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Gender Egalitarian Attitudes and Support for Islamist Parties in the Middle East and North Africa

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ABSTRACT

How do attitudes about women's equality affect political support for Islamist parties? Women's issues remain a key point of contention between religious groups and the government in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Given Islamists' conservative stances on women's rights, individuals who support gender equality may naturally be skeptical of Islamist parties participating in politics. Nevertheless, democratic stability in the region requires creating inclusive political institutions, including women's movements and the Islamic opposition. Where democracy is inclusive and competitive, Islamist parties may moderate their positions to remain electorally viable, thus alleviating gender equality proponents' concerns. To test these expectations, we draw on two different survey data sources from the MENA region. Our results, consistent across time and data sources, demonstrate that gender egalitarian individuals are less likely to trust Islamist parties or tolerate their inclusion in formal politics. Nevertheless, democracy mitigates this negative relationship.

KEYWORDS

Islamist parties; gender; political support; democracy; Middle East and North Africa

In late 2010, Tunisia experienced the first of a series of uprisings that would soon spread and affect Arab-majority countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) including Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, and Syria. The protestors in these countries gathered to demand freedom, social justice, human rights, economic progress, and democracy. Various groups in society became politically visible during the protests, including women who were on the frontlines in countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia (Johansson-Nogués 2013; Mhajne and Whetstone 2018), as well as Islamists (Chamkhi 2014; Madaman 2015). After decades of experiencing backlash and political exclusion, both women and Islamist parties were finally able to take part in democratic politics throughout the region.

These simultaneous political openings present a potential tension, particularly regarding gender equality. Because of Islamist parties' conservative stances on women's issues (Alexander and Apell 2016; Blaydes and Linzer 2008; Brumberg 2002; Waterbury 1994), proponents of women's rights may be fearful about Islamists coming to power, and hence support their exclusion from formal politics. Still, the idea that political Islam is antagonistic toward women's rights is based on a Western view of feminism, as there are many "highly religious Muslims who support feminism and employ religion for feminist goals" (Glas and Spierings 2019, 288). More broadly, given that public opinion research finds an association between gender egalitarian attitudes and a commitment to democratic values (Ciftci 2013), there is theoretical reason to expect that proponents of women's rights should favor a political system that incorporates a diversity of groups and interests in society. Not only do diverse deliberative bodies collaborate more effectively and produce outcomes that benefit a greater number of citizens (Barnes 2016) and that are seen as more legitimate (Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019), but research

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from the MENA region also suggests that formal inclusion in democratic politics actually moderates Islamist parties' stances on women's rights (Schwedler 2006, 2013), thus alleviating feminists' concerns about them coming to power.

Given the simultaneous rise of Islamists after the 2011 Arab uprisings, the centrality of women's rights in the post-revolutionary transitions, and potential concerns about Islamist parties restricting women's rights once in office, we examine how individuals' attitudes toward gender equality affect political support for Islamist political parties in the MENA region, and how this relationship varies depending on the democratic context in a country. We also acknowledge that political support is a multidimensional concept (Easton 1975; Norris 1999, 2011), thus we specifically investigate whether individuals with gender egalitarian attitudes trust Islamist parties in general, and whether they support their right to compete in elections.

This article tests competing expectations about the relationship between gender egalitarianism and political support for Islamist parties by analyzing public opinion data from three waves of the Arab Barometer, covering 11 countries in the MENA region, and novel survey data from the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACPRS) in Doha, Qatar, covering eight Arab countries between 2017 and 2018. Through this two-pronged approach, we are able to investigate whether individuals with gender egalitarian attitudes support Islamist parties' formal inclusion in democratic politics, as well as attitudes toward them if and when they come to power.

Although democracy is essential for sustainable and inclusive representation (Jamal 2010), we find that people who express gender egalitarian attitudes are less likely to support Islamist parties, across multiple indicators of political support. Nevertheless, this relationship is mainly limited to the more authoritarian countries in our analyses. This finding implies that even if individuals who support gender equality are suspicious of Islamist parties because of their conservative gender ideology, they may nevertheless disapprove of banning Islamists from formal democratic politics since competitive elections prevent Islamist parties from eroding women's rights if and when they are elected to office.

The compatibility of Islamist parties and representative democracy

Representative democracy is designed to reflect the "will of the people" by allowing multiple groups in society to have their voices heard in open, deliberative processes. Yet, two groups that gained political power in many MENA countries following the 2011 uprisings – women's and Islamist movements – were naturally skeptical of each other (Mhajne and Brandt 2020; Mhajne and Whetstone 2018). In countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, where the outcomes of the Arab protests were more favorable for women than in Egypt, Syria, or Yemen (Darhour and Dahlerup 2013; Moghadam 2018), the new rise of political Islam was accompanied by an increase in support for democratization (Spierings 2020) and a desire for previously excluded groups to take part in politics (Tessler 2015). Rather than being incompatible with democracy, many see Islamic governance as simply a reflection of a deep discontent with existing political arrangements, leading many to favor an alternative that incorporates both the democratic principles of choice and accountability and the Islamic principles of justice and protection of the weak.

While Islamist parties are not necessarily incompatible with democracy (Tessler 2002, 2015), the fear of Islamists having majority control over the government has caused some citizens to support autocratic governments. Nevertheless, the survival of any form of democracy in the region depends on creating political space for Islamic opposition, since the banning of these parties does not appear to be an effective response. The tendency to repress opposition within MENA states has depleted civil society, with negative effects on democratic development (García-Rivero and Kotzé 2007; Sivan 2000). Thus, tolerance toward Islamists is important for creating support for democracy, which in turn fosters the widespread "buy in" that is necessary for democracy to eventually consolidate (Linz and Stepan 1996).

Prior research on Islamist movements in the MENA region, women's rights, and political support, when taken together, suggest two potential narratives about how gender egalitarian views might affect political support for Islamist parties. On the one hand, "conventional wisdom" suggests gender

egalitarianism, which is itself a pro-democratic value, may be associated with increased support for Islamist parties and other groups' political enfranchisement. On the other hand, given concerns that Islamists might restrict women's rights if they come to power (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007), it is reasonable to expect that individuals with gender egalitarian views might be wary of – or outright opposed to – Islamist parties' incorporation into formal governing structures. In the following sections, we contribute to this diverse body of literature by developing each of these competing arguments, as well as testable hypotheses, in more detail.

Gender egalitarian attitudes strengthen support for Islamist parties

Behavioral research has long recognized that political support is a multidimensional concept (Booth and Seligson 2009; Easton 1975; Norris 1999, 2011). For instance, institutional trust is a *specific* form of political support, aimed at tangible actors or authorities, and largely driven by evaluations of performance (Cleary and Stokes 2006; Easton 1975; Sika 2000). Alternatively, support for democratic values, such as supporting unpopular groups' right to compete in elections, is a *diffuse* form of political support that taps individuals' adherence to core democratic values and principles (Norris 2011). From a normative standpoint, the notion that democracy should reflect the will of the people is a core democratic value. One important pro-democratic value is support for women's formal inclusion in politics (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Cross-national research shows that, on average, gender egalitarian attitudes tend to be positively correlated with pro-democratic values, particularly in other regions of the developing world (Barnes and Córdova 2016; Morgan and Buice 2013). This positive relationship between gender egalitarian and pro-democratic values is also evident in policy debates about incorporating marginalized groups into formal politics. For instance, gender egalitarian attitudes predict support for legislative gender quotas (Barnes and Córdova 2016).

In addition to beliefs about political inclusion, political tolerance is another important pro-democratic value (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003). In the West, tolerance is generally defined as the willingness to extend civil rights to disliked groups in society (e.g., communists, atheists, homosexuals), but in the MENA region, it is best conceptualized as “how people respond to others with different worldviews” (Spierings 2017, 7). Individuals who support gender egalitarianism may rightfully be skeptical that Islamist parties do not share their worldview, yet we still expect them to espouse pro-democratic values and thus be willing to extend Islamist parties the right to political representation, even if they do not outright trust them.

Comparative research on democratic representation suggests that gender egalitarian attitudes may be associated with *increased* tolerance for Islamist parties participating in formal politics. Islamist parties in MENA have been sidelined or outright outlawed in some countries for decades. Not only is the political underrepresentation of historically marginalized groups, such as women and Islamists in a number of Arab countries, “intrinsically unfair” (Williams 1998), but exclusion sends a signal that politics only represents a narrow set of interests (Barnes and Saxton 2019; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012) and undermines the de facto legitimacy of the entire political system (Mansbridge 1999). From a policy perspective, when political institutions are less inclusive, the quality of democratic deliberation suffers (Barnes 2016), as does the perceived legitimacy of policy outcomes (Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019).

Beyond tolerating different groups' right to inclusion, such as the right to compete in elections, we can also conceptualize support for Islamists in terms of political trust. Trust in political institutions such as political parties (which is different from interpersonal trust), is important for democratic health and stability (Cleary and Stokes 2006; Sika 2000). This sort of institutional trust, which Cleary and Stokes (2006) say is characterized by skepticism (as opposed to blind trust) and a confidence in institutional checks on politicians' behavior, represents an important dimension of political support, which is itself a multidimensional concept (Easton 1975; Norris 1999, 2011). Hence, institutional trust in Islamist parties, and support for their right – and the right of *all* groups in society – to take part in formal politics and compete in elections, are both important attitudinal requisites for a healthy democracy.

Although we might not expect gender egalitarians to support Islamist parties in the *trust* sense due to their conflicting ideologies (Alexander and Apell 2016), it is entirely possible that gender egalitarianism and support for Islamist parties are not completely incompatible. Recent research finds that lower levels of gender egalitarianism in the MENA region are not the result of Islam, per se, but because of the strength or religiosity in the region (Price 2015). Public opinion research from the MENA region suggests that the assumed incompatibility between feminism and Islam is based on a narrow, Western conceptualism of feminism. Indeed, in Arab MENA countries, there are many individuals who are “highly religious Muslims who support feminism and employ religion for feminist goals” (Glas and Spierings 2019, 288). For instance, Muslim feminists may endorse women’s empowerment through education, but not necessarily through political inclusion (Price 2014). Although being active in politics may conflict with traditional views on motherhood, women’s equality in education does not in the same way, and indeed, women’s empowerment through education is often framed by religious feminists in the Arab MENA as the key to making better mothers (Glas et al. 2019).

In sum, we argue that gender egalitarians in the Arab world should be more committed to democratic principles, and thus should be more likely to think that all groups in society are deserving of political representation.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who express gender egalitarian attitudes will be more likely to express political support for Islamist parties.

Despite the positive relationship between gender egalitarian and democratic attitudes found in other regions such as Latin America, evidence from the Muslim world is a bit mixed. Some studies show that favorable views of gender equality are associated with higher support for democracy (Ciftci 2013). Jamal (2006), however, finds no evidence of this relationship when looking at Egypt and Jordan. And further, Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer (2007) find that gender egalitarian attitudes and pro-democratic values are positively associated in non-Arab Muslim world, but negatively associated in the Arab Muslim world. One possible explanation for these mixed findings is that the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes depends on the democratic context in a country. Jamal (2010) explains that democracy and good governance are essential for promoting women’s rights and empowerment. Not only is democracy supposed to “secure the interests of the entire population, including women,” but it encourages tolerance and creates additional political openings for a variety of groups to make demands on the state (Jamal 2010, 3). Additionally, “inclusion-moderation” research in the MENA region demonstrates that the inclusion of Islamist parties in the formal democratic process moderates their positions because inclusion obligates Islamist parties to work with – and compete with – other groups with diverse political views (Schwedler 2006, 2011, 2013).

Given Islamist parties’ conservative stances on women’s economic, social, and political rights, it is not controversial to expect that gender egalitarians would be skeptical to support a party that wants to roll back gender equality. In places like Egypt, where democratic gains following the Arab Spring uprising were short-lived, gender equality was not a core demand of the uprising, and the new regime quickly moved to restrict women’s rights (Alexander and Apell 2016). Yet in other contexts, especially in countries where civil conflict did *not* break out, the Arab uprisings simultaneously created new political openings for Islamists by breaking with the old regime (the central pro-democracy demand) *and* activated support for feminism (Glas and Spierings 2020).

Tunisia nicely illustrates a case where the rise of an Islamist party did not negate the Arab Spring’s liberalizing effect on public gender attitudes. Following the 2011 Tunisian uprising, women’s movements were successful at lobbying for gender parity language in the new constitution (Al-Ali and Romdhane 2014). In the parliamentary elections following Tunisia’s “Jasmine Revolution,” the Islamist party Ennahada won a plurality of seats and attempted to replace the parity language with “complementarity” language (the notion that women are men’s complements, rather than their equals). Nevertheless, party leaders quickly bowed to public pressure and had to

back off plans to add the complementarity language, a huge concession to women's movements in order to maintain electoral viability (Tripp 2019). In the end, the new Tunisian constitution enshrined women's political equality, as well as parity in the legislature, into law (Al-Ali and Romdhane 2014).

Democratic institutions, such as competitive elections, should prevent the increase of Islamist parties' political power from eroding women's rights if and when they come to power. In other words, even if individuals with gender egalitarian attitudes do not agree with Islamist parties, because of their conservative gender ideology, they should still support their right to take part in competitive elections in a democracy. Thus, we posit the following context-specific hypothesis:

H1a: Gender egalitarian attitudes will be positively associated with support for Islamist parties, but only in democratic contexts.

Gender egalitarian attitudes erode support for Islamist parties

The previous hypotheses are based on a Western understanding of democracy, a *liberal* vision which is directly linked to individual rights (Kostenko, Kuzmichev, and Ponarin 2016). However, prior studies on democracy in the MENA show that citizens view it *instrumentally*. Citizens become disillusioned with democracy when it fails to deliver economic or physical security (Spierings 2020). Teti, Abbott, and Cavatorta (2019, 6) explain that MENA citizens see “economic rights as more important in defining democracy than civil-political and social rights.” This explains why despite women's role in protesting authoritarian governments (Charrad and Zarrugh 2014; Johansson-Nogués 2013), there remains a particular tension between people who support gender egalitarianism and Islamists – who certainly represent broad swaths of the population across the MENA region – when it comes to formal representation in political institutions.

Beyond different understandings of democracy in the Arab world, women's organizations and secular intellectuals in the MENA region have long been concerned that Islamist parties and movements pose a threat to women's rights (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). This fear, whether well-founded or not, stems from a concern that if Islamist parties come to power, women's rights would be targeted or compromised when Shari'a law, rather than secular law, becomes the basis for legal restrictions, and has thus eroded hope for democratic reform (Brumberg 2002; Waterbury 1994). Several empirical studies have demonstrated that fear of Islamists parties' regressive views, and the implications for policies on women's issues, are indeed well-founded. For instance, stronger Islamic-religious orientations are, on average, associated with less support for gender equality (Glas, Spierings, and Scheepers 2018; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Moaddel 2006; Norris and Inglehart 2012; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007; Spierings 2014), although this relationship is weaker in countries with better governance (Tessler 2015).

Not only have authoritarians in the region used the threat of Islamists taking over to justify their rule (Kubba 2008), but in several MENA countries they have historically made concessions to women's rights both as a way to signal their modernity to the international community, and to counter and quell Islamic extremism (Tripp 2019). Women in Tunisia, for instance, gained the right to vote and run for office in 1957, well ahead of women in other MENA countries, and President Habib Bourguiba often “[used] women's rights as a way to drive a wedge between the state and the Islamists, both of whom fought to win women's loyalty” (Tripp 2019, 234).

Thus, some non-Islamist groups, including women's organizations who are concerned about women's social and political rights, often reluctantly affiliated with secular authoritarian and “modern” military states (i.e., Egypt, Turkey, and Algeria) in order to counter the Islamist opposition (Brand 1999; Tohidi and Bayes 2001). MENA states have seen central opposition groups, including those who support democracy, actively and publicly support authoritarian regimes due to their fear of Islamists, thus producing a situation of “autocracy with democrats” (Brumberg 2002, 110–11). Indeed,

in the Arab world, there tends to be a negative relationship between support for gender equality and support for democracy, although the opposite relationship holds in non-Arab Muslim countries (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007; Spierings 2014).

In sum, although women's movements have been associated with democratization in the MENA region and around the world, proponents of women's rights may fear political Islam to such an extent that they oppose Islamist parties' democratic right to representation and inclusion in formal politics. That is, the fear that Islamist parties will restrict women's legal and political rights if they come to office may outweigh other democratic principles such as political pluralism and the representation of all groups in society. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: People who express gender egalitarian attitudes will be less likely to express political support for Islamist parties.

As with our first hypothesis, it is also possible that the democratic context in a country conditions the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes and support for Islamist parties. Given democracy's role in creating an open political space for various societal interests to compete over policy, as well as their role in fostering trust by safeguarding individual rights, the above arguments about Islamist parties' conservative stances on women's rights (Alexander and Apell 2016; Blaydes and Linzer 2008) may be most acute in contexts with weak or non-existent democratic institutions. It could be especially relevant in the context of MENA countries where for years authoritarian leaders in Arab-majority countries justified their rule by feeding into fears that elections would empower extremist Islamist parties who were labeled as anti-western, anti-democratic, and against women's rights (Kurzman and Türkoğlu 2015).

Women's issues remain one of the key issues of contention between religious groups, secular opposition, and governments in the MENA region. For instance, conversations on women's issues in Egypt under President Hosni Mubarak (1981–2011) happened in an environment where an authoritarian regime controlled civic engagement, and religion became the normative framework for this engagement (Tadros 2016). The state controlled the conversation on women's issues through the establishment of the National Council for Women, a state sponsored institution advocating for women's issues. Through support for such institutions, the state was able to counter the growing influence of Islamists and their popularity in Egypt (Tadros 2016). By projecting a liberal image, Hosni Mubarak's government labeled itself as moderate, following a progressive interpretation of Islam on issues related to personal status laws (e.g., those that govern divorce, child custody, marriage, and inheritance) and offering an alternative to Islamists who constructed Islam as against women's rights, the West, and democracy.

H2a: People who express gender egalitarian attitudes will be less likely to express political support for Islamist parties, but only in authoritarian contexts.

Evaluating competing expectations about gender views and support for Islamist parties

To test our competing hypotheses, we take a two-pronged approach which allows us to examine the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes and different dimensions of political support for Islamist parties. In our first study, we analyze Arab Barometer data from 11 MENA countries to examine the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes and trust in Islamist parties, a *specific* indicator of political support. Second, we turn to the question of democratic values more generally and ask, even if gender egalitarians do not trust Islamist parties, do they still support their right to compete in elections? Novel survey data from the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACPRS) in Doha, Qatar allows us to examine this possibility. Although the ACPRS covers fewer countries and years than the Arab Barometer, it asks a question that specifically measures attitudes about laws that explicitly ban the Muslim Brotherhood as a political party.

Gender egalitarian attitudes and trust in Islamist parties

In our first analysis, we examine survey data from Waves 3 to Wave 5 of the Arab Barometer, covering a timespan from 2012 to 2019. Our analysis covers 11 Muslim majority countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen.¹ After accounting for the fact that not all countries were included in Wave 4 and that the question used for our dependent variable was not asked in all countries in the later waves, the resulting sample includes 24 country-year surveys.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is *trust in Islamist parties*. As previously explained, *trust* captures a “specific” dimension of political support that taps evaluations of performance, as well as confidence in the ability to govern (Norris 2011). Arab Barometer asks respondents, “To what extent do you trust Islamist parties (Muslim Brotherhood, Freedom and Justice Party, Justice and Construction Party)? Do you trust them to a great extent (coded 1), a medium extent (2) a limited extent (3), or absolutely do not trust (4)?” In the analysis, responses are recoded such that higher values indicate *greater* trust in Islamist parties. In the pooled sample of country-year surveys, the modal response to this question is “not at all” (coded 1), with around 53% of respondents selecting this answer. There is also significant heterogeneity in support for Islamist parties across the MENA region.² The average level of *trust* in the sample is 1.86 (out of 4) and ranges from 1.28 (Lebanon in 2016) to 2.49 (Sudan in 2013).

Independent variables

The primary predictor of political trust in Islamist parties in this analysis is *gender egalitarian attitudes*. Recognizing that the factors driving attitudes about women versus their actual political inclusion may be different (Price 2014), we need measures that capture multiple dimensions of gender equality. Across all three survey waves, Arab Barometer asks two questions that tap different gender egalitarian attitudes. The first question about women in politics asks, “Please indicate the extent of your agreement with the following statement: In general, men are better at political leadership than women. Do you strongly agree (coded 1), agree (2), disagree (3), or strongly disagree (4)?” The second question which taps support for women’s equality in education asks about agreement with the statement, “University education for males is more important than university education for females.” Responses are coded in the same manner as the political question, with higher response values indicating more gender egalitarianism. We estimate two sets of models with each gender equality question as the main independent variable. Although the modal response to the question about “men are better at political leadership” is “agree” (coded 2), the most common response to the question about university education being “more important for males than females” is “strongly disagree” (4). Consistent with prior research on different gender equality attitudes in the MENA region (e.g., Price 2014), citizens’ views about women’s political equality are more conservative than attitudes about equality in education.

To test our conditional hypothesis (H1a) about the role of democracy, we include a measure from Freedom House. Freedom House classifies countries as “free,” “partly free,” or “not free” according to their scores on political rights and civil liberties dimensions. Each dimension ranges from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). To create our *democracy* measure, we reverse code each dimension score for a more intuitive interpretation, and then we add the two scores for a theoretical range between 2 (least democratic) to 14 (most democratic). In our sample, *democracy* scores range from 2 (Sudan in all waves) to 12 (Tunisia in 2016).

Control variables

To control for potential sources of spuriousness, we include controls for democratic values and religiosity, which could theoretically drive both individuals' attitudes about gender equality and Islamist parties. We measure democratic values with the question, "To what extent do you agree with the following statement: A democratic system may have problems, yet it is better than other systems?" Responses range from "strongly disagree" (coded 1) to "strongly agree" (4). Controlling for *support for democracy* is especially important for us to isolate the effects of *gender egalitarian attitudes* from other pro-democratic values. To measure religiosity, we follow Hoffman and Jamal (2014) and use a question that asks respondents how often they read or listen to the Qur'an/Bible.³ Responses to this question range from "never" (coded 1) to "always" (5). We also control for a number of individual characteristics that prior research shows are associated with political trust and support for social policies, specifically, whether income meets basic needs, political interest, respondent's sex, education, and age.

In addition to individual-level characteristics, we also include a country-level control for the percentage of women in the legislature. Prior research has shown that women's political presence shapes citizens' perceptions of democratic representation (Barnes and Taylor-Robinson 2018; Schwandt-Bayer 2010) and transmits important elite cues about the inclusiveness of the political system (Morgan and Buice 2013).

Results

We begin our analysis by examining the bivariate relationship between *trust in Islamist parties* and our different measures of *gender egalitarian attitudes*. Lending preliminary support to *Hypothesis 2*, both measures of gender egalitarianism (women's political ability and right to a university education) are negatively and significantly ($p < 0.01$) associated with our *trust* dependent variable. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that certain omitted factors may affect this observed relationship. For this reason, we turn the results of our multivariate analysis.

Table 1 shows the results from a series of multilevel ordered logit models in which we predict *trust in Islamist parties*. Models 1–3 use the question about women in politics as the *gender egalitarianism* independent variable, whereas Models 4–6 use the question about women's right to a university education. The first model in each set includes only individual-level covariates. The second model introduces country-level covariates, and the third model tests our conditional hypotheses by including a cross-level interaction between *gender egalitarian attitudes* and the *democracy* measure from Freedom House.⁴ Following Heisig and Schaeffer (2019), we include a random slope for the individual-level independent variable in each model in Table 1.⁵ The first thing to notice in Table 1 is that the coefficient on our variable for *gender egalitarian views* is negative and statistically significant across model specifications and measures of *gender egalitarianism*. These results lend further support to *Hypothesis 2*. Individuals who express egalitarian views about women's role in politics are *less* likely to express support for Islamist political parties. Consequently, we do not find support for *Hypothesis 1*.

To aid in the substantive interpretation of the results in Table 1, we use the results in Models 2 and 5 to generate the predicted probability of observing each response outcome of our dependent variable measuring *trust in Islamist parties*, at each value of gender egalitarian views. Moving from the least to most egalitarian attitudes about women in politics is associated with a 0.08 increase in the probability of trusting Islamist parties "not at all" (from 0.50 to 0.58). The same change results in a .03 decrease in the probability of trusting Islamist parties "a lot." Both sets of changes represent statistically significant differences in predicted probabilities ($p < 0.01$). Turning to Model 5, moving from the least to most egalitarian attitudes about women's right to a university education is associated with a 0.10 increase in the probability of saying trust "not at all" and a 0.03 decrease in the probability of saying trust "a lot."

Table 1. Gender Egalitarian Attitudes and Trust in Islamist Parties.

	Women in Politics			University Education		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Gender Egalitarianism	-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.12 (0.08)	-0.15*** (0.03)	-0.15*** (0.03)	-0.24** (0.09)
Democracy (FH)		-0.08 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.08)		-0.09 (0.06)	-0.12 (0.07)
Gender X Democracy			-0.00 (0.01)			0.02 (0.01)
<i>Individual-Level Controls</i>						
Support for Democracy	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.02)
Political Interest	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)
Female	0.20*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.20*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.03)
Education	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Income	0.11*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.12*** (0.01)	0.12*** (0.01)
Age	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
Religiosity	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)
<i>Country-Level Controls</i>						
Percent Women		0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Cut 1	0.52* (0.21)	0.34 (0.45)	0.38 (0.52)	0.41* (0.19)	0.11 (0.46)	-0.10 (0.48)
Cut 2	1.48*** (0.21)	1.30** (0.45)	1.35** (0.52)	1.38*** (0.19)	1.07* (0.46)	0.87 (0.48)
Cut 3	3.01*** (0.21)	2.83*** (0.45)	2.88*** (0.52)	2.92*** (0.19)	2.61*** (0.46)	2.41*** (0.48)
Individual N =	23,369	23,369	23,369	23,451	23,451	23,451
Country-Year N =	24	24	24	24	24	24
Wald Chi ²	417.10	418.99	419.03	413.95	416.20	418.80

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (standard errors). Multilevel ordered logit coefficients, estimated in Stata 17.0. DV: How much trust do you have in Islamist parties (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood)? 1 = None to 4 = A lot.

Although the results in Table 1 support Hypothesis 2 and not Hypothesis 1, recall that we developed hypotheses that the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes and political support for Islamist parties may be conditional on the democratic context in a country. To evaluate support for Hypotheses 1a and 2a, we turn to the cross-level interactions in Models 3 and 6. When it comes to attitudes about women in politics, there is no conditional relationship between gender egalitarianism and trust in Islamist parties, as is evident from the insignificant interaction term in Model 3 ($p = 0.85$). Yet, when we measure gender egalitarianism with an Arab Barometer question about women’s right to a university education, we find evidence that is more consistent with Hypothesis 2a. Although the coefficient on the interaction term in Model 6 does not reach conventional levels of significance ($p = 0.24$), numerous scholars warn we should exercise caution when interpreting interaction, especially in nonlinear models. We thus present substantive results of the interaction in Model 6 graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1 graphs the average marginal effect of a change in gender egalitarian attitudes on the probability of observing the lowest and highest response outcomes to the question about trust in Islamist parties, across the range of democracy values in the sample. The histograms in each panel of Figure 1 show the distribution of observations for each combined Freedom House value in the sample. Positive (negative) marginal effects indicate a positive (negative) relationship that weakens the closer estimates are to the $y = 0$ line. Where confidence intervals around marginal

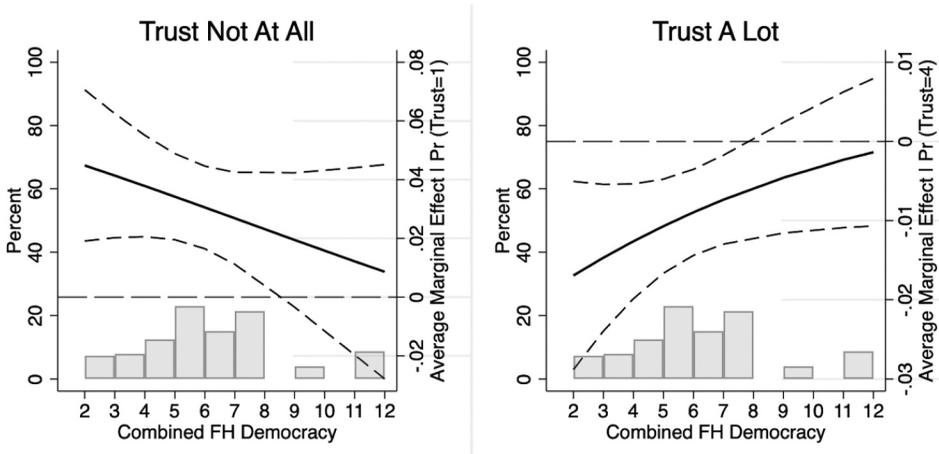


Figure 1. Gender Egalitarianism, Political Trust, and Democracy. Note: Marginal effect estimates were calculated using the results in Table 1, Model 6, in Stata 17.0. Where bars cross $y = 0$, the relationship between *gender egalitarianism* and *trust in Islamist parties* is not significant at the 95% confidence level.

effect estimates cross $y = 0$, the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is not statistically significant. The results in Figure 1 suggest that the main result we observe in Table 1, which is consistent with *Hypothesis 2* that gender egalitarian individuals are less supportive of Islamist parties, is largely driven by the less democratic countries in our sample. All else constant, the negative relationship between *gender egalitarian attitudes* about women’s right to a university education and the probability of trusting Islamist parties “a lot” is no longer significant beyond a combined Freedom House score of 7. Moreover, the marginal effect estimates for the probability of saying “trust a lot” at the lowest and highest Freedom House scores in our sample are statistically different at $p < 0.10$.

These findings are consistent with Schwedler’s (2006, 2011, 2013) “inclusion-moderation” theory that formal inclusion in democratic politics moderates Islamist parties and can even curb their influence. This finding is also consistent with past developments in Tunisia, which was the most democratic country in our sample during the analysis period. In 2016, the Tunisian Islamist movement Ennahda declared that it wished to be labeled as a Muslim Democratic party rather than an Islamist party. This shift represented a process of ideological transformation in the movement and its political party since the 1970s, when at its founding was considered an “anti-democratic and illiberal movement . . . determined to impose religious law” (Cavatorta and Merone 2013, 858) to a movement which now endorses democracy (Filali-Ansary 2016; Netterstrom 2015).

Gender egalitarian attitudes and support for Islamist parties’ inclusion in elections

In our second analysis, we turn to novel survey data from the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACPRS) in Doha, Qatar. The ACPRS data used in this analysis are from the 2017–2018 wave and covers eight MENA countries (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Sudan). This second analysis allows us to test our hypotheses using a more *diffuse* indicator of political support that taps acceptance of democratic values. Even if Arab citizens with gender egalitarian attitudes do not trust Islamist parties, in the *specific support* sense – as Study 1 suggests they generally do not – they may still believe that parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood should be permitted to compete in elections. We describe the survey measures used in this analysis below.

Dependent variable

As in our first analysis, the dependent variable is *political support for Islamist parties*. However, this time we use a more diffuse measure of political support that captures tolerance for Islamist parties' right to take part in electoral politics. Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood have faced periodic state repression since their founding in Egypt in 1923, and a mere two years after its electoral victory in the 2011 Egyptian elections, was ousted from office in a military coup and was officially outlawed. The dependent variable in this study comes from the question, "Some Arab countries have blocked the Muslim Brotherhood as a political party. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?" Responses to this question range from "strongly approve" (coded 1) to "strongly disapprove" (4). In other words, higher response values indicate *more* political support for Islamist parties. Although there are a variety of Islamist parties throughout the Middle East and North Africa, the Muslim Brotherhood has been especially marginalized (or outright banned) in several MENA countries. Hence, using this question, as opposed to a question about "trust in religious parties" in the abstract, offers an additional test of our hypotheses along a different dimension of political support. The median response to this question is "approve" (coded 2) of the decision to block the Brotherhood as a political party. As in the Arab Barometer data, we see significant variation in responses to this question across countries, with average responses ranging from a low of 1.85 (out of 4) in Egypt, to a high of 3.05 in Mauritania.

Independent variable

The primary predictor of support for Islamist parties in our analysis is *gender egalitarian attitudes*. As in Study 1, we first use a measure of attitudes about women in politics. This measure comes from the question, "In principal, do you support or oppose the president or prime minister of your country being a woman?" Responses in the analysis range from "strongly disapprove" (coded 1) to "strongly approve" (4). In the pooled sample of all eight countries in our analysis, the modal response to this question is "approve" (coded 3). Respondents in Sudan express the least support for a female executive (2.32 out of 4), whereas respondents in Lebanon are the most receptive to the idea of a female executive (average response of 3.05 out of 4). We then replicate our analysis using a measure of gender equality in society. The ACPRS asks a much broader battery of questions about gender equality than the Arab Barometer. We conducted factor analysis on a series of twelve questions about women's rights and created a measure of *gender egalitarian attitudes* about women in society by averaging responses to questions about women's right to a university education, working outside the home, equality in job opportunities, and traveling outside the country alone. Responses to these four questions load strongly onto a common underlying factor and have strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.75$).

Control variables

As in the first analysis, we control for several individual characteristics that consistently predict political evaluations. Specifically, we include controls for respondents' political interest, sex, education, income, and age. Unfortunately, our ACPRS data does not include questions about support for democracy or religiosity, thus we are unable to control for these variables in our analysis. The closest to a question tapping democratic values is one that asks the extent to which the respondent agrees with the Egyptian military's ouster of Muhammad Morsi in 2013. However, given President Morsi's affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, and the fact that we are predicting support for the Muslim Brotherhood in our analysis, using this question as a proxy for democratic values introduces serious concerns about tautology. Hence, we have opted not to use this question. As with our Arab Barometer analysis, we again include country-level covariates for the democratic context (Freedom House) which allows us to test our conditional hypotheses, as well as the percentage of women in the legislature (IPU 2019).

Table 2. Gender Egalitarianism and Islamist Parties' Right to Participate in Elections.

	Women in Politics			Women in Society		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Gender Egalitarianism	-0.15*	-0.15*	-0.11	-0.32**	-0.32**	-0.20
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.17)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.28)
Democracy (FH)		0.05	0.07		0.07	0.12
		(0.11)	(0.14)		(0.12)	(0.16)
Gender X Democracy			-0.01			-0.02
			(0.03)			(0.05)
<i>Individual-Level Controls</i>						
Political Interest	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Female	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***	0.19***	0.18***	0.18***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Education	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04*	0.04*	0.04*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Income	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.09***	-0.07***	-0.08***	-0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age	0.04**	0.04**	0.04**	0.04**	0.03*	0.03*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
<i>Country-Level Control</i>						
Percent Women		0.02	0.02		0.02	0.02
		(0.03)	(0.03)		(0.03)	(0.03)
Cut 1	-1.78***	-1.06	-0.93	-2.28***	-1.38	-1.08
	(0.37)	(0.79)	(0.91)	(0.38)	(0.81)	(1.03)
Cut 2	-0.22	0.50	0.62	-0.69	0.19	0.48
	(0.37)	(0.79)	(0.91)	(0.38)	(0.81)	(1.03)
Cut 3	1.37***	2.09**	2.21*	0.98**	1.78*	2.08*
	(0.37)	(0.79)	(0.91)	(0.38)	(0.81)	(1.03)
Individual N =	10,237	10,237	10,237	11,446	10,237	10,237
Country N =	8	8	8	8	8	8
Wald Chi ²	75.13	76.29	76.42	75.54	82.79	83.18

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (standard errors). Multilevel ordered logit coefficients, estimated in Stata 17.0. DV: Do you agree with the decision to block the Muslim Brotherhood as apolitical party? 1 = S.agree to 4 = S.disagree

Results

Table 2 shows the results from a series of multilevel ordered logit models in which we predict support for the Muslim Brotherhood's formal inclusion in politics with gender egalitarian attitudes about women in politics and in society more broadly. As in Table 1, all the models feature a random coefficient specification, and we show in Appendix B1 that our results are robust to this modeling choice. In Table 2, we follow the same modeling strategy and presentation as in Table 1. The results in Table 2 again are consistent with Hypothesis 2. In all the non-interactive models that test for a direct relationship, individuals who express gender egalitarian attitudes are less likely to indicate that the Muslim Brotherhood should be allowed to officially organize as a political party. This relationship holds even after controlling for the democratic context in a country and women's numeric representation in the legislature.

As before, we use the results from Table 2 to present the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes and support for Islamist parties graphically. Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of observing the highest and lowest response outcome for the question about support for the Muslim Brotherhood, given values of the question about support for a female executive as well as our "gender equality in society" measure. Turning first to the top panels in Figure 2, results are generally consistent with the results from Study 1. As individuals express more egalitarian attitudes about women in politics, they have a lower probability of agreeing that Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood should be permitted to take part in formal politics. Turning to the bottom panels in Figure 2 and using a broader indicator of gender egalitarian attitudes about women in society, we

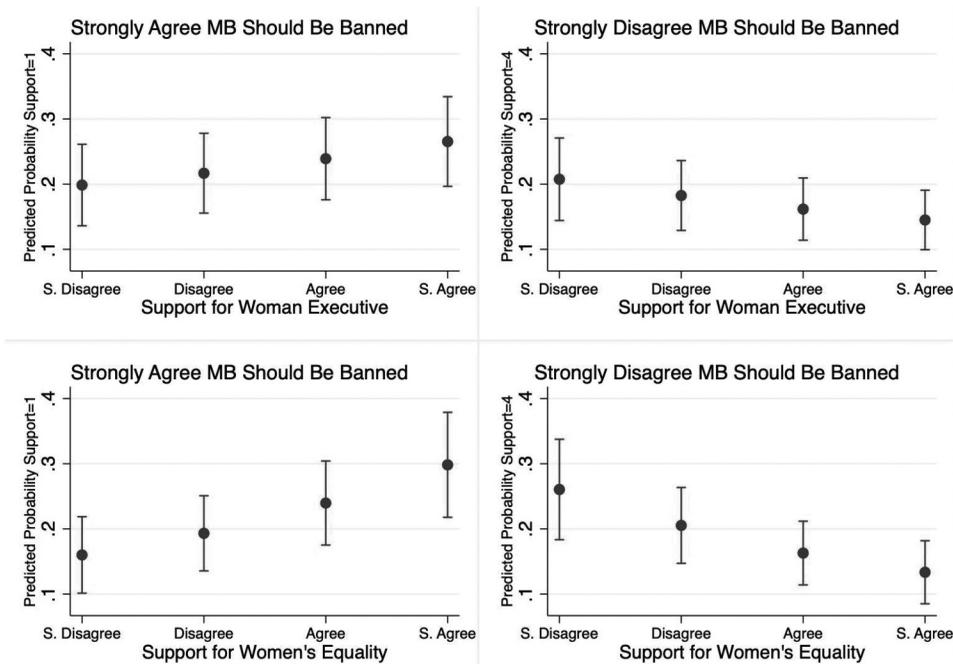


Figure 2. Predicted Support for Islamist Parties’ Right to Contest Elections. Note: Point estimates represent the predicted probability of observing each response outcome for the dependent variable (support for Islamist parties), for each value of the gender egalitarianism measure. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Calculated using the results in Table 2, Models 2 and 5.

observe even larger and statistically significant differences. Moving from the lowest to the highest level of gender egalitarianism is associated with a .14 increase in the probability of “strongly agreeing” that the Muslim Brotherhood should be banned (the least tolerant response), and with a 0.13 decrease in the probability of “strongly disagreeing” that they should be banned (the most tolerant response option).

Taken together, the results in Table 2 and Figure 2 are consistent with Hypothesis 2. Individuals who hold gender egalitarian views are *less likely* to support Islamist parties’ political inclusion. We again do not find support for Hypothesis 1. Although prior research suggests that those with gender egalitarian views may be willing to support other groups’ political inclusion – even those groups with fundamentally different worldviews – we do not find evidence that this is the case in the MENA region. The results from both sets of analysis presented here suggest that gender egalitarian individuals’ concerns about Islamist parties restricting women’s right trump democratic concerns about all groups’ right to political representation.

Finally, we turn to the interactive models in Table 2 to evaluate support for our conditional hypotheses. Although the results in Table 1 and Figure 1 from Study 1 provide some evidence that democracy moderates the relationship between gender egalitarianism – especially regarding women’s equality in society – and *trust* in Islamist parties, Table 2 does not suggest that democracy matters when it comes to more *diffuse* indicators of political support, such as tolerating Islamist’s right to compete in electoral politics. Rather, these results suggest that across the different levels of democracy in this sample, individuals who express gender egalitarian attitudes are willing to accept policies that ban Islamists from formal political inclusion. Although the results from this multilevel analysis do not support our conditional hypotheses, it is important to note that in Study 2, we are only able to leverage data from eight country surveys, which can severely limit causal inferences regarding higher-level covariates (Stegmueller 2013). In Appendix B2-B3, we estimate a separate ordered logit model for each country in the multilevel analysis. The negative relationship we observe

in Table 2, Model 6 is largely driven by the less democratic countries in our sample, such as Egypt and Kuwait, whereas in more democratic countries like Tunisia, the negative relationship does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. This finding is consistent with *Hypothesis 2a*, as well as the results in Study 1.

Discussion and conclusion

Drawing upon a diverse body of research on political Islam, gender attitudes, public opinion, and democratic representation, we develop and test two competing expectations about the relationship between gender egalitarian attitudes and support for Islamist parties in the MENA region. Results from two separate multilevel analyses indicate that individuals who express egalitarian attitudes are less, not more, likely to support Islamist parties, across both specific and diffuse 525 measures of political support. Our findings have important implications for democratic stability and legitimacy, which we discuss below, as they suggest that egalitarian attitudes about women's rights do not necessarily translate into broader support for the incorporation of other politically marginalized groups that represent large swaths of society in the MENA region.

This finding could be explained by the fact that since Islamist parties push for the complementary engagement of women in public life, they are viewed by most as a threat to women's rights and thus a threat to democracy. Yet, in the cases of Tunisia and Morocco, the rise of Islamist parties did not necessarily erode women's rights. The integration of Islamist parties into the political process is important for achieving and sustaining democracy in the MENA region. Not only does the inclusion of religious parties serve as a mechanism for articulating demands and grievances from Islamic sectors of society (Yavuz 1997), but the integration of these parties into the political process may also expand opportunities for political participation and civil society (García-Rivero and Kotzé 2007).

Although our findings contribute to extant literature by building on research on Islamist parties, women's rights, and democracy in the MENA region, these results are preliminary and more work needs to be done to flesh out the mechanisms linking attitudes about gender and political support for Islamist parties, and how the historical and political context in a given country might condition this relationship. Future research should investigate the generalizability of these findings beyond the Arab Muslim world. If fear about Islamists restricting women's rights is the mechanism that explains why gender egalitarians are less willing to extend political rights to Islamist parties, then we should expect this relationship to hold in other Muslim countries where Islamist parties have politicized conservative or fundamentalist views of gender roles. Yet, in Muslim countries where Islamic parties have not historically placed conservative social values related to gender at the center of their party platforms, pro-democratic values might trump any potential concerns about Islamists restricting women's rights once in office. In countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, for instance, Islamist parties with the largest bases of mass support campaign on issues related to economic and social justice, progressive economic policies, and anticorruption (Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2012). In such a context, we might expect gender egalitarian attitudes about women in politics to be positively associated with support for Islamist parties' political representation. And beyond the Muslim world, we should expect individuals with gender-egalitarian views, which prior research has shown to be otherwise associated with pro-democratic values (Barnes and Córdova 2016; Ciftci 2013; Morgan and Buice 2013), to be skeptical of extending full political rights to unpopular groups that have politicized their hostility to the advancement of women's rights, such as radical Right populist parties in Europe (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015).

This research also has broader implications for policy and democratic health more generally. Our findings suggest that support for women's equality does not necessarily translate into support for other politically marginalized groups in society, particularly in more authoritarian contexts. In democratic contexts, institutions such as competitive elections foster support for more inclusive politics, which translates into effective collaboration (Barnes 2016), and ultimately better policy that benefits a greater number of citizens.

Nevertheless, these gains may prove short-lived if democracy fails to live up to MENA citizens' *instrumental* expectations about democracy (Spierings 2020) or to deliver economic well-being (Blaydes and Linzer 2008). As events in Summer 2021 in Tunisia illustrate, the government's failure to handle the COVID-19 pandemic led citizens to reject representative democracy in favor of an authoritarian alternative that promised to restore order and economic security. Trusting that democratic institutions will serve as a check on politicians – including those who have a fundamentally different worldview but nevertheless have the right to participate in politics – is vital for the functioning of a healthy democracy (Cleary and Stokes). As such, effective governance in MENA countries may be key to fostering the widespread “buy-in” (Saxton 2021), such as support for both women's rights and Islamists' participation in politics, that is required for democracy to consolidate. Places where Islamist parties can effectively collaborate alongside secular parties in the legislature may offer some room for optimism, suggesting that Islamist parties' inclusion in formal politics is not necessarily antithetical to advancing women's rights and demonstrating that more diverse representative institutions produce policy outcomes that benefit a wider swath of society.

Notes

1. A full list of countries and years for both sets of analyses can be found in Appendix A1.
2. A one-way ANOVA indicates that trust in Islamist parties differs significantly across countries in the analysis ($F = 207.94; p < 0.001$).
3. Reading religious texts is only one measure of religiosity. In Appendix A2, we show that our main results are robust to other measures of religiosity, including attending religious services and frequency of prayer.
4. In Appendix A3, we show that these results are robust to using Polity's regime score as a measure of democracy.
5. To demonstrate that our results do not hinge on modeling choice, we estimate models with only random intercepts (Appendix A4 and Figure A1), as well as with country fixed effects (Appendix A5). Our results and interpretation are robust across model specifications.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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