

Islamism and the Problem of Western Hegemony: Experimental Evidence from Egypt

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Abstract

Scholars have long held that political Islam is in part a response to the rise of the West. In this telling, the West's cultural, economic, and military superiority are thought to produce grievances or psychological strains that Islamist ideas and parties are uniquely positioned to address. We test this hypothesis with a survey experiment conducted in Egypt in the summer of 2013, in which we vary the salience of different aspects of Western hegemony for respondents in a small-scale survey, and observe the effect on their attitudes toward Islamist principles and politicians. We find only limited support for the proposition that Western hegemony generates support for Islamism, and find the effect is most evident among women.

Introduction

During the waning years of the Mubarak era, a visitor to most any Muslim Brotherhood office, mosque-based health clinic, or Islamic bookstore had a decent chance of encountering a peculiar poster, composed only of 16 lines of text. Beneath the words “This is how we once were, so when shall we be so again?” the poster purports to reproduce a letter, allegedly written by “George the Second, King of England, Sweden, and Norway” to the “Caliph, King of the Muslims in the Kingdom of Andalusia, his exalted majesty Hisham the Third:”

“With due praise and reverence, we wish to inform you that we have heard of the great sophistication that the institutes of learning and industry in your cosmopolitan country enjoy in great abundance. We wish for our sons to be able to emulate some of these virtues, so may this be the fortuitous beginning of your influence, to spread the light of knowledge in our country, which is beset on all four corners by ignorance...”

In the letter, George goes on to inform the caliph that he has sent a delegation of English noblewomen, headed by his niece (whose name is rendered “Dubant”), to learn the manners of court under the Caliph’s great patronage.¹ After urging the Caliph to accept a gift that he has sent for him with the young princess, the King ends his letter by declaring himself, “your obedient servant, George the Second.”

Leaving aside the question of whether the particular historical episode related by the poster actually took place (all evidence suggests that it did not), the document’s purpose seems clear: to inspire in its (presumably Muslim) readers a sense of pride in their heritage, to suggest to them that Muslims once inhabited a

¹ The poster helpfully indicates a source for the letter, “Kitāb al-Istidhkār” of Ibn ‘Abd al-Bar, Volume 1, page 113. Though this much seems accurate, the larger story is harder to verify. For example, no George II ruled England until the 18th century.

world that was a mirror image from our own, contemporary one. If Arab leaders today genuflect before their Western counterparts, if the universities of the Muslim world are today only faint facsimiles of the research institutions of the West, if the children of the Arab elite are sent across the seas to learn the ways of Europe and America, the poster seems to be saying, things were precisely the opposite during Islam's glory days. The poster concludes with the following exhortation:

“Brother... sister... this is our history and these are our glories, so may you play an active role in returning greatness and confidence to our nation.”

This poster is of interest not just as a relic of the Mubarak era. Instead, it speaks to what scholars have long thought political Islam—which we define as a political ideology that considers adherence to Islamic scripture as the *sine qua non* of political legitimacy—is all about. Scholars have argued that the central obsession of Islamism, and the critical factor in its genesis and development, is the rise of the West to world domination in the nineteenth century. The Western Christian incursions into and colonization of Muslim lands, the imposition of humiliating capitulations on the subject peoples of the Muslim world, culminating in the military defeat and subsequent dissolution of the caliphate, are all thought to be the original grievances that motivated the thinkers and activists who began today's Islamist movements. In a letter to the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the Simon Bolivar of pan-Islamism, expressed the rationale behind his project:

[T]he Powers have their own interest in view, and not ours, and [...] they all have only one desire, that of making our land disappear up to our last trace. And in this there is no distinction to make between Russia, England, Germany, or France, especially if they perceive our weakness and our impotence to resist their designs. *If, on the contrary, we are united, if the*

*Muslims are a single man, we can then be of harm and of use and our voice will be heard.*²

In 1928, four years after the abolition of the caliphate by Turkey's Mustafa Kemal, Hassan al-Bannā, a student of al-Afghāni's student Rashīd Rida, founded the Society of Muslim Brothers (Jamā'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn) in the northeastern Egyptian town of al-Ismā'īliya. The sting of Western ascendancy is evident in the Muslim Brotherhood's origin story, as narrated by al-Banna in his memoirs. Al-Banna describes being visited at home in March 1928 by six men of Ismā'īliyya, who knew him from the lectures and speeches he gave in mosques and coffee shops around town. With "strength in their voices and lightning in their eyes," he says, the men declared to him:

We have listened and become aware, and we have been affected. We know not the practical way to the glory of Islam and the welfare of the Muslims. *But we are tired of this life: this life of humiliation and oppression. You see that Arabs and Muslims in this country enjoy no stature or dignity, and do not exceed the rank of mere peons possessed by these foreigners.* We own nothing except this blood that runs hot with pride in our veins, and these souls brightened by faith and dignity in ourselves, and these few dirhams from the sustenance of our children. We are not able to see the road to action as you see it, or to know the path to serving the homeland and the religion and the nation as you know it. All that we wish now is to present to you what we own, to fulfill our duty before God, and for you to be responsible before Him for us and for what we must do.³

The West's dominance over a supine Muslim world is theorized to have done more than simply inspire the thought and actions of individuals like al-

² Quoted in Keddie (1966), "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdūlhamid II," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 3:1, p. 65. Emphasis ours.

³ Ḥassan al-Bannā, *Mudhakirāt al-Da'wa wa al-Dā'iyya* (Memoirs of Preaching and the Preacher), n.d., p. 68. Emphasis ours.

Afghānī and al-Bannā, but is also thought to drive mass support for Islamism as well. Dawn (1993, 7) talks of how the “need to imitate the West” caused “injury” to the “Eastern self-view” and inspired the belief that a “return to the true pristine Islam [...] would recover its lost power and glory.” Lewis (1990) tells us that Islamism is an “historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.”

This thesis, though widely accepted and repeated, has never been subject to a systematic empirical test. This paper describes the preliminary results of a field experiment that is designed to ascertain whether Western dominance leads to support for Islamism, and if so, why. It is part of a larger project that brings experimental methods to bear on the cognitive mechanisms thought to lie behind support for political Islam—from the alleged emotional resonance of religious language and symbols (Singerman 1995, Wickham 2002, Benford and Snow 2000, Perry and Aminzade 2001), to religion’s ability to provide psychological comfort in the face of adverse life events (Scheve and Stasavage 2006), to the subject of this paper: the trauma that comes from being on what is perceived to be the losing side in a civilizational struggle.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review existing literatures on the relationship between Western ascendance and political Islam. We then describe the research design, and why we believe an experimental exploration of the question of Western ascendancy’s effect on Islamism is both desirable and, more importantly, possible. We then present preliminary results from a field test of the experiment among several hundred respondents in Greater Cairo, Egypt. We find that Western hegemony does increase support for political Islam, but that this result is more pronounced for women than for men. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings.

Literature Review:

As Bernard Lewis (1990) writes, “there is no lack of individual policies and actions, pursued and taken by individual Western governments, that have aroused the passionate anger of Middle Eastern and other Islamic peoples.” Western powers are seen by the peoples of the Muslim world as the conquerers of Muslim lands, supporters of the occupation of Palestine, and the helpmates of dictators (Abdallah 2003; Gerges 1999; and Makdisi 2002). One influential account holds that Islamists earn mass support because they represent resistance to these things. As Ayooob (2004) describes, Islamists “continue in multifarious ways to challenge not only the domestic status quo but the international status quo as well. Since the latter often props up the former, the two are closely intertwined from the Islamist perspective.” According to Haddad (2007, 506), Islamists attract support because “Arab nations and peoples have continued to be subservient to foreign domination, which Islamists describe as a continuing predatory relationship.”⁴

This set of accounts, while helpful, leaves unanswered the question of why voters identify *Islamists* as the prime opponents of foreign domination. Secular and leftist movements in the Arab world are among the most vociferous critics of Western intervention in the region. A nationalist figure such as Gamal Abdel Nasser, who ruled Egypt from 1954 to 1970, is today revered as much for his resistance to Western domination and his assertion of Egyptian independence as he is for his populist economic policies. Why then, do not voters turn to contemporary Nasserist parties for redress against Western malfeasances?

For other scholars, it is the West’s *cultural* ascendancy that generates support for Islamism, especially since Western norms pose direct challenges to Islamic traditions and practices. Bayat (2005, 894) writes that Islamist

⁴ Ibid., pp. 507.

movements are “reactive movements carried out by traditional people, the intellectuals, and the urban poor against Western-style modernization.” Kepel (1984, 46) declares that “the point of departure [for Islamists] is the observation of the bankruptcy of the West, of both capitalism and socialism. This is a truism of Muslim Brotherhood ideology, as is the assertion that the resurrection of Islam holds the solution to humanity’s problems.” As Burgat (2003, 71) tells us,

“If over the past few decades, mosques have seen increasing attendance numbers, it is certainly because that is where the word of God is spoken, but also because the language used in them is that of the only movement to have resisted the cultural pressure of the north.”

Monroe and Kreide (1997, 21) write that the Islamists’ emphasis on “the restoration of past traditions” is an attempt at “national self-preservation and cultural purity” in the face of Western cultural contagion. Barber (1995) has written of Islamic fundamentalism as a defensive response to the spread of American popular and consumer culture. This argument shares much with an earlier, sociological literature that hypothesizes the rise of cultural counter-movements in response to foreign influences. For example, Barrington Moore (1967, 384) has written, “in many parts of the world, when an established culture was beginning to erode, threatening some of the population, people have responded by reaffirming the traditional way of life with an increasing and frantic vigor.” Marty and Appleby (1993) say that “fundamentalism,” (of which political Islam is considered a variant), is triggered by “a crisis of identity by those who fear extinction as a people or their absorption into an overarching syncretistic culture to such a degree that their distinctiveness is undermined in the rush to homogeneity.”

Still others argue that the ascent of the West generates a constituency for Islamism not because of its conquest of Muslim lands or its disruption of Muslim cultures, but through the juxtaposition of the West’s achievements with the Muslim world’s backwardness. According to Berman (2003, 258), Muslims thus

can catch a “glimpse of what modernity has to offer,” without actually being able to achieve it. Why, however, this causes citizens to turn to Islamism as opposed to causing them to abandon Islam in the first place, is not well theorized. In the following section, we describe our strategy for testing each of these hypothesized causal mechanisms.

Empirical Strategy and Experimental Design:

Our first impulse when we approached the question of whether Western dominance gives rise to Islamism was to study the question cross-nationally, comparing Islamist vote shares across countries and regressing them against various measures of Western military and cultural penetration. However, there are a number of difficulties with this approach. First, there is little variation in the extent of Western ascendance across countries. This is particularly true of cultural ascendancy. Most countries receive American and European cultural products such as television programs, images, and consumer goods. Even if there were significant variation in the degree of exposure to these things, measuring it is likely to be difficult in practice. The second reason for the difficulty in studying this phenomenon observationally is that there is likely to be significant endogeneity of the hypothesized treatment (Western intervention) to the effect (Islamism). For example, we might want to see if countries that are more exposed to Western military interventions (either directly or in neighboring countries) are more likely to witness large vote shares for Islamist parties. But it might be that the West intervenes in places precisely because Islamists are strong there. Though this inferential challenge might be dealt with by exploring the relationship between Islamism and Western intervention over time, potential confounds can never be entirely eliminated.

Individual-level survey data are certainly more appropriate for testing the causal mechanisms hypothesized to undergird support for Islamism, which all operate at the individual level, but these too present analytical problems inherent in all observational studies. Experimental design is obviously the way forward,

but it is not immediately obvious how one varies the treatment variable: Western ascendancy. Barring the ability to generate an alternate universe in which Muslims do not experience the humiliations of Western cultural, scientific, economic, military, and political superiority, how can we test whether these things genuinely lead them to embrace Islamist parties?

Our solution is to vary the *salience* of Western ascendancy. Though all respondents in a survey presumably exist within the same web of Western dominance, we can test whether bringing this dominance to the front of a respondent's mind changes her support for Islamist principles and politicians. Moreover, we can test *which* elements of Western dominance are most productive of the supposed Islamist response. Do citizens turn most to Islamism when they are reminded of the West's conquering militaries, its productive research and educational institutions, its seductive cultural products, or its (comparatively) roaring economies? Finally, we can ask whether other non-Western ideologies are as likely to attract citizens who have been treated to a painful reminder of Western supremacy. If respondents are as likely to turn to Nasserists as to Islamists when reminded of American boots on Iraqi and Afghani soil, or of the hours of Western television programs consumed by their children, then the electoral dominance of the latter, and feeble political power of the former, would have to be explained with reference to something other than political Islam's anti-Western discourses.

We designed our experiment as follows. We sample a nationally-representative group of Egyptian adults, and randomly administer one of 5 questionnaires. The first questionnaire (the control), asks the respondent a series of questions intended to gauge their attitudes toward Islam and politics, and their evaluations of political figures from across the Egyptian political spectrum. Specifically, they are asked two sets of question. The first presented two statements, and asked them whether they "agree strongly," "agree," "disagree," or "disagree strongly" with each of them:

1. All Egyptian political parties should have an Islamic frame of reference
2. Every member of the Egyptian parliament should have expertise in fiqh and shari‘a

The second battery presents a series of individuals from recent Egyptian political history, and asks respondents to indicate whether they “strongly favor,” “favor,” “dislike,” or “strongly dislike” each:

1. **Hosni Mubarak:** President of Egypt from 1981 until his overthrow in February, 2011.⁵
2. **Hasan al-Bannā:** Founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. His 1949 assassination is widely believed to have been at the hands of the Egyptian secret police.
3. **Anwar al-Sadat:** Third president of Egypt, from 1970 until his assassination in 1981. Though Sadat was a patron of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups during his early years in power, his pursuit of peace with Israel (culminating in the 1978 Egyptian Israeli Peace Treaty) eventually earned him the enmity of the Islamist current in his country. Likewise, Sadat’s attempts to liberalize the country’s economy culminated in bread riots in 1977 and generated significant opposition from the secular left.
4. **Gamal Abdel Nasser:** Leader of the 1952 “Free Officers” coup against King Farouk of Egypt; President of Egypt from 1954 until his death in 1970. A pan-Arabist with socialist economic leanings, Nasser initiated failed unification efforts with Syria and Yemen, presided over a major military defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967, and pursued a populist policies that resulted in a bloated state sector and a raft of burdensome subsidies on basic foodstuffs. Nonetheless, Nasser remains today a symbol

⁵ Capsule descriptions of each figure were *not* presented in the survey. Respondents who were unfamiliar with a particular figure could choose to answer “don’t know.”

- of pride for Egyptians, more for the grandness of what he represented than for the modesty of what he achieved.
5. **Muhammad Mursī:** First democratically-elected president of Egypt, until his overthrow in a military coup in July 2013; former member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau (2004 to 2011), member of parliament (2000 to 2005), and president of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party from 2011 to 2012.
 6. **Taha Husayn:** Twentieth-century Egyptian intellectual and man of letters. Widely regarded as an opponent of the clerical influence of al-Azhar and of an exponent of a secular Egyptian identity that united Christians and Muslims within the boundaries of a nation-state.⁶
 7. **Sayyid Qutb:** Twentieth-century Egyptian Islamist educator and man of letters, a principal ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood who was executed by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966 for allegedly participating in a secret Muslim Brotherhood plot to assassinate him. His most influential work, *Ma'ālim fī al-ḥaḍarā* (Signposts on the Road), articulates a political theory that locates a ruler's legitimacy in his adherence to Islamic law and principles. Berman (2004) has identified Qutb as the principal philosopher of *jihadism*, for his exhortation to wage jihad against Muslim rulers who fail to uphold the shari'a. (See also Toth 2013)
 8. **Hamdīn Sabāhī:** Journalist and self-described Nasserist who founded a small Arab Nationalist political party called al-Karama, or dignity. Ran for the Egyptian presidency in May 2012 and earned approximately 21 % of the vote, coming in third. After Morsi's election, became a stalwart opponent of the former president's, and co-founded, with Muhammad ElBaradei and Amre Moussa, a National Salvation Front (Jabhat al-Inqadh al-Watani) that was instrumental in organizing protests against president Muhammad Morsi in 2013.

⁶ See, for example, Yasir Suleiman, *Language and Identity in Egyptian Nationalism*, Curzon Press, 1996, p. 34

9. **ʿAmr Mūsā**: Egyptian diplomat who served as foreign minister under Mubarak from 1991 to 2001, and as secretary general of the Arab League from 2001 to 2011. In 2012, ran for the presidency, achieving 11% of the national vote. Joined with Hamdin Sabahi and Muhamd ElBaradei in December 2012 to form the National Salvation Front. Currently serves as the president of the committee of 50 Egyptian opinion leaders tasked with discussing and proposing amendments to the country’s constitution after the July 3, 2013 military coup.
10. **Muhammad al-Baradī**: Former Egyptian diplomat and head of the International Atomic Energy Agency from 1997 to 2009, earning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. Founded the anti-Mubarak National Association for Change in 2010 in conjunction with secular and Islamist political dissidents. Widely described as a liberal, emerged as a critic of president Muhammad Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded the Constitution Party in April 2012, and joined with Hamdin Sabahi and Amre Moussa in December 2012 to form an anti-Morsi National Salvation Front. Was appointed Vice President for International Relations after Morsi’s overthrow, a position he resigned after four weeks, in protest at the violence meted out against Muslim Brotherhood protesters.
11. **Ahmad Shafīq**: Former air force general, minister of civil aviation, and prime minister under Hosni Mubarak. Ran for president in 2012, coming in second in the first round, and losing to Muhammad Morsi in the runoff. Currently under investigation for corruption charges relating to his time as minister of civil aviation, and is now in self-imposed exile in the United Arab Emirates.

These figures can be broadly assigned to four groups: Morsi, al-Banna, and Qutb represent Islamism; Sadat, Nasser, Mubarak, and Shafiq represent the Egyptian security establishment, which has ruled that country since 1952 until 2012, and arguably does again today; and Husayn and ElBaradei represent Western-oriented Egyptian liberalism. Musa and Sabahi might be placed in a “nationalist” residual category that is neither Islamist, liberal, or part of the military establishment.

In addition to the control group, the remainder of the sample is randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups. In each treatment group, the batteries of questions described above are preceded by one of four questions each of which is designed to prime the respondent on a *different* aspect of Western dominance and superiority. The primes, which are designed to be as spare and unobtrusive as possible, are framed in the form of questions:

Treatment 1: To what extent do you think that the West is superior to the Middle East in its military power? [Answers range from “to a great extent,” “to a limited extent,” and “not at all.”]

Treatment 2: To what extent do you think that the West is superior to the Middle East in the spread of its culture?

Treatment 3: To what extent do you think that the West is superior to the Middle East in its respect for human rights?

Treatment 4: To what extent do you think that the West is superior to the Middle East in terms of scientific achievement?

Though each treatment is framed as a question, we are actually not primarily interested in the respondents’ answer to the treatment question. Instead, given that we believe Western ascendance in each of these four areas to be empirically true and widely recognized (even if sometimes denied), we employ the questions merely to bring this social reality to the forefront of the respondents’ thinking as they are asked the substantive questions that follow. Our broad hypothesis is that exposure to any one of the four treatments should

cause respondents to (a) express more support for Islamist political positions, and (b) adopt more favorable views toward Islamist politicians and thinkers. We do not have strong expectations about the variation (if any) in the effects of the different treatments, although it stands to reason that the treatments emphasizing the West's military might and cultural hegemony might elicit the strongest pro-Islamist effects, if only because they are likely highly salient to begin with.

The survey was fielded among 420 respondents in May, 2013 in greater Cairo (encompassing the city of Cairo, and the districts of Gīza and Qalyūb). The sample included 197 men and 203 women. Treatment and control groups were balanced with respect to gender and education, although women were oversampled in one of the treatments (see appendix). A national version of the survey is currently being deployed.

Results:

The results of the experiment provide guarded support for our expectation that citizens who are exposed to a reminder of the West's dominance will be more receptive to Islamist political positions and personalities. Due to the small sample size, we are not able to say definitively which of the treatments—and, hence, which of the aspects of Western dominion—produced the largest effects. However, we can tentatively say that the West's military and scientific superiority appear to be most likely to trigger an “Islamist” response, and only on a circumscribed set of issues. None of the treatments rendered a respondent more or less likely to believe that “all Egyptian political parties should have an Islamic frame of reference” or that “all members of the Egyptian parliament should have expertise in *fiqh* and *sharī'a*.” Respondents in the treatment groups were more likely to believe that “the president of Egypt must be a Muslim,” but this was true only of those respondents who had received the military and scientific treatments.

The results of the treatments on support for Islamist personalities were similarly mixed. Only the cultural treatment affected estimations of ʿAbd al-Bannā, and in the direction *opposite* to that hypothesized. Respondents who had been reminded of the spread of Western culture were less likely to approve of al-Bannā. Moreover, they were more likely to approve of Hosni Mubarak, whose wife Suzanne was widely reviled as a westernizer for her attempts to reform Egyptian laws to bring them in conformity with UN conventions on the rights of women and children. No treatment rendered citizens more approving or disapproving of Muhammad Morsi, whose negative ratings were the highest in our sample. And both the cultural and scientific treatments made citizens more likely to disfavor Islamic ideologue Sayyid Qutb.

Moving beyond these aggregate results, we sought to investigate whether treatment effects varied across demographic groups. Our small sample size made it impossible to conduct multivariate analyses, but comparing means across education groups, and across different levels of religiosity (measured as the amount of Quran readership (Jamal and Tessler (2008))), reveal no systematic effects. We do, however, find that the treatment effects differ across genders. Specifically, we find that when women were exposed to the treatments, they systematically became more supportive of the statements that *political parties should have an Islamic frame of reference* and *members of parliament should have expertise in fiqh and shariʿa*. Conversely, men became less supportive of these statements when they were exposed to the treatments. See Figures 1 and 2 below. The differences in means are statistically significant.

Figure 1:

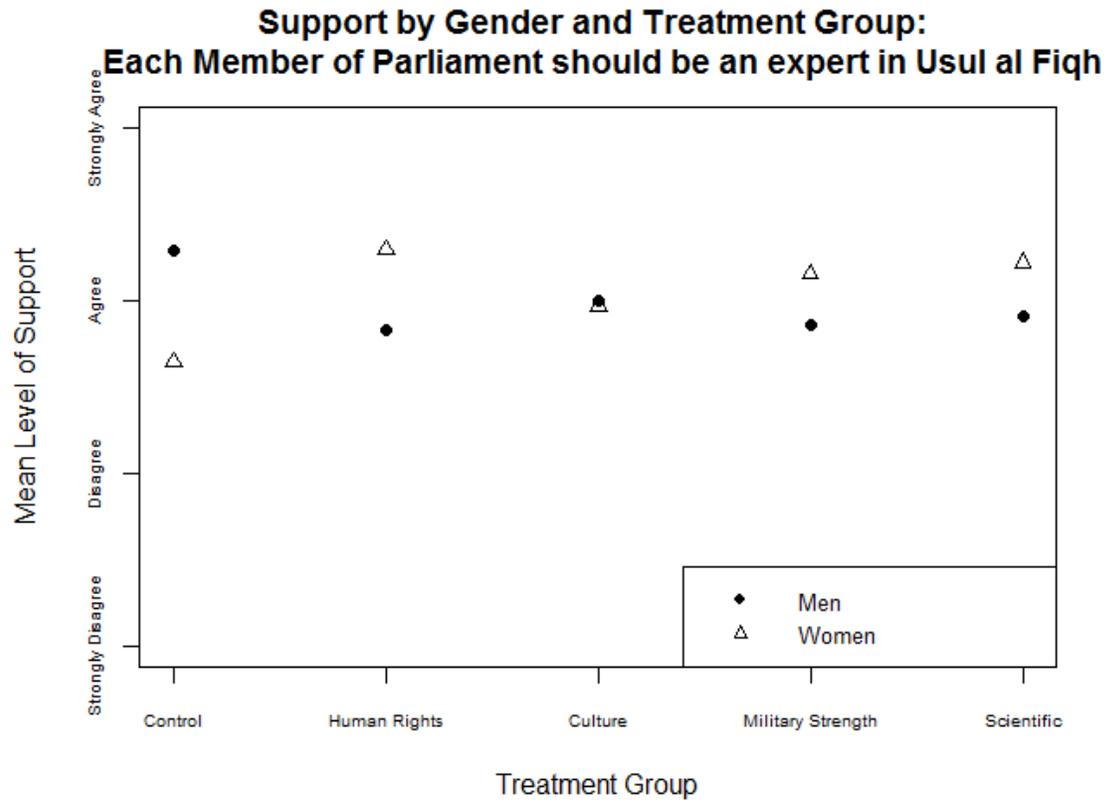
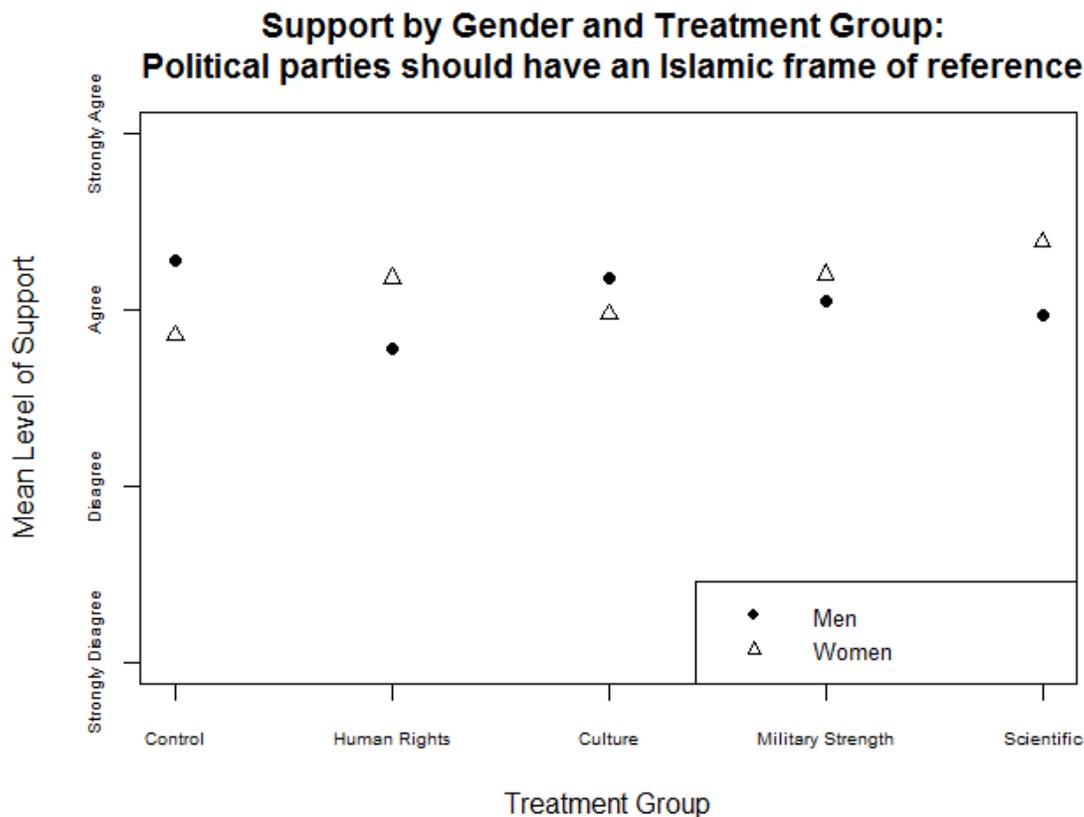


Figure2:



When we examine the effects of the treatment on men and women’s support for different political figures, a more complex picture emerges. Men, on average, became more supportive of “nationalist/secular” leaders like Sadat, Nasser and Mubarak after receiving the treatments. Women, in contrast, do not become supportive of such figures. Instead, we find that female treatment recipients become for favorable to “Islamist” leaders. The following table captures response patterns by gender across each of the political figures for whom we observed a significant effect.

Figure 1 Response patterns by gender⁷

	Women	Men
Mubarak	(-)	(+)
Al-Banna	(+)	
Sadat		(+)
Nasser		(+)
Mursi	(+)	(-)
Qutb	(+)	(-)
Moussa	(-)	(+)

(+)=More support; (-)=Less support

In the remainder of this section, we explore the potential reasons for this observation. We find that women in the sample are not substantially different from men in terms of their education or religiosity, which suggests that these things are unlikely to be driving the results.

One possibility is that we oversampled women who were supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements, and that this explains why women subjected to the treatments offer more “Islamist” responses. In order to determine whether this is the case, we examine a pre-treatment measure of confidence in the Muslim Brotherhood: *What is the extent of your confidence in the following groups to help Egypt achieve progress (FJP Muslim Brotherhood)?* Again, we find no discernible pattern between the genders. Men and women in July of 2013, were equally likely to have confidence in the Muslim Brotherhood. (See figure 4)

⁷ We find similar trends with the other leaders mentioned above as well.

Figure 2: Confidence in the Freedom and Justice Party, by gender

	No confidence	Some confidence	A lot of confidence
Male	64%	23%	14%
Female	70%	20%	10%

Pearson chi2(2) = 1.7798 Pr = 0.411

We further test whether women are more likely to respond to western hegemony by turning to Islamist ideas and personalities because they have more exposure to these ideas in their daily lives than men, as women are disproportionately the recipients of the kinds of health and welfare services that Islamists provide. However, we find no support for this hypothesis, either. We asked respondents to rate the Muslim Brotherhood’s political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, on the extent of its provision of services to citizens. Responses to the question did not differ by gender (see figure 5), which suggests that differential exposure to Islamist service provision is not driving results.

Figure 3: Assessment of FJP service provision, by gender

	Provides High Level	2	3	4	Does not Provide Goods or Services
Male	41.71%	15.43%	13.14%	2.29%	27.43%
Female	41.35%	14.94%	9.77%	4.02%	29.89%

Pearson chi2(4) = 1.9011 Pr = 0.754

One potential explanation for the observed divergence between men and women in response to the treatments is that women turn to Islamism because it is the least patriarchal or violent of the available alternatives to Western hegemony. Women may experience Egyptian secular nationalist discourses as hyper-masculine, violence-prone celebrations of the state's coercive apparatus. Thus, Islamism, with its emphasis on personal reform, agency and growth, may be more appealing to women seeking a respite from a militarized discourse they view as fundamentally patriarchal. Incidents such as the widely publicized beating of a female protester in Cairo in December 2011, during which soldiers stripped the protester of her clothing while striking her with boots and batons, and the military's administration of so-called "virginity tests" to female protesters taken into custody in March 2011 serve as powerful signals of the state's repressive patriarchy. As newer works on gender have begun to illustrate, women embrace Islam to combat traditional patriarchal forms of control, while at the same time distancing themselves from the Western hegemonic discourse of liberal feminism (Mahmoud, 2006).

Of course, caution is in order. Given the small sample size, and the restriction of the experiment to Greater Cairo, it may be that these heterogeneous treatment effects will disappear in the full study. However, if they persist—as we expect them to—more work will need to be done to tease out their sources.

Conclusion:

The preliminary results of this experiment yield only limited support for the hypothesis that support for political Islam is driven by anxiety over and resistance to the West's military, cultural, and political hegemony. To the extent that such an effect exists, it seems to be more prevalent among women than men, although the precise reasons for this divergence remain undetermined.

If these results hold up in the full experiment, they will provide a powerful rejoinder to a longstanding theory of political Islam's appeal. Though Islamist

thinkers and activists may indeed be motivated by grievances against the West and a desire to see the lands of Islam ascendant, these things seem not to be what drove citizens to vote for them. And, as we saw with the men in our sample, Western dominance is just as likely to cause citizens to embrace military and nationalistic figures as Islamist ones. This should not be surprising—none of the theories that locate political Islam’s appeal in its anti-Western message are able to explain why that religious anti-Western discourse is more appealing than the many others on offer.

Indeed, the degree to which Islamists are even seen as anti-Western is itself in flux. Today, Muslim Brotherhood leaders lobby for Western support in the wake of the July 2013 military coup, the United States earns the ire of Egyptians by cutting its aid to that country, and Egyptian newspapers report breathlessly, and erroneously, on the American administration’s secret support for the Muslim Brotherhood and its desire to install Islamists in power across the Middle East. It thus seems likely that resistance to the West is no longer something that Islamists can claim a monopoly on, if they ever could in the first place.

What all of this suggests is that explanations of political Islam’s successes will require us to attend to contextual factors as much as cognitive ones. The mass protests that lead to the overthrow of Muhammad Morsi in July 2013, and the widely reported public satisfaction with the military’s subsequent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood⁸, suggest that support for Islamism is highly contingent and subject to change in ways that the existing literature does not lead us to expect.

⁸ Basil El-Dabh, “Most Egyptians agree with sit-in dispersals: Baseera,” Daily News Egypt, August 23, 2013

Appendix: Randomization

	Male	Female	Secondary and above
Control	48%	52%	55%
Treatment 1	47%	53%	53%
Treatment 2	43%	57%	53%
Treatment 3*	58%	42%	54%
Treatment 4	51%	49%	51%

There's a slight undersample of women in Treatment 3 and oversample of women in treatment 2. Due to the small sample size we are unable to model any potential bias this potentially presents just now. However, we did analyze covariates, and women in the treatment groups look similar to one another.

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