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Education as Liberation?^{*}

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Abstract: Scholars have long speculated about education's political impacts, variously arguing that it promotes modern or pro-democratic attitudes; that it instills acceptance of existing authority; and that it empowers the disadvantaged to challenge authority. This paper studies the political and social impacts of increased education. To address the potential threat of bias from selection into human capital investment, we utilize a randomized girls' merit scholarship incentive program in Kenya that raised test scores and secondary schooling. We find little evidence for modernization theory. Consistent with the empowerment view, young women in program schools were less likely to accept domestic violence. Moreover, the program increased objective political knowledge, and induced acceptance of political authority. However, this rejection of the status quo did not translate into greater perceived political efficacy, community participation, or voting intentions. Instead, there is suggestive evidence that the perceived legitimacy of political violence increased. Reverse causality may account for the view that education instills greater acceptance of authority.

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