

1

A POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH TO GENDER INEQUALITY

For thousands of years, in most of the world's societies, women have had fewer life chances than men. Certainly they have been under-represented in the ranks of the rich and powerful. But even among ordinary folk, women have been subordinated to their fathers and husbands, and sometimes to brothers and grown sons. Even in the twenty-first century, men still dominate, if to a lesser extent. Patriarchy is so much a part of life that for many people it is largely invisible. This book takes male dominance as a puzzle to be examined.

Its sheer ubiquity among many different cultures and levels of economic development has convinced many scholars that patriarchy is simply a part of human nature, whether that nature's source is evolutionary or divine. But although patriarchy has ancient roots, it has varied considerably across time and place. Male dominance was much less pronounced in hunting and gathering communities before the Neolithic Revolution, and today young women in countries as diverse as the United States and Sweden look at the subordination of their grandmothers with bewilderment. A huge variety of factors has shaped this variation, ranging from biology to culture to changing economic and political arrangements. Historians and social scientists have illuminated different dimensions of them, but none has paid sufficient attention to the ways in which these arrangements interact with the domestic dynamics between women and men. That is our focus here.

We believe the standard tools of political economy can help to explain

why patriarchy is so common. It is not an inevitable part of our evolutionary heritage, like language acquisition or an omnivorous diet, but is instead a product of specific economic conditions that are nonetheless very widespread.¹ Existing social science on the family and gender relations tends to divide into two broad methodological traditions. One is rooted in a macrosociological approach that looks at how the organization of political, economic, and social institutions shapes ideologies and affects men and women differently in terms of income, careers, and political power. Esping-Andersen (1999), for example, attributes gender inequality to the institutions of the welfare state and the role of markets in the provision of services.² The large feminist literature on gender and the political economy traces macrolevel effects all the way down to the individual, where internalized social norms can create constrained preferences.³ The other approach is a microeconomic analysis of how the division of household labor, fertility choices, and consumption patterns arise from considerations of household efficiency or as the result of bargaining within the family.⁴ Both approaches provide valuable insights into gender inequality and family policy, but they are limited by the focus on either macro- or microlevel processes, and by their relative neglect of each other. In this book we seek a systematic integration of the two perspectives by embedding a microlevel household bargaining model in a macrolevel mode of production framework. In this embedded bargaining model the balance of power between the sexes inside the household is shaped by macrolevel conditions that define “outside options” in the event of marital dissolution.⁵ Because the relevant macrolevel conditions vary across time and space, so does the power of men and women in household bargaining. Who does the laundry, who decides where to spend the family vacation, how to spend income, and so on, are all shaped by the organization of the economy and the political system, so we need a model that pays attention to macrolevel institutions and processes. This includes cultural values in the sense that equilibria in the embedded bargaining game come with common knowledge about appropriate behavior. Such common knowledge is what we usually refer to as norms, and these can take on an independent causal force in situations where there are multiple equilibria.

But it is insufficient to say that macroconditions shape household bargaining since the microdecisions by household members in turn have sig-

nificant implications for macro-outcomes. When some women decide to enter into paid employment in spite of the attending social opprobrium—whether to achieve greater economic independence, improve their influence over household decisions, or as an insurance against divorce—they change the incentives of other women to do the same. Because of the externalities of individual decisions, once changes have been set in motion among some women they can cause a cascade of behavioral changes that shifts the macrolevel equilibrium and alters the division of labor, public policies, and even gender norms. In this book we therefore seek to explore the macroimplications of microdecisions, even as we try to understand how the microchoices are shaped by macroconditions. In this sense our ambition is to provide a general equilibrium model of the household where distinct family structures and gender norms are complements to distinct modes of production and political systems.

The embedded bargaining model, we suggest, can help make sense of many puzzling facts that are at the center of much comparative work on the family and political economy. One is the surprising speed of change in patriarchal norms, which philosophers and social scientists for centuries assumed to be immutable. Within just one generation a majority of girls in countries as different as the United States, Spain, and Sweden are brought up to have completely different expectations about their role in life than their mothers, or certainly their grandmothers. Reflecting the depth of this change, fifty years ago women were a rarity in higher education; today they outnumber men in many, perhaps most, Western countries. From the perspective of our embedded bargaining model, this transformation marks a shift to a new equilibrium with wide-ranging implications for the economy, gender equality, divorce, partisan politics, and gender norms.

To illustrate this shift in terms of norms, think of values that validate female subordination as a collective giving up on the possibility of female economic independence. When parents know that there is limited market demand for their daughter's labor, they will be more likely to feel obliged to equip her with attributes that give her every advantage in the marriage market instead. But rarely do parents—let alone their daughters—have to behave strategically in any conscious way, because social norms have a tendency to consolidate around economically efficient outcomes, and people

internalize those norms unobtrusively. In game-theoretic terms such norms are equivalent to common knowledge about appropriate behavior. In many societies, girls are never taught why they must be docile, demure, and sexually chaste. They only learn that this behavior is proper, decent, and morally correct. They are rewarded for engaging in it and punished for deviating from it. But when economic autonomy becomes not only a possibility but increasingly also a necessity in a world where divorce is an ever-present concern, caring parents will teach their daughters the value of education, careers, and independence. Without having to think twice, girls brought up with these values will now tell you that an active life outside the family is the most natural thing for a woman. In chapter 2 we develop this argument further and show how rapid and fundamental changes in norms are possible when changes in macrolevel conditions set in motion microlevel choices that have large externalities. We also explain how gender norms can be understood as complements to particular modes of production.

Related to changes in gender roles is the rise in the gender gap in voting behavior that has been recorded during the past few decades. Whereas forty years ago women everywhere had political attitudes that tended to be more conservative than those of men, today the pattern is reversed in many, though not all, countries. How can we explain this shift in political preferences, and why are there countries where it has not happened? We think the answer lies in the interaction of bargaining within the household and changing macrolevel conditions. We also seek to explain why women in a country like the United States continue to be vastly underrepresented in the political arena even as they have made major inroads into the labor market and even as they seek different policies than men. This is particularly puzzling in a comparative perspective because in countries as diverse as Spain and Sweden women have reached virtual parity with men in political representation yet underperform American women in terms of gaining access to high-powered private sector jobs. Again, we think, the explanation lies in the manner macrolevel conditions—in this case political institutions—interact with microlevel decisions in the household.

Another central puzzle we seek to explain is the fact that women in countries as different as Italy and Japan are no longer having enough children to reproduce the population. This “fertility crisis” has potentially dire

consequences for the future funding of the welfare state, and it cannot be disentangled from difficult political questions concerning reforms of pension systems and even whether to allow more immigration. A straightforward explanation would be that women are now having careers instead of children—a view that is popular on the religious right. But while the relationship between female labor force participation and fertility was unambiguously negative thirty years ago, today it is positive: countries where women spend a lot of time in the household tend to have lower fertility rates than countries where women are very active in the labor market. Our contention is that the explanation for the fertility crisis flows from the same underlying logic as the explanation for the political underrepresentation of women or the shift in gender norms.

In the chapters that follow, we attempt to show how these and other puzzling facts can be accounted for within the same embedded bargaining framework, integrating micro- and macrologics from the existing literature. But our ultimate aim is not to promote a particular political economy approach to the study of the family and gender relations. It is to understand why inequality in all its many facets has such a strong gender dimension, and why and how this millennium-old fact may finally be changing in a fundamental way.

Family Bargaining, Work, and Political Representation

Given the predominance of agricultural production in human history, it is not surprising that patriarchy—which imbues this economic division of labor with moral imperative—has been similarly entrenched in human experience. The fact that patriarchy was looser in hunter-gatherer societies, and is once again losing ground, is evidence that material causes rather than immutable human hardwiring are responsible for this otherwise exceedingly widespread form of social organization.

In modern societies, too, outside options influence bargaining within the family. We find from survey data that women with better outside options—in the form of education and job opportunities—do relatively less housework than women who lack those options, even when we control for actual hours of paid work. It is a given, of course, that stay-at-home women do more housework than those who work outside the home. But

we have found that a woman is able to pass off more housework onto her husband if there is merely the *possibility* of her working outside the home, as indicated by her education and by the demand for female labor in the marketplace.

Industrialization reduces the productivity advantage of male labor, but the modern welfare state hits women with an unanticipated disadvantage. Among industrial economies, the more interventionist welfare states protect workers from easy layoffs. Employers invest in their workers' firm-specific skills and naturally want to maximize their returns. They want to avoid investing in people who will then leave, taking their accumulated human capital with them. But women are left out of this game because employers know they are more likely than men to interrupt their careers for child-bearing and other family work. This reduces firms' prospects of making good on long-term investments in women's human capital, and private sector firms in countries with robust labor protections thus tend to avoid hiring and promoting women. Although this dampening of female labor force participation is surely inadvertent, in most countries—in fact, in almost all of Europe outside Scandinavia—it remains unaddressed.

The market economies with the least interventionist governments are, paradoxically, the most congenial to female employment. Where labor markets are relatively unprotected, a worker's expected tenure at any given firm is correspondingly short. Workers invest in general skills that are transferable across firms, and employers structure production around a fungible workforce. They do not invest extensively in worker training and so do not worry that such training would go to waste on a woman who quits to raise a family. In economies where men are as insecure in their jobs as women, the playing field is more or less gender-neutral, and family bargaining tends to be relatively egalitarian. There are, of course, trade-offs: gender equality often comes at the cost of income inequality.

The possibility of divorce also shapes the bargaining environment in the family. Women are more likely to work—and likely to do less household work—in countries with higher divorce rates. The opposite is true in countries where legal or social barriers to divorce make it difficult to take outside options, even if they exist. Where partners are forced to treat the union as a going concern, bargaining—and the division of family labor—may

reflect old social norms more than would be warranted by relative levels of male and female labor productivity alone.

Domestic bargaining also affects such family decisions as how many children to have. All else being equal (and of course all else is not strictly equal since people have children for myriad reasons), as higher market demand for female labor increases women's options for remunerative work outside the home, fertility is correspondingly lower. But here we find a striking anomaly: among rich democracies, fertility is relatively high in countries with the highest female labor force participation. Apparently the opportunity cost story provides only a partial account.

Our bargaining logic unravels the puzzle. In countries with high divorce rates, women are willing to have children only if doing so does not damage their ability to earn income on their own, should the need arise. Countries with a high demand for female labor—either because of fluid private sector labor markets that do not discriminate against women or because of large public sector employment of women—provide would-be mothers with the greatest opportunity for combining family with continuous work.

Fertility is lowest of all in countries, such as Japan and Italy, with low demand for female labor and high divorce barriers—the conditions least conducive to female bargaining clout. One might expect women in these circumstances to give up on the possibility of autonomy and embrace the traditional maternal role. Perhaps because of the diffusion of values from more feminist countries, these women instead have fewer children. It is as if they are trying to eke out whatever economic independence they can. A vexing question for governments confronting this kind of fertility “strike”—some of them ironically in countries with a strong Catholic Church—is whether they need to embrace major reforms in family and labor market policies to address what is widely regarded as an emerging funding crisis for the welfare state. Much may depend on the willingness of women to abandon their embrace of policies designed to guarantee the security of the male breadwinner. If they do, the convergence of fiscal and electoral incentives may at long last compel governments everywhere to unleash the economic potential of women. This brings us to the emerging gender gap.

The Gender Gap in Democratic Politics

Government policy can influence how easily women straddle their household and market roles, both by subsidizing childcare and other family work and by employing women in the public sector. The bargaining model predicts that men and women will have different preferences over these policies since they will place some value on cultivating their respective outside options apart from maximizing family income. When we tested this proposition empirically, we found that women are systematically more supportive of government spending on services and employment than men in the same income bracket. This result accounts for the gender voting gap in developed countries, where women are now more likely than men to vote for candidates and parties on the left.

A cultural theory of societal value change might predict that the gender voting gap would disappear with the crumbling of patriarchy. Instead we find that the difference between male and female preferences is largest in the most gender-equal countries. This is in fact what the bargaining model would predict. Women in countries with a strong demand for female labor are more likely to have preferences on public policy that are distinct from their husbands' than women in countries with low female labor force participation. It makes sense in a bargaining context that women would favor policies that help them improve their outside options, while men should favor the opposite. Curiously enough, however, we do not find a greater gender gap in countries with more gender inequality. To the contrary, in those societies where women are in the most subordinate position in the economy and in the family, they are least likely to deviate from their husbands even when the political system allows them to do so. This is one of the puzzles we seek to solve in this book.

There is another empirical puzzle as well: the absence of a correlation between the gender voting gap—or any other measure of societal feminism—and female political representation. Countries with larger gender voting gaps do not, on average, have more female politicians. Although the female labor force participation is associated with a rise in the proportion of legislative seats going to female politicians, the effect is strongly contingent on the electoral rules. Proportional representation systems, which pit parties against each other at the national or regional level, have more

female politicians than plurality systems, in which individual candidates compete for a single seat in geographic districts. Why this happens requires some exploration, since electoral rules were often chosen before female political representation was permitted and so cannot have been designed with that in mind.

If we think about the market for politicians in the same terms as other labor markets, we can see how electoral rules that place a premium on career continuity can create a bias against female success. The political market acts much like a labor market with long-term contracts, which creates statistical discrimination against women through the expectation of career interruptions for family reasons. District-based systems, particularly those that require politicians to establish strong personal reputations, favor politicians who can accumulate political capital over a long career. As long as mothers are the default caretakers of children, women politicians will compete at a disadvantage against men, who can begin their careers early and stick with the job. Voters need have no predisposition against women for this disadvantage to exist, and indeed, female candidates who pass the nomination hurdles tend to do as well as men. But because of past career interruptions, relatively few women can match the human capital of men at any given stage in their careers.

In proportional electoral systems, by contrast, each party presents voters with a slate of candidates who represent the party's collective face. Because parties compete with each other on programmatic grounds, attention centers on the policies each party advocates rather than on the personal qualities or political clout of individual candidates. Female politicians do not confront high barriers to advancement in this system because time spent on family work does not interfere with acquiring the qualities that win politicians a place on the list: loyalty to the party platform and the ability to articulate the party's priorities. Qualification for higher office does not depend on seniority and the accumulation of personal political capital. The exceptions are the top leadership posts, which as in the district-based systems require accumulated experience, networks, and bargaining skills. Even for these positions, however, women often have a better chance than in majoritarian systems because the pool of experienced female politicians is larger, and because the party continues to play a greater role in policy formation and competition for voters.⁶

Several kinds of evidence favor this explanation over the alternative, that there exists a cultural bias against women in politics. In addition to the cross-national comparisons in which proportional representation systems send more women into politics, we observe that in countries with mixed systems, women are more likely to be elected on lists than from districts. When countries switch electoral rules from proportional representation to districts, female representation declines, and it increases when they switch in the other direction. Another piece of evidence against a cultural explanation is that women do simultaneously better in business and worse in politics in the United States, with its district-based system, than in most countries with proportional representation. Clearly the cross-country comparisons are not merely picking up some national level of gender stereotyping.

Children in the Family Bargain

Our model poses a challenge to the traditional economic analysis of the family, in which the family is a unitary actor maximizing a single utility function: the family's overall well-being. The false power of that assumption becomes apparent when we see how many of the standard conclusions fall away when it is altered. A woman's individual utility may be lowered under a division of labor that maximizes family income if she has no control over the money's allocation. It is also lowered if she takes on all household duties and neglects developing her marketable skills, because marketable skills are the only ones she can use if the marriage dissolves. The problem is particularly severe for time spent on children, because this is a specific investment that carries no value in the remarriage market. Alternatively, a man may become worse off when his wife goes into the labor market and raises total family income if her enhanced bargaining power reduces his slice of an enlarged pie or if he now has less time for developing his own marketable skills.

Note that there is no implication here that people have children for purely economic reasons. That may have been approximately true in agricultural societies when children were an indispensable source of labor and insurance in old age. In postindustrial societies children tend to be a net cost that is outweighed only by deep-seated desires for love, companion-

ship, and procreation. Rational choice theory does not explain such desires, and nor do we. Our argument about fertility is instead that the desire to have children comes at a cost that differs across countries. The severity of the trade-off determines the extent to which women sacrifice children for careers. Rational choice theory *can* help us understand choices in this trade-off.

In fairness to the efficiency model, it is important to remember that the family is taken to be maximizing collective utility, including that of children, rather than income per se. It makes more sense to us to extend the model to include the utility of children rather than to subsume them into a family unit. What's best for the children may not be best for the parents, and vice versa.

The idea that childcare, at least during some stages of the child's life, cannot be subcontracted out of the family without some loss of utility for the child rests on assumptions that remain contested among experts.⁷ We will not weigh in on that debate, except to note that attachment parenting does not require that the mother be the principal caregiver. We focus instead on the parents' asymmetrical accumulation of marketable skills and experience. Even if the children are better off having a parent at home for some period, this benefit comes at some cost to a parent who, in order to provide it, abstains from investing in the labor market. The fact that it is difficult for the mother to exclude her husband from benefiting from her investment in the children—assuming both parents delight in healthy and well-adapted children—further undermines her bargaining position.⁸

This trade-off shows up in a striking tendency for women in some countries to have fewer children. What is sometimes called a fertility crisis has its source, we argue, in women's increasing desire for financial independence from men. If marketable skills are the only insurance against the consequences of divorce, and if childcare is too expensive or hard to find, women will sacrifice large families to build sustainable careers. The fertility crisis is perhaps the most vivid manifestation of the conflict between men and women over the division of labor. Efficiency arguments not only fail to explain this phenomenon but blind us to the efficiency consequences of gender conflict. As the Scandinavians realized when they faced their own fertility crisis, the funding of the welfare state, especially pensions and healthcare for older people, depends crucially on a large, economically ac-

tive younger generation. Efficiency, in the broader sense of intergenerational sustainability, cannot be separated from the question of how to manage distributive conflict between the sexes.

Efficiency does not, then, capture all the dimensions of the problem we care about. But it nonetheless remains an important concept for the political economy of gender. We have noted that social norms about gender roles tend to solidify around the efficient allocation of family resources regardless of the distributional effects on family members. In agricultural societies, which historically made up the vast bulk of human communities, male physical strength was put to productive use in tilling the land while women were fully employed in the home, keeping offspring alive under formidable conditions. Economic efficiency is thus one of the drivers of patriarchy.

It has been objected that efficiency is itself a creation of the male mind and has been used as a tool of domination.⁹ What better way to get the entire female sex to submit to male rule than to persuade them it was for the common good? As modern social scientists, we endanger the objectivity of our enterprise if we buy into an ideology that has enslaved women and other weak groups for millennia.

While we do not doubt that patriarchs have enjoyed their dominance within the family or that many have used brute force to defend it, male power cannot be the whole causal story, as some would have it. Men face enormous problems acting collectively to achieve any common purpose. These problems are compounded by their competition for desirable female mates. Given the uneven allocation of strength among males and their competing interests, male collusion should be extraordinarily precarious. Although polygamy is a terrible system for men at the bottom of the ladder, monogamy is unstable under conditions of unequal wealth when wealthy men compete for the most desirable women. Male power alone cannot account for variation in family forms or for vertical power structures.

An explanation of patriarchy requires elements of both power and efficiency. Over the many centuries since the Neolithic Revolution, people and societies have competed for land and other resources. Competition rewards the productive allocation of assets and punishes the less productive with annihilation or abandonment. Efficient allocation of resources

changes with the technology of production, but for much of human history, agricultural production has favored male physical strength and child survival has favored female nurturing.¹⁰

Among families and across communities, a wide variety of factors created winners and losers. Societies waxed and waned. Our account concerns what happened within families in all of those places. Agricultural production everywhere favored male brawn, and the exigencies of survival forced considerable homogeneity around a division of labor that left men dominant over and thus better off than women. Social norms validated this strategy, sparing each new generation costly errors. Male power is as much consequence as cause.

Gender and Domestic Bargaining

The embedded bargaining model of gender incorporates important insights from the three dominant social science paradigms that have been applied to account for patriarchy: materialism, institutionalism, and explanations that focus on values and beliefs. *Materialism* encompasses a wide category of arguments, but they all have two things in common: the primacy of material resources in generating effective demands on government, and the material basis of the interests imputed to groups of people who possess those resources.¹¹ Our approach shares a strong focus on modes of production and material interests, but we pay more attention to institutional design and conditions outside the market than is common in this literature. Household bargaining and decisions interact with market conditions as well as political and economic institutions that cannot be captured by a simple state versus market dichotomy.

Institutionalism involves a similarly broad collection of theories regarding government and market institutions and the relations among them. Institutions are important in our analysis because they are part of the environment in which individual bargaining is embedded. But while institutions shape behavior, they are occasionally also transformed by such behavior. The massive inflow of women into the labor market has unquestionably had consequences for the workings of both economic institutions and the welfare state, and we seek to understand these effects as well. Rather than treating institutions as immutable exogenous constraints

on behavior, we view them as endogenous to equilibria that are also shaped by behavior.

The third paradigm takes *ideas and values* to be autonomous from both institutions and resources. We agree that, in the short and medium run, values are very powerful. But in the longer run, material forces shape both institutions and values. Changes in production technology, in our argument, drive the emergence and demise of patriarchy by giving and then taking away a productivity advantage to male labor. Competition over resources in societies with labor-intensive agriculture creates patriarchal family institutions.¹² Social norms are principally a result rather than a cause of patriarchy: families socialize their children in ways that help them navigate the strategic environment they will face. This is not to deny that for any relatively short period of time, norms can be powerful autonomous forces that are thoroughly internalized, invisible, and resistant to change. In the countries now suffering a fertility crisis, for example, new opportunities for women in the labor markets have clearly shifted the balance of power toward a less gender-divided division of labor, but traditional norms seem to have blocked any effective political solution. If we are right that norms ultimately adapt to economic necessity, those countries will see profound changes in family policy over the next decade or so. We believe this is precisely what is happening in a country like Spain where traditional values represented by the Catholic Church are challenged by economic and political change. Perhaps other countries with similar patriarchal institutions and traditions are not far behind.

The many variants of the institutionalist paradigm take the organization of political and economic incentives as crucial in shaping the demand for policies. It stands to reason that the incentive structures of legislatures would reflect the markets they regulate, and vice versa. Countries with proportional representation electoral rules are more likely to have strong labor parties that can gain labor protections and set the stage for long term labor contracts. PR also facilitates consensus-based regulatory institutions that manage and implement these rules, as well as those governing skill formation and wage-setting. In majoritarian and district-based systems, parties compete with each other to keep taxes low and markets fluid, and consensus-building is inhibited.

The market institutions that map onto each type of electoral system, in

turn, profoundly affect the productivity of male versus female labor. In labor markets characterized by long-term contracts, women are a bad investment, as we have seen. Proportional representation (PR) and long-term labor contracts were not adopted with the intent of suppressing women's market power, but they will not disappear once voters become aware of this effect. It is very difficult to change economic institutions that benefit incumbent workers. On the other hand, PR electoral systems have facilitated the political representation of women and their interests, which has modified the operation of labor markets.

We need all three paradigms, then, to make sense of the relative bargaining leverage of men and women. Which variants of materialist accounts are most useful depends on how production technology and the regulatory environment affect various actors' ability to take collective action. In today's rich democracies, women's interests are poorly aligned with class because it is a very heterogeneous group and because labor parties are organized to protect existing—predominantly male—workers.¹³ More generally, whether resources, institutions, or values are causes or consequences depends on where one slices into the story and how long a perspective on history one takes. In the long run, technological change and modes of production loom large. In the medium run, institutions, and in the short run, also norms become much more prominent.

Conclusions

Historical and cultural differences in the degree and style of male dominance provide intriguing clues as to why and how men have ruled the world for so long. The productivity of male versus female labor, depending on modes of production, provides a baseline explanation. In hunter-gatherer societies, the division of labor between male hunting and female gathering did not remove women from a source of their own food, should they seek to dissolve a relationship with a male partner.

The Neolithic Revolution was also a patriarchal revolution because sedentary agriculture and herding shifted the advantage of food production to male brawn and consigned women to a supplementary and family-centered role. Women lost their social mobility when their family-specific investments in children took away their economic viability outside the fam-

ily unit. By contrast, a man controlled resources with which he could dominate his family and also cultivate other relationships. The possibility of storing food, trading it in the marketplace, and conquering others' stores makes agricultural societies considerably more complex than hunter-gatherer ones, opening up new levels of wealth, social hierarchy, and military organization. These in turn increased the importance of the marriage market for women and the strategic value of teaching daughters how to "marry up." The resulting web of gendered role expectations is patriarchal in the extreme.

Social norms grew up around agricultural economies but survived into the industrial age, despite a gradual decline in the productivity advantage of male brawn. This is partly because of the stickiness of values. Even if a woman could operate a big machine, the idea was anathema to the Victorians who both introduced machines to the world and did their best to keep women, petticoats and all, well away from them.

Eventually, the increased demand for female labor in postindustrial societies and the need for more family income would inspire many women to push past the bars of the domestic cage. Once they did, an irreversible process of change was set in motion by the accumulation of hundreds and thousands of individual decisions, which in turn affected the decisions of millions of others. But electoral rules, and the market arrangements they both reflect and reinforce, generate vastly different levels of demand for female labor. Only Scandinavia has brought women into the labor force in numbers comparable to men—partly on account of a more flexible labor market, but mostly by hiring them into public sector service jobs. In market-based economies like the United States, women have also made significant inroads into the private labor market, but they have been left at a huge disadvantage in the political system.

The embedded bargaining model of gender follows the fall and rise of women's economic autonomy through the ages. In modern democracies, the power of public policy to bend markets to public priorities creates new opportunities to address the concerns of women left behind in the march to equality. Explaining why those policies are needed is the purpose of this book.