

ECON 460: Women, Work, and the World Economy

Reading Guide: “*On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough*”

Alberto Alesina, Paola Giuliano, and Nathan Nunn’s paper “On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough” and full of technical details. I suggest reading each section and then working through the review questions for that section before proceeding to the next section of the paper. Pay particular attention to Sections II through V, as they illustrate the fundamental strategy underlying all of the authors’ analysis.

I. Introduction

1. What is the main hypothesis that the authors seek to test in this paper?
2. To what extent have the authors correctly summarized Boserup’s argument (from “Male and Female Farming Systems”)?
3. The authors argue that adoption of the plough may have been plausibly exogenous by referencing research by Frederic Pryor. What was Pryor’s main argument?

II. Conceptual Framework

1. Based on the first paragraph of Section II, what are two reasons that the authors suggest to explain the fact that plow agriculture is typically done by men while shifting cultivation agriculture is typically done by women?
2. How do the authors define “cultural beliefs”?
3. Why do the authors suggest that cultural traits like beliefs about the appropriate role for women in society may be relatively persistent?

III. The Historical Impacts of Traditional Plough Agriculture

1. What is the *Ethnographic Atlas*? What types of data does it contain, and where do the data come from?
2. What is the main empirical association that the authors examine in this section of the paper? What hypothesis do they test? How do they translate this hypothesis into a statistical test?
3. What society-level characteristics do they control for in their analysis?
4. What do they find?
5. What is the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample*, and how does it differ from the *Ethnographic Atlas*?

6. How do they authors use the *Standard Cross-Cultural Sample* to extend their analysis, and what do they find?

IV. Linking the Past to the Present: Data and Methodology

1. What do you take away from the map in Figure II?
2. What potential concerns with the analysis do the authors discuss, and how do they propose to address each of them?

V. Country-Level OLS Estimates

1. What outcome variables do the authors consider in their analysis of the cross-country relationship between traditional plough use and modern gender norms?
2. What do the scatter plots presented in Figure III suggest about the unconditional cross-country relationships between use of the plough and women's participation in economic and political life in the modern era?
3. What empirical specification do they use in their cross-country regression analysis?
4. What are the headline results from Table III?
5. How do the results presented in Table III differ from the results presented in Table IV?
6. How much of the observed variation in female labor force participation is explained by historical plough use?
7. What is the empirical relationship between the traditional level of female involvement in agriculture and present-day female labor force participation? What evidence do the authors present on this topic?

VI. Subnational Estimates

1. What outcome variables do the authors construct from the *World Values Surveys*?
2. What are the main findings reported in Table V?
3. What is the source of the data used in the regressions presented in Table VI?
4. What is the main empirical takeaway from Table VI?

VII. Addressing the Issue of Causality

1. Why might the authors be concerned that the results presented so far do not demonstrate the causal impact of historic plough use on women's outcomes in the present? What are the most plausible confounds?
2. What controls do the authors add to their regressions in an attempt to address concerns about omitted variable bias? How convincing is this approach (to establishing causality)?
3. How do the authors use instrumental variables to attempt to address concerns about omitted variable bias?

VIII. Evidence from the Children of Immigrants

1. How do the authors use data on the labor force participation of immigrants to explore the mechanism underlying their main empirical results? What hypothesis do they test?
2. What regression specification(s) do they use to test this hypothesis?
3. What do they find?

IX. Conclusions

Congratulations! You made it to the end of our first economics paper! They won't all be this long.