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# Foreign policies or culture – What shapes Muslim public opinion on political violence against the United States?

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**Abstract**

This analysis uses survey data representing three of the world's most populous Muslim majority countries to challenge conventional wisdom on what shapes Muslim public opinion on political violence against the United States. It improves previous analysis by clearly distinguishing support for violence against civilians from support for violence against military targets and by featuring independent variables that clearly separate views on US foreign policies from views on US culture. Logistic regression shows that, among Egyptian, Pakistani and Indonesian Muslims, perceptions of controversial US policies toward Israel, Middle Eastern oil, or the perceived attempt to weaken and divide the Muslim world are not related to support for attacks on civilians in the United States, but only to support for attacks on US military targets. Approval of attacks on US civilians is shaped, instead, by negative views of US freedom of expression, culture, and people, disapproval of the domestic political status quo as well as the notion of general US hostility toward democracy in the Middle East. This last finding has important implications for US and Western policies toward the post-Arab Spring Middle East in particular and the broader relationship with the Muslim World in general.

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**Introduction**

More than a decade after the events of September 11, 2001, investigations of the sources of

public support for Islamist terrorism are still limited in number and scope when compared

with the substantial quantitative and qualitative studies of possible root causes of terrorist

attacks (Berrebi, 2007; Urdal, 2006; Piazza, 2006; Li and Schaub, 2004; Testas, 2004;

Krueger and Maleckova, 2003).[1] This gap is unfortunate given the dependence of terrorist

organizations on a minimum level of societal support in their efforts to recruit members and to

facilitate operational assistance (Sarseloudi, 2005). As Paul Pillar, National Intelligence

Officer for the Near East and South Asia from 2000 to 2005, pointed out, '(t)he target for

intelligence is not just proven terrorists; it is anyone who *might* commit terrorism in the future

(2004: 115, emphasis in original).' Since these future terrorists are likely to be recruited from

among those who sympathize with terrorist attacks in the first place, many academic and

political observers view reduced public support for terrorism as a central measure of

successful US counterterrorism efforts (Cronin, 2006; Simon & Martini, 2004; Byman, 2003).

This examination of Muslim public opinion on terrorist attacks on US civilians and guerilla-

type attacks on US military targets is guided by the broader theoretical debate on the role

which perceptions of US foreign policies and US culture might play. In particular, it utilizes

Katzenstein & Keohane's (2006: 26) important contribution on the manifestations of Anti-

Americanisms which differentiates 'unfavorable judgments about the United States or its

policies' from the deeper resentment of US culture and its people. The firm belief that

'America's identity ensures that its actions will be hostile to the furtherance of good values,

practices and institutions elsewhere in the world' (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2006: 31) sets the

'biases' of such culture-centered Anti-Americanism apart from the 'opinions' of policy-

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[1] This article follows Abrahms (2006), Tessler/Robbins (2007) and Wight (2009) in
understanding terrorism as violence, or the threat thereof, committed by non-state actors
against civilians with the aim of altering government policies.

centered Anti-Americanism that shares key American values but deplores US failure to act on them either at home or abroad.

Employing independent variables that reflect these long over-due specifications, this article shows that negative assessments of controversial US policies toward Israel, Middle Eastern oil or a general sense of US hostility toward the Muslim world only shape public support for political violence against US military targets, not against US civilians. Instead, approval of 9/11-type terrorist attacks on civilians in the United States is only driven by negative views of US culture as well as the rejection of the domestic political status quo and perceived US hostility to Muslim democracy.

This article proceeds as follows: The first section briefly reviews the main theoretical arguments regarding the possible correlates of public support for Islamist terrorism. The second section sets out the benefits and limitations of the present data set and the methodology employed for its analysis. The third section presents and discusses the results of binomial logistic regression analyses conducted for each country. The final section lays out the theoretical and policy implications of this paper's findings.

**Theory and hypotheses**

The post-9/11 debate about what might drive some Muslims to support terrorist attacks directed at the United States has primarily been shaped by arguments that point to the widespread rejection of US policies and those that emphasize Muslim resentment of what the United States represents. In an early assessment that focused on the root causes of terrorist engagement, but is also relevant for the debate on possible drivers of Muslim public opinion, Stephen Walt saw a combination of both factors at work

> 'At one extreme, terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda are inspired by an intense antipathy toward the United States and its global dominance. Some of this antipathy arises from a particular vision of the United States as a corrupt and godless society, but

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it is also fueled by America's close relationship with Israel, its support for several

conservative Arab regimes, and its seemingly endless conflict with Iraq (2001/02:

59).'

In its qualification of cultural explanations, Walt's argument is in line with publications which

link support for political violence with foreign occupation and perceived US political

dominance (Pape, 2005; for a critique see Moghadam, 2006) or a general sense of humiliation

and betrayal emanating from US policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iraq (Fattah &

Fierke, 2009).

This paper seeks to examine the extent to which these possible causes of *engagement with*

terrorism are also possibly shaping *public support for* terrorism. Previous quantitative

explorations by Tessler & Robbins (2007) as well as Mostafa & al-Hamdi (2007) showed that

negative views of US foreign policies correlated with greater support for political violence

against the United States. The following analysis will thus test

*Hypothesis I*: Among Muslim publics, support for political violence against US

civilians is associated with negative views of US foreign policies toward the Middle

East.

Others asked whether Arab governments had to accept at least some responsibility for the rise

of anti-US violence. Moghaddam (2005), for instance, hypothesized that the perceived

injustice associated with a lack of options for peaceful participation in decision-making

constituted the first rung on a five-step 'staircase toward terrorism'. Indeed, Fawaz Gerges

(2005) showed how the Arab governments' crackdown on any form of political opposition

reinforced the impression among Islamist radicals that the United States should be targeted as

a means of pressuring it into ending support for its 'local puppets'. Testas' statistical analysis

of terrorist incidents in 37 Muslim countries from 1968 to 1991 (2004) confirmed the

existence of a U-shaped function, in which repression initially reduces terrorism, but

ultimately makes wider public support for political violence more likely. Krueger & Laitin (2008) used a US State Department data-set of 785 international terrorist incidents that occurred between 1997 and 2002 to show that international terrorism originated in countries suffering from political repression and targeted economically successful countries. With Tessler & Robbins (2007) reporting that negative views of their own governments are strong predictors of support for violence against the United States among Algerians and Jordanians, the following analysis will thus test:

> *Hypothesis II*: Among Muslim publics, support for political violence against US civilians is associated with rejection of the domestic political status quo.

The notion of an Anti-American hatred that goes beyond a particular US foreign policy found its most prominent political expression in President Bush's widely quoted speech to a joint session of Congress shortly after the attacks on New York and Washington, DC he declared that

> '(t)hey hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other (2001).'

Such assessments find some support in the writings of Islamist radicals such as Sayyid Qutb, who inspired those who would later become involved in al-Qaeda (Shepherd, 2003; Brown, 2000; Moussalli, 1992; Goldberg, 1991; Kepel, 1985). In one of the letters he wrote during his time as an exchange student at the University of the District of Columbia in Washington, DC and the University of Northern Colorado, Qutb (2000: 10) stated that:

> 'I fear that a balance may not exist between America's material greatness and the morality of its people. And I fear that the wheel of life will have turned and the book of time will have closed and America will have added nothing, or next to nothing, to the

account of morals that distinguishes man from object, and indeed, mankind from

animals.'

More recently, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's successor as leader of Al-Qaeda,

called for a 'holy war' against the United States in response to an Anti-Islam video, which, as

he pointed out, was made possible by US freedom of expression (Guardian, 2012). The

following analysis offers an empirical test of whether anti-Americanism as measured in the

rejection of US culture help explain support for violence against US civilian and military

targets. Thus,

> *Hypothesis III*: Among Muslim publics, support for political violence against US
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> civilians is associated with stronger rejection of US culture.

One particular variant of cultural explanations focuses on religion. The Orientalist notion of

Islam as a crucial independent variable in the analysis of Middle East politics (Halliday, 1993)

was the hallmark of Samuel P Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' (1996) and Bernard Lewis'

'The Roots of Muslim Rage' (1990). Numerous studies of public opinion data from several

Arab and Muslim countries failed to detect any direct relation between religious practice or

identity and the support for violence, international conflict or groups such as the Taliban and

al Qaeda (Fair, Malhotra & Shapiro, 2012; Mousseau, 2011; Shapiro & Fair, 2009; Tessler &

Robbins, 2007). On the other hand, Blaydes & Linzer (2012) found religiosity to be positively

related to Anti-Americanism as measured in negative views of US culture. The final

hypothesis thus is

> *Hypothesis IV*: Among Muslim publics, support for political violence against US
>
> civilians is associated with greater religiosity.

**Data and methodology**

In contrast to previous examinations of Muslim public opinion that have used an ambiguous dependent variable (Shafiq & Sinno, 2010; Tessler & Robbins, 2007), the following discussion bases its observations on the statistical analysis of the first data set that sufficiently disentangles support for terrorist attacks against civilians from support for guerilla-type attacks on military targets. The corresponding surveys were administered in Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia in summer 2008 as part of a WorldPublicOpinion.org project managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and supported by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. They were conducted using in-home interviews (1,101 in Egypt; 1,120 in Indonesia; 1,200 in Pakistan) covering both urban and rural areas based on multi-stage probability sampling. Given the low number of non-Muslims within the samples and this paper's particular interest in Muslim views on political violence against the United States, non-Muslim respondents were excluded from this analysis.[2]

A comparison with recent United Nations (2009) data reveals that all three samples are broadly representative in terms of gender, age and education, with an overrepresentation of those younger than 30 years (44% in sample versus 31% national average) and an underrepresentation of illiterates (20% versus 34%) in Egypt as well as on overrepresentation of urban respondents in Pakistan (50% versus 36%) and Indonesia (65% versus 43%).

A second caveat results from the substantial number of respondents in Pakistan and Indonesia who were either unwilling or unable to offer views on US foreign policies and culture (table I). As the almost equal number of non-responses to questions about US foreign policies and various aspects of US culture suggests, this seems to reflect more a lack of awareness of or interest in these issues than concerns about the possibly 'sensitive' nature of such questions. This interpretation is supported by results of a survey (PEW 2011a) where a question about

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[2] There are no substantial differences in the results of regression analyses for the full sample and the sample which omits all non-Muslims.

views on President Obama's policies toward the Arab-Israeli conflict had a similarly low response rate among Pakistanis, but high response rates in all Arab countries. Also, if respondents had perceived questions about US foreign policy as too sensitive to be answered then we could have expected more missing responses in Egypt than in Indonesia and Pakistan. This is because in pre-revolutionary Egypt, the regime and its security services were pursuing the most clear-cut anti-Islamist and pro-US agenda out of the three countries. Instead, in all three countries, the ability or willingness to offer a view on US foreign policies was significantly correlated with educational achievement. The same applied to views on US culture in the Egyptian and Pakistani samples (table A1, online appendix).

Insert table I here

Confidence in respondents' willingness to answer 'sensitive' questions is further increased by their responses to questions about domestic politics (table I) and personal faith (table A2, online appendix) which are as 'sensitive' as questions could get in semi-authoritarian or newly democratizing Muslim majority countries. The list-wise exclusion of respondents with missing responses did not alter the demographic profile of the Egyptian and Indonesian samples. The exception was Pakistan where dramatic differences in educational achievement between men and women among the general population (Fair, Kaltenthaler & Miller, 2012) meant that the exclusion of such cases produced a sample with a substantially lower number of female (32%) and illiterate (32%) respondents than in the original sample (50% women; 43% illiterate). This is line with Krosnick & Milburn's (1990) finding that women (even if controlled for education) and the less-knowledgeable have higher non-response rates than men and those more knowledgeable. Concerns about the shortcomings of the Pakistani sample are mitigated by the fact that the main findings are, first, similar in the more balanced Egyptian and Indonesian samples and, second, confirmed in robustness checks which

included those without clear attitudes on the political questions (tables A9, A10, A11, online appendix) or featured a dataset (tables A12, A13, online appendix) imputed with the Amelia II program (Honaker, King & Blackwell, 2011).

A final caveat relates to the fact that public opinion surveys in authoritarian countries such as Egypt face the problem of possible preference falsification among respondents (Rowley & Smith, 2009; Kuran, 1997). Many respondents might have felt uncomfortable with straightforward answers to questions about their support for attacks on US civilians or the US military. It can therefore not be ruled out that the dependent variables underreport support for anti-US violence. With regard to this article's particular interest in testing whether views on US foreign policies or US culture increase support for terrorist attacks on US civilians, the problem of preference falsification is mitigated by the fact that linking anti-Western violence with complaints about Western policies constitutes the 'safe' option in the context of regimes that had a strong interest in blaming external forces for (trans-)national problems with possible domestic roots (Behr & Berger, 2009). It can therefore be assumed that with preference falsification working heavily in favor of detecting the influence of US foreign policy, the discovery of other robust predictors would be all the more significant.

With these caveats in mind, the data set analyzed here offers a number of important advantages over previous analyses that employed either exclusively urban (Shafiq & Sinno, 2010; Furia & Lucas, 2008; Bueno de Mesquita, 2007; Fair & Shepherd, 2006) or Arab samples (Haddad & Khashan, 2002; Mostafa & al-Hamdi, 2007; Tessler & Robbins, 2007). First, the START survey covered not only three Muslim countries that offer crucial variations in terms of, for instance, political system, political culture, socio-economic development and dominant interpretations of Islam. Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia were also all described in post-Cold War studies of US Grand Strategy as so-called 'pivotal states', which deserved particular attention because their "fate determines the survival and success of the surrounding region and ultimately the stability of the international system (Chase, Hill & Kennedy,

1996)." In Egypt, the apparent defeat and delegitimization of domestic Islamist terrorism coincided with the unrelenting Islamization of the public sphere (Ismail, 2003; Gerges, 2000). Apart from a brief period in early 2005, all post-Cold war US administrations had offered unquestioned loyalty to the increasingly authoritarian pre-revolutionary regime in Cairo (Berger, 2011). Pakistan's 2008 return to democracy after the third post-independence experiment with US-supported military rule occurred against the backdrop of Islam's strong public role (Haqqani, 2004/05). Indonesia's national pride feeds from its status as the world's fourth most populous nation, its most populous Muslim majority nation and third largest democracy (Murphy, 2009). Since 1998, the country has moved away from nearly half a century of an 'authoritarian divide-and-rule' approach to Islam that some observers accused of 'wreaking havoc' with the country's moderate, syncretistic religious traditions (Hefner, 2005: 297-298). This led President Obama to describe the achievements of Indonesia's 'extraordinary democratic transformation' as demonstrating that 'democracy and development reinforce each other (2010).'

Second, the timing of the survey in 2008 offers the advantage of reflecting public sentiment after central events such as the US-led invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, Israel's wars in Gaza (2005) and Lebanon (2006) as well as the international boycott of the Hamas government. Since all these are widely blamed for having exacerbated Arab/Muslim concerns about US foreign policy, the present data constitute a solid base from which to explore possible links between support for terrorism and rejection of US foreign policies toward Israel and the wider region. The survey does not, obviously, reflect the Arab Spring which only began to reshape the Middle East two-and-half years later. At the same time, the Arab world's quest for democratic governance has in many ways only just begun. Associated questions about the shape of US support for political reform in this geo-strategically crucial region will thus be of political and academic salience for some time to come.

*Dependent Variables*

The third and most important advantage of the present data set pertains to the availability of adequately phrased questionnaire items that produce unambiguous dependent and independent variables. In their search for possible correlates of public opinion on terrorism and suicide attacks, Bueno de Mesquita (2007), Fair & Shepherd (2006), Mousseau (2011) and Shafiq & Sinno (2010) all constructed their dependent variable from responses to the following question which the Pew Global attitudes project (for most recent data, see 2011a: 55-56) routinely employs:

> 'Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?'

As Bueno de Mesquita (2007: 43) himself warns, the particular wording of this question makes it impossible to gauge whether respondents are indicating their support for the legitimacy of 'violence against civilians', the tactic of 'suicide bombings' or the need to defend 'Islam from its enemies'. At first glance, the question Tessler & Robbins (2007) used to construct their dependent variable appears more likely to elicit a response that captures approval of violence against the United States:

> 'As you may know, after the military campaign in Afghanistan began, some people called on all the Muslims to join in armed jihad against the United States. Do you strongly support, support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this call to armed jihad?'

As the following analysis of less ambiguous dependent variables clearly shows, this question fails to specify whether the respondent is supposed to think of attacks on US troops in Afghanistan which would fall under the definition of guerrilla war, or whether to think of

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attacks on US civilians in the United States which would fall under most definitions of terrorism (Abrahms 2006; Wight, 2009; Hoffman, 2006). In addition, Tessler & Robbins combined this question with another one that queried respondents' feelings about Osama bin Laden. This approach is highly problematic because in the Muslim world only minorities are convinced that al-Qaeda and thus Bin Laden were responsible for the attacks of 9/11. A 2011 Pew survey found (2011b: 68), for instance, that only 21% of Egyptians, 20% of Indonesians and 12% of Pakistanis believed that 'Arabs carried out the attacks … on September 11'. This present paper circumvents these problems by using the answer to a questionnaire item that eschews ambiguous cues (table II):

> 'Thinking about the following kinds of attacks on Americans, please tell me if you approve of them, disapprove of them, or have mixed feelings about them? - Attacks on civilians in the United States.'

Insert Table II here

The responses were re-coded into a binary variable where those who approved or strongly approved were coded as '1' and those who simply disapproved, disapproved strongly or had mixed feelings were coded as '0'. This reflects this paper's particular interest in what sets apart those who agree with political violence against the United States from the rest. There are a number of theoretical and methodological reasons why separate analysis instead of a pooled analysis is warranted. First, focusing on only three countries, this analysis cannot aim at drawing conclusions representative of all Muslims. However, given clear differences in political, social, cultural, and religious contexts, any consistent pattern across three countries makes it more likely that they extend to Muslims in other contexts as well. Second, as the descriptive analysis shows, the three countries under consideration vary on a number of key variables of interest such as support for political violence and concern about US foreign

policies and culture. Using one of the countries as the baseline for a regression analysis of pooled data would thus make the interpretation of the findings less clear.

In order to test whether different predictors achieve statistical significance depending on the type of target, the following analysis compares the results of the binomial logistic regression of this first dependent variable with the results of a regression analysis of a second dependent variable which captures support for 'attacks on US military troops in Iraq'. This question is less ambiguous than the Pew survey question used by Shafiq & Sinno (2010: 151) which simply asked respondents about their feelings on 'suicide bombings carried out against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq' and which did not distinguish between American military and civilian targets as well as different nationalities. Table II makes clear just how crucial such a distinction is in the eyes of various Muslim publics. Egyptian Muslims, for instance, were as unanimous in their rejection of attacking US civilians as they were in support of attacks on US military targets. While Indonesian and Pakistani Muslims shared the Egyptian disapproval of attacks on civilians in the United States, Europe and those working in Islamic countries, they were also much less likely to express support for attacks on US military targets. A factor analysis confirmed the existence of two distinct factors representing these two different types of targets (table A3, online appendix). Together, these results highlight how important the type of target is in shaping Muslim public opinion on anti-US violence. They also cast doubt on conclusions drawn from previous analyses which used dependent variables that did not reflect this differentiation.

*Independent Variables*

The lopsided results in table II mirror those presented in table I which captures respondents' views on items that featured most prominently in the post-9/11 debates outlined above. Survey participants were asked whether they believed it was 'definitely', 'probably', 'probably not' or 'definitely not' a goal of the United States to help Israel expand its

geographic borders, control the region's oil resources, or weaken and divide the Islamic world in general. These questions cover a range of themes which feature prominently in the conventional wisdom on what might shape Muslim public opinion on anti-US violence as well as in the rhetoric which radical Islamists employ in order to attract popular support for their violent acts (Lawrence, 2005; Ibrahim, 2007). Among those willing or able to offer their assessment, overwhelming majorities of Egyptians, Pakistanis and Indonesians saw the United States pursuing policies which many people in the Arab and Muslim world consider as threatening or harmful. These results mirror Egyptian, Pakistani, and Indonesian views on President Obama's policies toward conflict between Israelis and Palestinians reported in a 2011 Pew survey (PEW, 2011a).

Taken together, tables I and II serve as a first note of caution with respect to claims, captured in hypothesis I, that perceptions of US foreign policies are linked to public support for political violence against civilians in the United States. The mismatch between the robust majorities who claim to see the US pursuing controversial foreign policies and the small number of respondents supporting attacks on US civilians constitutes enough of a puzzle to warrant examining independent variables outside the narrow confines of conventional wisdom.

In order to test the possible role of domestic politics in the Muslim world (hypothesis II), the following models also include variables measuring respondents' confidence in their national government, police, and judiciary (table I). Views on possible US responsibility for this crisis of confidence are captured in a question on respondents' perceptions of US policies toward Middle East democracy. In 2008, only half of Egyptians, Pakistanis and Indonesians saw the United States as supporting Muslim democracy at least conditionally (table I). Answers were recoded into a dummy variable where those who thought that the United States opposed Middle East democracy in general were coded as '1' and the other two responses as '0'. This recoding addresses the problem of a small number of cases among those who saw the US as

supporting Middle East democracy in general and serves the analytical interest in measuring the possible impact of a general sense of US hostility toward Middle East democracy.

A dearth of relevant questionnaire items has meant that most of the currently available studies had to rely on indirect measures to assess the possible impact of 'cultural' factors reflected in hypothesis III. The present analysis can make use of an item that specifically asked respondents whether they had very favorable, favorable, unfavorable or very unfavorable views of US freedom of expression, US culture, and US people (table I). This approach is preferable to one that queries attitudes toward Western culture only in the context of the widely rejected 'clash-of-civilization' thesis (Mostafa & al-Hamdi, 2007). The data presented in table I reveal that negative views of US freedom of expression and US culture which Katzenstein & Keohane's (2006) assessment of anti-Americanisms differentiates from negative opinion of US policies extends well beyond a small fringe of Muslim public opinion. In all three countries, a majority of respondents had unfavorable views of US culture and US people of varying intensity. Similarly, pluralities in Egypt and Pakistan and a majority in Indonesia had unfavorable views of US freedom of expression. These results fall broadly in line with previous data sets on Muslim public opinion on the United States (BBC, 2003).

A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted with direct oblimin on the attitudinal variables represented in tables I. The analysis confirmed the existence of three distinct factors which correspond with potential correlates of Muslim public opinion on violence against US targets (table A4, online appendix). Factor 1 which captures perceptions of US culture explained 22.4% of the variance. Questions about confidence in domestic institutions load strongly on factor 2 which explained 19.8% of the variance. Factor 3 which captures perceptions of US foreign policies explained 18.3% of the variance. Perceptions of US policies toward Middle East democracy do not load strongly on either of these factors. That is why the separate inclusion of this variable appears warranted. The independent variables listed in table I were thus used to create summative index variables in which higher values

reflect lower confidence in domestic institutions, more negative views of US culture and its manifestations and the firmer belief that the United States pursues foreign policies detrimental to Muslim interests.

Finally, the present analysis follows Tessler (2002) as well as Shapiro & Fair (2009) by employing daily prayer as an indicator of religiosity in a test of hypothesis IV. A dummy variable compares those who reported praying five times a day as prescribed for every Muslim with those who did not (table A2, online appendix). A robustness check featuring the original variable confirmed the results reported below (tables A14 and A15, online appendix).

*Controls*

Some of the views captured by this set of independent variables might reflect the socio-economic costs of a development crisis which features prominently in many analyses of Islamist organizations (Ayubi, 1991; Sadowski, 2006). Contrary to Crenshaw's depiction of urbanization as a major permissive cause for the modern phenomenon of terrorism (1981), Urdal (2006) did not find the urban-rural divide to be of statistical significance in explaining the outbreak of political violence. Yet, Mousseau (2011) found that Muslim urban poor were more likely to support suicide bombings in the name of defending Islam.

The image of an unmarried male in his twenties as the typical profile of someone looking for social recognition and belonging in a terrorist group has received some empirical substantiation with several studies linking younger age to higher support for terrorism (Bueno de Mesquita, 2007; Tessler & Robbins, 2007; Fair & Shepherd, 2006; Haddad & Khashan, 2002). The empirical evidence on a possible link between age and negative views of the United States, however, is less clear with some studies showing a positive relationship (Blaydes & Linzer, 2012; Carlson & Nelson, 2008) and others showing a negative relationship (Harmaneh, 2005). Similarly, Carlson & Nelson's (2008) finding that higher education was linked to more negative views of the US contrasts with the findings that greater

wealth and higher educational achievement were all associated with less negative views of US culture and technology across 20 Muslim countries (Blades & Linzer, 2012).

In order to test the possible influence of socio-economic variables, the following models contain binary variables comparing urban and rural respondents, women and men, singles and those who are married or widowed, those aged 30 and above with those aged 29 and younger, those who achieved at least high school degree with those who did not complete secondary education, and those with at least average income with those on low or very-low incomes (table A2, online appendix). Robustness checks with original variables or different cut-off points did not offer different results (table A15, online appendix).

**Analysis**

The results reported in table III show that, in striking contrast to hypothesis I and confirming hypothesis III, greater support for attacks on US civilians is not correlated with negative views on US foreign policies in any of the countries under investigation, but with negative views on US culture and its manifestations in all three of them.

Insert Table III here

The impact of the perceptions of US culture becomes even more plastic through the calculation of predicted probabilities. For example, for an unmarried man, younger than 30 years of age, living in an urban area with incomplete school and below average income who prays five times a day, the probability of endorsing terrorist attacks on US civilians stands at 1.4% if he has very positive views on all dimensions of US culture in Egypt, 7.4% in Pakistan, and 1.5% in Indonesia. This probability increases to 9.3% in Egypt (from 4.3% to 24.6% if does not pray five times a day), to 23.4% in Pakistan, and to 16.2% in Indonesia if he has very negative views on all dimensions of US culture.

The total lack of influence of perceptions of US foreign policies in the civilian model contrasts sharply with the military model (table IV). There, support for attacks on US military targets correlates with negative views on US foreign policies in all three countries. The probability of endorsing an attack on US troops in Iraq among those with highly positive views on US foreign policies toward Israel, Middle Eastern oil, and the broader Islamic world stands at 64.2% in Egypt,18.3% in Pakistan, and 16.5% in Indonesia. It increases to 92.7% in Egypt, 51.3% in Pakistan, and 41.1% in Indonesia if the respondent holds very negative views on these US foreign policies. Only in Indonesia did perceptions of US culture also correlate with approval of attacks on US troops with the likelihood of endorsing such violence increasing from 15.9% for those who viewed all aspects of US culture positively to 42.2% for those who viewed all negatively.


Insert Table IV here


Robustness checks which used approval of attacks on US civilians working for US companies in the Islamic world and approval of attacks on civilians in Europe, US troops in Afghanistan and US troops stationed in the Persian Gulf as dependent variables (tables A5, A6, A7, A8, online appendix) confirmed the finding that perceptions of US foreign policies only correlate with approval of attacks on military targets, but not with approval of attacks on US civilians. In addition, robustness checks which compared those who had negative attitudes in table I with those who had either positive or no views (tables A9, A10, A11, online appendix) as well as robustness tests run on a dataset imputed via Amelia II (Honaker, King, Blackwell 2011, tables A12, A13 online appendix) confirmed the consistent, cross-country impact of perceptions of US culture in the civilian model and the consistent, cross-country impact of perceptions of US foreign policies in the military model. Classification tables and ROC curve

results demonstrate the ability of the two models to predict support for violence against

civilians and military targets (tables A16, A17, A18, online appendix).

All this shows how crucial the differentiation between different types of targets is in terms of

assessing the factors that influence corresponding Muslim public opinion. These results offer

further empirical validation of Katzenstein & Keohane's (2006) distinction between criticisms

of particular US foreign policies and the outright rejection of what the United States

represents. Perceptions of hostile US policies only correlate with greater support for attacks

on what might be seen as instruments of these policies, i.e. military targets. The fringe

position of endorsing attacks on US civilians is more likely to be adopted by those whose

negative views extend beyond US policies and into US culture and its symbols.

Quite remarkably, in pre-revolutionary Egypt, skeptical views of US democracy promotion

correlated with greater support for both types of political violence. If a respondent held this

view, the likelihood of him endorsing violence against US civilians increased from 3.6% to

12.2% in Egypt and from 5.2% to 9.9% in Indonesia, and against US military targets from

82.7% to 91.0% in Egypt. This pattern is somehow mirrored with the variable measuring

confidence in national institutions which exhibits a statistical association with greater support

for both forms of political violence against the United States in Indonesia. There, the

probability of endorsing attacks against US civilians increases from 2.4% if the respondent

has high confidence in Indonesian government, police and judiciary to 10.8% if he has not

confidence whatsoever in these three institutions and against US military targets from 9.1% to

57.8%. In Egypt, this relationship is only noticeable with regard to the likelihood of

supporting attacks on US civilians where those who viewed positively their domestic political

institutions (1.8%) differed from those with negative views (7.4%). In Pakistan, a country

that, at the time of the survey, was experiencing a US-supported transition away from military

dictatorship under Pervez Musharraf, no such pattern was discernible (tables III and IV). The

strong support for hypothesis II in the cases of Egypt and Indonesia offers confirmation of

similar findings made by Tessler & Robins (2007: 32) regarding the role which an 'intolerable political status quo' played in increasing support for political violence against the United States among Algerians and Jordanians.

The dramatic political implications of this finding are underscored by the Egyptian military's forceful removal of Egypt's first freely and democratically elected, yet increasingly authoritarian and anti-liberal, President Morsi in July 2013. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman az-Zawahiri tried to instrumentalize the crisis by calling upon his global audience to unite in the face of what he described as 'American plotting' (Tawfeeq, 2013). More moderate Islamist voices warned that many supporters and sympathizers of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated organizations across the Arab world could (again) see the engagement with democratic processes, as opposed to more radical pursuits of their political agendas, as futile in light of detrimental US policies. Amr Darrag, minister of planning and international cooperation under President Mohammed Morsi, described the increasing perception that

> 'American rhetoric on democracy is empty; that American politicians won't hesitate to
> flout their own laws or subvert their declared values for short-term political gains; and
> that when it comes to freedom, justice and human dignity, Muslims need not apply
> (Darrag, 2013).'

The prominent role which the predictor capturing attitudes toward US culture and its various manifestations played in explaining support for violence against US civilians should not be conflated with a resounding confirmation of Orientalist stereotypes as posited in hypothesis IV. Indeed, Orientalist determinism cannot explain why the most widely used measure of Muslim religiosity has the opposite impact in Egypt and Pakistan in the civilian model and no statistically significant impact in the military model (tables III and IV). Earlier findings about the pacifying role of religiosity in the Muslim world find confirmation in the case of Egypt where those who claim to adhere to the Islamic precept of five daily prayers (3.7%) are substantially less likely to support terrorism against US civilians than those who did not

(10.8%). This might reflect the fact that a series of authoritarian military-led regimes had ensured that religious authorities at Cairo's prestigious Al-Azhar University would not openly challenge the foreign policies pursued by secular political elites (Moustafa, 2000). The relationship is the reverse in Pakistan where radical interpretations of Islam emanating from the Arab world have gained influence since the 1980s (Haqqani, 2004/05). Here, the probability of a respondent endorsing attacks on civilians in the United States increases from 4.3% if he does not pray five times a day to 13.5% if he does. The lack of a pattern in Indonesia is in line with an earlier study by Ginges, Hansen & Norenzayan (2009) who did not find a link between prayer and willingness to engage in religiously inspired political violence. Together, these results reaffirm the need to investigate the cultural and political influence of specific religious discourses as opposed to general platitudes concerning the supposedly peaceful or violent nature of religions.

Finally, the models confirm earlier findings about the limited effect of socio-economic variables with only Pakistani women (19.4%) less likely to support violence in the case of US troops in Iraq than men (32.9%) (table IV).


**Conclusion**

This analysis offered a more nuanced understanding of variables shaping Muslim public opinion on terrorist attacks on US civilians and guerilla attacks against US military targets. Whether or not the insights into public opinion presented here can also be applied to the study of possible root causes of sub-state anti-US violence is, obviously, a question for separate analysis.

The stark differences in the relative influence of perceptions of US foreign policies and US culture between models that explain support for terrorist attacks on civilians and models explaining support for guerilla attacks on US troops corroborate previous calls to unmistakably distinguish between these two forms of political violence (Abrahms, 2006). It

has become clear that previous analyses purporting to provide evidence for a link between support for political violence against US civilians and perceptions of US foreign policies rested on misspecifications of dependent and independent variables, which blurred the lines between violence against US civilians and violence against US military targets and failed to appropriately control for the effects of anti-Americanism that rejects US culture. This highlights the need to pay closer attention to issues of concept equivalence and possible cues in the wording of future public opinion surveys on these topics.

Previous analyses have often relied on data where, in light of the findings presented here, it remains doubtful whether individual variables constituted an exact measure of respondents' support for various forms of political violence against the United States. If Muslim respondents understand that they are supposed to indicate support for violence against US civilians as opposed to attacks on members of the US military, US foreign policy only plays a role with regard to perceived US support for governments that do not enjoy the confidence of their citizens. This means that surveys and corresponding analyses that fail to take this into account will continue to mistakenly report the significance of widely editorialized US policies toward Israel or Middle Eastern oil in the case of attacks on US civilians, when their strong impact is limited to approval of attacks on US military targets. The findings presented here make clear that radical Islamists face more difficulties in turning (perceived) political indignation at the hands of the United States into support for terrorist attacks on US civilians than many journalistic and academic accounts assume. As the models presented above clearly show, support for violence against civilians in the United States remains mostly limited to a version of anti-Americanism that believes that 'the West, and the United States in particular, are so incorrigibly bad that they must be destroyed (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2006: 31).'

It is important to point out that the findings on the role of US freedom of expression do not confirm Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory. This is because, as a related result, religious practice has a more ambiguous impact than Orientalist reductionism stipulates. The

different strengths and directions the corresponding parameters exhibit across models and countries underscore the need to pay closer attention to the role of specific religious discourses. These multifaceted findings might disappoint those looking for a general pattern of religious influence. They do, however, correspond with other studies (Collins & Owen, 2012) which showed that among Muslims religiosity can indeed influence views on salient political issues, but that, contrary to essentialist viewpoints, this influence varies depending on the specific political context. The present results thus strengthen the arguments of constructivist scholars who have for a long time emphasized that religion's escalating or deescalating role depends on which reading of the holy texts is culturally dominant at any given time (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000). Further in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis is therefore required to explain which factors bolster the societal relevance of particular interpretations of religion.

Second, the rejection of US culture is not a prerogative of any single cultural context. Ceaser (2003: 4) provides a long list of examples from European history that demonstrates the idea that 'something at the core of American life is deeply wrong and threatening to the rest of the world' is not unique to the Arab or Muslim world. Indeed, Chiozza (2009) showed that among publics in Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Russia negative views of the American people shaped the formation of negative views of the United States in the context of the Iraq war more than any other factor.

This study confirms the at best limited influence of demographic and socio-economic variables such as gender and educational achievement, with the urban-rural divide and marital status playing no role at all. It does, however, highlight the noticeable impact of alienation from domestic political institutions and the perception that the United States supports those deemed responsible for the ongoing domestic political and social malaise. These findings have crucial implications for US policies toward the dramatic events unfolding in the Arab world since late 2010. It provides further empirical evidence to Wintrobe's (2006) argument

that authoritarian regimes are more likely to produce terrorists by suppressing dissent and through the failure to provide public goods. As James B Steinberg who later served as Hilary Clinton's Deputy Secretary of State already remarked in 2002,

> '(…) in the long run, terrorist networks will reconstitute themselves unless we make it harder for them to recruit new members and sustain their activities. This means helping to build stable, prosperous, democratic societies in countries that have seen too little of all three, particularly in the Arab world, Africa, and parts of Central, South, and Southeast Asia (2002).'

This investigation into variables associated with Muslim public support for anti-US violence reaffirms the urgency of this task.

## Data replication

The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets. Models have been produced using SPSS and Amelia II.

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## Table I. Attitudes toward US and domestic politics

| US goals in the Middle East (%) | | Definitely | Probably | Probably not | Definitely not | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expand geographic borders of Israel | Egypt | 78 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 9 |
| | Indonesia | 20 | 36 | 12 | 3 | 29 |
| | Pakistan | 31 | 21 | 4 | 2 | 41 |
| Control oil resources of the Middle East | Egypt | 83 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| | Indonesia | 34 | 39 | 8 | 1 | 19 |
| | Pakistan | 45 | 17 | 5 | 3 | 30 |
| Weaken and divide the Islamic world | Egypt | 84 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| | Indonesia | 36 | 35 | 8 | 3 | 18 |
| | Pakistan | 56 | 19 | 4 | 3 | 17 |

| Confidence in (%) | | Great deal | Quite a lot | Not very much | None at all | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| National government | Egypt | 29 | 30 | 20 | 20 | 2 |
| | Indonesia | 17 | 46 | 34 | 3 | 1 |
| | Pakistan | 14 | 30 | 29 | 21 | 7 |
| Local police | Egypt | 33 | 35 | 19 | 13 | 1 |
| | Indonesia | 16 | 49 | 32 | 2 | 1 |
| | Pakistan | 13 | 31 | 28 | 24 | 5 |
| Justice system | Egypt | 41 | 31 | 13 | 13 | 3 |
| | Indonesia | 11 | 33 | 46 | 8 | 2 |
| | Pakistan | 16 | 30 | 28 | 17 | 9 |

**Table I. continued**

| Views of (%) | | Very favorable | Somewhat favorable | Somewhat unfavorable | Very unfavorable | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| US culture | Egypt | 12 | 16 | 6 | 56 | 10 |
| | Indonesia | 1 | 8 | 47 | 38 | 6 |
| | Pakistan | 6 | 6 | 16 | 39 | 34 |
| US freedom of expression | Egypt | 27 | 14 | 5 | 44 | 10 |
| | Indonesia | 4 | 16 | 44 | 25 | 11 |
| | Pakistan | 10 | 12 | 12 | 31 | 35 |
| US people | Egypt | 6 | 19 | 7 | 59 | 10 |
| | Indonesia | 3 | 22 | 47 | 12 | 17 |
| | Pakistan | 6 | 14 | 16 | 32 | 32 |

| The United States (%) | Egypt | Indonesia | Pakistan |
|---|---|---|---|
| Supports democracy in general | 7 | 9 | 10 |
| Favors democracy, but only if government is cooperative with US | 42 | 42 | 35 |
| Opposes democracy in Muslim countries | 38 | 24 | 25 |
| Don't Know | 13 | 26 | 30 |

N: Egypt=1041; Indonesia=967; Pakistan=1131, Muslims Only

**Table II – Attitudes toward violence against US targets**

| Approval of attacks on (%) | | Strongly approve | Approve | Mixed feelings | Dis-approve | Strongly disapprove | DK/NS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Civilians in United States | Egypt | 8 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 78 | 5 |
| | Indonesia | 2 | 4 | 10 | 29 | 38 | 17 |
| | Pakistan | 3 | 6 | 15 | 17 | 38 | 21 |
| Civilians in Europe | Egypt | 6 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 79 | 5 |
| | Indonesia | 2 | 3 | 10 | 29 | 38 | 17 |
| | Pakistan | 4 | 5 | 17 | 16 | 34 | 24 |
| U.S. civilians working for U.S. companies in Islamic countries | Egypt | 6 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 78 | 5 |
| | Indonesia | 3 | 4 | 13 | 31 | 33 | 16 |
| | Pakistan | 5 | 7 | 18 | 16 | 30 | 24 |
| U.S. military troops in the Persian Gulf | Egypt | 71 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 7 |
| | Indonesia | 13 | 15 | 18 | 15 | 16 | 23 |
| | Pakistan | 14 | 11 | 17 | 8 | 18 | 32 |
| U.S. military troops in Iraq | Egypt | 77 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 6 |
| | Indonesia | 14 | 16 | 17 | 15 | 19 | 19 |
| | Pakistan | 14 | 12 | 22 | 7 | 24 | 21 |
| U.S. military troops in Afghanistan | Egypt | 77 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 7 |
| | Indonesia | 14 | 14 | 19 | 16 | 18 | 20 |
| | Pakistan | 17 | 13 | 18 | 7 | 24 | 20 |

N: Egypt=1041; Indonesia=967; Pakistan=1131, Muslims Only

**Table III. Binomial regression analysis of support of attacks on civilians in the United States**

| | Egypt | | Pakistan | | Indonesia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Exp | B | Exp | B | Exp |
| | (S.E.) | (B) | (S.E.) | (B) | (S.E.) | (B) |
| Rural | -.166 | .847 | -.365 | .694 | -.067 | .936 |
| | (.256) | | (.302) | | (.361) | |
| Women | -.076 | .927 | -.457 | .633 | .227 | 1.255 |
| | (.259) | | (.344) | | (.324) | |
| Single | -.151 | .860 | -.121 | .886 | -.529 | .589 |
| | (.351) | | (.420) | | (.572) | |
| Under 30 | -.034 | .966 | -.079 | .924 | .184 | 1.203 |
| | (.362) | | (.388) | | (.408) | |
| Incomplete school | -.212 | .809 | .174 | 1.190 | .730 | 2.074 |
| | (.292) | | (.350) | | (.389) | |
| Below average income | .079 | 1.082 | .053 | 1.055 | .274 | 1.316 |
| | (.264) | | (.292) | | (.696) | |
| Five daily prayer | **-1.152**** | **.316** | **1.251**** | **3.493** | .459 | 1.582 |
| | **(.361)** | | **(.386)** | | (.409) | |
| No confidence in national institutions | **.163***** | **1.177** | .051 | 1.052 | **.176*** | **1.192** |
| | **(.047)** | | (.063) | | **(.087)** | |
| US opposes Middle East democracy in general | **1.293***** | **3.644** | -.006 | .994 | **.706*** | **2.025** |
| | **(.285)** | | (.313) | | **(.354)** | |
| Negative views on US foreign policies | -.067 | .935 | .105 | 1.110 | -.043 | .958 |
| | (.102) | | (.089) | | (.111) | |
| Negative views on US culture | **.221***** | **1.247** | **.149*** | **1.161** | **.281*** | **1.325** |
| | **(.055)** | | **(.060)** | | **(.115)** | |
| Constant | **-4.178**** | **.015** | **-5.423***** | **.004** | -7.133 | .001 |
| | **(1.392)** | | **(1.440)** | | (1.629) | |
| N | 735 | | 420 | | 435 | |
| Cox/Snell | .110 | | .061 | | .072 | |
| Nagelkerke | .216 | | .105 | | .142 | |
| Chi square | **85.517***** | | **26.517**** | | **32.506**** | |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

**Table IV. Binomial regression analysis of support of attacks on US troops in Iraq**

|  | Egypt | | Pakistan | | Indonesia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | B | Exp | B | Exp | B | Exp |
|  | (S.E.) | (B) | (S.E.) | (B) | (S.E.) | (B) |
| Rural | -.268 | .765 | -.037 | .964 | .184 | 1.201 |
|  | (.281) |  | (.222) |  | (.234) |  |
| Women | -.066 | .936 | **-.711**** | **.491** | .228 | 1.257 |
|  | (.281) |  | **(.252)** |  | (.210) |  |
| Single | -.065 | .937 | .300 | 1.350 | -.050 | .951 |
|  | (.364) |  | (.319) |  | (.325) |  |
| Under 30 | -.007 | .993 | -.487 | .614 | -.150 | .861 |
|  | (.377) |  | (.293) |  | (.266) |  |
| Incomplete school | .133 | 1.142 | .073 | 1.076 | .385 | 1.470 |
|  | (.312) |  | (.252) |  | (.228) |  |
| Below average income | .156 | 1.169 | -.073 | .930 | -.213 | .808 |
|  | (.283) |  | (.221) |  | (.432) |  |
| Five daily prayer | .396 | 1.486 | .424 | 1.527 | -.112 | .894 |
|  | (.522) |  | (.235) |  | (.239) |  |
| No confidence in | .080 | 1.084 | -.079 | .924 | **.291***** | **1.338** |
| national institutions | (.055) |  | (.047) |  | **(.058)** |  |
| US opposes Middle East | **.754*** | **2.126** | .234 | 1.264 | .045 | 1.046 |
| democracy in general | **(.308)** |  | (.232) |  | (.232) |  |
| Negative views on US | **.218*** | **1.244** | **.175*** | **1.191** | **.141*** | **1.152** |
| foreign policy | **(.091)** |  | **(.071)** |  | **(.068)** |  |
| Negative views on US | .083 | 1.087 | -.016 | .984 | **.148*** | **1.160** |
| culture | (.049) |  | (.039) |  | **(.069)** |  |
| Constant | -1.906 | .149 | -1.548 | .213 | **-5.201***** | **.006** |
|  | (1.316) |  | (1.031) |  | **(1.043)** |  |
| N | 732 |  | 416 |  | 437 |  |
| Cox/Snell | .029 |  | .067 |  | .115 |  |
| Nagelkerke | .066 |  | .090 |  | .154 |  |
| Chi square | **21.539*** |  | **28.788**** |  | **53.312***** |  |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001