

Life isn't a Highway: Measuring the Cost of Transport Constraints for Women in Pakistan

Sarah F. Thompson
December 3, 2019

Abstract

Women's political participation and representation in Pakistan remain low despite progressive electoral laws and recent institutional reforms. Additionally, a social and religious norm of *chador aur chardiwari* ("the veil and four walls") discourages women's movement outside of their homes. Data show that when they do leave the home, they have a lower quality of transportation than men, relying on slower modes of transport and experiencing sexual harassment at high rates. In this paper, I will explore the link between mobility and women's civic engagement, examining transport decisions as a household-level phenomenon. This project has several goals: to measure the unequal costs women face for transport, to test theories about why this is the case, and to suggest how mobility shapes participation in civic life. Using a survey experiment in Lahore, Pakistan, I will measure the additional transport costs faced by women when complying with social norms surrounding appropriate modes of transport, and test the willingness of women to expend resources to overcome these constraints for political and non-political tasks. I also will evaluate if a commonly-cited justification for restrictions on women's mobility—that streets are too unsafe—is driven by real safety concerns or social norms against women's involvement in the public sphere. In doing so, I provide some of the first evidence linking an understudied resource, mobility, to outcomes of interest within the field of political science.