accept domestic violence or agree to an arranged marriage, but are more likely to elope, compared to girls in the control school. In addition, girls in the GSP consumed more media, are more politically cognizant, and can identify their **[favorite newspaper](#)**. GSP girls also have less deference to authority, are less satisfied with the government, and are likely to support statements such as, "As citizens, we should be more active in questioning the actions of our leaders."

Despite this increased political awareness, there is no significant variation between GSP girls and those in the control group regarding participation in political and community affairs. More importantly, the GSP girls are just as likely to believe that they have very little political efficacy. The combination of the GSP girls' political dissatisfaction and their perception of powerlessness provides an explanation for their greater acceptance of violence in the political arena.

Authors of the study emphasize that their key findings are for rural Kenyan girls. Hence, caution should be taken when generalizing from the study. However, the paper suggests that educating disadvantaged social groups can allow members to become more politically informed, have a greater desire for autonomy, and reject the idea of being powerless. Female presence on the Kenyan Supreme Court provides evidence that educated women in Kenya are both exerting their political autonomy and challenging the traditional constraints of women's roles.

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