

From Islamists to Muslim Democrats:
How Living in Secular Democracies Shaped Tunisia's Ennahda*

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July 8, 2017

Abstract

What drives some Islamist political parties to become “Muslim Democrats,” downplaying religion and accepting secular democracy? This paper hypothesizes that one channel of ideological change is time spent in secular democracies. Drawing on an original dataset of parliamentary votes from the Tunisian Islamist movement Ennahda, I find that MPs who had lived in secular democracies were more likely to vote against enshrining Islam in the constitution than their counterparts who had lived only in Tunisia. They were also more likely to vote for freedom of conscience and to prohibit the labelling of another Muslim as an apostate. Interviews with several of these MPs demonstrate that they recognize a causal effect of their experiences abroad on their ideologies, and provide support for three distinct mechanisms by which this effect may have occurred. Finally, Arab Barometer survey data suggest that this theory may extend beyond the case of Tunisia.

*Interviews were conducted under Princeton IRB #6749. I thank Intissar Samarat and Hamza Mighri for exceptional research assistance. For helpful comments on earlier drafts, I thank Matthew Cebul, Nathan Gonzalez, Nathan Grubman, Kim Guiler, Amaney Jamal, Robert Kubinec, Mirjam Künkler, Ellen Lust, Tarek Masoud, Victoria McGroary, Quinn Mecham, Rory Truex, and audiences at Princeton, the American Political Science Association, the Midwest Political Science Association, and the Project on Middle East Political Science.

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1 Introduction

In May 2016, the Tunisian Islamist movement Ennahda announced that it had left political Islam, and wished to instead be labeled a Muslim Democratic party. This announcement was the culmination of an ideological transformation of a movement that in the 1970s could be described as an “anti-democratic and illiberal movement [...] determined to impose religious law” (Cavatorta and Merone 2013, p. 858) to one that today accepts democracy and even secularism. Such an evolution is akin to that which led Christian Democratic parties in Europe to “acquire their distinctive character as religiously inspired yet secular parties that fully accept [...] parliamentary democracy” (Kalyvas and van Kersbergen 2010, p. 189). This acceptance of secular democracy forms one part of the “twin tolerations” that Stepan (2000) finds critical to democratization in religious contexts. The case of Tunisia’s Ennahda raises the question: what drives some Islamist political parties to become Muslim Democrats?

The existing literature on Islamist moderation, inspired by social movement theory, tends to highlight political opportunity structures (El Ghobashy 2005; Schwedler 2006; Brown 2012; Hamid 2014; Tezcur and Künkler 2015). In this view, Islamists moderate their platforms to take advantage of political openings or avoid repression, and downplay religion to appeal to the median voter and maximize their vote share. These structural or party-level explanations, while undoubtedly important, do little to explain *who* within an Islamist movement is likely to be the driving force pushing for change.

This paper suggests that one faction driving moderation within Islamist movements may be those individuals who have spent time abroad in secular democracies. Whether for education or exile, time spent in secular democracies could contribute to ideological change in at least three ways. First, there may be important socialization effects of living in such environments (e.g., Gift and Krčmaric 2015), inculcating norms of democracy and secularism. Second, drawing on intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954), time abroad may facilitate interactions with individuals of different faiths and thereby elicit more liberal orientations toward non-Muslims. Finally, Islamists living in secular countries may find that secularism does not mean the violent repression of religion – as it had under their previous autocrats – but instead guarantees that religious individuals have a proverbial seat at the table. These three causal mechanisms suggest that time spent in secular

democracies may have an important effect in diffusing an acceptance of secularism among Islamists.

To test this theory, this paper focuses on Tunisia's Ennahda, today's poster child of Islamist moderation. Following the ouster of Tunisian strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, Ennahda swept Tunisia's first free and fair elections, and headed a coalition government that stepped down following the passage of Tunisia's 2014 constitution. Contrary to the will of some its hardline activists, Ennahda made critical compromises during the drafting of the new constitution, most prominent among them its decision not to make Islam or Islamic law the basis of legislation. These compromises were crucial to gaining the support of secular parties, and more generally to the success of Tunisia's transition to democracy (Hamid 2014; Marks 2014; Brownlee et al. 2015).

Internally, however, Ennahda was divided on these compromises. This paper uses an original dataset of parliamentary votes to identify which Ennahda MPs supported these compromises, and which did not. Collecting biographical data on each parliamentarian, I find that Ennahda MPs who had spent time in secular democracies were consistently the most supportive of these secular compromises. Ennahda MPs who had either studied or been exiled in secular democracies were more likely than their counterparts who had lived only in Tunisia to vote against making the Quran and the Sunna the basis of legislation. They were also more likely to vote in favor of freedom of conscience, and to prohibit *takfir*, or the labelling of another Muslim as an apostate. These findings are robust to the inclusion of a variety of demographic controls as well as several proxies for parliamentarians' political incentives, including the electoral district they represent, their district-level vote share, and their place on the party list.

To address concerns of endogeneity and explore possible mechanisms, this paper then draws upon several interviews conducted by the author with Ennahda MPs. These interviews suggest that the patterns in voting behavior were not mere correlations. Ennahda MPs acknowledged that their time abroad has had a causal effect on their beliefs, whether by socializing them into accepting democratic norms and practices, providing them with their first interactions with non-Muslims, or by revising their conceptions of what secularism is. The voting and interview data thus suggest that time spent in secular democracies may be one source of ideological change pushing some Islamists to become Muslim Democrats.

To determine whether this theory travels beyond Tunisia, the paper finally turns to survey data from the Arab Barometer, covering twelve Arab countries between 2012-2014. It finds that Islamists

who had spent time in the West espoused significantly more secular beliefs than Islamists who had not. These results hold when matching Islamists who had travelled abroad with Islamists who had not on a variety of demographic covariates. These results provide observational support that time abroad in secular democracies may indeed push Islamists toward an acceptance of secularism.

In terms of policy prescriptions, these results imply that scholarships, exchanges, and other opportunities for individuals to visit the West – many of which are on the chopping block at the time of writing – may be critical components of the West’s democracy promotion efforts. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that the results in the Ennahda case may be a function of the time period in which they visited the West. The post-9/11 backlash against Muslims in the U.S. and Europe, manifesting itself through increased harassment and hate crimes as well as government monitoring and manipulation, may very well mitigate the previously positive effects of time spent in the West.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 overviews the literature on Islamist moderation, while Section 3 outlines this paper’s theory and its mechanisms. Section 4 introduces the case of Tunisia and the use of parliamentary votes, and presents results. Section 5 then address concerns of endogeneity and traces out possible mechanisms through interviews. Section 6 examines data from the Arab Barometer for external validity. The final section concludes with an eye toward policy prescriptions and future research.

2 Muslim Democrats

An important facet of democracy in religious contexts is what Stepan (2000) calls the “twin tolerations.” On the one hand, a democratic state must tolerate the inclusion of religious groups and religious argumentation in politics. On the other, religious groups must avoid actions that “impinge negatively on the liberties of other citizens or violate democracy and the law” (Stepan 2000, p. 39-40). While it is acceptable for a political party to be inspired by religion and to draw its policy proposals from its interpretation of religious texts, it would be undemocratic for it to elevate religion above popular sovereignty by, for instance, mandating in the constitution that all laws must be in accordance with its religion. For democracy to survive, religious parties, like all others, must tolerate democratic notions of popular sovereignty as well as religious freedom for minorities.

Such a transformation was first seen in the Christian Democratic parties in Europe. Drawing on the median voter theorem (Downs 1957; Kirchheimer 1966) and the experience of socialist parties (Przeworski and Sprague 1986), Kalyvas (1996) explains the moves of early twentieth century Christian Democratic parties to “deemphasize the salience of religion in politics” as an attempt “to appeal to broader categories of voters and strike alliances with other political forces” (p. 18). “In a process of symbolic appropriation, confessional party leaders reinterpreted Catholicism as an increasingly general and abstract moral concept,” (p. 244) downplaying Catholic doctrine in favor of ‘Christian values’ and ‘religious inspiration.’ “Catholicism was thus drained of its religious content even while being legitimated as a political identity” (p. 244).

While deemphasizing religion to appeal to the median voter may be appropriate for a democratic context, the moderation of Islamist political parties prior to the Arab Spring occurred in the context of competitive authoritarianism. As a result, scholars of Islamist parties have highlighted that moderation may occur to take advantage of limited regime openings or to avoid repression. El Ghobashy (2005), in her study of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, finds that “parties in electoral authoritarian regimes adapt to fend off state repression and maintain their organizational existence. It is not Downsian vote seeking but, rather, Michels’s self-preservation that is the objective of a party in an authoritarian regime” (p. 391). Similarly, Künkler and Tezcur (forthcoming) find that in Turkey and Indonesia, Islamist political parties “need to be sensitive to the preferences of [...the judiciary and army] to avoid dissolution and military interference. Consequently, parties are more risk-averse and avoid controversial issues.” For Hamid (2014), it is low levels of repression that breed moderation; for Cavatorta and Merone (2013), even the high levels in Tunisia forced moderation.

Beyond fear of repression, another pathway thought to lead to Islamist moderation is inclusion. The seminal work behind this “inclusion-moderation hypothesis” is Schwedler (2006; see also 2011; 2013), who argues that once included into the formal political arena, Islamists will be forced to interact and work with other parties and individuals of vastly different viewpoints on university campuses, civil society, and electoral coalitions. Mirroring intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954), Schwedler (2006) argues that these interactions can “reinforce the recognition of multiple worldviews and interpretations of how existing problems may be resolved,” in theory breeding greater tolerance of alternative viewpoints and an acceptance of pluralism (p. 11).¹

¹ For important qualifications on the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, see Clark (2006), Browsers

Each of these motives for moderation – electoral incentives, fear of repression, interactions – have been theorized at the party-level. However, the mechanisms likely operate at the individual level. Individuals interact with other individuals of differing worldviews. Fear of repression is a psychological process at the individual level, and individual experiences – such as having personally been imprisoned – may heighten the salience of this fear for certain individuals. Electoral incentives would similarly vary based on the characteristics of the district that each individual candidate seeks to represent, with stronger incentives to moderate in districts where the party is weaker.

Despite the mechanisms occurring at the individual level, most of the literature draws upon case studies of Islamist parties (the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, etc.) or of a handful of individuals at the top of these groups. To truly test these theories, we would need systematic data at the individual level. The Arab Spring has provided a new opportunity on this front, as Islamist parties made significant electoral gains in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and elsewhere in the region. In Tunisia, for instance, Ennahda won 89 seats in the National Constituent Assembly, enough to conduct a statistical analysis of Ennahda parliamentarians. This paper seeks to take advantage of this opportunity to test theories of moderation through systematic, individual-level data. Moreover, beyond this methodological contribution, this paper also offers another factor that may affect Islamist moderation: time spent in secular democracies.

3 Secular Diffusion

Recent literature finds that migration to advanced democracies can generate not only economic remittances, but political ones as well. Spilimbergo (2009), for instance, finds that countries that send more students to study in the West subsequently have higher levels of democracy (see also Atkinson 2010; Docquier et al. 2016). At the individual-level, Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010) find that Mexicans who had temporarily lived in the U.S. or Canada were significantly more tolerant, less satisfied with Mexican democracy, and more politically active than their counterparts who had not travelled abroad. Corroborating these attitudinal results, Batista and Vicente (2011) conduct a unique behavioral experiment to find that Cape Verdeans who had lived in the U.S. were more likely to demand political accountability at home upon their return. Even at the elite level, Gift

(2009), and Tezcur (2010), among others.

and Krčmaric (2015) find that Western-educated leaders are more likely to democratize. Migrants to advanced democracies, whether for work or study, generally develop more positive views of the destination country and of democracy, and are more politically active upon their return home (Careja and Emmenegger 2012; Chauvet and Mercier 2014; Chauvet et al. 2016; Dana 2017).

Beyond diffusing support for democracy and political participation, I argue that time in secular democracies may also diffuse an acceptance of secularism. In particular, I contend that Islamists who have lived in secular democracies are more likely to adopt secular orientations than their counterparts who have not. I posit three mechanisms by which this effect may occur: socialization, intergroup contact, and political learning.

First, Islamists living in secular democracies may be socialized into accepting secular norms. Socialization in foreign countries is especially likely to occur when a migrant's personal material or cognitive situation has improved, as they implicitly or explicitly credit their new country's institutions and values for this improvement (Careja and Emmenegger 2012). Chauvet et al. (2016) find that "when individuals increase their personal economic resources in migration, they may be tempted to adopt the values and ideas of the country that they perceived as being the source of this expansion." Such comparisons between one's socioeconomic situation in their home country vs. abroad have also been shown experimentally to impact political attitudes (Huang 2015).

For Islamists, especially those fleeing repression in their home countries, their newfound freedom in secular democracies should similarly incentivize them to take up the values and norms of their host country. While today, Islamists in the West may be subject to harassment – a topic I return to in the conclusion – the time period that the Islamist leaders in this study had studied in the West (pre 9/11) was generally more permissive and free than their home countries. As a result, they may have been socialized into accepting not only democracy but also secularism.

Second, Islamists living in secular democracies may become more tolerant of non-Muslims as a result of increased intergroup contact. For many Islamists coming from Muslim-majority countries, living in the West provides one's first opportunity to meet and interact with non-Muslims. In passing, some scholars of Islamism have noted that such interactions may have contributed to greater openness and tolerance. Wickham (2004), for instance, in her case study of the Wasat party in Egypt, finds that the party's leader, Abu Ayla Madi Abu Ayla, moderated in part due to his "forty-seven trips abroad, including several trips to Europe and the United States," which

along with his interactions domestically led him to “the recognition that ‘we don’t monopolize the Truth’” (p. 220).

Finally, living in secular democracies may trigger political learning about what secularism entails. For many Islamists, autocrats in their home countries had repressed political Islam under the guise of secularism. In Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, among others, autocrats had forcibly secularized their public spheres, repressing public displays of piety such as wearing the veil and suppressing political expressions of faith. Such forced secularism stands in stark contrast to the secularism practiced by most Western democracies, which allow political parties to be inspired by religion and even to make religious arguments in political debates. While secularism in an authoritarian context often means the repression of religion, secularism, as practiced in these democracies, represents a means of ensuring that all parties – including religious ones – have an equal seat at the table. Living in secular democracies may therefore update an Islamist’s expectations of what secularism will entail for their political future.

As a result of socialization, intergroup contact, and political learning, living in secular democracies may drive Islamists to consciously or subconsciously develop more positive attitudes toward secularism. Upon their return to their home countries, they are likely to hold more secular political attitudes than their peers who had not travelled abroad. As a result, they can be considered as political remittances, embodying the diffusion of secularism out of secular democracies.

It is not readily apparent that secularism would diffuse to Islamists living in secular democracies. Islamists, like other religious conservatives, are generally considered more resistant to change than nonreligious actors. Religious principles, especially when textually derived or divinely ordained, are viewed as largely fixed attributes, difficult to compromise over let alone abandon. Moreover, there are notable examples of Islamists who instead became more conservative while in the West. Famously, Sayyid Qutb was so shocked by the loose morals he saw in Colorado that he instead moved toward a stricter form of Islamism (Barber 1995; Hunter 1998). As such, Islamists who travel to the West may very well be more conservative than those who remain in their home countries.

In this piece, I test whether on average, Ennahda MPs who had gone abroad to secular democracies became more secular or more conservative than their counterparts who remained in Tunisia. This sample is of course limited in that it examines only members of parliament – Islamists who had radicalized into violent extremism would not appear in this sample. However, of the majority

of Islamists who continue to contest elections, I contend that time in secular democracies has on average a secularizing rather than Islamizing effect.

4 Secular Diffusion in Tunisia

4.1 Case Selection and Background on Ennahda

The case of Tunisia is a particularly appropriate venue to test theories of moderation. Tunisia has emerged as the single success story of the Arab Spring, an accomplishment in no small part due to Ennahda's willingness to compromise on a number of important issues. As this paper will show, one of the critical compromises – agreeing to not enshrine Islam in the constitution – was the product of a decades-long process of moderation among a wing of Ennahda in exile in Western capitals. With Ennahda now hailed as a model of Islamist moderation, it is critical to understand how it came to be where it is today.

Like elsewhere in the region, Islamism began in Tunisia in response to both domestic and regional factors. Domestically, the overtly secularizing reforms of Tunisia's founding father, Habib Bourguiba – who notoriously drank orange juice on national television during the fasting month of Ramadan (Hamid 2014) – unsettled the more conservative sentiments of many Tunisians. Tunisian Islamism also benefited from a broader, regional shift toward political Islam in the 1970s and 1980s following the disillusionment with Arab nationalism with the 1967 defeat to Israel and the inspiration of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In 1981, preacher and philosophy teacher Rachid Ghannouchi established the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI). While the Tunisian regime closed any avenues for the MTI's formal political participation, the movement was able to operate, agitate, and proselytize on university campuses and in civil society.

The rise to power of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 1987 initiated a brief liberalization of the regime. The MTI rebranded itself as the Ennahda (Renaissance) movement and fielded candidates on an independent list in the 1989 elections. Threatened by its popularity, Ben Ali soon cracked down on Ennahda, decimating the movement and driving its members into exile, imprisonment, or underground. For the next two decades, Ennahda would remain divided, one wing abroad in Western capitals ("*Ennahda fi al-kharij*") and the other in prison or underground in Tunisia ("*Ennahda fi al-dakhil*").

Following Ben Ali’s ouster in 2011 during the Arab Spring, Ennahda finally reunited in Tunisia and moved quickly to prepare itself for the 2011 constituent assembly elections. Ennahda swept these elections, winning the largest share of the vote with 37% and receiving 89 of 217 seats in the assembly. Ennahda formed a “troika” government with two other parties, Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol. In the summer of 2013, following the assassination of two liberal politicians in Tunisia and a military coup in Egypt, the troika government faced massive protests forcing them to step down from power in an agreement brokered by four civil society organizations known as the Quartet. In the subsequent 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, Ennahda placed 2nd, winning 69 seats in the parliament. Ennahda remains a powerful political force, helping to form a coalition government that rules to this day.

4.2 Dependent Variable: Parliamentary Votes

Tunisia’s National Constituent Assembly (NCA) provides a unique sample of Ennahda leaders on which to test theories of Islamist moderation. With 89 Ennahda members in the NCA, there is sufficient number to conduct statistical analyses. The NCA was also the site of some of the transition’s most important debates and compromises, including how much to “Islamize” Tunisia’s new constitution. While the Ennahda MPs on most issues voted unanimously as a bloc, controversial issues like the role of Islam generated important and illuminating internal disagreement that permit us to separate Ennahda MPs into more liberal and more conservative on this issue.

Previous studies tend to infer Islamists’ preferences from their public or private statements, whether a party platform, press statement, or a private interview with the researcher.² Given the relatively costless nature of these statements, one potential problem with using them as measures of moderation is preference falsification: especially when Islamists are speaking with the West,

² The use of parliamentary votes may also eliminate bias on behalf of the researcher. Schwedler (2011), in her review of the literature, notes that “Many studies are biased toward more liberal individuals within [Islamist] groups – those to whom foreign researchers have the greatest access – leaving open questions of whether the individuals examined are in any way representative of the different layers of members.” By looking comprehensively at all Ennahda MPs through their votes, this approach may also mitigate researcher bias.

they may have incentives to misrepresent their true beliefs in order to appear more moderate, or selectively omit beliefs that would make them appear hostile to the West. These sources may therefore provide little guidance for how Islamists will actually behave upon coming to power.

These concerns are mitigated when examining parliamentary votes. Votes are not only an actual measure of what Islamists do once in power, but they are also costly. Ennahda has maintained the highest party discipline in Tunisia; its MPs face considerable social and organizational pressure to toe the party line. Divergences from the party line carry real consequences, including a lower likelihood of being renominated by the party in subsequent elections. They also have a direct, substantive impact on the constitution, laws, and future of the country. As a result, divergences from the party line, whether in a more liberal or conservative direction, likely reflect an MP's strongly held beliefs and are unlikely to be preference falsification.

4.2.1 Secularism

A dominant cleavage in Tunisia's transition centered around the question of religion and the state (Berman and Nugent 2015). Particularly contentious was whether to include in the constitution a reference to *shari'a*, or Islamic law, as the basis of legislation. Early in the transition, Rachid Ghannouchi, the head of Ennahda who had been exiled in London, assured Tunisia's secularists and the international community that the first article of the constitution – that the official language is Arabic and religion is Islam – would be left as is; “there will be no other references to religion in the constitution.”³

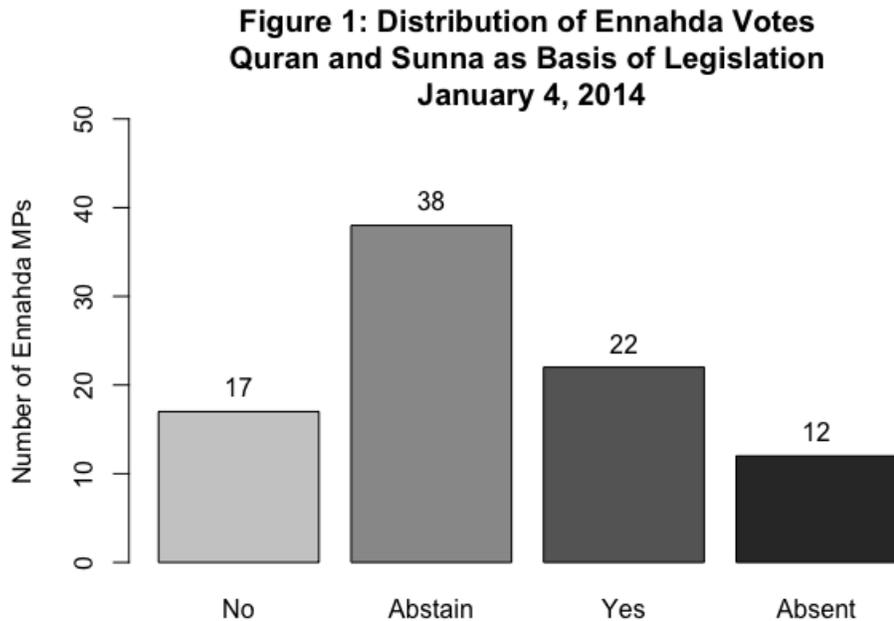
Yet that campaign promise did not sit well with some in Ennahda. In the spring of 2012, conservative firebrands Habib Ellouz and Sadok Chourou, both of whom had spent much of the last two decades in Tunisian prisons, forced an internal debate on the matter. The debate was protracted, further reinforcing fears among Tunisia's secularists that Ennahda harbored a hidden, fundamentalist agenda (Marks 2014, p. 20-22).

While Ennahda's conservative wing lost that round, they had not given up. When it came time to draft the new constitution, they introduced amendment 42 to article 1, which would have added

³ Tom Heneghan, “Tunisian constitution will make no place for faith; Ennahda leader rejects laws to enforce religion,” *Al-Arabiya News*, November 4, 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/11/04/175488.html>.

to the constitution’s first article: “the Quran and the Sunna are the main sources of its [Tunisia’s] legislation.” If a reference to the *shari’a* had been ruled out, perhaps a reference to the sources of the *shari’a* – the Quran and the Sunna – could gain enough votes.

Although the amendment failed to get enough support when it came up for a vote on January 4, 2014, Ennahda MPs were uncharacteristically divided (see figure 1).⁴ Twenty-two of 89 Ennahda MPs voted for this amendment, while 38 stuck to the party line, which was to abstain. Twelve were absent during the vote, while another 17 voted no.



Statistically, I code those voting “no” as a 1, the most secular position on this issue, and those voting “yes” as a -1. Those voting “abstain” were coded as a 0, as MPs interviewed observed that an abstention represents an intermediate vote between no and yes. Absentees are excluded as missing data, although results are robust to coding them as a 0 alongside abstentions (results available from author). As the dependent variable is ordinal, I run ordered logistic regressions.

To check the robustness of the results, I also examine Ennahda’s votes on two other controversial facets of religion and the state: freedom of conscience and the ban on *takfir*. Amendment 62 of

⁴ Votes on article 1 amendment 42 available here: <http://majles.marsad.tn/vote/52c92fa112bdaa7f9b90f423>.

article 6, voted down on January 4, 2014,⁵ would have eliminated the constitution’s guarantee to freedom of conscience, commonly interpreted as permitting atheism. As MPs were debating this amendment, Ennahda MP Habib Ellouze called secular MP Mongi Rahoui an “enemy of Islam,” prompting secularists to introduce a new amendment to article 6 prohibiting *takfir*, or the labelling of another Muslim as an apostate.⁶ This amendment passed on January 5, 2014.⁷ The Ennahda bloc was internally divided on both of these votes (for the distribution of these two votes, see the appendix). I follow the previous coding rule in coding as a 1 the most secular position (voting no to deleting freedom of conscience and yes to banning *takfir*), and 0 and -1 as before.

4.2.2 The Cost of Voting

One assumption driving the use of parliamentary votes as a measure of moderation is that these votes are costly: diverging from the party line could bring considerable social and organizational consequences, and thus MPs are unlikely to do so to falsify their preferences. To provide evidence of one such cost, I examine whether those who voted against the Ennahda party line on the three votes outlined above were less likely to be renominated by the party in the 2014 elections. Divergences from the party line were coded as voting in favor of the Quran and Sunna as the basis of legislation, in favor of removing freedom of conscience, or against banning *takfir*.

⁵ See <http://majles.marsad.tn/vote/52caefeb12bdaa7f9b90f45d>.

⁶ Asma Ghribi, “The Problem with Tunisia’s New Constitution,” *Foreign Policy*, January 9, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/09/the-problem-with-tunisi-as-new-constitution/>.

⁷ See <http://majles.marsad.tn/vote/52cde39b12bdaa09ac3f39bf>.

Figure 2: Likelihood of Renomination by Votes On Secularism

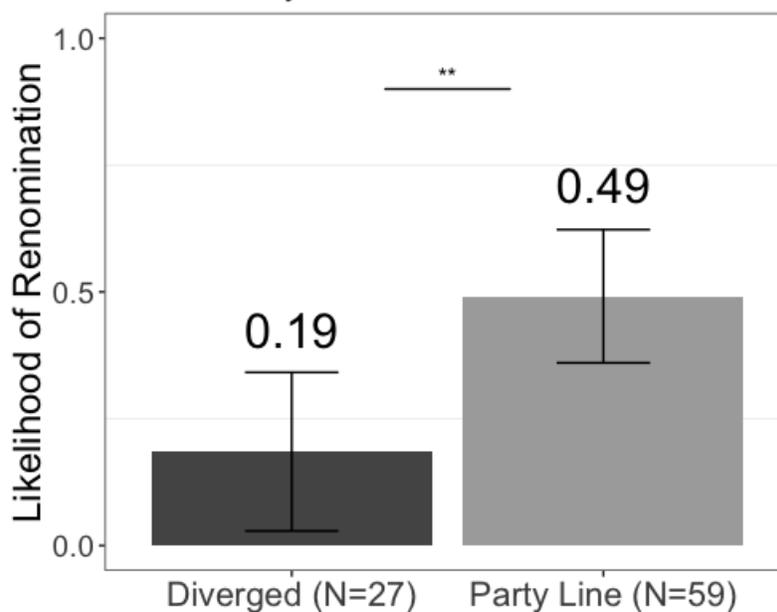


Figure 2 finds strong evidence for this proposition. Of the 86 MPs who chose to remain within Ennahda, those who diverged from the party line were 30% less likely to be renominated than those who stuck to the party line ($p=0.0066$). An interview with Ennahda executive board member and MP Sahbi Atig confirmed that although party lists were drawn up by each governorate level office of Ennahda, the executive board “intervened in four or five governorates” to block certain individuals. Atig in particular mentioned the district of Sfax 2, where the aforementioned MP Habib Ellouz was not renominated.⁸

Interviews also revealed that MPs knew about this cost ahead of time. In the lead-up to controversial votes, for instance, the Ennahda headquarters had individually called those MPs leaning toward voting against the party line to inform them that they may not be renominated if they do so. MP Mohamed Saidi recalled that: “We were called, we were even threatened, if you vote for this you are killing your political future!”⁹

⁸ Interview with Sahbi Atig, Tunis, January 25, 2016.

⁹ Interview with Mohamed Saidi, Tunis, June 1, 2016. President of Ennahda’s political bureau, Noureddine Arbaoui, admitted that they called MPs ahead of particularly contentious votes (Interview, Tunis, June 30, 2016).

Given this cost of voting, diverging from the party line likely reflects an MP's strongly held convictions and preferences. It is unlikely to be cheap talk or preference falsification. Parliamentary votes should thus provide a fairly accurate measure of moderation.

4.3 Independent Variables and Descriptive Statistics

Based on the theory of secular diffusion, I hypothesize that **Ennahda MPs who studied or were exiled in secular democracies would vote more secularly** in the NCA than their counterparts who had not. Data for time spent in secular democracies come from public biographies of the MPs. Each MP submitted a detailed biography to *al-Bawsala*, an NGO that monitored the assembly.¹⁰ Each biography was cross-checked with other online sources as well as with the Ennahda headquarters.¹¹

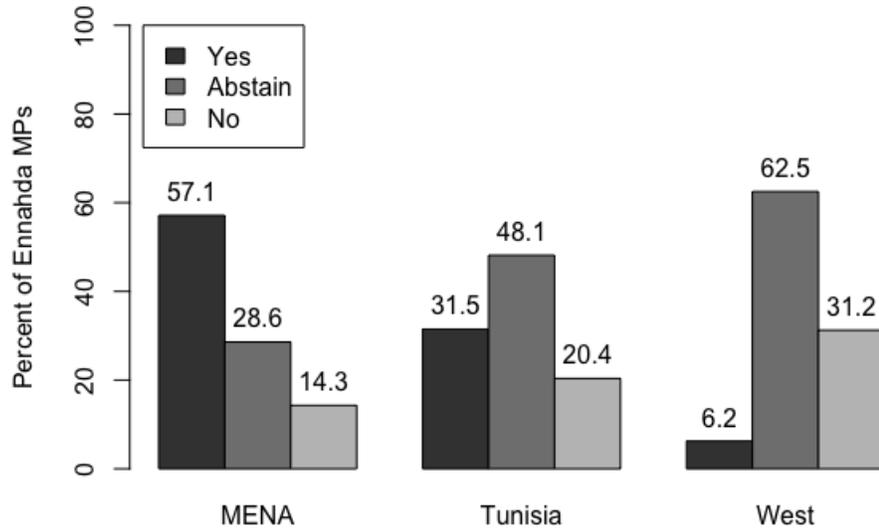
Of 89 MPs, 18 had studied or were exiled in secular democracies in the West, including Belgium (1), Canada (1), France (12), Germany (1), Italy (2), and the US (1). These 18 MPs spent an average of fifteen years abroad, primarily in the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, 9 other MPs had studied or been exiled in other authoritarian regimes in the region (Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Qatar, and Sudan). These MPs can serve as a placebo demonstrating that it is not traveling abroad that is important but the destination country in particular. The remaining 62 MPs had only lived in Tunisia.

Descriptive statistics provide initial support for the theory. Figure 3 plots the votes on whether the Quran and the Sunna should be basis of legislation for MPs who have spent time in secular democracies in the West (right), lived in autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa (left), or lived only in Tunisia (middle). Of the 16 who lived in the West and were present for this vote, only 1 (6%) voted for the Quran and the Sunna to be the basis of legislation, while the remaining 15 either voted no or abstained. By contrast, those who only lived in Tunisia (middle) were more conservative, with 32% voting for the Quran and the Sunna. Finally, those who had lived in other MENA countries were the most conservative, with 57% voting for the Quran and the Sunna.

¹⁰ See <http://majles.marsad.tn/assemblee>

¹¹ Interview with Nouredine Arbaoui, Tunis, June 30, 2016.

Figure 3: Distribution of Ennahda Votes on Quran and Sunna



4.4 Control Variables

The introduction of regression analysis to studies of moderation allows us to isolate the effect of living in the West on moderation by controlling for a number of covariates. Model 1 in each of the results tables will show the relationship without any controls, testing whether the differences found in figure 3 were statistically significant. Model 2 in each table adds demographic covariates: **age**, **gender**, level of **education**, and **hometown** (coded as coast, southwest, southeast, interior, or northwest).

Model 3 then adds several variables capturing the existing theories of Islamist moderation outlined in the literature review. To capture the interactions with other political parties that Schwedler (2006) highlights in the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, I control for **activism**, coded as participation in student unions or professional syndicates. To account for the repression that is also thought to breed moderation, I control for whether the MP had ever been in **prison**. Nugent (2017), for instance, argues that since Ennahda and secular politicians had both been repressed, their joint experience in jail may breed ideological convergence, moderating Ennahda MPs who had been imprisoned. Finally, to capture the political incentives MPs might have to moderate to appeal to the median voter, I include four additional variables:

1. **Electoral District:** Those MPs representing districts in the more secular coastal regions may vote more secular.¹²
2. **Ennahda Vote Share:** MPs may vote more secular in those districts where Ennahda was weak. Where Ennahda's vote share was low, it would need to reach out to a larger constituency to win reelection, and thus would have more incentives to moderate.
3. **CPR Vote Share:** Of all the secular parties, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) is the most friendly to Islamism, and indeed includes some former Islamists like Imed Daimi among its leadership. CPR's success in a district may therefore signal a friendly constituency for Islamism even beyond Ennahda's base. CPR vote share should therefore be correlated with less secularism.
4. **Place on Party List (inverted):** The lower an MP is on Ennahda's party list, the more incentive he or she may have to stick to the party line in order to advance up the ladder. The opposite effect could also occur: Ennahda's executive committee may have placed them lower down the list precisely because they knew they were less loyal to the party line. In addition, the lower they are on the list, they more concerned they may be about pleasing their constituents (and thereby receiving sufficient votes to retain a seat in the next election). As a result, they may be more likely to stray from the party line when they think their constituency is more conservative than the party line. I invert the list so that regardless of the number of seats Ennahda won in a governorate, those at the bottom receive the same low value (1).¹³

Several of these variables occur post-treatment, and thus the effect of living in the West may be running through them. For instance, Ennahda may have placed MPs who lived abroad higher (or lower) on the party list or in governorates that were competitive (or uncompetitive). In short, because some of these variables are post-treatment, we may expect the effect of living in the West

¹² This variable has a low correlation with hometown, as many MPs ran in districts they were not born in.

¹³ In governorates where the candidate at the top of the list went on to become a minister, I moved each candidate below him (always him) up by one and placed his replacement at the bottom.

to weaken; yet, it is important to test the robustness of the results to these alternative, electoral incentives explanations.

4.5 Results

Table 1 presents the results for the vote on whether the Quran and the Sunna should be the basis of legislation. The coefficient of interest is living in the West, which should be positive if the secular diffusion thesis is correct. In all three models – the baseline regression, adding demographic controls, and adding alternative explanations – the effect of living in the West is positive and statistically significant. MPs who had lived in the West were significantly more likely to vote against making the Quran and the Sunna the basis of legislation.

Included in all models was also the placebo: those Ennahda MPs who also lived abroad, but instead in other (authoritarian) Middle Eastern and North African countries. Those elsewhere in the MENA region are no more secular than those who remained in Tunisia, and on the contrary are leaning more conservative. It is being in secular democracies, not simply being abroad, that is diffusing secularism.

Several of the covariates are significant. Female MPs tended to vote more secular. Ennahda MPs representing districts where Ennahda and CPR did well, signaling a relatively more Islamist-friendly constituency, voted more Islamist, lending credence to the median voter theorem at the district-level. Finally, place on the party list also reaches significance: MPs higher up on the party list were more likely to vote secular than those lower down the list.

Interestingly, two of the literature’s dominant explanations of Islamist moderation – interactions with other political parties and repression – had no significant effect on secularism. Ennahda MPs who were involved in student unions or professional syndicates were no more likely to vote secular than Ennahda MPs who were not. Imprisonment similarly had no effect. These results of course do not rule out the potential importance of these factors in moderating Ennahda MPs in other issue areas, for instance on women’s rights or lustration, but they appear to have no effect on breeding an acceptance of secularism.

Table 2 presents the results for the two other controversial, role of religion parliamentary votes: freedom of conscience and the prohibition of *takfir*. Here again, Ennahda MPs who had lived in secular democracies were significantly more likely to vote secularly in all six models. The importance

Table 1: Secular Diffusion Among Ennahda MPs (Ordered Logit)

	<i>DV: Quran and Sunna</i>		
	<i>1=No; 0=Abstain; -1=Yes (NA=Absent)</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
West	0.940* (0.535)	1.038* (0.588)	1.725** (0.698)
MENA	-0.998 (0.813)	-0.795 (0.860)	-0.421 (0.958)
Age		-0.013 (0.027)	-0.035 (0.031)
Female		0.978* (0.523)	1.253** (0.608)
Education		0.207 (0.443)	-0.174 (0.494)
Activist			0.600 (0.544)
Prison			-0.249 (0.662)
Ennahda Vote Share			-9.014* (4.634)
CPR Vote Share			-16.648** (8.069)
Place on Party List			0.562* (0.299)
Hometown FE		✓	✓
Electoral District FE			✓
-1 0	-0.841*** (0.290)	-0.867 (2.239)	-6.750** (3.417)
0 1	1.463*** (0.330)	1.642 (2.245)	-3.889 (3.343)
Observations	77	76	76
Residual Deviance	154.659	145.217	132.398
AIC	162.659	167.217	166.398

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

of living in the West is particularly clear when comparing it to the effects of alternative explanations: very few of the covariates are significant. The primary covariate reaching significance is age, with older Ennahda MPs voting more conservatively. Having lived in a secular democracy appears to be one of if not the most important predictor of whether an MP votes for secularism.

4.6 Alternative Explanations

Prior to demonstrating support for my hypothesized mechanisms, it is important to first address two alternative explanations. First, perhaps Ennahda MPs who had lived in the West became more secular not because of any secular diffusion from these countries but rather because being in the West facilitated meetings and close relationships with Ennahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi, who was exiled in London. As a result, these MPs may be voting more secular – i.e. in the way Ghannouchi, as head of the party, wants them to vote – because Ghannouchi has greater influence over them.¹⁴ This explanation, however, would imply that these MPs should across the board vote closer to Ghannouchi and the party line than other MPs, not just on votes related to secularism. To test for this explanation, therefore, I calculate each MP’s overall propensity to diverge from the party line. To do so, I collect all 1731 votes in the NCA, and calculate the party line for each vote as the modal vote (yes, no, or abstain) on each bill.¹⁵

I find that Ennahda MPs who had lived in the West did not vote significantly closer to the party line than MPs who had remained in Tunisia (see figure in appendix). On average, Ennahda MPs voted against the party line 13% of the time. MPs who had lived in the West voted against the party line 12.1% of the time, while MPs who lived only in Tunisia did so at 13.7%. This difference is not statistically significant ($p=0.24$), and thus we can reject the alternative explanation that Ennahda MPs who lived in the West simply happened to be closer to the party line or to Ghannouchi than

¹⁴ A related counterexplanation may be that leaders of Ennahda who were outside of the country may have been involved in the October 2005 Collectif between Ennahda and secular opposition parties, and those interactions with secular parties may have produced moderation. However, none of the MPs in my sample, who are primarily mid-level Ennahda leaders, were involved in the negotiating or signing of the Collectif. Ennahda leaders who were involved generally became ministers following the 2011 revolution.

¹⁵ I am indebted to *al-Bawsala* for sharing voting data.

Table 2: Secular Diffusion and Alternative Secularism Votes (Ordered Logit)

	<i>Parliamentary Votes</i>					
	Removing Freedom of Conscience			Prohibition of <i>Takfir</i>		
	<i>1=No; 0=Abstain; -1=Yes</i>			<i>1=Yes; 0=Abstain; -1=No</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
West	1.288** (0.589)	1.285** (0.625)	1.844** (0.728)	1.433* (0.803)	1.724** (0.862)	1.755* (0.938)
MENA	-0.740 (0.771)	-0.546 (0.800)	0.027 (0.889)	-0.724 (0.672)	-0.161 (0.736)	0.168 (0.836)
Age		-0.057** (0.028)	-0.062* (0.033)		-0.048 (0.032)	-0.062* (0.036)
Female		-0.043 (0.491)	-0.094 (0.561)		0.836 (0.619)	0.692 (0.716)
Education		-0.149 (0.445)	-0.551 (0.485)		-0.493 (0.577)	-0.641 (0.600)
Activist			0.966* (0.531)			0.918 (0.644)
Prison			-0.292 (0.636)			-0.250 (0.721)
Ennahda Vote Share			4.113 (3.682)			-4.711 (4.999)
CPR Vote Share			-13.249* (7.092)			-4.950 (6.500)
Place on Party List			0.125 (0.280)			0.326 (0.332)
Hometown FE		✓	✓		✓	✓
Region FE			✓			✓
-1 0	-1.219*** (0.300)	-4.673* (2.281)	-4.875* (2.937)	-1.737*** (0.365)	-6.287** (2.839)	-8.716** (3.822)
0 1	0.479* (0.265)	-2.901 (2.240)	-2.954 (2.904)	-0.628** (0.290)	-5.002** (2.799)	-7.383** (3.782)
Observations	81	79	79	79	76	76
Residual Deviance	164.485	155.381	20 146.254	126.700	113.172	109.584
AIC	172.485	177.381	180.254	134.700	135.172	143.584

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

other MPs.

A second and potentially more damaging alternative explanation would be selection bias: perhaps those Ennahda MPs who lived in the West did so because they were already more secular – it was not that they *became* more secular, but rather they already were. Unfortunately, there is no data on these MPs’ ideological preferences prior to going abroad to be able to directly test for selection bias. However, we may be able to exploit rough proxies for their level of secularism, such as Tunisia’s regional divisions. The Northeastern coastal areas from Bizerte to Sfax were historically privileged for development by both the French colonialists and subsequent Tunisian dictators (Boughzala and Hamdi, 2014), meaning their citizens are far wealthier, more educated, and, most important for our purposes, more secular, than those in the impoverished interior, Northwest, or Southern regions. If it were the case that the more secular members of Ennahda were the ones who travelled to the West, then we would expect to see them to consist of higher numbers of members from the coast than members from what Tunisians call “the regions.”

Table 3: Covariate Balance among Ennahda MPs

Pathway	N	Av. Age	% Female	Education (1-3)	Hometown (% Coast)
Tunisia	62	47	56	2.76	50
West	18	49	22	2.89	47
MENA	9	55	22	2.78	44
Total	89	49	46	2.79	49

Table 3, however, shows that Ennahda MPs who had lived in the West were no more likely to hail from the coast than MPs who had not. Across all ‘treatment groups,’ roughly half of MPs hailed from the coast.¹⁶ Ennahda MPs who had lived in the West were similarly no different in terms of age or level of education. Where there is imbalance – gender – the results actually cut in the opposite direction. Female MPs are significantly more secular (see Table 1); yet those who went abroad were more likely to be male and thus less secular. While these are admittedly crude proxies for secularism, they suggest that the MPs who lived in the West were not demographically

¹⁶ These figures reflect the 86 of 89 MPs for whom data was available on their hometown. Results hold when narrowing the coastal region just to its most developed regions, Tunis and the Sahel (Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia).

likely to already be more secular. Statistically, demographic covariates suggest there was minimal self-selection into ‘treatment groups.’

Moreover, most of the MPs who lived in the West were exiles fleeing Tunisia during a massive political crackdown in 1991, a response to the strong showing by Ennahda in the 1989 elections. Whether an MP was arrested or managed to flee the country during this crackdown was relatively random, and certainly not based on the MP’s level of secularism. In a private interview with the author, the director of internal security within the military from 1988-2000 noted that the 1991 crackdown was wide-reaching and indiscriminate, targeting leaders, members, and even sympathizers of Ennahda.¹⁷ Ennahda claims that 30,000 of its members were imprisoned during this period – the largest crackdown in Ennahda’s history.¹⁸

Whether an Ennahda member managed to escape arrest during the 1991 crackdown was primarily a matter of chance. Interviews with several of these Ennahda MPs are illustrative in this regard. Ennahda MP Mohamed Zrig, who managed to escape from his hometown in Gabes in southern Tunisia to Canada, explained:

[President] Ben Ali wanted to arrest everyone, whether a leader or an average member! You could call it chance or call it circumstance. I, for instance, was not in my house the day they [the police] came for me. It was a holiday but I was still at work. Others were captured at the border, or Libyan officials sent them back to Tunisia, etc. The

¹⁷ Interview with retired major colonel (army) who did not wish to be named, Tunis, June 20, 2016. This director of internal security noted the regime used four primary sources to determine who to arrest. The first were the names included in Ennahda’s application for a license and its electoral lists. Second, the regime found the names of those who voted for the independent (Ennahda) candidates in the 1989 elections. Third, police officers had been in attendance at every rally Ennahda had held during the campaign, taking pictures of both who was on the stage and in the crowd. The final source was a snowball: police officers extracted further names through torture. Each of these sources were also mentioned in interviews with the following Ennahda MPs/leaders: Mohamed Saidi, Tunis, June 1, 2016; Walid Bennani, Tunis, June 15, 2016; Badreddine Abdelkafi, Tunis, June 21, 2016; and Nouredine Arbaoui, Tunis, June 30, 2016.

¹⁸ Interview with Nouredine Arbaoui, Tunis, June 30, 2016.

possibility of being arrested was there for all of us. It was luck.¹⁹

MP Walid Bennani, from the interior town of Kasserine, who managed to escape to Belgium, likewise attributes his escape to chance:

I took a louage [collective taxi] from Kef to [Sakiet] Sidi Youssef on the border with Algeria. There were checkpoints along the way. I am a believer – if Allah had written about my arrest I would have been arrested. At one particular checkpoint, police were checking every car in front of us. The police even had “wanted” pictures on them. But the driver of the taxi happened to know one of the police officers, and told him *yalla*, let’s go. It was pure luck that I made it out.²⁰

These interviews suggest that whether an Ennahda MP managed to flee to the West or was arrested in 1991 was largely random, or at the very least uncorrelated with secularism. We can therefore increase our confidence that there was minimal selection bias of already secular Ennahda MPs traveling to the West.

The final piece of evidence against selection bias is the strongest: that the MPs themselves admit that their time abroad had a causal impact on their beliefs. Thus, even if there was some selection bias in who went abroad, there was at least an additional effect of living in the West on their preferences. To see this, and to explore the potential mechanisms by which this effect occurred, I turn next to several interviews with these Ennahda MPs.

5 Mechanisms

To establish a causal effect and capture the mechanisms through which it occurs, I conducted interviews with 8 Ennahda MPs, including Badreddine Abdelkafi, Sahbi Atig, Dalila Babba, Walid Bennani, Habib Khedher, Meherzia Laabidi, Mohamed Saidi, and Mohamed Zrig. In addition, I interviewed 5 other prominent Ennahda leaders, including former prime ministers Ali Laarayedh and Hamadi Jebali, former minister Samir Dilou, MP and former governor Mohamed Sidhom, and Ennahda political bureau president Noureddine Arbaoui (for details on each interview, see

¹⁹ Interview with Mohamed Zrig, Tunis, December 8, 2015.

²⁰ Interview with Walid Bennani, Tunis, June 15, 2016

supplementary materials). These interviews were useful in discovering that these actors themselves acknowledge that their time in secular democracies have shaped them in the hypothesized direction, and in hearing from them exactly how these effects occurred.

These interviews suggest that there were a number of mechanisms by which living in secular democracies produced greater secularism. For some, like Ennahda MP Dalila Babba, who was exiled in France for 20 years, it was intergroup contact that was key:

There was a big difference between those of us who experienced twenty years in the West and the others who lived here [in Tunisia]. The whole world and all of its freedoms were opened to us. We met with other people and the other world! [...] For instance, I was involved in religious dialogues in an Islamic Center in Grenoble. Next to us was a Jewish synagogue - our buildings shared a wall! We often had dialogues with Christians, Jews, and Muslims where we interacted, discussed, and came together at the end to realize that all religions have the same core values and are having the same internal conflicts with extremists.²¹

Ennahda MP Sayida Ounissa, who spent 18 years in France, concurred, explaining how interactions with ‘the other’ bred greater tolerance and an acceptance of pluralism:

Growing up in a very secular country when you are a Muslim [...] pushes you to think about diversity, about the place of minorities. Probably this is why Ennahda is the most [likely] to think about minorities in Tunisia. [...] It was an important moment for us as a political family to be there, in Paris, London, Germany, or Italy. I don’t know if it is determinative of what we are doing now. But it definitely helped us to have this sense that diversity is important and you should listen to the other. And that what the other is doing or saying or believing in is not automatically something bad. We were living in societies where not everyone was thinking or living like us or having the same religion. It definitely had a very positive impact.²²

²¹ Interview with Dalila Babba, Tunis, January 22, 2016.

²² Interview with Sayida Ounissi by Shadi Hamid and William McCants, March 13, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/03/13/islamists-on-islamism-today-an-interview-with-sayida-ounissi-of-tunisia-s-annahda-party/>

These accounts corroborate one mechanism by which living in secular democracies contributes to moderation: interactions with members of other religions. This intergroup contact pushes Islamists to become more tolerant of other faiths, making them more likely to abandon goals of enshrining Islam in the constitution. Yet there were also other advantages to living in the West beyond these interactions. For Ennahda MP (and Vice President of the NCA) Meherzia Laabidi, who also spent two decades in France, it was their first taste of democracy, socializing them into accepting these norms:

[Ennahda MPs who only lived in Tunisia] will never appreciate it [freedom] like we do because we tasted it. We actually experienced citizenship, experienced democracy, experienced living together with others. We realized the intrinsic and inherent value of these concepts.²³

Ennahda MP Mohamed Zrig, who spent 20 years in Canada, agreed, noting they learned not only democratic norms but practices too:

In the 1990s and 2000s, we had different experiences. There was the experience of those in prison and those abroad. Both experiences were very rich. Our brothers who were in prison spent their time studying the history of the movement, its ideology, how it developed. For us abroad, we benefited a lot from the West. I realized how democracy works, how citizens are respected. And in addition, I learned the mechanisms: how to practice democracy, how to practice respect for citizens by the regime, how to apply democracy in reality.²⁴

Beyond intergroup contact and socialization, a third possible effect of living in the West was political learning: revising Islamists' interpretations of what secularism is. Living in the West may have taught Islamists that the separation of religion and the state does not mean the exclusion of Islamists like it had under previous Tunisian autocrats, but rather ensures that Islamists also have a voice. In the foremost biography of Ennahda head Rachid Ghannouchi, Tamimi (2001) writes that "initially, his critique was radical; it rejected almost everything that came from the West"

²³ Discussion with Meherzia Laabidi, Tunis, July 27, 2015.

²⁴ Interview with Mohamed Zrig, Tunis, December 8, 2015.

(p. 35). Ghannouchi rejected Bourguibism, the secular ideology of Tunisia's first autocrat Habib Bourguiba, "in its totality and could only see its negative aspects" (p. 45). Yet after living in London for two decades, Ghannouchi realized that "North African secular elites have not pursued the model of their Western inspirers. [... Instead of] the state and religion being separate, [...in Tunisia] the state [...] monopolizes religion" (p. 113). Ghannouchi now maintains that as practiced in the West, "secularism is not only justifiable but has had positive aspects" (p. 113).²⁵

Even those who were imprisoned recognize this ideological moderation among those exiled in the West. Conservative Ennahda MP Sadok Chorou, who spent almost two decades in prison, affirmed:

It is true that the brothers who were in the Diaspora have been affected by the environment of Europe and America. [...] This influence created new intellectual orientations, especially politically with regards to Islamic thought. [Their outlook] has changed dramatically since 1991. [...] This has made the movement head in a different direction.²⁶

The effect of living in the West on secularism appears to hold even out of sample. Imed Daimi, CPR Secretary-General and Chief-of-Staff of former Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki, observed that his personal transition from Islamism to secularism, and accordingly his decision to join CPR instead of Ennahda, stemmed from his experience living in France:

Living inside the Arab, Islamic society, we don't see many differences. The majority of the people think in one way. When I left [Tunisia] and met others [in France], my ideas changed. I preserved my identity of course, but in daily interactions especially with the [French] government, I realized that as a minister, for instance, you must deal with all people. I was affected a lot by its democratic culture and pluralism.²⁷

²⁵ It is possible that this mechanism may not operate as strongly for those exiled in France, where French *laïcité* explicitly bans religious influence on politics, rather than adopting a "twin tolerations" perspective (Stepan 2000).

²⁶ Quoted in Alysa Bedig (2012), "Ennahda's Split Personality: Identity Crises in Tunisian Politics," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, <http://www.fletcherforum.org/2012/04/08/ennahdas-split-personality/>.

²⁷ Interview with Imed Daimi, Tunis, September 22, 2015.

In sum, Ennahda MPs recognize that their time in secular democracies has had a causal impact on their beliefs, and provide support for each of the three hypothesized mechanisms for this effect: socialization, intergroup contact, and political learning. In the case of Tunisia, therefore, we see strong evidence of the secular diffusion hypothesis. To examine whether this theory holds outside of Tunisia, I turn next to survey data from the Arab Barometer.

6 External Validity: Arab Barometer Surveys

Wave 3 of the Arab Barometer, conducted in twelve Arab countries between 2012-2014 (see supplementary materials for dates and sample sizes), provides a unique sample to test the observable implications of the secular diffusion theory. It is the first wave of the Barometer – and for that matter, the first survey – to ask about support for Islamist groups across the Arab world. As such, it allows us to examine whether Islamists who had lived in the West are more secular in their political orientations than Islamists who have not. To capture Islamists, I subset the data to Muslims who have at least some trust in their mainstream Islamist party (tailored to each country: Ennahda in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, etc.).

The primary independent variable is Q702: “During the past five years, did you spend time in a Western country (European country, Canada, the United States)?” Answers are coded dichotomously. Of 7644 Islamist supporters in the dataset, 1216 (16%) had lived in the West in the past five years.

I examine whether these Islamists who had lived in the West were more secular than those who did not. Two questions help to capture secularism. First, respondents were asked for their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with the statement: “the government and parliament should enact laws in accordance with Islamic law (*shari‘a*).” This captures precisely the main compromise Ennahda made in Tunisia’s transition: not to pursue Islamic law, or its sources (the Quran and the Sunna), as the basis of legislation. Second, respondents were also asked for their level of agreement (on the same 4 point scale) with a more general statement: “Your country is better off if religious people hold public positions in the state.” This question similarly captures respondent’s beliefs regarding the separation of religion and the state. I code both variables on a 1-4 scale with higher values indicating greater secularism (i.e., 4=strongly disagree). If the

secular diffusion hypothesis is correct, living in the West should be positively correlated with these dependent variables.

The primary inferential obstacle is that Islamists who have spent time in the West may be different on some covariate than Islamists who have not, and that covariate may confound the relationship. I address this concern in two ways. First, I control for a number of demographic variables in the regression, including **age**, **gender**, **education**, and whether the respondent is a **student**, **married**, and from an **urban** area. I also control for the Islamist’s level of trust in the mainstream Islamist party (limited, medium, or great trust), and include country fixed effects.

An alternative approach is to pre-process the data by matching Islamists who went abroad with Islamists who did not on these same covariates. I employ “nearest” matching, which pairs up each Islamist who went abroad with his or her closest demographic match among the Islamists who did not go abroad.²⁸ While this significantly reduces the number of observations, it ensures that each individual Islamist who went abroad is compared to his or her perfect match who did not. This pre-processing of the data helps ensure the validity of the comparison and thereby increase confidence in the results.

Table 4 presents the results using both the unmatched (models 1-2) and matched (models 3-4) data. Across all four models, Islamists who have lived in the West were significantly more secular than Islamists who had not. This effect holds using either measure of secularism, and either the matched or unmatched sample. These results provide strong evidence that among Islamists across the Arab world, living in the West is correlated with more secular attitudes. They provides important external validity to the results in the Ennahda case, demonstrating that secular diffusion may occur even outside of the particular case of Tunisia.

7 Conclusion

Leveraging unique voting data and interviews with Islamist parliamentarians in Tunisia, this paper contends that one neglected pathway to Islamist moderation may be time spent in secular democracies. Through a variety of mechanisms – socialization, intergroup contact, and political learning – an acceptance of secularism may diffuse to Islamists living in secular democracies. As a result,

²⁸ Results are robust to alternative matching specifications such as full or genetic matching.

Table 4: Secular Diffusion in the Arab World (OLS)

	<i>DV: Secularism (1-4)</i>			
	<u>Unmatched</u>		<u>Matched</u>	
	Shari'a (1)	Religion in Politics (2)	Shari'a (3)	Religion in Politics (4)
West	0.110*** (0.028)	0.089*** (0.033)	0.112*** (0.040)	0.083* (0.044)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.0004 (0.002)
Female	-0.011 (0.018)	-0.012 (0.021)	0.016 (0.042)	0.091* (0.046)
Education	-0.001 (0.006)	0.014** (0.007)	0.014 (0.013)	0.042*** (0.014)
Student	0.055* (0.033)	0.006 (0.038)	0.107 (0.073)	-0.115 (0.080)
Urban	0.0004 (0.019)	-0.007 (0.022)	0.045 (0.045)	-0.002 (0.050)
Married	0.027 (0.021)	0.007 (0.025)	0.011 (0.053)	-0.021 (0.059)
Trust in Islamists	-0.123*** (0.012)	-0.235*** (0.014)	-0.146*** (0.028)	-0.262*** (0.031)
Country FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	2.259*** (0.059)	3.038*** (0.069)	2.181*** (0.134)	2.927*** (0.148)
Observations	6,755	6,573	1,410	1,410
R ²	0.166	0.127	0.190	0.190
Adjusted R ²	0.164	0.125	0.179	0.179

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

upon their return to their home countries, they may be significantly more secular-minded than their counterparts who had not gone abroad. At least in the case of Tunisia's Ennahda, these Islamists who had lived in secular democracies were the driving force pushing for Ennahda to move from an Islamist political party insistent on enshrining Islam in the constitution to Muslim Democrats not only willing but committed to secular democracy.

These results highlight a new pathway of Islamist moderation: time spent in secular democracies. The two dominant explanations in the literature – domestic interactions with other political parties and repression – were found to have no impact on whether Ennahda MPs voted for secularism. Moreover, the results suggest that the psychological and ideological impacts of living in the West appear to affect Islamist MPs' voting behavior even when taking into account a number of political incentives, such as appealing to their constituency's median voter. Of course, it may simply be that these parliamentarians had not yet fully grasped these political incentives just two or three years into democracy. The relative weight of these political interests with each parliamentarian's past experiences may very well change as parliamentarians get conditioned to playing the political game. But at least in the early stages of a democratic transition, Islamists' personal experiences may matter as much as their political context in determining their behavior in power.

Beyond their contribution to Islamist moderation, these findings are also important to explaining the Arab Spring's one successful democratic transition: Tunisia. While much has been made of Ennahda's important compromises in the transition, this paper sheds light on who within Ennahda supported the major concession to avoid enshrining Islam in the constitution. Contrary to existing explanations (i.e., Nugent 2017), it suggests that it was not the wing of Ennahda that was imprisoned but rather the wing of Ennahda that had been in exile that played the pivotal role in compromising with secularists and thereby rescuing the transition at critical moments in the bumpy road to democracy.

These findings may also have important implications for one of the Arab Spring's failed democratic transitions: Egypt. As a result of the July 2013 coup, members of the Muslim Brotherhood have similarly found themselves in prison, underground, or in exile, largely in Istanbul with others scattered in the West. If and when the Brotherhood returns to political life in Egypt, these diverse experiences are likely to have lasting impacts on each individual's political preferences. These findings would suggest those members of the Muslim Brotherhood who have found refuge in Western

capitals are likely to be most secular minded upon their return to Egypt.

Finally, these findings have important policy implications. They would suggest that opportunities for Islamists to study or find refuge in the West are critical components of the West's democracy promotion efforts. At a time when scholarships and exchanges for Muslim students are being cut and borders are being closed, these results provide important evidence that exposure to the West may be critical to moderating Islamists into accepting secular democracy. While the shock of liberal Western morals occasionally produces greater conservatism, these results suggest that on average, the effect is toward secularism. Of course, it is also crucial to acknowledge that how Islamists are treated in the West is as important as allowing them entry. Socialization effects are strongest where an immigrant's personal situation has improved in the destination country. If Islamists are instead harassed, spied upon, and repressed in secular democracies, as has increasingly occurred post-9/11, they are unlikely to view secular democracy in a positive light.

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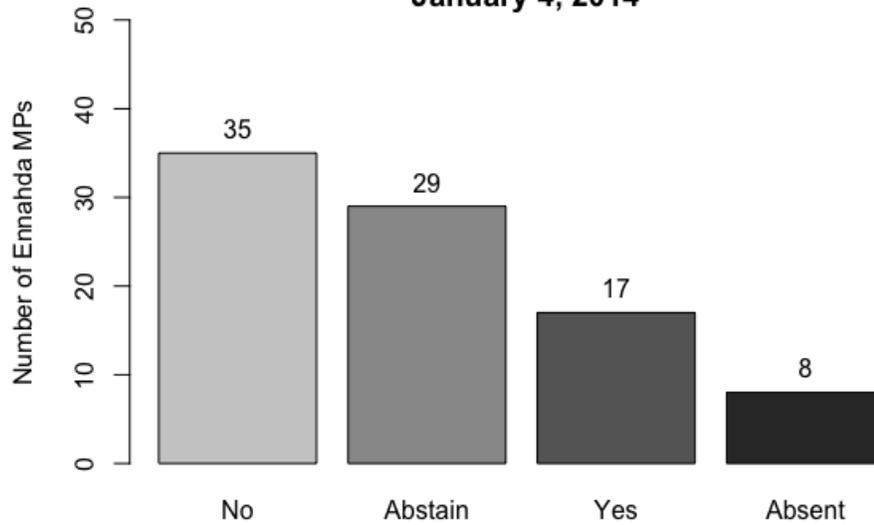
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8 Appendices

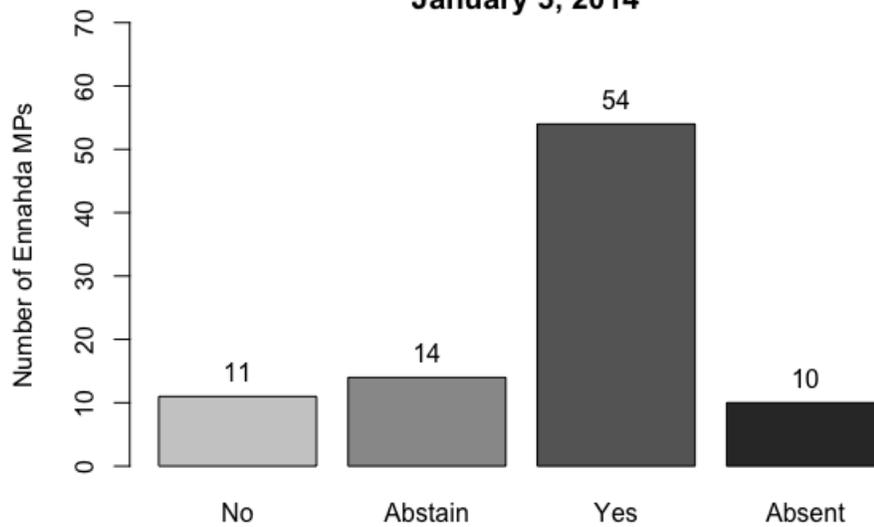
- Appendix A presents the distribution of Ennahda votes on the two alternative measures of secularism: freedom of conscience and prohibition of *takfir*.
- Appendix B shows that living in secular democracies is not correlated with a lower latent propensity to diverge from the party line.
- Appendix C provides details of each interview conducted for this project.
- Appendix D presents information about the Arab Barometer surveys, and the wording of each survey questions used in the analysis.

8.1 Appendix A

**Distribution of Ennahda Votes
Removing Freedom of Conscience
January 4, 2014**



**Distribution of Ennahda Votes
Banning Takfir
January 5, 2014**



8.3 Appendix C

Table 5: Interviews

ID	Name	Position	Language	Date	City	Duration	Record
1	Imed Daimi	Former Presidential Chief of Staff (CPR)	Arabic	9-22-15	Tunis	1.5 hr	Audio
2	Mohamed Sidhom	MP and Governor (Ennahda)	Arabic	11-25-15	Tunis	1.5 hr	Audio
3	Ali Laarayedh	Former Prime Minister (Ennahda)	Arabic	12-7-15	Tunis	2 hr	Audio
4	Mohamed Zrig	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	12-8-15	Tunis	1.5 hr	Audio
5	Samir Dilou	Former Minister (Ennahda)	Arabic	12-10-15	Tunis	1 hr	Audio
6	Hamadi Jebali	Former Prime Minister (Ennahda)	Arabic	12-17-15	Sousse	2 hr	Audio
7	Dalila Babba	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	1-22-16	Tunis	1.5 hr	Audio
8	Sahbi Atig	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	1-25-16	Tunis	1 hr	Audio
9	Mohamed Saidi	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	6-1-16	Tunis	2 hr	Audio
10	Habib Khedher	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	6-1-16	Tunis	30 min	Audio
11	Walid Bennani	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	6-15-16	Tunis	1 hr	Audio
12	Anonymous	Retired Colonel Major (Military)	Arabic	6-20-16	Tunis	2 hr	Audio
13	Badreddine Abdelkafi	MP (Ennahda)	Arabic	6-21-16	Tunis	30 min	Audio
14	Noureddine Arbaoui	Executive Bureau (Ennahda)	Arabic	6-30-16	Tunis	1 hr	Audio

8.4 Appendix D

Table 6: Arab Barometer, Wave 3

Country	Sample Size	Date(s)
Algeria	1220	Mar-Apr 2013
Egypt	1196	Mar-Apr 2013
Iraq	1215	Jun 2013
Jordan	1795	Dec 2012-Jan 2013
Kuwait	1021	Feb-Mar 2014
Lebanon	1200	Jul 2013
Libya	1247	Mar-Apr 2014
Morocco	1116	Apr-Jun 2013 and Mar 2014
Palestine	1200	Dec 2012
Sudan	1200	Apr-May 2013
Tunisia	1199	Feb 2013
Yemen	1200	Nov-Dec 2013

Questions used in the analysis:

- To subset to Islamists:
 - Q1012: Religion (Muslim)
 - Q201.12: Trust in the Muslim Brotherhood (limited, medium or great extent of trust)
- Independent Variable: Lived in the West
 - Q702: “During the past five years, did you spend time in a Western country (European country, Canada, the United States)?” (dichotomous)
- Dependent Variable: Secularism
 - Q 605.2: “The government and parliament should enact laws in accordance with Islamic law” (strongly disagree to strongly agree)
 - Q 606.2: “Your country is better off if religious people hold public positions in the state” (strongly disagree to strongly agree)
- Controls
 - Q1001: Age
 - Q1002: Gender

- Q1003: Education
- Q1005.3: Student
- Q1010: Married
- Q13: Urban
- Country Fixed Effects