

Religion in the Arab Spring: Between Two Competing Narratives

Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal

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Introduction

Observers have characterized the Arab Spring as a watershed moment in the relationship between religion and politics in the Middle East. These characterizations, however, have not all been consistent. On the one hand, a popular account of the Arab Spring maintains that it was driven by secular liberals who wanted democracy, not the theocracy advocated by the region's best-known opposition movements. On the other, narratives abound about protesters walking from Friday prayers to central squares in order to demand the removal of the regime, motivated by the sermons heard at their mosques. It is unclear from existing accounts whether the Arab Spring protesters were particularly religious (or just the opposite) and whether or not they are more likely to support secular politics.

This paper will attempt to address the role of religion in the Arab Spring protests. In doing so, it will assess the relationship between religious belief (and practice) and the likelihood of participation in protest. Using newly-available data from the second wave of the Arab Barometer in Tunisia and Egypt (collected shortly after the fall of the regimes in each country), it will consider whether religious individuals in these countries were more (or less) likely to participate in anti-regime protest during the recent spate of uprisings in the Arab world. In this

paper, we will suggest that religion was an important motivator of protest in the Arab Spring, but in a manner that is perhaps different from that proposed by the “mosque to square” narrative. The evidence presented in this paper suggests that individual piety, not communal practice, is associated with higher levels of protest.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 describes the Arab Spring and characterizes the debate about the role of religion in its development. Section 2 reviews the existing literature regarding protest, with a particular emphasis on the role of religion. Section 3 explains the data and methods used to assess the competing claims. Section 4 presents the results of the large-N tests. Section 5 discusses the implications of these results. Section 6 concludes.

Background

While many observers have speculated about the causes and motivations behind the Arab Spring, little systematic analysis of who actually protested has been conducted. On one side, commentators have argued that the Arab Spring was a fundamentally secular phenomenon: the protesters mobilized in opposition to not only the existing regimes, but to extremist religious ideologies as well (Wright 2011). Knickmeyer (2011) writes that “Rather than the Arab world’s usual suspects—bearded Islamists or jaded leftists—it is the young people, angry at the lack of economic opportunity available to them, who are risking their lives going up against police forces.” In a similar spirit, Noueihed and Warren (2012, p. 304) state that “the Arab Spring was not an Islamic Spring. The initial surge in early 2011 was not about religion but was an expression of anger over elite corruption, economic inequalities, widespread injustice and geriatric leaders who were out of touch with reality.” Indeed, some analysts were struck by the Arab Spring as a departure from a history of religious motivations for political activity. As Sami

Zubaida (2011) writes, “After decades of the dominance of religion and ethno-religious nationalisms in the region, the "revolutions" in Tunisia and then Egypt seemed to eschew religion and nationalism in favour of classic political demands of liberty, democracy and economic justice.” In this sense, it is conceivable that the Arab Spring was, at most, a non-religious phenomenon (and perhaps even anti-religious; al-Rasheed (2011) suggests that religion has been used as a counter-revolutionary strategy in Saudi Arabia.) On the other hand, scholars have pointed to the role of Islam as a catalyst for anti-regime mobilization. Lynch (2012, pp. 81, 91) notes that Fridays frequently became “days of rage” in Egypt and elsewhere because of the convenience of organizing would-be protesters during Friday prayers. Benhabib (2011) suggests that the Islamic notion of *shahada*, meaning both “witness” and “martyr,” belongs in any Arab Spring narrative because of the importance of this concept in motivating anti-regime activity. Likewise, mosques themselves are often said to have served as organizational hubs for protest. We call this the “mosque-to-square” narrative: as Ardic (2012, p. 38) suggests, “mosques...functioned as a locus of anti-government agitation and logistical centers of preparation for demonstrations.”

This paper seeks to adjudicate between these two competing narratives. Before proceeding with the data analysis, however, it is important to briefly summarize the key moments of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt. Lynch (2012) notes that the commonly-accepted starting point of the Arab Spring was December 17th, 2011, when Mohammed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian in the small city of Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire. Bouazizi had been attempting to sell produce on the street when he was approached by police officers who accused him of not possessing a permit (presumably, these officers wanted a bribe – this story is not an uncommon one in Tunisia). When some of his goods were confiscated, Bouazizi walked to the governor’s office to

file a complaint, but was ignored. He then found a can of gasoline and set himself on fire, shouting “how do you expect me to make a living?”

In response to this event, Tunisians began to protest—first in Sidi Bouzid, then rapidly spreading to other areas of the country. Within a month, most Arab countries had been affected by protests. Protests began in earnest in Egypt on January 25th, and grew in size and intensity until the resignation of longtime president Hosni Mubarak on February 10th. One of the key moments in the Egyptian revolution was the January 28th “day of rage,” where hundreds of thousands of Egyptians marched from mosques to Tahrir Square in order to protest (Lynch 2012, p. 91). To some degree, this was the date on which the Egyptian revolution truly took on the character of a mass uprising.

Protests have spread across the Arab world, bringing down dictators not only in Tunisia and Egypt, but in Libya and Yemen as well, and threatening to do so in Syria. Most Arab regimes were forced to respond to these protests in one way or another, employing accommodation, repression, or some combination of the two. Although the experiences of various Arab countries during this tumultuous period share many key features, each country possesses unique characteristics (as Anderson, 2011, is careful to warn us). The focus of this paper, however, is on the behavioral aspects of the Arab Spring protests. Particularly, the paper asks: which of the two major narratives of religion in the Arab Spring holds more water? In other words: was the Arab Spring motivated by religion, or were the uprisings non-religious or even anti-religious in character?

Protest and Religion

Much of the existing social scientific literature on protest focuses on protest behavior as a collective action problem. Simply put, protest is a costly behavior that becomes progressively less risky as the number of participants increases. As Kuran (1991, 1995) observes, the dynamics of protest participation can perhaps be described in the following way: potential

protesters will only participate if a sufficient number of other citizens also participate; consequently, chain-reactions are possible once a relatively small number of highly-motivated individuals decide to participate. Furthermore, as Lohmann (1994) notes, public protest displays make information available to would-be protesters who were previously not engaged. The available information facilitates collective action because citizens learn about the preferences of other similarly aggrieved segments of the population and are more likely to join them in protest. Marwell and Oliver (1993) suggest that such information can aid in building a “critical mass” in which an increasing number of individuals become willing to participate. Using World Values Survey data, Dalton et al. (2009) find that protest activity becomes more likely not as a result of dissatisfaction with the government, but because of access to the resources necessary for protest, such as education and involvement in social groups. A major implication of these models of protest behavior is that the key condition for such behavior is not merely the existence of sufficient grievances, but conditions that allow protesters to overcome the collective action problems inherent to such costly behavior.

The collective action genre of protest literature was developed in response to earlier theories of protest behavior that emphasized the role of grievances. Gurr’s (1970) concept of relative deprivation is the most famous of these theories, emphasizing inequality, oppression, and regime mistreatment as key determinants of protest behavior. In these theories, adverse conditions motivate protest, and less emphasis is placed on the factors that make high-cost behavior more feasible. A variety of adverse conditions may motivate such behavior. While Gurr’s account generally emphasizes economic factors, Goodwin (2001) suggests that revolutions are typically responses to political oppression and violence rather than economic considerations. In either case, this literature argues that opportunities are less important than

motivations in driving protest.

It is conceivable that religion might motivate protest behavior through either the grievance or opportunity mechanisms. On the one hand, religious engagement might create the opportunity for greater protest. It may reduce the costs of collective action by increasing trust among co-religionists, it may enhance the availability of information among co-religionists, or otherwise serve as an organizational platform for political mobilization. A number of recent experimental studies have shown that religion promotes cooperation and pro-social behavior, at least within one's own religious group (Blogowska and Saroglou 2011, Parra 2011, Johnson et al. 2012). This account would suggest that *communal* religious practice should be more likely than individual piety to promote protest behavior because the key mechanisms are the social capital built by religion as well as its organizing capacity. Individual religious behaviors, according to this account, would not be likely to have as strong of an effect; as Putnam (2000, p. 74) notes, "privatized religion may be morally compelling and psychically fulfilling, but it embodies less social capital." In addition to fostering social capital, communal religious activity may help to *organize* political behavior. Wald et al. (1988, p. 531) state that "churches possess many of the characteristics that should maximize behavioral contagion." Jamal has found that mosque participation in the context of the US, enhances a sense of "group consciousness", useful for political mobilization (2005). According to these accounts, therefore, the major mechanism linking religion to protest behavior is religion's *communal* aspect: through both social capital and organization, group religious behavior could promote even high-risk political mobilization.

Other mechanisms, however, might link religion to protest behavior, perhaps even through individual-level channels that have little to do with communal religious practice. As Johnston and Figa (1988, p. 33) state: "there is wide variation in the role religion plays in

oppositional processes.” The recognition of the potentially different effects of the various aspects of religion as a social scientific phenomenon stretches back to Durkheim, who famously distinguished between “beliefs” and “rites.” Durkheim (2008 [1912], p. 36) writes that “religious phenomena fall quite naturally into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are fixed modes of actions. These two classes of phenomena differ as much as thought differs from action.” Harris (1994, 1999) suggests that the different aspects of religion have distinct effects on political mobilization. Studying the African-American religious-political context, he notes that *church* activism provides organizational resources for collective action, while internal religiosity promotes feelings of efficacy, interest in politics, and other psychological traits conducive to political activity. In total, he finds that “both organizationally and psychologically, religious beliefs and practices promote political involvement” (Harris 1994, pp. 61-62). Thus, it is not only the communal aspect of religion that motivates political engagement: the individual dimensions of religion may also play a role. This finding is echoed by Loveland et al. (2005, p. 13), who find that “prayer fosters a cognitive connection to the needs of others that manifests itself in the civic involvement choices of the prayerful.” Religion, it seems, may influence political mobilization (and therefore protest behavior) in a variety of ways and through a variety of channels.

Thus, the multiple channels through which religion may have influenced protest behavior can be classified as follows. A first potential mechanism involves social capital and trust – which in effect reduce the cost of collective action, because citizens now are more trusting of others and worry less about defection. This mechanism can operate at both the organizational level and the individual level. The religious institution itself may enhance social capital. Similarly, individual piety may increase one’s trust in society in ways that bode well for collective action. The second

possible mechanism involves political mobilization, primarily derived from the “mosque to the square” formulation. Here, mosques serve as vehicles of political mobilization. Not only do they structure participation but they equip participants with the necessary organizational resources to influence policy and participate in collective action. Finally, there may be a “social justice” mechanism, driven more compellingly at the individual-level by beliefs and personal convictions about justice and equality (cf. Durkheim 2008 [1912]; Harris 1994), which suggests that those individuals who are more pious are more likely to care about the plights of others and, consequently, the behavior of their regimes. As such, religious individuals may be more likely to mobilize on behalf of other citizens. By unpacking these mechanisms, we ask: what role, then, did religion play in promoting participation in the protests of the Arab Spring?

Data and Methods

To assess the extent to which higher levels of religiosity were associated with a greater or lesser likelihood of participating in anti-regime protest, we use survey data from Tunisia and Egypt, collected shortly after the removal of their respective regimes. These data are drawn from the second wave of the Arab Barometer survey¹. The dependent variable is measured as follows. Respondents were asked the following question: “Did you participate in the protests against former president [president’s name] between [dates of protests]?” In each case, respondents were allowed to answer “yes” or “no.” Therefore, the outcome is binary; respondents who said “yes” were scored as a 1 on the protest measure, while those who responded “no” were scored as 0.

Since the outcome variable is binary, we use logistic regressions to test the relationship between

¹ The Egyptian survey was administered by Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies—led by Gamal Abdel Gawad. The survey was administered during the month of June (2011) and relied on an area probability sampling approach. The survey in Tunisia was administered by Sigma Group—led by Youssef Meddeb. The survey was administered during the month of October (2011) and relied on an area probability sample. In Egypt, 1,220 people were surveyed, while in Tunisia 1,196 were surveyed.

the independent variables and the likelihood of protest. The independent variables of interest were operationalized as follows. The Qur'an readership question (which proxies for individual belief in these models) asked respondents if they listen to or read the Qur'an. The principal investigators of the Arab Barometer have found this question to be the most reliable predictor of religiosity among the questions asked in the survey (Jamal and Tessler 2008). The "communal practice" questions asked respondents whether or not they attended Friday prayer services. For each question, respondents could choose "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "most of the time," or "always."

Standard demographic controls (age, gender, income, college education) were included to address possible confounding effects. Two additional controls were included in the models in order to address features that might be particularly important in the Arab world: interest in politics and unemployment. Interest in politics is a potentially important determinant of protest behavior because of the authoritarian context and relatively low levels of development of each of these countries: it is often claimed that citizens of these countries simply focus on matters other than politics. Thus, to the extent that interest in politics might be associated with both protest and either greater or lesser religiosity, it is a potential confounder. Likewise, unemployment is said to have been a driving force behind the Arab Spring: the region's high levels of unemployment (particularly among educated citizens) are claimed to have motivated anti-regime behavior. Thus, an indicator of unemployment is added as a control variable.

Results

Table 1 displays the likelihood of protest by frequency of Qur'an reading in each of the two countries. This simple sketch of the relationship between individual piety and probability of engaging

in protest suggests an interesting result: individuals who frequently read the Qur'an were substantially more likely to protest than those who did not. Although the trend is not monotonic, a pattern emerges: those who never (or rarely) read the Qur'an are the least likely group to protest (in each country), while those who always read the Qur'an are the most likely group. In Egypt, over 10 percent of citizens who "always" read the Qur'an reported engaging in protest, while less than 4% of those who "rarely" read the Qur'an said that they had participated.² In Tunisia, a similar pattern is present. Less than 6% of those who said they "never" read the Qur'an had engaged in protest, while over 19% of those who "always" read the Qur'an said that they had participated. These results should be interpreted with caution, as they do not control for any potential confounders, but the results are suggestive of an interesting pattern nonetheless.

[Table 1 about here.]

² Respondents in Egypt were not given the option of saying that they "never" read the Qur'an, so the comparison is slightly different between the two countries. Nonetheless, the overall pattern is the same.

Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regressions. Model 1 in each country includes both the “belief” and “communal practice” variables; models 2 and 3 omit communal practice and belief, respectively. The results for the key independent variables of theoretical interest are similar whether the models include both religiosity measures or analyze them separately without controlling for the other. In each model (and for each country), the coefficient on the Qur’an reading variable is positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. These results indicate that those who read the Qur’an more frequently were significantly more likely to protest than those who read the Qur’an less frequently. The effect of communal prayer is much weaker, and works in the opposite direction; citizens in each country who engaged in communal religious practice were somewhat less likely than others to engage in anti-regime protest, but this effect is substantively small and fails to reach conventional levels of significance in any of the models in either country.

[Table 2 about here.]

It is possible that education might be a confounding factor in these analyses. For example, education might be correlated with both Qur’an reading and protest, in which case the relationship between Qur’an reading and likelihood of protest would not be causal, but rather caused by this third variable. While our baseline models control for college education (a variable identified as a strong predictor of participation in the Arab Spring protests), it is necessary to consider multiple operationalizations of this variable in order to increase our confidence that the link between Qur’an reading and protest is not spurious. To this end, Table 3 displays robustness checks of our results. The first two columns in this table measure education on a 7-point scale.

As expected (and in accordance with the coefficients on college education in the baseline models), education is a strong and significant predictor of protest. However, this alternative measurement of the education variable does not noticeably affect the size or significance of the Qur'an reading variable. Likewise, the latter two models in this table control for illiteracy rather than education; it is possible that illiterate individuals (who cannot, of course, read the Qur'an³) were less likely to protest, suggesting another spurious relationship. However, this possibility is not borne out in the data. Regardless of the specification of the education variable⁴, Qur'an reading is strongly and significantly associated with an increased likelihood of participation in the Arab Spring protests.

[Table 3 about here.]

³ It is important to note, however, that the question used in this survey asked respondents how often they read or *listen* to the Qur'an, so even illiterate individuals can indicate frequent Qur'an "reading."

⁴ We have also tested models including interaction terms between education (measured in a number of ways) and unemployment, in case protesters were more likely to come from the pool of educated, unemployed individuals. None of these interactions were close to statistical significance, and none of the specifications affected the size or significance the coefficients on our variables of interest. Results for these models are omitted for the purposes of space, but are available from the authors upon request.

Since it is often difficult to interpret logistic regression coefficients, it is important to consider quantities of interest in order to assess the substantive magnitude of the effects considered. In each country, protesters were a minority among those sampled. About 8% of Egyptians said that they participated in the protests against Hosni Mubarak, while just over 16% of Tunisians reported participating in the demonstrations against Ben Ali. However, religiosity generated some differences in predicted probabilities among individuals. Therefore, it is important to consider the relative impact of each type of religiosity on protest behavior in each country. In order to do so, Figure 1 presents the relative risks of protest associated with each of these types of religiosity⁵. The “relative risk” compares the relative likelihood of protest among an “always” respondent versus a “rarely” respondent for each type of religious behavior. As this figure demonstrates, individuals in Egypt who always read the Qur’an were over 4 times as likely to protest compared to those who rarely do. In Tunisia, “always-readers” were about 3.1 times as likely to protest compared to rarely-readers. The impact of communal practice is much weaker, and in the opposite direction: in Egypt, “always-practicers” were about 69% as likely to protest compared to those who rarely engage in communal practice; the corresponding figure in Tunisia is about 76%. The result for communal practice is not statistically significant in either country; but the effect of Qur’an reading is significant at the 0.01 level or greater for both Egypt and Tunisia.

[Figure 1 about here.]

⁵ The quantities of interest in this section are calculated by leaving the control variables at their observed values for each respondent, then calculating predicted probabilities under both the “treatment” and “control” status for each respondent. This method is generally preferable to holding the control variables at constant values such as their means (Hanmer and Kalkan, 2012). However, results were virtually identical using either method.

Discussion

What do these results suggest about the role of religion in the Arab Spring? The implications are perhaps surprising. On the one hand, it is clear that the Arab Spring protests were not, in general, motivated by anti-religious sentiment. On the contrary, individuals who read the Qur'an more often were three to four times as likely as others to participate in the protests. On the other hand, the "days of rage" narrative does not have much empirical support. People who engaged in communal religious practice were, in fact, slightly less likely than others to engage in protest. The evidence from the second wave of the Arab Barometer suggests that in the Arab Spring itself, belief rather than communal practice was the more important source of religious motivation for protest. It appears, therefore, that the role played by religion in the Arab Spring—at least from a behavioral perspective—was primarily psychological rather than organizational.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the possibility that the association between Qur'an reading and protest may be spurious simply due to an association between *political Islam* and opposition to the regime. Since organized Islamist movements had represented the strongest opposition to the existing regimes in each of these countries, there is a strong possibility that once attitudes about political Islam are controlled for, the effect of Qur'an reading may disappear. In order to account for this possibility, Table 4 presents the results of logistic regressions controlling for two separate measures of support for political Islam. In the first set of models, respondents were asked about their belief that Islamic law is appropriate for their countries. In the second, respondents were asked if they believed that a political system in which *only* Islamist parties were allowed to compete was appropriate for their country. While support

for political Islam does seem to have some independent impact (which may vary by country), the effect of Qur'an reading remains largely unchanged when including these control variables. The magnitude of the coefficients remains comparable whether the political Islam variables are included or not, and the effect of Qur'an reading remains statistically significant at the 0.01 level in each country, regardless of which Islamism variable is included. For ease of interpretation, Figure 2 displays the "relative risks" of protest, comparing the effect of Qur'an reading with the effect of supporting Islamic law. In both countries, it is clear that the effect of Qur'an reading trumps the effect of Islamism; indeed, the effect of support for Islamic law is *negative* and statistically significant in Tunisia. In Egypt, Islamist attitudes have a positive and marginally significant effect on the likelihood of protest, but as demonstrated by this figure, the magnitude of this effect is less than half the size of the effect of Qur'an reading. This evidence suggests, then, that Qur'an reading had an independent effect on protest behavior, and is not simply proxying for Islamist attitudes in our data.

[Table 4 about here.]

[Figure 2 about here.]

It is possible that the positive association between Qur'an reading and likelihood of protest is simply due to social desirability bias. In order for this to be true, it must be the case that social desirability concerns lead individuals to be more likely to report both Qur'an reading and protesting. Such a relationship is plausible, but our findings suggest that this mechanism is not driving the results. The findings displayed in Figure 1 show that mosque attendance is not associated with an increased likelihood of protest (indeed, the relationship is perhaps slightly

negative). Were it the case that social desirability concerns were driving respondents to report both Qur'an reading and protesting, presumably the same concerns would push them to report attending mosque as well. Since mosque attendance is not at all associated with protest in our sample, there is evidence to suggest that social desirability concerns are not simply motivating respondents to over-emphasize their piety as well as their participation in protest.

There are many possible explanations for the positive link between Qur'an reading and protest behavior. While it is impossible given the available data to determine with any certainty what causal process was at work, it is useful to consider a handful of potential mechanisms. First, most of the regimes targeted by the Arab Spring were not primarily legitimized by Islamic values. Hosni Mubarak, for instance, viewed political Islam as the greatest threat to his rule. It is conceivable, therefore, that more religious people mobilized in greater numbers because they viewed the regimes they targeted as unfaithful to Islam. Given this account, it becomes easier to believe that Qur'an readers were more likely to protest. Another possible explanation relates to the link between religion and politics more broadly. Putnam (1993) famously claimed that religion in Italy makes individuals focus more on the city of God than the city of man; however, he made the opposite claim when discussing the United States (Putnam 2000). Depending on the context, religion may make individuals more inclined to mobilize in order to change their societies. The potency of political Islam in many Arab countries suggests that such a mechanism may be at work: in many cases, Islam motivates pious Muslims to work to change the world around them rather than simply inducing them to stay out of politics. Either of these mechanisms suggests a means by which individual piety might induce individuals to engage in higher levels of anti-regime protest.

Fortunately, the Arab Barometer dataset allows us to conduct initial tests of several

potential mechanisms. Broadly, we classify these mechanisms into two categories: resources and motivation. In the first category, we consider the possibility that Qur'an reading provides citizens with psychological or cognitive resources that facilitate protest behavior. Such resources might include feelings of political efficacy or trust, which make mobilization easier. In each case, these resources do not promote *grievances* among Qur'an readers, but simply make it more likely that existing grievances will translate into political activity such as protest. The second category, *motivation*, addresses the possibility that Qur'an readers may be particularly disenchanted with the status quo; Qur'an readers might be more likely to care about and mobilize against social injustice. In this case, Qur'an readers would be more likely to protest because they had more *reason* to oppose the incumbent regimes, and might be more inclined to mobilize because of divine sanction. These motivations linked to social injustice might include feelings of relative deprivation (Gurr 1970), sensitivity to regime behavior, and outrage against violations of human rights.

A number of items on the Arab Barometer questionnaire address variants of these issues. While analysis of causal mechanisms with observational data is always difficult, we believe that these data allow us to develop a plausible account of how and why Qur'an reading is associated with a greater likelihood of protest. We do so by considering a handful of questions that correspond closely to the phenomena mentioned above, as classified into the "resources" and "motivation" categories. These motivations and resources, we believe, either galvanize political consciousness in ways similar to Gurr's "relative deprivation" thesis and lead to protest participation or reduce the costs of collective action through greater trust and other elements of social capital conducive to widespread participation. First, we consider a handful of "resources" that are potentially provided by Qur'an reading. The first of these resources is interpersonal

trust. It is conceivable that Qur'an readers might be more likely to protest simply because they are more trusting; if Qur'an reading promotes trust, it is plausible that Qur'an readers may have been more likely than others to overcome the collective action problems inherent to protest behavior. We measure interpersonal trust through a question asking respondents: "Generally speaking, do you think most people are trustworthy or not?" Second, it is possible that political efficacy is responsible for this link: Qur'an readers might feel a stronger sense of efficacy, thus enabling them to engage in high-risk political activity at a lower cost than other citizens. We measure political efficacy through the following question: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Sometimes, politics are so complicated that I cannot understand what is happening." We likewise measure a different type of political efficacy through the following question: "In your opinion, are people nowadays able to criticize the government without fear?"

The second category of potential mechanisms linking Qur'an reading to protest behavior addresses *motivations*. One possible motivation for protest behavior is relative deprivation. If Qur'an readers are more likely than others to perceive inequities in the government's treatment of them relative to others, then such perceptions might be the link between Qur'an reading and protest. To measure this concept, we use the following question: "To what extent do you feel that you are being treated equally to other citizens in your country?" Taken together, these questions provide a reasonable test of several possible mechanisms linking Qur'an reading to protest activity. Additionally, it is possible that Qur'an readers might be more supportive of democracy than non-readers, and therefore more motivated to engage in protest against authoritarian regimes. To address this possibility, we build a composite measure of support for democracy consisting of three items that capture attitudinal *commitment* to democracy. All items are scored from 1-4, with 4 indicating the most pro-democracy response. Each question asks

respondents how much they agree with the indicated statement. The first statement is: “Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems.” The second is: “A democratic system may have problems, yet it is better than other systems,” and the third is “Democracy negatively affects social and ethical values in your country.” We use these measures as they are the best items available that measure *commitment* to democracy rather than *evaluation* of democracy; i.e., questions about democracy’s effect on economic growth are omitted. This composite index can theoretically range from 0 to 12, but no respondents were scored as 0 or 1, so an 11-point scale resulted.

Table 5 displays some tests of the “resources” hypothesis: the results of regressions modeling the likelihood of the outcomes mentioned above as a function of the predictors included in earlier models. Models 1 and 2 indicate that, on average, Qur’an readers were *less* trusting than other individuals, and this relationship was highly statistically significant in Egypt. This result suggests that the trust mechanism, at least in the form specified above, is not the reason for Qur’an readers’ increased likelihood of protest. On the contrary, the fact that Qur’an readers were significantly *less* trusting than other citizens hints at a potential motivation mechanism, which is considered in other models. Models 3 and 4 suggest that political efficacy is not the missing link; Qur’an readers are substantially more likely to agree that politics is “too complicated” for someone like them. In total, the “resource” mechanisms perform poorly in these models: the only significant relationships between Qur’an reading and the dependent variable across these models are in the *opposite* direction of that predicted by the resource theories of mobilization.

Models 1 and 2 in Table 6 suggest that Qur’an readers were significantly more likely than non-Qur’an-readers to perceive unequal treatment of individuals in their countries. Models 3 and

4, which use an 11-point composite index of several items relating to support for democracy⁶, indicate that Qur'an readers in both countries were, on average, more supportive of democracy than non-readers. All four of these results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or better, and are all in the predicted direction. Taken together, the "motivation" mechanisms find much more support in these models than do the "resource" accounts. Qur'an readers are significantly more likely to perceive inequalities in their treatment from the regime, and are more supportive of democracy than are non-readers. We interpret these findings to suggest the following. While there are likely many reasons why Qur'an reading was linked to a greater likelihood of protest during the Arab Spring, the main implication of our results is that Qur'an reading *motivated* protest rather than *facilitating* it. Qur'an readers appear to be more sensitive to injustice, a result that is plausible given the social justice message found in various parts of the Qur'an. Thus, Qur'an readers were more likely to engage in protest than were non-Qur'an readers despite having much lower levels of overall trust and a much weaker sense of political efficacy. In the Arab Spring, it appears, Qur'an reading increased motivation for protest, but did not provide the resources that tend to make protest easier. In this case, motivation seems to have trumped resource scarcity.

Conclusion

Even with access to survey data about the Arab Spring protesters, it remains difficult to identify who the protesters were and why they were mobilized into anti-regime activity. Likewise, it is impossible to predict what the future holds with regard to regime outcomes or the

⁶ The models presented here using this variable are OLS, but results are comparable using ordinal logistic regression.

relationship between religion and politics. At the same time, systematic analysis of individual-level political behavior is a crucial step towards improving our understandings of the recent Arab uprisings.

Esposito (2011) argues that the Arab youth—who are widely argued to have driven the Arab Spring—want democracy above all else. While this claim might in fact capture the interests of the drivers of the Arab Spring, the results presented in this paper suggest that religion should not be discarded as a motivator for protest behavior in the Arab world. The next phase of Arab politics may involve moves towards democracy, but is unlikely to involve a move away from religion. Thus, the traditional temptation to associate democracy with secularization—particularly common in the West—is likely to be misleading in the Arab world. Indeed, as Filali-Ansary (2012) notes, some of the revolutionaries in the Arab world hope that these revolutions will bring about some sort of fusion between Shari'a law and democracy. Regardless of the type of relationship between religion and politics that will emerge from the Arab Spring, it is clear that studies of these revolutions must rethink the classical assumptions about religion and democracy.

The key implication of the results presented in this paper is that religion was a significant factor in *motivating* the Arab Spring, but perhaps not in the expected ways. Individual piety played a significant role in influencing protest behavior, but communal religious practice did not. While the mechanisms behind these relationships are indeterminate, there is evidence to suggest that many of the revolutionaries active in the Arab Spring were motivated, at least in part, by a psychological attachment to religion.

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Figure 1: Relative Risks of Protest, by Type of Religiosity and Country

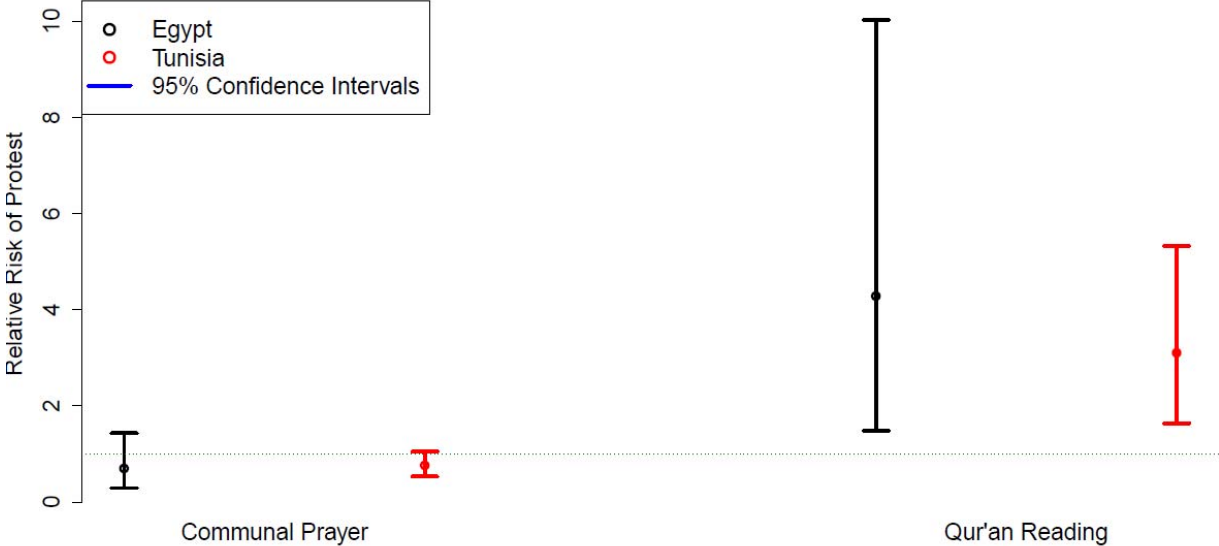


Figure 2: Relative Risks of Protest Comparing Qur'an Reading and Support for Islamic Law

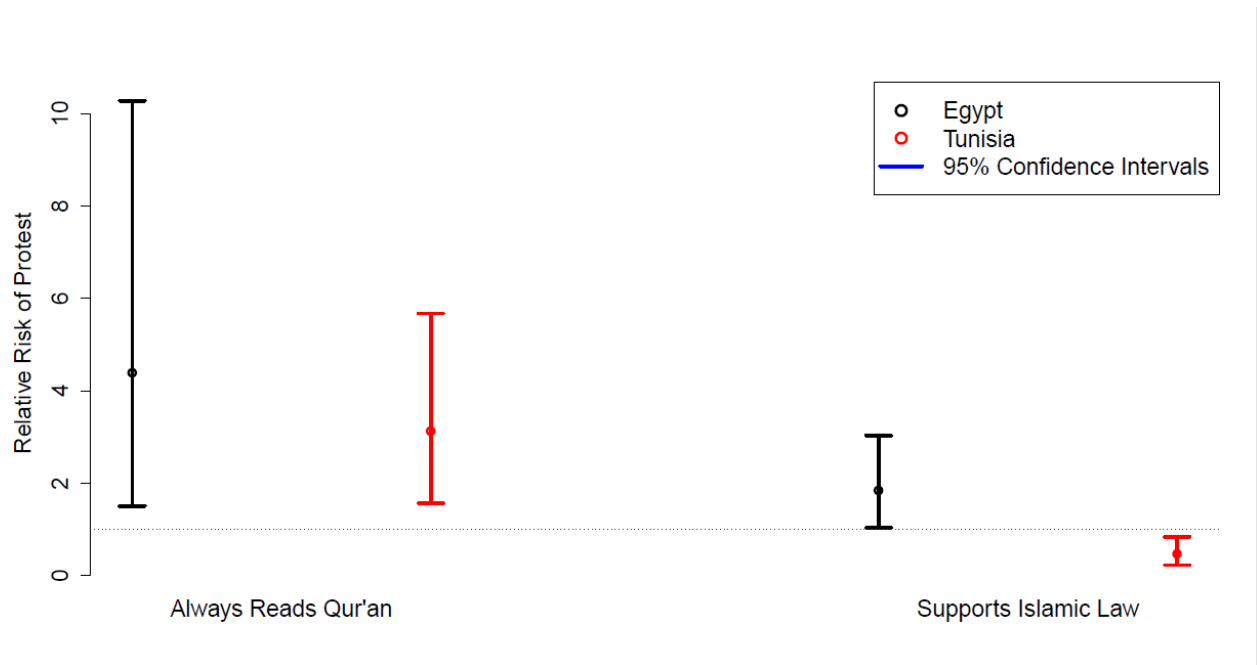


Table 1: Likelihood of Protest, by Qur'an Reading

<u>Frequency of (Daily) Qur'an Reading</u>	Tunisia			<u>Frequency of (Daily) Qur'an Reading</u>	Egypt		
	<u>Did not Protest</u>	<u>Protested</u>	<u>Total</u>		<u>Did not Protest</u>	<u>Protested</u>	<u>Total</u>
Never	52 94.55%	3 5.45%	55 100.00%	Rarely	71 95.95%	3 4.05%	74 100.00%
Rarely	71 87.65%	10 12.35%	81 100.00%	Sometimes	194 94.17%	12 5.83%	206 100.00%
Sometimes	326 82.95%	67 17.05%	393 100.00%	Most of the Time	283 94.02%	18 5.98%	301 100.00%
Most of the Time	339 84.33%	63 15.67%	402 100.00%	Always	503 89.18%	61 10.82%	564 100.00%
Always	192 80.67%	46 19.33%	238 100.00%	<u>Total</u>	1051 91.79%	94 8.21%	1,145 100.00%
<u>Total</u>	980 83.83%	189 16.17%	1,169 100.00%				

Chi-Squared statistic = 7.58 (4 df), p-value = 0.108

Chi-Squared statistic = 10.32 (3 df), p-value = 0.016

Table 2: Logistic Regression Results, Protest (Baseline Models)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>
(Intercept)	-1.72 (1.06)	1.38** (0.48)	-2.50** (0.80)	1.31** (0.48)	-0.96 (0.99)	1.88*** (0.46)
Age	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.02† (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Income	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender	-1.63*** (0.39)	-1.97*** (0.25)	-1.40*** (0.31)	-1.81*** (0.23)	-1.40*** (0.38)	-1.70*** (0.23)
Interest in Politics	1.16*** (0.35)	0.51* (0.20)	1.13** (0.35)	0.50* (0.20)	1.27*** (0.34)	0.50* (0.20)
College Educated	0.97*** (0.27)	0.59* (0.23)	0.98*** (0.27)	0.61** (0.23)	1.03*** (0.27)	0.59** (0.23)
Unemployed	-0.14 (0.52)	0.29 (0.24)	-0.13 (0.52)	0.26 (0.24)	-0.13 (0.51)	0.20 (0.24)
Mosque Attendance	-0.17 (0.15)	-0.11 (0.07)			-0.09 (0.15)	0.00 (0.06)
Qur'an Reading	0.47** (0.17)	0.43*** (0.12)	0.45** (0.17)	0.33** (0.11)		
N	1003	937	1020	941	1003	937
AIC	487.08	717.64	486.84	721.62	493.75	729.18
BIC	663.87	891.97	644.52	876.72	650.89	884.14
logL	-207.54	-322.82	-211.42	-328.81	-214.87	-332.59

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Robustness Checks, Education and Literacy

	Model 4		Model 5	
	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>
(Intercept)	-2.64*	0.46	-1.54	1.41**
	(1.12)	(0.59)	(1.06)	(0.48)
Age	-0.02†	-0.04***	-0.02†	-0.05***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Income	0.00	0.00	0.00†	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender	-1.63***	-1.95***	-1.63***	-1.89***
	(0.39)	(0.25)	(0.39)	(0.25)
Interest In Politics	1.13**	0.49*	1.20***	0.60**
	(0.35)	(0.20)	(0.35)	(0.20)
Education	0.22**	0.21**		
	(0.08)	(0.07)		
Unemployed	-0.16	0.33	-0.13	0.35
	(0.51)	(0.24)	(0.51)	(0.24)
Mosque Attendance	-0.19	-0.13†	-0.19	-0.12
	(0.15)	(0.07)	(0.15)	(0.07)
Illiterate			-0.77†	-0.36
	(0.43)			(0.31)
Qur'an Reading	0.47**	0.44***	0.49**	0.43***
	(0.17)	(0.12)	(0.17)	(0.12)
N	1003	937	1003	937
AIC	491.25	715.51	495.58	722.73
BIC	668.04	889.85	672.37	897.06
logL	-209.63	-321.75	-211.79	-325.36

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 4: Robustness Checks, Political Islam

	Model 4		Model 5	
	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Tunisia</u>
(Intercept)	-1.81† (1.09)	1.47** (0.53)	-1.53 (1.07)	1.42** (0.52)
Age	-0.02† (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02† (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Income	0.00† (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00† (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender	-1.58*** (0.39)	-1.90*** (0.27)	-1.51*** (0.39)	-1.87*** (0.27)
Interest in Politics	1.21*** (0.35)	0.48* (0.20)	1.15*** (0.35)	0.48* (0.20)
Illiterate	-0.71 (0.44)	-0.09 (0.35)	-0.65 (0.43)	-0.07 (0.35)
Unemployed	-0.15 (0.51)	0.41 (0.26)	-0.07 (0.51)	0.36 (0.26)
Mosque Attendance	-0.16 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.08)	-0.20 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.08)
Islamic Law Appropriate	0.61* (0.31)	-0.99* (0.39)		
Only Islamist System Appropriate			-0.28 (0.37)	-0.74* (0.32)
Qur'an Reading	0.50** (0.17)	0.44*** (0.13)	0.47** (0.17)	0.44*** (0.13)
N	924	724	903	731
AIC	489.51	640.11	488.83	643.43
BIC	682.66	823.50	681.06	827.21
logL	-204.76	-280.05	-204.42	-281.72

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 5: Mechanism Tests (Resources)

Dependent variable:

	Trust		Efficacy	
	<i>logistic</i>		<i>ordered logistic</i>	
	Egypt (1)	Tunisia (2)	Egypt (3)	Tunisia (4)
Age	0.008 (0.005)	0.022*** (0.006)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.005)
Income	-0.0002*** (0.0001)	-0.00004 (0.0001)	-0.0002 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)
Female	-0.159 (0.178)	-0.252 (0.191)	-0.224* (0.108)	-0.223 (0.167)
Interested In Politics	0.251* (0.151)	0.301* (0.169)	0.215 (0.141)	-0.047 (0.150)
Islamic Law Appropriate	-0.066 (0.180)	-0.277 (0.275)	-0.247 (0.169)	0.132 (0.234)
College Educated	-0.123 (0.184)	-0.091 (0.211)	0.226 (0.181)	0.299 (0.181)
Unemployed	-0.542* (0.299)	-0.062 (0.240)	-0.373 (0.282)	-0.022 (0.205)
Mosque	-0.056 (0.074)	0.001 (0.061)	0.120** (0.053)	0.091 (0.055)
Qur'an Reading	-0.352*** (0.081)	-0.039 (0.097)	-0.140* (0.072)	-0.230** (0.086)
Intercept	1.749*** (0.523)	-1.113** (0.442)		
Observations	920	711	896	707
Log likelihood	-603.579	-439.255		
AIC	1,227.159	898.510		

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 6: Mechanism Tests (Motivation)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Perceives Unequal Treatment		Support for Democracy	
	<i>logistic</i>		<i>OLS</i>	
	Egypt (1)	Tunisia (2)	Egypt (3)	Tunisia (4)
Age	-0.006 (0.005)	0.007 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Income	-0.00003 (0.0001)	-0.0003* (0.0001)	0.0002*** (0.0001)	-0.00004 (0.0001)
Female	-0.165 (0.188)	-0.143 (0.182)	-0.185 (0.148)	-0.242* (0.129)
Interested In Politics	-0.372** (0.156)	-0.214 (0.164)	0.271** (0.122)	-0.070 (0.115)
Islamic Law Appropriate	0.191 (0.185)	0.151 (0.246)	-1.010*** (0.147)	-0.682*** (0.179)
College Educated	-0.043 (0.194)	-0.164 (0.206)	0.131 (0.146)	0.166 (0.135)
Unemployed	0.610** (0.294)	0.651*** (0.223)	-0.057 (0.248)	0.067 (0.160)
Mosque Attendance	-0.012 (0.077)	-0.122** (0.059)	0.065 (0.061)	-0.039 (0.041)
Qur'an Reading	0.163** (0.083)	0.188** (0.094)	0.408*** (0.064)	0.141** (0.066)
Intercept	-0.587 (0.541)	-0.475 (0.429)	8.476*** (0.417)	10.462*** (0.298)
Observations	919	712	865	653
R ²			0.178	0.035
Adjusted R ²			0.170	0.021
Log likelihood	-566.159	-470.007		
AIC	1,152.317	960.015		

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

