RE-UNDERSTANDING RELIGION AND SUPPORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN ARAB COUNTRIES

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Much is said about Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) publics opposing gender equality, often referring to patriarchal Islam. However, nuanced large-scale studies addressing which specific aspects of religiosity affect support for gender equality across the MENA are conspicuously absent. This study develops and tests a gendered agentic socialization framework that proposes that MENA citizens are not only passively socialized by religion but also have agency (within their religiosity). This disaggregates the influence of religiosity, highlights its multifacetedness, and theorizes the moderating roles that gender and sociocognitive empowerment play via gendered processes of agentic dissociations. Using 15 World Values Surveys and multilevel models, our analyses show that most dimensions of religiosity fuel opposition to gender equality. However, the salience of religion in daily life is found to increase women's support for gender equality and cushion the negative impact of religious service attendance. Also, gender and education moderate the impacts of several religiosity dimensions; for instance, women's (initially greater) support for gender equality more sharply declines with increased service attendance than men's. Altogether, this study finds that religious socialization is multifaceted and gendered, and that certain men and women are inclined and equipped to deviate from dominant patriarchal religious interpretations.

Keywords: *Middle East and North Africa; gender equality; public opinion; Islam; agency*

Arab Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) publics report one of the world's lowest rates of support for gender equality (Norris 2009; Price 2016), and, consequently, the Arab MENA shows relatively large

political and socioeconomic inequalities between men and women (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes 2007). Thorough knowledge of what drives the MENA publics' resistance to gender equality is thus pivotal to address real-world inequalities. However, previous public opinion research and Western public debates explain opposition to gender equality in the MENA by pointing rather unidimensionally to Muslims' (vs. non-Muslims') patriarchal religious socialization (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Lussier and Fish 2016; Moaddel 2006; Rizzo, Meyer, and Ali 2007). This narrative breathes Orientalism: a homogenous MENA "other" characterized by irrationality, oppression, passiveness, and, most of all, patriarchal Islam is opposed to "the self," the progressive, active, secular West (Abu-Lughod 2002; Korteweg 2008; Said 1979), without acknowledging or theorizing how religiosity is a multifaceted and gendered force.

The present study aims to understand relations between religiosity and support for gender equality in the Arab MENA in a more sophisticated manner by developing and testing new theoretical notions of "agentic socialization." These notions build on multidisciplinary insights from classic sociology, in-depth qualitative studies, and feminist scholarship (e.g., Avishai and Irby 2017; Charrad 2011; Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003; Sewell 1992; Spierings 2015). The agentic socialization framework rejects claims that MENA inhabitants are solely and uniformly passively socialized to oppose gender equality. Instead, it proposes that MENA citizens have agency—even within dominant patriarchal socialization—and that socialization processes are gendered (see also Moghissi 2011; Read and Bartkowski 2000; Zion-Waldoks 2015). The framework thus stresses that women and men might "live" their religion differently and have the ability to bargain with their religion and interpret it in ways that deviate from the dominant patriarchal mainstream (Hall 1997; Kandiyoti 1988; Rinaldo 2014).

In applying our framework, we propose that religious socialization may be gendered and particularly women may be more inclined to make up their own minds on gender equality and religion and that sociocognitive empowerment may equip people to agentically deviate from patriarchal religious interpretations. We thus theorize specifically how gender and education shape religious reinterpretations. This implies that relations between people's religiosity and their support for gender equality differ by gender and education, which we test empirically (Khurshid 2015; Prickett 2015).

To understand how religion can be both a source of emancipatory reinterpretations and patriarchal socialization, we argue that it is necessary to

take a more refined approach to individual-level religiosity than to focus on differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, as is done in most MENA public opinion studies (e.g., Alexander and Welzel 2011; Lussier and Fish 2016; Price 2016). We therefore disaggregate the concept of religion and conceptualize it multidimensionally. Sociology of religion scholars have shown that religiosity is indeed multidimensional and complex, identifying among others: communal practices (e.g., attending religious services), doctrinal beliefs (e.g., textualism), devotion (e.g., religious self-perception), and salience (e.g., religion-driven daily choices) (Cornwall et al. 1986; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Stark and Glock 1968). Appreciating these distinctions allows us to address more precisely in which ways religiosity might have different implications for women and more highly educated citizens than for men and lower educated citizens. Altogether, our research question reads: To what extent are different dimensions of religiosity related to support for gender equality in the Arab MENA, and how do these relations differ for women and more highly educated individuals?

RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION RECONSIDERED

The Agentic Socialization Framework

Our agentic socialization framework aims to understand support for gender equality in the Arab MENA in a nuanced manner by refining and integrating classic sociological frames and gender theories (Abu-Lughod 2002; Avishai and Irby 2017; Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003; Kandiyoti 1988; Korteweg 2008; Sewell 1992; Stark and Glock 1968). At its core, the framework emphasizes that MENA citizens are embedded in dominantly patriarchal religious structures, but that socialization processes within those structures differ between men and women. Moreover, citizens have the agency to reinterpret their religion; women and men in the MENA are not solely passively socialized to follow prevailing religious interpretations but can give alternative, progressive meanings to their religiosity that are more conducive to support for gender equality.

Our framework departs from life course theory (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003) and agency-structure duality's (Sewell 1992) assertion that people are always embedded in spatio-temporal contexts with pre-existing (socially constructed) structures that shape their lives. Here we focus on the established patriarchal interpretations of religion in which MENA citizens are embedded from birth and childhood on (Al-Hibri 1982; Mir-

Hosseini 2006; Moghissi 2011). Integration in and socialization by these pre-existing religious structures shape MENA citizens' lives, including the meanings they attach to gender. In other words, the more integrated individuals are in this patriarchal religion in general, the less likely they are to support gender equality. Simultaneously, these theories propose that people have the agency to construct their own lives within their contexts rather than to merely reproduce patriarchal interpretations from generation to generation (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003, 11).

Regarding agency and gender, Kandiyoti proposed in her influential work that women use strategies to maneuver specific patriarchal contexts (1988, 275). In the following debate, some argued that women's agency is found in resisting religion, which equates agency to secularism and thus denies religious women their agency while still conceptualizing religion as a unidimensional force that singularly oppresses women (Abu-Lughod 2002; Korteweg 2008). Other scholars emphasized "illiberal agency," which claims that religious women might exercise agency in actively being orthodox even when that reinforces patriarchal religious structures (Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2005). This position has been criticized for stretching "agency" so far that it becomes a hollow term (Moghissi 2011; Rinaldo 2014).

In our framework, we transcend both views and integrate them into contemporary sociological theories. Our premise is that people are indeed—to different degrees—socialized by patriarchal religious structures, but that people embedded in these patriarchal religious structures have the agency to subvert dominant religious interpretations to promote their (gendered) interests (see also Korteweg 2008; Rinaldo 2014). Paradoxically, dominant patriarchal religious structures thus provide the very conditions for agentic *re*-interpretations of religion (Jansen 2004; Mir-Hosseini 2006; Prickett 2015). Religious MENA citizens—especially women—thus should not be considered to be solely passively socialized by patriarchal religious structures but capable of actively negotiating religious meanings attached to gender by drawing on alternative religious and secular sources (Read and Bartkowski 2000).

This framework signifies "religion" as dynamic and negotiable, allowing room to advance support for gender equality but simultaneously as containing rigid oppressive structures that socialize citizens into patriarchal worldviews. To understand how religious socialization shapes people's support for gender equality in negotiable ways, we argue that religiosity needs to be conceptualized in a multidimensional way because different manifestations of individual-level religiosity have different
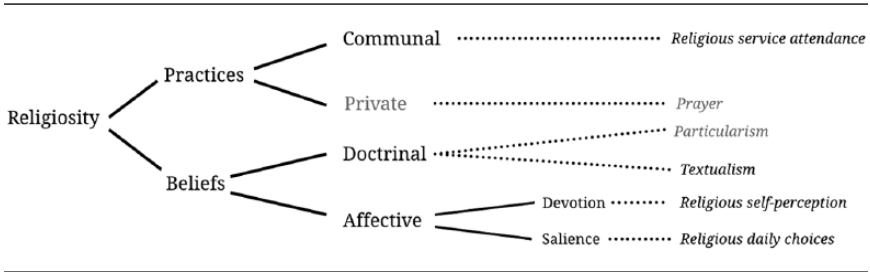
FIGURE 1:   Conceptual Scheme of Religiosity

implications regarding socialization and negotiability, as will be theorized more concretely below.

In line with classic and more contemporary distinctions, we firstly differentiate between (external) religious practices and (internal) religious beliefs (see Figure 1) (Cornwall et al. 1986; Hall 1997; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Stark and Glock 1968). We further subdivide religious practices into two categories: private religious behaviors that are acted out without others, and communal practices, such as attending religious services, that imply exposure to the institutional patriarchal establishment's home (Aune 2015; Mir-Hosseini 2006; Nyhagen 2017). Concerning religious beliefs, a further distinction can be made as well. Doctrinal beliefs stipulate the interpretation of one's religion, whereas affective beliefs relate to feelings of attachment to religion regardless of the specific content of those beliefs. Affective beliefs encompass a more general and abstract attachment to religion in and of itself ("devotion") and feelings that religion specifically guides daily life choices ("salience"). Below, we apply our theoretical framework to communal practices (attendance), doctrinal beliefs (textualism), and affective beliefs (devotion and salience), the dimensions we could incorporate empirically.

Multidimensional Religious Socialization

Whereas previous quantitative MENA studies have predominantly drawn on unidimensional socialization perspectives (e.g., Alexander and Welzel 2011; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Lussier and Fish 2016; Price 2016), our multidimensional framework emphasizes that different dimensions of religiosity link differently to socialization and support for gender equality. First, attending religious services entails exposure to the MENA's structural "ruling patriarchal establishment," which generally preaches

gendered worldviews of men and women being complementary and hierarchically related (Al-Hibri 1982, ix; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Frequent attendance therefore is expected to increase the likelihood that such messages will be internalized, corroding support for gender equality (Hervieu-Léger 1998; Sumerau 2012). Second, doctrinal beliefs are expected to influence support for gender equality (Al-Hibri 1982; Kucinskas 2010; Moghadam 2013; Spierings 2015). The doctrinal belief we specifically focus on is "textualism" (Rinaldo 2014): the belief that religious texts have one static literalist meaning—voiced by the institutionalized patriarchy—instead of a spirit to be interpreted in light of the time they were written (Masoud, Jamal, and Nugent 2016; Moghissi 2011). For example, the Quran and Hadith can be interpreted textually, or literally, as a point-blank condemnation of taking your own life,[1] while contextualists have proposed more lenient conclusions based on the current rapid expansions of Muslim-majority countries' populations (Shapiro 2013). Textualist readings generally oppose gender equality. For instance, interpreting the Quran's proclamations on inheritance textually stipulates that women's shares should literally be half of men's (4:11, Khan trans.). Contextual interpretations stress an emancipatory spirit as women are allocated more than the nothing they generally had in the seventh century before Islam (Mir-Hosseini 2006; Selim 2003). Altogether, we thus expect that: The frequency of communal religious service attendance and holding textualist beliefs are negatively related to support for gender equality (*Hypothesis 1*).

Drawing attention to affective beliefs, our framework however suggests that religiosity might actually fuel support for gender equality. Counter to doctrinal beliefs, religious affect does not reflect a certain (patriarchal) *content* of beliefs, but rather it reflects on the attachment to religion in and of itself, to the main undercurrents of religion. These main religious tenets of monotheistic religions have been argued to involve benevolent traits related to mercy, generosity, and fairness (Schwartz and Huismans 1995). Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche's review (2015, 205), for instance, points out that "the major religious traditions all emphasize compassion." Regarding Islam, one of the five pillars, *Zakat*, specifically concerns charity, and the Quran designates Allah as *al-Rahman* (Most Merciful) and *al-Rahim* (Compassionate). Similarly, El Fadl (2001, 9) has illustrated the Islamic ethos as one of general egalitarianism: "Islam rejects elitism and emphasizes that truth is equally accessible to all Muslims regardless of race, class, or gender." Altogether, we hypothesize that: The stronger peoples' affective religious

beliefs (devotion and salience), the higher their support for gender equality (*Hypothesis 2*).

Gendered Socialization and Agentic Reinterpretation

As our agentic socialization framework proposes that citizens are not uniformly passively sculpted by dominant religious interpretations, but that socialization processes may differ for different societal groups, the impact of individuals' religiosity may vary with their gender and education (Khurshid 2015; Rinaldo 2014). Several mechanisms lead us to expect that religiosity's impact on support for gender equality is gendered, including women's personal interests and the gender conservative socialization in the MENA region overall (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Concerning people's interests, gender equality is generally considered to be more in the direct interest of women than men. Currently men benefit from being designated head of households with greater legal rights. Therefore, women may be more inclined to diverge from patriarchal religious messages and seek or accept alternative interpretations that allow them more rights, as several in-depth studies have shown (Jansen 2004; Masoud, Jamal, and Nugent 2016; Moghissi 2011; Prickett 2015; Read and Bartkowski 2000; Rinaldo 2014; Selim 2003; Zion-Waldoks 2015). Women may also be socialized differently than men. While men tend to be taught to be aggressive, competitive, household leaders, women's socialization accentuates their supposedly emotional, affectionate, caring, gentle, and overall benevolent nature (Gonzalez 2011; Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow 2001). Women's socialization into benevolence—apart from religious benevolence—has been shown to translate to greater social compassion and support for gender equality (Eagly et al. 2004). Both gendered interests and gendered socialization thus lead us to expect that women will support gender equality more than men, but also that religion's impact will vary between women and men. Still, as Lussier and Fish (2016, 35) note, "surprisingly little has been written about the intersection between sex and religious identification with regard to attitudes about gender inequality."

Filling this lacuna, first we propose that the gender gap in support for gender equality will close with stronger integration in the established religious patriarchy. Low integration in institutionalized religion—that is, not frequenting services and not adhering to strict textualism—is expected to bolster space to deviate from patriarchal religious interpretations. Given gendered socialization and interests, we then propose that espe-

cially women will use that space (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004), whereas men have no incentive to reinterpret their religion on top of their more conservative socialization.

However, stronger integration in the institutional patriarchy—with its authoritative truth-claims of the proper interpretation of religion—is expected to leave little wiggle room for those agentic deviations. Religious service attendance and textualism thus are expected to shrink spaces that particularly women use, impeding especially women's propensity to benevolent reinterpretations. At the same time, it is also theoretically possible that, for instance, women who frequent services represent a selective group that is more gender conservative even before attendance. Still, here it should be noted again that intergenerational transmissions of religiosity and the structural character of religious institutions render this possibility less likely. Also, the most conservative women might not attend services because there are no facilities or because they believe they should pray at home. Not attending services is thus not one-to-one translated to being less conservative, which is also illustrated by the fact that a substantial number of women attend services at least once a week, but even more do so less often.[2] Moreover, a wealth of ethnographic research in this area shows that even if attendance is partly a process of self-selection, it seems unlikely that women's gender attitudes also are unaffected by attendance (see Bartkowski and Read 2003; Prickett 2015; Read and Bartkowski 2000). Several studies have even pointed out that women who attend religious services start off more progressive but amend their views following service attendance (see Chong 2006; Griffith 1997). Altogether, we expect that, compared to men's, women's initially greater support for gender equality will be more sharply reduced when they attend services and adhere to textualist beliefs, narrowing the gender gap in support for gender equality. Or formulated in more technical terms: Negative relationships between religious service attendance and textualism and support for gender equality are stronger for women than men (*Hypothesis 3*).

Women's reinterpretations are however not expected to be stonewalled by all dimensions of religiosity, drawing our attention to affective beliefs. Affective religious beliefs—feelings of attachment to religion rather than particular beliefs regarding its proper content—are expected to enlarge room for reinterpretations as they are disconnected from the institutional religious patriarchy and, as noted, may inspire interpreting religion benevolently. Women's socialization into compassion and incentives to reinterpret their religion are expected to drive women especially to make good use of affective beliefs' space for renegotiations (Prickett 2015; Read and

Bartkowski 2000; Rinaldo 2014). We thus expect that: Affective religious beliefs are positively related to support for gender equality especially among women rather than among men (*Hypothesis 4*).

Agentic socialization also draws attention to being better equipped to diverge from patriarchal religious socialization, which might have particular implications for the role of education. As others have argued, more highly educated people's cognitive skills allow them to reconcile more easily seemingly contradictory views such as strongly religious and feminist ones (Moghadam 2013). Also, their advantaged social position implies that the more highly educated are more likely to encounter divergent views on (religious interpretations of) gender norms, increasing their awareness of alternatives (Shamaileh 2016). Because of these resources, more highly educated people are expected to deviate from patriarchal religious interpretations more often, provided space for such renegotiations exists. Thus, among those who are less integrated in the institutional religious patriarchy, the more highly educated are expected to support gender equality more. However, this educational gap in support for gender equality will close with greater service attendance and textualism. In technical terms: Negative relations between religious service attendance and textualism and support for gender equality are stronger among the more highly educated than the lower educated (*Hypothesis 5*).

Still, as seen, affective religious beliefs do not imply integration in the institutional religious patriarchy and are expected to inspire benevolent reinterpretations. Following their greater cognitive skills and awareness of alternatives, especially more highly educated people are expected to use this space and renegotiate religious meanings of gender (Moghadam 2013). Particularly the more highly educated may thus translate affective beliefs into support for gender equality: Affective religious beliefs are positively related to support for gender equality especially among the more highly educated rather than the lower educated (*Hypothesis 6*).

Finally, regarding the different dimensions of religiosity, our agentic socialization framework also proposes that citizens can reinterpret their religion in its own terms. Greater religious affect might make people rethink, contest, or buffer some dominant oppressive religious interpretations, as affective beliefs are expected to create knowledge of and adherence to religion's main benevolent messages (Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015; Schwartz and Huismans 1995). For instance, attachment to the general notion of "love thy neighbor" could be expected to make more devoted people less passively receptive to patriarchal views voiced in services. Similarly, considering the benevolent side of religion,

it is expected that when religion is more saliently guiding people's daily life choices, textualism is translated less strongly to judging others, including prescribing how women should behave. We thus expect that: Relations between attending religious services and textualism and support for gender equality are weaker with higher levels of religious affect, that is, devotion and salience (*Hypothesis 7*).

METHODS

This study uses the MENA subset of the World Values Survey. Of these, 15 surveys (2001-2014) included the items needed. They represent 12 countries: Algeria (2x), Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan (2x), Lebanon, Libya, Morocco (2x), Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen. All surveys target representativeness for the population of 18 years and older, using stratified random sampling. These data are representative regarding gender and age for most populations, and sometimes for education and regional distributions as well.[3] The initial dataset contained 20,254 respondents; after listwise deletion 19,009 respondents (94 percent) remained. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics.

Support for Gender Equality

We operationalize support for gender equality using three widely used items on gender equality in the public sphere in particular. The three items asked respondents to which extent they agreed with the statements: "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do" (four-point scale), "A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl" (four-point scale), and "When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women" (three-point scale) (e.g., Blaydes and Linzer 2008; Kostenko, Kuzmuchev, and Ponarin 2016; Price 2016; Spierings 2014). Factor analyses showed that these items tap into the same underlying factor overall and in 16 of 17 surveys separately,[4] indicating measurement equivalency (Van de Vijver and Leung 1997). All items were recoded so that higher scores indicate greater support for gender equality. To approximate a normal distribution, we took the square root of the mean scores of the three items, weighted by their factor loadings to create the index *support for gender equality.* For ease of interpretation, the final scale was rescaled to run from 0 to 100. The descriptive analyses present a simple summed scale, as is mentioned.

TABLE 1:   Descriptive Statistics of All (Prestandardized) Variables

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Dependent variable					
Support for gender equality	19,009	0	100	35.37	24.10
Religion variables					
Religious service attendance*	19,009	0	1	0.59	0.39
Textualism*	19,009	0	1	0.92	0.16
Devotion*	19,009	0	1	0.78	0.32
Salience*	19,009	0	1	0.95	0.12
Agency variables					
Gender	19,009				
Men		0	1	0.51	
Women		0	1	0.49	
Education*	19,009	0	1	0.45	0.34
Control variables					
Denomination	19,009				
Muslim		0	1	0.96	
Non-Muslim		0	1	0.04	
Age*	19,009	18	93	37.03	14.00
Age^{2,}*	19,009	324	8,649	1566.92	1199.35
Marital status	19,009				
Not married		0	1	0.33	
Separated		0	1	0.03	
Widowed		0	1	0.04	
Married		0	1	0.60	
Employment status	19,009				
Full-time employed		0	1	0.28	
Part-time employed		0	1	0.09	
Self-employed		0	1	0.13	
Retired		0	1	0.05	
Homemaker		0	1	0.25	
Student		0	1	0.10	
Non-employed		0	1	0.10	
Robustness check variables					
Prayer	11,456				
Prayer WVS 4*	1,132	0	1	0.71	0.43
Prayer WVS 5*	1,067	0	1	0.87	0.34
Prayer WVS 6*	9,257	0	1	0.75	0.40
Particularism	14,959				
Not particularistic		0	1	0.61	
Particularistic		0	1	0.39	

NOTE: Min. = minimum; Max. = maximum; SD = standard deviation.
SOURCE: WVS.
*Variable is z-scored for analyses.

Religiosity

We measure the *frequency of religious service attendance* with the question "Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" (never, less than once a year, once a year, only on holy days, once a month, once a week, more than once a week). The scores were rescaled to a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 1.

Textualism—interpreting religious texts statically and literally instead of contextually—is measured by the proxy of respondents' views regarding the justifiability of euthanasia and suicide. As noted in the theory section, taking your own life (by euthanasia or suicide) is textually prohibited but contextually permitted, making these measurements useful proxies for textualism (Shapiro 2013). These measurements, however, only pertain to one particular issue (i.e., taking one's own life). Had the data permitted it, it would have been ideal to include other issues or a more direct measurement, although we have no strong reason to expect that being a textualist on other issues relates differently to support for gender equality. Moreover, as discussed below, in our robustness tests we included particularism as an alternative measurement of doctrinal beliefs, which was measured unrelated to specific issues, and it is similarly related to support for gender equality. To operationalize *textualism*, we averaged the two 10-point items and rescaled it to a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 1. Higher values signal greater textualism. As the distributions of the two scales were similar, respondents were included if they had a valid score on at least one indicator.

Concerning affective beliefs, we distinguished devotion and salience (see Stark and Glock 1968). *Devotion*—an abstract attachment to religion itself—is measured using two items that have been shown to tap the same concept before (Spierings 2014): (a) "Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are" a religious person (scored as 1), not a religious person, or a convinced atheist (following Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer [2007], the last two are both scored 0); and (b) "Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important?" Respondents who chose "religious faith" were considered to be more devoted (1) than others (0). The scores of respondents with at least one valid answer were averaged to the scale "devotion."

Salience—a specific attachment to religion as a guide in (daily) life—was measured by another two items: "How important is God in your life?" (ten-point scale, 0 to 1), and "For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life. Would you say religion is very important (1),

rather important, not very important, or not at all important (0)?" If at least one item was answered validly, scores were averaged to the continuous scale "salience."

Our measurements of devotion and salience are less distinct from each other than the theoretical concepts, as there are no data available on the salience of religion in *specific daily* life choices. However, empirically devotion and salience are not very strongly related and do not cause multicollinearity issues (see online Appendix 1). We thus include both in our analyses to make our results as nuanced and informative as possible.

Gender and Education

To study the gendered effects of religiosity, we measure respondents' *gender* as observed by the interviewer (0: woman; 1: man). *Education*, the second moderator, includes four categories across surveys: "no formal education completed" (0); "complete elementary" and "incomplete secondary" (combined into "elementary," 0.33); "complete secondary" and "incomplete university education" (combined into "secondary," 0.67); and "complete university education and higher" (1).

Control Variables

Denomination, age, marital status, and employment status are included as control variables. Respondents' self-reported denomination, distinguishing between Muslims and non-Muslims, is controlled in our models, and we also established our results are substantially similar when we estimate models for Muslims separately. The Bahrain 2014 survey does not include denomination, but virtually all native Bahrainis are Muslim and considered as such here. Unfortunately, a more refined distinction among either Muslims or non-Muslims was not available in the majority of the surveys; comparing Muslims and non-Muslims does make our results comparable to other studies (e.g., Lussier and Fish 2016; Norris 2009). *Age* is a continuous scale; respondents under 18 were excluded as they were not sampled in all surveys. Age squared is included to capture important life course effects. Marital status is distinguished by four groups: married, widowed, separated, and never married. Employment status encompasses "fulltime employed," "part-time employed," "self-employed," "retired," "homemaker," "student," and "non-employed" (including "unemployed" and "other non-employed").
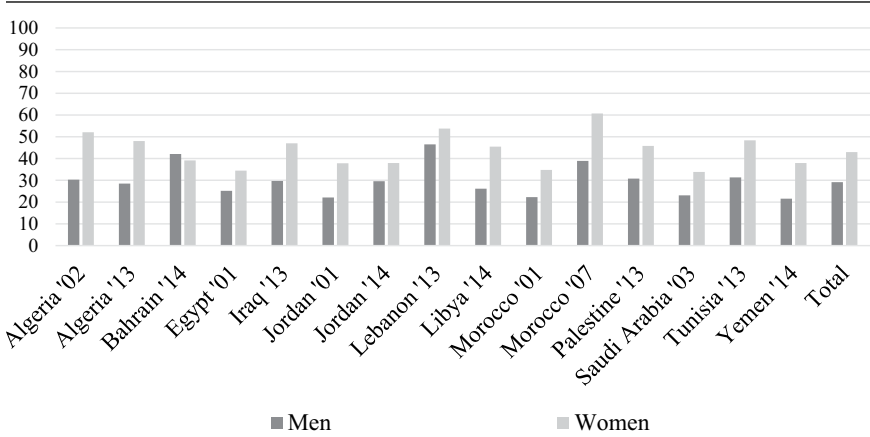
FIGURE 2:   Mean Support for Public Gender Equality per Gender per Survey (N = 19,009)

Analytic Strategy

Our data have to be modeled using multilevel models to control for clustered observations within country-years and countries; one-level models would deflate our p-values and increase the chance of type I errors. Random intercepts are included at the higher levels (country-time; country).[5] This takes into account the clustered structure of the data and prevents us from drawing false positive conclusions. To further increase the rigor of our tests we also conducted various robustness checks, which we briefly discuss after our main results as they yielded similar findings.

SUPPORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

How supportive of gender equality (focused on equal participation in the public sphere) are MENA publics in the new millennium? Figure 2 presents the mean scores on the three items used to measure support for gender equality (without taking their square root) and shows that respondents score an average of 36 out of 100 in the WVS data. As a point of reference, when we analyze all countries included in the most recent WVS wave, the MENA region has the lowest pooled average in the WVS. It is several points below that of the next United Nations–defined regions—Southern Asia and West Africa—and substantially below the total sample average. Still, we also see

considerable differences within the MENA region; for instance, women's average support is 43, while men's is less than 30.

EXPLAINING SUPPORT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Table 2 presents the multilevel regression results for support for gender equality. Model 1 includes all direct effects of religiosity (Hypotheses 1 and 2); in Models 2 and 3, the moderations between religiosity and gender and education are added, respectively (Hypotheses 3 through 6); Model 4 includes interaction terms between the different dimensions of religiosity themselves (Hypothesis 7). All models include the control variables, which relate to support for gender equality as expected (see Lussier and Fish 2016; Price 2016); for instance, education has a clear positive impact, and women tend to be considerably more supportive of gender equality: more than 15 points on a scale ranging from 0 to 100.

Multidimensional Religiosity

Model 1 suggests that religiosity mostly fuels opposition to gender equality. MENA inhabitants who attend religious services more frequently, who interpret their religion textually, and who are more devoted, all oppose gender equality more. However, the salience of religious beliefs is the exception to the rule, as it shows no clear significant relationship to support for gender equality. Additional analyses indicate this is partly due to contradictory effects in different contexts (see online Appendix 2). Altogether, these results support hypothesis 1 and lead us to reject hypothesis 2.

Gender and Education

Turning our attention to Model 2, we should first repeat that, as expected following gendered socialization and gendered interests, women's support for gender equality overall is far greater than men's, as is the case after taking religiosity and other factors into account (cf. Figure 2). Thus, women can and do interpret gender equality differently from men, "even" in patriarchal MENA countries (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004).

Model 2 furthermore shows that several dimensions of religiosity also are differently related to support for gender equality for women and men. First, service attendance is associated with a sharper decline in support for gender equality among women than among men. As expected, when

TABLE 2: Multilevel analyses of support for public gender equality (N = 19,009)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Religious service attendance	**−1.12**	0.18	**−0.56**	0.26	**−1.13**	0.18	**−1.16**	0.18
*Women			**−0.86**	0.36				
*Education					**−0.61**	0.16		
*Devotion							0.15	0.17
*Salience							**0.42**	0.19
Textualism	**−0.88**	0.17	**−0.97**	0.24	**−0.92**	0.17	**−0.81**	0.18
*Women			0.17	0.33				
*Education					0.14♂	0.17		
*Devotion							0.17*	0.15
*Salience							0.07	0.11
Devotion	**−0.62**	0.18	−0.14	0.24	**−0.59**	0.18	**−0.56**	0.18
*Women			**−1.12**	0.34				
*Education					−0.13	0.18		
Salience	−0.30	0.19	**−1.53**	0.24	*−0.32*	0.19	−0.19	0.21
*Women			**2.70**	0.35				
*Education					0.16♀	0.18		
Gender: Women (ref. = men)	**15.46**	0.42	**15.65**	0.42	**15.35**	0.42	**15.50**	0.42
Education	**3.24**	0.19	**3.22**	0.19	**3.25**	0.19	**3.23**	0.19
Denomination: Muslim (ref. = non-Muslim)	**−4.83**	0.89	**−4.90**	0.89	**−4.95**	0.89	**−4.87**	0.89
Age	−0.53	1.05	−0.54	1.04	−0.40	1.05	−0.53	1.05
Age^2	0.78	1.01	0.82	1.01	0.64	1.01	0.77	1.01
Marital status								
Not married	0.61	0.48	0.71	0.48	0.66	0.48	0.61	0.48
Separated	**2.73**	0.96	**2.70**	0.96	**2.76**	0.96	**2.69**	0.96
Widowed	−1.45	0.86	−1.50	0.86	−1.38	0.86	−1.45	0.86
Employment status								
Part-time employed	−1.08	0.62	−1.02	0.62	−1.09	0.62	−1.10	0.62
Self-employed	**−2.24**	0.55	**−2.29**	0.55	**−2.29**	0.55	**−2.27**	0.55
Retired	−1.11	0.85	−1.24	0.85	−1.21	0.85	−1.13	0.85
Homemaker	**−5.08**	0.57	**−5.31**	0.57	**−4.92**	0.57	**−5.07**	0.57
Student	0.28	0.69	0.17	0.69	0.25	0.69	0.24	0.69
Non-employed	−1.09	0.62	**−1.23**	0.62	**−1.14**	0.62	−1.10	0.62
Intercept	**34.73**	1.85	**34.58**	1.85	**34.86**	1.83	**34.71**	1.85
Variance								
Country-year	38.1		38.1		37.4		38.3	
Individual	473.0		471.1		472.6		472.8	

NOTE: Bold coefficients indicate significance at α = 0.05, italics at α = 0.10. *, ♀, and ♂ indicate parameter is only significant in the Muslim subsample, female subsample, or male subsample, respectively.
SOURCE: WVS.
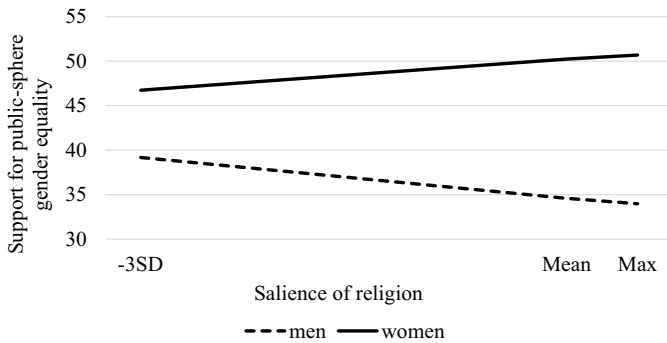
FIGURE 3:   Gendered Relations between Salience and Support for Gender Equality (N = 19,009)

women do not attend religious services, they are more supportive of gender equality than men (about 50 vs. 35), but service attendance reduces women's support with $(-0.56 - 0.86) -1.42$, while it only reduces men's with -0.56. These findings provide support for hypothesis 3, but only partially, as a similar effect is not found for textualism. Face-to-face exposure to members of the religious patriarchy voicing authoritative messages thus probably shrinks spaces for emancipatory reinterpretations that especially women are initially inclined to use, reducing the gender gap in support.

Second and interestingly, religious salience turns out to be negatively related to support for gender equality among men (-1.53), but actually *increases* support for gender equality among women $(-1.53 + 2.70 = 1.17)$, as is illustrated in Figure 3. So, women who are more affectively attached to their religion support gender equality more, while among men the stronger believers support gender equality less. We did not find this for devotion; thus, only partial support is found for hypothesis 4. These findings illustrate that among women, salience—that is, the importance of religion in daily life—is the religiosity dimension that also functions as a help, not a hurdle, to support for gender equality.

Relations between several religiosity indicators and support for gender equality also are moderated by educational attainment. Model 3 first indicates that the negative impact of religious service attendance strengthens when education increases. As expected, more highly educated individuals' initially more progressive views are reduced more sharply when they frequently partake in religious services (see Figure 4). The same is not found for textualism, however; hypothesis 5 is thus only partially supported.
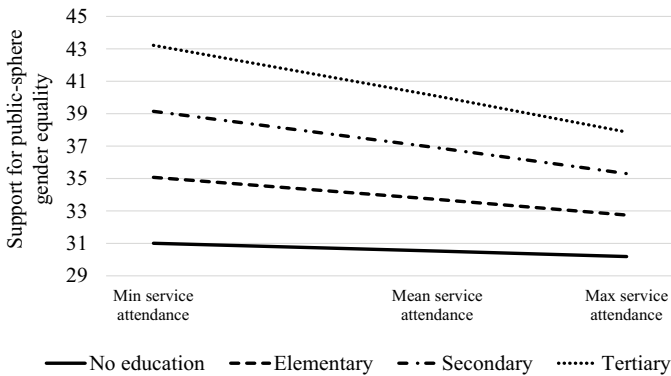
FIGURE 4:   Religious Service Attendance and Support for Gender Equality per Education Level (N = 19,009)

Model 3 furthermore shows that, among women, the negative impact of salience, but not devotion, is weakened by education; these findings support hypothesis 6, but only in one specific case. Overall, Models 2 and 3 suggest that while womanhood and education form a buffer against the impact of one's own beliefs, socialization via religious services reduces the room for agentic reinterpretations deviating from societally dominant norms, diminishing women's and more highly educated citizens' initially greater support for gender equality.

Interdependent Religiosity

Finally, Model 4 shows that salience and devotion weaken the impact of service attendance and textualism, respectively.[6] For instance, across the MENA, people who attend services (one standard deviation) more often show increased opposition to gender equality, with 1.2 points, as compared to citizens for whom religion is averagely salient. All other things being equal, among individuals for whom religion and God are more important in their lives (salience) the impact of attending religious services is only (1.16 – 0.42) 0.7. Not all expected interaction effects were found to be statistically significant, but they were all in the expected direction. These findings thus provide some support for hypothesis 7; the patriarchal influence of doctrinal religious beliefs and communal practices seems to be mitigated by having stronger affective religious beliefs (i.e., salience or devotion). What is more, all results together pinpoint religious salience as the only dilutor of service attendance's impact, emphasizing that the influ-

ence of exposure to the institutional religious patriarchy may not be buffered by womanhood or education, but it is by (affective) religion itself.

Robustness Tests

We conducted additional analyses as robustness checks. As mentioned above, we estimated our models on subsamples (only Muslims, women, and men) and within individual country-years; divergent results are indicated in Table 2 and Appendix 2. We also varied the inclusion and operationalization of the religiosity variables by including respondents with missing scores on denomination and service attendance (classifying them as a separate group); additionally distinguishing between the nonreligious and religious non-Muslims; and including prayer and particularism, although then many cases have to be excluded from the analyses.[7]

Our main results are robust for each of these alternatives. For instance, our additional measurements of religiosity relate to support for gender equality as expected, which provides further support for hypothesis 1 in particular (see online Appendix 3). As individual prayer is not significantly related to support for gender equality, it seems that it is the actual exposure to others in services that serves a patriarchal socialization function, and not practicing religion in and of itself. Moreover, particularism shows a clear negative relation with support for gender equality, which further supports our conclusion that adherence to orthodox doctrinal beliefs diminishes support for gender equality—also when the measure is not focused on one particular issue (as textualism was).

CONCLUSION

This study addressed relations between different dimensions of religiosity and support for gender equality, and how they differed for women and more highly educated individuals in the Arab MENA. We did so based on a newly developed agentic and gendered socialization framework, which we tested on data from 15 WVS surveys from between 2001 and 2014. At its core, the agentic and gendered socialization framework proposes that while MENA citizens are embedded in dominantly patriarchal religious structures, they are not solely or uniformly passively socialized by religiosity, as previous large-scale studies implied (cf. Inglehart and Norris 2003; Price 2016). Instead, the framework proposes that religious socialization is gendered and that people can reinterpret their religion and thus actively deviate from patriarchal interpretations (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe

2003; Kandiyoti 1988; Korteweg 2008; Rinaldo 2014; Sewell 1992).

This framework implies that a disaggregated, multidimensional conceptualization of religiosity is needed, instead of focusing on differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, as previous studies have done (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2003; Lussier and Fish 2016; Norris 2009). This is because rigid patriarchal religious structures obstruct support for gender equality while other dimensions of religiosity stimulate emancipatory advancements (see Cornwall et al. 1986; Hall 1997; Nyhagen 2017; Stark and Glock 1968). Indeed, our results consistently showed that while religious service attendance, textualism, and devotion decreased support for gender equality, the salience of religious beliefs in life choices had no singularly negative impact. Among women we even found that religious salience *increases* support for gender equality (cf. Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Hello 2002). Moreover, even though religious salience does not consistently fuel support for gender equality (as was expected), it was the only moderator in our analyses that buffered the negative impact of exposure to the institutional patriarchy in religious services. All in all, these findings showed that most but not all dimensions of religiosity serve patriarchal socialization, and that using religion as a guideline in daily life is thus the main (or only) safeguard to the patriarchal influence of exposure to religious institutions. Translating findings from in-depth qualitative studies, religious salience thus seems to be the key to reinterpreting religion along more emancipatory lines (e.g., Aune 2015; Jansen 2004; Mir-Hosseini 2006).

At the core of our framework are genderedness and agency. Consequently, we also proposed that relations between religiosity and support for gender equality vary between different societal groups. Indeed, religious service attendance was more strongly negatively related to support for gender equality among women and more highly educated individuals, as service attendance reduced women's and more highly educated citizens' initially greater support (see Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow 2001; Moghadam 2013; Zion-Waldoks 2015). So it seems that among those who have the space to deviate from dominant patriarchal interpretations, that is, those exposed less to patriarchal religious institutions, especially women and more highly educated individuals use that space to progressively reinterpret their religion (Al-Hibri 1982; Moghissi 2011; Prickett 2015; Read and Bartkowski 2000).

Also, the negative impact of (internal) religious beliefs, particularly religious salience, was weaker among women and more highly educated individuals. Again it seems that given the space for renegotiations, women

and more highly educated individuals more often seek or accept emancipatory reinterpretations of their religion conducive to support for gender equality, as suggested by previous qualitative studies (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015; Kandiyoti 1988; Khurshid 2015; Prickett 2015). Women and more highly educated citizens thus tend to be at the forefront of renegotiating the religiosity–gender inequality coupling.

Based on this summary of results, two core contributions of this study to the literature can be highlighted. First, we have shown that religiosity is a medley. Previous quantitative studies mainly studied denomination (e.g., Alexander and Welzel 2011; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Lussier and Fish 2016), while we theorized a more fine-grained and gendered version of religion's relation to support for gender equality. We showed in greater detail how (disaggregated) religiosity works and that it is not always a hindrance to support for gender equality in the MENA. Especially, religious salience (among women) cushions the blow to support for gender equality of other religiosity dimensions.

Second, previous public opinion studies focused on patriarchal socialization, implying that individuals in the MENA are passive beings (see Said 1979; Spierings 2015). This study provided evidence that people who are more inclined (women) and sociocognitively better equipped (higher educated) can and do cushion patriarchal interpretations of their religiosity. Future research would do well to not only consider MENA citizens as unilaterally passively socialized but also as active agents in a gendered context.

Other important avenues for future research can be derived from some of the challenges we faced, particularly regarding data availability. First, despite taking considerable steps forward, we were unable to tap into every form of religious socialization. For instance, no data were available on religious socialization in schools or parental homes. The socialization processes in these domains may be similar to religious socialization that our data did cover, but that remains an empirical question to tackle in future research. Second, panel data provide more insights into the assumed causality of religious socialization, but such data are currently unavailable. Consequently, we could not empirically show that women's and more highly educated citizens' support for gender equality is reduced *due to* service attendance, instead of women and more highly educated citizens who attended services being more conservative from the start. However, there are distinct reasons to assume some causality; MENA citizens are embedded in religious structures by birth, and previous studies have proposed religious socialization processes are ever-present, implying that

religious socialization predates people forming their opinions on gender equality. Moreover, our models controlled for core variables linked to religiosity and gender equality attitudes, such as education (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Aune 2015).

Third, some indicators of religiosity leave room for improvement. For instance, textualism could not be measured directly. We expect that other aspects of textualism would provide similar results—an expectation supported by our results concerning particularism—but further empirical study is welcome. Similarly, regarding salience we had no measures on the importance of religion in *specific daily* choices (Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Hello 2002). However and if anything, most likely this has led to an *under*estimation of salience's relation to support for gender equality.

Finally, we recommend that future researchers look into different domains of support for gender equality. Although our theory predicts roughly similar patterns, only empirical study can verify this. The vast majority of large-scale quantitative studies pertain to public sphere attitudes; studying support for equality in the private sphere or sexual emancipation would greatly add to our knowledge (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2003; Lussier and Fish 2016; Price 2016). Current data do not permit this, however. For instance, the WVS includes an item on the justifiability of divorce, but it is hard to discern whether men and women filling out the questionnaire had *talaq* or *khul'* in mind—men's unilateral right to divorce or divorce that women can initiate (Shehada 2016).

Still, to our knowledge, this study has included more precise and nuanced measurements of religiosity's impact on gender equality attitudes than any other MENA study. Studying the multidimensional facets of religiosity, as well as their interrelated and particularly agency-moderated influences, has provided important and more nuanced insights into the gendered impact religiosity has on support for gender equality in the MENA, which is pivotal for women in the MENA as well as for public debates around the world.

NOTES

1. The Quran states, "And no person can ever die except by Allah's leave and at an appointed time" (3:145, Khan trans.), and Bukhari's Hadith (4.56.669) reports Allah's response to a man who has taken his own life, "My Slave hurried to bring death upon himself so I have forbidden him (to enter) Paradise."

2. In our sample, women attended services less than men; still, about one-third frequents religious services weekly or more.

3. http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/

4. In the Bahrain 2014 survey, employment and education loaded on two factors. The pooled analysis showed high factor loadings (0.78 [politics], 0.63 [education], 0.72 [employment]) on one dimension, although Cronbach's alpha was moderate (0.50), probably because of the number of items.

5. F tests showed that support's variation over time is marginal compared to between countries, justifying our data structure. Also, the much debated minimal number of higher-level units is not very relevant, as we add no higher-level predictors.

6. The interaction terms largely (just) lose their statistical significance in the men-only model, but they remain similar in the women-only and Muslim-only subsamples.

7. Eleven surveys include *frequency of private prayer*. We standardized scores per survey. Thirteen surveys included *particularism* as follows: "On this list are various groups of people. Which would you not like to have as neighbors?" The answer "from a different religion" is scored 1, others 0. Details can be obtained from the authors.

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