

## Islam and Democracy in the Middle East

### The Impact of Religious Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Four Arab Countries

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Discussions about democracy in the Arab world often include attention to the political orientations of ordinary men and women. In particular, questions are raised about whether popular attitudes and beliefs constitute an obstacle to democratization, possibly because the religious traditions that predominate in most Arab countries inhibit the emergence of a democratic political culture. But while questions are frequently raised about the views of ordinary citizens, about what is sometimes described as "the Arab street," answers are most often based on impressionistic and anecdotal information. Indeed, some analyses appear to be influenced by western stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. By contrast, systematic empirical inquiries into the nature, distribution, and determinants of political attitudes in the Arab world are rare.

This article examines the influence of Islam on attitudes toward democracy using public opinion data collected in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. In surveys conducted by or in collaboration with Arab scholars, interview schedules containing questions about governance and democracy and also about conceptions and practices relating to Islam were administered to comparatively large and representative samples of adults in all four countries, including two samples in Egypt. These data provide a strong empirical foundation from which to address questions about the relationship between Islam and democracy at the individual level of analysis.

#### **Democracy and Political Culture**

Despite a few exceptions, the Arab world has made relatively little progress toward political liberalization in recent years. On the contrary, many of the experiments in democratization that were launched a decade or so ago have been cut back substantially or even abandoned. A prominent American scholar describes the situation as "exceptionally bleak...from the spectacular crash and burn of Algeria's liberalization to Tunisia's more subtle but no less profound transformation into a police state, from

Egypt's backsliding into electoral manipulation [and repression of Islamic political movements] to the obvious reluctance of Palestinian authorities to embrace human rights."<sup>1</sup>

Yet the importance of political liberalization, and ultimately of democracy, has been emphasized by Arab as well as western scholars. According to a Lebanese political scientist, unchecked authoritarianism in many Arab countries is "paving the way to a deep crisis in the fabric of society."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a Jordanian journalist writes that "one of the leading sources of instability and political-economic distortion in the Arab world is the unchecked use of state power, combined with the state's whimsical ability to use the rule of law for its own political ends."<sup>3</sup> An Egyptian sociologist thus argues that "political reform must be initiated, or else there is a real danger of political chaos," while a second Egyptian scholar laments that, "although I dreamed of democracy in my youth, I now see that our country is regressing politically."<sup>4</sup>

Studies of democratic transitions and democratic consolidation identify two analytically distinct concerns to which attention must be devoted.<sup>5</sup> One involves political institutions and processes. The other involves citizen attitudes and values, often described as political culture. Institutional and process considerations call attention to the need for mechanisms that make political leaders accountable to those they govern, including free, competitive, and regular elections. Political culture calls attention to the orientations of ordinary men and women and, so far as democracy is concerned, to the need to develop civic and participatory norms at the level of the individual citizen.

The importance of political culture, the focus of this article, has been documented in a growing number of empirical studies carried out in new democracies. It is illustrated, for example, by Mainwaring's conclusions about the reasons democratic consolidation has been more successful in Latin America than in many other developing areas. An important factor "that has contributed to the greater survivability of Latin American democracies," he writes, "revolves around changes in political attitudes, toward a greater valorization of democracy."<sup>6</sup> Chu, Diamond, and Shin offer a similar assessment in their study of Korea and Taiwan, stating that the consolidation of democratic transitions requires "sustained, internalized belief in and commitment to the legitimacy of democracy among the citizenry at large."<sup>7</sup> Thus, as summarized by Inglehart, "democracy is not attained simply by making institutional changes or through elite level maneuvering. Its survival depends also on the values and beliefs of ordinary citizens."<sup>8</sup> The applicability of these conclusions to the Arab world is noted by Harik, who writes that "in the long run, of course, a democratic government needs a democratic political culture, and vice versa."<sup>9</sup>

Research on new democracies also sheds light on the particular attitudes and values that are necessary for successful democratization. Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer, for example, note that relevant citizen orientations include both support for democra-

tic political institutions and such democratic values as tolerance of diversity and an appreciation of political competition and pluralism.<sup>10</sup> According to Gibson, a democratic citizen is one who "believes in individual liberty and is politically tolerant, has a certain distrust of political authority but at the same time is trusting of fellow citizens, is obedient but nonetheless willing to assert rights against the state, and views the state as constrained by legality."<sup>11</sup>

Despite the importance of such research, there have been few studies of the attitudes and values related to democracy held by ordinary Arab men and women. There has been some relevant research using public opinion data from Palestine,<sup>12</sup> as well as political attitude surveys of more limited scope and relevance in Lebanon,<sup>13</sup> Egypt,<sup>14</sup> and Jordan.<sup>15</sup> Overall, however, the absence of such research has been noted and lamented by students of Middle East politics.<sup>16</sup> With public opinion data from four Arab societies and attitudes toward democracy treated as the dependent variable, the goal of this article is to help fill this important gap.

### **Religion and Politics**

To what extent do religious orientations account for variance in attitudes related to democracy in the Arab world? Two very different bodies of scholarly research may be consulted for possible insights, and the findings of this article may contribute to both of them. The first asks about the relationship between Islam and democracy, focusing for the most part on issues of doctrine and political thought. The second consists of empirical studies that assess the influence of religion and religiosity on various political attitudes in western countries.

There is much discussion, and considerable disagreement, about the relationship between democracy and Islam. Although stereotypes are sometimes advanced, questions about the influence of Islam are appropriate. There is a strong historic connection between religion and politics in the Muslim world, reflecting Islam's character as a religion of laws pertaining to society's organization as well as individual morality. Thus, as summarized in a recent study, Islam plays a critical role in shaping political culture; no Middle Eastern Muslim country is "able to escape completely from its overarching reach." Indeed, this analysis continues, the intersection of culture and politics "may be more pervasive than in other [non-Islamic] contexts."<sup>17</sup>

In addition, Islam has become increasingly influential in Arab cultural and political life during the last quarter century. On the one hand, new Muslim associations, study groups, welfare organizations, and financial institutions have emerged, accompanied by a sharp increase in such expressions of personal piety as mosque attendance and public prayer. On the other, Islam has become an important point of reference in debates about how the Arab world should be governed.<sup>18</sup> Campaigning under

the banner "Islam is the solution." Muslim political organizations have had notable success in attracting new followers, including younger individuals, women as well as men, and many well-educated persons.<sup>19</sup>

So far as democracy is concerned, some observers, particularly some western observers, assert that democracy and Islam are incompatible. Whereas democracy requires openness, competition, pluralism, and tolerance of diversity, Islam, they argue, encourages intellectual conformity and an uncritical acceptance of authority. Equally important, Islam is said to be antidemocratic because it vests sovereignty in God, who is the sole source of political authority and from whose divine law must come all regulations governing the community of believers. In the view of some scholars, therefore, Islam "has to be ultimately embodied in a totalitarian state."<sup>20</sup> The late Elie Kedourie, a prominent student of Arab and Islamic society, gave forceful expression to this thesis in *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*.

...the notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, or elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, of these laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary, the ideas of the secularity of the state, of society being composed of a multitude of self-activating groups and associations—all of these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Many others reject the suggestion that Islam is an enemy in the struggle for accountable government. They note that Islam has many facets and tendencies, making unidimensional characterizations of the religion highly suspect.<sup>22</sup> They also report that there is considerable variation in the interpretations of religious law advanced by Muslim scholars and theologians and that among these interpretations are expressions of support for democracy, including some by leading Islamist theorists.<sup>23</sup> Finally, they insist that openness, tolerance, and progressive innovation are well represented among traditions associated with the religion, and thus entirely compatible with Islam.<sup>24</sup> Such assessments receive institutional expression in the newly established Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, which in 2000 cosponsored two international conferences at which scholars from five countries sought to demonstrate that the essence of Islam is not antidemocratic. Rather, participants argued, forces of history and economics account for the absence of democratic governance in much of the Arab world.<sup>25</sup>

These various and competing assessments suggest that there are to be found within Islamic doctrine and Muslim tradition both elements that are and elements that are not congenial to democracy. The influence of the religion thus depends to a very considerable extent on how and by whom it is interpreted. There is no single or accepted interpretation on many issues, nor even a consensus on who speaks for Islam. Further, serious doubts have been expressed about the motivation of some

religious authorities. As one Arab scholar observes, "there are numerous examples of *ulama* manipulating Islamic teachings....Motivated by political rather than religious considerations, they have offered doctrinal interpretations that are deliberately designed to justify the behavior of political leaders."<sup>26</sup> Systematic empirical research on the connections between religious orientations and political culture in the Arab and Muslim world is therefore needed.

A small but growing number of studies explores these connections with public opinion data from western countries. Findings from this research are not entirely consistent. Nor are there studies in which attitudes toward democracy is the dependent variable. But these studies offer evidence about whether and how religion and religiosity influence political attitudes.

One of their conclusions is that strong religious attachments usually push toward more conservative political views. Several studies conducted in the U.S. report, for example, that personal religiosity is strongly and positively related to a conservative stance on issues of public policy, especially when these issues involve an ethical or moral dimension.<sup>27</sup> Another study, also using data from the U.S., found that religiosity defined in terms of Biblical literalism and a tendency to seek religious guidance are positively correlated with anticommunism and higher levels of support for military and defense-related spending.<sup>28</sup> Research based on survey research in the U.S. has also shown these hawkish foreign policy attitudes to be more pronounced among individuals with strong evangelical beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, a study using European data found that greater religiosity was positively correlated with higher levels of internationalism, and specifically with more support for European integration and for aid to developing countries.<sup>30</sup> In this case, religiosity was measured by the degree to which respondents reported that religion was important in shaping their personal outlook. A study based on survey data from twelve European countries found a direct positive correlation between religiosity and support for military security in three countries, a direct but negative correlation between these variables in two countries, and a positive but indirect correlation in seven countries.<sup>31</sup>

A final observation for which there is some evidence is that the explanatory power of religion may vary as a function of demographic characteristics. For example, a study using data from six European countries reported that religion is a more salient independent variable among women than among men, apparently because women are more religious and are thus more likely to be influenced by the teachings of their religion, as they understand them. Although stressing the need for further study, the authors of this study hypothesize that the higher level of religiosity among women helps to account for their greater conservatism relative to men.<sup>32</sup>

Neither of these bodies of scholarly research leads to clear expectations about whether and how attitudes toward democracy will be influenced by the religious ori-

entations of individual Muslim Arabs. Both, however, will benefit from findings based on additional empirical research. Such research has the potential to increase confidence in one position or another in debates about whether Islam is an obstacle to democratization or at least to the emergence of prodemocracy attitudes among ordinary citizens. It will also expand the comparative dimension of social science efforts to determine the nature, extent, and locus of the relationship between religion and political attitudes more generally.

### **Data and Measures**

This study uses survey data from Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt to examine the relationship between Islam and democracy at the individual level of analysis. The surveys were conducted between 1988 and 1996 and, some limitations notwithstanding, provide a strong empirical foundation from which to assess whether and how religious orientations influence attitudes toward governance among ordinary citizens in the Arab world.

The Palestinian survey was conducted in August 1995 by the Center for Palestine Research and Studies (CPRS) in Nablus, under the supervision of its director, Dr. Khalil Shikaki, and the head of its polling unit, Dr. Nadir Said. Multistage area probability sampling techniques were employed to select respondents, and the interview schedule was administered to a highly representative sample of 1,184 adults residing in the West Bank and Gaza. Almost all respondents are Sunni Muslim, although a small number of Christians, approximately 4 percent, is included in the sample. CRPS has been conducting opinion polls every six to eight weeks since the Oslo Accords of September 1993 and has developed increasingly rigorous procedures for pretesting survey instruments, selecting respondents, and training interviewers. Additional information about the Palestinian survey has been published elsewhere.<sup>53</sup>

The North African surveys were conducted in Morocco and Algeria in late 1995 and early 1996 under the auspices of the American Institute for Maghrib Studies. The project was directed by an international research team composed of fifteen social scientists from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and the U.S. Each country was represented in approximately equal measure, and all national teams included scholars from at least three different academic disciplines. The group met regularly over a three year period to develop and then refine both conceptual and methodological aspects of the project.

The surveys were conducted in Rabat, Morocco, and Oran, Algeria. Although limited to a single city in each country, the data are based on carefully drawn random samples of 1,000 households in each city, and they are thus representative of large and very heterogeneous populations. Rabat and Oran are both major urban centers, each with approximately one million inhabitants and populations that are extremely

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diverse in terms of wealth, lifestyle, culture, and residence patterns. As important centers of administration, finance, and/or commerce, each also contains numerous migrants from rural areas and small towns and villages.

An innovative, multistage procedure was developed to select respondents. One battery of questions was administered to the head of each randomly selected household; another, composed of questions dealing with political, social, and economic attitudes, was given to a second, randomly selected member of each household; and an additional set of questions pertaining to fertility and family planning was asked of all women of childbearing years residing in the household. Extensive care was taken in the training of interviewers, most of whom were university students, and a lengthy "interviewer manual" was prepared for use in each country. Additional information about the study appears in several publications.<sup>34</sup>

There are two Egyptian surveys. The first was carried out in mid 1988 under the direction of Dr. Jamal Al-Suwaidi, who presently directs the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi and who designed the project in collaboration with the present author. Based on stratified samples of 295 adults in Cairo, respondents reflect the extremely heterogeneous nature of the city's population. The sample includes an approximately equal number of men and women, and, despite a slight underrepresentation of poor and less well educated individuals, it is broadly representative with respect to age, education, socioeconomic status, and place of residence. Christians were excluded from the sample for analytical purposes, in order to facilitate comparison with Sunni Muslim populations in other Arab countries. The interviews were conducted by university students and government employees who were given a four day orientation and then participated in a pretest of the survey instrument. Several publications give additional information about the study.<sup>35</sup>

The second Egyptian survey was carried out in Cairo and Alexandria in late 1992. It was conducted by the Market Research Organization, based in Amman, Jordan, under contract to the United States Information Agency, and the data were later obtained from the archives of the Roper Center. Area probability sampling involving a "random walk" was employed in both cities, with 400 individuals interviewed in Cairo and 100 interviewed in Alexandria. Interviewers, supervised by Market Research Organization personnel, were trained and then given detailed instructions before selecting and interviewing respondents.

The items that may be used to measure attitudes toward democracy vary across the four data sets. The Palestinian survey contained a number of questions about the importance of democratic practices, including government accountability and an elected parliament representing diverse political trends. The Moroccan and Algerian surveys, which used the same interview schedule, asked respondents to rate the importance of openness to diverse political ideas relative to other criteria for political leadership and of developing democratic institutions relative to other priorities for government action. The 1988 Egyptian survey contained a number of questions

about the preferred model of government. Respondents were asked, for example, to evaluate parliamentary systems and liberal democracy relative to other political and ideological formulas, including socialism, Arab nationalism, and Islamic government. Finally, the 1992 Egyptian survey asked respondents to rate the importance of open and competitive elections. These items are listed in the Appendix.

With the exception of the 1992 Egyptian survey, factor analysis was used to select the items listed in the Appendix from a larger battery of questions on each interview schedule that appeared to measure attitudes toward democracy. Factor analysis identifies items that cluster together and hence measure the same underlying concept, thereby increasing confidence in reliability and validity. Confidence is further increased by the fact that the Moroccan and Algerian surveys produced identical results. Only in the case of the 1992 Egyptian survey was it impossible to offer this evidence of reliability and validity. That survey contained only one item pertaining to democracy.

The factor analyses in all instances also included items pertaining to Islam, and it is significant that the same two dimensions emerged in all four cases where the technique was employed. One dimension is based on questions about personal piety, including prayer, other religious observance, and recourse to religion when facing important problems or decisions. The other is based on items pertaining to Islam's political role, including questions about Islamist political movements, the political involvement of religious leaders, and Islamic guidance in public affairs. In the 1992 Egyptian survey there was only one item pertaining to religion. It asked respondents whether or not they agreed that their country should always be guided by Islamic laws and values.

### **Analysis and Findings**

The dependent variable in this analysis is attitudes toward democracy. It is measured for Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt in 1988 by an additive index constructed from the relevant items shown in the Appendix. In each case, responses have been dichotomized and then summed. Based on these measures, Table 1 shows for each data set the proportion of respondents attaching various degrees of importance to democracy. Table 1 also presents responses to the single item measuring attitudes toward democracy in the 1992 Egyptian survey. Similar procedures have been employed to construct additive indices measuring personal piety and attitudes toward the role of Islam in politics and public affairs.

The differences across data sets shown in Table 1 result at least partly from the different survey instruments employed. But Table 1 shows that there is also considerable variation within each of the populations surveyed. To determine whether religious orientations are useful in accounting for this variance, regression analysis has been employed to examine the relationship between attitudes toward democracy and each of two Islamic dimensions identified by factor analysis. Age and education are



**Table 1** Importance Attached to Democracy in Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, and Egypt

	Palestine 1995	Morocco 1995-96	Algeria 1995-96	Egypt 1988	Egypt 1992
Very important	16.8	18.6	5.5	13.2	38.6
Somewhat important	43.3	26.4	32.8	22.1	59.8
Not important	39.9	55.0	61.7	64.7	21.6

included as control variables, and models are run not only for entire samples but also for subsamples based on sex.

For Palestine, regression analysis shows that personal piety is inversely related to support for democracy, whereas a preference for religious influence in political affairs is not related to the dependent variable to a statistically significant degree. Disaggregation of the data reveals, however, that this pattern characterizes women but not men and, further, that it obtains for women in the West Bank but not for women in the Gaza Strip. These findings are presented in Table 2, which gives standardized regression coefficients (betas) since the attitudinal indices are not composed of standard and equivalent units of measurement. The table also reports t-statistics and levels of significance.

In Morocco, there is no statistically significant relationship between attitudes toward democracy and personal piety, but support for Islamic guidance in public affairs is strongly related to the dependent variable. Specifically, higher levels of support for Islamic guidance are associated with lower levels of importance attached to democratic norms and institutions. These patterns are shown in Table 3.

Additional insight is provided by two further analyses. The first replaces the scale measuring attitudes toward Islamic guidance by its two constituent items, one asking about politics and administration and the other asking about economics and com-

**Table 2** Multiple Regression Showing Influence of Islamic Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Palestine

	Full Sample	Men Only	Women Only	West Bank Men	West Bank Women	Gaza Men	Gaza Women
Personal Piety	-.13 (-1.77)***	-.33 (-1.04)	-.12 (-2.32)***	-.05 (-.70)	-.15 (-2.50)***	-.11 (-1.30)	-.05 (-.67)
Islam and Politics	.26 (2.76)**	-.02 (-.29)	.05 (1.05)	-.08 (-1.18)	-.00 (-.13)	.10 (1.21)	.15 (1.90)
Education	.12 (1.70)***	.09 (1.95)**	.10 (2.15)**	.13 (2.30)**	.11 (1.95)**	-.02 (-.32)	.06 (.76)
Age	-.14 (-4.28)***	.12 (2.81)***	.09 (1.95)**	.09 (1.53)	.10 (1.71)	.22 (3.17)***	.09 (1.04)
Constant	138.43***	26.05***	124.48***	22.27***	126.97***	17.37***	112.51***

Note: Table shows standardized coefficients (betas) and gives t statistics in parentheses. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .02, \*\*\* p < .01

**Table 3** Multiple Regression Showing Influence of Islamic Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Morocco

	Full Sample	Full Sample	Men Only	Women Only
Personal piety	-.17 (-.778)	-.03 (-.08)	-.04 (-.24)	-.09 (-.09)
Islamic Guidance in Public Affairs	-.29 (-1.53)**			
1 in politics and administration		-.06 (-1.23)	-.11 (-1.67)	-.01 (-.13)
2 in economics and commerce		-.12 (-2.43)**	-.08 (-1.20)	-.15 (-2.17)*
Education	.40 (10.70)***	.38 (9.75)***	.40 (7.54)***	.31 (5.56)***
Age	-.05 (-1.7)	-.06 (-1.48)	-.03 (-.58)	-.11 (-2.00)*
Constant	-1.07***	-1.824***	-2.02***	-3.86***

Note: Table shows standardized coefficients (betas) and gives t statistics in parentheses.  
\* p < .05 \*\* p < .02 \*\*\* p < .01

merce. The regression in this case shows that the item pertaining to guidance in economic and commercial affairs provides the scale's explanatory power; it remains statistically significant in the new regression model, whereas the item pertaining to guidance in political and administrative affairs loses its statistical significance. The second involves separate analyses undertaken for men and women, which reveals that the previously reported pattern holds for the latter but not the former. These findings, too, are shown in Table 3.

Findings from Algeria are similar to those from Morocco. Support for Islamic guidance is inversely related to democratic attitudes to a statistically significant degree. Also, as in Morocco, Islamic guidance in economic and commercial affairs but not in politics and administration remains significant when the individual items are included in the analysis, and this relationship again holds for women but not men when the data are disaggregated on the basis of sex. In addition, personal piety is inversely related to democratic attitudes, but only for women. These findings are shown in Table 4.

The 1988 data from Egypt show that personal piety but not support for a strong connection between religion and politics is inversely related to the degree of importance attached to democracy. Also, as in the other cases, the statistically significant relationship holds for women but not for men. The 1992 Egyptian data do not contain any items measuring personal religiosity. The one item dealing with religion assesses support for political Islam, and, as in the 1988 Egyptian data, this variable is unrelated to attitudes toward democracy, for both men and women and for residents of Alexandria as well as Cairo. Findings from the 1988 Egyptian data are presented in Table 5, and those from the 1992 Egyptian data are shown in Table 6.

**Table 4** Multiple Regression Showing Influence of Islamic Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Algeria

	Full Sample	Full Sample	Men Only	Women Only
Personal Piety	-.06 (-1.55)	-.06 (-1.60)	.03 (.52)	-.15 (-2.82)***
Islamic Guidance in Public Affairs	-.09 (-2.54)***			
1. in politics and administration		.00 (.09)	-.00 (-.13)	.01 (.22)
2. in economics and commerce		-.11 (-2.53)***	-.06 (-.90)	-.15 (-2.56)***
Education	.09 (2.22)**	.10 (2.36)**	.09 (1.41)	.11 (1.93)
Age	.03 (.77)	.04 (.03)	.07 (1.03)	.03 (.46)
Constant	(4.90)***	(4.37)***	(4.32)***	(1.89)

Note: Table shows standardized coefficients (betas) and gives t statistics in parentheses.  
\* p < .05. \*\*p < .02. \*\*\*p < .01

**Table 5** Multiple Regression Showing Influence of Islamic Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Egypt in 1988

	Full Sample	Men Only	Women Only
Personal Piety	-.20 (-2.81)***	-.11 (-1.23)	-.33 (-2.87)***
Islam and Politics	-.03 (-.42)	-.00 (-.08)	-.00 (-.02)
Education	.10 (1.54)	.06 (.67)	.23 (2.45)**
Age	-.10 (-1.41)	.12 (1.28)	.03 (.27)
Constant	(15.26)***	(10.33)***	(9.52)***

Note: Table shows standardized coefficients (betas) and gives t statistics in parentheses. \* p < .05. \*\*p < .02. \*\*\*p < .01

**Table 6** Multiple Regression Showing Influence of Islamic Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Egypt in 1992

	Full Sample	Men Only	Women Only
Islam and Politics	-.07 (-1.28)	-.04 (-.59)	-.09 (-1.11)
Education	.11 (2.13)*	.16 (2.21)*	.04 (.50)
Age	.00 (.00)	.01 (.20)	-.02 (-.26)
Constant	(18.98)***	(14.40)***	(11.57)***

Note: Table shows standardized coefficients (betas) and gives t statistics in parentheses. \* p < .05. \*\* p < .02. \*\*\* p < .01

### Conclusions

Three sets of conclusions may be tentatively advanced on the basis of these findings. All raise questions that deserve additional research. First, despite a number of statistically significant relationships, Islam appears to have less influence on political attitudes than is frequently suggested by students of Arab and Islamic society. Specifically, among the most complete models presented in Tables 2 through 6, with male and female respondents treated separately, religious orientations bear a statistically significant relationship to the dependent variable in only five of twenty-two instances. This study is of course limited in both space and time, and it is also restricted to the individual level of analysis. Nevertheless, it strongly suggests that Islam should not be reified when attempting to explain Arab political orientations, and, in particular, it offers evidence that support for democracy is not necessarily lower among those individuals with the strongest Islamic attachments. On the contrary, it provides support for those who challenge the thesis that Islam discourages the emergence of political attitudes conducive to democracy.

Second, the locus of those relationships that are and are not statistically significant is noteworthy. Three patterns stand out. One of them concerns sex-linked differences. While there is most often no relationship between Islamic attachments and attitudes toward democracy, all of the exceptions to this pattern occur among women. Personal piety has explanatory power among women in the West Bank, Algeria, and Egypt in 1988, although not among women in Gaza and Morocco. Also, support for Islamic guidance in economic and commercial affairs has explanatory power in Morocco and Algeria, but only among women. Stronger Islamic attachments are inversely related to support for democracy in each of these instances.

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Although additional research is needed to understand the reasons for this pattern, it appears that Muslim women are at least somewhat more likely than Muslim men to take cues from religion about political affairs. This pattern may be explained by the fact that men tend to be more involved in life outside the home and thus to receive information about political issues from a broader array of sources, whereas women rely on religion to a greater degree.

Another observed pattern is that support for political Islam and religious guidance in public affairs has little explanatory power. Only among Moroccan and Algerian women and only for guidance in economic and commercial affairs, rather than in politics and administration, are relevant measures strongly related to democratic attitudes. This pattern suggests that support for political Islam does not involve a rejection of democracy and that those with a more favorable view of Islamist movements and platforms are no less likely than others to favor political competition and to desire mechanisms to hold leaders accountable. Thus, in the popular mind, at least, there is no necessary incompatibility between democracy and Islamic governance. Rather, deeply discontented with existing political arrangements, many may favor an alternative that incorporates both the democratic principles of choice and accountability and the Islamic principles of justice and protection of the weak.

A final pattern deserving comment is the inverse relationship between a desire for Islamic guidance in economic and commercial affairs and prodemocracy attitudes among women in Morocco and Algeria. Although the other data sets used in the present study do not contain measures with which to explore this relationship, these identical and unexpected findings from the two North African countries suggest that the pattern may be generalizable. In all probability, women are discontented with the socioeconomic status quo more than men and thus favor policies guided by the values they associate with Islam, including justice, equality, social welfare, and protection of the weak. If correct, this pattern may reflect women's relatively greater concern with family needs or, possibly, with a social and economic status inferior to that of men. On the strength of the findings from Morocco and Algeria, these propositions would seem to be worthy of further study.

Third, findings from the present study are somewhat but not entirely consistent with findings reported in research conducted in the U.S. and Europe. Several areas of similarity may be noted. Religious orientations most often push away from liberal political attitudes; findings vary from one research location to another, suggesting that the nature and extent of religion's impact on political attitudes may be conditioned by system-level attributes; and religion tends to have more explanatory power among women than among men. These similarities suggest that factors which differentiate the Arab world from the U.S. and Europe may be of limited importance so far as the influence of religion on political attitudes is concerned.

At the same time, alternatively, this study also suggests that religious orientations are not as frequently related to political attitudes as appears to be the case in the U.S.

and Europe. Despite the variation in findings within each region, a comparison across regions suggests that religion influences political orientations more frequently and consistently in the West than in the Arab world. Levels of personal piety are higher in the Arab world, and also there is a strong and historically legitimated connection between Islam and politics, thereby making religious orientations perhaps less useful in distinguishing among individuals with dissimilar political inclinations. If correct, this analysis leads to the hypothesis that aggregate religiosity at the system level constitutes a conditionality affecting the relationship between religion and politics at the individual level. Specifically, whereas religiosity most often tends to push toward political conservatism in more secular societies, it does so less frequently and consistently in more religious societies. This proposition, too, deserves further research.

More opinion studies, as well as research at other levels of analysis, are necessary in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of whether and how Islam influences the prospects for democratic transitions in the Arab world. This study aspires to encourage and advance this effort, while at the same time making a contribution to cross-regional analysis and scientific cumulativeness. In the meantime, the evidence presently available from Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt suggests that Islam is not the obstacle to democratization that some western and others scholars allege it to be. A democratic, civic, and participatory political culture may indeed be necessary for mature democracy, but this study suggests that only to a very limited extent is the emergence of such a political culture discouraged by the Islamic attachments of ordinary Arab citizens.

#### **Appendix: Items Used to Measure Attitudes toward Democracy and Islam in Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt**

##### **Palestine 1995 (West Bank and Gaza)**

###### *Attitudes toward Democracy*

1. Greater accountability of the government is very important.
2. Freedom of the press without government censorship is very important.
3. Fair and regular elections are very important.
4. The existence of an elected parliament representing all political trends is very important.

###### *Personal Piety*

1. Prays regularly.
2. Describes self as "religious."
3. Observes all religious fasting obligations.

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*Islam and Politics*

1. Men of religion should have a leading role in politics.
2. Islam is the sole faith by which Palestinians can obtain their rights.
3. Supports Islamic political parties.
4. Supports the establishment of an Islamic caliphate state.

**Morocco and Algeria 1995–96**

*Attitudes toward Democracy*

1. Openness to diverse political ideas is an important criterion for national leadership (ranks first or second on a list that includes experience, a sense of justice, integrity, and human sensitivity).
2. The development of democratic institutions is a high priority for government (ranks first or second on a list that includes economic well-being, civil peace, and preservation of traditional values).

*Personal Piety*

1. Prays regularly.
2. Consults *imam* or *f'kih* if has a personal problem.
3. Often reads works on religion (high loading only for Morocco).

*Islam and Public Affairs*

1. Believes that religion should guide political and administrative affairs.
2. Believes that religion should guide economic and commercial affairs.

**Egypt 1988**

*Attitudes toward Democracy*

1. Parliamentary government is the preferred political system.
2. Prefers liberal democracy to Arab nationalism, socialism, and Islamic government.
3. Prefers a competitive political system along the U.S. or European model.
4. Disagrees that western values are leading to the moral erosion of our society.

*Personal Piety*

1. Refers to religious teachings when making important life decisions.
2. Reads the *Quran* frequently.
3. Prays regularly.
4. Observes all religious fasting obligations.

*Islam and Politics*

1. Religion and politics should not be separate.

2. Disagrees that religion is a private matter.
3. Is in favor of the religious "awakening" now current in society.
4. Supports present-day organized religious movements.

### **Egypt 1992**

#### *Attitudes toward Democracy*

Very important to have open parliamentary elections in a country like ours.

#### *Islam and Politics*

Our country should always be guided by Islamic law and values.

## **NOTES**

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