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Sharī‘a, Islamism and Arab support for democracy

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Abstract:

The Arab Spring and its aftermath reignited the debate over the relationship between Islamism and democracy. This analysis improves upon previous research by demonstrating the crucial contribution which a more precise understanding of the multiple meanings of the concept of Sharī‘a can have on our assessment of the future of democracy in the Arab world. While support for the Sharī‘a-conformity of laws has a positive impact on the preference for democracy, the insistence that Sharī‘a represents the word of God as opposed to the human attempt to interpret it reduces support for democracy. These findings are of considerable significance for academics and policy-makers interested in the future of democracy in the Arab world as it suggests that generic expressions of support for Sharī‘a are less relevant in explaining support for democracy than what Arab women and men consider to be its essence.

Keywords: Sharī‘a, Islamism, democracy, Arab Spring, gender equality, religious freedom, public opinion

Introduction

The Arab Spring renewed academic interest in the question of whether Islamism and democracy are compatible.[1] Irrespective of whether one views pro-democracy attitudes as helping to bring about democracy[2] or to sustain existing democratic political orders[3], it is clear that democracy in the Arab world has no future without robust popular support. The following analysis thus builds on previous scholarship which examined possible determinants of support for democracy[4] to offer the most in-depth and comprehensive examination yet of how different interpretations of Islam help explain support for democracy in the Arab world. More specifically, it improves on earlier analyses by utilizing independent variables which are more precise in capturing the essence of the Islamist political program by distinguishing the Islamist insistence on interpreting Sharīʿa as the word of God[5] from the general public support for Sharīʿa as a symbol of good governance[6]. This improvement in the specification of crucial independent variables sets the foundation for the academically and politically significant finding that it is not general support for the Sharīʿa-conformity of laws, but whether or not people accept Sharīʿa as the product of human agency which constitutes an obstacle to the wider embrace of democracy.

Theory and Hypotheses

The insistence on the implementation of a political order based on 'Islamic Law' features prominently in the Islamist political program.[7] The question arises whether this vision can be reconciled with the demands of a robust democracy. According to Stepan and Linz[8], there is not a single Muslim-majority democracy which has established Sharīʿa as its legal code. In some of the countries under consideration here (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya), Sharīʿa is mostly applied in family law. In Sudan, elements of penal law are

based on Sharī‘a. At the other end of the spectrum, Tunisian political elites embraced the notion of a ‘civil state’.[9] An-Nahda’s re-interpretation of Sharī‘a from a set of legal norms to a set of moral values and the movement’s support of Tunisia’s new constitution despite it only referring to the ‘teaching of Islam’ and not ‘Islamic law’[10] suggests one way of solving the possible tension between the strong support for Sharī‘a and democracy across the Arab[11] and wider Muslim world[12].

While the understanding of Sharī‘a as a fixed set of laws which only need to be implemented by political authorities might be central to how Western Orientalists, Islamists and some authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world interpret Islam[13], it does run counter to the existence of a multitude of interpretations of Sharī‘a throughout Muslim history[14]. Otto, for instance, differentiates between ‘divine, abstract’ Sharī‘a, ‘classical’ Sharī‘a, ‘historically transferred’ Sharī‘a, and ‘contemporary’ Sharī‘a.[15] As these terms suggest, they all differ with regard to the involvement of human agency. The widely shared understanding that ‘divine, abstract’ Sharī‘a encapsulates ‘God’s plan for mankind’ comes closest to the notion of an ‘unchanging’ Sharī‘a.[16] Recognizing the need to translate the abstract norms of ‘divine’ Sharī‘a into specific guidelines, Muslim scholars spent the first two hundred years after the death of Prophet Muhammad producing what Otto labels ‘classical’ Sharī‘a’.[17] As a product of human interpretation, it reflected the political, social, and religious conditions of its time. Otto therefore argues that the ‘classical’ Sharī‘a of the first two hundred years of Islam’s history, the ‘historically transferred’ Sharī‘a as it developed over the following millennium and ‘contemporary’ Sharī‘a are all products of human activity and thus better understood as fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence.[18] This distinction has crucial implications for the extent to which support for Sharī‘a can go hand in hand with a genuine commitment to democracy. If Sharī‘a is treated as fixed ‘Islamic’ law, then this would seriously curtail the ability of the people and their representatives to freely pass laws as is the case in a democracy. It is this

unease with the notion of people's sovereignty which led 20th century Islamist thinkers to regard the demands of 'God's law' and democracy as irreconcilable.[19] For Sayyid Qutb, the choice was clear: 'Either divine law, or human whim.'[20] However, as Al-Azmeh pointed out, this rigid interpretation of Sharī'a ignores its abstract nature which, as originally understood, 'does not designate law, but is a general term designating good order, much like nomos or dharma' which made general calls for its application 'meaningless'.[21] As Hallaq put it,

> (i)n order for the term 'law' to reflect what the Shari'a stood for and meant, we would be required to effect so many omissions, additions, and qualifications that we would render the term itself largely, if not entirely, useless.[22]

So how did this notion of a fixed set of 'Islamic laws' emerge? As various observers[23] have pointed out, it was during the process of (post-) colonial state building across the Muslim world during which Sharī'a was turned from a 'transcendent, divine source of law interpreted by scholars' into a 'set of rules defined and applied by authority of the state'.[24] For Feldman, the call to implement Sharī'a should thus be viewed as a response to the 'constitutional defect'[25] of unfettered post-colonial authoritarianism. Reflecting its symbolic function 'as a guarantee of stability and justice that is at the same time "authentic"'[26], Muslim women and men nowadays often see the implementation of Sharī'a as an instrument that helps facilitate ethical conduct and good governance as well as the fight against corruption and economic inequalities.[27] That is why large numbers of Muslims support Sharī'a in principle while disagreeing over what this should mean in terms of practical implementation.[28] Rediscovering the original meaning of Sharī'a as divine guidance, which, through the exercise of people's sovereignty, still needs to be translated into specific laws would help marry the widespread demand for political adherence to 'Islamic' values[29] with the notion of people's sovereignty as a central ingredient of democratic political systems.

These theoretical arguments find some initial support in existing evidence for the tension between support for the strict implementation of Sharī'a and support for democracy. Moaddel[30] for Saudi Arabia as well as Hoffman and Jamal[31] for Egypt and Tunisia found preference for democracy to be negatively correlated to support for the notion that only Sharī'a should be implemented. In the context of Pakistan, on the other hand, Fair, Littman, and Nugent[32] showed that those respondents who associated Sharī'a implementation with the provision of social services and security for the people were more likely to support democratic governance. This suggests that the direction of any correlation between support for Sharī'a and democracy might quite strongly depend on what respondents perceive Sharī'a to be. The present analysis is the first to offer a broad comparative investigation of this question in the Arab world. It thus tests the following main hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Support for the *Sharī'a* compliance of laws correlates with lower support for democracy.

Hypothesis 2: Support for the notion that *Sharī'a* constitutes the word of God correlates with lower support for democracy.

Closely connected to the Islamist demand for the implementation of a supposedly fixed set of Islamic laws is the question of whether the resulting political system would be able or willing to protect the rights of religious minorities and women[33] or transcend instead into some kind of illiberal democracy.[34] Islamist rhetoric on the issue of religious freedom traditionally focused on the concept of Dhimmī which applies to followers of other monotheistic religions, predominantly Christians and Jews, as fellow people of the book ('ahl ul-kitāb'). At the time of its development by classical scholars, the status of Dhimmī offered a level of protection of life, property and religious practice, which was generous when compared to the general treatment of the 'religious other' in medieval Christian Europe.[35] This status does, however,

fall short of modern notions of equality and tolerance as '(f)reedom from persecution is different from freedom for social and political mobility.'[36] Again, the distinction between Sharī'a as a set of divine norms and fiqh, which, as Jurists' law, cannot claim divine status, is crucial.[37] As Kraemer observed with regard to freedom of religion, the notion that conversion from Islam is punishable by death only emerged within fiqh, i.e. the human attempt to interpret the will of God.[38] While the Qur'an does describe apostasy as a sin, it does not proscribe a specific punishment.[39] Hadiths which do appear to proscribe a specific punishment are, in Kraemer's view, of debatable quality.[40]

A similar pattern emerges with regard to the question of women's rights. Traditional interpretations of what Otto[41] would term 'classical' or 'historically transferred' Sharī'a insist on the dependence of women on the 'guardianship' of men similar to those of minors.[42] Muslim feminists stress, however, that these traditional interpretations merely reflect the patriarchal biases of the time of their codification and fail to adhere to the egalitarian essence of Islam, which emphasized gender equality.[43] All of this explains why the differentiation between the view of Sharī'a as the word of God and Sharī'a as the human attempt to interpret the word of God is so crucial. Only in the latter case is it possible to reconcile Sharī'a with modern notions of human and women's rights, which lie at the heart of a functioning democracy.[44] In other words, if 'divine' and human sources of Sharī'a are appropriately differentiated, possible tensions between Sharī'a and democracy begin to dissipate. The following analysis thus tests the assumption that a respondent's view of Sharī'a correlates with their willingness to support religious freedom and gender equality as set out in figure 1.

Figure 1 here

The possible interaction between views of Sharī'a and support for religious freedom and gender equality also matters since the latter form part of a broader set of 'pluralist'[45] or

'emancipative values'[46] which are strongly linked to the development of effective democracy. As Milligan, Andersen, and Brym pointed out,

> tolerance of minority rights prevents the formation of a tyrannical majority, ensuring that the interests of all citizens are respected to a degree.[47]

For Rowley and Smith[48], it is this unease with religious freedom which explains the democracy deficit in Muslim-majority countries. The following analysis therefore tests

Hypothesis 3a: *Support for the Sharī'a compliance of laws correlates with lower support for* democracy through reduced support for religious freedom.

Hypothesis 3b: Support for the notion that *Sharī'a constitutes the word of God correlates* with reduced support for democracy through reduced support for religious freedom.

Similarly, Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel[49] as well as Inglehart and Norris[50] demonstrated that gender equality is not just a consequence of democratization, but is part of a broader cultural change which increases demands for democracy. In their pooled analysis, Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer[51] showed that in non-Arab Muslim societies support for gender equality and democracy were indeed positively correlated, but that the relationship was negative in Arab societies. They thus suggested that in the Arab world, women might prefer to work within the constraints of the existing authoritarian regimes out of concerns over what the democratic empowerment of Islamists might mean for women's rights.[52] This interpretation found support more recently in Kostenko, Kuzmuchev and Ponarin's analysis of first wave Arab Barometer data according to which only 17% of respondents supported both democracy and gender equality.[53] By contrast, Ciftci[54] showed that support for gender equality helped predict support for democracy in the Arab world. This raises the question of whether views of

Sharī'a have an indirect association with support for democracy via their link with views of gender equality as outlined in figure 1.

Hypothesis 4a: *Support for the Sharī'a compliance of laws correlates with lower* support for democracy through lower support for gender equality.

Hypothesis 4b: *Support for the notion that Sharī'a constitutes the word of God correlates* with lower support for democracy through lower support for gender equality.

Data and Method

This analysis makes use of data collected via the third wave of the Arab Barometer project. Most of the interviews took place between December 2012 and July 2013 (with the exception of Kuwait and Libya where surveys took place in March and April 2014). Results of earlier waves of the Arab Barometer have been utilized in important research referenced above.[55] The current data set offers a number of advantages over earlier data sets. First, it covers the largest number of countries representing more than 82 percent of the Arab world's total population. With twelve countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen) surveyed, it goes beyond the ten countries covered in the second wave and the seven countries covered in the first wave. These countries offer considerable variety in terms of experiences with democracy and the political influence of Islamist movements. In light of this diversity, robust cross-country findings would increase confidence in the applicability of the underlying pattern to the wider Arab world.

Second, the data set is more comprehensive in terms of the inclusion of theoretically important variables. Earlier analysis did not test for the impact of support for Islamism[56] or support for political gender equality[57]. Most crucially, the present data set features, for the

first time, a variable which captures respondents' views on whether or not they think that Sharī'a constitutes the word of God. Previous analyses on the impact of support for Sharī'a relied on a measure of generic support which did not contain information on what respondents thought Sharī'a's essence to be[58] or only asked whether respondents viewed Sharī'a primarily as a symbol of good governance or system of huddūd punishments.[59]

Third, the current data is the result of fieldwork conducted when the Arab Spring's political ascendancy of Islamist movements had reached its short-lived peak. In early 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood controlled presidency and parliament in Egypt, the Tunisian an-Nahda party and the Moroccan Justice and Development party had secured pluralities of seats in their countries' parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Development Party had won 17 out of 80 seats reserved for parties in Libya's 2012 elections, and the Green Algeria Alliance had secured 49 out of 462 seats in Algeria's 2012 parliamentary elections.[60] The present analysis is thus able to capture views of democracy among supporters of the Islamist political agenda at a time when the idea of their leaders exercising political power was not merely a distant vision, but political reality. In other words, the timing of the underlying survey allows us to test whether the exercise of political power had moderated or even improved views of democracy among supporters of Islamist movements.

The present analysis, run in STATA, is similar in its empirical strategy to earlier analyses[61] in employing ordinary least squares regression on samples covering Muslim respondents. It does, however, go one step further by developing simultaneous effects models. This approach helps test whether views of Sharī'a and the political role of Islam do not just impact support for democracy directly, but also, as outlined in hypotheses 3a-b and 4a-b, indirectly by influencing support for religious freedom or gender equality which previous research identified as crucial measures of pro-democracy attitudes (see figure 1).

Dependent variables

Existing research on public support for democracy in the Arab world often relied on the rudimentary measure of support for the notion 'Democracy may have its problems but it's better than any other form of government', which was sometimes combined into an index variable with another question measuring general approval of having a democratic political system in the respondent's country.[62] Critics of this approach[63] argued that simply measuring generic support for 'democracy' is misleading as this could simply reflect 'lip service'[64] which lacks a 'truly exogenous effect'[65] on democracy. Welzel[66] as well as Norris and Inglehart[67] thus developed a democracy-authoritarianism index which subtracted 'support for army rule', 'approval of experts, not politicians making decisions', and 'support for strong leaders who do not have to bother with parliaments and elections' from support for democracy. While the third wave of the Arab Barometer does not contain specific questions on support for the rule of army or technocrats, it does contain a question about authoritarian rule similar to the one which Norris and Inglehart[68] utilized. The following analysis thus utilizes as its dependent variable a subtractive index which subtracts support for a 'political system with an authoritarian president who is indifferent to parliament' (Question 517.2, Arab Barometer, table II, appendix) from support for a 'democratic political system that ensures public freedoms, equality in political and civil rights, devolution of authority, and accountability and transparency of the executive authority' (Question 517.1, Arab Barometer, table I, appendix). This dependent variable resembles the Democracy-Authoritarianism index which Inglehart and Welzel[69] and Inglehart and Norris[70] showed to be a much stronger predictor of a society's actual level of democracy than any of the questions which simply probed general preference for democracy.

A second, quite common, approach has been to combine the general preference for democracy with views on its performance.[71] This approach has been criticized by Norris and Inglehart[72] who emphasized the need to differentiate between the general support for democracy and views on its specific performance. As Inglehart and Welzel argued, 'there are a large number of people who support democracy for reasons of expected performance.'[73] Esmer[74] thus differentiated between views on possible problems with democracy such as weak economic performance, indecisiveness, or the inability to maintain order on the one hand and views on possible alternatives to democracy on the other. Ciftci[75] adopted a similar approach when he differentiated between a 'diffuse' support for democracy, as measured in a general preference, and 'specific' support for democracy, as measured in views on its performance. A factor analysis of the present data confirmed the appropriateness of the approach adopted by Ciftci[76] and Esmer[77]. Views on the performance of democracy, which explained 39.4 percent of the variance, and the general preference for democracy, which explained 17.0 percent of the variance, constitute two distinct dimensions (table III, appendix).[78] The following analysis thus incorporated a robustness check which followed Ciftci[79] and Esmer[80] in constructing a separate dependent variable out of the items listed in table III of the appendix which measure views on democracy's performance with higher values indicating greater confidence in the capability of democracies to generate economic growth, make decisions and maintain order.[81] This approach addresses Hofman's concern that the inclusion of questions about general preferences for democracy, strong rulers or military rule might 'underestimate the support for democracy in nations undergoing democratization, especially when this process is tumultuous.'[82] In a second robustness check, views on the question of whether democracy is appropriate for the respondent's country (table IV, appendix) were utilized as the dependent variable. It offers a useful complement to the other two dependent variables as it encourages respondents to directly situate support for

democracy in the specific political and economic context of their country. In both cases, the results of the main analysis were confirmed (table VIII, appendix).

Independent variables

Existing studies of the impact of support for Sharī'a on attitudes toward democracy[83] or economic equality[84] made use of a question probing support for the statement that '(t)he government should implement only the laws of Sharī'a.' The following analysis utilizes a more comprehensive measure of support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws to test hypotheses 1, 3a, and 4a. It combines responses to the statements 'government and parliament should enact laws in accordance with Islamic law,' 'government and parliament should enact penal laws in accordance with Islamic law,' 'government and parliament should enact personal status laws (marriage, divorce) in accordance with Islamic law', and 'government and parliament should enact inheritance laws in accordance with Islamic law,' so that higher values indicate greater support (Cronbach's Alpha .830). In order to test hypotheses 2, 3b, and 4b, a separate variable is employed which measures support for the view that 'Sharī'a is the word of God' (coded '1') as opposed to 'Sharī'a is the human interpretation of the word of God' (coded '0').

In addition to usual control variables such as gender, education, and income, the following models also contain further controls capturing the possible impact of additional views and interpretations of Islam. Tessler's[85] earlier factor analysis had already demonstrated the existence of a personal dimension of religion which covers prayer, religious observance, and the use of religion when facing important problems on the one hand and a political dimension which covers views on the political role of religious leaders and general Islamic guidance in public affairs on the other. In addition, Tessler, Jamal, and Robbins[86] found that questions on

whether it would be better to have more religious people hold public office and on whether men of religion should play a role in government decision-making effectively capture support for Islamism. These questions offer the advantage of directly capturing agreement with the idea of the twin toleration of political and religious elites.[87] As Stepan had argued, without this 'twin toleration' of democracy and religion, where a country's 'religious authorities do not control democratic officials who act constitutionally' and 'democratic officials do not control religion as long as religious actors respect other citizens' rights', neither can flourish.[88] The sceptics' view that Islamists might simply use democracy as an instrument of gaining power was encapsulated in the warning by President Clinton's first Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Edward Djerejian, that 'one man, one vote, one time is not democracy'.[89] In contrast to such scepticism, existing public opinion research unearthed some overlap between support for democracy and the support for a political role of Islam in the Arab world.[90] Other studies found the negative impact of Islamism to be limited either to female respondents in the case of a question about support for a role of Islam in economic affairs[91] or to respondents in non-Arab Muslim countries[92]. Ciftci's[93] examination of 3rd wave Arab Barometer data did, by contrast, show that respondents who supported the notion that men of religion should influence government decisions were less likely to support democracy in Jordan, Palestine, Algeria, and Yemen. The following analysis utilizes an index variable which builds on Ciftci[94] as well as Tessler, Jamal, and Robbins[95] and Tessler and Gao[96] in operationalizing Stepan's[97] 'twin toleration' concept via the combined support for a public role for religious people and for religious elites influencing government decisions (tables V and VI, appendix). The potential impact of individual religiosity is measured via an index variable combining frequency of prayer, attendance at religious services and Qur'ān reading.[98] Factor analysis (table VII, appendix) conducted on the present sample confirms that views on the applicability of Sharī'a (31.8 percent of variance explained), individual

religiosity (14.7 percent), support for a political role of Islam (12.8 percent), and the view that Sharī'a is the word of God as opposed to the human attempt to interpret it (10.0 percent) load onto four distinct dimensions which warrant the inclusion of four separate independent variables.[99]

Hypotheses 3a-b are tested via a question asking respondents whether they (strongly) (dis)agreed with the right of 'religious minorities such as Christians and Shī'a to practice their religion freely'. Hypotheses 4a-b are tested via a measure of gender equality which follows the approach taken in earlier assessments of Arab and Muslim support for democracy.[100] It combines into an index variable support for the right of married women to work outside the home with the rejection of the notion that men make better political leaders than women and that university education is more important for men.

Analysis

Results reported in table 1 make it abundantly clear how crucial the distinction is between support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws and the insistence that Sharī'a constitutes the word of God.[101] Contrary to hypothesis 1, support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws increases, not reduces, support for democracy irrespective of model specification (table 1, models 1-3). This finding reaffirms earlier qualitative[102] and quantitative[103] studies insofar as support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws should not be understood as support for an Islamist political program, but rather an expression of support for an instrument that is seen as facilitating ethical conduct[104] or a just social and political order which reflects Islamic values[105] more generally. It reflects the fact that roughly half of all Arab supporters of democracy follow an instrumentalist interpretation of democracy which emphasizes fighting corruption and

furthering social justice over a procedural interpretation which emphasizes rights and freedoms (table IX, appendix).[106]

Table 1 here

The positive impact of support for the Sharī‘a-conformity of laws contrasts quite starkly with the negative impact which the insistence that Sharī‘a constitutes the word of God has on support for democracy. In line with hypothesis 2, respondents who follow this viewpoint are less likely to prefer democracy over authoritarianism (table 1, model 3), to view the performance of democracy positively and to regard democracy as suitable for their own country (table VIII, appendix). In short, this variable is the only variable capturing various interpretations of Sharī‘a and Islam’s political role which consistently correlates with public opinion on democracy across the Arab world. It thus becomes clear that it is not the widely shared preference for the Sharī‘a-conformity of laws that is problematic, but the Islamist insistence on the unchanging nature of Sharī‘a.

There is also considerable evidence for the hypothesized indirect effect of views of Sharī‘a on support for democracy as they interact with support for religious freedom and for gender equality as the two only variables which, in line with earlier research[107] consistently help predict support for democracy (table 1, models 1-3). What the present analysis adds to these earlier findings is concrete evidence that these two crucial dimensions of pro-democracy attitudes are themselves shaped by different conceptions of Sharī‘a and views on the political influence of Islam. Again, the distinction between support for the Sharī‘a-conformity of laws on the one hand and the insistence on Sharī‘a as the word of God on the other hand is crucial.

Contrary to hypothesis 3a, support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws increases support for religious freedom across the three models. The impact of views on the essence of Sharī'a, however, points into the opposite direction. In line with hypothesis 3b, respondents who think that Sharī'a is the word of God are less likely to support religious freedom (model 3).

Hypothesis 4a on the negative association between support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws and support for gender equality finds some supporting evidence in models 1 and 2. However, when views on the essence of Sharī'a are added to the model (model 3), the association loses its statistical significance. As predicted in hypothesis 4b, it is the insistence on Sharī'a constituting the word of God which now emerges as a significant negative predictor of support for gender equality. This finding would not surprise Muslim feminist voices who had long argued that the notion of a 'fixed' Islamic law constitutes a significant obstacle to the empowerment of Muslim women.[108] The gendered nature of the debate over the meaning and essence of Sharī'a comes into even clearer focus when we compare the results of our model across male and female samples. While views on the essence or applicability of Sharī'a have no impact on support for gender equality among women, they both clearly reduce support among men (table X, appendix). Further research thus appears to be warranted into the possibly different ways in which Muslim women and men conceive of and interpret the essence and applicability of Sharī'a.

A number of control variables exert noteworthy direct and indirect influence on support for democracy. In line with earlier research[109], support for a political role of religious elites reduces support for democracy both directly and indirectly via reducing support for religious freedom and gender equality (table 1, models 2-3). This finding serves to illustrate how crucial the twin toleration of religious and political spheres as set out by Stepan and Linz[110] will be if democracy has any hope of survival in the Arab world.

The impact of religiosity is felt mostly at the level of our mediator variables. Here, the interaction with views on the essence of Sharī'a as well the political role of Islam is noteworthy. Once these variables are added to our model, religiosity emerges as a positive predictor of support for religious freedom and ceases its significant negative correlation with support for gender equality (table 1, models 2 and 3). In other words, from a rights perspective, individual religiosity is only problematic if it goes hand in hand with a literalist approach to religious sources and the demand for a greater political role of religion.

Women do not differ from men in their views on democracy and religious freedom. They are, however, more likely to support gender equality, which, as mentioned above, is strongly correlated with greater support for democracy (table 1, models 1-3). In light of the international media's attention on the younger generation's role in the early stages of the Arab Spring, it might come as a surprise that age has a positive direct impact on preference for democracy as well as a consistent positive indirect impact as it increases support for religious freedom and gender equality (table 1, models 1-3).[111] Analysis reported in the appendix (table X) reveals an interesting pattern. While younger women are weaker in their preference for democracy, young Arab Muslim men are particularly reluctant to protect the rights of women and religious minorities. Here, we might witness the concern among young Muslim women over the possible impact of an Islamist-led democracy on their personal rights and freedoms.[112]

Finally, education exerts the expected influence as it strengthens the preference for democracy and increases support for religious freedom and gender equality (table 1).[113] This finding aligns with earlier evidence on the positive relationship between education and support for democracy from Central Asia[114] and Africa[115]. It offers further confirmation for the robustness of the link between education and support for democracy irrespective of the actual level of democracy achieved in a given country[116].

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated the need to carefully distinguish the general support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws from the insistence that Sharī'a constitutes the word of God when assessing support for democracy in the Arab Muslim world. Just like the rejection of the twin toleration of religious authorities and political office-holders, the insistence that Sharī'a constitutes a set of clearly defined laws, which represent the word of God as opposed to the human attempt to interpret God's message, is linked with a weaker preference for democracy and lower support for religious freedom and gender equality as crucial safeguards of effective democracy. It is thus no coincidence that the only successful transition toward democracy occurred in Tunisia where Rashid Ghannouchi, leader of the formerly Islamist an-Nahda, announced his party's departure from Islamism and the embrace of the label Muslim democrat.[117]

The fact that much previous analysis was unable to detect a strong negative association between Islamist ideology and support for democracy suggests that any future examination of this relationship must be careful to utilize and construct dependent and independent variables which offer precise measures of support for Islamism and democracy. First, as has been pointed out before[118], support for democracy can be most meaningfully measured if it is combined with a measure of support for authoritarian alternatives. Second, any attempt to measure support for Islamism needs to include a question on respondents' views on the direct political influence of religious authorities. Only such a measure is capable of appropriately depicting support for what Stepan and Linz[119] described as the twin-toleration of religious authorities and political elites without which democracy cannot succeed.

The strong negative impact on views of democracy of support for a political role for Islam and a literalist interpretation of the meaning of Sharī'a contrasts starkly with the positive impact of support for the Sharī'a-conformity of laws. This suggests that just like democracy itself, for many Muslims across the Arab world, Sharī'a does connote good governance. Wider academia as well as, most crucially, policy-makers in the West need to understand that in the context of social desirability and Sharī'a's perceived ability to address widespread social problems, the expression of a generic support for Sharī'a is not an appropriate measure of support for the Islamist political project. Support for Sharī'a only becomes problematic when combined with an exclusivist interpretation of its essence. The question which divides supporters and opponents of democracy in the Arab world is not whether laws should follow the ethical guidance contained in Islam's founding message, but whether a fixed corpus of 'Islamic laws' already exists and only requires implementation, as stipulated by some Islamist movements and authoritarian governments desperate for religious legitimacy.[120] This flexibility regarding the meaning of Sharī'a would also make the embrace of modern notions of religious freedom and gender equality easier to obtain. Such reconceptualization is crucial as support for personal freedoms and emancipative values lie at the heart of effective democracy[121] as evidenced yet again in their strong positive impact on support for democracy in our models. This analysis has demonstrated that this link continues to persist even in the context of the upheaval of the Arab Spring. The considerable, yet far from overwhelming, support which gender equality and a separation between religion and politics enjoy in the Arab world serves as a reminder that the region is not as inescapably hostile to effective democracy as the disappointments of the post-Arab Spring in Egypt, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere might suggest. Those among the international community interested in supporting democracy in the region could thus make a profound contribution towards increasing the chances of success of any future political transitions by helping to protect Arab supporters of

gender equality and religious freedom who seek to develop less literalist and exclusivist interpretations of Islam from the attempts by authoritarian governments and radical Islamists to silence them.

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Figure 1: Hypothesized Impact of Independent and Mediator Variables on Support for Democracy

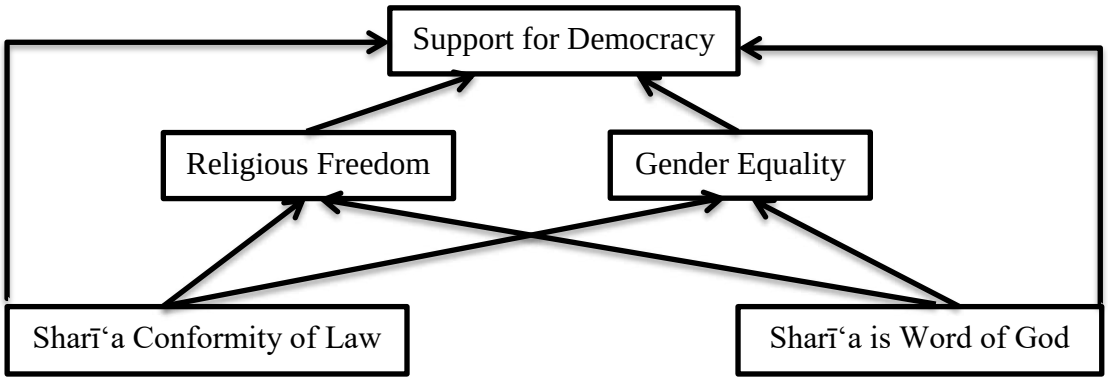

Table 1 – Simultaneous Effects Model:
Arab Views of Democracy (3rd Wave Arab Barometer)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	Std. E.	B	Std. E.	B	Std. E.
Sharī'a Word God					-0.083**	0.026
Religion & Politics			-0.077***	0.008	-0.074***	0.008
Support Sharī'a Law	0.038***	0.005	0.045***	0.005	0.045***	0.005
Religious Freedom	0.184***	0.013	0.179***	0.013	0.173***	0.014
Gender Equality	0.087***	0.006	0.081***	0.006	0.081***	0.006
Women	-0.070**	0.023	-0.049*	0.024	-0.044	0.024
Age	0.003***	0.001	0.003***	0.001	0.004***	0.001
Education	0.063***	0.013	0.063***	0.014	0.060***	0.014
Income	-0.012	0.013	-0.012	0.013	-0.017	0.013
Religiosity	-0.008	0.005	-0.002	0.005	-0.002	0.005
Algeria	0.169**	0.059	0.145*	0.062	0.156*	0.063
Egypt	-0.034	0.055	-0.081	0.056	-0.061	0.058
Iraq	0.186**	0.054	0.234***	0.055	0.244***	0.056
Jordan	-0.342***	0.049	-0.319***	0.050	-0.296***	0.051
Kuwait	-0.656***	0.056	-0.634***	0.057	-0.641***	0.058
Lebanon	0.267***	0.066	0.198**	0.067	0.197**	0.069
Libya	-0.213***	0.054	-0.266***	0.056	-0.236***	0.057
Morocco	0.198**	0.057	0.205**	0.059	0.240***	0.061
Palestine	-0.507***	0.053	-0.491***	0.054	-0.479***	0.055
Sudan	0.158**	0.054	0.205***	0.055	0.228***	0.056
Tunisia	0.184**	0.056	0.181**	0.057	0.212***	0.059
Constant	2.964***	0.113	3.220***	0.119	3.275***	0.122
Religious Freedom						
Sharī'a Word God					-0.041*	0.018
Religion & Politics			-0.053***	0.006	-0.053***	0.006
Support Sharī'a Law	0.019***	0.003	0.026***	0.004	0.024***	0.004
Women	0.006	0.016	0.005	0.016	0.007	0.017
Age	0.002***	0.001	0.002***	0.001	0.002**	0.001
Education	0.060***	0.010	0.055***	0.010	0.056***	0.010
Income	-0.023*	0.009	-0.021*	0.009	-0.023*	0.009
Religiosity	0.002	0.004	0.008*	0.004	0.008*	0.004
Algeria	-0.817***	0.042	-0.831***	0.043	-0.830***	0.044
Egypt	0.717***	0.039	0.668***	0.040	0.700***	0.041
Iraq	0.536***	0.038	0.540***	0.039	0.542***	0.040
Jordan	0.301***	0.035	0.318***	0.036	0.342***	0.036
Kuwait	0.497***	0.040	0.520***	0.041	0.538***	0.041
Lebanon	0.868***	0.046	0.809***	0.047	0.806***	0.048
Libya	-0.143***	0.039	-0.173***	0.040	-0.157***	0.041
Morocco	0.225***	0.041	0.225***	0.042	0.257***	0.043
Palestine	0.439***	0.038	0.443***	0.039	0.464***	0.039
Sudan	0.103**	0.039	0.119**	0.039	0.147***	0.040
Tunisia	0.480***	0.040	0.463***	0.041	0.493***	0.042
Constant	2.359***	0.073	2.474***	0.074	2.513***	0.076

Gender Equality						
Sharī'a Word God					-0.130**	0.039
Religion & Politics			-0.209***	0.012	-0.207***	0.012
Support Sharī'a Law	-0.046***	0.007	-0.018*	0.008	-0.013	0.008
Women	1.003***	0.034	0.997***	0.035	0.998***	0.036
Age	0.004**	0.001	0.004**	0.001	0.004**	0.001
Education	0.218***	0.021	0.197***	0.021	0.196***	0.021
Income	0.027	0.020	0.035	0.020	0.030	0.020
Religiosity	-0.031***	0.008	-0.013	0.008	-0.014	0.008
Algeria	1.105***	0.089	1.145***	0.093	1.196***	0.095
Egypt	0.518***	0.084	0.319***	0.085	0.349***	0.088
Iraq	0.141	0.082	0.169*	0.083	0.196*	0.085
Jordan	0.352***	0.076	0.377***	0.076	0.414***	0.079
Kuwait	0.357***	0.086	0.430***	0.087	0.467***	0.089
Lebanon	1.511***	0.100	1.271***	0.100	1.342***	0.104
Libya	0.253**	0.084	0.135	0.085	0.174*	0.088
Morocco	0.831***	0.088	0.761***	0.090	0.825***	0.093
Palestine	0.262**	0.082	0.293***	0.083	0.325***	0.085
Sudan	0.365***	0.084	0.419***	0.084	0.416***	0.086
Tunisia	1.111***	0.087	1.057***	0.087	1.136***	0.090
Constant	7.573***	0.156	8.045***	0.159	8.029***	0.165
Log Likelihood	-195890.82		-205732.7		-204147.71	
LR chi2	123.63		81.22		79.72	
Prob > chi2	0.000		0.000		0.000	
N	11414		10890		10480	

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001, Reference category is Yemen

[1] Cavatorta and Dalmasso, “Democracy, Civil Liberties”; Kirdiş, "Wolves in Sheep Clothing”; Schwedler, “Can Islamists become Moderates”; Somer, “Conquering versus Democratizing the State”; Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”; Volpi and Stein, “Islamism and the State”.
[2] Inglehart and Welzel, “Changing Mass Priorities”; Welzel, “Are Levels of Democracy”; Welzel and Inglehart, “The Role of Ordinary People in Democratization”.
[3] Linz and Stepan, “Problems of Democratic Transition”; Przeworski and Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts”.
[4] Braizat, “Muslims and Democracy”; Ciftci, “Modernization”; Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Hofman, “Islam and Democracy”; Hoffman and Jamal, “Religion in the Arab Spring”; Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”; Jamal and Tessler, “Attitudes in the Arab World”; Moaddel, “The Saudi Public Speaks”; Rose, “How Muslims View Democracy”; Rowley and Smith, “Islam’s Democracy Paradox”; Tessler, “Islam and Democracy”, “Do Islamic Orientations Influence”; Tessler and Gao, “Gauging Arab Support”; Tessler, Jamal and Robbins, “New Findings on Arabs and Democracy”; Yuchtman-Ya’ar and Alkalay, “Political Attitudes in the Muslim World”.
[5] An-Na’im, “Islam, Sharia”; Kraemer, “Modern but not Secular”.
[6] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Davis and Robinson, “Egalitarian Face”; Fair, Littman and Nugent, *Pakistani Conceptualization of Sharia*.
[7] Feldman, “The Fall and Rise”; Kraemer, “Modern but not Secular”; Shepard, “The Application of Shari’a in Egypt”.
[8] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”, 18.
[9] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”.
[10] Netterstrøm, “The Islamists’ Compromise in Tunisia”.
[11] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”.
[12] Driessen, “Sources of Muslim Democracy”; Davis and Robinson, “The Egalitarian Face”; Pew Research Center, *The World’s Muslims.*
[13] Sonbol 2010, “A Response to Muslim Countries’ Reservations”.
[14] Hefner, *Shari’a Politics*; Khan, “Islam, Democracy, and Islamism”; Lombardi, “Designing Islamic Constitutions”.
[15] Otto, “Introduction”.
[16] Ibid, 25.
[17] Otto, “Introduction”; see also Rehman, “Accommodating Religious Identities in an Islamic State”.
[18] Otto, “Introduction”; see also Sonbol, “A Response to Muslim Countries’ Reservations”.
[19] Ayubi, “Political Islam”.
[20] Soage, “Ḥasan al-Bannā and Sayyid Quṭb”, 297.
[21] Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, 12.
[22] Hallaq, “What is Sharia”, 152.
[23] Hallaq, “What is Sharia”, 169. See also Dalacoura, “Islamism, secularization, secularity” for the specific case of the Muslim Brotherhood.
[24] Feldman, “The Fall and Rise”, 81.
[25] Feldman, “The Fall and Rise”, 79.
[26] Kraemer, “Modern but not Secular”, 641.
[27] Davis and Robinson, “The Egalitarian Face”; Fair, Malhotra and Shapiro, “Islam, Militancy”; Kendhammer, “The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria”.
[28] Kendhammer, “The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria”.
[29] Driessen “Sources of Muslim Democracy”; Feldman, “The Fall and Rise”.
[30] Moaddel, “The Saudi Public Speaks”.
[31] Hoffman and Jamal, “Religion in the Arab Spring”.
[32] Fair, Littmann, and Nugent, *Pakistani Conceptualization of Sharia*.
[33] Cofman Wittes, “Three Kinds of Movements”; Schwedler, “Can Islamists Become Moderates”; Rehman, “Accommodating Religious Identities in an Islamic State”; Pew Research Center, *Arab Spring Adds to Global Restrictions on Religion*.
[34] Hamid, *Temptations of Power*.
[35] Furman, “Minorities”.

[36] Kumaraswamy, “Islam and Minorities”: 100.
[37] Kraemer, “Modern but not Secular”.
[38] Kraemer, “Modern but not Secular”.
[39] Shepard, “The Application of Sharia”.
[40] Kraemer, “Modern but not Secular”.
[41] Otto, “Introduction”.
[42] An-Na’im, “Islam, Sharia”.
[43] Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*; Sonbol, “A Response to Muslim Countries’ Reservations”.
[44] An-Na’im, “Islam, Sharia”.
[45] Tessler and Gao, “Gauging Arab Support”.
[46] Welzel and Inglehart, “The Role of Ordinary People in Democratization”.
[47] Milligan, Andersen, Brym, “Assessing Variation in Tolerance”, 242, emphasis in original.
[48] Rowley and Smith, “Islam’s Democracy Paradox”.
[49] Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel, “Gender Equality and Democracy”.
[50] Inglehart and Norris, “The True Clash of Civilizations”.
[51] Rizzo, Abdellatif, Meyer, “The Relationship between Gender Equality and Democracy”.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Kostenko, Kuzmuchev, and Ponarin, “Attitudes towards Gender Equality”.
[54] Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”.
[55] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Hoffman and Jamal, “Religion in the Arab Spring”; Tessler, Jamal and Robbins, “New Findings on Arabs and Democracy”.
[56] Hofman, “Islam and Democracy”.
[57] Esmer, “Islamic Civilization”; Moaddel, “The Saudi Public Speaks”.
[58] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Davis and Robinson, “The Egalitarian Face”.
[59] Fair, Littman and Nugent, *Pakistani Conceptualization*.
[60] Cavatorta and Dalmasso, “Democracy, Civil Liberties”; Khan, “Islam, Democracy”; Pack and Cook, “The July 2012 Libyan Elections”.
[61] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”.
[62] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”; Moaddel, “The Saudi Public Speaks”; Rose, “How Muslims view Democracy”; Yuchtman-Ya’ar and Alkalay, “Political Attitudes in the Muslim World”.
[63] Esmer, “Islamic Civilization”; Inglehart and Welzel, "Political Culture and Democracy”.
[64] Inglehart and Welzel, “Political Culture and Democracy”: 61-62.
[65] Welzel, “Are Levels of Democracy”.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Norris and Inglehart, “Islamic Culture and Democracy”.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Inglehart and Welzel, “Political Culture and Democracy”.
[70] Inglehart and Norris, “The True Clash of Civilizations”.
[71] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Hoffman and Jamal, “Religion and Politics”; Hofman, “Islam and Democracy”; Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”; Rizzo, “The Relationship between Gender Equality and Democracy”.
[72] Norris and Inglehart, “Islamic Culture and Democracy”.
[73] Inglehart and Welzel, “Political Culture and Democracy”, 74.
[74] Esmer, “Islamic Civilization”.
[75] Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Esmer, “Islamic Civilization”.
[78] The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .780.
[79] Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”.
[80] Esmer, “Islamic Civilization”.
[81] For a similar approach, see Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”; Norris and Inglehart, “Islamic Culture and Democracy”.
[82] Hofman, “Islam and Democracy”: 659.
[83] Benstead, “Why do some Arab citizens”, Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”; Driessen “Sources of Muslim Democracy”; Moaddel, “The Saudi Public Speaks”.

[84] Davis and Robinson, “The Egalitarian Face”.
[85] Tessler, “Islam and Democracy”.
[86] Tessler, Jamal, Robbins, “New Findings on Arabs and Democracy”.
[87] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”.
[88] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”, 17.
[89] Djerejian, “One Man, One Vote”. For more recent assessments, see Kirdiş, "Wolves in Sheep Clothing” and Somer, “Conquering versus Democratizing the State”.
[90] Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”; Tessler and Gao, “Gauging Arab Support”.
[91] Tessler, “Islam and Democracy”.
[92] Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”.
[93] Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Tessler, Jamal, Robbins, “New Findings on Arabs and Democracy”.
[96] Tessler and Gao, “Gauging Arab Support”.
[97] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”.
[98] For a similar approach, see Tessler, “Islam and Democracy”.
[99] The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .753.
[100] Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”; Ciftci, “Secular-Islamist Cleavage”, Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”.
[101] Multicollinearity statistics are well within acceptable parameters.
[102] Kraemer, “Modern, but not Secular”.
[103] Davis and Robinson, “The Egalitarian Face”; Driessen “Sources of Muslim Democracy”; Fair, Littman and Nugent, *Pakistani Conceptualization*.
[104] Kendhammer, “The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria”.
[105] Feldman, “The Fall and Rise”.
[106] See Jamal and Tessler, “Attitudes”, for a similar finding on 2nd wave Arab Barometer data. Multinomial regression analysis confirmed that correlations of theoretically important variables detected here remain the same irrespective of whether respondents followed an instrumentalist or procedural understanding of democracy.
[107] Ciftci, “Modernization, Islam”; Inglehart, Norris and Welzel, “Gender Equality and Democracy”; Rowley and Smith, “Islam’s Democracy Paradox”.
[108] Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*; Sonbol, “A Response to Muslim Countries’ Reservations”.
[109] Jamal, “Reassessing Support for Islam and Democracy”.
[110] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”.
[111] See also the post-Arab Spring study of Egyptian public opinion by Hassan, Kendall, and Whitefield, “Between Scylla and Charybdis”. Kostenko, Kuzmuchev, and Ponarin’s analysis of the link between age and support for democracy in first wave Arab Barometer data suggests that this is not a new phenomenon.
[112] Faqir, “Engendering Democracy and Islam”.
[113] For a similar finding, see Kostenko, Kuzmuchev, and Ponarin, “Attitudes towards Gender Equality”.
[114] Rose, “How Muslims View Democracy”.
[115] Bratton, “Briefing”.
[116] Chong and Gradstein, “On Education”.
[117] McCarthy, “How Tunisia’s An-Nahda party turned from its Islamist roots”.
[118] Esmer, “Islamic Civilization”; Norris and Inglehart, “Islamic Culture and Democracy”; Welzel, “Are Levels of Democracy”.
[119] Stepan and Linz, “Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring”.
[120] Lombardi, “Designing Islamic Constitutions”.
[121] Inglehart and Welzel, “Changing Mass Priorities”; Welzel, Inglehart and Klingemann, “A Theory of Human Development”.