



Revisiting the Islamist–Secular divide: Parties and voters in the Arab world

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ips**Eva Wegner**

University College Dublin, Ireland

Francesco Cavatorta

Laval University, Canada

Abstract

Electoral politics in the Arab world are either portrayed as clientelistic affairs void of content or as highly ideological clashes between Islamist and Secular Left forces. Although both arguments are intuitively appealing, the empirical evidence to date is limited. This article seeks to contribute to the debate by investigating the extent of programmatic voter support for Islamist and Secular Left parties in seven Arab countries with data from recent surveys by the Arab Barometer, Afrobarometer and World Values Survey. Ideological congruence between voters and parties exists but is limited to the Islamist–Secular core divide with regard to the role of religion in politics and gender values. In contrast, there are virtually no differences in economic attitudes between respondents and there is no evidence of class-based voting, with Islamist and Secular Left parties sharing the same voter base of better-off, more educated voters. Core results are robust across surveys.

Keywords

Political Islam, Middle East and North Africa, electoral behaviour, public opinion

Introduction

There are two competing narratives about the role of ideology in Arab politics. According to the first one, political competition is highly ideological, with the conflict between Islamist and Secular political and social forces being the decisive socio-political cleavage. Blaydes and Linzer (2012: 4–5) characterize this conflict as ‘akin to the left–right ideological dimension that describes policy preferences in most Western democracies’. In other words, it is viewed as the most important

Corresponding author:

Eva Wegner, School of Politics & International Relations, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland.

Email: eva.wegner@ucd.ie

cleavage in Arab countries with profound consequences for political opinions and political competition. This perception is certainly reflected in research on Islamist movements and parties. Indeed, many studies start from the assumption that cooperation between Islamist and Secular forces is very difficult. Collaboration is often used as an indicator of Islamist ideological moderation (Cavatorta, 2009; Clark, 2006; Schwedler, 2006; Shehata, 2009; Wegner and Pellicer, 2011).

The second narrative focuses more directly on electoral politics and contends that electoral support in Arab countries is largely driven by clientelistic inducements, that is, the promise and handing out of particularistic benefits to voters, such as gifts, jobs, money or other favours. According to this narrative, ideology is of little relevance. Voters are thought to have little or no ideological attachment and mainly hold parties accountable on their ability to deliver particularistic goods rather than on policy promises (Corstange, 2012; Lust, 2009). Accordingly, political parties in the Arab world are mostly characterized as being void of programmatic ambitions (Boukhars, 2010; Ibrahim and Lawson, 2010), operating to a considerable extent as clientelistic networks and transmission belts of 'bribes' to voters.

Although both narratives are intuitively compelling and may coexist, they cannot be equally and universally true. For the time being, there is only limited empirical evidence supporting either one or the other. The Islamist–Secular divide narrative generally takes irreconcilable divisions between Islamist and Secular political movements for granted, but scholars have hardly looked at whether the values held by supporters – activists, sympathizers and voters – do reflect such a divide. Virtually all extant research on this divide focuses on elites, such as the leaders of Islamist and Secular Left organizations, and is based on interviews or analyses of the writings of the respective groups. It is, however, perfectly possible not only that elites overemphasize the divide for strategic reasons but also that an Islamist–Secular ideological divide might exist at the elite level but might not inform the attitudes and behaviour of ordinary citizens.¹

For the clientelism narrative, the argument is that if elections do not matter much in shaping policy outcomes, voters try to get at least some tangible return – money, employment, access to state resources – out of electoral participation (Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009). Certainly, observers of elections in Arab countries would agree that clientelistic inducements and expectations play an important role but, thus far, there are only three studies that focus explicitly on the extent and nature of clientelistic linkages, and they are concerned with Lebanon (Corstange, 2012), Yemen (Corstange, 2016) and Jordan (Lust-Okar, 2006). However, these countries may be exceptional in that voting behaviour in Lebanon is sectarian and in Yemen largely tribal; furthermore, political parties in Jordan are particularly meaningless to voters with less than 5% of respondents indicating a party preference in the 2014 World Values Survey.

More generally, it is surprising how scarce research on voting behaviour in the Middle East and North Africa still is. Most party studies focus on Islamist ideology and its compatibility with democratic principles (Schwedler, 2011), not on the parties' electoral strategies.² Studies of the electorate have looked at drivers behind turnout (De Miguel et al., 2015) and at Islamist voters. Islamist voter studies come in three types. The first two types mirror the above narratives and focus on clientelism and voter values, respectively. Studies considering clientelism propose that the connection of Islamist parties to large charity organizations places them in a good position to gain electoral support through 'charitable' handouts. This type of study focuses on voter characteristics such as education and poverty (Pellicer and Wegner, 2014). Value studies have looked at whether certain values, mainly anti-democratic values or religious piety, are correlated with support (Garcia-Rivero and Kotze, 2007; Robbins, 2010). A third type of study looks at Islamist voters as mainly protest voters, unhappy with the performance of the regime and other parties and attracted by the anti-establishment and anti-corruption messages of Islamist parties (Mecham and Chernov Hwang, 2014). As most of these studies focus on individual countries and use different methods and data,

findings on the features of the Islamist electorate have remained inconclusive. For their part, findings on Secular Left voters are virtually nonexistent despite the historical significance of the Arab Left across the region.

Against this background, this article investigates whether Islamist and Secular Left parties represent distinctive sets of voters in the Arab world. In other words, we explore whether there is evidence that voters – not only activists – support these parties for programmatic reasons. This allows us to speak to two interrelated issues. Most importantly, the extent of programmatic support for Islamist and Secular Left parties allows us to gauge the existence and nature of an Islamist–Secular divide at the voter level. Second, it allows us, although only indirectly, to contribute to an assessment of the ubiquity of clientelistic motives for party support in the Arab world.

We operationalize programmatic support as the extent of ideological congruence between party and voter values. Essentially, if voter values and party ideology do not match, the rationale for casting a ballot for that party is likely to be clientelistic or unrelated to ideology in other ways. If voter values and party ideology are, instead, aligned, programmatic party identification is more likely – even if it might coexist with other support motives. Whereas we give most weight to ideological congruence, we additionally identify programmatic voting by looking at parties' voter bases and the extent to which they are targeted by offers of vote-buying.

We combine data on seven Arab countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Palestine) from three recent surveys: Word Values Survey, Arab Barometer, and Afrobarometer. Not all countries are included in all three surveys, but we have at least two surveys – around 3000 observations – per country. Combining these three surveys enables us, on the one hand, to consider values covered by different surveys and, on the other, to check the robustness of our findings for those items asked in all three. This allows for drawing conclusions that may hold beyond the specific dataset. For each country, we categorize parties as either Islamist, Secular Left or others.³

We find that ideological congruence exists but that it is, by and large, limited to an Islamist–Secular core content, with supporters of Islamist and Secular Left parties having significantly different attitudes towards the role of religion in politics. Islamist voters are also more conservative with regard to the role of women in society. Supporters of Islamist parties drive the larger part of this divide. We also find that they are less likely to be offered vote-buying incentives. In contrast, there are virtually no differences in economic attitudes between respondents and there is no evidence of a class divide in support for these parties, with Islamist and Secular Left parties sharing essentially the same voter base of better-off, more educated voters. In addition, we find that supporters of Islamist and Secular Left parties share a number of attitudes with each other but not with the remainder of the respondents. Importantly, both parties' supporters have a more favourable attitude towards democracy and globalization.

Our results provide a nuanced picture of the support for these two sets of parties. On the one hand, voters favouring Islamist parties display some clear features of programmatic attachment. On the other hand, our results temper the claim that the Islamist–Secular divide systematically organizes policy preferences in the Arab world. Instead, this divide only appears to exist for ideological core content. This has significant implications for the literature on Arab politics because it provides a counter-narrative to the one that sees Islamists and Secular Leftists as inherently opposed to each other on a wide range of issues, rendering coalition-making and vote-switching near impossible. At the same time, the clear differentiation between Islamist voters and other respondents on some core issues suggests that at least these voters are not *only* driven by clientelistic or protest motives in giving their support.

Although we believe that these findings give an important nuance to the dominant narratives, our study has limitations. First, findings based on opinion surveys in Arab countries should be taken with a pinch of salt. The (semi-)authoritarian context has an impact on respondents, and

affinity with Islamists, in particular, might not be truthfully expressed. We seek to address this problem by showing that the share of survey respondents supporting Islamist and Secular Left parties exceeds their vote share in elections in most countries, suggesting that we are not looking at a distorted sample of core supporters or activists. A second limitation is that we are unable to determine how salient ideological factors are for the actual voting decision; we can only determine the extent to which supporters' attitudes overlap with party ideology. Possibly, other factors, such as candidate characteristics or the government's economic performance, are crucial for voting decisions.⁴ Third, we fully acknowledge that it was necessary to simplify our study. Thus, we could not include more subtle distinctions between additional party/voter types in the empirical analysis because many parties have very few supporters. This makes it impossible to differentiate, for example, between Nationalist Left and Secular Left parties. Finally, it is important to highlight that our classification of Islamist and Secular Left party platforms is – in the absence of a comprehensive coding effort of such platforms – a simplistic approximation of the values promoted by these parties. Nevertheless, considering the dearth of systematic research on voting behaviour in the Arab countries, we hope that this study can be a first step on the way to more sophisticated research on electoral behaviour in the region.

Identifying programmatic voting in Arab countries

We approach programmatic voting in three complementary ways. First, and most importantly, we seek to identify the existence of programmatic linkages through the extent of *ideological congruence* between party positions and the preferences of their voters. As Kitschelt (2012: 14–16) argues, programmatic party competition requires that parties develop and prioritize certain policies; voters understand these policies and make a choice 'between parties based on their announced policy objectives'. If voters' values and party ideology are aligned, some degree of programmatic party identification is likely, even if it might coexist with clientelistic inducements. In contrast, if voters' values and party ideology are opposed, the rationale for casting a ballot for that party is likely to be clientelistic or personalistic. In order to identify ideological congruence and distinctiveness, we establish the core positions of parties on key issues, based on the literature and their electoral platforms, and assess whether the positions of their voters are in line with these ideologies.

Second, we investigate the socio-economic characteristics of a party's support base, although this may deliver ambiguous insights. On the one hand, socio-economic differences between parties' supporters could signal differences in policy preferences (Kitschelt, 2012). For example, if a party's electorate mostly belongs to a certain class, it could be inferred that this class is attracted by the party's economic policies. On the other hand, many studies have shown that poorer voters are most often targeted by clientelistic parties, either because they value a handout more than wealthier voters and are thus cheaper to buy, or because they are more risk-averse (see, among many others Stokes et al., 2013). Thus, a voter base comprised predominantly of poorer people could indicate a clientelistic strategy instead of a class attracted by a party's redistributive policy platform.

Finally, we look more directly at which party's voters are targeted with offers of vote-buying. This does not necessarily mean that their own party targets them with such offers (voters might also be approached as potential swing voters by other parties) or that they accept the bribe. It has been shown, however, that parties (brokers) carefully select recipients of clientelistic inducements (Finan and Schechter, 2012). Not being targeted thus implies that parties do not see these voters as beneficial targets, possibly because they have a stronger party attachment.

These three indicators of programmatic voting have a clear hierarchy. We give most weight to identifiable policy differences between parties and voters because such differences would be difficult to reconcile with an explanation other than the ideological distinctiveness of parties and a

Table 1. Indicators of ideological congruence.

		Islamist	Secular Left
Socio-political	Religion in politics	More support	Less support
	Gender values	More conservative	More progressive
	Democracy	More support	More support
Economic	Economic redistribution	More support	More support
	Economic liberalization	More support	Less support
	Globalization	More support	Less support

certain level of programmatic attachment of voters. The demographic base and offers of vote-buying are secondary evidence, used to complement a picture that is emerging from the analysis of voter positions.

Policy positions of Islamist and Secular Left parties

To date, no systematic study of party manifestos and policies in Arab countries has been undertaken, limiting our ability to provide a very elaborate account of Islamist and Secular Left party positions. Instead, we rely on a combination of a broad study of Islamist manifestos by Kurzman and Naqvi (2009) and case studies to establish expectations regarding programmatic voting.⁵ We distinguish between socio-political positions (secularism, gender, democracy) and economic positions (redistribution, liberalization, globalization).

Table 1 summarizes the type of differences we would expect if voters cast their ballot based on programmatic identification. We cannot always establish how much emphasis different parties in different countries place on each of these topics in campaigns or manifestos, but a tentative hierarchy is possible. Issues highlighted in bold in the table indicate that we consider them crucial for party identity and that lack of congruence would be a strong indicator against programmatic voting. Non-highlighted issues indicate difficulties in establishing the parties' positions, either because there is variation within party type or because little is known about them, so that voters might be more 'confused' about their party's position and even programmatically minded voters may diverge from it.

Before discussing these policy differences in more detail, it is important to emphasize that the neat division between Islamist and Secular Left parties is, to some extent, problematic, and even prominent political figures in the two camps do not always see them as inherently incompatible (Ghannouchi, 2016). In addition, there are sharp divisions within the broader Islamist camp, for example, between Muslim Brotherhood-inspired parties and Salafi ones, with the latter often denying the Islamist credentials of the former (Al-Anani and Maszlee, 2013). Conversely, secular figures and parties have often argued that being labelled as such overlooks the fact that they are also good Muslims and conferring the label Islamists on political movements simply overstates religiosity, giving such parties a normative advantage. Nevertheless, from an analytical perspective, the separation between Islamists and Secularists makes sense insofar as the former employ religious precepts to guide public policies, even though their ideology might not be entirely religious (Delibas, 2009), whereas the latter wish to relegate religion to the private sphere. For this study, we assume that there is a clear separation between Islamists and Secular Leftists due to their radically divergent understanding of the role religion should play in public policy and in the attainment of crucial political objectives. For example, Lybarger (2007) outlines how Palestinian political actors differ sharply on the role religion should play in the attainment of statehood. Within the secular

camp, Leftist parties with roots in the Leftist politics of the 1960s are the ones the article focuses on because they represent a clear ideological alternative to Islamism and promote a type of secularism that often diverges with the one nationalists adopt.

With regard to *socio-political values*, Islamists are, of course, credited with seeking a larger role for religion in politics than the Secular Left or others. The Secular Left agenda supports this to a much lesser extent than either Islamists or others. At the same time, many parties have stopped advocating secular values openly (Khatib, 2011), in part because the language of religion is often equated with the language of morality (Spiegel, 2015) and, therefore, it becomes problematic to push a Leftist liberal secular agenda on social matters as it could be construed as immoral. Even programmatically minded Secular Left voters would thus not need to be more 'secular' than the average voter.

The rights of women are another major difference between Islamist and Secular Left parties in many countries. According to the Kurzman and Naqvi data on Islamist platforms, Islamists mostly support a distinctive, instead of equal role for women in society. Differences between Islamist and Secular Left perspectives on women are often manifest in discussions around the personal status legislation that enshrines women's rights regarding marriage, divorce or inheritance. Islamists have generally opposed progressive liberal reforms, whereas Secular Left parties have mobilized against what they call discriminatory and obscurantist legislation or at least supported progressive reforms (Wegner, 2011). Thus, programmatically minded Islamist voters ought to be more conservative and programmatically driven. Secular Left voters should be more progressive than the rest of society and frame women's rights through the language of individual rights and universal values.

Concerning support for democracy, establishing clear positions is less straightforward. Secular Left parties and Western policy-makers are often suspicious of Islamists' commitment to democracy, but the truthfulness of their commitment is not at stake in this article. Rather, the question is whether a clear position is articulated to the electorate that could serve to gauge programmatic support. The Kurzman and Naqvi data show that Islamist party platforms tend to mention democracy favourably, with some defining it in 'civil' terms and others with reference to Islamic principles. We lack similar information on Secular Left parties, but the general wisdom would be that they are supportive of a secular version of democracy. For both parties, it is unclear how much credibility they would have with the electorate. For the Islamists, this is due to generally negative perceptions of such parties' commitment to democracy, and with regard to the Secular Left parties it is due to the fact they have in practice often sided with dictators when it came to the repression of Islamists (Cook, 2005). We will, therefore, characterize both their positions as slightly more supportive of democracy than the average voter but without giving much weight to this issue.

Expectations regarding *economic issues* would regard Secular Left voters as more supportive of economic redistribution and less supportive of economic liberalization than the average citizen. There is little doubt that the Arab Left is still very much focused on redistributive issues through the dominant role of the state and tends to view the policies suggested or imposed by international financial institutions with great suspicion. For example, the Algerian Workers' Party (*hizb al-'amal*) opposes the free market economy and calls for ending the association agreement with the EU and the WTO accession process (Parti des Travailleurs, 2014). Islamists have less developed attitudes in these matters, probably because there is no distinctive 'Islamic' economic model (Gerges, 2012; Habibi, 2012). Indeed, in none of the Arab Islamist platforms analysed did the economy appear among the top three concerns (see Kurzman and Naqvi data).

In his detailed analysis of political platforms of religious parties in Morocco, Egypt and Turkey, Yildirim (2010) argues that different Islamist party 'types' promote different economic policies. Muslim democratic parties, such as the Moroccan Justice and Development Party or the Egyptian Wasat Party, are essentially 'pro-liberal economy' in that they seek to increase

economic opportunities for entrepreneurs. However, they combine this with an emphasis on social safety nets so as not to alienate supporters from lower social strata. In contrast, reformist Islamist parties, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party, are ‘nationalist–protectionist’ and support an interventionist state and policies (Yildirim, 2010). In general, the social and economic parts of the electoral platforms of these parties are less developed than those of the Muslim democratic parties.

Although we have, thus, potentially two distinct types of economic platform promoted by Islamist parties, it is unclear how much importance this has in practice. Recently, Lyra’s study (2017) confirms that Islamist parties in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco have all strongly advocated the creation of a business-friendly investment climate and cuts in public spending and, at the same time, emphasized the need for redistributive and interventionist policies. This suggests that most Islamist parties support an approach that combines traditionally left (strong state responsible for the poor) with traditionally right (promotion of economic liberalization and business-friendly policies) positions (see also Wegner, 2011 on Morocco and Khattab, 2012 on Egypt).

We might, thus, expect that programmatic Islamist voters are supportive of economic liberalization and, possibly, of redistribution. At the same time, it remains quite unclear how much these policies have been marketed to the electorate. Islamist supporters without very distinctive positions would not necessarily stand against programmatic voting.

In sum, programmatically minded Islamist voters should be able to be identified particularly because of their views on the role of religion in politics and gender roles, whereas Secular Left voters should hold highly distinctive values on economic issues and, probably, gender roles.

Data

The data used in this article come from Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (WVS), Round 5 of the Afrobarometer and Round 3 of the Arab Barometer. The WVS focuses on a large battery of social, political and economic values, whereas the two Barometer surveys mostly seek to measure respondents’ assessments of government performance and democracy. All data were collected between 2011 and 2014, that is, during/after the Arab Spring but before the authoritarian backlash or widespread violence that occurred in countries such as Egypt, Libya and Yemen. This implies that the surveys were undertaken at a time when citizens were likely to have expressed their views more freely than in any other period.

We combine the data into one dataset and create six simple additive indices that are at the core of the empirical analysis. A first set of indices measures the socio-political values mentioned above, namely, support for a greater role of religion in politics, gender equality and democracy. The second set measures economic values, namely, support for economic redistribution, economic competition and (economic) globalization. We normalize these indices so that they have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.⁶

Each survey also asks the respondent to name a party he/she would vote for if there were elections tomorrow.⁷ It is important to note that – very much in line with real voting behaviour in Arab countries – most respondents in these surveys indicated they would not vote. We have coded parties into ‘Islamist’, ‘Secular Left’ and ‘others’ (see Table A.3 in the online appendix for the coding). Some of the coding choices in the Secular Left camp are certainly debatable, but most of them concern very small parties and are, thus, unlikely to make a difference. In addition, the surveys also contain socio-economic variables, such as age, sex, education, income and employment status, which we use as controls and for evaluating the demographic profiles of the parties’ voters.

Combining these three surveys has several advantages. First, our study can explore a wider range of attitudes compared to other studies. Second, those indices that can be constructed from all

Table 2. Shares of Islamist and Secular Left voters in the latest elections and surveys.

		Morocco	Algeria	Tunisia	Libya	Egypt	Palestine	Yemen
Latest parliamentary election		2011	2012	2014	2014	2012	2006	2003
Arab Barometer Survey		2014	2013	2013	2014	2013	2012	2013
WVS Survey		2011	2014	2013	2014	2013	2013	2014
Afrobarometer Survey		2013	2013	2013	—	2013	—	—
Islamist	Election shareⁱ	5%	2%	12%	4%	33%	24%	11%
	Arab Barometer	11%	3%	23%	9%	7%	24%	18%
	WVS	4%	9%	15%	12%	14%	17%	10%
	Afrobarometer	13%	2%	15%	—	13%	—	—
Secular Left	Election shareⁱ	3%	3%	19%	18%	6%	23%	3%
	Arab Barometer	3%	7%	21%	17%	4%	35%	2%
	WVS	2%	14%	22%	14%	5%	41%	4%
	Afrobarometer	2%	5%	18%	—	10%	—	—

ⁱElection share = votes received/voting age population. This includes potential voters who have not registered. This represents the survey sample more accurately than votes/votes casts, or even votes/registered voters as the surveys include respondents who have not registered.

WVS: World Values Survey.

three surveys have more statistical power. Third, and most importantly, our findings can be considered more robust than those in extant studies based on opinion surveys. Studies relying on one survey are bound to build on a small, and possibly unrepresentative sample because there are generally few respondents identifying with a party in surveys in Arab countries (consistent with high abstention rates). The findings of such studies might also be influenced by the particular way in which a question was asked. We can partly overcome this problem as three of our core indices can build on at least two surveys. For these three indices, a similar picture emerges from surveys individually, making us, therefore, quite confident about the results presented. The fact that the questions on which these three indices are based appeared at different points of the respective questionnaires and were not asked in fully identical ways further increases our confidence.

At the same time, we face two typical challenges when it comes to research based on surveys in Arab countries. The first is that the share of supporters of Islamist and Secular Left parties sometimes varies greatly between the surveys (see Table 2). Therefore, we control for survey and country effects in all empirical models so that we compare supporters within countries and surveys. In this way, we ensure that it is not one survey (or country) with more numerous and perhaps peculiar Islamist (or Secular Left) supporters driving the results.

Another issue that could potentially challenge our study is that respondents who indicate support for a party in an opinion survey might be committed core supporters, whereas those respondents who vote for a party for other, possibly clientelistic reasons are probably likely to state that they do not identify with a party in such a survey. If our sample consisted of committed core supporters our study would overstate the programmatic attachment of voters. However, the extent of this problem can easily be checked by comparing the share of respondents supporting a given party in the surveys with that party's vote share in the last elections. If it were indeed the case that the samples consisted of core supporters, it would be expected that there would be lower support in the surveys compared to the elections, in which both the core supporters and the clients turn out to vote. As can be seen in Table 2, this is not the case with these data: in almost all cases support for Islamist and Secular Left parties is either similar or even substantially higher in the surveys than in the actual elections. This sample is unlikely to contain overly committed supporters.

Results

For all analyses presented below, the empirical model consists of multinomial logistic regressions, in which the outcome variable is a categorical variable capturing support for the different party types (no party preference, Secular Left, Islamist, others). The core explanatory variables are the different value indices discussed above for the analysis of ideological congruence, different demographic characteristics for the analysis focusing on the parties' voter base and a survey item (discussed below) from the Afrobarometer for the analysis of bribe offers. For ease of presentation we display the results as average marginal effects in coefficient plots.

In addition, given that Islamist and Secular Left parties *do* display distinctive voter bases in terms of age, sex, employment, education and poverty we include these demographic characteristics as controls in the analyses focusing on voter values and bribe offers. All models also control for country and survey. Unless otherwise indicated, the base outcome in all models is respondents not indicating a party preference. Because such respondents are by far the largest category in all surveys, we sometimes refer to them as the average respondent, or average voter, in the discussion below.

Ideological congruence between voters and parties

We compare the attitudes of voters from Islamist parties with those from Secular Left parties and those of other respondents, namely voters from other parties and respondents without a party preference.⁸ We assess whether the values differ significantly from the direction suggested in Table 1. For example, if Islamist supporters were more gender conservative than the average respondent and Secular Left supporters more progressive, we would consider this as an important signal that some programmatic support is manifest for both parties.

The estimates in Figure 1 show items on the socio-political dimension: gender conservatism, support for more religion in politics and support for democracy. The 0 vertical line represents the respective base respondent and the horizontal axes display the extent to which the values of Islamist and Secular Left supporters deviate from these. The left-hand panel of Figure 1 shows the results for the whole sample with respondents without party preference as base outcome; the right-hand panel shows the results from a reduced panel of respondents that indicated that they voted in the latest national election with Secular Left voters as base outcome. This latter analysis allows for three additional insights. First, it considers the possibility that programmatic considerations are only relevant for respondents who go to the polls. Second, it allows for a more nuanced picture with regard to which party's supporters' values are truly distinctive. Finally, it is a first robustness check on whether or not ideological congruence remains in a more restricted sample.

The left-hand panel of Figure 1 shows a distinctive pattern.⁹ With regard to the role of religion in politics and women in society, Islamist and Secular Left voters display attitudes consistent with ideological support as indicated in Table 1. Islamist voters strongly favour a greater role for religion in politics and are more gender conservative than the average respondent. Secular Left voters have the opposite values. Regarding the third item, support for democracy, Secular Left voters and Islamists display a higher level of support for this than the average respondent.

The right-hand panel nuances this picture. It strongly confirms the distinctiveness of the supporters of Islamist parties in terms of gender conservatism, in particular with regard to support for religion in politics. For these items, Secular Left voters' attitudes are, however, generally similar to those of supporters of other parties, suggesting that they are possibly not basing their support decision on these items.

Figure 2 shows attitudes towards the economy: redistribution, economic liberalization and globalization. Contrary to the socio-political dimension, there is virtually no difference between

Figure 1. Socio-political values of different voter types.

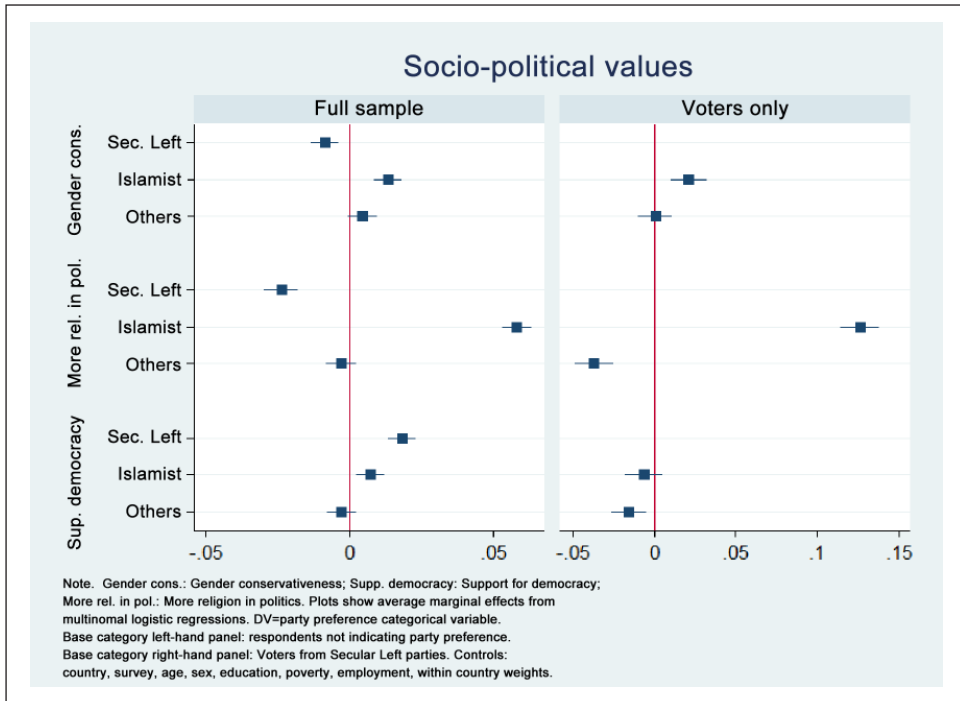
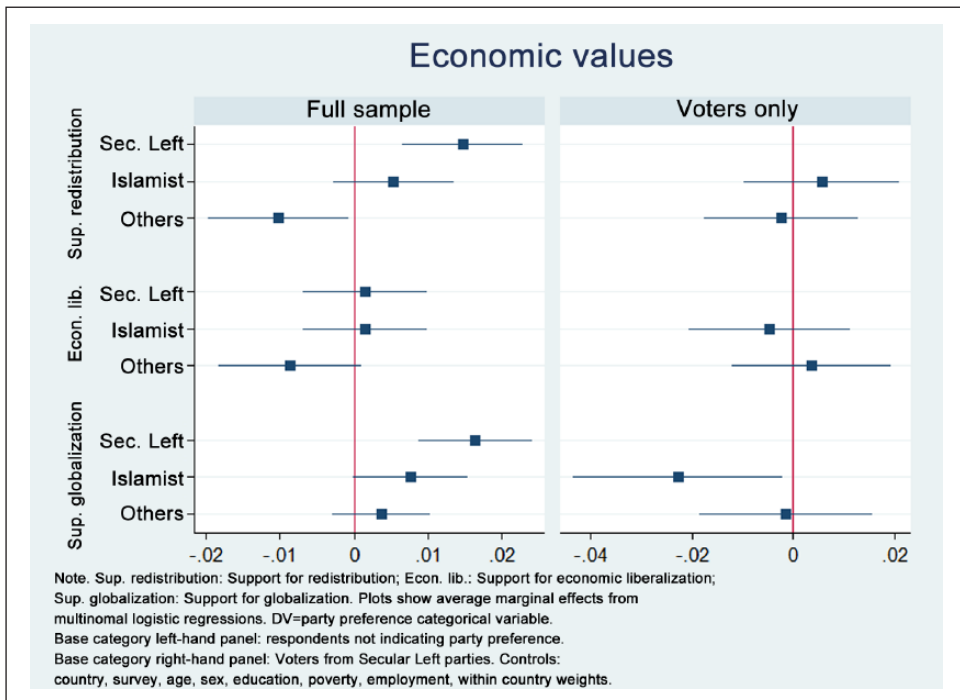


Figure 2. Economic values of different voter types.



Islamist and Secular Left voters. In addition, and again contrary to the socio-political dimension, this lack of distinctiveness between Islamist and Secular Left supporters is further reinforced when considering only voters in the right-hand panel in Figure 2. Whatever divide there is between supporters of these parties, it clearly does not extend to economic issues.

Compared to the average respondent, Secular Left voters are more supportive of redistribution, which would be aligned with expectations of programmatic support, but also of economic globalization, which goes against the alter-globalization discourse of Secular Left parties.

The extent of ideological party–voter congruence, therefore, shows a mixed picture. Programmatic voter identification with both types of party is taking place in relation to what can be labelled ‘identity politics’, that is, the role of religion in public policy-making, and women. This is particularly strong for supporters of Islamist parties, particularly so when it is concerned with the role of religion in politics, and even more so when considering actual voters only. Preferences with regard to the organization of the economy show no real differences between respondents from Islamist and Secular Left parties. This could be due to the lack of distinctiveness of the parties’ positions and suggests that electoral support for these parties is largely based on social/identity issues.

Voter demographics: Support base of Islamist and Secular Left parties

The second dimension for examining potential programmatic support is voter demographics. As explained above, there are two somewhat contradictory ways in which voter demographics can be significant with regard to the type of party–voter linkages. On the one hand, class-based support (e.g. the poor supporting Leftist parties) could be an indicator that particular social classes feel represented by a party’s policies. On the other hand, a support base of mainly poorer voters could be an indicator of a clientelistic voter base because it is easier to ‘buy’ their votes.

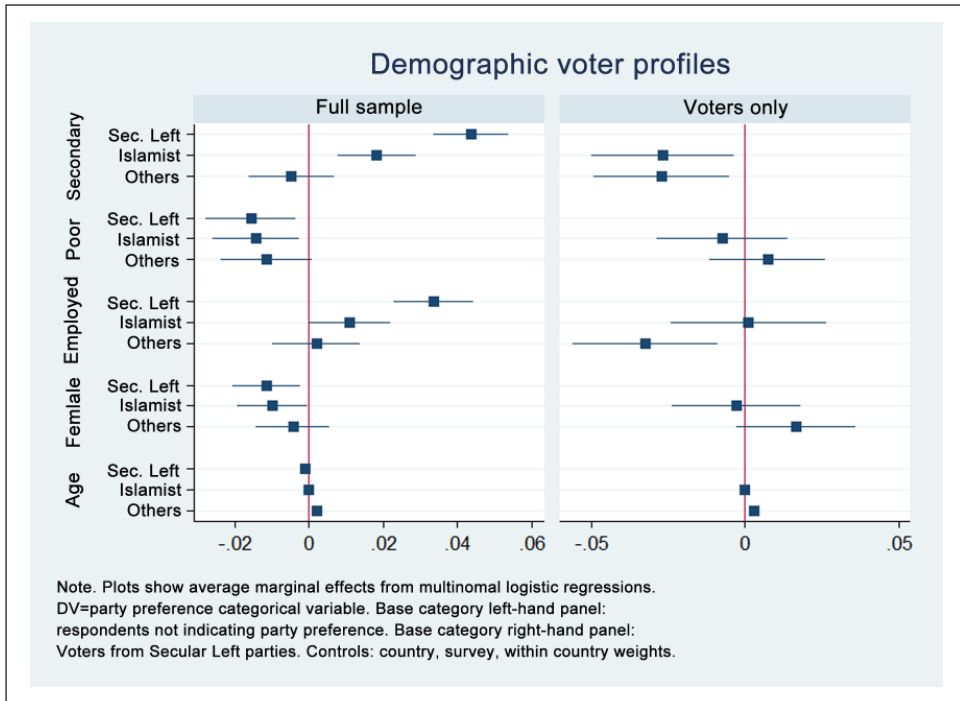
Figure 3 shows the results for both the full sample (left-hand panel) and voters only (right-hand panel). The results are clear and striking. Virtually the same voter groups support both Islamist and Secular Left parties. They are more likely to be male, educated and employed, and less likely to be poor than non-voters. Supporters of Secular Left parties seem to be more educated than supporters of Islamist parties, but the difference is small and possibly insignificant. In contrast, voters supporting other parties very much resemble non-voters, the only exception being that voters supporting other parties are older than the average respondent.

First, this middle-class type of profile of Islamist and Secular Left supporters suggests that their votes are more expensive (and thus, possibly, less likely to be bought). Second, and more importantly, this *shared* middle-class profile suggests that support for these two types of party is not class driven, a finding that is in line with the lack of party identification based on economic policies. The fact that supporters of Islamist and Secular Left parties are better-off voters suggests that the identity issues that seem so relevant for support of these parties are issues that are mostly of concern to wealthier respondents, that is, to those who can *afford* to care about them.

Election incentives

Ideological congruence and the demographic profile of Islamist and Secular Left parties suggest that programmatic voting considerations are not altogether absent in Arab countries. In addition, the Afrobarometer survey has an item that asks how often respondents have been offered ‘something, like food or a gift or money, in return for your vote’ during the latest election.

The survey item is, of course, far from perfect. First, answers to this question do not tell us whether or not an actual exchange has taken place, as voters may have received an offer but did not accept it. Second, other forms of clientelism may take place without an actual exchange on election

Figure 3. Demographic voter profiles.

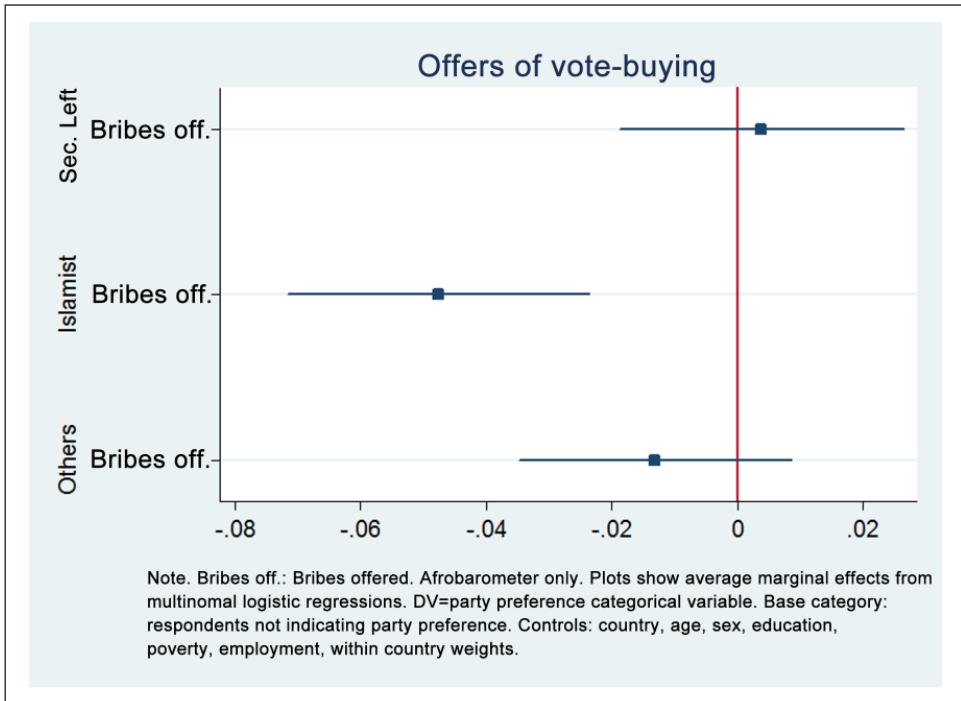
day. Third, admitting to having been offered a bribe could indicate social desirability bias and this bias could be systematic, for example, with more educated respondents being more aware that vote-buying is illegal. Although we cannot address the first two issues, the third is less problematic. Given the similar demographic profile of Islamist and Secular Left supporters, we can be relatively confident that differences between *these* two parties are not driven by systematic bias.

The sample consists of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt because the question was only asked in the Afrobarometer. The results are shown in Figure 4. There are no differences between Secular Left voters, other voters and respondents who do not support a political party. In contrast, being a supporter of an Islamist party makes a respondent considerably less likely to be offered a bribe in exchange for his/her vote.

Robustness

The results presented in this article are based on data from three different surveys. As shown in the descriptive statistics, these surveys have sometimes significantly different shares of Islamist/Secular Left voters by country. An important concern is, therefore, whether any of these surveys has a peculiar sample of Islamists or other voters that may be driving the results. We cannot fully address this concern. However, there are two indices – gender roles and support for democracy – that can be constructed from all three surveys, and an additional one – role of religion in politics – that can be constructed from two of these surveys.

As shown in Figure 5, the three surveys mostly yield similar results for these indices. Although the coefficients do not always reach conventional significance levels, they are all heading in the direction shown in the aggregate analysis. The consistent results we find for most of values across

Figure 4. Incidence of vote-buying offers to different voter types.

the three surveys, in spite of a different order of questions, different wording and different shares of Islamist and Secular Left voters, increase our confidence in the robustness of our findings.

Discussion

Taking the results on ideological congruence, demographic characteristics and vote-buying together, a relatively consistent picture emerges (see Table 3). First, programmatic support is not altogether absent when it comes to voting for Islamist and Secular Left parties. This is supported first and foremost by the clear and partly substantial differences in voter positions with regard to identity politics and, second, by the middle-class type of profile of Islamist and Secular Left voters. Second, Islamist voters clearly emerge as the most programmatically driven. The ideological congruence between them and party ideology was more developed than for Secular Left voters and, although they had the same demographic profile, Islamists did have substantially fewer offers of vote-buying. This relatively tight link between Islamist voters and Islamist parties suggests that Islamist voters do indeed feel represented ideologically by these parties to some extent. In contrast, the absence of ideological congruence on economic issues in the Secular Left camp and the fact that Secular Left supporters broadly shared similar values on gender and religion with supporters of other parties suggests a lower level of programmatic support for this party type.

On a more general level, the virtual absence of differences with regard to economic issues for supporters of different parties stands in stark contrast to the strong emphasis on economic grievances in the literature studying the causes of the Arab Spring (Achcar, 2013). This result is particularly interesting in the light of the Arab uprisings and their aftermath. Despite a consensus that poor socio-economic conditions drove the uprisings, mobilization following the fall of the regimes

Figure 5. Core results by survey.

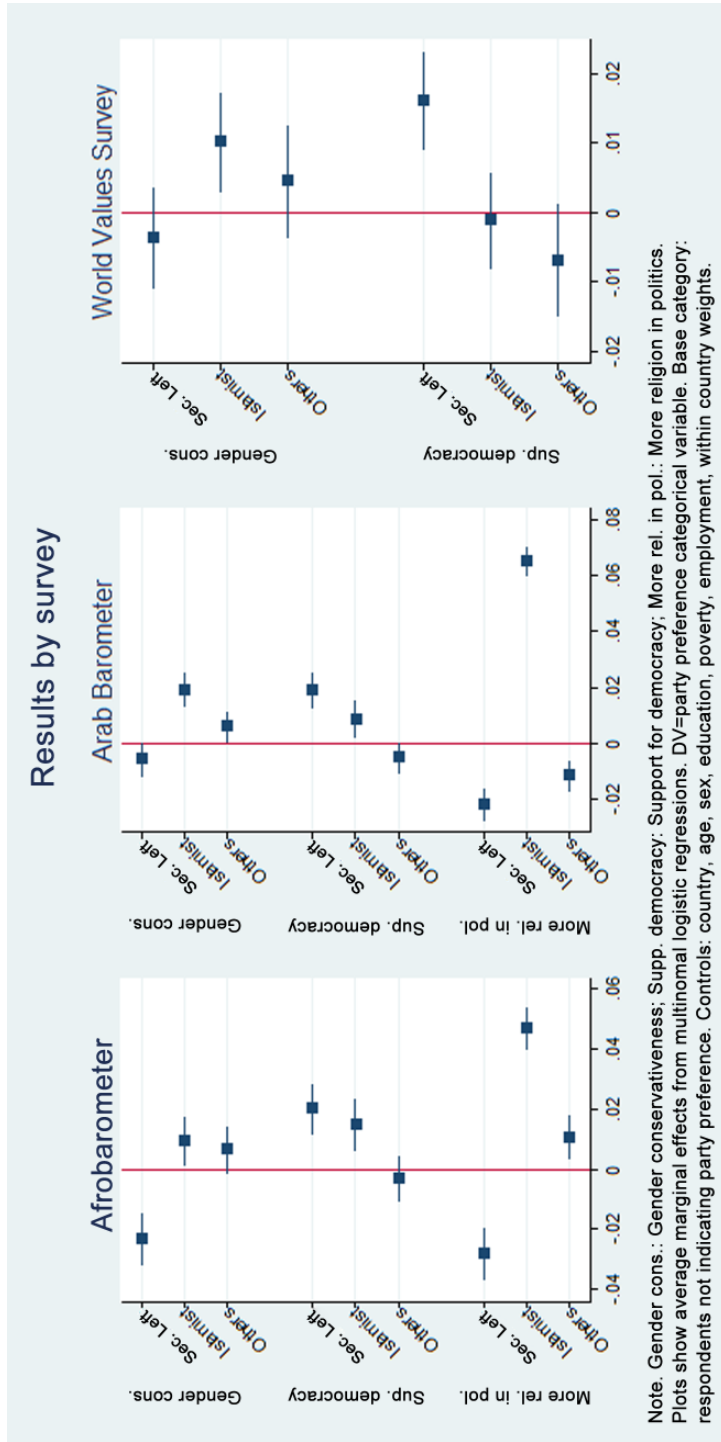


Table 3. Summary results.

	Islamist voters	Secular Left voters
Ideological congruence	High	Low–medium
Demographic base	Not distinctive but not prone to clientelism	Not distinctive but not prone to clientelism
Offers of vote-buying	Lower	Average

tended to focus on identity issues. Thus, the processes of transition succeeded only if compromises around such identity issues could be reached. Where they succeeded, democratic structures were built (in Tunisia), and where they failed (in Egypt) authoritarian rule returned. With this in mind, it is not surprising that scholars find, for example, in post-revolutionary Tunisia, that the marginalization of economic issues in the political process leads to the disaffection of large sectors of the population with electoral politics, seen as a middle-class compromise over identity issues (Merone, 2015). The apparent lack of a serious political debate on economic issues and the absence of the development of recognizable economic policies by political parties might negatively affect the prospects of stability in these countries because they imply that parties do not invest in policies that address the economic grievances which drove the Arab Spring. The contradictory messages regarding the economy that Islamist parties, for example, send out to voters, are quite telling.

Finally, our findings suggest that the Islamist–Secular divide is restricted to identity politics. Rather than organizing society and politics in other relevant dimensions, this divide is limited to disagreements over the role of religion and social issues such as gender roles. These are certainly important questions, but the absence of other issues suggests that there might be more common ground between Islamists and other parties than often assumed.

Conclusions

This article investigated the linkages between Islamist and Secular Left parties and their voters in the Arab world. It identified the existence of programmatic voting for these parties by looking at party–voter ideological congruence, support bases and vote-buying. The findings suggest that support for these parties has some programmatic characteristics, especially for supporters of Islamist parties, but that the ideological attachment of voters is, by and large, limited to differences with regard to the role of religion in politics and gender values.

Our findings point to the need for more systematic studies of voter values, party mobilization, parties' policy positions and voting behaviour in the region. Although many parties operate in semi-authoritarian settings and may, thus, not be able to implement the policies they advocate, it is important to understand which topics are at the core of party mobilization and which ones resonate with the electorate in the Arab world, because these influence behaviour when and if the political space opens up. Considering the authoritarian backlash in different countries that targets Islamist parties in particular, it is also important to gain a better understanding of those social groups whose formal political participation and representation is again restricted and whose values are excluded from public debate.

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Supplementary material

Please also refer to supplementary material at: journals/sagepub.com/home/ips.

Notes

1. Most scholars take Islamist and Left elites at face value when they argue that they do not want to cooperate for ideological reasons. Wegner and Pellicer (2011) suggest that both parties might overemphasize the divide for other reasons, such as, for example, the fact that the other party in the alliance might have more support.
2. Turkey is an exception.
3. The discussion of the selection criteria can be found in the appendix together with the list of parties.
4. Generally, large majorities of survey respondents indicate economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, are the country's most important problems.
5. Kurzman and Naqvi (2009) undertake a basic coding of Islamist manifestos on a limited number of items, such as support for democracy, free trade and the welfare state, and the role of Sharia law, minorities and women. For these items, they provide a rough assessment as to how central they are to the manifesto. They rely on very varied materials, sometimes manifestos of less than a page, sometimes elaborate election platforms. Their data also include non-Arab Islamist parties and earlier electoral platforms. We limit our use of their data to countries that are included in our dataset (namely, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and Palestine) and the latest platform included in their data.
6. The exact wording of the questions used to construct each index and the coding are provided in Table A.1 in the online appendix. Table A.2 displays simple descriptive statistics for the respective items.
7. The exact wording of this question is: (a) Afrobarometer: 'If a legislative election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?'; (b) Arab Barometer: 'Which of the existing parties is closest to representing your political, social and economic aspirations?'; and (c) WVS: 'Which party would you vote for if there were a national election tomorrow?'
8. Supporters of other parties are either supporters of pro-regime parties, such as the PAM in Morocco, the FLN in Algeria, or the GPC in Yemen, or parties that cannot be allocated to either the Islamist or Secular Left camp, for example, the Istiqlal Party in Morocco that is socially conservative but not Islamist.
9. Tables with detailed results are in the online appendix. For Figure 1, consult Tables A.4, A.5 and A.6, for Figure 2, Tables A.7., A.8 and A.9, for Figure 3, Table A.11, for Figure 4, Table A.12 and for Figure 5, Tables A.13.1, A.13.2 and A.13.3.

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Author biographies

Eva Wegner is an assistant professor in the School of Politics and International Relations at University College Dublin. She has published extensively on political behaviour and accountability in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* and *Party Politics*, among others.

Francesco Cavatorta is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and Research Fellow at the Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche sur l'Afrique et le Moyen Orient (CIRAM) at Laval University. He has published extensively on Islamist parties and movements, and on processes of democratization in the Middle East and North Africa. His work has appeared in *Democratization*, *Mediterranean Politics*, *Government and Opposition*, *Middle East Policy* and the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, among others.