

More than a Secular-Islamist Divide: Attitudinal Polarization among Voters in Muslim Majority Countries

Ashley Anderson¹ and Caroline Lancaster¹

¹Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

February 25, 2022

Abstract

Although it is a common narrative that politics in majority-Muslim countries are characterized by religious cleavages — dominated by struggles between secularists and Islamists who hold fundamentally distinct ideological positions — little research has been done to evidence this divergence among voters. Using data from the World Values survey, this article investigates ideological polarization between secularists and Islamists at the mass-level. We find that, in contrast to popular perception, latent attitudes among Islamist and secular voters are surprisingly similar on several ideological dimensions. Statistical results indicate that secular and Islamist constituents share similar views on democracy and traditional values, with only slight differences evident in their respective positions on gender norms and the role of religion in politics. Furthermore, individuals possessing more liberal, pro-democratic, and non-traditional attitudes tend to exist within the better educated and wealthier classes, regardless of political orientation. Taken together, these findings suggest that preferences are simply split among a

secular or Islamist cleavage and indicate a growing harmonization of political attitudes at the mass level.

Introduction

The alleged tug of war between proponents of a civil, democratic and secular state, on the one hand, and conservative forces, specifically Islamist hardliners, on the other, has been at the heart of political debates in the Middle East. Religion has often been perceived as the central cleavage which defines politics in Muslim-majority countries (MMCs); academic publications and journalistic accounts alike are filled with anecdotes of a purported divide between progressive, secular forces and conservative, religious society (Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Cavatorta 2009; Esposito and Voll 1996; Schwedler 2007). Such divisions are seen to be highly consequential — in numerous studies, religious-secular cleavages have been shown to negatively impact the likelihood of compromise (Haugbølle and Cavatorta 2009; Shehata 2013), cooperation (Clark 2006; Schwedler and Clark 2006), tolerance (Bilgili 2015) and trust (Grigoriadis 2009). At the most extreme, ideological division between Islamist and secular camps can contribute to a general climate of ungovernability in affected societies, increasing both the prevalence of political violence (Kalyvas 2000) and the likelihood of democratic breakdown (Hamid 2014; Kilani 2013)

Much of the existing literature on the existence and effects of the Islamist-secular divide, however, has been limited to political parties and elites. Despite ample research which suggests that the ideological attitudes of political elites may be unrepresentative of the broader population (Converse 1964; Dalton 1985; Fiorina et al. 2005; 2008; Mason 2013; 2015), woefully little research has investigated whether similar ideological divides exist at the mass level — among citizens, party sympathizers, and voters (see for notable exceptions Fossati et al. 2020; Gorman 2018; Pepinsky et al. 2018; Wegner and Cavatorta 2019). This lacuna has meaningful consequences for our understanding of the salience of religious-secular divides in Muslim politics. First, if the preferences of citizens are more multi-dimensional than those of elites, then religious-secular issues may not sufficiently capture the most significant dimensions of political conflict. Second, if issue positions are less constrained among voters (Converse 1964; Kinder 1984), a focus on elites may bias our conclusions about the effects of ideological divides on important political outcomes (i.e. violence and governability), enhancing controversy and leading to diametrically opposed observa-

tions in the literature.

In light of these concerns, this article investigates mass-level ideological preferences in Muslim world — how attitudes are organized in society and how they differ among constituent groups. In characterizing mass ideology in MMCs, scholars have largely relied upon in-depth, qualitative analyses of voters’ behaviors across cases or quantitative surveys conducted within single countries (Corstange 2012; Fossati et al. 2020; Gorman 2018; Pepinsky et al. 2018; Wegner and Cavatorta 2019). Advancing this research, we examine ideological preferences among voters using survey data that covers eight Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. Using a variety of quantitative methods, we test whether a religious-secular divide exists among Muslim voters and the extent to which such ideological differences are correlated with political behaviors such as vote choice.

Our core finding is a null one. Contra existing evidence of a secular-Islamist divide among elites, we find that religious preferences have little effect on ideological positions among the masses. Principal component analysis reveals that religious attitudes are a marginal component of citizens’ ideologies and only weakly predict their preferences on other issue areas. Moreover, latent class analyses show that while citizen attitudes are grouped in systematic ways that reflect contemporary debates about gender, social issues, and democracy, these issue positions are not cleanly related to religion and fail to provide sufficient evidence of a substantive secular-Islamist divide.

Instead, our findings show that on numerous issues, Islamist and secular voters have more in common than is typically assumed. Latent class analysis reveals that there are three main ideological classes of voters, with the primary axes of contention defined by gender/social issues and attitudes towards democracy. However, secular and Islamist voters are united on several of these positions; for example voters from both camps express high levels of support for democratic governance. By and large, ideological differences between these groups appear limited to gender and morality concerns. While we do not claim that such issues are trivial, our findings nuance the dominant narratives surrounding ideology in the Middle East by suggesting that there may be more common ground between Islamist and secular forces than is typically assumed.

This study makes significant contributions to the literature on Middle Eastern politics and to the broader literature on political ideology. We provide one of the first studies on mass ideological preferences using survey data from a diverse sample of countries in the Middle East. Our work thus provides insight into political ideology in a region where left-right ideological competition holds little meaning, and where mass attitudes (due to the dearth of free and fair elections) have largely been overlooked. Our findings are likely to be particularly relevant for scholars studying political preferences in Muslim societies with similar levels of institutionalization (e.g. Central Asia) and may speak to a broader pattern of elite-voter ideological incongruence in non-democracies writ large.

Second, our work nuances scholarly debates about the existence of a secular-Islamist divide. We find that there are ideological differences between secular and Islamist voters; however these are not structured primarily around religious content. Instead, ideological divisions reflect differences on issues of gender and morality, which are uncorrelated with religious preferences. At the same time, Islamist and secular voters exhibit similar positions on several alternative issues such as democracy and the economy — voters from parties show ambivalence about state intervention and strong commitment to democratic ideals. Our findings thus temper claims that religious-secular divides systematically organize policy preferences in the Arab world. In contrast, we find significant evidence of cross-partisan ideological harmony among non-elites, opening up new possibilities for coalition-building and compromise.

Finally, we bring the Middle East into conversation with wider research on political ideology in Western democracies. A common sentiment in this literature is that voters' policy preferences are not derived from a coherent ideological framework or at least that they are not structured in the same way as politicians' (Broockman 2016; Ellis and Stimson 2009; Kinder orge; Lauderdale et al. 2018). Our findings support this claim, showing that Middle Eastern voters display less evidence of ideological polarization than is demonstrated among political elites. This has significant implications for the literature on Middle Eastern and comparative politics. On the one hand, similar differences in the structure of elite versus mass ideologies in Middle East, contradict claims

of “Arab exceptionalism” that have defined discussions of Middle Eastern politics in the past. On the other, evidence of elite-citizen ideological incongruence has significant implications for the quality of political representation in the Middle East; as several studies show citizen-politician congruence is closely tied to satisfaction with governance, democratic legitimacy, and political participation (Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Reher 2014).

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. In the following section, we review existing scholarship on the secular-Islamist divide, providing critiques of the literature and highlighting its inattention to mass attitudes. Next, we present our own conceptualization of ideological cleavage, and provide initial hypotheses and measurement criterion to identify the presence of a mass-level ideological divide. The following three sections present the results of our analyses, outlining the structure of political ideology, the different ideological classes identified by our latent class model, and testing the association between these and different demographic characteristics including, religiosity, education and vote choice. Finally, the last section reviews our results, draws conclusions, and discusses implications for further research.

Exploring the secular-Islamist divide

The notion that political competition in the Middle East is driven by an ideological conflict between secularists and Islamists is a common one (Cavatorta 2009; Esposito and Voll 1996; Schwedler 2007) In public rhetoric, this division forms the central cleavage in the Muslim world, with several scholars likening its salience to the left-right ideological divide in Western Europe (Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Hunter 1995; Roy 1994). Particularly in the wake of the resurgence of political Islam after the Arab Spring, much has been made of the divide between Islamist and secular ways of life, with domestic secular elites from Tunisia to Jordan expressing fears about the compatibility of Islamism and liberal political values such as women’s rights and the protection of religious minorities (?Al-Sharif 2016). Ultimately, such divides are expected to have dramatic consequences for the future of politics in Muslim-majority states, hindering compromise between groups on either side

of the divide (Haugbølle and Cavatorta 2009; Shehata 2013), making alliances more unlikely (Cavatorta 2009; Buehler 2018), undermining the stability of democratic rule (Hamid 2014; Kalyvas 2000; Kilani 2013), and fueling perceptions that Islamist parties can only be successfully incorporated into the system once they moderate (Clark 2006; El-Ghobashy 2005; Schwedler 2007; Wickham 2004).

Yet, while the notion of a secular-Islamist divide has received much attention over the past several years, the existence of such a divide has yet to be “tested against the weight of empirical evidence” (Denoeux 2002; 80). By and large, empirical studies on the subject have relied on observations drawn from a few country cases, and have frequently been based on evidence from party manifestos or elite statements regarding ideological conflict (see Abduljaber 2018; Kurzman and Naqvi 2010; Kurzman and Türkoglu 2015, and Schwedler 2007 for notable examples).

While such perspectives are important, a focus on organizations and elites leaves open the question of whether similar divides exist at the mass-level — among party constituents, activists, sympathizers and everyday citizens. Already, scholarship from the developed West has called into question the relevance of elite attitudes for inferring political preferences among the masses; as a significant body of research has shown, polarization is often heightened among elites, masking the prevalence of cross-ideological agreement on policy issues at the mass-level (Converse 1964; Dalton 1985; Fiorina et al. 2005; 2008; Mason 2013; 2015). Additionally, citizens’ opinions may be more likely to be multidimensional (Broockman 2016; Lauderdale et al. 2018) or may not be well-formed enough to reflect consistent ideological positions (Ellis and Stimson 2009; Kinder et al.)

On a separate note, because parties participate in electoral competition, elites may face strategic incentives to exaggerate divisions in order to distinguish themselves from ideologically similar competitors and attract more support (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Carsey and Layman 2006; Meguid 2005; Wegner and Pellicer 2011). To the extent that mass attitudes do reflect elite divides, research has shown that it is limited to a set of symbolic and divisive “takeoff issues”, which reflect citizens’ affective rather than ideological preferences (Baldassarri and Bearman 2008; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015). Put simply, secular-Islamist cleavages, while salient among elites, may

not easily “trickle down” to voters. Although research on elite attitudes has been fruitful, it cannot be used to automatically impute citizen preferences at the mass-level.

The above critiques highlight the limitations of an elite-centered perspective and emphasize the need to reorient the focus of scholarship towards the masses. While much of the literature on the secular-Islamist divide has neglected mass attitudes due to the constraints on political expression present in most MMCs and the general perception that politics in these states is governed more by clientelistic preferences than ideological attachments (Berenschot 2018; Corstange 2012; Lust 2009; Marschall et al. 2016), there is reason to believe that mass preferences matter a great deal, and, to some extent, more than those of elites. On the one hand, everyday citizens represent the largest portion of the population and, while not directly responsible for policymaking, may exert significant influence on the political system by pressuring elites — through means of voting, contention or force — to adopt their ideological positions (Barberá et al. 2019). On the other, evidence from the Middle East suggests that mass political ideology may be broader than scholars have previously assumed, opening up new possibilities for cross-partisan cooperation and compromise. Scholars find that there is extreme diversity within the Islamist camp, even on divisive issues such as minority rights, gender equality, and implementation of shari’a law (Abduljaber 2018; Catalano 2011; Kurzman and Türkoglu 2015), and that many Islamist voters resemble their secular counterparts in their policy positions, attitudes and demographic composition (Gorman 2018; Pellicer and Wegner 2014; Wegner and Cavatorta 2019). At the same time, recent research has shown that Islamist parties themselves draw support from diverse constituencies who may “vote Islamist” for instrumental rather than purely religious reasons, further obscuring differences between the Islamist and secular camps (Blaydes and Linzer 2008; Masoud 2014; Pepinsky et al. 2012).

Thus, we argue that greater attention must be paid to the study of ideology among voter bases. In the following section, we discuss some of the challenges in operationalizing ideology among the masses, present or own definitions, and discuss initial hypothesis regarding ideological preferences among secularists and Islamists.

Theorizing ideology in the Middle East

A central issue in identifying a secular-Islamist divide among the mass public is clarifying the concept of ideology¹. In this paper, we define ideology, in line with Converse (1964), as a specific configuration of beliefs whose elements are “bound together by some form of constraint of function interdependence” (207). In so doing, we focus on an operational rather than symbolic conceptualization of ideology by emphasizing the measurement and description of citizens’ issue positions rather than their self-identified values and sense of identity (see (Ellis and Stimson 2012; Mason 2018)). In specific, we are interested in how beliefs across issue areas are organized among individuals in society and whether we can identify coherent sets of preferences among Islamist voters that are distinct from those held by supporters of secular groups.

We focus on two key aspects of ideology: 1) the configuration of political preferences and 2) the existence of issue constraint. We define a configuration of preferences to be the minimum number of dimensions (D) that can best capture divisions of attitudes and beliefs among individuals. When D is small, there are only a few key attributes that meaningfully distinguish between preferences — i.e. left-right, religious-secular — all of other attitudes are too idiosyncratic to be organized into a common policy space. However, when D is large, there is a greater variety of systematic political attitudes: one could hold opinions on the role of religion in politics, globalization, nationalism and income redistribution separately. Operationally, dimensionality is analogous to the (correct) number of covariates in a linear regression model or the number of different components identified by a factor analysis or PCA. With higher dimensionality, a greater number of independent variables will be needed to characterize political preferences within a population (in our case, survey respondents).

The level of constraint, in contrast, refers to how much knowledge of someone’s policy attitudes on some issues helps us predict their policy attitudes on other issues. In a highly constrained population, attitudes exhibit consistency across concrete issue areas: individuals who prefer re-

¹For a review of the temporal evolution of definitions of ideology, and the debates surrounding its conceptualization, see Knight 2006

ligious leadership are also more likely to hold conservative views on gender/social issues. If dimensionality is the correct number of covariates needed to model expected political preferences, then constraint is the amount of variation those covariates can explain. Moreover in the presence of ideological cleavages, clustering of attitudes should differ among competing ideological groups — within a group, individuals should display ideological coherence (intra-group homogeneity) while across the cleavage, individuals should be ideologically distinct (inter-group heterogeneity) (Schattschneider 1960).

In the case examined here, the above discussion implies that the following should hold in the presence of an Islamist-secular divide:

H₁: Preferences on the role of religion in politics should be a central dimension of political ideology, forming the primary axis of contention

H₂: Islamist and secular voters should have coherent configurations of preferences, with Islamist voter and secular supporters, separately, sharing a number of attitudes along several dimensions and Islamist and secular voters, collectively, sharing few similar positions

Data

To explore the existence of a secular-Islamist ideological cleavage, we analyze data from the sixth wave of the World Values Survey, a cross-national survey of political attitudes and behaviors in sixty-one countries across the globe, fielded from 2010-2014. The WVS is one of the only cross national surveys of Middle Eastern countries that asks respondents explicitly about vote choice², enabling us to effectively distinguish Islamist from secular voters for direct comparison of these groups. Most important, the timing of the sixth wave of the WVS is ideal for our purposes of

²Three other surveys, the Arab Barometer, the Middle Eastern Values Study (MEVS), and the Pew World's Muslims Survey cover a similarly broad (if not broader) range of countries. However, the Pew and Arab Barometer surveys only ask respondents about general party preference, not actual vote choice. The MEVS survey includes information on vote choice, but only for a limited number of countries — Jordan, Turkey, and Tunisia.

identifying Islamist voters because it was fielded around the time of the Arab Spring — that is, during a rare moment of political liberalization in which Islamist parties were allowed to participate openly for political office. Therefore, it is likely that respondents were more comfortable with voicing support for an Islamist party at this time compared to previous periods during which such support may have been stigmatized, or even illegal³.

Given our primary interest in the secular-Islamist divide, we include only those countries with at least one active secular and Islamist party⁴. We also hone our analysis to the Middle East, where religious-secular issues are particularly salient and differences are likely to exist (Bell 2013). This leaves us with eight countries for analysis: Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Palestine, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen.

These countries, while similarly located, provide a diverse sample in terms of political institutions, the prevalence of Islamist politics, and trends in public opinion. For example, while the states of Algeria, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen are all listed as “not free” by Freedom House during the course of their survey period, Libya, Tunisia and Turkey are all listed as “partly free”. In addition, while both the Algerian and Jordanian constitutions include provisions designating an official role for Islam in their respective constitutions, Tunisia and Turkey are known for having more pluralist constitutional systems despite being governed by Islamist parties. Finally, next to multiple references to Islam as the state religion in Yemen and Palestine, shari’a is specified as the constitutional source of legislation, highlighting the significant position afforded to political Islam in these countries. Given this notable diversity in political systems which may condition the nature of ideological divides, we include country fixed effects in all of our statistical models.

³Due to their sensitivity, questions about vote choice and support for Islamist movements have been routinely excluded from survey questionnaires, particularly in the Arab world Benstead 2018. While concerns about social desirability bias still mar research relying on survey instruments, there is reason to believe that this bias has been decreasing in the post-Arab Spring period and is no more substantial in the Middle East — from which a number of the cases analyzed are drawn — than in other world regions (ibid)

⁴To categorize parties as Islamist or secular, we rely on a reading of the secondary (and primary) literature where possible. In large part, classifications for Islamist and secular parties come from Kurzman and Naqvi 2010 (updated by Kurzman and Türkoglu 2015) and Wegner and Cavatorta 2019, which compile the most comprehensive data on Islamist and secular-left parties to date. For newer parties, or countries not included in the Kurzman and Naqvi/Wegner and Cavatorta data, country-specific literature on parties was used to categorize secular-left and Islamist parties.

Operationalizing ideology in MMCs

To identify our primary outcome of interest — the secular-Islamist divide — we analyze seventeen attitudinal questions from the WVS which reflect key areas of ideological debate in the Muslim-majority world. We group these questions into four categories — 1) position on religion in socio-political life, 2) social values, 3) positions on democracy, and 4) economic preferences — which represent areas where cleavages in public preferences, should they exist, would be most likely to be found⁵. The selection of these issue areas are informed by prior academic research on the structure of ideology in the Muslim world (Denoeux 2002; Kurzman and Naqvi 2010; Wegner and Cavatorta 2019) as well as scholarship on the intellectual and cultural debates that surround the secular-Islamist divide (Sabri 2013; Gorman 2018; Kurzman and Türkoglu 2015; Schwedler 2011a). Below, we discuss each of these categories in turn, specifying our operationalization of each and offering predictions on how preferences would be aligned in the presence of a secular-Islamist divide.

Role of religion in socio-political life

First and foremost, belief in an expanded role for religion in politics and society is expected to be at the core of ideological debates in the Muslim-majority world and a key source of division between Islamist and secular voters (Blaydes and Linzer 2012). In the literature on political Islam, a distinguishing feature of Islamist parties is their preference for direct clerical involvement in government and their use of religious precepts to guide public policies, particularly as compared to secular parties who wish to relegate religion into the private sphere (Delibas 2009; ?). Though the specific form of such involvement may vary among Islamists, most scholars agree on

⁵It is important to note that, in selecting these four focus areas, we do not claim that these categories represents an exhaustive list of preference domains in Muslim-majority countries nor the only axes upon which Islamist and secular voters may be divided. While scholars have cited these as the main issues at the center of ideological debates in the Muslim world, there may be other issues that distinguish voters, for example preferences about globalization or attitudes on the Palestinian question. Where possible we have tried to control for these issues in the principal and subsequent analyses (see Appendix); however the WVS does not include questions on all issue areas. Nonetheless, we believe that this data offer a compelling first step in studying ideology in the Muslim-majority world.

a specific set of political preferences — support for implementing shari’a law, preference for rule by religious leaders, and feeling that piety is a desirable characteristic in politicians — that are indicative of Islamist ideology (Moaddel and Karabenick 2008; Tibi 2013; Gorman 2018; Wegner and Cavatorta 2019). At the same time, Islamists often advocate for the Islamization of society as a way of addressing the “cultural challenges faced by contemporary Muslim societies” (Denoeux 2002; 61), making them potentially less tolerant of religious freedom than those with more secular orientations (Kurzman and Türkoglu 2015; Schwedler 2011a).

Given this, we include two questions on religion in politics and society as a means of operationalizing preference for religious rule and (in)tolerance of religious pluralism: 1) whether religious authorities should be allowed to interpret the law, and 2) whether all religions should be taught in public schools. For each of these measures, original values from the WVS (coded on Likert scales) were re-coded so that higher values represented more conservative/religiously-oriented responses.

Social values

Closely related to the role of religion in socio-political life, citizens may also be divided in their attitudes regarding gender norms and social issues. While Muslim societies, in general, are known to hold more socially conservative positions on morality issues (premarital sex, divorce, abortion, and the like) than their Western counterparts, secular voters traditionally favor more liberal positions, even in the context of highly religious or morally restrictive environments (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Similarly, issues of gender equality have become fierce topics of debate in several countries. While certain countries — such as those in the Francophone Maghreb and non-Arab Muslim world — have been at the vanguard of promoting egalitarian social policies and gender regimes (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer Rizzo et al.; Tripp 2019), others continue to be characterized by neo-patriarchal attitudes and retrogressive gender laws (Moghadam 2020). In some contexts, issues related to gender equality are so salient that they have become takeoff issues, marked by a high level of attitudinal polarization and a refusal to compromise (Fish 2011; Ismail 2003; Schwedler

and Clark 2006). In specific, Islamist groups have been shown to hold more restrictive attitudes towards gender equality — promoting distinctive roles for men and women in society and opposing liberal reforms to legislation regarding women’s rights in marriage, inheritance, and divorce proceedings (Kurzman and Türkoglu 2015).

To capture attitudes on these dimensions, we include several questions on gender equality and morality. To measure gender egalitarianism, we include four separate questions which ask respondents to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements: 1) “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”, 2) “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women”, 3) “A university education is more important for a boy”, and 4) “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do”. Cronbach’s alpha (α) for these questions is .69, indicating that these questions reliably tap into the same construct of attitudes towards gender equality. Similarly our morality measures ($\alpha = .7$) include four questions which ask about the acceptability of homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and suicide. Although the WVS includes three other related questions (prostitution, sex before marriage, and euthanasia), these were not asked in all countries and thus were excluded. For each measure, responses are coded in Likert scales, with higher values indicating the presence of more liberal/gender egalitarian attitudes. While all respondents are expected to provide more conservative answers to these questions relative to citizens of Western nations (Inglehart 1977), relative to secular constituents, Islamist voters are expected hold less liberal positions on the above dimensions.

Institutional preferences & democratic value orientation

Third, attitudes regarding political preferences and democracy are critical to take into account. Debates over what types of political institutions are best for Muslim societies have long been a topic of public interest, with opinions about these issues only intensifying in the wake of the Arab Spring (Schwedler 2011b; Tibi 2013; Roy 2012; Fradkin 2013). In particular, discussions about the appropriateness of democracy have become especially salient in light of the failure of several pro-democratic movements and the retrenchment of autocracy throughout much of the contempo-

rary Middle East (). On the one hand, Islam itself is seen as incompatible with democracy due to the alleged tension that exists between the concept of popular sovereignty and the fusion between religion and state promoted within fundamentalist Islam (Filali-Ansary 1996). Exacerbating this negative association between Islam and democracy is the relatively high incidence of authoritarianism throughout the Muslim-majority world, particularly within countries in the Arab Middle East (Kedourie 1994; Stepan and Robertson 2003). On the other hand, recent scholarship has evidenced an uptick in democratic sentiment among Muslim citizens, with the vast majority of individuals ($\geq 80\%$ in most countries) expressing favorable opinions about the benefits of democracy and its appropriateness as a system of governance in their homelands (Jamal and Tessler 2008; Sabri 2013).

From a partisan standpoint, Islamist parties have long been considered to hold an opportunistic commitment to democracy (Lewis 1996; Tibi 2013). In much of the Muslim world, suspicions about the truthfulness of Islamists' commitment to democracy has driven the exclusion of such parties from electoral participation, as it is feared that Islamists might use democracy to come to power, only to later abandon this system and install theocracy in its place (Fox 2008; Blaydes and Lo 2011). While the bulk of scholarly evidence suggests that misgivings about the compatibility of political Islam and democracy may be unfounded (Gurses 2014; Tessler 2002; Wickham 2004; Yadav 2010), the recent rise of "illiberal Islamism" within parties such as the AKP in Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have once again brought attention to the possible "democratic deficit" among adherents of political Islam. At the same time, while the secular left has been generally seen as supportive of a secular version of democracy, the complicity of these parties with former autocrats — particularly in the repression of Islamists — calls into question the veracity of their democratic credentials (Cook 2005).

To measure citizens' attitudes towards democratic governance, we examine three questions that probe respondents' institutional preferences. The first question taps into citizens' preference for democratic leadership by asking "whether a strong leader that does not have to bother with parliament" is good or bad for the governing of the country. A second question, focusing on the

procedural aspects of democracy, asks whether “free and fair” elections are considered an essential feature of democratic rule. Lastly, to probe citizens’ personal commitment to democracy, we include a question which measures how important it is for respondents to live in a democratically governed country. For each of these indicators, responses from the WVS are re-coded so that higher values indicate greater support for democracy. Furthermore, because these questions tap into different theoretical constructs of democratic rule (leadership style, procedure, and value-orientation) we include them as three separate categories in our analysis.

Market economy & redistribution

Lastly, we include several measures that tap into citizen’s preferences regarding regulation of the economy and the state’s role in resource allocation. While many Middle Eastern countries initially embraced socialism as their primary model of development, in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis and the resultant push for liberalization promoted by the World Bank and IMF, policy debates arose around how much state intervention should be allowed in the market and what responsibility the government should have in ensuring the economic welfare of its citizens (). Members of the secular Left, including senior party members, staunchly opposed initiatives for economic liberalization, arguing that market reforms would constrain government’s economic sovereignty and expose citizens to the damaging effects of foreign competition. At the same time, these parties have promoted a greater focus on economic redistribution by the state to alleviate some of the financial burdens placed upon citizens as a result of economic reforms. Islamist parties, on the other hand, have expressed less consistent preferences on these issues, likely because there is no distinctive “Islamic” economic model (Gerges 2012; Habibi 2012). While some Muslim democratic parties, such as the Moroccan Justice and Development Party combine neo-liberal economic orientations with an emphasis on welfare and social safety nets, others, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, advocate for a more “nationalist-protectionist” model, which supports an interventionist state with extensive welfare policies (Yildirim 2010). Consequently, the extant literature provides less clear expectations on Islamist supporters preferences on economic issues and state intervention in the

economy. While Islamists are likely to be in favor of redistribution, given their parties' long-standing history of social welfare provision (Brooke 2019; Cammett 2014), it remains unknown how these preferences combine with opinions on inequality or state intervention in the economy.

To quantify these debates and operationalize citizen's economic preferences, we include three questions on state intervention in markets, which includes attitudes towards, private ownership, redistribution and inequality. For each question, respondents were asked to place their views on a scale of 1 to 10, indicating their level of agreement with one of two opposing statements, for example: "private ownership of business and industry should be increased" versus "government ownership of business and industry should be increased". For simplicity, responses were recoded into a five point scale, with higher values indicating a more leftist (i.e. anti-inequality, pro-government intervention, pro-welfare) value orientation.

Table 1 summarizes the type of attitudinal differences we would expect between secular and Islamist voters in the presence of a secular-Islamist ideological divide. While, in some cases, it is difficult to ascertain how voters will align on a particular issue, in many cases, establishing clear predictions is more straightforward. To reflect potential uncertainty about the saliency of issue areas, issues highlighted in bold indicate preferences that we consider unequivocal indicators of political ideology that would clearly evidence a secular-Islamist divide. Non-bolded issues are those that present greater challenges for identifying ideology, either because there is substantial variation upon these issues within the secular and Islamist camps, or because scholars offer contradictory predictions about voter's positionality on these issues. In sum, we expect Islamist voters to be particularly distinguished by their views on the role of religion in politics, and gender/morality issues, while secular supporters should hold highly distinctive views on economic issues and gender roles.

Demographic covariates

In addition to the attitudinal questions above, we include several demographic covariates associated with Islamist (and secular) support. Previous research has suggested that women (Tessler 2002;

Table 1: Predicted indicators of political ideology

	Islamist	Secular-Left
Religion in politics	More support	Less support
Gender	More conservative	More liberal
Moral issues	More conservative	More liberal
Democracy	Unclear	Unclear
Market economy	Unclear	Less support

Blaydes and Linzer 2008), the elderly (Wegner and Pellicer 2011), and the especially pious may be more likely to hold Islamist ideologies than their younger, male and non-religious counterparts. Finally, it is possible that secular constituents may be more likely to be poor and uneducated given these parties' traditional appeals to the economically underprivileged, while Islamists have been shown to draw support from a wide range of social and educational classes including students, middle class elites and the urban poor (Hermassi 1994; Masoud 2014; Pellicer and Wegner 2014). In recognition of these trends, we include covariates which measure respondents' gender, age, religiosity, education and income in our analysis.

Demographic covariates

In addition to the attitudinal questions above, we include several demographic covariates associated with Islamist (and secular) support. Previous research has suggested that women (Tessler 2002; Blaydes and Linzer 2008), the elderly (Wegner and Pellicer 2011), and the especially pious may be more likely to hold Islamist ideologies than their younger, male and non-religious counterparts. Finally, it is possible that secular constituents may be more likely to be poor and uneducated given these parties' traditional appeals to the economically underprivileged, while Islamists have been shown to draw support from a wide range of social and educational classes including students, middle class elites and the urban poor (Hermassi 1994; Masoud 2014; Pellicer and Wegner 2014). In recognition of these trends, we include covariates which measure respondents' gender, age, religiosity, education and income in our analysis.

Classifying ideology in the Middle East: Configuration of preferences and organization of beliefs

To investigate the existence of the secular-Islamist divide, we employ a multi-method approach. First, to gauge the extent to which attitudes and preferences are organized in a coherent way, we use principal component analysis (PCA) to identify the basic configuration of preferences. Next, we employ and latent class analysis (LCA) to assess the extent of constraint on the configuration of preferences. Finally, we use multinomial regression — predicting latent classes with the demographic covariates mentioned above — to examine the strength of the association between ideology and vote choice. As our above hypotheses suggest, if a secular-Islamist ideological division were to exist, we should expect religion in politics to be an especially prominent dimension of ideological conflict, with Islamist and secular voters, respectively, demonstrating similar preferences on these and related issues, and sorting into distinct ideological groups.

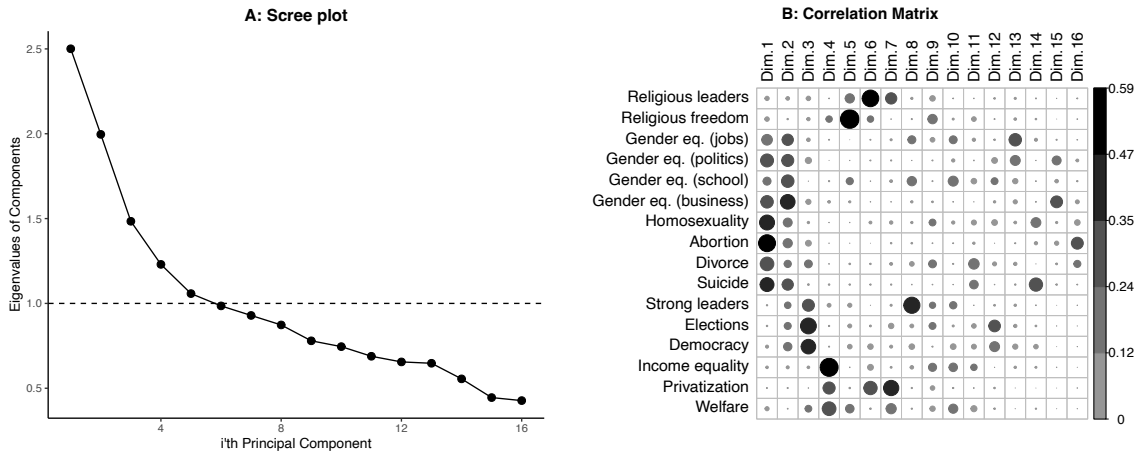
Configuration of preferences

As a first step in exploring the contours of political ideology in the Muslim-majority world, we use PCA on our data to determine whether there is any systematic grouping of preferences among respondents. A sizeable literature exists on the use of PCA to study the configuration of preferences both in political psychology (Carsey and Layman 2006; Heckman and Snyder Jr. 1997), and sociology (O'Brien and Noy 2015). With PCA, a data-matrix of multiple possibly correlated dimensions is converted into a number of smaller linearly uncorrelated composite dimensions, or principal components (PCs), that best summarize it. Thus, PCA allows us to map multiple survey responses into a space with lower-dimensionality, finding orthogonal dimensions that explain the largest part of the variation in the data.

If a secular-Islamist ideological divide were present, we should expect attitudes on religion in politics to form a central component in our analysis, being highly correlated with other survey responses or explaining much more of the variance in our data than the other PCs. However, as

Figure 1 shows, this is not what we observe. The scree plot depicted in Figure 1, panel A shows that the first six principal components have an eigenvalue bigger than 1 with the first four having considerably larger eigenvalues than the remaining PCs. Yet, as panel B reveals, these principal components have little to do with religious attitudes; instead voters seem principally divided on gender issues (16% of the total variance), moral issues (11%), attitudes towards democracy (9%), and issues of market regulation (9%). Religious issues, by contrast explain very little of the variance in the sample ($\approx 6\%$ for each item, respectively) and are weakly associated with one another, indicating their marginality as a driver of ideological differentiation. Furthermore, religious items do not significantly overlap with other principal components in the analysis, as suggested by the low correlation coefficients depicted in Figure 1. Thus, while there is some level of organization of citizens' preferences, attitudes on the role of religion in politics do not play a critical role in structuring these preferences, casting doubt on the existence of a secular-Islamist divide.

Figure 1: Results from principal component analysis (PCA)



Organization of attitudes

To add further depth to our analysis of preference configuration, we also conduct an LCA, which has been widely used to uncover subgroupings of individuals based on multivariate categorical or continuous data (Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Alvares et al. 2017; ?; Petersen et al. 2019). Like PCA, LCA models identify latent variables based on observed responses to multiple empirical indicators — in our case, responses to survey questions. Yet, unlike factor analysis or PCA, the latent variables in latent class analysis are respondent-centered, rather than item-centered; in other words, LCA assumes that discrete groupings of individuals exist in the population of interest, and therefore “probabilistically group[s] respondents] into a ‘latent class’” (Linzer and Lewis 2012; 2) based on similar patterns of survey responses. Moreover, latent subgroups can be characterized by multiple dimensions, rather than being categorized along a single continuous scale. Because we cannot assume strong priors regarding the distribution of attitudes in our sample or the dimensionality of ideological space, a latent class model is ideal for the research task at hand.

The main LCA models in our analysis include the indicators described in the “Data” section above, as well as a set of sociodemographic covariates that includes age, education, income,

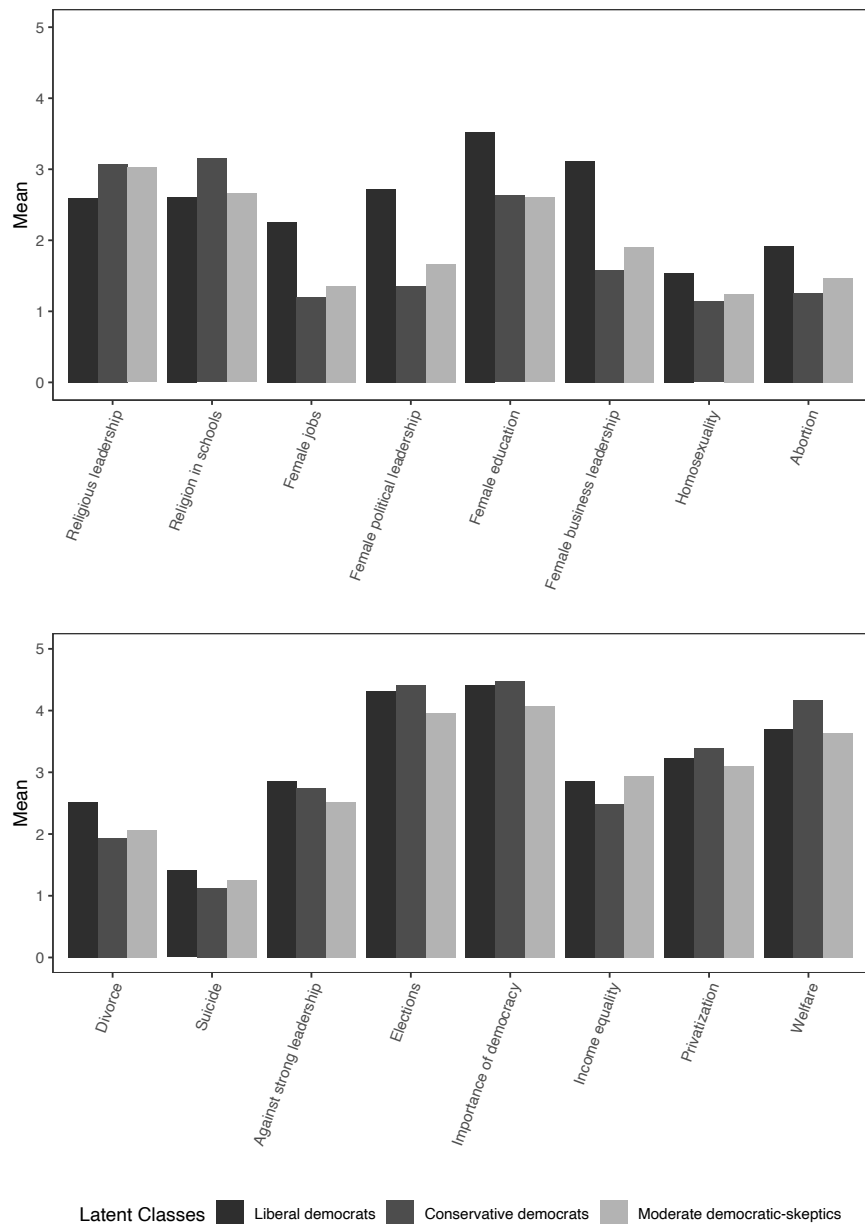
gender, religiosity, and vote choice⁶. For the purpose of our analysis, we treated the attitudinal indicators as ordinal, rather than continuous. After the deletion of observations with missing data on socio-demographic covariates, our sample size was 4,504.

To determine the appropriate distribution of classes, we fit latent class models successively, starting with a 1-class model and then adding another class for each subsequent model. In keeping with standard practice, we used Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), goodness of fit statistic (χ^2), and interpretability of model results to select the appropriate class number (?). Based on these criteria, we selected a three-class model to best distinguish between population subgroups. While the AIC and BIC were lowest in the four-class solution (Figure 1A), classes were most coherent, and more amenable to interpretation, in the three-class model.

The three classes identified by the latent class analysis provide considerable insight into the organization of citizen attitudes in Muslim-majority countries (Figure 2). In particular, the organization of preferences among voters appear to be three-dimensional: individuals vary significantly in their levels of social conservatism and, separately, their support for democracy. It is notable that, of the three classes, none were extreme on any single dimension — while there are clear differences between classes, considerable overlap exists among classes on a number of attitudes. Importantly, confirming our empirical findings above, religion does not appear to be a major dividing line among classes, and no class conformed perfectly to the traditional secular-Islamist attitudinal profiles identified within the literature.

⁶By adding socio-demographic covariates to our analysis, we can produce more accurate assignment of observations to latent classes by incorporating demographic information to adjust individuals' prior probabilities of belonging to each latent class (Clogg 1981; Hagenars 1993).

Figure 2: Response means by latent class



Liberal Democrats

The first class identified by the latent class model, which we term “liberal democrats”, is the least prevalent in the overall sample — comprising roughly 25% of voters. Individuals in this class are distinguished by their “liberal” attitudes towards on gender and social issues; while not as liberal as typical voters from Western countries, these individuals are most likely to advocate for more equitable roles for men and women in political, economic and private life, and are less likely to express opposition to taboo social behaviors such as abortion and divorce. Still, on several dimensions, this class exhibits conservative tendencies — like other classes they are largely opposed to homosexuality and suicide (though to a lesser extent than other classes) and express noticeable ambivalence towards redistribution and government intervention in markets. Finally, this group is highly supportive of “secular democracy”. Compared to other classes, they show middling levels of support for religious leadership but strong preferences for elections and democratic governance.

Conservative Democrats

Opposing the liberal democrats are the class we term “conservative democrats” (32% of the sample). The defining feature of this class is that they are the most conservative on gender issues (particularly regarding the role of male leadership in political and economic life), in line with their strong preference for moral conservatism. This class is also the most supportive of democratic governance; while they are only mildly opposed to strong leadership, they consider elections and democracy to be of paramount importance in their political lives. With regards to the economy, they display somewhat incongruous attitudes, expressing strong preferences for both privatization and state reallocation of resources in the form of welfare. Finally, while attitudes are far from extreme, this group displays the strongest preference for religious leadership and the least amount of tolerance for other religions.

Moderate Democratic-Skeptics

The largest class in the sample — 43% of respondents — is the “moderate democratic-skeptics”. As an intermediate between the liberal and conservative democrats, this class combines moderate positions on gender issues with conservative political attitudes. Like the conservative class, they are generally in favor of religious leadership and are somewhat conservative on social issues. However, similar to the liberal democrats, they are tolerant of other religions and express similar hesitation to government intervention in the economy. On gender issues, they hold moderate views; while they express more progressive views than conservatives, they are less gender-egalitarian than the liberal class. Finally, their defining feature is their ambivalence towards democracy. While they are still quite supportive of democracy in general — with most respondents ranking democratic governance as “very important” — compared to other classes, they are the least likely to rank elections as a necessary feature of democracy and the most supportive of authoritarian leadership.

Summary

The three classes yielded by the latent class analysis highlights the diversity of mass attitudes in Middle Eastern countries — especially among individuals who are typically lumped together under a broad “conservative” label. While several classes do display more conservative attitudes towards gender and social issues, there is a significant share who hold more liberal views and combine these with middling support for religious rule. Similarly, there are also many voters who are socially conservative and highly in favor of religious leadership but who nonetheless remain supportive of free and fair elections and democratic governance. Finally, a third group of individuals are more moderate in their views towards social issues and gender, but expresses more skeptical views about elections and democracy. Notably, individuals in these latter two groups are disproportionately likely to vote for Islamist parties, as we discuss below.

Explaining belief systems: Is there evidence of a secular-Islamist divide?

Having established the configuration of preferences and classification of ideological subgroups at the mass-level, we investigate the strength of ideological cleavages, where strength refers to the extent to which assignment into an ideological class is associated with specific demographic characteristics or behaviors. Previous research suggests that political competition in Middle Eastern countries is highly polarized, with the conflict between Islamist and secular partisans being the dominant political cleavage. Yet, if secular and Islamist voters are ideologically distinct from one another, we should be able to categorize constituents into separate ideological classes, based on observed characteristics such as partisan affiliation, education or gender. In the analysis that follows, we use latent class regression — the inclusion of covariates in an LCA — to test the net association of ideological class assignment with demographic characteristics, focusing specifically on the relationship between ideology and vote choice.

Table 2 presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression predicting latent class with demographic covariates, where the reference category is liberal democrats. As is evident, vote choice is strongly related to membership in the liberal democratic class, with Islamist voters being significantly less likely to be classified as “liberal democrats” than their secular counterparts (19.1% compared to 29.8%).

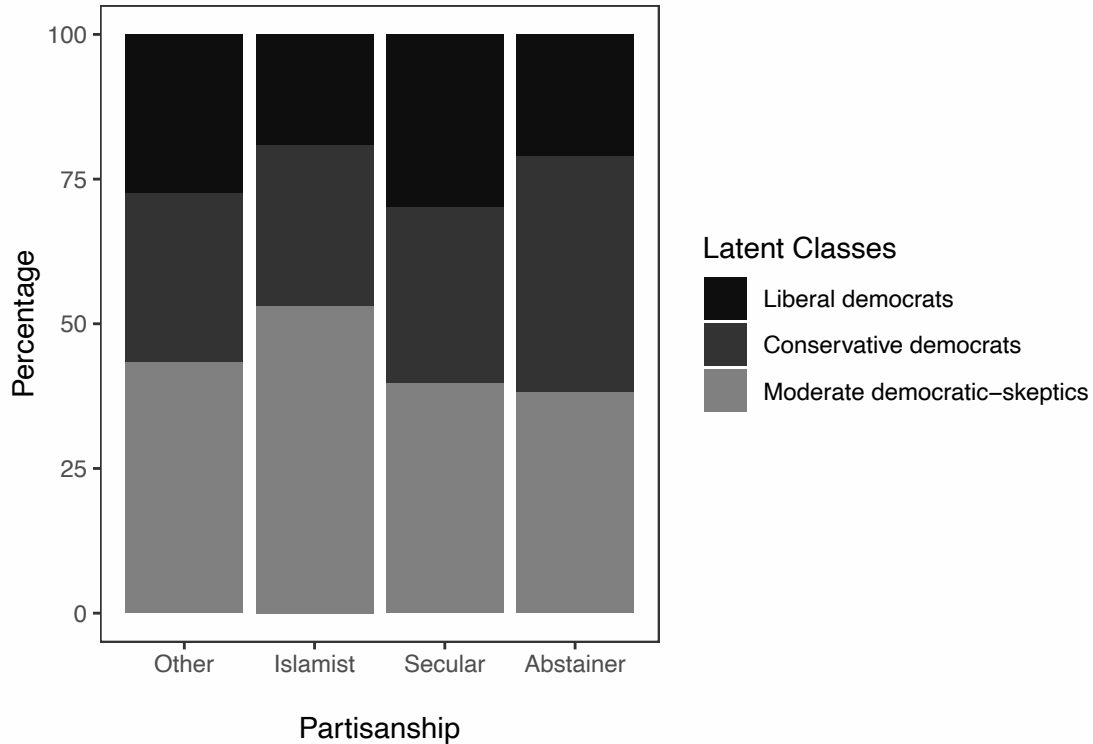
Table 2: Multinomial logistic regression

	Conservative vs. liberal democrats		Moderate democratic skeptics vs. liberal democrats	
Intercept	-0.003	(0.351)	-0.545*	(0.328)
Vote choice (non voter)	-0.071	(0.169)	0.153***	(0.153)
Vote choice (Islamist)	0.449***	(0.148)	0.512***	(0.132)
Vote choice (other)	0.071	(0.188)	-0.113	(0.194)
Religiosity	0.220***	(0.050)	0.086*	(0.049)
Gender	1.511***	(0.130)	1.495***	(0.119)
Age	0.007*	(0.004)	0.001	(0.004)
Education	-0.33***	(0.038)	-0.326***	(0.036)
Income	-0.198***	(0.062)	-0.080*	(0.059)
Country fixed effects	✓		✓	

*Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$*

However, while the distribution of ideological profiles differs between secular-Left and Islamist voters, it is important to note that how little divergence we observe among these groups in most substantive areas. Contrary to theoretical expectations, ideological positions do not map cleanly onto partisan divides; secular-Left voters are not overwhelmingly liberal nor are Islamists predominately conservative. Rather, for all voters, the most prevalent class is the moderate democratic-skeptics, i.e. those that hold intermediate views on most issue areas (Figure 3). Similarly, while there is strong evidence that Islamists are more likely to be illiberal in their gender and social views than secularists, attitudes on other dimensions display much more overlap between secular-Left and Islamist groups. For example, secular-Left voters display relatively favorable opinions towards religious leadership, with the majority of secular partisans agreeing that religious authorities

Figure 3: Predicted probability of class by vote choice

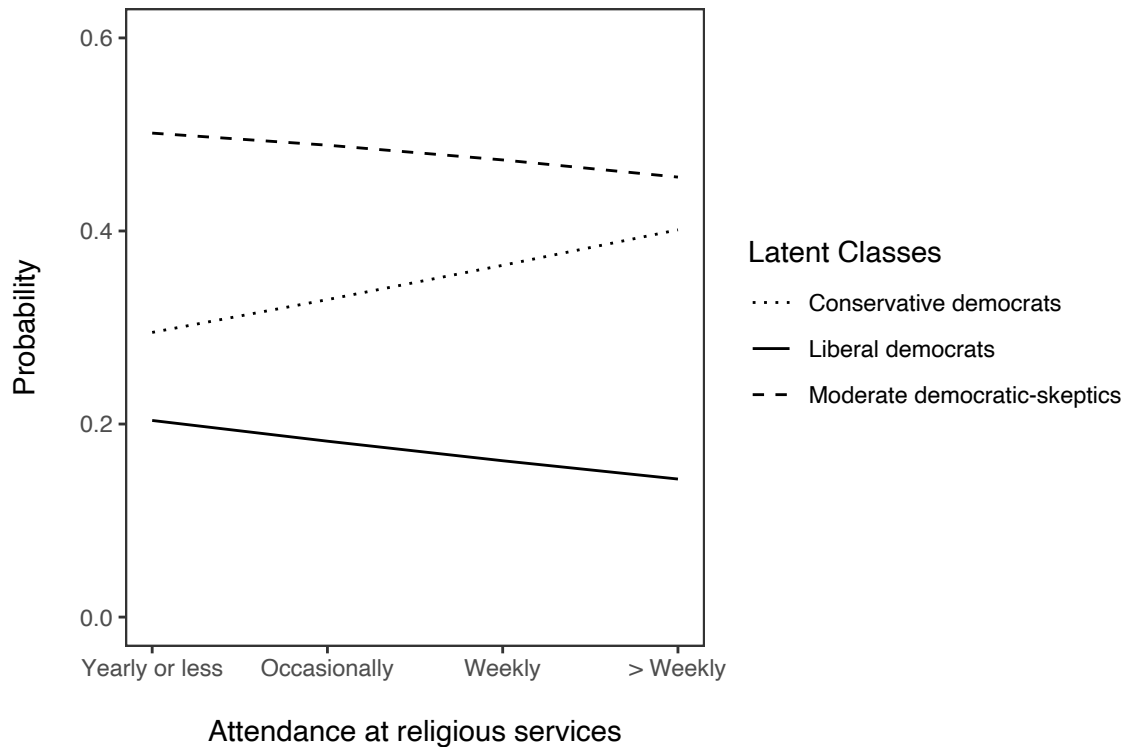


should have some ability to interpret the law. Additionally, on the issue of democratic governance, many Islamists hold highly positive views, despite concerns about Islamist parties' commitment to democratic rule. While a contingent of Islamist voters — moderate democratic skeptics – express ambivalence about the procedural aspects of the democratic process (i.e. elections) overall, these individuals are still highly supportive of democracy, and view it as very important in their lives.

Beyond vote choice, we also find that several other demographic characteristics significantly predict the likelihood of class assignment. Echoing the findings of Blaydes and Linzer, gender is highly correlated with conservatism. More men than women make up the conservative democrat class (36% versus 26%), while women are more likely to belong to the liberal class than men (38% versus 13%). Similarly, as might be expected, personal religiosity (as indicated by religious service attendance) is highly correlated with membership in the conservative democrat class with those who attend religious service more than weekly having a 40% probability of being classified as conservative democrats (Figure 4). By contrast, frequent service attendees show a slightly

lower probability of belonging to the liberal and moderate democratic-skeptic classes — for each of these categories the probability of class membership decreases by six and five percentage points respectively when religious service attended increases from yearly to more than weekly.

Figure 4: Predicted probability of class by religious service attendance

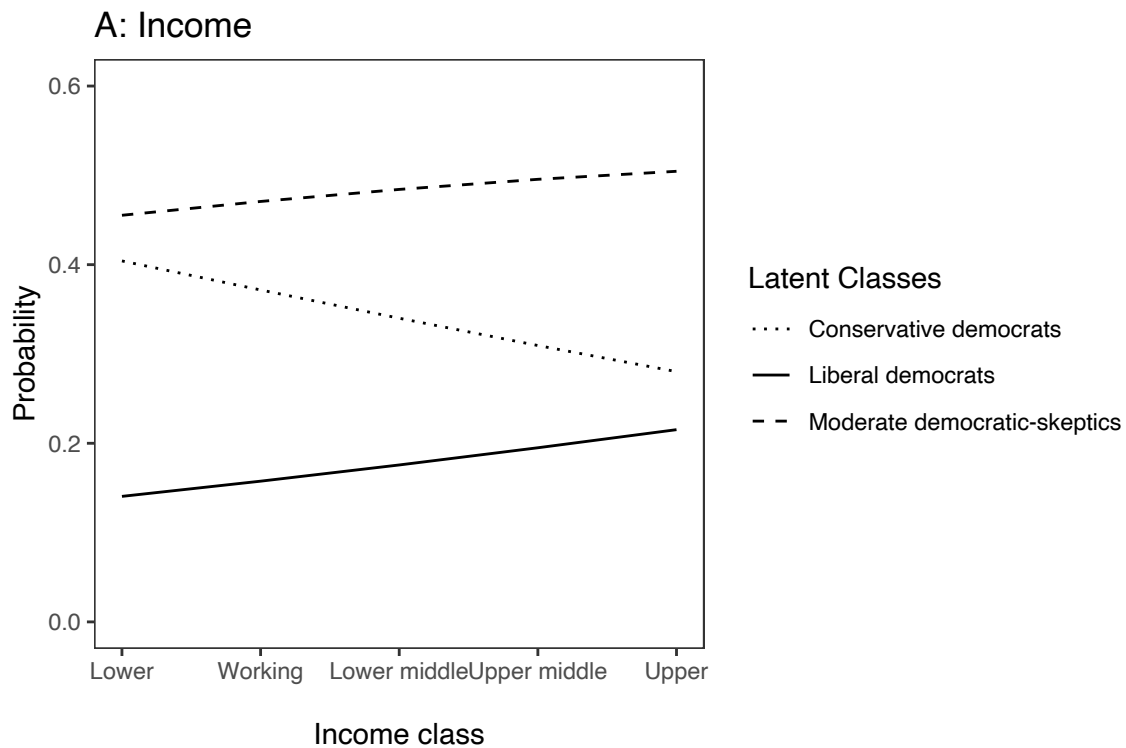


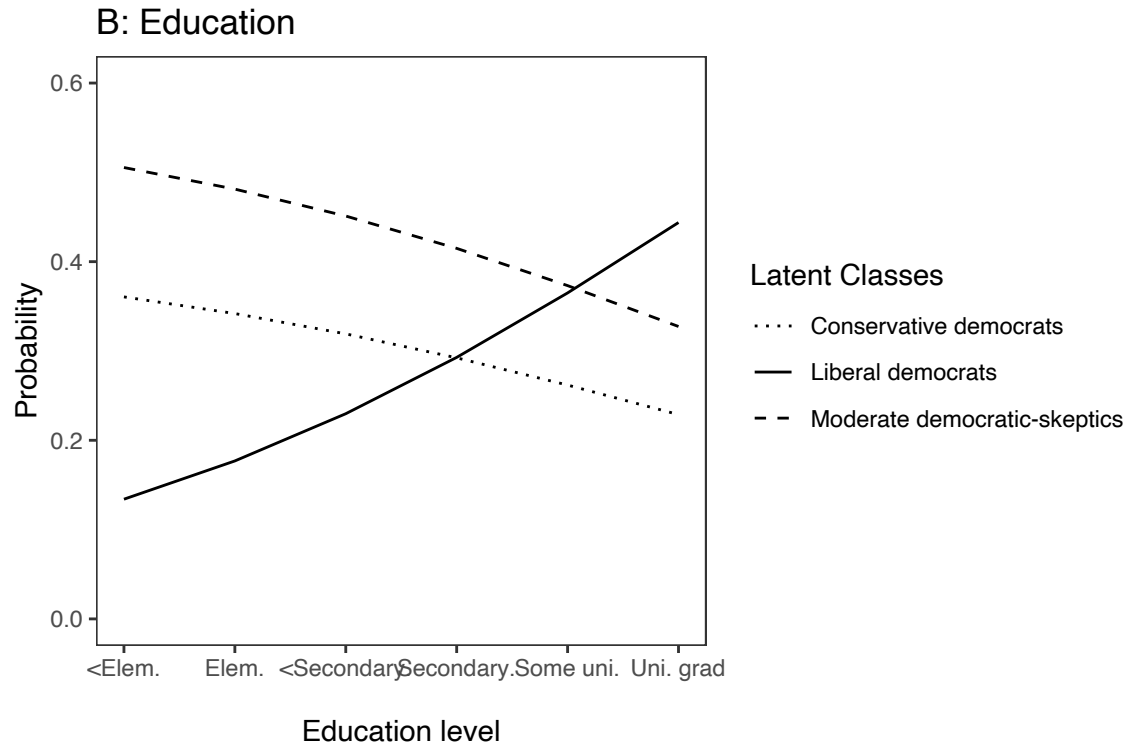
Education and socio-economic status (SES) are also significant predictors of class membership. The substantive effect of education on the probability of belonging to the liberal class is especially noteworthy; for those with less than secondary education the probability of being identified as a liberal democrat is 23%, while for university graduates this figure increases to 44% (Figure 5, Panel B). Additionally, the likelihood of belonging to the conservative and moderate classes decreases markedly with increased education, reaching a minimum of 22% and 32% respectively. Finally, the proportion of conservative respondents decreases with higher SES (Figure 5, Panel B). As income increases to the highest quintile, the estimated proportion of conservative democrats is reduced by a third. Our findings thus mirror those of studies done among radical right voters in Europe and the United States, which show that individuals with less supportive attitudes

towards liberal democracy tend to be un/under-educated and less financially secure than the average voter. However, it is worth noting that income does not significantly reduce the likelihood of belonging to the moderate class as compared to the liberal-democratic class ($p = .16$).

Finally, age exhibits significant, although less substantive, effects on class assignment. Consistent with expectations, conservative democrats are likely to be older as compared to moderate democratic-skeptics, while the probability of being a liberal democratic-skeptic decreases considerably with age. As with all of the previous indicators, these differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Figure 5: Predicted probability of class by income and education





Summary

Taking the results of the latent class analysis and regression together, our findings reveal considerable ideological diversity among voters in Muslim-majority countries and evidence the relative weakness of the so-called “secular-Islamist” divide. While Islamist and secular voters differ in their attitudes on some issue areas (notably gender roles and social issues), this disagreement is neither as prevalent nor as polarizing as elite-centered narratives suggest. Instead, evidence demonstrates that Islamists are more democratically-oriented than current accounts claim, while secular constituents are more religious and traditional than they are typically portrayed. Thus, while secularists and Islamists may invoke different visions of what an ideal democracy would look like, they appear largely united on a number of issues regarding governance, religious tolerance, and the economy.

Robustness Checks

We conduct several robustness checks to ensure that our results are not driven by our data or model specifications. First, to mitigate concerns about cross-national variation in our sample and ensure that influential country-cases are not biasing our results, we run separate latent class analyses for each country included in our sample. In countries with historical legacies of political repression against Islamist parties and religious groups, the exclusion of Islamists from the electoral arena may increase support for democracy among Islamist voters, leading us to overestimate the prevalence of democratic support within this group. On the other hand, in countries with a tradition of state secularism, such as Tunisia and Turkey, citizens may be less likely to openly express conservative ideologies; therefore, the conservative democrat class may be less common.

We find that a three-class solution accurately captures ideological classes in each of our single-country models with two notable exceptions: Jordan and Yemen (Fig 2A). To ensure that these cases are not significantly biasing our results, we re-estimate our latent class model on the full sample of country-cases, performing step-wise exclusion of cases via a jackknife procedure. We find that the class proportions in each of these jackknifed models are substantively similar to those of the main model, increasing our confidence in the robustness of our results.

Second, to determine whether the classes found in the main model exist outside of the Arab Spring, we estimate our models on an alternate version of the WVS. Given the opening of the political systems throughout the Arab world and the subsequent rise of several Islamist parties, supporters of Islamist groups may have been more forthcoming about their attitudes during the Arab Spring compared to periods before or after. Especially as concerns support for democracy, Islamist constituents may have been stronger advocates for democratic governance at a time in which such a system held the possibility of bringing their preferred parties to power, consistent with the “opportunistic” characterization of Islamist parties (Lewis 1996; Tibi 2013).

By comparing the relative distribution of latent classes found in WVS surveys administered during 2010-2014 (Wave 6) and 2017-2020 (Wave 7), we can examine stability in the prevalence of preferences and political attitudes over time. Thus, we ran identical LCA models on WVS

data from Waves 6 and 7, taking advantage of the fact that the WVS featured similar questions on religious issues, social values, institutional preferences and the economy in both surveys⁷.

The main result of our analysis is that the *structure* of ideology has remained consistent over time, but that the *prevalence* of certain classes has varied markedly. As shown in Appendix Table A4, we find that both LCAs produced a best-fit model with three classes, conforming to the “liberal”, “moderate”, and “conservative” classes described above. In terms of specific attitudes, the preferences of the classes remains similar with a few notable exceptions (Figure 3A). For all classes support for democratic governance decreased, consistent with evidence of growing “disappointment with democracy” in the revolutionary states of the Middle East (?), though for many classes (e.g. conservatives and liberals) these changes were minimal. Additionally, conservative support for more liberal gender and social positions increased on a number of items. In specific, conservative democrats appear more supportive of female leadership, abortion, and divorce than they have in previous periods. This observation aligns with recent literature which shows that Islamist elites in countries like Tunisia have moderated their positions on women’s issues to appeal to a broader population (Tripp 2019; Glas and Spierings 154). Nonetheless, these changes do not significantly alter our results, since *net* differences among the conservative and liberal democratic classes on gender issues remain similar over time.

Interestingly, although the structure of political attitudes does not change significantly over the seven year period, we find that the prevalence of classes has shifted noticeably over time. Examining the distribution of respondents across classes (Figure 4A), we observe a rise in the number of conservative and liberal democrats at the expense of the moderate democratic-skeptic class. For both the liberal and conservative classes, the number of assigned respondents increased by six percent, while the number of moderate democratic-skeptics declined by twelve percent. Ultimately, these findings attest to the durability of ideological attitudes in the Middle East, while providing (limited) hope for the possibility of cross-ideological cooperation and compromise, even on divisive issues like gender and democracy, in the future.

⁷Certain questions included in the main analysis were not available later WVS waves. In specific, the question on religious pluralism was omitted from Wave 6, and thus does not appear in our longitudinal analysis.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social scientists have demonstrated that political ideology is structured differently on the mass and elite levels, with voters exhibiting less ideological constraint and more normally distributed attitudes than party and government leaders. However, the relative dearth of studies of individual-level political attitudes among voters and constituents in the Muslim-majority world has overstated the role of religion in shaping political behavior and obscured potential agreement between voters on various social and political issues. In this study, we examine the nature of organization of ideological preference among voters in the Middle East, using novel empirical methods which identify ideological classifications based on voters' latent attitudes and characteristics. We show that voters in Middle Eastern countries exhibit significant ideological diversity, but that this does not cleanly map onto partisan affiliation or vote choice. Descriptive results suggest that secularists and Islamists alike support religious pluralism, oppose government intervention in the economy and exhibit strong desires for electoral democracy. While there is some evidence that Islamist voters tend to be less liberal than their secular counterparts, this division is limited to discussions of social norms and gender equality, and does not heavily permeate larger issues about governance and institutional design.

Our findings thus nuance debates about secular-Islamist divides, showing that these ideological differences are likely ones of detail rather than substance. Both camps agree that democracy is an ideal method for governing society, but disagree on the specific type of democracy (whether secular or religious) that should be implemented. While this difference is important, the depth of agreement between secularist and Islamist voters highlights the need for more systematic studies of voter values, behaviors, and policy preferences in the Muslim world. Without such studies, general agreement on issues among the electorate may be overshadowed by ideological polarization among elites, leading to false assessments about the importance of religious issues and the impossibility of cooperation among different ideological camps.

Indeed, a major conclusion of our research is that religious attitudes do not systematically organize citizens' preferences in the Arab world; mass ideology is multi-dimensional and citizens'

may hold opinions on multiple (uncorrelated) policy issues at the same time. Therefore, parties have a breadth of issues upon which they can mobilize potential voters — rather than emphasizing the religious-secular dimension they could highlight issues of democratic governance or positions on the economy, which are equally (if not more) important to voters. A significant implication of our research, then, is to suggest that parties who can successfully address these issues may be able to build broader coalitions of support through vote switching. Research on Turkey provides evidence of this dynamic; as Gidengil and Karakoç (2016) convincingly show, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has amassed diverse support — from both religious and secular voters — by addressing citizens’ “bottom-line” concerns like the provision of social services, democratization, and economic performance. Results from opinion surveys suggest that similar dynamics may be at play in the broader Middle East. Preliminary analysis of data from a 2013 Pew survey, for example, shows that respondent’s who report greater interest in democracy are more likely to view Islamist parties as equal or better to other alternatives ($\chi^2 = 34.06$, Table 2A).

At the same time, we recognize that our study, while nuancing the dominant narrative on political ideology in the Middle East, has some limitations. For example, the sixth wave of the World Values survey lacks survey items probing preferences for shari’a law, thereby disabling us from capturing support for more fundamentalist variants of political Islam⁸. While we are sensitive to this concern, we see this as a rationale for global surveys to adopt more nuanced measures for operationalizing political ideology in the Muslim world. At present, most surveys that have comprehensive measures of political Islam lack questions on social values, which our research shows to be important dimensions of ideology. On the other hand, surveys that include these questions insufficiently operationalize the varying aspects of political Islam (Denoeux 2002).

Second, while our analysis takes into account possible differences among the countries in our sample, we cannot definitively say that ideological divides will operate the same way in all countries or that disagreements on certain issues will have the same salience within different political environments. Indeed, scholars have suggested that in highly secular/post-modern contexts

⁸To the extent that fundamentalist attitudes have been shown to be correlated with conservative positions on gender and social issues (Blaydes and Linzer 2008), this could lead us to estimate the extent of secular-Islamist divides

debates over issues like gender equality and identity politics may hold greater importance and form new cleavages within politics and society (Bornschier 2010; Hooge and Marks 2018). Similarly, differences in the domestic balance of power between Islamist and secular parties may affect the salience and severity of ideological divides: where Islamists obtain enough political power to enact their preferences wholesale, debates over the implementation of secular versus religious democracy can cripple political transition, as witnessed in Egypt (Hamid 2014). Thus, future research should deepen attention to contextual factors by using hierarchical methods and cross-country qualitative comparisons to examine how the contours of the secular-Islamist divide change within different country contexts and across time. Nevertheless, considering the dearth of systematic research on voter attitudes in the Muslim world, we believe that the present study is a crucial first step in understanding the intersection between attitudes, ideology and political behavior among secular and Islamist constituents.

References

- Abduljaber, M. (2018). The dimensionality, type, and structure of political ideology on the political party level in the arab world. *Chinese Political Science Review* 3(4), 464–494.
- Al-Sharif, O. (2016). The secular islamist divide deepens in jordan. Technical report, Middle East Institute.
- Alvares, R. M., I. Levin, and N. nez (2017). The four faces of political participation in argentina: Using latent class analysis to study political behavior. *The Journal of Politics* 79(4), 1386–1402.
- Baldassarri, D. and P. Bearman (2008). Dynamics of political polarization. *American Sociological Review* 72(5), 784–811.
- Barberá, P., N. J. Casas, Andreau, P. J. Egan, R. Bonney, and T. J. A. Jost, John T. (2019). Who leads? who follows? measuring issue attention and agenda setting by legislators and the mass public using social media data. *American Political Science Review* 113(4), 883–901.
- Bell, J. (2013). The world’s muslims: Religion, politics and society. Technical report, Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life.
- Benstead, L. J. (2018). Survey research in the arab world: Challenges and opportunities. *PS, Political Science & Politics* 51(3), 535–542.
- Berenschot, W. (2018). The political economy of clientelism: A comparative study of indonesia’s patronage democracy. *Comparative Political Studies* 51(12), 1563–1593.
- Bilgili, N. (2015). Religiosity and tolerance in turkey: Is islam the problem? *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15(4), 473–494.
- Blaydes, L. and D. A. Linzer (2008). The political economy of women’s support for funamentalist islam. *World Politics* 60(4), 225–243.
- Blaydes, L. and D. A. Linzer (2012). Elite competition, religiosity, and anti-americanism in the islamic world. *American Political Science Review* 106(2), 225–243.
- Blaydes, L. and J. Lo (2011). One man, one vote, one time? a model of democratization in the middle east. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 24(1), 110–146.
- Bornschieer, S. (2010). The new cultural divide and the two dimensional political space in western europe. *West European Politics* 33(3), 419–444.
- Broockman, D. E. (2016). Approaches to studying policy representation. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(1), 181–215.
- Brooke, S. (2019). *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.
- Buehler, M. (2018). *Why alliances fail: Islamist and leftist coalitions in North Africa*. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press.

- Cammett, M. (2014). *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.
- Carmines, E. G. and J. Stimson (1989). *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carsey, T. M. and G. C. Layman (2006). Changing sides or changing minds? party identification and policy preferences in the american electorate. *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2), 464–477.
- Catalano, S. L. (2011). Islamists and the regime: Applying a new framework for analysis to the case of family code reforms in morocco. *Party Politics* 19(3), 408–431.
- Cavatorta, F. (2009). ‘divided they stand, divided they fall’: Opposition politics in morocco. *Democratization* 16(1), 137–156.
- Clark, J. (2006). The conditions of islamist moderation: Unpacking cross-ideological cooperation in jordan. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38(4), 539–560.
- Clogg, C. C. (1981). New developments in latent structure analysis. *Factor Analysis and Measurement in Sociological Research*, 215–246.
- Converse, P. E. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*. New York NY: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Cook, S. (2005). The right way to promote arab reform. *Foreign Affairs* 84(2), 91–102.
- Corstange, D. (2012). Vote trafficking in lebanon. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44(3), 483–505.
- Dalton, R. J. (1985). Political parties and political representation: party supporters and party elites in nine nations. *Comparative Political Studies* 18(3), 267–299.
- Delibas, K. (2009). Conceptualizing islamic movements: The case of turkey. *International Political Science Review* 30(1), 89–103.
- Denoeux, G. (2002). The forgotten swamp: Navigating political islam. *Middle East Policy* 9(2), 56–81.
- El-Ghobashy, M. (2005). The metamorphosis of the egyptian muslim brothers. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37(3), 539–560.
- Ellis, C. and J. Stimson (2009). Symbolic ideology in the american electorate. *Electoral Studies* 28, 388–402.
- Ellis, C. and J. A. Stimson (2012). *Ideology in America*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Esposito, J. and J. O. Voll (1996). *Islam and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Filali-Ansary, A. (1996). Islam and liberal democracy: The challenge of secularization. *Journal of Democracy* 7(2), 76–80.
- Fiorina, M. P., S. J. Abrams, and J. C. Pope (2005). *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Fiorina, M. P., S. J. Abrams, and J. C. Pope (2008). Polarization in the american public: Misconceptions and misreadings. *Perspectives on Politics* 7(2), 556–560.
- Fish, M. S. (2011). *Are Muslims Distinctive*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fossati, D., E. Aspinall, B. Muhtadi, and E. Warburton (2020). Ideological representation in clientelistic democracies: The Indonesian case. *Electoral Studies* 63, 1–12.
- Fox, J. (2008). *A world survey of religion and the state*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Fradkin, H. (2013). Arab democracy or islamist revolution? *Journal of Democracy* 24(1), 5–13.
- Gerges, F. (2012). The new capitalists: Islamists' political economy. URL: www.opendemocracy.net/fawaz-gerges/new-capitalists-islamists-political-economy (last accessed: June 11, 2021).
- Gidengil, E. and Karakoç (2016). Which matters more in the electoral success of islamist (successor) parties – religion or performance?: the Turkish case. *Party Politics* 22(3), 325–338.
- Glas, S. and N. Spierings (131–154). *Double-Edged Politics on Women's Rights in the MENA Region*, Chapter Changing Tides? On How Popular Support for Feminism Increased after the Arab Spring. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gorman, B. (2018). The myth of the secular-islamist divide in muslim politics: Evidence from Tunisia. *Current Sociology* 66(1), 145–164.
- Grigoriadis, I. N. (2009). Islam and democratization in Turkey: secularism and trust in a divided society. *Democratization* 16(6), 1194–1213.
- Gurses, M. (2014). Islamists, democracy and Turkey: A test of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. *Party Politics* 20(4), 646–653.
- Habibi, N. (2012). The economic agendas and expected economic policies of Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia. Technical Report 67. URL: <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB67.pdf> (last accessed: June 11, 2021).
- Hagenaars, J. A. (1993). *Loglinear Models with Latent Variables*. New York NY: Sage Publications.
- Hamid, S. (2014). *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.

- Haugbølle, R. H. and F. Cavatorta (2009). Will the real tunisian opposition please stand up? opposition coordination failures under authoritarian constraints. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38(3), 323–341.
- Heckman, J. J. and J. M. Snyder Jr. (1997). Linear probability models of the demand for attributes with an empirical application to estimating the preferences of legislators. *The RAND Journal of Economics* 28(0), 142–189.
- Hermassi, E. (1994). Montée et déclin du mouvement islamiste en tunisie. *Confluences Méditerranée* 12, 33–50.
- Hetherington, M. J. and T. J. Rudolph (2015). *Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hooge, L. and G. Marks (2018). Cleavage theory meets europe's crises: Lipset, rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy* 25(1), 109–135.
- Hunter, S. (1995). The rise of islamist movements and the western response: Clash of civilizations or clash of interests. In L. Guazzone (Ed.), *The Islamist Dilemma: The Political Role of Islamist Movements in the Contemporary Arab World*. London UK: Ithaca Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1977). *The silent revolution: changing values and political styles among Western publics*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. and P. Norris (2003). *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ismail, S. (2003). *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism*. New York NY: I.B. Tauris.
- Jamal, A. and M. Tessler (2008). Attitudes in the arab world. *Journal of Democracy* 19(1), 97–110.
- Kalyvas, S. (2000). Commitment problems in emerging democracies: The case religious parties. *Comparative Politics* 32(4), 379–398.
- Kedourie, E. (1994). *Democracy and Arab political culture*. London UK: Frank Cass.
- Kilani, M. (2013). A return to conflict between leftists and islamists: A healthy phenomenon or a threat to democracy? *Al-Chourouk*. URL: www.alchourouk.com/9577/151/1/ (last accessed: June 09, 2021).
- Kinder, D. (MacKuen, Michael, and Rabinowitz, George). Belief systems after converse. In *Electoral Democracy*, Chapter Belief Systems After Converse. University of Michigan Press.
- Knight, K. (2006). Transformations of the concept of ideology in the twentieth century. *American Political Science Review* 100(4), 619–626.
- Kurzman, C. and I. Naqvi (2010). Do muslims vote islamic? *Journal of Democracy* 21(2), 50–63.

- Kurzman, C. and D. Türkoglu (2015). Do muslims vote islamic now? *Journal of Democracy* 26(4), 100–109.
- Lauderdale, B., C. Hanretty, and N. Vivyan (2018). Decomposing public opinion variation into ideology, idiosyncrasy and instability. *Journal of Politics* 80(2), 707–712.
- Lewis, B. (1996). Islam and liberal democracy: A historical overview. *Journal of Democracy* 7(2), 52–63.
- Linzer, D. A. and J. B. Lewis (2012). polca: An r package for polytomous variable latent class analysis. *Journal of Statistical Software* 42(10), 225–243.
- Lust, E. (2009). Competitive clientelism in the middle east. *Journal of Democracy* 20(3), 122–135.
- Marschall, M., A. Aydogan, and A. Bulut (2016). Does housing create votes? explaining the electoral success of the akp in turkey. *Electoral Studies* 42(1), 201–212.
- Mason, L. (2013). The rise of uncivil agreement: Issue versus behavioral polarization in the american electorate. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57(1), 140–159.
- Mason, L. (2015). ‘i disrespectfully agree’: The differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization. *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1), 539–560.
- Mason, L. (2018). Ideologues without issues: The polarizing consequences of ideological identities. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82(1), 866–887.
- Masoud, T. (2014). *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Meguid, B. (2005). *Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Moaddel, M. and S. Karabenick (2008). Religious fundamentalism among young muslims in egypt and saudi arabia. *Social Forces* 86(4), 1675–1710.
- Moghadam, V. (2020). Gender regimes in the middle east and north africa: The power of feminist movements. *Social politics* 27(3), 467–485.
- O’Brien, T. L. and S. Noy (2015). Traditional, modern, and post-secular perspectives on science and religion in the united states. *American Sociological Review* 80(1), 92–115.
- Pellicer, M. and E. Wegner (2014). Socio-economic voter profile motives for islamist support in morocco. *Party Politics* 20(1), 116–133.
- Pepinsky, T. B., R. W. Liddle, and S. Mujani (2012). Testing islam’s political advantage: Evidence from indonesia. *American Journal of Political Science* 53(3), 584–600.
- Pepinsky, T. B., R. W. Liddle, and S. Mujani (2018). *Piety and Public Opinion: Understanding Indonesian Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Petersen, K., P. Qualter, and N. Humphrey (2019). The application of latent class analysis for investigating population child mental health: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, 1214.
- Reher, S. (2014). The effect of congruence in policy priorities on electoral participation. *Electoral Studies* 36, 158–172.
- Rizzo, H., A.-H. Abdel-Latif, and K. Meyer. *Sociology* (6), 1151.
- Roy, O. (1994). *The Failure of Political Islam*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Roy, O. (2012). The transformation of the arab world. *Journal of Democracy* 23(3), 5–18.
- Sabri, C. (2013). Secular-islamist cleavage, values, and support for democracy and shari'a in the arab world. *Political Research Quarterly* 66(4), 781–793.
- Schattschneider, E. (1960). *The semisovereign people; a realist's view of democracy in America*. New York NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Schwedler, J. (2007). *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwedler, J. (2011a). Can islamists become moderates? rethinking the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. *World Politics* 63(2), 10–11.
- Schwedler, J. (2011b). A paradox of democracy? islamist participation in elections. *Middle East Report* 209(Winter 1998), 25–29.
- Schwedler, J. and J. Clark (2006). Islamist-leftist cooperation in the arab world. *ISIM Review* 18(1), 10–11.
- Shehata, D. (2013). *Islamist and Secularists in Egypt: Opposition, Conflict and Cooperation*. Routledge.
- Stecker, C. and M. Tausendpfund (2016). Multidimensional government-citizen multidimension government-citizen congruence and satisfaction with democracy. *European Journal of Political Research* 55(3), 492–511.
- Stepan, A. and G. B. Robertson (2003). An 'arab' more than 'muslim' democracy gap. *Journal of Democracy* 14(3), 30–44.
- Tessler, M. (2002). Islam and democracy in the middle east: The impact of religious orientations on attitudes toward democracy in four arab countries. *Comparative Politics* 34(3), 337–354.
- Tibi, B. (2013). *The Shari'a State: Arab Spring and Democratization*. New York NY: Routledge.
- Tripp, A. M. (2019). *Seeking legitimacy: why Arab autocracies adopt women's rights*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wegner, E. and F. Cavatorta (2019). Revisiting the islamist-secular divide: Parties and voters in the arab world. *International Political Science Review* 44(4), 1–18.

- Wegner, E. and M. Pellicer (2011). Leftist-islamist opposition cooperation in morocco. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38(3), 303–322.
- Wickham, C. R. (2004). The path to moderation: Strategy and learning in the formation of egypt's wasat party. *Comparative Politics* 36(2), 205–228.
- Yadav, S. P. (2010). Understanding 'what islamists want': Public debates and contestation in lebanon and yemen. *Middle East Journal* 64(2), 199–213.
- Yildirim, A. K. (2010). *Muslim Democratic Parties: Economic Liberalization and Islamist Moderation in the Middle East*. Ph. D. thesis, Furman University, USA.

Online Appendix

Table 1A: Recoding criterion for main covariates

Variable Name WVS	New Variable Name	Recoding scheme
V45	GENDER_EQ1	No recoding
V51	GENDER_EQ5	No recoding
V52	GENDER_EQ6	No recoding
V53	GENDER_EQ7	No recoding
V79	TRADITION	1=5; 2=4; 3=3; 4=2; 5=1; 6=0
V127	STRONG_LEAD	4=0; 3=1; 2=2; 1=3
V132	RELIG_1	No recoding
V133	SUPPORT_DEMOC2	No recoding
V140	DEMOC_IMPT	No recoding
V145	ATTEND_CHURCH	7=0; 6=1; 5=2; 4=3 3=4; 2=5; 1=6
V155	FLEX_RELIG1	4=0; 3=1 2=2; 1=3
V203	LIBERAL1	No recoding
V204	LIBERAL3	No recoding
V205	LIBERAL4	No recoding
V207	LIBERAL6	No recoding
V228	PARTY_CHOICE	
V238	INCOME_QUINT1	5=1; 4=2; 3=3; 2=4 1=5
V240	SEX	1=1; 2=0
V242	AGE	No recoding
V248	EDUC	No recoding
V258	WEIGHT	No recoding

Table 2A: Cross-tabulation of preference for Islamist parties and preference for democracy

	Better	Worse	About the same
Pref. democracy	2324	1001	2120
Pref. strong leader	1136	694	1234

Figure 1A: Fit of latent class models for main (pooled) analysis

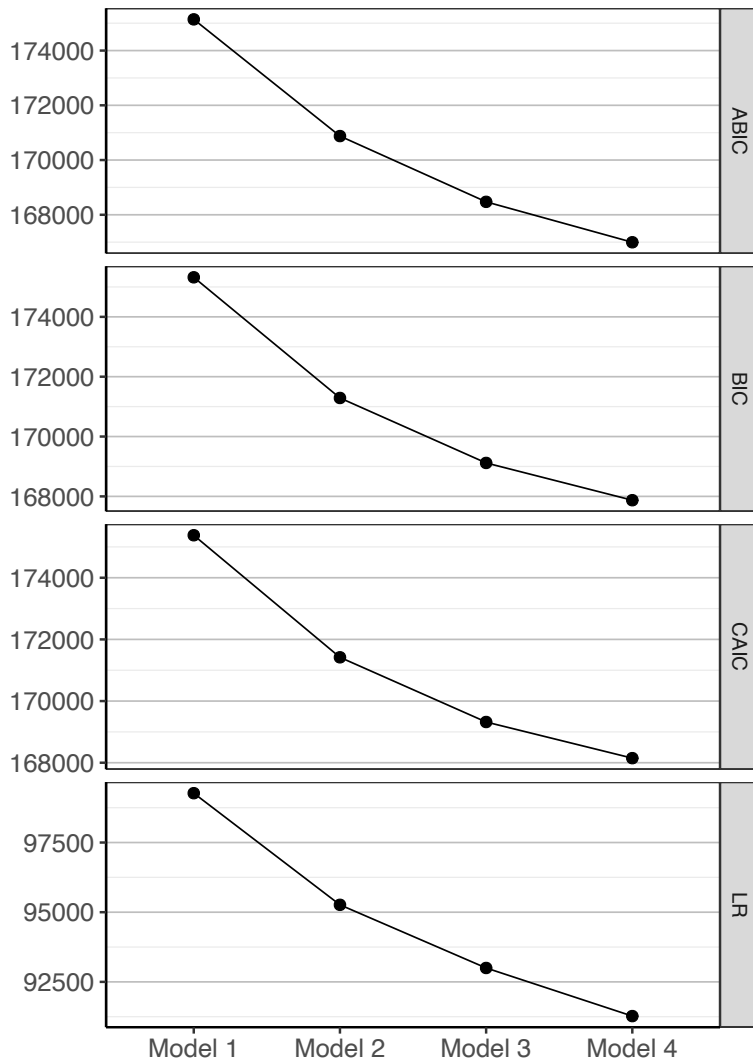
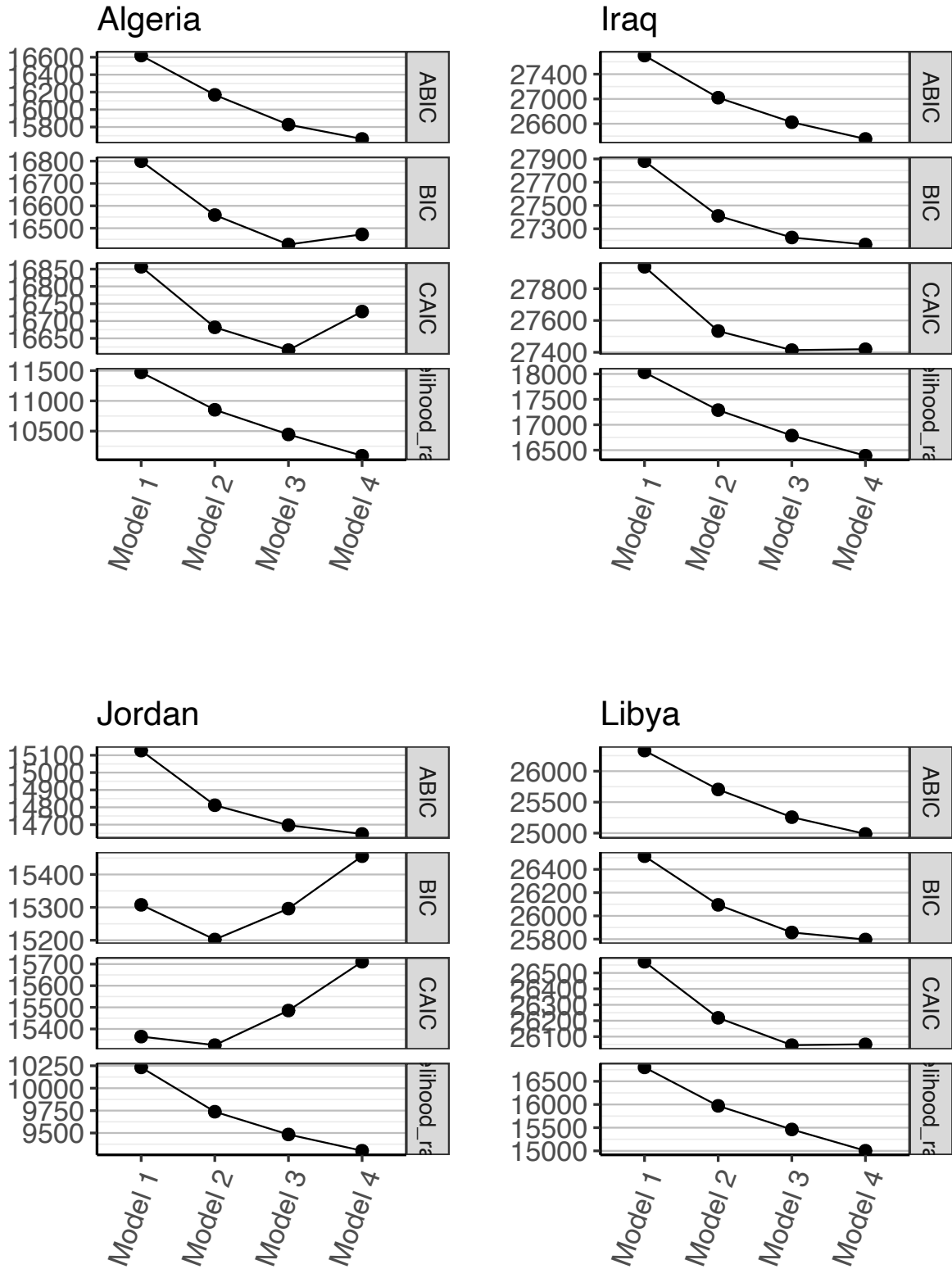


Figure 2A: Fit of latent class models for individual country cases



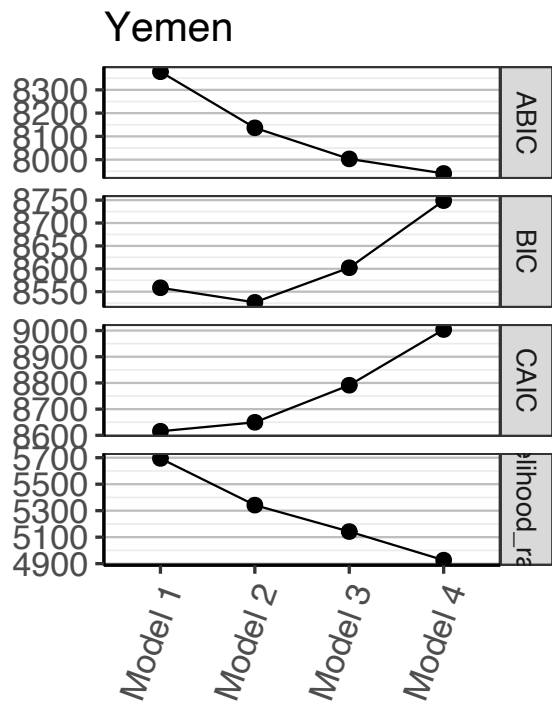
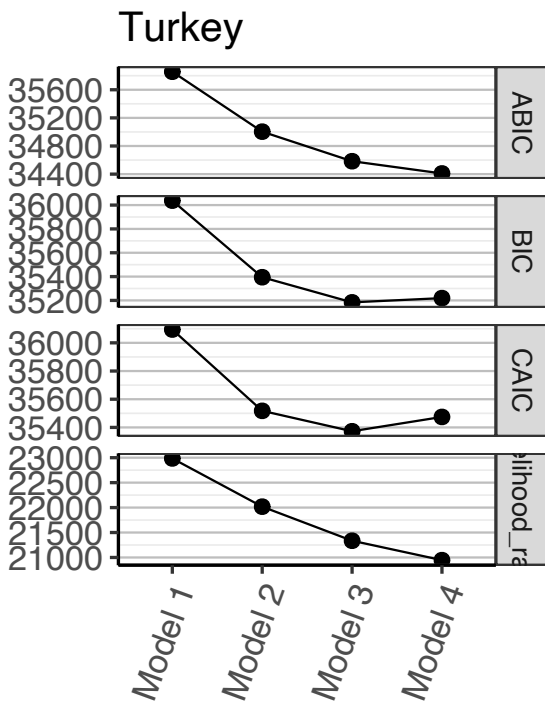
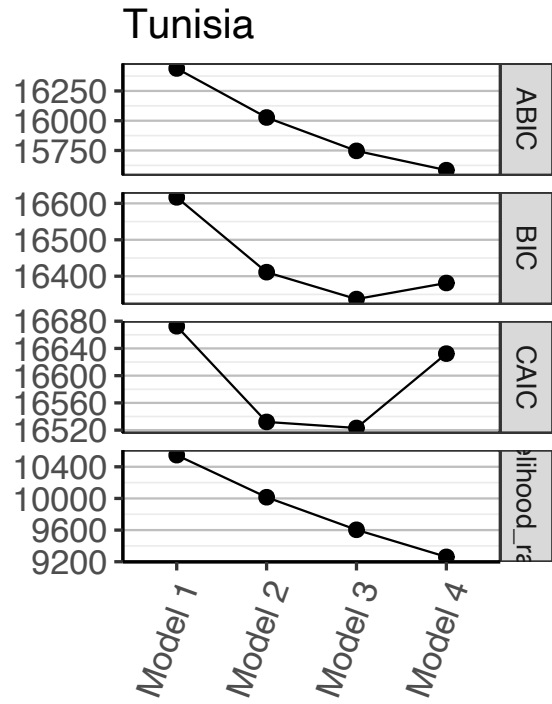
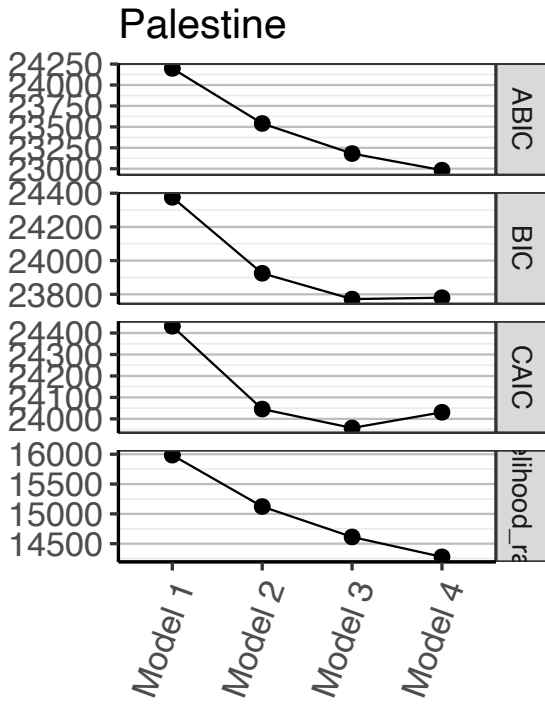


Figure 3A: Class content, WVS Wave 6 (2010-2014) and Wave 7 (2016-2020) surveys

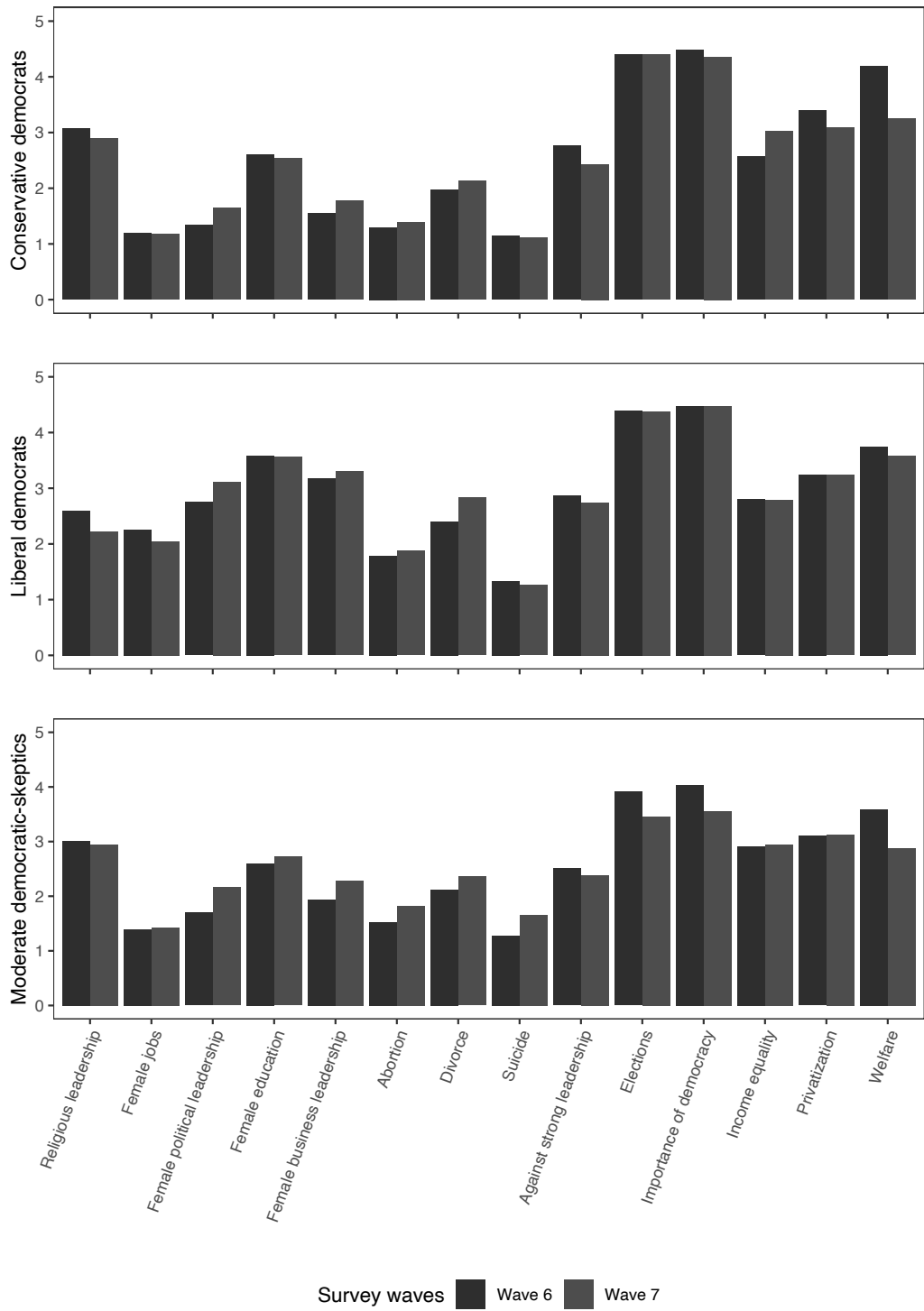


Figure 4A: Distribution of Latent Classes, Wave 6 (2010-2014) and Wave 7 (2016-2020) surveys

