

Soft Power, Religion and anti-Americanism in the Middle East

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Abstract: This study presents the first systematic analysis of the public opinion dimension of soft power competition in the contemporary Middle East. Building on the scholarship on perceptions of foreign states and Arab public opinion, it proposes a series of hypotheses about sectarian identity, religious worldviews, and anti-Americanism as determinants of attitudes toward Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia in the context of regional rivalry. It then presents multivariate probit estimations utilizing Pew Global Attitudes Survey to test these hypotheses. The findings suggest that religious identity and worldviews directly affect favorability ratings of these three powers in the Arab Middle East. While Sunnis favor Saudi Arabia and Turkey over Iran, religious individuals demanding Islamic law favor the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, anti-Americanism translates into lower support for Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but greater support for Iran. Democratic attitudes have no influence over perceptions of these three powers indicating the limits of democracy promotion as a foreign policy tool.

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Introduction

The Middle East has been one of the most contested geopolitical environments of contemporary times. The U.S. emerged as the hegemon in the region in the post-Cold War era. However, the gradual decline of the U.S. hegemony in the aftermath of the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 generated opportunities for regional powers to pursue a more active foreign policy. The Arab uprisings of 2011 generated turmoil in Egypt and Syria, two historically leading Arab states alongside with Iraq, and severely diminished their ability to engage in foreign policy activism. The diminishing influence of Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus was conducive to the rise of Saudi Arabia and two non-Arab countries, Iran and Turkey, who cater to the Arab publics with different religious-political arrangements. It also stoke the fire of sectarian conflict involving these three powers that took a particularly ominous turn with the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in June 2014.

In this historical juncture, this study presents the first systematic analysis of the public opinion dimension of this regional rivalry in the Middle East. More specifically, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran present distinct models of political governance and state-religion relations, each with a different vision of political Islam ranging from Muslim secular-democratic model of Turkey to Wahhabi brand of Saudi system and to Iran's populist theocracy. The governments in these three countries actively promote their version of political Islam as an ideal configuration to be emulated in the region. The increasing salience of the public opinion in the aftermath of the Arab Spring makes the study of this timely topic important especially given our meager understanding of how ordinary people in the Arab Middle East perceive these regional powers.

Our theoretical framework builds on scholarship on public perceptions of foreign states and Arab public opinion. As we discuss in detail below, attitudes toward democracy, religious values, and anti-Americanism may have strong influence over how publics evaluate foreign

states, in this case, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. While some recent studies focus on the perceptions of American soft-power in the Arab Middle East (e.g., Jamal 2012), this article is the first study examining public views about soft-power strategies within a regional rivalry framework. Furthermore, it also contributes to the scholarship on the determinants of public perceptions of foreign states in international relations.

In the next section, we offer a discussion of soft power and its public opinion dimension as it relates to the Arab Middle East. We then briefly discuss how distinct international images of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are perceived in the context of a regional rivalry. All three countries appeal to the citizens of the Arab Middle East with competing versions of governance principles and political Islam. We provide a theoretical framework about the impact of democratic orientations, religious values, and anti-Americanism on perceptions of these three countries. On the basis of this theoretical framework, we formulate five hypotheses about the determinants of Arab public opinion toward regional foreign states. Data for the statistical analyses come from survey responses from Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project (GAP) conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. We employ a series of *multivariate probit* estimations to test these hypotheses.

The results show that sectarian and secular-Islamist cleavages and support for Islamist governance are the main driving forces shaping public perceptions of regional powers in the Middle East. The strongest effect is associated with Sunni-Shiite division. Those who identify as Sunni are more likely to favor Turkey and Saudi Arabia, but more strongly the latter, as opposed to those who identify as Shiite who hold favorable views of Iran. While Sunni-Shiite division has a long history and is primarily associated with Iran and Saudi Arabia, the emergence of Turkey as a "Sunni power" is a relatively new phenomenon reflecting Turkey's foreign policy activism

in the Middle East. More surprisingly, attitudes toward democracy do not seem to influence how Arab publics perceive these foreign states. The Turkish model of “Muslim democracy” does not have strong appeal as individuals who favor Turkey tend to have secular orientations. Individuals with Islamists vision tend to exhibit support for Islamic Republic of Iran, more so than Saudi Arabia. While personal religiosity does not have a strong impact, anti-Americanism has significant effects on the perceptions about regional powers in the Middle East. The conclusion discusses the broader implications of these findings for regional rivalries and democracy promotion efforts, and identifies avenues for future research for studying public opinion and foreign policy.

Soft Power and Arab Public Opinion

Joseph Nye (1990) defines soft power as the ability to attract, persuade, and co-opt as opposed to coercion in international relations.¹ According to Nye, soft power “occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants” without the use of any hard power means like military intervention or economic sanctions (166). Soft power helps a country to persuade others by setting an example or by power of attraction. As Nye (2004, 5) states “a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it.” As such, soft power requires a voluntary and positive attitudinal or behavioral change on part of the elite or the public in target states.

Such attitude shifting strategies can occur through multiple means and allows states to establish spheres of influences by becoming attractive role models in the eyes of an international audience.² The legitimacy and attractiveness of a state’s political, social, and cultural resources gain currency to the extent that a state is able to hold an image which is perceived as a role

model by others. This image rests on the *perceptions* of the others who view this state in favorable terms (Shih 2012). Thus, the success of states' soft power appeal is highly dependent on whether the ideas representing a state are acceptable to the publics in target countries. As much as it is important to have ideas or institutions that attract the others and give legitimacy to the foreign policy goals of a state, more significant is winning the hearts and minds of publics in other countries.

Despite its increasing salience, until recently, Arab public opinion, subsumed under the notion of the "Arab street" has not been subject of serious inquiry. The "Arab street" was synonymous with unpredictable, angry, and irrational people with potential to cause violence (for a critical view see Bayat 2010, 209-220). The authoritarian Arab rulers and the U.S. could afford to ignore Arab public opinion and pursue their own interest as long as they appeased popular sentiments and kept popular discontent manageable through policies of coercion and rhetorical cooptation. This image of Arab public opinion has been since discredited. The advent of satellite television and the digital technologies generated a transnational public sphere with profound implications for Middle Eastern politics (Lynch 2003). Even the authoritarian Arab leaders need to engage with the Arab public sphere and to mobilize support for and justify their policies (Jamal 2012; Lynch 2003). The popular uprisings of 2011 further undermined the image of Arab public opinion viewed as composed of fixed and reactionary convictions (Tessler, Jamal, and Robbins 2012).

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, many Arab citizens became more receptive to different models of governance after decades of corrupt and repressive rule (Ciftci 2013b). In this context, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey promote distinctive religious and political models as part of their soft power oriented foreign policy in the region (Aras and Gorener 2010). Since

Arab public opinion is becoming more important in domestic and international politics of the region, the appeal of these states will be intrinsically linked to their perceived image in the transnational Arab public sphere. Thus, soft power strategies aiming for regional leadership are likely to work insofar as foreign states manage to win the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

Regional Power Rivalry in the Middle East

As indicated above, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia emerged as powerful contenders in the contemporary Middle Eastern geopolitical context. Iran and Saudi Arabia represent two conflicting models of Islamic governance as historically high oil prices finance their foreign policy ambitions. While Saudi Arabia emphasizes its unique role as the custodian of Mecca and Medina, the two holiest cities in the Muslim World, the populist Islamic government in Iran presents a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy (Simon 2013, 4-5).

Meanwhile, Turkey, after achieving impressive economic growth under the AKP (Justice and Development Party) rule, rediscovered the Middle East and pursued an increasingly active regional foreign policy. As a country ruled by a popularly elected Islamic party in a secular system, Turkey presents a very different model of political Islam than both the Saudi and Iranian regimes. Thus, despite being two non-Arab powers, both Turkey and Iran cater to the Arab public opinion with different religious-political arrangements in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings.

Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran have basically three ways to achieve influence in the region: military involvement, economic linkages, and dissemination of cultural and political norms. While all three states used military means, none of them have enough resources to establish dominance over other regional states through military means. Furthermore, the U.S. continues to have a significant military presence in the region and would use overwhelming

power to prevent any changes opposing its interests. Hence, these three countries would be more influential through soft power strategies.

[Figure 1 about here]

Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have considerable economic clout and are the largest economies in the region. Economic linkages can be one mechanism through which these countries may project soft power in the Middle East. According to the IMF, Turkey was the world's 17th largest economy followed by Saudi Arabia (19th) and Iran (32nd) in 2013.³ While intra-regional trade in the Middle East has historically been low (Malik and Awadallah 2013), the 2008 economic crisis has contributed to the improvement in regional trade relations. As Figure 1 shows, China has emerged as the top trade partner of the MENA countries after the 2008 economic recession, as the share of the U.S. exports and imports in the Middle East decreased. Besides, Turkey and UAE overtook Germany and France between 2008 and 2012.⁴ Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil reduces its regional trade given the concentration of oil based economies in the Middle East. Iran has a more diverse economy than Saudi Arabia, but international sanctions over its nuclear program significantly limit its trade. Saudi Arabia was ranked the 13th, and Iran the 17th largest trade partner of Middle Eastern economies in 2012.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 shows top ten trade partners of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia (four countries analyzed in this paper). Turkey is among the top ten trade partners of each of these four countries in 2012. Turkish exports (rather than imports) account for most of these trade relations (Tezcür and Grigorescu 2014). Saudi Arabia is the top trade partner of Jordan and has considerable trade with Egypt. Iran does not rank among the top ten trade partners of any of these countries primarily due to the expansion of the sanctions regime since 2011. Overall, this

overview of trade relations suggests that Turkey is likely to have relatively higher favorable ratings in Lebanon and Tunisia; Saudi Arabia in Jordan; and both Turkey and Saudi Arabia in Egypt.

A third way through which these three countries seek regional influence is through disseminating their cultural and political norms. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey represent competing models of political governance and make appeals to Arab publics in a time of change. In this regard, religion is central to their international image and soft power politics (Haynes 2008). The appeal of these models can be best understood by examining the views of ordinary citizens about these countries.⁵

Iran presents itself as a nonsectarian power “resistance” against the U.S. imperialism and Israeli aggression in the region (Adib-Moghaddam 2007). That strategy had considerable success during the Israeli-Hezbollah war in the summer of 2006. However, as Iran has thrown its weight behind the Assad regime waging a vicious fight of survival, Iran’s characterization of the popular uprisings as an “Islamic awakening” is likely to fall on deaf ears in the Sunni world (Jones 2013). At the same time, Iran has a hybrid populist theocratic regime that has proved to be more resilient than the Arab republican regimes and to be more participatory than the absolute Arab monarchies. As such, despite being a non-Arab nation, Iranian model may be appealing to pious individuals, to Shiites and to supporters of Islamic rule in the Arab Middle East.

Saudi Arabia as an absolute monarchy with no tolerance for dissent has been on the defensive in the face of massive popular demonstrations shaking the authoritarian order in the region (Ennis and Momani 2013; Matthiesen 2013). The Saudi regime exerts strong influence in the Gulf cooperation Council, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference. Most notably, as the home of Islam’s holy places, Saudi Arabia continues to be a center of

religious training and its soft-power influence in the Sunni World is unmatched (Gause 2002). The Saudi government spends billions of dollars to promote a Wahhabi brand of Sunni conservative Islam and back Salafi movements across the region. It advertises its own Islamic state model which relies on the symbiotic relationship of religious scholars and the Saudi rulers. The Saudi influence can be particularly strong among pious Sunni Arabs with weak democratic commitments.

As mentioned above, Turkey has pursued a very active foreign policy in the Middle East especially since 2007, as the AKP consolidated its power (Bank and Karadag 2013; Öniş 2014). Economic expansion and political stability under a popularly elected Islamic government contributes to the image of Turkey as a model country combining Islam, democracy and neoliberal economics. Turkey's foreign policy activism partly relies on the rediscovery of the Ottoman heritage and its utilization as a positive cultural trait without any references to the imperialist past (Tuğal 2012; Öniş 2014).⁶ Turkish exports, bilateral aids programs of the TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), the rapidly growing flight network of the Turkish Airlines, Turkish soap operas which carry an Ottoman/Turkish pop-culture to large segments of Arab societies, and increased tourism activity to and from the region are cited as examples of Turkish soft power capabilities (Oğuzlu 2011). The bold discourse of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and anti-Israeli foreign policy position may have raised concerns in the West about Turkey's new orientation, but the factors above may have a "demonstrative effect" (Kirişci 2011) and inspire the Middle Eastern policymakers and publics to desire similar economic and political gains. Overall, while many observers remain skeptical of the applicability of the "Turkish model" to other Middle Eastern countries (Çavdar 2006; Öniş 2012), Turkey has emerged as a

model country in the eyes of many Arabs in the wake of the popular uprisings (Salem 2011; Telhami 2011).⁷

In summary, all three countries have economic resources to gain advantage in this competition, but they have increasingly used religious ideology and proposed distinct models of political governance in the post-Arab uprising period. As the uprisings have demonstrated the importance of public opinion, these countries are likely to gain regional influence insofar as they appeal to the hearts and minds of ordinary Arab citizens. In the light of this discussion, we formulate a series of hypotheses about the perceptions of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in the Arab public sphere largely drawing from recent advances in the literature on international relations theories and public opinion.

Hypotheses

We formulate five hypotheses, based on the international relations literature that identifies religiosity and political attitudes as being central to public perception of foreign states. First, we focus on religiosity as a multidimensional phenomenon consisting belief, behavior, and belonging (Glock and Stark 1965). Recent international relations scholarship suggests that shared religious identity affects attitudes about foreign states. British and American publics are most likely to endorse attacks against an Islamic dictatorship and both publics are likely to support war against an Islamic democracy as much against a Christian dictatorship (John and Davies 2012). Furthermore, religiosity is likely to shape public perceptions of foreign powers as state leaders instrumentally use religious messages and images to bolster their international appeal (Fox and Sandler 2004; Hurd 2007; Philpott 2009; Warner and Walker 2011, 119-20). These findings are consistent with the image theory's insight that the nature of intergroup relations are

critical to the formation of stereotypes about outgroups (Alexander, Brewer, and Livingston 2005).

In terms of religious belonging, recent developments in the Middle East have increased the salience of transnational sectarian identity (i.e., Sunni versus Shiite) over transnational ethnic identities (i.e., pan-Arabism). The Sunni-Shiite divide was the subject of the rivalry between the Ottomans and Safavids for centuries. In modern times, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been the main contenders of this cleavage. Sectarianism became central to geopolitical conflicts due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the turmoil in the post-Arab uprisings period (Nasr 2007). While Turkey is also a predominantly Sunni power like Saudi Arabia, it promotes an image of a state ruled by popularly elected pious Sunni Muslim politicians especially since 2007. Turkey's over-engagement in the domestic politics of Egypt and Syria has drawn Turkey into the sectarian politics of the region (Tuğal 2012; Onis 2014). In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, Turkey has supported the Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Sunni insurgent groups (e.g. Al-Nusra) in Syria. Thus, Turkey's regional policy ambitions might have transformed its image from a Western oriented secular democracy to the leader of Sunni religious movements. Consequently we propose that:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals with Sunni identity will hold favorable views of Saudi Arabia and Turkey and less favorable views of Iran.

A second dimension of religiosity concerns the state-religion relationship. The secular-Islamist cleavage has been central to political struggles in the Muslim world since the early 20th century (Zubaida, 1993). Islamist ideologies demanding Islamic state gained popular influence and swept the Arab world especially after the demise of the pan-Arab nationalism in the 1970s (El-Affendi 2003; Kepel 2006; Ayoob 2007). Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are religious regimes

where Islam plays a central role in shaping the parameters of social life despite their sectarian differences. Furthermore, both states implement Shari'a rule that has been the demand of many Islamist movements in the broader Muslim world. In contrast, Turkey remains a secular state whose laws are not based on Shari'a despite the increasing public influence of Islam under the AKP rule. While some Arab citizens may not find the religious rule of Iran and Saudi Arabia appealing, Iranian and Saudi models are more likely to be popular among those who desire a greater role for Islamic principles in government.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who desire a greater role for Islamic principles in government will hold more favorable views of Saudi Arabia and Iran and less favorable views of Turkey.

A third dimension of religiosity concerns personal belief and piety. Public opinion scholarship has reached conflicting findings about the effect of religiosity on political attitudes. For example, some scholars find no relationship between religiosity and democratic orientations (Tessler 2002), while others find this relationship to be context dependent (Tezcur et al. 2012) or be conditional on the regime type (Ciftci 2013b). Furthermore, the effect of religiosity on attitudes toward violent religious groups and foreign states also remains ambivalent (Tessler and Robbins 2007; Berger 2014). A similar ambivalence may characterize the relationship between religiosity and views of foreign states in the Arab Middle East. On the one hand, religious individuals may be more supportive of Saudi and Iranian models that give more weight to Islamic principles in governance as opposed to the Turkish secular model. On the other hand, pious individuals may not like the Saudi or Iranian models more or less than the Turkish model given the rigid and narrow interpretations characterizing the former two. Thus, our third hypothesis tests both the null and directional associations between religiosity and views of foreign states.

Hypothesis 3a: There is no relationship between religiosity and favorable views toward Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

Hypothesis 3b: Religious individuals will hold more favorable views about Iran and Saudi Arabia and less favorable views about Turkey.

Our fourth hypothesis concerns the impacts of political attitudes on foreign state evaluations. An increasing number of scholars highlight the role of public opinion as one of the primary causal factors characterizing the democratic peace argument (Doyle 1983; Russett 1993) that democracies rarely go to war with each other. According to an earlier study, when Americans perceive a country ruled by a nondemocratic regime, their support for war against this country significantly increases (Hermann, Tetlock and Visser 1999). As public in democratic states feel less threatened by a moral common ground with other democratic states, they are less likely to support the use of military force against democracies than non-democracies (John and Davies 2012; Tomz and Weeks 2013). Iran and Saudi Arabia remain bastions of authoritarian rule in the region while Turkey has a history of free electoral competition going back to 1950. We expect to find Turkey having the highest favorable ratings in Tunisia and Lebanon that had more pluralistic and democratic regimes than Jordan in 2012. We do not have strong expectations about Egypt in this regard given deep political turmoil and polarization in that country in 2012. By the same logic, citizens with pro-democracy views should have more sympathy for Turkey, an electoral democracy, over both the authoritarian regimes of Iran and Saudi Arabia. This is because pro-democratic Arab citizens are likely to share greater affinity with Turkey and feel less threatened by Turkish foreign policy given its relatively higher democratic credentials. .

Hypothesis 4: Individuals who support democracy will hold more favorable views of Turkey and less favorable views of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

From a realist perspective, it can be argued public attitudes toward foreign states are ultimately shaped by the behavior rather than identity of these states. Building on Hans Morgenthau's insights (1954), Furia and Lucas (2008) find that Arab publics evaluate foreign states on the basis of its behavior regarding issues they care about rather than its identity. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have different types of relations with the U.S., the hegemon in the region since the Cold War. Anti-Americanism, which is widespread in the Middle East, has strong influence on the Arab public opinion (Chiozza 2006; Blaydes and Linzer 2012). It has multiple dimensions; people may resent America for its culture and way of life, or for its foreign policy (Katzenstein and Keohane 2006). While most research to date has focused on the sources of anti-Americanism, it has substantial implications for the U.S. foreign policy. High levels of anti-Americanism translate into weaker voting support for the U.S. favored positions in the United Nations General Assembly, declining American trade, and smaller contributions to American war efforts in Afghanistan (Datta 2014). Anti-Americanism can also affect perceptions of regional powers. More specifically, Arab citizens who are resentful of the U.S. influence in the region may also have unfavorable views of regional states perceived to be closely aligned with the American interests.

Consequently, we expect that anti-American views are also associated with unfavorable views of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which continue to have close relations with the U.S. despite diverging interests, and more favorable views of Iran, the main power challenging the U.S. in the region.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals who hold anti-American views will hold more favorable views of Iran and less favorable views of Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Data and Variables

We use Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project (GAP) which conducts public opinion surveys around the world about issues ranging from people's own lives to national and global problems.⁸ The empirical analysis utilizes data from the 2012 GAP surveys and includes responses from Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Lebanon. We include these countries because they include questions necessary for testing our hypotheses. In addition, the four countries in the sample have different political systems and they represent different arrangements in state-religion relations. Tunisia remains one of the most secular countries in Arab world; Lebanon a confessional system with 18 officially recognized sects; Egypt sustains a precarious and ambiguous secular political system where Islam plays a dominant role; Jordan refers to Islamic principles in legislation but also limits the role of Islam in policymaking. Jordan and Tunisia have dominantly Sunni populations; Lebanon is a diverse country with significant Sunni, Shiite, and Christians communities; and Egypt has a Sunni majority with a sizeable Coptic Christian minority. Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia are republics while Jordan is ruled by the Hashemite dynasty as a kingdom since its foundation in 1921. The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia overthrew long-serving dictators, but democratization has been more successful in Tunisia than in Egypt.

The surveys include questions about attitudes toward various countries and many items tap respondents' religiosity, identity, and their views about state-religion relations along with demographics (see Appendix A for the exact wording of the questions). The dependent variable asks the respondents whether they favor certain countries or not. We create a dummy variable taking the value of 1 when the respondents have very favorable or somewhat favorable views of

these countries and 0 when they hold somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents with favorable views of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran in comparison to U.S. and China, two superpowers with considerable interest and involvement in the Middle East. Overall, Iran and U.S. have lower ratings than Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and China. Saudi Arabia has the highest favorability ratings in Jordan and Egypt, 91% and 81% respectively, but only 38% of the respondents hold favorable views of this country in Lebanon and 41% in Tunisia. The popularity of Saudi Arabia in Jordan is expected given these two countries' extensive trade partnership and monarchial regimes. In contrast, in all four countries over 60% of the respondents hold favorable views of Turkey with the highest ratings in secular Tunisia (78%). As noted above, Turkey's growing trade relations with Tunisia and its image as a Muslim democracy are likely to contribute to these ratings. These patterns provide support for trading state and public opinion dimensions of democratic peace arguments. Iran has very limited appeal among the Egyptian and Jordanians, but is viewed more favorably in Tunisia and especially in Lebanon. Positive perception of the U.S. is the lowest in Jordan (12%) and highest in Tunisia (45%), whereas China enjoys much higher favorability ratings, over 50% in three of the four countries analyzed here, a finding consistent with the earlier discussion about its growing economic presence in the region.

[Figure 3 About Here]

Pew Surveys include many items asking the respondents about religious values and practices. To test *Hypothesis 1* about sectarianism and perceptions of regional powers, we use a question about their sectarian identity. A dummy variable is created to separate those who identify themselves as Sunni from the others who identify as Shiite, other, or choose not to identify with any religious sect.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that individuals who espouse greater role of Islam in politics are likely to favor Iran and Saudi Arabia over Turkey. To test this hypothesis, we use two variables measuring individual preferences about secularism and Islamic governance. The first variable, *secular*, is a conditional index of two items about the role of Islam in politics and ranges from 1 (non-secular) to 4 (secular). To measure preferences for *Islamic governance*, we use an item asking the respondents their views about the implementation of Islamic principles and the teachings of Quran in legislation. We use an index combining responses about frequency of prayer and fasting to measure personal religiosity. Since these items are measured with different scales, we recode the responses about fasting into a 7 point scale (1=1, 2=3, 3=5, 4=7) and then form an additive index of personal religiosity ranging from 2 to 14. This variable allows us to test *Hypotheses 3a* and *3b* that posits null and positive relationships between religiosity and views of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

As shown in Figure 4, there is significant variation in the distribution of these measures across the four countries in the sample. The figures represent the mean values of three variables, religiosity, secular, and support for Islamic legislation, which are recoded to 0-100 scale to allow comparison. As expected, the level of religiosity is very high ranging from 69 in Lebanon to 84 in Jordan. The mean level of secularist orientations is relatively low reaching only 27 in Jordan, 34 in Tunisia, 37 in Egypt, and 39 in Lebanon. In contrast to low levels of support for Islamic legislation in Lebanon (49), this figure reaches very high levels in Egypt (79) and Jordan (87).

[Figure 4 about Here]

We generate a composite variable to test *Hypothesis 4* suggesting that Arab citizens with pro-democratic attitudes are more likely to favor Turkey over Iran and Saudi Arabia. The index variable is based on three questions about: 1) the preference for democracy over other types of

regimes, 2) the ability of democracy versus a strong leader to solve problems, and 3) the trade-off between democracy and strong economy. It ranges from 0 to 3 with higher values representing more support for democracy. Finally, we use six items (see Appendix A) to measure anti-Americanism. This index ranges from 0 to 6 (the alpha coefficient for both indices is well over the .50 threshold).

We use age (in years), education (dichotomous, university education is 1), income, and country dummies as controls in the models. The response scales for income are different across the sample countries. So, we obtain the 25th percentile distributions from these items to generate harmonized variables measured with a four-point scale for income levels. Then, we create three dichotomous variables and middle income is the reference category. Appendix B shows the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the statistical models.

Findings and Discussion

When asked about their views toward Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, individuals are likely to compare the different models presented by these countries in their cognition. When making up their mind about one of these countries, they also refer to their opinion of the other countries. In other words, attitudes toward Iranian, Turkish, and Saudi models are dependent on each other in the attitude formation process. A multivariate probit analysis (trivariate probit) taking this dependency into account is theoretically the most appropriate approach to test our model of public opinion. In each of the estimations presented below, the joint likelihood ratio tests confirm the dependency among the error terms in three equations justifying the use of multivariate probit estimation. According to the results of these tests, the choice of whether or not to favor any of these three countries is not independent of the attitudes toward other countries. In models where the bivariate likelihood ratio test of the error terms is not statistically

significant, we prefer this approach over separate probits as multivariate probit provides more efficient estimations. We use the R package "mvProbit" (Henningson 2012) with 500 simulation draws of the GHK algorithm to compute integrals of the multivariate normal distribution.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 presents the results of our multivariate probit estimations testing the first four hypotheses. As expected according to *Hypothesis 1*, Sunni identity leads to favorable views of Turkey and Saudi Arabia but decreases the likelihood of favorable orientations toward Iran in all models. Thus, we find strong support for the sectarian identity hypothesis. We have limited support for *Hypothesis 3a* regarding the effects of religiosity that does not appear to have a consistent impact on opinion of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, religious individuals are more likely to favor Iran partially consistent with *Hypothesis 3b*. These findings show that, Iran's religious governance model finds a more receptive audience among pious Arabs than the Saudi model. There is more support for *Hypothesis 2* tested by two variables. Secularists are less likely to hold favorable attitudes toward Iran and more likely to hold favorable views of Turkey. Furthermore, those who want Islamic legislation are more favorable of Iran while they are indifferent toward Turkey. Unexpectedly, they are less favorable of Saudi Arabia. Finally, there is no support for *Hypothesis 4* suggesting a relationship between support for democracy and favorable views of Turkey. This finding is different from John and Davies (2012)'s study establishing an association between public opinion and democratic peace. However, overall support for the Turkish model is higher in Lebanon and Tunisia, implying that this association might operate at the national level rather than at the individual level (see Figure 3). As for demographic controls, women and older people hold more favorable views of Saudi Arabia and less favorable views of Iran whereas they remain indifferent about Turkey. The fixed effects also

reveal an interesting pattern. *Ceteris paribus*, Jordanian and Egyptian citizens are more likely to hold positive views of Saudi Arabia and negative views of both Iran and Turkey vis-à-vis the citizens of other categories (Tunisia is the reference category).

[Figure 5 about here]

We calculate marginal effects using the estimation results from Table 1. Figure 5, shows the conditional marginal effects calculated at all observations included in the model for variables of interest assuming that all other dependent variables are one.⁹ This preference (as different from assuming all other dependent variables are as observed) imposes a more robust test as the calculation assumes existing support for the two countries as the value of the third dependent variable changes. We show the average marginal effects for religious variables with 95% confidence intervals and report those for other variables in Appendix C. Sectarian identity has the largest impact on favorability ratings of Saudi Arabia (average conditional marginal effect of 0.14 or 14% likelihood of favorability), followed by Turkey (3% likelihood, significant at 90%). Consistent with *Hypothesis 1*, individuals who identify as Sunni are 30% less likely to favor Iran. As we discussed above, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been the main contenders in the Sunni-Shiite division whereas Turkey has recently involved in this sectarian politics. Thus, the substantive effects may reflect the current geopolitical configuration. Furthermore, individuals with secular attitudes are more likely to favor Turkey (about 1.6% increased marginal likelihood) and less likely to favor Iran (1.6% less likelihood) and Saudi Arabia (1.1 % in both panels). While average marginal effects are statistically significant in all equations, the substantive effects remain relatively small in relation to the effect of Sunni identity. Third, the marginal effects show that individuals who desire an Islamic legislation are about 4% more likely to hold favorable views of Iran. The same variable has a significant but negative effect for Saudi Arabia

and insignificant effect for Turkey. This finding suggests that the populist Islamic model of Iran may be more appealing than the rigid monarchial Saudi model. Furthermore, the results confirm that, *ceteris paribus*, Turkey's appeal is based on its secular character rather than the so-called "Muslim democratic" model. Scholars are right to be skeptical about the exportability of this dubious model to other contexts (Bali 2011). Finally, the marginal effects do not show any substantive effect associated with personal religiosity.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 reports the results from multivariate probit estimation that also tests *Hypothesis 5* about anti-Americanism. In substantive terms, the results remain the same. Secularists have more favorable views of Turkey and less favorable views of Iran, religious individuals demanding Islamic legislation support Iran, and Sunnis favor Saudi Arabia (strongly) and Turkey over Iran. Different from Table 1, Islamic legislation is no longer a significant coefficient in the Saudi Arabia equation. This result, once again, confirms that the religious models of Iran and Saudi Arabia are not necessarily appealing among religious Arab citizens. Consistent with *Hypothesis 5*, Anti-Americanism, decreases the favorability of Turkey and Saudi Arabia and increases the likelihood of holding positive views toward Iran controlling for a range of religious, political and demographic variables. This finding provides an interesting insight that may inform the foreign policy strategies of these countries in their pursuit of regional dominance. Increasing levels of anti-Americanism is likely to hurt regional powers that are perceived to be aligned with the U.S. interests and bolster popular images of powers that are perceived to challenge the world's leading economic and military state. In this regard, anti-Americanism that is inherent to Iranian foreign policy since 1979 may have a strategic value in the Islamic Republic's quest for greater influence and prestige in the Middle East.¹⁰

Conclusion

The Arab uprisings of 2011 are often viewed as the awakening of people whose aspirations were long suppressed by ossified and brutal regimes. As the dictators trembled, ordinary people asserted their right to decide on their collective fate and demanded a realignment of not only the domestic but also the regional political order.¹¹ These monumental transformations inevitably facilitated the retrenchment of the American power in the Middle East and paved the way for the rise of a competition for geopolitical supremacy among regional powers. As three traditional Arab powers, Egypt, Iraq and Syria, fall into political turmoil, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey sought greater influence among the Arab publics. In this historical context, this study presents the first systematic analysis of the public opinion dimension of competition among these three countries. Providing the first systematic analysis of soft power capabilities of these three states vis-à-vis the views of Middle Eastern citizens, this study also finds that anti-Americanism is a major factor directly affecting the perceptions of these three states among the Arab publics. The Saudi and Turkish alliance with the U.S. is a liability undermining these two regional power's quest for greater influence among the Arabs who resent American involvement in the Middle East. Consistent with national role conception approaches (Holsti 1970), this study proposes that religion is central to both the self-image of these countries and their perception among the Arab publics. In this regard, in the Middle East, an analysis of public opinion data reveals that religious identity and worldviews directly inform the favorability ratings of these powers among the Arab publics. Religion shapes the parameters of soft power projection by Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the region. Growing sectarianism limits the appeal of Iran among the Sunnis, who constitute an overwhelming majority of the Arabs. It is actually in the self-interest of Saudi Arabia to play the sectarian card to limit the Iranian soft power. While Turkey under the AKP also aimed to increase its popularity among Sunni Arabs, the success of this strategy has been

limited. At the same time, the Iranian model combining Islamic rule with regular electoral competition and populism has appeal among religious Arabs citizens who demand greater role for Islam in legislation. Turkey's pursuit of greater involvement in the Middle East, often dubbed as "neo-Ottomanism" and most visibly seen in the pop-culture, seems to be of some appeal not because of Turkey's image as a "Muslim democracy" but rather thanks to its secularism. Turkey retains a positive image especially among Arabs who favor secular rule. Interestingly, Arabs who are more supportive of democracy are not more likely to hold Turkey in a more positive light compared to Iran and Saudi Arabia. This finding is consistent with Jamal's (2012) argument that popular demands for democracy do not necessarily translate into favorable views of the U.S., the beacon of democracy. Religiosity matters more than attitudes about democracy in shaping perceptions of regional states. More broadly, democracy promotion as a tool of serving foreign policy interests is likely to fail. Arabs demanding democracy seems to make a crucial distinction between their domestic political systems and foreign policies of the external states. A paradoxical implications of this study is, then, democracy promotion in the region is unlikely to transform the Arab public opinion into favoring the states with democratic regimes.

Naturally, this study has numerous limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, studies utilizing survey data over time will be more effective in distinguishing between contextual and predispositional nature of these evaluations. For instance, it is not clear if Sunnis disfavor Iran because of its Shiite identity or policies in the increasingly sectarian geopolitical struggles in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. Iran used to have strong appeal in 2006 when Hezbollah fought against Israel.¹² Finally, studies based on survey experiments employing vignettes will be useful to flesh out causal mechanisms linking political attitudes and religiosity to foreign policy views. For instance, it remains unspecified how anti-Americanism informs

unfavorable views of Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as both of these countries' relations with the U.S. are characterized by tensions. Finally, it is not clear how favorable images of foreign states in Arab public opinion help them to pursue their agendas. In this regard, Datta's innovative study (2014) arguing that anti-Americanism leads to decreasing support for the U.S. positions in the UN General Assembly, economic relations with the U.S., and cooperation with the U.S. in Afghanistan can be insightful. Along similar lines, it would be productive to explore how public evaluations of regional powers affect Arab states' foreign policies vis-à-vis these states.

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Figure 1

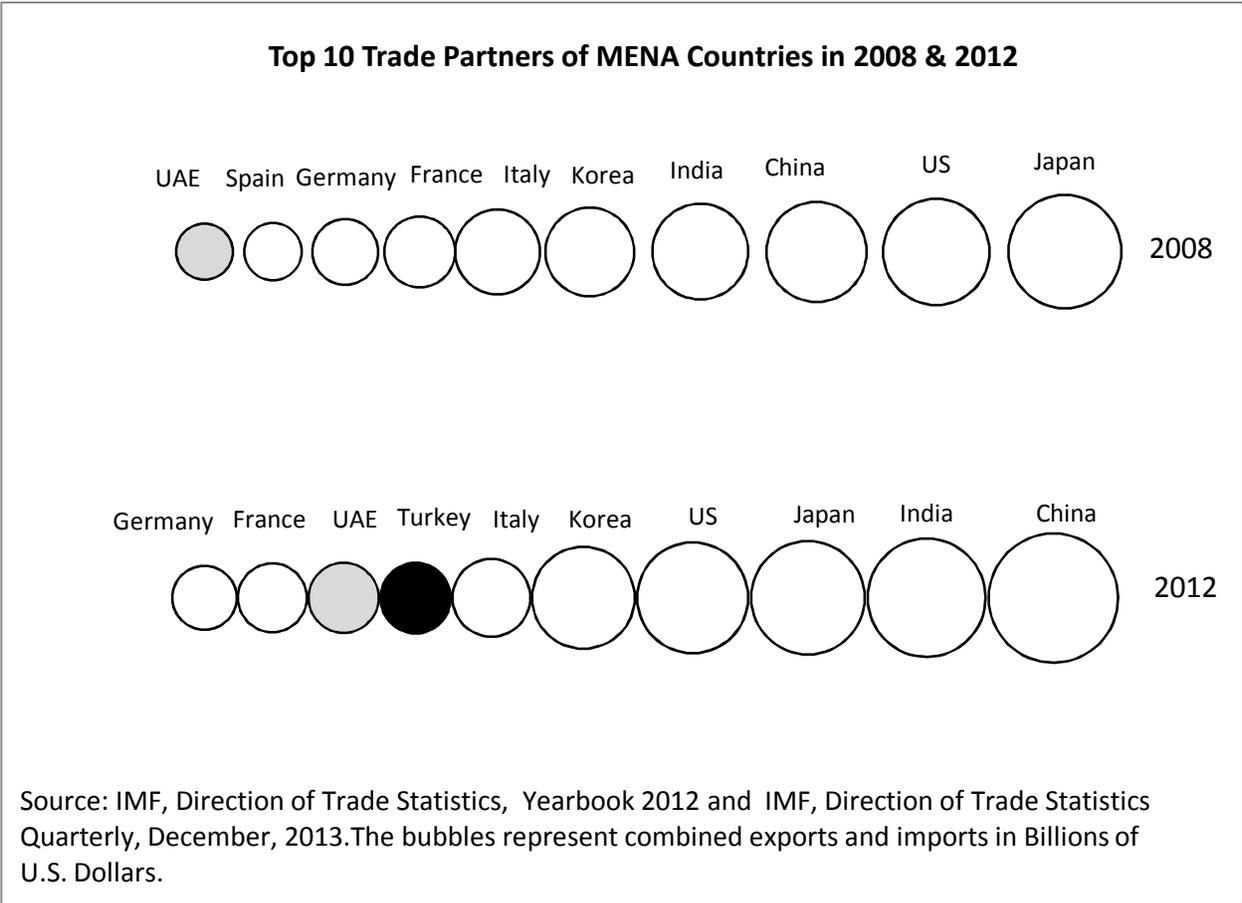


Figure 2.

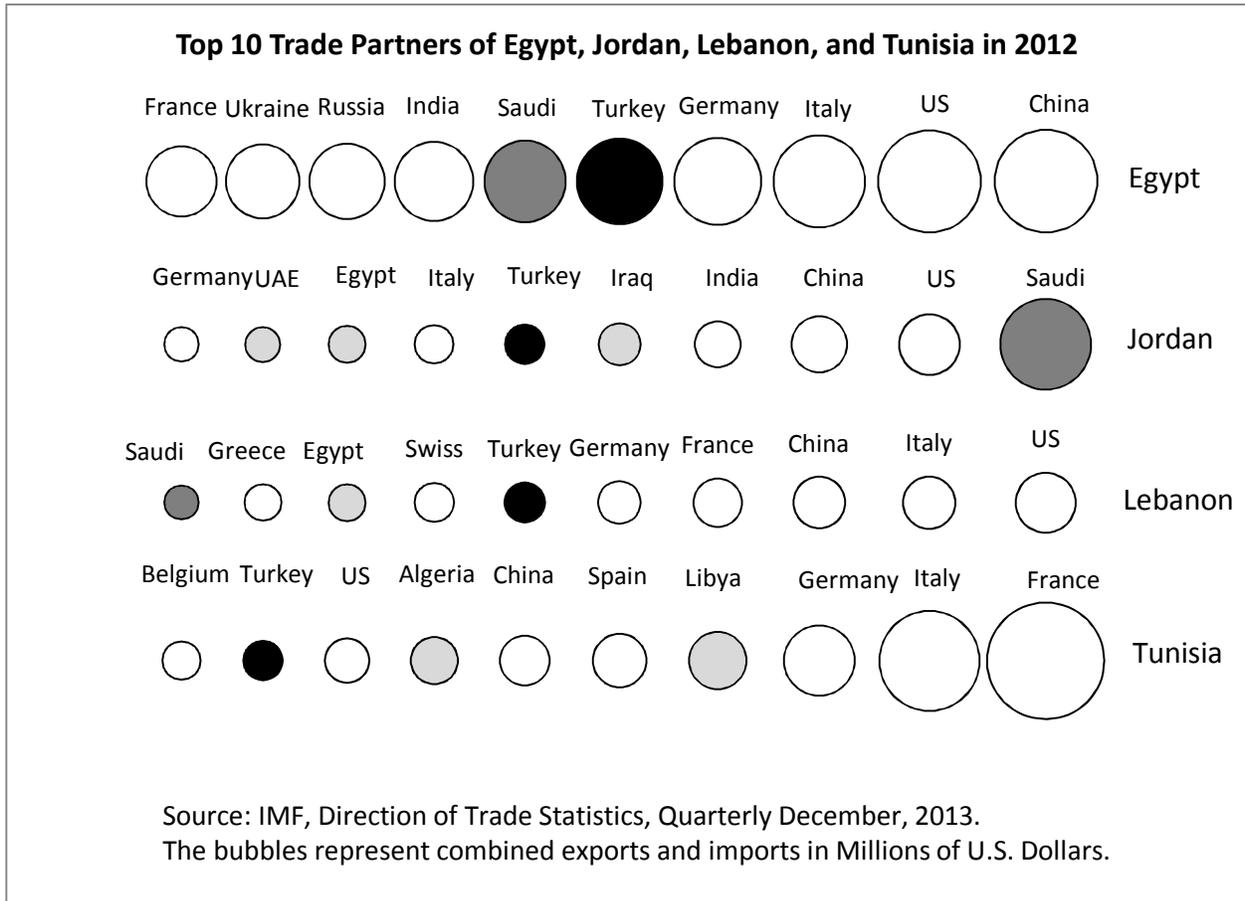
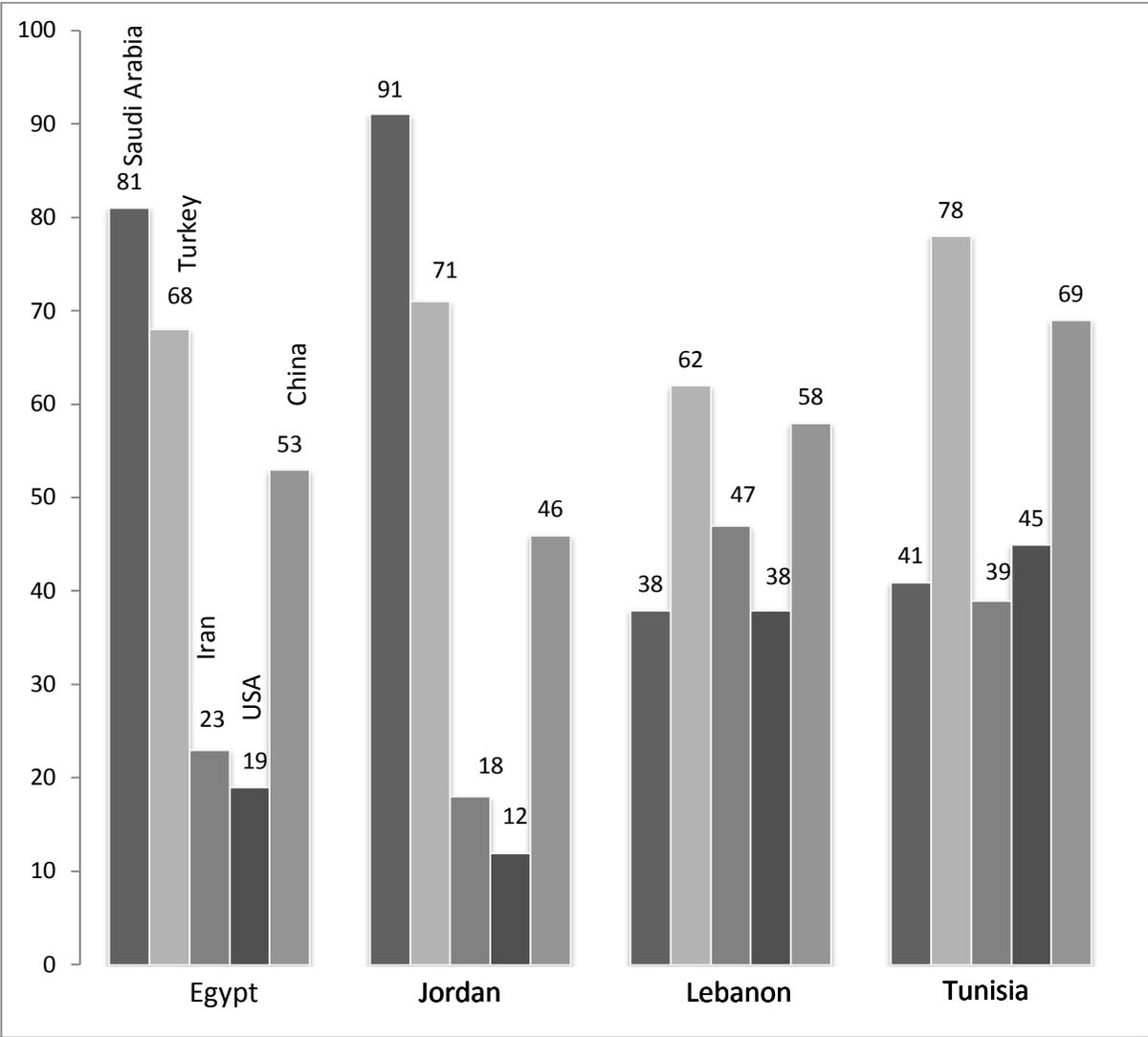
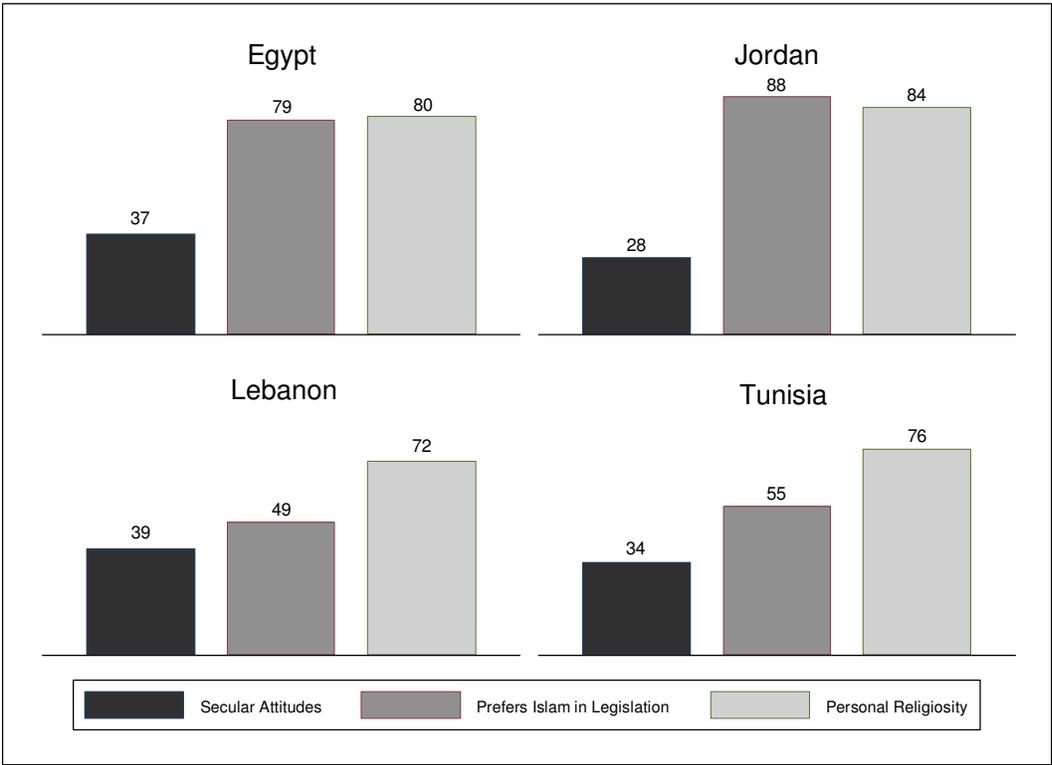


Figure 3: Favorability of Regional and Global Powers by Country



Source: Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2012)

Figure 4: Secularist Orientations, Islamic Governance, and Religiosity: Average Scores



All variables are standardized along a 0-100 scale. The numbers represent mean scores.

Figure 5: Marginal Effects

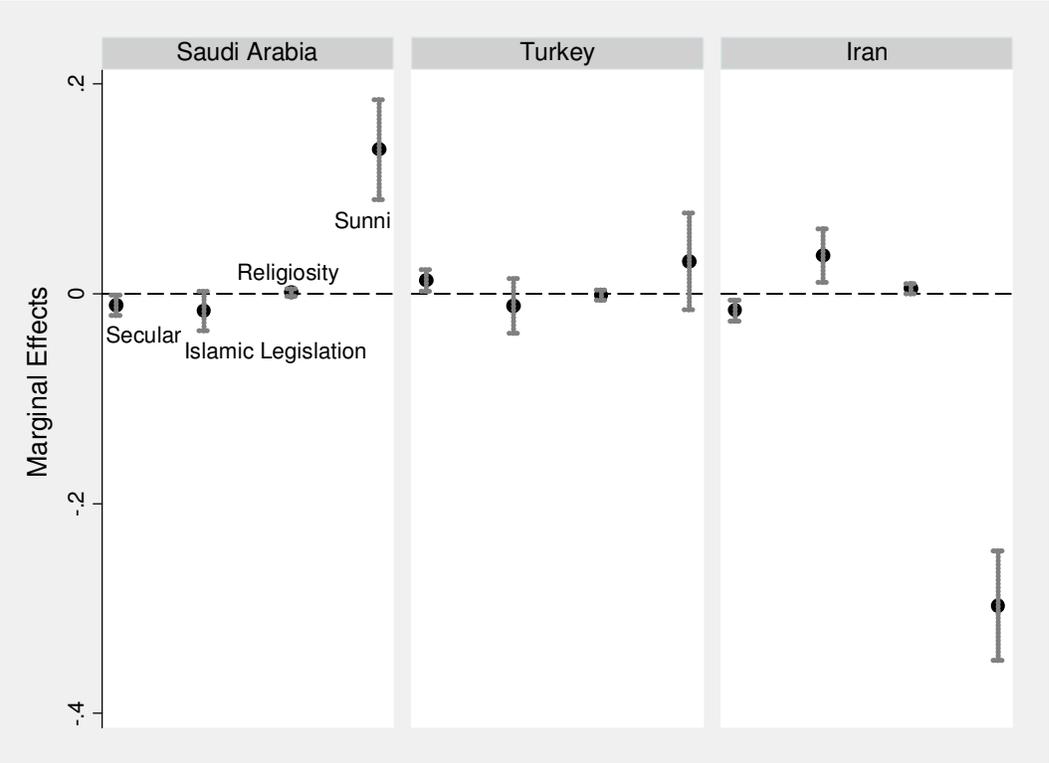


Table 1: Multivariate Probit Estimations of Favorable Attitudes toward Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran

	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Iran
Secularist	-0.024 (0.022)	0.042 (0.019)**	-0.048 (0.019)**
Islamic Legislation	-0.081 (0.044)*	-0.061 (0.044)	0.117 (0.045)***
Religiosity	0.002 (0.009)	-0.004 (0.009)	0.015 (0.009) *
Sunni Identity	0.553 (0.069)***	0.23 (0.068)***	-0.835 (0.062)***
Support for Democracy	0.04 (0.029)	0.013 (0.027)	-0.02 (0.027)
Education	-0.01 (0.073)	0.101 (0.069)	-0.028 (0.067)
Age	0.004 (0.002)**	0.003 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)*
Female	0.102 (0.053)*	-0.058 (0.049)	-0.084 (0.051)
Low Income	0.017 (0.06)	-0.048 (0.057)	0.035 (0.058)
High Income	-0.141 (0.073)*	-0.099 (0.067)	-0.022 (0.069)
Egypt	1.079 (0.073)***	-0.371 (0.071)***	-0.371 (0.067)***
Jordan	1.506 (0.086)***	-0.202 (0.076)**	-0.6 (0.076)***
Lebanon	-0.069 (0.093)	-0.461 (0.089) ***	0.101 (0.104)
Constant	-0.675 (0.173)***	0.632(0.175)***	0.238 (0.171)
N	3037		
Rho21	0.464 (0.03) ***		
Rho31	-0.083 (0.035) **		
Rho23		0.054 (0.035)	
Likelihood ratio test of rho21 = rho31 = rho32 = 0 : p <0.0000)			

Table 2: Multivariate Probit Estimations of Favorable Attitudes toward Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran (with Anti-Americanism)

	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Iran
Secularist	-0.031 (0.024)	0.04 (0.021)*	-0.058 (0.021)***
Islamic Legislation	-0.029 (0.051)	-0.057 (0.05)	0.139 (0.05)***
Religiosity	0.013 (0.01)	0 (0.009)	0.02 (0.01)**
Sunni Identity	0.533 (0.077)***	0.179 (0.077)**	-0.913 (0.068)***
Support for Democracy	0.039 (0.033)	-0.006 (0.03)	-0.033 (0.03)
Anti-Americanism	-0.114 (0.017)***	-0.086 (0.016)***	0.028 (0.016)*
Education	-0.027 (0.079)	0.048 (0.075)	-0.02 (0.072)
Age	0.093 (0.059)	-0.058 (0.055)	-0.062 (0.056)
Female	0.005 (0.002)**	0.005 (0.002)**	-0.005 (0.002)**
Low Income	0.011 (0.067)	-0.012 (0.063)	0.046 (0.064)
High Income	-0.224 (0.079)***	-0.152 (0.073)**	-0.054 (0.074)
Egypt	1.238 (0.081)***	-0.329 (0.08)***	-0.347 (0.073)***
Jordan	1.684 (0.094)***	-0.057 (0.083)	-0.678 (0.084)***
Lebanon	-0.013 (0.102)	-0.481 (0.099)***	0.097 (0.112)
Constant	-0.589 (0.192)***	0.902 (0.198)***	0.223 (0.189)
N	2575		
Rho21	0.441 (0.034)***		
Rho31	-0.107 (0.038)***		
Rho23	0.024 (0.039)		

Likelihood ratio test of $\rho_{21} = \rho_{31} = \rho_{23} = 0$: $p < 0.000$

Appendices

Appendix A:

These are the GAP survey questions used in the analyses.

Views of foreign powers (dependent variable):

Q8. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of [Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran].

Questions on religiosity:

Q 148. Are you Sunni (for example, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, or Hanbali), Shi'a (for example, Ithnashari/Twelver or Ismaili/Sevener), or something else? (1) Sunni (for example, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, or Hanbali) (2) Shi'a (for example, Ithnashari/Twelver or Ismaili/Sevener) (3) Ahmadiyya (91) Something else.

Q 149. How often, if at all, do you pray: hardly ever, only during religious holidays, only on Fridays, only on Fridays and religious holidays, more than once a week, every day at least once, or every day five times? (7 point scale)

Q 151. How often, if at all, do you fast – hardly ever, some days during Ramadan, during most or all days of Ramadan, OR during all of Ramadan and other religious holidays? (4 point scale)

Q 62. How much of a role do you think Islam plays in the political life of our country – a very large role (1), a fairly large role (2), a fairly small role (3), or a very small role (4)?

Q 63. [Follow up to the previous question] In your opinion – is this good or bad for our country? (1) Good (1), (2) Bad

Q 39. Which of the following three statements comes closer to your view: Laws should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran, laws should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the teachings of the Quran, or laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran?

Questions about democracy:

Q21. And which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion: (1) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, (2) in some circumstances a non-democratic government is preferable (3) For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

Q71. Some feel that we should rely on a democratic form of government to solve our country's problems. Others feel that we should rely on a leader with a strong hand to solve our country's problems. Which comes closer to your opinion?

Q72. If you had to choose between a good democracy or a strong economy, which would you say is more important?

Questions about the U.S. (anti-Americanism index) :

Q54. Which of the following phrases comes closer to your view? It's good that American ideas and customs are spreading here, OR it's bad that American ideas and customs are spreading here.

Q55. And which of these comes closer to your view? I like American ideas about democracy, OR I dislike American ideas about democracy.

Q 56. Which comes closer to describing your view? I like American ways of doing business, OR I dislike American ways of doing business.

Q 57. Which is closer to describing your view—I like American music, movies and television, OR I dislike American music, movies and television.

Q 58. And which comes closer to describing your view? I admire the United States for its technological and scientific advances, OR I do not admire the United States for its technological and scientific advances.

Q8. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of U.S.A.

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Favors Saudi Arabia	3037	0.65	0.48	0	1
Favors Turkey	3037	0.72	0.45	0	1
Favors Iran	3037	0.31	0.46	0	1
Secular Attitudes	3037	2.37	1.33	1	5
Prefers Islam in Law	3037	2.39	0.65	1	3
Anti-Americanism	2575	3.29	1.84	0	6
Religiosity	3037	11.43	3.01	2	14
Sunni	3037	0.78	0.41	0	1
Support for Democracy	3037	1.72	0.95	0	3
Education	3037	0.18	0.38	0	1
Age	3037	37.62	13.87	18	88
Female	3037	0.49	0.50	0	1
Low Income	3037	0.34	0.47	0	1
High Income	3037	0.20	0.40	0	1

Appendix C: Full Marginal Effects

Panel A: Conditional marginal effects, calculated at all observations assuming that all other dependent variables are as observed.						
	Model 1			Model 2		
	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Iran	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Iran
Secular	-0.011***	0.016***	-0.016***	-0.012*	0.015**	-0.019***
Islamic Legislation	-0.016**	-0.015	0.036***	-0.001	-0.017	0.043***
Religiosity	0.001	-0.002	0.005*	0.004	-0.001	0.006**
Sunni	0.134***	0.043*	-0.295***	0.124***	0.026	-0.321***
Anti Americanism Support				-0.024***	-0.02***	0.007
Democracy	0.01**	0.001	-0.006	0.01	-0.004	-0.01
Education	-0.011	0.034	-0.01	-0.011	0.017	-0.007
Age	0.001***	0.001	-0.001**	0.001	0.001*	-0.001**
Female	0.032***	-0.026	-0.024**	0.028*	-0.024	-0.017
Low Income	0.009	-0.018	0.012	0.005	-0.005	0.015
High Income	-0.033**	-0.022	-0.008	-0.052**	-0.033	-0.019
Egypt	0.322***	-0.21***	-0.089***	0.342***	-0.197***	-0.078***
Jordan	0.401***	-0.186***	-0.151***	0.421***	-0.14***	-0.169***
Lebanon	0.02	-0.16***	0.038	0.033	-0.166***	0.035

Panel B: Conditional marginal effects, calculated at all observations assuming that all other dependent variables are 1.						
Secular	-0.011**	0.013**	-0.016***	-0.013*	0.012**	-0.019***
Islamic Legislation	-0.016*	-0.011	0.036***	-0.001	-0.013	0.043***
Religiosity	0.001	-0.001	0.005*	0.004	-0.001	0.006**
Sunni	0.137***	0.031	-0.297***	0.128***	0.016	-0.322***
Anti-Americanism Support				-0.026***	-0.015***	0.007
Democracy	0.01*	0.001	-0.006	0.011	-0.004	-0.01
Education	-0.01	0.025	-0.01	-0.011	0.013	-0.007
Age	0.001**	0.001	-0.001**	0.001	0.001	-0.001**
Female	0.032***	-0.02	-0.024	0.028*	-0.02	-0.017
Low Income	0.009	-0.014	0.012	0.005	-0.004	0.015
High Income	-0.034**	-0.016	-0.008	-0.055**	-0.024	-0.02
Egypt	0.321***	-0.168***	-0.092***	0.35***	-0.163***	-0.081***
Jordan	0.391***	-0.139***	-0.157***	0.421***	-0.105***	-0.173***
Lebanon	0.017	-0.128***	0.038	0.031	-0.135***	0.036

Marginal Effects are calculated using R package mvProbit developed by Arne Henningsen (2012). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

¹ Soft power is criticized by scholars for being ineffective (Ferguson 2004; Mearsheimer 2001).

² Some of these means include trade relations (Rosecrance 1986), state institutions (İpek 2013), and non-state actors (Bertelsen 2012).

³ IMF, World Economic Outlook Database. Available at

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2014/01/weodata/index.aspx>. Accessed on May 16, 2014.

⁴ In fact, some observers argue that rise of Turkey as a “trading state” is one of the primary drivers of its foreign policy (Kirişçi and Kaptanoğlu 2011)

⁵ For an empirical analysis of public opinion in relation to foreign policy in the Middle East see Ciftci (2013a).

⁶ The Gülen movement, Turkey’s most influential religious organization, promotes a more Turkish nationalist agenda with important differences from the AKP’s more Islamist foreign policy agenda.

⁷ Turkey’s over-engagement in the Middle East has undermined its image as a benign power (Öniş2014). However, as a relatively prosperous and democratic Muslim polity, Turkey’s image in the Middle East remains more positive than many other states in the eyes of Middle Eastern politics (see Akgün and Gündoğar 2014).

⁸ More information about these surveys can be found at <http://www.pewglobal.org/about> Accessed on May 16, 2014.

⁹ We also calculated the conditional marginal effects for all observations at existing values of dependent variables. Marginal effects for all independent variables with both calculation methods are presented in Appendix C.

¹⁰ Turkey’s increasingly positive image is also attributed to the popularity of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Middle East. We run a multivariate probit estimation including Erdogan’s favorability ratings as an independent variable and a bivariate probit estimation using favorability of Erdogan and favorability of Turkey as dependent variables. In these analyses, the results do not change significantly.

¹¹ For instance, see Mishra (2012).

¹² <http://www.aaiusa.org/dr-zogby/entry/the-rise-and-fall-of-iran-in-arab-and-muslim-public-opinion>. Accessed on September 19, 2014.