

# Between Dictates and Dispensations: Experimental Evidence on Legitimacy and Policy Preferences

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## Abstract

Scholars have long argued that religion plays a powerful role in politics, at times motivating collective action for change, at others eliciting compliance with the status quo. Religion's effect is thought to be particularly profound in Muslim majority countries, and has been invoked to explain everything from the durability of its autocracies to the electoral successes of its social conservatives. However, empirical research on the role of religion in Muslim societies is still in its infancy. In this paper, we report the results of a randomized controlled survey experiment conducted in Egypt in November 2013, which allows us to determine whether religious discourse is more influential than other types of discourses in influencing citizens' views on highly salient, "hot button" policy issues. Specifically, we weigh the causal impact of religious information (in the form of scriptural injunctions) against secular information (in the form of published results of scientific studies) on attitudes toward female empowerment and economic egalitarianism. We find no support for the notion of Islam as a rhetorical trump card, in which scriptural justifications are potent whenever and to whatever purpose they are deployed. Instead, we find that the impact of religious arguments is circumscribed by the domain in which they are applied. Religious justifications for or against economically egalitarian positions were no more influential than scientific ones (and neither produced outcomes statistically different from the control condition). However, religious justifications did have an effect in the domain of women's rights. Specifically, we found that scriptural arguments for female empowerment—and against the dominant patriarchy—caused individuals to express more progressive views on women's empowerment than those in the control group. We label this the "dispensation effect."<sup>1</sup>

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# 1 Introduction

Religion has long been thought to possess a kind of totemic power in political life, endowing those who don its mantle with the ability to do everything from elicit compliance with systems of oppression to motivate collective action against those systems of oppression. For example, Bendix (1980, 7) tells us that "for millennia, rulers rested their claims on divine sanction. Other grounds of rule, such as tradition or law also required and received their warrant from the divine." Thus Geertz (1983) describes "the intense focus on the figure of the king and the frank construction of a cult, at times a whole religion, around him." More recently, Williams and Alexander (1994, 1-15) describe how 19th century American populists used religious imagery and symbols to mobilize the poor against the country's economic elites. In his study of church-state relations in Latin America, Gill (1998, 150) testifies to "the power of religion to legitimate (or delegitimate) political movements," describing how political elites and their opponents vied with each other to coopt the Catholic church for this purpose. In their comparison of social movements in Africa and China, Aminzade and Perry (2001, 161) tell us that religion is unique in motivating collective action because "religious leaders do not have to rely only on rational persuasion since their followers can be 'moved by the spirit' rather than persuaded by rational arguments." Similarly, Tarrow (1998, 112) finds that "religion is a recurring source of social movement framing" because "it is so reliable a source of emotion ...."

Nowhere has this belief in religion's inherent charisma been more in evidence than in studies of the politics of Arab- and Muslim-majority countries. The twin obsessions of scholars of the region—the longevity of its autocrats and the electoral successes of its religious conservatives—have both been endogenized to the special qualities of faith. For example, several scholars have argued that Arab dictators managed to remain in power in part by deploying Islamic rhetoric and symbols to convince citizens of their moral right to rule. Eickelman and Piscatori (1996, 12) tell us that "rulers such as Sadat in Egypt and Hasan II [...] in Morocco have legitimized the existing political hierarchy by referring to themselves as 'the President-Believer' (al-ra'īs al-mu'min) and the 'commander of the faithful' (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) respectively." Michael C. Hudson (1977, 98), in his study of regime legitimacy in the Middle East, tells us that "the charismatic leader who employs religious symbolism finds a receptive audience." Elsewhere, he describes how Libyan leader Mu'ammār al-Qadhāfī "forcibly projects an image of religious rectitude and authority by invoking Islamic scriptures and symbols" (321). Razi (1990, 76) argues that Muslims offer to their leaders "total devotion and supreme sacrifice, since the source for authority is God."

Similar arguments have been invoked to explain why Muslims have repeatedly voted into office parties that call for the application of Islamic law or *sharī'a*. For example, Singerman (1995, 151) has attributed the appeal of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood to the fact that its slogan, "Islam is the solution" (*al-Islām huwa al-ḥal*) "resonates on so many levels in the Muslim world and as a result it influences multiple social and political fields and encourages a collective identity." Likewise, in

her learned study of Islamic mobilization in Egypt, Wickham (2003, 157) explained that Islamists were better able than other political groups to recruit followers in part because they “adapted a respected cultural repertoire to new purposes. By framing their outreach as engaging in the da’wa [proselytizing], the Islamists endowed it with a cultural legitimacy it otherwise would have lacked.” Francois Burgat (2008) has argued that political actors seeking to win votes or acclaim in Muslim majority countries must wrap their political appeals in Islamic rhetoric and symbols (which he calls “Muslim-speak”). And Timur Kuran (2004, 71) has noted that Islamists are good at selling their economic policies to Muslims because “Islamist tracts have an emotional appeal often lacking in secular economic writings.”

Despite this large body of writings positing the unique power of Islam to do everything from legitimate existing authorities to inspire dissent against them, there remains a need for systematic empirical investigation of these claims. This paper comes to fill this lacuna. Though the topic of how Islam impacts politics is an impossibly broad one, we hone in on a single question suggested by the examples above. In all of those examples, the framing of political claims as religious ones is thought to increase receptivity to and compliance with those claims. We describe and report the results of a survey experiment conducted in Egypt in November of 2013 that allows us to measure the causal impact of religious discourse on individuals’ policy attitudes. Survey experiments are a relatively new methodology in the study of Middle Eastern politics (see, for example, the recent contribution by Corstange and Marinov 2012), but they have the potential to help settle long-standing theoretical debates and puzzles in the discipline. Our research design not only allows us to identify whether Islamic appeals influence opinion, but also whether this influence is mediated by individual attributes (such as religiosity or education), and whether this influence varies by policy domain—specifically, if religious discourse only matters in arenas that are considered the special province of religion (such as personal morality and gender roles). Most importantly, our experiments are designed to allow us to compare the causal weight of appeals to religious discourse against other kinds of speech, such as those that deploy claims of scientific knowledge and expertise.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we identify the two principal mechanisms by which religious discourse has been hypothesized by scholars to influence preferences and behavior in the Muslim world. The first is that religious discourse merely serves a heuristic function for individuals trying to evaluate politicians, parties, or policies when information is scarce (or when the issue is of low enough importance that individuals cannot be bothered to gather the required information). The second hypothesis is that religious claims are more influential than non-religious ones—regardless of the salience of the policy domain or the amount of information possessed—because they are inherently viewed by Muslims as legitimate. We then describe our experiment, conducted in Egypt in November 2013, which is designed to test these mechanisms by determining the relative effect of religious and non-religious authority claims on respondents’ attitudes on two important policy issues in the contemporary Egyptian context: economic policy and the empowerment of women. Turning to our results, we find little support for the strong claim

that religious discourse moves people in whatever direction it is deployed. However, we do find evidence that citizens who hold, or are receptive to, unorthodox views on matters of gender relations are more likely to express those views if provided religious justifications for them. We label this the “dispensation effect,” and conclude by examining its implications for the study of religion and politics and for the future of politics in the Arab world.

## 2 How Religion Works

Surveying the literature on religion in politics generally, and Islam in politics specifically, we discern two distinct causal mechanisms that have been put forward to explain why Islamic discourse might possess an advantage over other forms of discourse in eliciting support and compliance from Muslims. The first hypothesis holds that the advantage that accrues to religious appeals is limited to domains in which individuals have limited information—either about the actors making the appeals, or about the substantive domain over which the appeals are being made. According to Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani (2012, 586) “the value of Islamic party ideology in majority Muslim countries is that it serves as an informational shortcut that communicates something positive about a party’s policy intentions.” In an ingenious survey experiment conducted in 2009, those authors found that Indonesians presented a choice between two hypothetical, unnamed parties were more likely to choose the party labeled “Islamic,” but only when the economic policy platforms of all parties were made unknown.

The notion that religious discourse serves primarily an informational role is consonant with Laitin’s (1986, 178) claim that, “the more [political leaders] can demonstrate the sharing of culture with potential supporters, the more they can generate political trust.” After all, it is unsurprising that Muslims who are forced to choose between two imaginary parties about which they are told nothing other than the fact that one shares their religion in a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian country will be more likely to trust the Islamic party. But a key implication of this hypothesis, however, is that as voters learn about the parties (or policy issues or political leaders) in question, they will have less need for such crude rules of thumb. In other words, information erodes any advantage that accrues to religious appeals. In fact, Pepinsky and his co-authors demonstrate that once the experiment’s (hypothetical) parties’ economic policy platforms are revealed, citizens actually evince a mild *preference* for non-Islamic parties.

As important as this finding is, our question, following Bechtel et al (2012), is whether Islam’s advantage travels beyond necessarily contrived settings in which respondents are asked to judge notional parties quickly and with no information other than a label. If the classic literature on the Middle East is to be believed, the answer is yes. This brings us to the second hypothesis regarding the power of Islamic discourse than one finds in the literature. In this latter telling, Islamic language, rhetoric, and symbols provide not *information*, but *legitimation*. In other words, since Muslims are conditioned by their faith to seek to bring all of their

worldly affairs into harmony with the teachings of Qur'ān and the prophet Muhammad, they are more likely to comply with demands, or support political parties, if it can be credibly claimed that doing so is a dictate of faith. An emblematic statement of the underlying logic of this argument was offered by Hudson's classic study of legitimacy in Arab countries:

“The profound significance of Islam as a component of Arab identity lies in its pervasiveness in society [...] In theory, there is no distinction between the worldly and the divine; the Muslim is not enjoined to render unto God what is His and unto Caesar what is his. In the domain of Islam, Caesar should be under God's divine guidance [...] Worship, through prayer five times a day, is continuous, not episodic, and Paradise will only be attained through obeying God's precepts in daily life.” (Hudson, 1977, 47-48)

Similar testimonials to what Hudson calls the “theological pervasiveness” of Islam in a Muslim's everyday life have been rendered by Razi (1990), Lewis (1996), and Burgat (2008), among many others—all of whom note the fusion of temporal and spiritual authority in Islam as generating a political landscape in which religion is the central obsession. The upshot of these accounts for our purposes, however, is that Muslims are supposed to be more likely to view arguments from religious authority as legitimate—and hence worthy of compliance or agreement—and not just under conditions of uncertainty or low salience or low information.

Most critiques of this latter hypothesis have been normative in nature, labeling it “orientalist” (Said 1978) and essentialist. For example, the Syrian scholar Sadiq al-Azm (1997) has declared that arguments about the Islam's legitimizing power reduce the Muslim to a “Homo-Islamicus,” who “will always revert to type under all circumstances and regardless of the nature and depth of the historical changes he may suffer or undergo.” Wedeen (2002), however, has suggested that assertions of religion's motive force among Muslims must be engaged empirically as well. This project represents an attempt to answer this call, by bringing the tools of experimental research to bear on the question of what types of discourse Muslims find legitimate, and when.

## 2.1 Sources and Limits of Legitimacy

Any investigation of the legitimacy-conferring effect of Islamic discourse must confront two questions. The first is whether Islamic discourse is *uniquely* able to confer such legitimacy. It is not obvious that it is. In his work on rhetoric, Aristotle spoke of those whose judgements it was “not seemly to gainsay”—namely: “the Gods, or one's father, or one's teachers.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, individuals often perceive multiple legitimate authorities, and this is no less likely to be true of Muslims than it was of Greeks in the fourth century BC. The question for us, then, is not simply

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<sup>2</sup>Aristotle, *Rhetorica*, W. Rhys Roberts, translator, in W.D. Ross, ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume 11, Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1924 p. 26

whether Islamic rhetoric and symbols “matter” when compared to nothing, but rather whether Islamic discourse trumps other forms of discourse that we have *a priori* reason to believe would be highly legitimate as well.

If the prestige and charisma of the faith and those who wield it is considerable in the Arab world, so too is that of men of learning (who might correspond to the “teachers” in Aristotle’s list). For example, Timothy Mitchell (2002) has written of how Egyptian autocrats in the 19th and 20th centuries relied on popular and elite deference to expertise in order to implement and justify modernizing schemes that inevitably failed (see Scott 1999 on the general phenomenon of “high modernism” used as a legitimizing discourse for authoritarian designs). Hilliard et al (2012, 888) speak of a “cultural deference to experts” among Arab patients in healthcare settings. There are also numerous folk traditions of the Prophet Muhammad that attest to the importance of learning and the favor bestowed on those that have it. For example, one of the most commonly-repeated sayings of the Prophet is “seek knowledge, even in China (*wa uṭlubū al-‘ilm wa law fī al-Ṣīn*).”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Prophet is supposed to have declared to his followers that “the superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is as my superiority over the lowest of you (*faḍl al-‘ālim ‘alā al-‘ābid ka faḍlī ‘alā adnākum*).”

Finally, anyone who has conducted field research in the Middle East can attest to the great respect that accrues to one upon whom the title of *duktūr* is bestowed (even on doctoral candidates who have not, strictly speaking, earned it). Amitav Ghosh’s (1992) autobiographic novel of his time as an anthropology graduate student conducting research in the Nile Delta offers a flavor of the common Egyptian awe for the credentialed bearers of higher learning. The villagers reverently refer to him as “the *doktor* from al-Hind (India),” and turn to him often for explanations about how the world works. Ghosh’s standing also renders him something of a threat to traditional village authorities, most notably an *imām* who tries to undermine the scholar by pointing out to the villagers that Ghosh comes from India, where they burn their dead. He thunders, “How will your country ever progress if you carry on doing these things? You’ve been to Europe, you’ve seen how advanced they are. Now tell me: have you ever seen them burning their dead?” When Ghosh replies that “yes, they do burn their dead in Europe,” the Imam tells the crowd that had gathered round them, “He’s lying. They don’t burn their dead in the West. They’re not an ignorant people. They’re advanced, they’re educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs” (Ghosh 1992, 235). In other words, even a religious authority such as that *imām* felt the need to appeal to science in order to undermine his rival for the adulation of the villagers.

What all of these examples suggest is that even if religious rhetoric and symbols can legitimate parties, policies, and personalities, they offer but one form of legitimation. Discourses rooted in appeals to alternative sources of authority (of which scientific expertise is only one) may, under certain circumstances, prove equally ca-

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<sup>3</sup>This saying, though widely known and often invoked, is considered by scholars to be of uncertain provenance, and is thus not classified among the *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ*, or authentic traditions of the Prophet. However, a lesser known but authentic tradition that has the same overall meaning is “seek knowledge from cradle to grave (*wa uṭlubū al-‘ilm min al-mahd ilā al-laḥd*).”

pable of bestowing legitimacy on actors and attitudes. The practical implications of this inquiry contemporary politics in majority Arab countries are evident. If non-religious parties wish to boost their (dismal) electoral fortunes, are they better off adopting an Islamic idiom to get their message across, or do they have access to non-religious funds of legitimation that do not require them to play on the Islamists' terrain? Consequently, scientific investigation of Islam's purported discursive advantage must be comparative in nature, pitting Islamic discourses against non-Islamic ones and observing whether there are differences in their effects.

The second question we must answer is whether Islamic rhetoric's ability to confer legitimacy is bounded by the domain in which it is applied. The classic literature on Islam and legitimacy has tended to view the faith as a rhetorical trump card that applies across all fields of human endeavor. Most recently, Davis and Robinson (2006, 168) have offered a theoretical justification for this view, arguing that Islam requires Muslims to subscribe to a "moral cosmology" that deems all individuals to be "subsumed by a larger community of believers and as subject to the timeless laws and greater plan of God," and which thus has as much to say about issues such as taxation and redistribution as it does about issues typically associated with religion, such as the regulation of sexual relations or prescriptions regarding worship. In contrast, Adkins, Layman, Campbell, and Green (2013, 239) have shown in experiments with U.S. subjects that the effect of religious discourse is "strongest for attitudes on cultural issues," although this finding has yet to be extended to Islamic contexts. In order to determine whether religion's effect is issue specific, we must examine the relative impact of Islamic and scientific discourses in more than one policy domain.

In the next section, we describe the experiments we have designed to answer these questions.

### 3 Experimenting with Islam and Science

The purpose of our experiments is straightforward. We want to know what happens to people's attitudes on important social and economic issues when we offer them contrasting policy arguments rooted in religious authority and in scientific expertise, and we want to know whether the relative effect of these different discursive strategies varies by the substantive issue area in which they are applied. Therefore, we want to randomly assign subjects to hear different kinds of arguments—religious and scientific—for or against certain policies in a variety of domains, and then observe how much (or how little) these arguments influence their subsequent attitudes.

The vehicle for our experiments was a nationally-representative survey of approximately 2,500 adult Egyptians conducted in the fall of 2013.<sup>4</sup> In the survey,

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<sup>4</sup>Households were selected randomly from the master sample of 1 million households maintained by the Central Agency of Public Mobilization and Statistics (al-Jihāz al-Markazī lil-Ta'bi'a al-Āmma wa al-Iḥṣā') from 22 of Egypt's 27 governorates. The five excluded governorates, New Valley, North Sinai, South Sinai, Red Sea, and Maṭrūh, lie on Egypt's borders and, due to limited

we ask respondents to share their attitudes on two policy questions—one in the realm of women’s empowerment, the other in the realm of economic policy. Both of these domains are high-salience issues in which respondents are likely to have settled views. After all, contestation over the rights of women is one of the premier political cleavages in the Muslim world today. As Singerman (1995, 109) has written in her masterful study of life and politics in Cairo’s poorer quarters, “it could be argued that the issues of sexuality and gender relations, right or wrong, are as sensitive to the the *sha‘b* as national security is to the state” (see also Blaydes and Linzer 2008). Similarly, discontent over the state’s slow dismantling of the egalitarian economic policies instituted by Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s was by many accounts the premier driver of the so-called Arab Spring. The slogan chanted by those who ousted Mubarak in February 2011 was not a call to God or for the application *shari‘a* law, but rather for “bread, freedom, and social justice (*‘aysh, hurriya, ‘adala ijtima‘iyya*).” The high salience of each of these domains provides the ultimate test of the potential power of religious legitimation. After all, it is one thing to show that religious discourse influences views toward policies or parties that people don’t care or know much about or to which they haven’t given much thought. It is another entirely to show that its influence extends to domains that actually matter.

We measure respondent attitudes on each of these domains with a direct question asking them to choose between two policy alternatives. On female empowerment, we ask them to indicate whether they are open to the notion of women assuming top leadership positions in the government. The question is worded as follows:

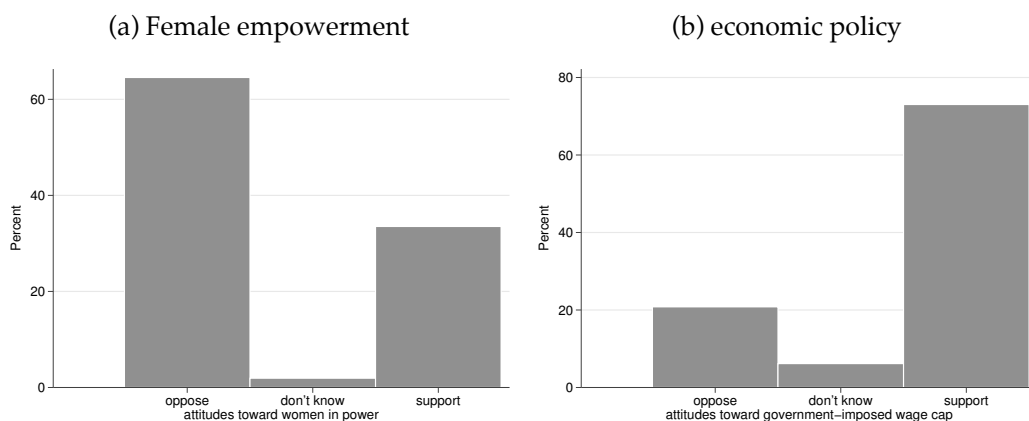
Between the following two opinions, which one is closer to your personal opinion? (a) It is not good for a woman to assume a position of authority, such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership, or (b) There is no problem if a woman assumes a position of authority, such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership.

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state capacity in these territories, are generally considered unsafe for survey researchers. Though there is some concern that excluding these governorates truncates our sample in consequential ways—especially since the Sinai and Maṭrūḥ are considered strongholds of Salafist (ultra-orthodox) Islamism (Masoud 2014, 187)—together, they account for less than 2 percent of the population. The 22 governorates from which we did sample are divided into 5,202 enumeration areas or primary sampling units. The number of PSUs sampled from each governorate is proportional to that governorate’s share of the population, stratified by urbanization. CAPMAS classifies each enumeration area as either urban or rural. The share of urban PSU’s sampled from each governorate is proportional to each governorate’s urban population. For example, the southern governorate of al-Minyā constitutes approximately five percent of the Egyptian population. Assuming a PSU size of 12 respondents, and a total sample size of 2,597, we needed to sample 14 PSUS from that governorate, yielding 156 respondents. Further, since al-Minyā is 78% rural, 11 of the 14 sampled PSUs were constrained to be rural. We randomly sampled 12 households from each enumeration area (in anticipation of non-responses). Within each household, respondents of alternating genders and age categories were selected according to a Kish grid. Interviews were conducted face-to-face by a team of 51 experienced enumerators. The response rate was 87%.



Figure 1: Baseline response patterns (control groups only)



On economic policy, respondents are asked to indicate whether they believe that government should impose limits on how much people can earn, as has been suggested by numerous Egyptian politicians, including, most recently, Hala Shukrallah, the president of Hizb al-Dustūr (Constitution Party), a liberal Egyptian political party founded in 2012 by former International Atomic Energy Agency chairman Mohamed ElBaradei. The question is worded as follows:

Between the following two, which one is closer to your personal opinion? (a) It is not good for the government to impose an upper limit on wages, or (b) It is better for the government to impose an upper limit on wages.

Respondents were also allowed to answer “don’t know.” Baseline answers (from our experimental control group) are graphed in figure 1. “Don’t knows” accounted for 2% of the control group responses on the question regarding female empowerment and 6.2% of responses on the question regarding economic policy. But, as is evident in figure 1, both domains are ones in which a comfortable majority of respondents share a single, “orthodox” view. More than 65% of respondents (again, in the control condition) believed that women should not be allowed to hold the highest government offices in the land, and almost 73% of respondents believed that the government should impose a ceiling on how much people can earn.

What we want to know is if these attitudes can be manipulated with religious and non-religious arguments. Therefore, before being asked these questions, respondents are randomly assigned to one of five groups (each consisting of approximately 500 individuals): four treatment groups and one control group. The four treatment groups receive a preamble that reveals information (a verse from scripture, or a brief encapsulation of the results of a relevant scientific study) that supports one of the two contrasting positions from which respondents are asked to choose. For instance, prior to being asked whether Egyptian women should be allowed to serve as presidents and prime ministers, respondents were randomly exposed to one of four statements: an argument *against* women’s empowerment that

relies on a verse from the Qur‘ān that attests to male superiority (which we call a “scriptural, patriarchal” treatment); an argument *against* women’s empowerment that relies on the results of a published scientific study that suggests differences between men and women (labeled “scientific, patriarchal” treatment); an argument *in favor* of women’s empowerment that is justified with a Qur‘ānic verse that puts men and women on equal footing (“scriptural, empowering”); and an argument *in favor* of women’s empowerment that cites the results of a scientific study that reveals no difference in male and female abilities (“scientific, empowering”). The exact treatments are listed below:

- *Scriptural, patriarchal*: Some people say it is not good for a woman to assume a position such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership. And they rely on a verse from Sūrat al-Nisā’ in the Holy Qur’ān that says, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women.” (4:34) And they interpret it to mean that God gave you men more capabilities than women.
- *Scriptural, empowering*: Some say that there is no problem if a woman assumes a position of authority, such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership. And they rely on a verse from Sūrat al-Tawba in the Holy Qur’ān that says, “Believing men and believing women are protectors of one another.” (9:71) And they interpret it to mean that God does not distinguish between men and women in their capabilities.
- *Scientific, patriarchal*: Some people say it is not good for a woman to assume a position such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership. And they rely on the results of numerous scientific studies. For example, in 2010, a group of leading scholars completed a study that showed that men had greater leadership abilities than women.
- *Scientific, empowering*: Some say that there is no problem if a woman assumes a position of authority, such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership. And they rely on the results of numerous scientific studies. For example, in 2010, a group of leading scholars completed a study that showed that women and men have the same leadership capabilities.

The questions on economic policy—i.e. whether or not the government should impose a wage cap—are similarly preceded by one of four randomly assigned treatments: one that *opposes* the wage cap with respect to scriptural references to inequality as part of the natural order of things (which we label “scriptural, individualistic”); another that *opposes* the wage cap with respect to the results of a scientific study that demonstrates the deleterious effects of government intervention in the economy (“scientific, individualistic”); one that *supports* the wage cap with reference to a verse condemning the hoarding of wealth (“scriptural, egalitarian”); and finally, one that *supports* the wage cap with reference to the benefits of reducing economic inequality. The treatments are presented below:

- *Scriptural, individualistic*: Some people say it is not good for the government to impose an upper limit on wages. And they rely on a verse from Surat al-Nahl in the Holy Qurʾān that says, “And God favored some of you to others in wealth.” And they interpret it to mean that it is not the government’s role to fix (determine) wealth.
- *Scriptural, egalitarian*: Some people say it is good for the government to impose an upper limit on wages. And they rely on a verse from Sūrat al-Tawba in the Holy Qurʾān which says, “And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the path of God, announce unto them a painful torment.” And they interpret it to mean that the government should fix (determine) wealth.
- *Scientific, individualistic*: Some people say it is not good for the government to impose an upper limit on wages. And they rely on the results of numerous scientific studies. For example, in 2010, a group of leading scholars completed a study that showed that the interference of the government in setting wages and salaries has a bad effect on the economy and development.
- *Scientific, egalitarian*: Some people say it is good for the government to impose an upper limit on wages. And they rely on the results of numerous scientific studies. For example, in 2010, a group of leading scholars completed a study that showed that government oversight and standardization of wages and salaries has a good impact on the economy and development.

A key requirement for the success of this experiment is that treatment groups should be evenly balanced with respect to size and makeup. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents across the five groups, with particular attention to key demographic and attitudinal indicators. The lack of any stark differences among the groups on any of these dimensions suggests that the randomization of treatment types for respondents for the most part succeeded. Though our sample size was 2,597, we excluded all Christians (103 respondents) from the sample, leaving us with 2,494 respondents.

Before turning to our results, we outline our expectations. First, given that large majorities of those surveyed responded to both the question on women’s empowerment and economic policy in the same way, we should expect negligible effects from the treatments that endorse the position already taken by most respondents. That is, we should observe no effect for the treatments opposing female leadership or for the treatments endorsing a ceiling on wages, since both views are already shared by majorities of citizens, and holders of the minority views are likely to be committed to their positions. In contrast, we should find the greatest effects among the treatments endorsing the minority views, on the reasoning that many who declare the majority view do so due to its social desirability rather than out of true belief.

The two hypotheses explored earlier—religious discourse as providing legitimation, and religious discourse as an informational shortcut—each lead to a different set of expectations regarding how individuals should respond to the treatments. If religious discourse serves a legitimation function, we should observe that

Table 1: Key social and political variables across treatments

	<i>Treatment Groups</i>					
	Control	T1	T2	T3	T4	Total
Observations	501	504	490	503	496	2494
Female (%)	47	48	48	45	50	47
Age	40.03	39.55	40.31	40.04	40.07	40
Education (4 point scale)	2.40	2.45	2.4	2.39	2.45	2.42
Rural (%)	56	56	58	58	56	57
Rooms per household	1.4	1.4	1.39	1.35	1.39	1.38
Income sufficiency (4-point scale)	1.91	1.87	1.93	1.82	1.97	1.90
Religiosity (28-point score)	19.08	18.88	18.79	18.58	19.01	18.87
Islamist supporter (%)	18.8	21.2	20.7	22	19	20.3

*Treatments were assigned as follows:*

*T1: Scriptural, empowering and scriptural, egalitarian; T2: Scientific, empowering and scientific, egalitarian;*

*T3: Scriptural, patriarchal and scriptural, individualistic; T4: Scientific, patriarchal and scientific, individualistic*

the scriptural treatments are always more influential than the scientific treatments, regardless of the domain. Furthermore, we expect the effect of the scriptural treatments to vary according to the religiosity of the respondent (McLaughlin and Wise 2014). However, it is not as simple as expecting more religious respondents to be more likely to respond to scriptural treatments. Instead, the effect should be mediated by the issue domain—specifically, by the centrality of religious injunctions in shaping public opinion on that domain. For a domain such as the empowerment of women, on which Islam is highly vocal, we should expect more religious respondents to be unmoved by a fragment of scripture that endorses feminine leadership, since they are likely familiar with interpretations of the fragment that harmonize it with the dominant patriarchy. The effects of the treatments should be similarly attenuated among the completely irreligious, who likely come to the experiment with heterodox views on the issue of women’s empowerment. Consequently, for the domains that are intrinsically religious, we should expect the scriptural treatments to have their strongest effect among those of medium to low religiosity. In practice, even those scoring on the low end of the religiosity scale in Egypt belong in this “middle” category of religiosity. After all, only 1.5% of respondents in our survey admit that they “never” pray to God.

Our expectations are different if religious discourse merely provides an informational shortcut. Instead of religion influencing citizens across all domains, we should expect it to matter most where the need for such a shortcut is most acute—that is, in domains where respondents have little information. However, neither of the two policy areas we have selected—whether women can be leaders and whether wages should be capped—comfortably fits this description. As we saw, the majority of respondents had a view on each issue. That said, the slightly higher num-

Table 2: Theoretical expectations

Legitimation	Information
Endorsements of non-majority position more likely to have influence than endorsement of majority position	Endorsements of non-majority position more likely to have influence than endorsement of majority position
Scriptural legitimation should affect attitudes across policy domains	Religious legitimation should affect attitudes most in low salience/low information domains
Scientific legitimation should be inferior to religious legitimation across domains	Scientific legitimation should influence attitudes in low salience/low information domains
For “religious” domain, effect of scriptural legitimation should be greatest at middling levels of religiosity. For “non-religious” domain, effect of scriptural treatments should increase with religiosity.	Effect of religious legitimation should increase with religiosity.
Influence of religious legitimation is independent of education	Influence of all discursive strategies should be greatest among least educated

ber of “don’t knows” in response to the wage ceiling question (approximately 6%) as opposed to the female leadership question (approximately 2%), suggest that it is marginally more likely that respondents will cue on religion in response to the wage ceiling question. Moreover, since more educated respondents are likely to have more information than less educated ones, we should expect the effect of the treatments to be strongest among the least educated. The predictions of each theory are laid out in table 2.

## 4 Results

To test if scriptural and scientific claims affect support for women as leaders, we regress support for women leaders (a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if the respondent answered “There is no problem if a woman assumes a position of authority, such as the presidency of the republic or the prime ministership,” and 0 otherwise) on a full set of indicator variables for the four treatment groups. The excluded, reference group is the control, which did not receive a cue prior to being asked about support for women leadership. We then repeat this to test if scriptural

and scientific claims affected support for a ceiling on wages (again, a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if the respondent answered “It is better for the government to impose an upper limit on wages,” and 0 otherwise). The results are presented in table 3. A significant coefficient on a treatment variable indicates that that treatment had a statistically significant effect on responses to the post-treatment question.<sup>5</sup>

Figures 2a and 2b plot the average treatment effects for each of the two experiments in comparison to the untreated control. For women’s empowerment, neither of the scientific treatments had a significant effect on opinions, whereas scripture was influential only when it was used to make an argument *in favor* of women’s emancipation. For economic policy, we find that neither religious nor scientific policy arguments produced responses significantly different from those in the control.

What do these findings mean? First, the inability of the religious claims to influence opinions on the wage cap suggests powerfully that the strong version of the doctrinal hypothesis—that Muslims will generally respond to religious arguments with compliance or agreement—is incorrect. It is likely that, contrary to Davis and Robinson (2006), the setting of wages is a domain that respondents do not experience as having much to do with religion. Religious authority claims are thus likely to be viewed as irrelevant in this context. However, equally irrelevant in this domain were claims from scientific authority, suggesting that respondents’ views on the issue of wage inequality are shaped by alternative discourses that are not captured in our treatments. Contemporary Egyptian discourse around wealth and the holders of it has largely focused on issues of corruption and fairness, and it is possible that treatments that referred to these two things may have had more of an influence on respondents’ opinions.

The impotence of scientific justifications is similarly evident in the experiment on female empowerment. Regardless of whether the argument justifies female leadership or undermines it, respondents did not express views different from those in the control. Again, this suggests that this is a domain in which scientific arguments are likely to be considered irrelevant—an unsurprising finding, given that the dominant orthodoxy with respect to women is religiously justified. This latter fact also explains why the scriptural argument against women’s empowerment did not have a significant effect. We have to assume that, since Egyptians already inhabit a universe in which they are constantly bombarded with highly conservative messages with respect to gender, our treatment did not represent a change in the discourse to which they are generally exposed. The religious justification *for* female empowerment, however, did have an effect on attitudes. Those exposed to the scriptural, empowering treatment were approximately 21% more likely than the control group to approve of the notion that women should be allowed to assume the presidency and premiership. We will explore the reasons for this below.

For now, however, we are interested in determining whether different types

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<sup>5</sup>One respondent, in the control group, had missing responses on all the post-treatment questions and was dropped from the analysis, leaving us with a sample of 2,493.

Table 3: Regression Results

(a) Effects of treatments on attitudes toward women in leadership

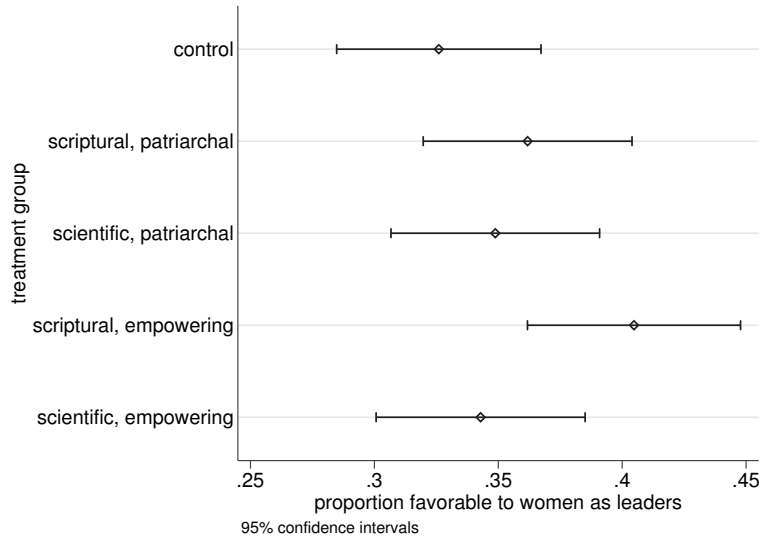
Treatment	
Scriptural, empowering	0.341*** (0.132)
Scientific, empowering	0.0757 (0.135)
Scriptural, patriarchal	0.159 (0.133)
Scientific, patriarchal	0.102 (0.134)
Constant	-0.726*** (0.0954)
Observations	2,493
<i>pseudo-R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.00236
log-likelihood	-1621

(b) Effects of treatments on attitudes toward wage ceiling

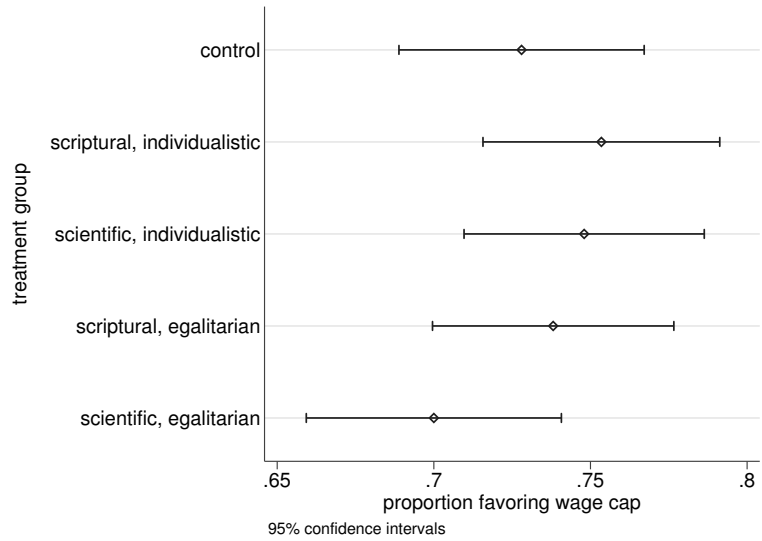
Treatment	
Scriptural, individualistic	0.133 (0.144)
Scientific, individualistic	0.103 (0.144)
Scriptural, egalitarian	0.0516 (0.143)
Scientific, egalitarian	-0.137 (0.141)
Constant	0.984*** (0.101)
Observations	2,493
<i>pseudo-R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.00154
log-likelihood	-1443

Figure 2: Treatment effects

(a) Female Leadership



(b) Wage cap





of respondents respond differently to the treatments. As noted earlier, we have reason to believe that the effects of the treatments will differ by religiosity and by respondents' level of education. We discuss each of these in turn.

## 4.1 Religiosity

How does religiosity affect responses to the treatments? Are more practicing individuals simply more receptive to religious rhetoric and symbols?<sup>6</sup> Or are those most likely to be swayed by scriptural arguments those who are religious enough to find such arguments legitimate, but not so religious that their views are already shaped by them? In order to answer these questions, we want to observe how our treatments interact with respondents' religiosity. We start by constructing a measure of religiosity using seven questions about respondents' religious practice. Specifically, respondents were asked how often they partake of the following activities:

1. Pray daily.
2. Fast during Ramadan.
3. Watch or listen to religious programs on television or radio.
4. Attend religious lessons in the mosque.
5. Attend Friday prayers.
6. Listen to the Qur'ān.
7. Read religious books.

Responses included "never" (coded as 1 on a 4-point scale), "sometimes" (coded as 2), "often" (coded as 3), and "always" (coded as 4). We added them to generate a 28-point religiosity scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.623). The resulting variable is normally distributed, taking on values ranging from 7 to 28 (see figure 3).

Using this measure, we then conduct a logistic regression of the form:

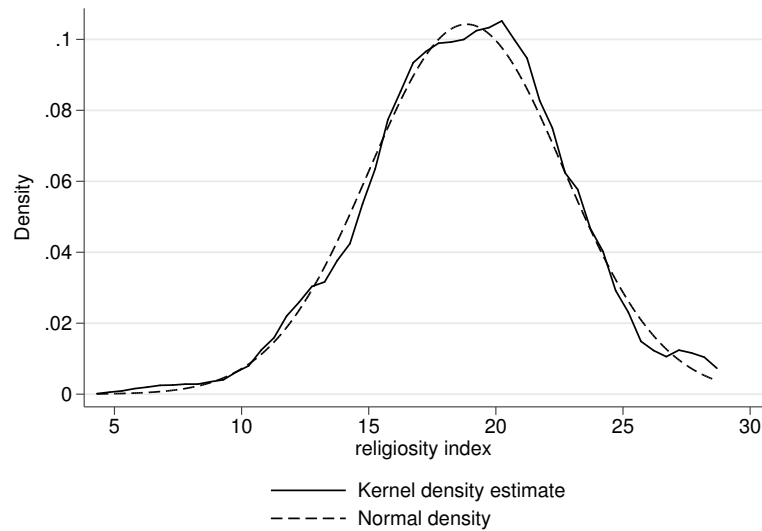
$$\text{Logit}(Y = 1) = \beta + \beta_1 \text{Treatments} + \beta_2 \text{Religiosity} + \beta'(\text{Treatments} * \text{Religiosity}) + \varepsilon_i$$

Where  $Y$  is the dependent variable of interest—i.e. answers regarding female leadership and the wage ceiling). The inclusion of the interaction term between *Religiosity* and the treatment variable allows us to discern the effect of the treatment conditional on self-reported level of religious practice. The results of the regressions for the female empowerment treatments are presented in table 4, and the results of the regressions for the economic policy treatments are presented in table 5.

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<sup>6</sup>Future drafts will report the results of interactions with a wider range of individual-level attributes, including income, gender, urbanization, and party identification, as well as report the results of an attempt to randomize the order of the questions.

Figure 3: Distribution of religiosity index



However, since Berry, DeMeritt, and Esarey (2010, 250) remind us that “a statistically significant product term is neither necessary nor sufficient for claiming interaction among independent variables,” instead of simply producing regression tables, we plot marginal effects of treatments, relative to the control, conditional on changes in religiosity. These are displayed in figure 4. We can see in sub-figure 4a that the scriptural, empowering treatment is somewhat more likely to have a positive effect (that is, to render respondents more hospitable to female leadership), at low levels of religiosity. Religiosity does not seem to mediate the effects of any other treatments in the realm of female empowerment, suggesting that religious and non-religious people do not respond differently to them.

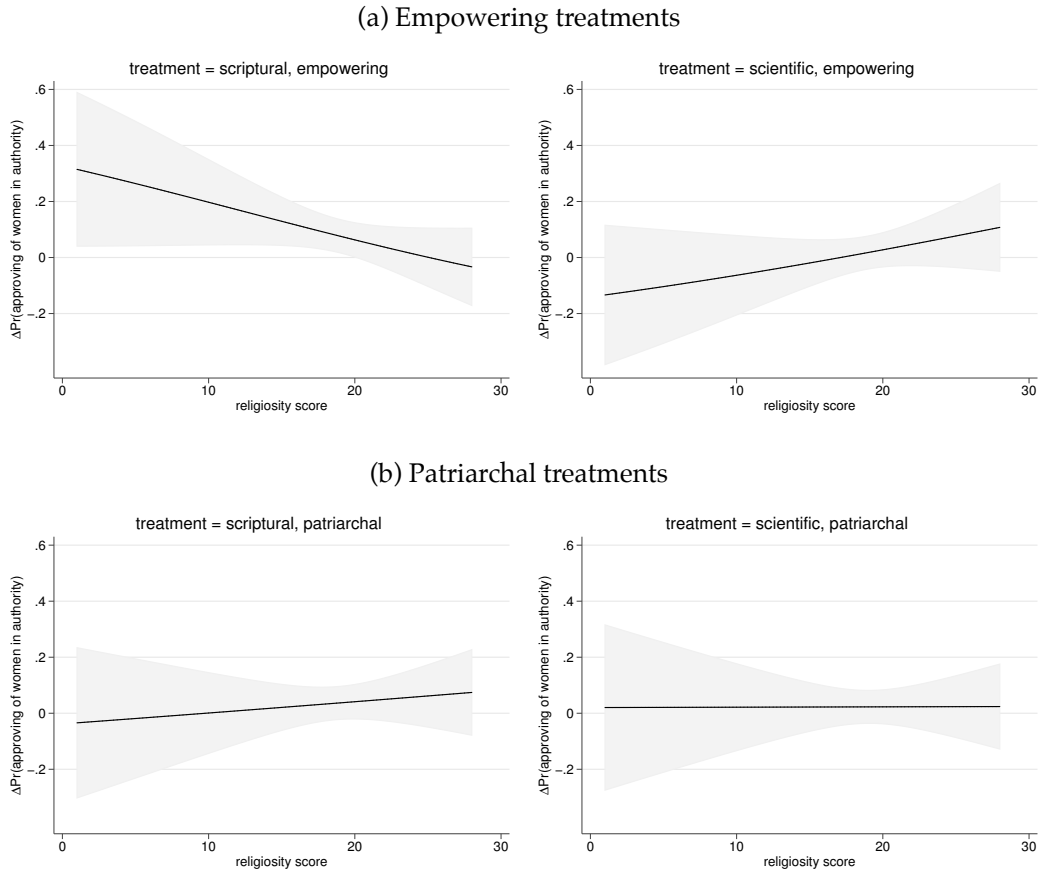
The results for the experiments on attitudes toward economic policy further undermine the notion that religiosity renders individuals more receptive to religious discourse. Neither of the scriptural justifications seemed to influence attitudes, regardless of level of religiosity. However, we see that the effect of the scientific, egalitarian prime on likelihood of favoring the wage cap increases with religiosity (as can be seen in figure 5a). This result seems driven by the fact that individuals at low levels of religiosity responded to this treatment by becoming *more opposed* toward the idea of the wage ceiling. This may be due to the fact that religiosity is negatively correlated with income, which would render the less religious (i.e. the more affluent) less likely to support a wage cap, but this would not explain why only the recipients of the scientific, egalitarian treatment responded in this way (as opposed to recipients of the religious, egalitarian treatment). It could be that respondents felt more comfortable opposing a scientifically-justified policy position than a religiously-justified one, which would suggest that religious discourse does confer legitimacy on policy positions outside of the gender domain, inasmuch as

Table 4: Regression results: Effect of *female empowerment* treatments (relative to control), conditional on level of religiosity

	<i>Treatments</i>			
	scriptural empowering	scriptural patriarchal	scientific patriarchal	scientific empowering
Treatment	1.357** (0.655)	-0.174 (0.659)	0.0890 (0.696)	-0.726 (0.684)
Religiosity	-0.00348 (0.0244)	-0.00348 (0.0244)	-0.00348 (0.0244)	-0.00348 (0.0244)
Treatment*Religiosity	-0.0541 (0.0338)	0.0178 (0.0343)	0.000670 (0.0359)	0.0424 (0.0353)
Constant	-0.660 (0.475)	-0.660 (0.475)	-0.660 (0.475)	-0.660 (0.475)
Observations	1,004	1,003	996	990
<i>pseudo-R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.00952	0.00138	0.000479	0.00218
log-likelihood	-652.9	-644.7	-636.4	-629.5

*Robust standard errors in parentheses* (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.01$ , (\*\*)  $p < 0.05$ , (\*)  $p < 0.1$

Figure 4: Effects of *female empowerment* treatments (relative to control), conditional on levels of religiosity



they make it harder for individuals to refute them publicly.<sup>7</sup>

## 4.2 Education

By measuring respondents' attitudes on two highly charged issues, we are unable to directly test the hypothesis that Islamic rhetoric merely provides individuals a cue as to the goodness of a particular policy or position. However, since respondents are not likely to be equally well-informed about both of these issues, we can ask whether religious rhetoric is more influential among the less informed. To do so, we wish to observe the interaction of our treatments with a measure of respondents' information. We use the highest level of education completed by the respondent. We divide respondents into four bins: those with no formal schooling, those with primary (*ibtidāʿī*) and preparatory (*īʿdādī*), those with secondary (*thānawī*) or vocational (*ṣināʿī*), and those with college or above. We recognize that, as a mea-

<sup>7</sup>These results are robust to two alternative measures of religiosity: whether the respondent supports an Islamist party, and the respondent's score on a 72-point scale that combines answers to a battery of 18 questions on specific provisions of the *shariʿa*.

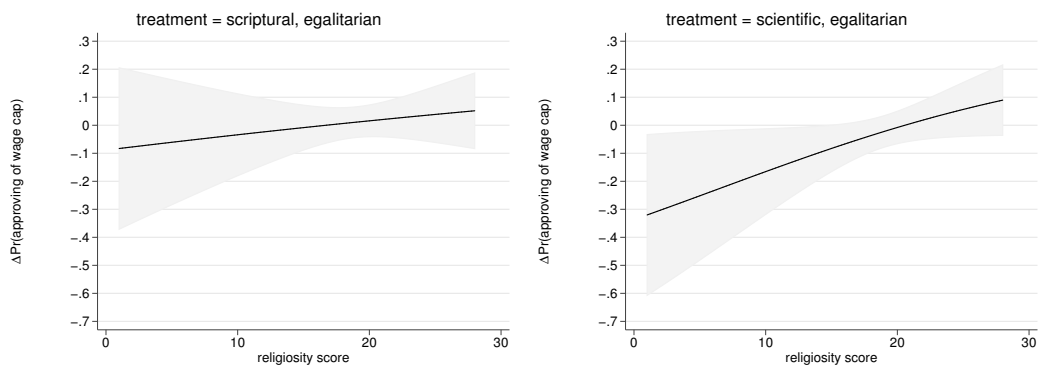
Table 5: Regression results: Effect of *economic policy* treatments (relative to control), conditional on levels of religiosity

	<i>Treatments</i>			
	scriptural egalitarian	scriptural individualistic	scientific individualistic	scientific egalitarian
Treatment	-0.412 (0.726)	-0.238 (0.747)	-0.213 (0.744)	-1.427** (0.705)
Religiosity	-0.000140 (0.0269)	-0.000140 (0.0269)	-0.000140 (0.0269)	-0.000140 (0.0269)
Treatment*Religiosity	0.0247 (0.0377)	0.0200 (0.0391)	0.0167 (0.0384)	0.0694* (0.0367)
Constant	0.987* (0.522)	0.987* (0.522)	0.987* (0.522)	0.987* (0.522)
Observations	1,004	1,003	996	990
<i>pseudo-R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.000850	0.00120	0.000735	0.00679
log-likelihood	-582.0	-573.3	-572.5	-588.4

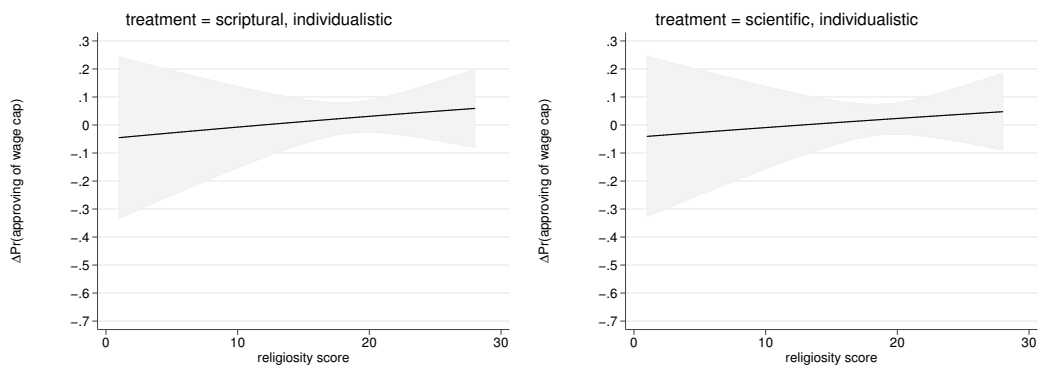
*Robust standard errors in parentheses* (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Figure 5: Effects of *economic policy* treatments (relative to control), conditional on levels of religiosity

(a) Egalitarian treatments



(b) Individualistic treatments



sure of a respondent’s access to or possession of information, education is imperfect at best. There is no reason to believe, after all, that a respondent with no formal schooling will think himself uninformed about either of the two issues under study here. Norms of patriarchy and egalitarianism are entrenched in Egypt and inform attitudes across the educational spectrum. However, as noted earlier, the relatively larger number of “don’t knows” in response to the question of the wage ceiling suggests that, if we are to discern an informational effect for religious rhetoric, it will be in that domain. Moreover, the average level of education for those responding “don’t know” was considerably lower than average—respondents who answered “don’t know” were, on average, less to have completed primary school (1.69 on the 4 point scale, compared to an average of 2.42). Thus, we should expect to see that, in response to the wage ceiling question, religious rhetoric is more influential among the least educated.

In order to observe whether this is the case, we then conduct a logistic regression of the form:

$$\text{Logit}(Y = 1) = \beta + \beta_1 \text{Treatments} + \beta_2 \text{Education} + \beta'(\text{Treatments} * \text{Education}) + \varepsilon_i$$

The results of the regressions for the female empowerment treatments are presented in table 6 and the results of the regressions for the economic policy treatments are presented in table 7. In order to simplify the analysis of these results, figure 6 plots the marginal effect of each treatment relative to the control, conditional on education for the female empowerment question, and figure 7 plots the marginal effect of each treatment relative to the control, conditional on education for the question about the wage cap. In the domain of female empowerment, we find that the effect of the empowering treatments—both scriptural and scientific—is greatest at a low-intermediate level of education. Respondents in this educational category who received either of the two empowering treatments were more likely to support female leadership than those of equivalent education in the control group; for none of the other educational groups was the effect of any treatment statistically different from zero. Moreover, the differences across educational categories are also not statistically significant. We see even less of an effect in the domain of economic policy. For every educational category, the effect of each treatment, whether scientific or scriptural, is indistinguishable from the control at the 95% level.

## 5 The Dispensation Effect

The above analyses suggest that the influence of religious discourse on policy attitudes is bounded by the policy domain. On average, religious justifications matter little in the domain of economic policy (although we do find that less religious people find such justifications harder to argue with). Scriptural discourses do matter, as we might expect, in the domain of women’s rights, but how do we explain the fact that we observe their influence in only one direction? Namely, why is it that religious justifications for female empowerment make our subjects more progressive

Table 6: Regression results: Effect of *female empowerment* treatments (relative to control), conditional on education

Treatment	<i>Treatments</i>			
	scriptural empowering	scriptural patriarchal	scientific patriarchal	scientific empowering
primary / preparatory	0.432* (0.256)	-0.0381 (0.263)	0.221 (0.260)	-0.140 (0.261)
secondary	-0.172 (0.308)	-0.172 (0.308)	-0.172 (0.308)	-0.172 (0.308)
college and above	0.130 (0.235)	0.130 (0.235)	0.130 (0.235)	0.130 (0.235)
Treatment*primary / prep	0.504* (0.297)	0.504* (0.297)	0.504* (0.297)	0.504* (0.297)
Treatment*secondary	0.297 (0.417)	0.489 (0.411)	0.266 (0.416)	0.856** (0.423)
Treatment*college	-0.113 (0.328)	0.379 (0.339)	-0.260 (0.338)	0.0920 (0.339)
Constant	-0.609 (0.420)	-0.231 (0.427)	-0.397 (0.423)	0.196 (0.423)
Observations	-0.831*** (0.181)	-0.831*** (0.181)	-0.831*** (0.181)	-0.831*** (0.181)
<i>pseudo-R</i> <sup>2</sup>	1,004	1,003	996	990
log-likelihood	0.00887	0.00802	0.00482	0.0106
	-653.3	-640.4	-633.6	-624.1

*Robust standard errors in parentheses* (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.01$ , (\*\*)  $p < 0.05$ , (\*)  $p < 0.1$



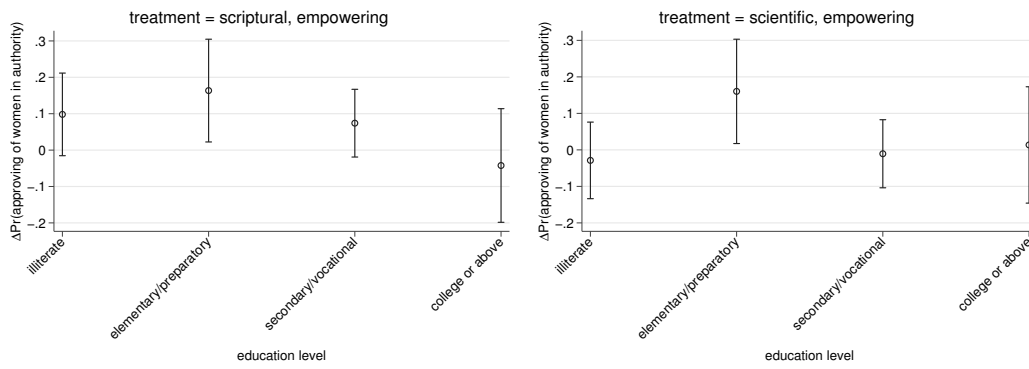
Table 7: Regression results: Effect of *economic policy* treatments (relative to control), conditional on education

Treatment	<i>Treatments</i>			
	scriptural egalitarian	scriptural individualistic	scientific individualistic	scientific egalitarian
	-0.268 (0.256)	-0.304 (0.253)	-0.121 (0.260)	-0.396 (0.247)
primary / preparatory	0.176 (0.304)	0.176 (0.304)	0.176 (0.304)	0.176 (0.304)
secondary	0.380 (0.244)	0.380 (0.244)	0.380 (0.244)	0.380 (0.244)
college and above	0.296 (0.321)	0.296 (0.321)	0.296 (0.321)	0.296 (0.321)
Treatment*primary / prep	0.550 (0.437)	0.543 (0.416)	0.0118 (0.419)	0.256 (0.421)
Treatment*secondary	0.550 (0.351)	0.544 (0.355)	0.495 (0.360)	0.391 (0.342)
Treatment*college	0.0588 (0.445)	1.128** (0.500)	0.319 (0.462)	0.543 (0.456)
Constant	0.766*** (0.179)	0.766*** (0.179)	0.766*** (0.179)	0.766*** (0.179)
Observations	1,004	1,003	996	990
<i>pseudo-R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.0150	0.0213	0.0139	0.0135
log-likelihood	-573.8	-561.7	-564.9	-584.4

*Robust standard errors in parentheses* (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.01$ , (\*\*)  $p < 0.05$ , (\*)  $p < 0.1$

Figure 6: Effects of *female empowerment* treatments (relative to control), conditional on levels of education

(a) Empowering treatments



(b) Patriarchal treatments

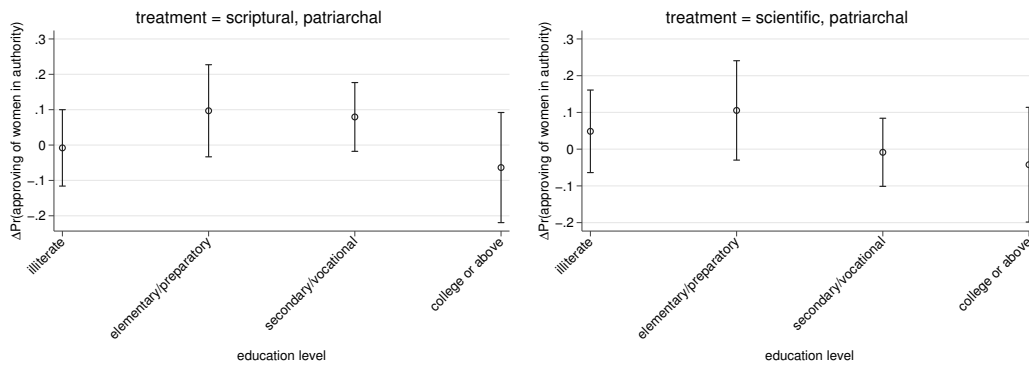
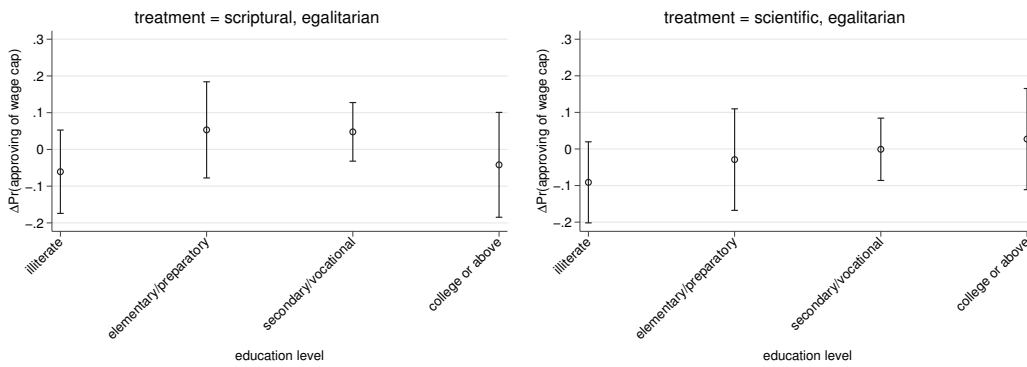
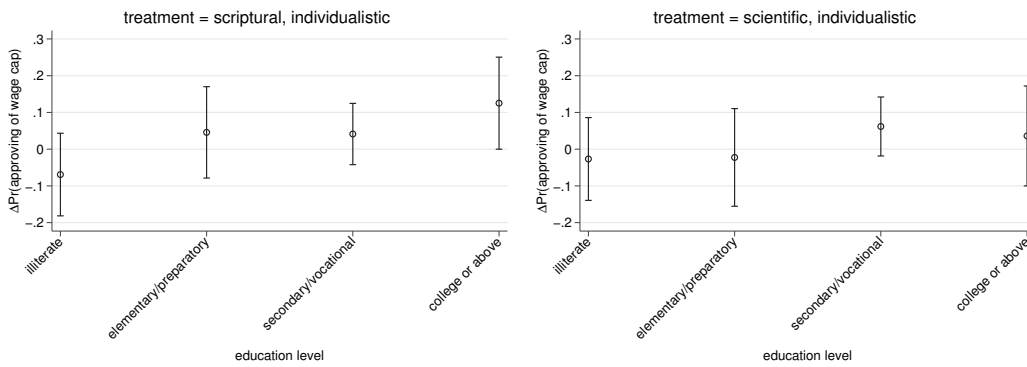


Figure 7: Effects of *economic policy* treatments (relative to control), conditional on levels of education

(a) Egalitarian treatments



(b) Individualistic treatments



on the question of female leadership, but that religious justifications for patriarchy do not have a similar effect in the opposite direction?

As we noted earlier, Egyptian respondents are likely inundated with scripturally-sourced, patriarchal messages. The question of whether women should be allowed top leadership roles is particularly fraught. For example, it was only in 1994 that the Muslim Brotherhood came around to the idea that women should be allowed to vote. In a document, entitled, “The right of women to vote and to membership in parliamentary assemblies and to assume public posts,” the Brotherhood concedes women’s right to vote mainly on pragmatic grounds: “Preventing the Muslim woman from participating in elections would weaken the Islamist candidates’ chances of winning” (p. 23).<sup>8</sup> However, the presidency was a red line: “The public trust upon which it is agreed that women are forbidden to hold it is the grand imamate, which is analogous to the presidency of the state in our current circumstances” (p. 27). In the Brotherhood’s 2007 party platform, they took up the issue of women and the presidency again, affirming their patriarchal stance: “From our point of view we see that the obligations imposed on the president of the state, who is responsible for command of the army, are among obligations that women should not be forced to undertake, because they are at odds with her nature and with her social and humanitarian roles.”<sup>9</sup> As we have seen with our own data (see figure 2a), though the Brotherhood was eventually ousted from power, its view on women’s unsuitability for high office is one that is widely shared by Egyptians.

Consequently, the “scriptural, patriarchal” treatment was likely experienced by respondents as unremarkable. The empowering treatments, inasmuch as they contradicted everyday orthodoxy, did not have this problem. What, then, explains why only the scriptural endorsement of women’s leadership was able to cause respondents to become more progressive with respect to female authority? We hypothesize that social attitudes that emerge from *religious orthodoxy* are unlikely to be amenable to change in response to non-religious arguments (which will be viewed as inappropriate), but rather will be more susceptible to change in response to arguments that are also rooted in religion. In other words, departures from religious orthodoxy require religious dispensations.

This would explain some of the patterns we observed in our subgroup analysis. For example, we saw that the scriptural, empowering treatment was most impactful at lower levels of religiosity. This makes sense, if we think that most religious people are likely highly familiar with all of the scriptural sources and thus less likely to be moved by a heterodox interpretation of the Qurʿān. In other words, whereas one who was less practicing might find the “empowering” verse we offered to be persuasive, someone who reads the Qurʿān and engages with religious

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<sup>8</sup>The Society of Muslim Brothers, “Haq al-Mar’a fī al-Intikhāb wa fī ‘Udwiyyat al-Majālis al-Niyābiyya wa fī tawallā al-wazā’if al-’amma (The rights of women to vote and to membership in parliamentary assemblies and to assume public posts),” in *Al-Mar’a al-Muslima fī al-Mujtama‘ al-Muslim; Al-Shūrā wa Ta’adud al-Aḥzāb (The Muslim Woman in the Muslim Society; Consultation and Multipartyism)*, Cairo: al-Markaz al-Islāmī li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Buḥūth (Islamic Center for Studies and Research), March 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Muslim Brotherhood Draft Party Platform, 2007 p. 103

texts more regularly would likely be familiar with the orthodox interpretations of that verse, and thus less likely to see it as justifying a departure from the patriarchal status quo. Future research will explore this dispensation effect in a wider range of policy domains. There is also no reason that it should be restricted to issues of religion. The most general form of our argument is that departures from any orthodoxy require arguments that are framed in the selfsame terms as those used to justify that orthodoxy in the first place.

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have shown that religious discourse matters, but that the domains in which it matters are circumscribed. Views about proper economic relations are generally unaffected by claims over what the Qur'ān does or does not enjoin, a finding that cuts against the notion of Muslims as uniquely beholden to Islam or subsumed under a "moral cosmology" that brings all affairs under its sway. We also find that religious discourse's influence in the cultural realm is most pronounced—at least in our experimental setting—for views that depart from orthodoxy. What this suggests is that political entrepreneurs seeking to advocate for progressive economic positions derive no benefit from framing their appeals in religious idiom, but that those who wish to argue for the empowerment of women and other culturally progressive attitudes may in fact benefit from wrapping their claims in religious rhetoric. This may be a hard pill to swallow. Those yearning for greater liberty for the Arab world's women are often those who desire to separate religion and politics, to create a public sphere that is equally open to all Egyptians, regardless of whether they read the Qur'ān, the Bible, or neither of these things.

The findings here are also relevant for understanding the future of Egyptian and Arab politics. After the Muslim Brotherhood's forcible ejection from power in Egypt in 2013, and the mass protests that compelled the al-Nahḍa government's resignation in early 2014, scholars, commentators, and policymakers have begun speaking of the "end" of political Islam. For example, the day after Mursī was ousted by military coup, Hazem Kandil, a Cambridge University sociologist, wrote that "the country that invented Islamism may well be on its way to undoing the spell."<sup>10</sup> The Lebanese columnist Jihād al-Zayn wrote of "the beginning of the end of the Islamist tide in its various manifestations."<sup>11</sup> Gilles Kepel, the noted French scholar of Islamism, declared that the Brotherhood's ouster represented nothing less than the "third phase of the Arab revolutions," a popular "reaction" to a political project "comparable to those of the Nazis in Germany in 1933 and the Communists in Czechoslovakia in 1948."<sup>12</sup> Comparatively modest was the assessment of the Egyptian scholar Khalil al-Anani, who, while resisting the temptation to de-

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<sup>10</sup>Hazem Kandil, "The End of Islamism?" *London Review of Books*, July 4, 2013

<sup>11</sup>Jihād al-Zayn, "al-Mushtarak bayn Turkiyā wa Miṣr wa Tūnis: Ufūl al-Islāmiyya (What Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia Share: Demise of the Islamist)," *al-Nahār* (Lebanon), January 16, 2014

<sup>12</sup>Gilles Kepel, "Egypt: The Third Phase of the Arab Revolutions," *Huffington Post*, August 20, 2013.

clare political Islam dead, nonetheless argued that “the failure of the Brotherhood in power has revealed the inability of orthodox Islamism to adapt to the political environment that developed from the Arab Spring.”<sup>13</sup>

However, this research reveals that the (at least momentary) demise of Islamic parties is unlikely to mean the demise of Islam in politics. The role of religion in shaping attitudes toward issues such as women’s rights, and the potential potency of religiously-based arguments for changing those attitudes in more progressive directions, means that religion—and who gets to interpret its dictates and dispensations—will remain an important rhetorical implement in Arab politics for some time to come. The sooner that non-Islamists come to terms with this fact, the sooner they may be able to begin speaking to voters in ways that will get them to listen.

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