Global Norms vs. Global Actors: International Politics, Muslim Identity, and Support for *Shari'a*

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Abstract

Many scholars argue that local cultures are an impediment to the diffusion of “global” norms. Others point out that local populations domesticate global cultural elements by integrating them into pre-existing cultures, generating hybridized systems. In the current study, I argue that local cultures are not necessarily impediments to cultural change and hybridization is only one aspect of cultural domestication. Instead, I find that individuals attribute global norms to local cultural objects as a means for disassociating putatively universal norms from the powerful actors that dominate international politics. I illustrate this process using the case of support for shari‘a (sometimes called Islamic law) in majority-Muslim countries. Results of multi-method analyses show that, with the exception of attitudes about gender roles and sexuality, Muslims who support implementing shari‘a do not systematically object to many so-called global norms; in fact, they may express more enthusiasm about democracy, tolerance for people of other religions, optimism about scientific advances, and concern for environmental preservation than those who oppose implementing shari‘a. Likewise, many Muslims assert their full participation in global society on terms not dictated by Western actors by repackaging ostensibly universal norms as components of the unambiguously local shari‘a.

Keywords

shari‘a, global society, symbolic boundaries, mixed methods, Middle East and North Africa

Introduction

In the early 21st century, domestic and international political disputes often involve references to a set of cultural norms including democracy, tolerance, environmentalism, science promotion, and women's rights. According to some scholars, this reflects an unprecedented global convergence wherein humanity "has become a single 'international society'" (Boli and Thomas 1997:171–72; see also: Meyer et al. 1997) that "no one in any corner of the world whatsoever can avoid" (Beck 2011:1352; see also: Canclini 2014). From this theoretical vantage point, pre-existing "alternative meaning systems" inhibit the adoption of so-called global norms (Boyle, McMorris, and Gómez 2002:26; Boyle and Meyer 1998:218–19; Carruthers and Halliday 2006:573), prompting populations to either reject aspects of global culture or hybridize them with local cultures (Pope and Meyer 2016: 291-294). However, cultural norms – both local and global – are internally incoherent and situationally-specific (Swidler 2013), casting doubt on the assertion that local meaning systems necessarily produce resistance to global norms.

Many of the actors that are in positions to define belonging to global society, including scholars, activists, Western politicians, and international organizations, identify shari'a – sometimes called Islamic law – as among the primary competing meaning systems complicating global cultural diffusion (Abiad 2008; Boyle et al. 2002; Eltantawi 2017; Kendhammer 2013b, 2013a; Korteweg 2008; Boyle and Meyer 1998). Previous empirical scholarship has largely treated shari'a as a unitary belief system, using survey data to explore how adherence to shari'a structures individual values and attitudes (Ciftci 2012; Davis and Robinson 2006; Moaddel and Karabenick 2008). Yet, an influential body of scholarship has found that belief systems are better understood as markers of belonging to (and distance from) social collectivities than indicators of value differences (Barth 1969; Brubaker 2015; Gauchat 2012; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012;

Malka and Lelkes 2010; Mason 2018; Nicholson 2012; Perrin, Roos, and Gauchat 2014).

Drawing on this scholarship, the current study investigates how individual Muslims employ shari‘a as a flexible cultural tool for expressing their desire to fully participate in global society on their own terms by analyzing three data sources: two cross-national surveys describing responses from over 30,000 Muslims across 16 countries and data from semi-structured cognitive interviews with fifty Tunisians between 2013 and 2014.

Results indicate that Muslims who support implementing shari‘a do not adhere to a coherent set of traditionalist values, systematically object to global norms, or lack a desire to participate in modern, global society. They may, in fact, be more enthusiastic about democracy, tolerant of people of other religions, pro-science, and concerned with environmental preservation than Muslims who do not support implementing shari‘a. Instead, ardent shari‘a supporters tend to hold reservations about the actions and intentions of the international community and its most influential members, feel that Muslims and Islamic concepts are purposefully marginalized by powerful global actors, and claim that shari‘a anticipates and subsumes key global norms. This suggests that local communities domesticate global norms not only through hybridization and appropriation, but also by disassociating these norms from the powerful and unpopular global actors that promote them. Explicitly linking local cultural objects to ostensibly universal norms and identities allows non-Western populations to assert their full participation in global society on terms not dictated by foreign actors they view as hostile and exploitative.

Boundaries, Beliefs, and Belonging in World Society

Empirical studies show a trend toward global homogenization of cultural practices around a set of norms including democracy, environmentalism, science promotion, religious tolerance, and women’s rights. While there is disagreement on whether international

organizations (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005; Longhofer and Schofer 2010), the most powerful members of the global community (Barrett, Kurzman, and Shanahan 2010; Carruthers and Halliday 2006:534), or advances in transportation and communication technology (Canclini 2014) are driving its diffusion, individuals and governments increasingly espouse the norms associated with this global culture, even when they have little ability or intention of implementing them (Cole and Ramirez 2013). Scholars in the world society tradition in sociology argue that the pressure to conform to global cultural norms is so great that people around the world “most avidly sacrifice their traditional cultural identities and adopt... models reflecting standard global values” with “voluntaristic eagerness” (Meyer 2010:12).

However, not everyone seeks conformity with global culture and inclusion in global society. Scholars in the world society and related traditions see the existence of “alternative meaning systems” (Boyle et al. 2002:26) as the primary barrier to global cultural isomorphism by providing values and identities that are not “linked to exogenous universal principles” or “the international community” (Boyle and Meyer 1998:118; see also: Boyle, Kim, and Longhofer 2015; Inglehart and Baker 2000). While there are many meaning systems that purportedly encourage adherents to resist inclusion in global society, scholars in this area argue that “Islam has served as a base of resistance to a number of global norms” by “[bolstering] individuals’ acceptance of ‘traditional’ norms over the norms promoted by the international community” (Boyle et al. 2002:16; see also: Ahmad 2001; Boyle and Meyer 1998:218–19; Tibi 1988). Indeed, the question of compatibility between Islamic cultures and cultural trends emanating from the West has fueled scholarly debates for decades (e.g., Fish 2011; Huntington 1997).

Taking an interpretive approach, others argue that local populations actively reconcile local and foreign cultural elements through a variety of domestication processes (Pope and

Meyer 2016:291–94). A large body of scholarship has shown that local populations bring foreign elements into compliance with local cultures via hybridization and appropriation, wherein individuals and organizations “select the elements of tradition and modernity that appeal to them and reject those that do not” (Harkness and Khaled 2014:591; see also: Appadurai 1996; Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Gorman 2016; Harkness 2012). While this scholarship more accurately reflects the dynamic interplay between local and foreign cultures by considering the accounts and experiences of individuals, it still considers a presumed clash between local and global cultural elements as the primary catalyst for these processes.

These arguments are widespread in studies on global cultural diffusion and rest on a social ontology that understands the social world as comprised of clearly delimited groups with unique cultures, resulting in *de facto* differences in values that must be reconciled as these groups come into contact. However, an influential body of scholarship on collective identification finds that social groups may not necessarily be separated by fundamentally different cultures but, instead, by “boundary objects” – cultural objects that serve as markers of distinction but are not always indicative of value differences (Barth 1969). Previous research has shown that people use cultural objects like food (DellaPosta, Shi, and Macy 2015), clothing (Lamont 1992), health behaviors (Beisel and Kay 2004), and political beliefs (Iyengar et al. 2012; Perrin et al. 2014) as boundary objects to distinguish between, and define the terms of belonging to, social categories. Thus, differences in belief systems may provide little insight into the content of social and political claims (Brubaker 2015:105); rather, professing (or rejecting) a belief system is one method people use to signal belonging to (and distance from) salient social categories (Gauchat 2012; Malka and Lelkes 2010; Mason 2018; Nicholson 2012).

Whether and how boundary objects – and distinctions between the social categories they

separate – become salient is a function of the struggle over the categorical divisions of society and the hierarchical ordering of social groups they entail (Wimmer 2008). Powerful actors function as gatekeepers for dominant social categories by “systematically [valorizing] dominant positions, dispositions, and forms of cultural capital while devalorizing and... stigmatizing others” (Brubaker 2015:38–39), thus controlling the “prizes” of belonging to these categories: honor, prestige, and access to resources (Wimmer 2013:5). Aside from formal exclusion of subordinate groups, these actors reinforce inequalities between social categories by intensifying or creating symbolic boundaries marked by boundary objects that highlight these groups’ cultural inferiority vis-à-vis dominant groups (Wimmer 2013:103). Relevant boundary objects are often symbolically important, and their public stigmatization produces “chronic and routine affronts to [the] dignity” of targeted groups (Brubaker 2004:112, 2015:139). As a result, some members of subordinate groups abandon stigmatized boundary markers in an attempt to gain acceptance from dominant groups (Wimmer 2008:986, 2013:31) while others embrace these boundary objects and emphasize dominant groups’ shortcomings in an attempt to disrupt the hierarchical ordering of social categories (e.g., Lamont and Molnár 2001; Morris 1999; Nagel 1995; Takezawa 1994).

By shifting the analytical focus from the content of cultural systems to the relationship between the groups associated with these systems, this approach highlights the role of power in global cultural diffusion. This is largely absent in “alternative meaning system” approaches to interactions between local and global cultural objects despite empirical evidence that Western countries dominate global politics, institutional networks, and normmaking (Beckfield 2010; Carruthers and Halliday 2006:534; Gorman and Seguin 2015; Hughes et al. 2009). These countries are uniquely capable of setting the terms of membership in global society, often drawing the boundary between “global” and “traditional” using cultural features of non-Western

peoples as “negative exemplars” of global culture (Barrett et al. 2010; Halliday, Block-Lieb, and Carruthers 2010:90–93; Merry 2006). There are real consequences for being placed on the “traditional” side of this boundary: those who fail to conform to the Western-dominated global cultural framework risk marginalization, stigmatization, public shaming, and even economic and military coercion by global actors (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Halliday 2009; Von Hippel 2000).

The role of Western hegemony in defining the boundaries of global society is not lost on people subject to its definitional power. In the contemporary era of near-ubiquitous global interconnection, derision and hostility directed at subordinate groups by powerful global actors “quickly move into local repertoires of irony, anger, humor, and resistance” (Appadurai 1996:7). Repeated exposure to disparaging messages may drive local populations to distance themselves from powerful global actors by criticizing these actors and associating stigmatized boundary objects with the global norms they promote (Boyle and Carbone-López 2006:441; Ivković and Hagan 2006). Historical research in Latin America, for example, shows that international campaigns against traditional drug use led to the widespread demonization of the key actors driving criminalization and the adoption of discourses that celebrated these substances as solutions to global challenges – even among non-users (Grisaffi 2010; Metaal 2014). In what follows, I use the example of support for shari‘a among Muslims to show how local populations domesticate global norms not only by hybridizing their content, but also by disassociating these norms from the powerful actors that police and promote them. This allows members of subordinate groups to embrace aspects of global culture on their own terms and challenge the social hierarchy espoused by globally-dominant actors.

Shari‘a in Global Culture

Shari‘a, sometimes called Islamic law, refers to the principles revealed in Islamic texts

and traditions that many Muslims believe ensure the public good (Esposito and DeLong-Bas 2018:13). Shari‘a is open to many interpretations and has been implemented in a variety of ways (Coulson 1964). For Islamic fundamentalists and extremists, shari‘a is a total institution defined (in part) in opposition to Western cultural norms (Al-Bannā’ 1978; Quṭb 1990). Islamic modernists, by contrast, believe that shari‘a should be relegated to the private sphere (Kurzman 2002), and those with liberal interpretations argue that it demands human rights, women’s rights, tolerance, and democracy (Kurzman 1998). Still others believe that adherence to shari‘a requires supporting rule of law by upholding the law of the land (Esposito and DeLong-Bas 2018:33). That shari‘a has been used by groups ranging from terrorists to modern states to justify practices ranging from female genital mutilation to women’s empowerment suggest it has no fixed meaning and that support for shari‘a neither necessarily entails opposition to global norms nor precludes a desire to belong to global society.

Despite the diversity of interpretations among Muslims, Western politicians, international organizations, and human rights activists tend to associate shari‘a with stonings, floggings, forced marriages, and worse (Abiad 2008; Eltantawi 2017; Korteweg 2008), and to depict it as exceptionally “anti-modern, fundamentalist, illiberal and un-democratic” (Casanova 2007:65; see also: An-Na‘īm 2011). Since the 9/11 attacks, fear of “creeping” shari‘a has become part of mainstream politics in the United States and Europe (Esposito and DeLong-Bas 2018). International organizations have characterized the Muslim world as a “desert of non-compliance” due in large part to provisions that refer to shari‘a (Modirzadeh 2006:192) and have unambiguously condemned its application, even when implemented democratically (Kendhammer 2013a) and the most sensationalized aspects of some shari‘a-based penal codes – including floggings, amputations, and stonings – do not occur (Kendhammer 2013b). Even more

benign discussions of shari‘a among global actors tend to define it as illegitimate: in a 2008 letter to the Security Council, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted with concern that wartime chaos was forcing Afghans to “revert” to shari‘a (Ban 2008:7). The use of this sacred cultural object as a boundary object for distinguishing between “global” and “traditional” Muslims reinforces global discourses that stigmatize “Muslim” as a social category (Brubaker 2015:46).

Historical studies suggest that the delegitimization of Islamic concepts among powerful global actors has led some Muslims to seek to create an alternative global culture based on Islamic principles as they understand them. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, for example, there have been various attempts, beginning with the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights in 1981, to outline a specifically “Islamic” declaration of human rights, all of which emphasize the centrality of shari‘a (Mayer 2007; Moosa 2000). Case studies in majority-Muslim contexts similarly suggest that some individuals and organizations that work towards the implementation of global norms like women’s and human rights couch their interests in the framework of shari‘a rather than (or in addition to) the language of international organizations (Kendhammer 2013a:482; Salime 2011:37–39).

I argue that shari‘a, rather than a component of a coherent ideology, is a boundary object that many Muslims use to distance global norms from powerful global actors that promote them. Celebrating shari‘a and associating it with global norms allows Muslims to embrace these norms on their own terms, challenge the dominant hierarchical ordering of social categories in global society, and distinguish themselves from Western countries and international organizations that they perceive as hostile toward Muslims.

Methods and Data

I use a multi-method design to explore the relationship between support for shari‘a and

attitudes about global norms and actors among individual Muslims. First, I test for statistical relationships between support for shari‘a and key independent variables using regression models with country-level fixed effects. I analyze two sources of data: 1) the second and third waves of the Arab Barometer (AB) survey, which include data on over 26,000 Muslim respondents across thirteen Arab countries – Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen – between 2010 and 2014 and, 2) the fourth wave² of the World Values Survey (WVS) with responses from approximately 8,000 Muslims across six majority-Muslim countries – Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia – between 1999 and 2004. In general, I analyze variables that exist across all of these datasets to maximize comparability. I drop non-Muslim respondents from both samples.

I use qualitative results from fifty semi-structured interviews that I conducted in Tunisia between August 2013 and March 2014 to triangulate findings from the statistical analyses and provide depth of interpretation to survey responses (Small 2011). Tunisia’s unique features make it an excellent case to pair with the survey data. First, its legacy of state-sponsored assertive secularism modeled on French *laïcité* galvanized religiously-based resistance to foreign actors and cultural norms (e.g., Haugbølle and Cavatorta 2011). As a result, Tunisia is home to many fundamentalist and extremist organizations, as illustrated by its per capita rate of citizens joining ISIS – the highest in the world (Benmelech and Klor 2016). Second, the political openings and the Islamist electoral victories following the 2011 uprisings thrust the role of shari‘a in Tunisia into the center of a global debate (Tibi 2013). As such, while driven by local factors, Tunisians’

² Only these waves contain survey items measuring attitudes about shari‘a, global norms, and the international community broadly construed.

attitudes are also attuned to larger discussions about shari‘a around the world.

I conducted interviews using cognitive interviewing techniques, which involve asking respondents to answer a set of survey items along with open-ended follow-up questions designed to provide insight into their perceptions of the survey items and justifications for their answers (Gorman 2015). By allowing respondents to explain their attitudes about shari‘a in their own words, these data allow me to examine, rather than ascribe, the content of these attitudes. Most interviews were conducted in Tunisian Arabic, with a handful in English at the request of the respondent. I chose interview respondents using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling (Teddlie and Yu 2007) designed to capture the full range of support for shari‘a, with self-described ultraconservative Salafists oversampled. Respondents ranged in age from 22 to 64 years (mean=33.32), were 60 percent men (N=30) and 40 percent women (N=20), and most had some college education (80%, N=40). This interview sample is more educated than the Tunisian population as a whole – according to the most recent AB data, 20% of Tunisians under age 65 have a college degree while 30% completed secondary school.

Quantitative Data and Method

Dependent Variable: Who Supports Shari‘a?

The dependent variable for the statistical models is *support for shari‘a*. For the AB data, I construct an index using four survey items presenting respondents with the statement that the government and parliament³ should enact: 1) laws; 2) penal laws; 3) personal status laws and; 4)

³ In Saudi Arabia, survey items refer to the *Shūrā* Council rather than parliament.

inheritance laws in accordance with shari‘a, with five-item Likert response scales.⁴ Because the resulting summative index is negatively skewed, I transform the values into their reflected square roots before z-standardizing to better approximate normality.⁵ Any missing indicator results in a missing index score (8%, N=2,190).

There is only one relevant survey item in the WVS data. It presents respondents with the statement “The government and parliament should implement only the laws of the shari‘a,” with a five-item Likert response scale. Figure 1 presents the distribution of the dependent variables in both datasets. While shari‘a is widely popular, there is considerable variation in attitudes.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Control Variables: Religiosity and Demographics

Some scholars argue more religious and religiously orthodox Muslims should be more supportive of shari‘a (Davis and Robinson 2006; Moaddel and Karabenick 2008; Potrafke 2012). I control for religiosity in both datasets by employing a variable capturing *self-reported religiosity*⁶ with responses ranging from “not religious” to “religious.”⁷

If shari‘a is a constitutive feature of a coherent pre- or anti-modern ideology, support for

⁴ Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha=0.85$) and fit statistics from a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicate that these items measure a single construct ($\chi^2[1]=121.64$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.99, SRMR=0.01).

⁵ The transformation for individual i is: $Y_i = \sqrt{K - X_i}$ where Y_i is the transformed dependent variable, K is a constant, and X_i is the original value of the dependent variable.

⁶ Supplemental analyses indicate that other items measuring religious belief and practice have similar relationships with support for shari‘a; including them does not substantively alter results.

⁷ There are three response categories for this item in the AB and two in the WVS.

it should be most prevalent among older and less educated individuals who are less exposed to global cultural trends (Boyle et al. 2002). On the other hand, some studies indicate that young men with a moderate amount of education are most likely to support shari‘a (Ibrahim 1980; Tessler 1997). To control for these relationships, I include five demographic variables in all models: *age* in decades, a binary variable indicating some *college education*,⁸ a binary variable indicating that a respondent is a *woman*, a binary variable indicating residence in an *urban* area,⁹ and a variable measuring *household income* in deciles centered at the country mean.

Independent Variables: Attitudes About Global Norms

Some scholarship conceptualizes religious political concepts like shari‘a as components of totalizing meaning systems that inspire their adherents to reject foreign cultural objects. To date, some prominent scholars have specified the myriad aspects of global culture that arguably run counter to shari‘a and preclude many Muslims’ full participation in global society. These range from abstract principles like individualism (Juergensmeyer 2008), capitalism (Barber 1995), democracy (Potrafke 2012), human rights (Moosa 2000), religious tolerance (Schwedler 2011), trust in science (Hameed 2008), environmentalism (Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin 2003:25, 258–59), and women’s empowerment (Fish 2011), to cultural objects including “fine arts, novels, [and] music” (Roy 2007:74). This suggests that Muslims who support implementing shari‘a may be more likely to object to global norms and resist inclusion in global society than those who do not.

⁸ This variable was recoded due to differences in response categories across countries.

⁹ In the AB data, urban/rural classification was predetermined by the survey researchers. In the WVS data, I classify residents areas with populations of at least 100,000 people as an urban.

While an ideal analysis would examine the relationship between support for shari‘a and all of these norms, existing data include measures on only five. In the AB data, I measure *religious tolerance* using a survey item that asks respondents whether they believe that religious minorities should be allowed to freely practice their religion. In the WVS data, I measure *trust in science* using a survey item that asks respondents whether they think scientific advances are harmful, helpful, or somewhere in between, and support for *environmentalism* using a binary survey item that asks respondents whether they prioritize protecting the environment over economic growth. In both the AB and WVS data, I measure attitudes about *women’s empowerment* using a survey item that asks respondents whether they think men make better political leaders than women¹⁰ and attitudes about *democracy* using a survey item¹¹ that asks respondents whether they think that democracy is better than any other political system. All questions except environmentalism and trust in science have four-item Likert response scales and all response categories are coded such that higher values indicate more favorable attitudes.

Independent Variables: Attitudes About Global Actors

Others posit that support for shari‘a is a form of resistance against political, economic, and military domination at the hands of foreign actors that marginalize and subordinate Muslims (Ayooob 2005; Jamal 2012). Here, support for shari‘a is, in part, an outcome of these actors’

¹⁰ This is the only survey item on attitudes toward women’s empowerment that is shared across the WVS and both waves of the AB. Supplemental analyses indicate that alternative variables tend to have similar empirical relationships with support for shari‘a.

¹¹ There is an analogous question which asks respondents to what extent they think democracy is a “good” political system. Results of models using this alternative question are near-identical.

historical mistreatment of Muslims and backing of oppressive secular-autocratic domestic regimes, and supporting it “makes a clearly anti-Western statement” (Peters 2005:145; see also: Kurzman 2011). This suggests that individuals who have reservations about global actors and their influence on Muslims are more likely to support shari‘a than those that do not. While scholarship in this area explicitly ties support for shari‘a with global power dynamics, it often considers attitudes toward global actors synonymous with attitudes toward the cultural objects these actors promote (e.g., An-Na‘im 2011). I argue that Muslims may support shari‘a as a means of embracing global norms by disassociating them from hostile global actors.

To measure reservations about the international community in the AB data, I use three survey items. The first asks whether external calls for reform are *illegitimate*, with a three category response scale characterizing these as “acceptable,” “acceptable with conditions,” or “unacceptable.” The second measures feelings of global *dependency*, asking respondents whether they believe foreign interference is an obstacle to reform in their countries, with a four-item Likert response scale. Finally, I construct a z-standardized additive index of perceived *hypocrisy among global actors* using two questions that ask respondents about the influence they believe the United States and European Union have had on the development of democracy in their countries, with a five-item response scale ranging from “very positive” to “very negative.”¹²

In the WVS data, I measure reservations about global actors using survey items that tap respondents’ opinions about the United Nations. First, I use a question asking for the respondent’s *confidence in the UN*, with a four-item response scale ranging from “none at all” to “a great deal.” Second, I construct a z-standardized additive index measuring respondents’ desire

¹² $\alpha=0.88$; CFA fit indices: $\chi^2[1]=334.69$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.98, SRMR=0.02.

for the UN to determine policies in five *policy areas* – aid to developing countries, environmental protection, international peacekeeping, refugees, and human rights – using a series of questions that ask respondents which institutions they believe should decide policies in these areas: national governments, national governments with UN coordination, or the UN only.¹³ For both variables, higher scores indicate more pro-UN attitudes.

Models

For the AB data, I estimate linear regression models with country- and wave-level fixed effects. For the WVS data, I estimate ordered logistic regression models with country-level fixed effects.¹⁴ All models include sampling weights to replicate nationally-representative samples and employ robust standard errors. Following standard practice, missing data were imputed using iterative chained equations, creating ten imputations per dataset with all variables transformed before imputing (Von Hippel 2009).¹⁵ I report results of both bivariate and multivariate analyses to assess the potential impact of multicollinearity on model results.

Statistical Results

Table 1 presents the results of the linear regression models using the AB data. Table 2

¹³ $\alpha=0.68$; CFA fit indices: $\chi^2[5]=590.60$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.95, SRMR=0.04.

¹⁴ Including fixed effects terms in these nonlinear regression models is unlikely to produce biased estimates data because the WVS data contain thousands of observations per country. I also ran a series of fixed-effects linear regression models with substantively similar results.

¹⁵ Listwise deletion results in dropping 50% of AB observations and 38% of WVS observations. Most dropped observations have missing values for a single variable, and no variable accounts for the majority of these missing values.

presents the results of the ordered logistic regression models using the WVS data.

[TABLES 1 & 2 ABOUT HERE]

Control Variables

Religiosity is significantly and positively related to support for shari'a in all models. Age is not statistically significantly associated with support for shari'a in any multivariate model. For gender and education, the results of models using the different datasets are inconsistent – the AB models suggest that women and people with college educations may be more likely to support shari'a while the WVS models show a statistically null relationship between gender and support for shari'a and indicate that college-educated individuals may be less likely to support shari'a. The discrepancy in the effect of college education is not due to the inclusion of non-Arab countries in the WVS data – supplemental analyses indicate that the association between education and support for shari'a is statistically null in all three cases. Instead, for the three Arab countries that appear in both datasets (Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia), null or negative associations in the WVS data give way to positive and statistically significant associations in the AB data. This is likely a result of the changing global political context: the decade and a half separating the two surveys saw the rise of the US-led Global War on Terror and subsequent intensification of “Muslim” as a salient social category. Though a full investigation of the impact of survey timing on support for shari'a is beyond the scope of this study, the consistent associations between support for shari'a and attitudes about global norms and actors discussed below indicates that these relationships are not artifacts of a specific time period or context.

Attitudes About Global Norms

The results for the variables measuring attitudes toward global norms are mixed. Consistent with previous literature, positive attitudes about women's empowerment are

significantly and negatively associated with support for shari‘a in all models. Among the other variables, however, a different pattern emerges. In models using both datasets, support for democracy is positively and significantly associated with support for shari‘a. Similarly, religious tolerance is positively and significantly associated with support for shari‘a in all AB models and both trust in science and environmentalism are positively and significantly associated with support for shari‘a in all WVS models. These results indicate that support for shari‘a does not necessarily entail a rejection of global society and may, in fact, be associated with greater enthusiasm for some global norms (at least in principal).

Attitudes About Global Actors

In contrast with the mixed effects of attitudes toward specific global norms, all of the models suggest that support for shari‘a is associated with skepticism about global and Western actors. The AB models indicate that individuals who believe that foreign interference is an obstacle to reform and that Western countries are insincere in promoting democracy are more likely to support shari‘a. Feeling that external calls for reform are illegitimate is positively and significantly related to support for shari‘a in the bivariate AB model but loses its statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level when other measures of attitudes toward global actors are added to the multivariate model. The coefficients show that, holding the other variables constant at their means, a respondent with the least supportive attitudes towards the international community scores approximately 18 percent higher on the dependent variable than one with the most supportive attitudes. Taken together, these variables have a larger effect on support for shari‘a than religiosity: moving from the lowest to highest scores for that variable is associated with a 11 percent increase in the support for shari‘a index. Figure 2 illustrates this association.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Results of the WVS models indicate that individuals who express confidence in the UN in general as well as in specific policy areas are less likely to support shari‘a. Figure 3 illustrates the results of the ordinal logistic regression model (Table 2) by showing the predicted probabilities of belonging to each category of the dependent variable given high and low values of independent variables measuring religiosity and reservations about the UN with other variables held constant at their means. The figure shows that respondents who express the greatest reservations about the UN are about 13 percent more likely to “strongly agree” with implementing shari‘a than respondents who express the least. This is smaller than the effect of religiosity, which is associated with a 17 percent increase.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Qualitative Method and Results

While the results of statistical analyses using two unrelated sources of data provide sufficient evidence to reject the hypothesis that shari‘a is associated with a wholesale dismissal of global norms and renunciation of global society, it is possible that the observed associations between support for shari‘a and reservations about global actors are a result of some omitted third variable. The fifty cognitive interviews, in which respondents were asked to justify their responses to closed-ended survey questions about implementing shari‘a, provide internal validity for these findings by offering depth of interpretation to the survey responses.

Because it was designed to probe attitudes about the relationship between shari‘a and democracy, the interview schedule did not contain any questions about international organizations, multinational corporations, or foreign countries. However, discussions of international organizations and the most powerful states in the international system emerged spontaneously in many of the interviews as respondents justified their support for shari‘a or lack

thereof. Roughly half of the respondents (26 out of 50 total interviews) answered that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with implementing shari‘a. I analyze the content of these interview data by grouping respondent attitudes into one or more of the four following substantive categories: positive assessments of global actors, negative assessments of global actors, positive assessments of global norms, and negative assessments of global norms. A boundary object theory of shari‘a leads us to expect that respondents who support its implementation should be more likely to express reservations about global actors than the cultural norms they promote.

While there was widespread agreement among the respondents that, to quote Salim, an electrician in his late twenties who had recently returned to Bizerte from working in Libya, “shari‘a touches all domains of life,” the interview responses show that it is open to a wide variety of interpretations. While some, like Abderrahmen, an imam at a prominent mosque in Kairouan, emphasized polygamy as central to shari‘a, others like Darine, a self-declared “student of progressive Islam” in her early twenties from Tunis, decried these as “wrong interpretations” of unscrupulous people “using shari‘a for political purposes.” The vast majority of respondents across the political spectrum agreed in their assessment that most of the actors who claimed to implement shari‘a were, by their definitions, violating it. Ibrahim, a self-described Salafist in his mid-twenties who owns a media store in downtown Bizerte, expressed the widespread sentiment that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are “among worst violators of shari‘a” going on to say that “Israel is closer to the shari‘a than they are.” Abdelaziz, a high school administrator in his mid-thirties and brother of the official spokesperson for an outlawed Islamist group in Tunisia, similarly lamented that, “when people hear shari‘a they think of Al-Qa‘ida and the Taliban, but these people do not implement shari‘a.”

How, then, did the interview respondents understand shari‘a? Ali, a store manager in his

mid-thirties from Kairouan, exemplified the prevailing theme that “shari‘a means building a society where people can live together.” All but one of the shari‘a supporters I interviewed (25 out of 26) supported this position by making positive associations between shari‘a and global norms. Among the most popular were democracy, science promotion, and religious tolerance. Sami, a bearded college student in his early twenties who is deeply involved in Islamist mobilization in his hometown of Bizerte, was one such respondent. During our interview, Sami described the position of his political action group as follows:

“We want to recognize Muslim values in everything, in civil society, in the unions and syndicates, in cafes and on the football field. This is why we don’t want to separate religion from politics. As a Muslim, I should work to enhance liberties and freedoms, to further scientific progress, to find a balance between economic development and the prohibition of interest. Muslims can be an example for the world in every way! This is why we want shari‘a.”

Other respondents, such as Ibrahim, privileged his trust in science over his religious identity, saying that scientists are “people who work hard to advance scientific progress, so I trust them even if they’re not Muslims.”

Consistent with previous research, however, respondents’ understandings of global norms often differed from those of Western and global actors. As in the results of the quantitative analyses, interview respondents who supported shari‘a tended to take issue with Western conceptions of rights related to gender and sexuality. Salim, for example, said:

In the shari‘a women are given many rights and protections. In the Western conception, women are not given their rights or afforded their full value. Women are not protected in the West, and there are a lot of problems [...] if you look to countries where homosexuality and fornication are prohibited, they have fewer problems with parentless children or sexually transmitted diseases.

While many respondents who opposed implementing shari'a justified their opposition in reference to women's rights, others like Khamisa, a secretary in her mid-twenties from Sousse, argued that a correct interpretation of shari'a would "liberate women and given them equal rights to men." Other responses, however, indicate that reservations about women's empowerment and the rights of sexual minorities are widespread among all sectors of the Tunisian population. Fatima, an entrepreneur, secularist, and self-described feminist in her late forties from Sfax, echoed the most conservative shari'a supporters when she said: "I'm for the emancipation of women, [...] but nobody should give up their natural roles to go out and do whatever they want."

Consistent with my expectations, all of the shari'a supporters I interviewed justified their support by claiming that shari'a anticipates and subsumes key global norms. Chokri, a college student in his late twenties studying in Tunis, echoed Sami when he said that shari'a "calls for liberty, freedom, justice, and many other modern values." Abderrahmen enthusiastically described religious tolerance as "the core" and "essence" of shari'a, laughing as he described competing interpretations as the ignorant preoccupations of "fanatics" who value "long beards" and "Afghani clothes" over the "true shari'a." This tendency was most pronounced among respondents who were strongly committed to shari'a. Afef, a very conservative computer technician in her early twenties, said during our brief interview that "most of the constitutions in the world follow shari'a" by emphasizing "tolerance of difference, freedom from coercion, and majority rule." Abdelaziz similarly stated that shari'a was responsible for "the birth of the social security system long before it was ever implemented in Europe." Still others attributed global norms like racial tolerance, self-determination, and environmentalism to shari'a.

Not all shari'a supporters I interviewed gave positive evaluations of global norms. Omar, a retiree in his mid-sixties and prominent Salafist from Bizerte, was one such respondent. During

our interview, Omar refused global norms like democracy, human rights, and women's rights. In many instances, he justified this refusal not because he considered a given norm as an alien imposition, but rather because he considered it an incomplete imitation of an idea that has its roots in shari'a. For example, he said of democracy:

"Shari'a contains democracy, it is more democratic than democracy. In shari'a you have the right to criticize your leader and hold him accountable for his actions and how he treats the people. Shari'a does not need democracy. Democracy came from shari'a."

He went on to explain his rejection of democracy and human rights in terms of Western domestic and foreign policies:

"I have been all over the world. I know the US from Boston to Miami and New Orleans. I've been all over Europe and [...] nobody has their human rights in those places. [...] There are 49 million Americans living in poverty. You should take care of those people, not impose yourself on people in other countries."

According to Omar and many others, shari'a is the only system that embodies the norms that global actors promote, including "freedom," "liberty," "education," and "scientific advancement," and the only way to ultimately eliminate "hatred, inequality, and jealousy" and achieve "world peace."

Omar was not alone in his criticism. Among the shari'a supporters I interviewed, a substantial majority (19 out of 26) offered negative assessments of global actors. Many respondents justified their views on the premise that Western countries and international organizations fail to live up to their own standards. Among the most common critiques was the global rejection of the democratic election of Hamas in Gaza in 2006. According to Faisal, a motorcycle mechanic from Bizerte in his late twenties, this illustrates how global norms like

democracy are “used for the geostrategic interests of the American empire and its proxies like France, NGOs, and the UN.” Others like Salim were keen to criticize international organizations for their perceived hypocrisy:

“Concerning associations that look after human rights, they look after the rights of Christians and ethnic minorities and urgently apply pressure to protect these people’s rights. But when it comes to the rights of Muslim people who are killed by the millions in Myanmar-Burma, Iraq, and other countries, we don’t see any action.”

I found the link between global actors, global norms, and shari‘a most clearly during my conversation with Aymen, a self-described Salafist in his mid-twenties. When I met Aymen, he had recently quit a high paying job in the tourism industry out of religious conviction. To him, implementing shari‘a meant creating a political system that works on behalf of its people rather than hostile or uncaring external actors. He explained:

“Today [the government] taxes Tunisian Muslims more than they tax Western investors. So you, for example, you’re American. You can come to Tunisia and open a company and hire Tunisians to work. You pay 30% in taxes. But the Tunisians, the Muslims, who work for you, they pay 90% of their income in taxes. [...] This benefits people like [George W.] Bush, who is responsible for killing Muslims [...] while talking about human rights. Where are [our] human rights?”

According to Aymen, a government based on shari‘a is the best way to “fight for the cause of the weak” and “protect the people.”

All of the shari‘a supporters I interviewed were concerned with the way it is represented in global culture; many saw this as an element of an ongoing campaign to subordinate Muslims vis-à-vis the West. Aymen, who was highly critical of many global norms, offered the observation that “the Americans are fighting to prevent shari‘a” as one of his justifications for

supporting it. Salim similarly argued that shari‘a had never truly been implemented because foreign domination had prevented Muslims “from being able to build a system of our own.” Even respondents who described shari‘a as largely compatible with global norms held this view: Chokri said that the United States and China are united in their desire “not to awaken the theory of shari‘a.” Marwa, an optimistic college student in her early twenties who described shari‘a as entirely compatible with global norms including women’s rights, thought that self-interested outsiders deliberately spread misinformation about shari‘a:

“Shari‘a means following the example of the Prophet, peace be upon him. [...] He was tolerant [of minorities], considerate of everyone’s needs, and made decisions for his community using dialogue and persuasion, not coercion. [...] If we search for [these] true values of shari‘a around the world we will find them in developed and modern countries. The people that say if you follow shari‘a, they will cut off your hand, or men will marry four wives, or if you fornicate you will be whipped, they just say this to make people fear Muslims and our shari‘a.”

Finally, many respondents who opposed implementing shari‘a justified their opposition in terms of a desire to maintain legitimacy in global society. Seif, a college student living in Tunis, responded that shari‘a is not an “internationally legitimate political system,” describing it as too “irrational” and “emotional” to meet global standards of “objective rationality.” Manel, a medical doctor in her late fifties employed by an INGO in Sfax, vehemently opposed implementing shari‘a, saying that she would support an Islamist politician only:

“...if he had a progressive interpretation of shari‘a that did not contradict international law and universal values. If someone gave me that kind of interpretation of shari‘a, I wouldn’t see him as a religious person. I would see him as a universal human being who is applying the universal values of humanity.”

Others expressed concern that applying shari‘a would endanger Tunisia’s status in the international community. Oussama, a teacher in his mid-forties who lived in Tunis, feared that implementing shari‘a could make Tunisia a global outcast along the lines of Somalia, Iran, or Sudan. Rym, a college student in her early twenties, was similarly concerned that applying shari‘a would damage Tunisia’s “good relations” with its neighbors.

Summary of Results

The multi-method approach employed in this study combines surveys, which are high on external validity, with interviews, which are high on internal validity (Small 2011:63–66). Consistency in results of statistical models using responses from nearly 35,000 Muslims spanning 16 countries over a decade and a half suggest that observed patterns from the qualitative analyses are likely not limited to the Tunisians I interviewed in 2013 and 2014. Likewise, the qualitative analyses offer a depth of interpretation that supports the statistical results by showing that: 1) many Muslims do not understand shari‘a as a coherent belief system, 2) individuals who support shari‘a neither necessarily object to global norms nor refuse to participate in global society, and 3) nevertheless, shari‘a supporters tend express unprompted reservations about Western and global actors. This suggests that the association between support for shari‘a and reservations about global actors in the statistical models is not an artifact of the survey data or modeling strategy. Finally, by investigating rather than ascribing the content attitudes about shari‘a, interview results show how respondents engage in active ideological work, disassociating global norms and identities from the actors that promote them by arguing that shari‘a anticipates and subsumes key aspects of global culture.

Discussion and Conclusions

Previous scholarship has suggested that popular support for local belief systems like

shari‘a represents a traditionalist holdout from the global trend toward cultural isomorphism. The current study proposes that support for shari‘a does not necessarily imply an ideological clash between global culture and an “alternative meaning system” based in Islam but rather is associated with feelings of exclusion and victimization by powerful global actors. My findings support this claim. While shari‘a supporters tend to be less than enthusiastic about women’s empowerment, they do not see a contradiction between shari‘a and a host of other global norms including democracy, religious tolerance, trust in science, and environmentalism. Instead, it appears that shari‘a supporters take issue with the way that international organizations and other powerful global actors neglect and marginalize Muslims: statistical results indicate that individuals who hold reservations about international organizations are significantly more likely to support shari‘a net of religiosity, and content analyses of cognitive interviews show that many respondents linked their support for shari‘a with general support for global norms and (without prompting) distrust for the most powerful members of the world polity.

These results suggest that, in an international environment that has consistently kept majority-Muslim societies in subordinate positions since the mandate era of the League of Nations and continues to delegitimize shari‘a and other Islamic political concepts, shari‘a operates as a contextually-situated boundary marker rather than a coherent ideology. Support for shari‘a is thus one way of taking a stance on the perceived historical mistreatment of Muslims that does not necessarily preclude embracing attitudes and identities that are consistent with global culture. As a result, many Muslims appropriate global norms – with some important exceptions for gender and sexuality – using the language of shari‘a. This ideological work, which is given added emphasis by dominant discourses that equate shari‘a with cultural inferiority and barbarism, disassociates global norms from the actors most closely associated with them.

The results of the current study indicate that support for shari‘a is associated with positive assessments of (most) global norms and negative assessments of (many) global actors. However, existing data provide little information about variation in exposure to the discourses and activities of global actors, the mechanism through which I theorize derision and hostility towards Muslims generates support for shari‘a as individuals seek to embrace global norms while distancing themselves from these actors. This is a common issue in world society research, which rarely investigates diffusion of global norms at the individual level. As such, future research might take an experimental approach, exposing some individuals to negative messages about Muslims and shari‘a drawn from global and Western discourses in order to determine the effect of this exposure on attitudes. Researchers might also investigate differences in support for shari‘a between majority-Muslim countries based on their positions in global networks, domestic regimes’ use of shari‘a as a discursive tool, or level of social fragmentation along religious lines. It may also be fruitful to compare attitudes of Muslims in majority-Muslim contexts with those in the West.

On the other hand, these results also indicate that there is an association between support for shari‘a and resistance to women’s empowerment as understood by Western and global actors. While this provides evidence that the “alternative meaning system” approach to interactions between global and local cultures may hold in this substantive domain, it is not clear that adherence to shari‘a is the ultimate cause of this resistance. A number of studies have shown that patriarchal attitudes in many majority-Muslim societies may result from localized factors including kinship structures that have little to do with religious belief (e.g., Harkness 2012), macroeconomic structures (e.g., Ross 2008), or even foreign domination (e.g., Esposito and DeLong-Bas 2018:105, 110, 128–29). While a full investigation of this important topic is beyond

the scope of this study, these results align with scholarship that shows that attitudes about gender norms may be especially resistant to change (e.g., Charles 2011). Future researchers might investigate how Muslim women themselves understand shari‘a and its implications their roles in society vis-à-vis Western and international discourses of women’s empowerment.

We already know that people elevate cultural objects and practices in response to critical external identifications. This insight is often overlooked in world society and related scholarship, where pre-existing cultural norms are understood as complicating cultural diffusion processes. The present study shows that, rather than representing a hold-out to cultural diffusion processes, support for support for local cultural objects may, instead, be a component of these processes as members of subordinated groups use stigmatized boundary objects to simultaneously embrace global norms and respond to claims of cultural inferiority leveled by dominant actors. This suggests that, in a global society dominated by Western interests and cultural features, adherence to local belief systems may facilitate, rather than hinder, the diffusion of global norms.

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Table 1: Fixed Effects Regressions on Support for *Shari'a* (AB)

	(1) Bivariate	(2) Multivariate
<i>Controls</i>		
Religiosity	0.203*** (0.025)	0.197*** (0.021)
Age	0.004 (0.011)	-0.012 (0.009)
College	0.068* (0.026)	0.079** (0.022)
Woman	0.023 (0.021)	0.051* (0.020)
Urban	-0.004 (0.037)	-0.001 (0.030)
Household Income	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.004)
<i>Global Norms</i>		
Women's Empowerment	-0.131*** (0.022)	-0.124*** (0.019)
Democracy	0.095*** (0.024)	0.090*** (0.022)
Religious Tolerance	0.046** (0.015)	0.034* (0.015)
<i>Global Actors</i>		
Dependency	0.127*** (0.020)	0.093*** (0.019)
IC Illegitimate	0.074*** (0.019)	0.038† (0.020)
Western Hypocrisy	0.092*** (0.017)	0.073*** (0.016)
N	26,252	26,252
Countries	13	13
†p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001		

Note: Column (1) contains results of ten separate bivariate models regressing each independent and control variable on the support for *shari'a* index, column (2) contains results of a single model including all independent and control variables. All models employ country- and wave-level fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered around country-waves.

Table 2: Ordered Logistic Regressions with Country-Level Fixed Effects on Support for *Shari'a* (WVS)

	(1) Bivariate	(2) Multivariate
<i>Controls</i>		
Religiosity	0.759*** (0.082)	0.745*** (0.082)
Age	0.052** (0.016)	0.021 (0.017)
College	-0.181*** (0.054)	-0.151** (0.057)
Woman	-0.116** (0.043)	-0.037 (0.046)
Urban	-0.093 (0.057)	-0.020 (0.060)
Household Income	-0.011 (0.010)	0.007 (0.011)
<i>Global Norms</i>		
Women's Empowerment	-0.385*** (0.029)	-0.366*** (0.029)
Democracy	0.134*** (0.034)	0.144*** (0.033)
Trust in Science	0.161*** (0.038)	0.121** (0.040)
Environmentalism	0.143** (0.045)	0.145*** (0.045)
<i>Global Actors</i>		
UN Confidence	-0.090*** (0.026)	-0.089*** (0.027)
UN Policy Index	-0.081*** (0.023)	-0.066** (0.023)
N	8,402	8,402
Countries	6	6

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Note: Column (1) contains results of ten separate bivariate models regressing each independent and control variable on the support for *shari'a* index, column (2) contains results of a single model including all independent and control variables. All models employ country-level fixed effects and robust standard errors.

Figure 1: Histograms Describing Dependent Variables

Note: The AB histogram presents transformed and standardized values. The distribution of the raw additive index is similar to the distribution of the WVS survey item.

Figure 2: Effect of Religiosity and Reservations About Global Actors on Support for *Shari'a* Index (AB)

Note: This figure compares the cumulative effect of moving from the lowest to highest values for each independent variable on the *shari'a* index, with 95% confidence intervals. The figure shows that the religiosity variable has the largest effect of any single variable (11% increase in predicted value), followed by dependency (8%), perceived hypocrisy among global actors (7%) and feeling that external calls for reform are illegitimate (3%).

Figure 3: Effects of Religiosity and Reservations About the UN on Predicted Probabilities of Ordinal Support for *Shari'a* Variable (WVS)

Note: This figure compares the cumulative effect of moving from the lowest to highest values for religiosity and the set of independent variables measuring attitudes toward the UN on the probability of belonging to each category of the support for *shari'a* variable. The latter variables are recoded such that higher values indicate more reserved attitudes about the UN.