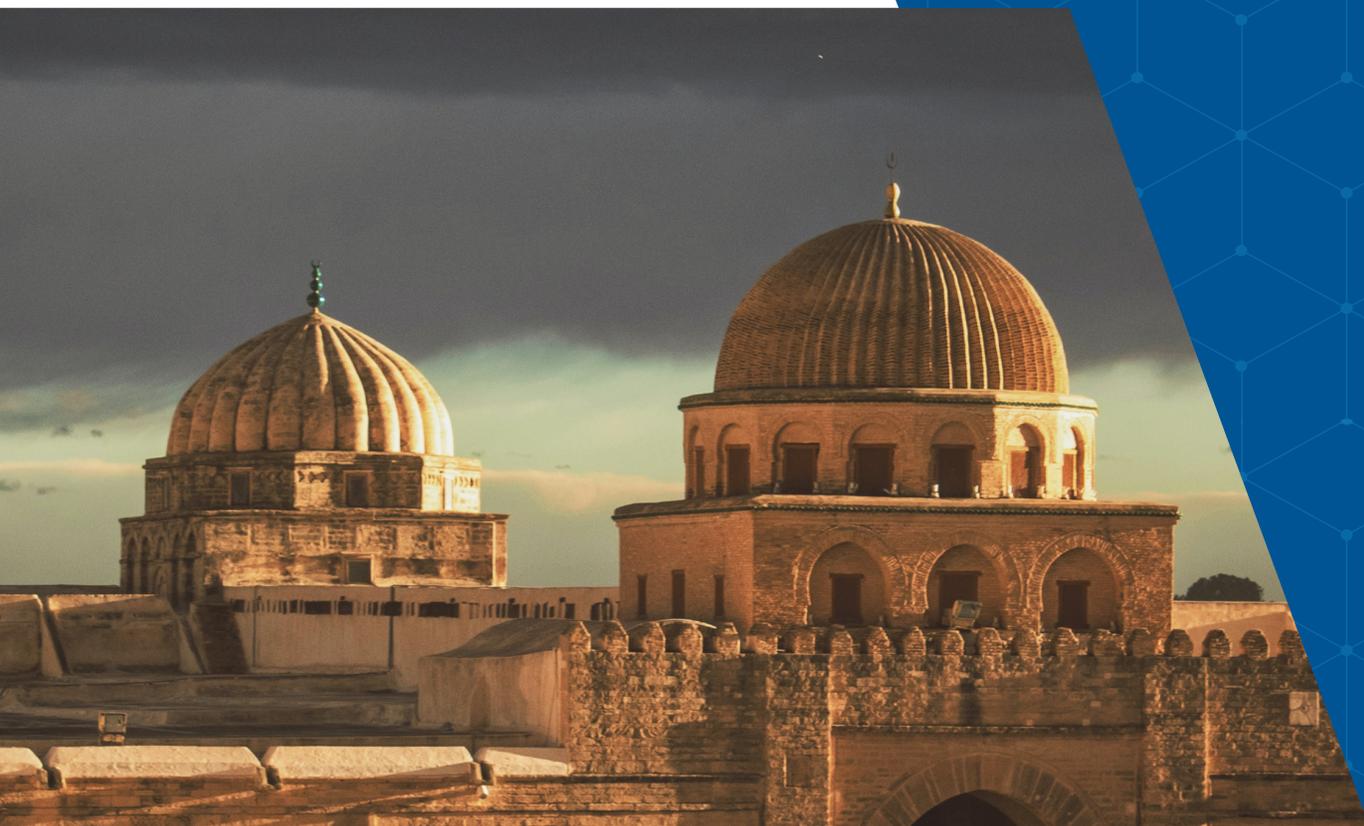




The Program on Governance
and Local Development
at Gothenburg



How Gender and Local State Capacity Shape Citizens' Use of the Mosque

Steven Brooke and Monica C. Komer

Working Paper
No. 37 2021

The Program on Governance
and Local Development



UNIVERSITY OF
GO HENBURG

How Gender and Local State Capacity Shape Citizens' Use of the Mosque

Steven Brooke
University of Wisconsin- Madison
sbrooke@wisc.edu

Monica C. Komer
University of Wisconsin- Madison
komer@wisc.edu

Acknowledgements

We appreciate feedback from Allison Hartnett as well as audiences at the 2020 American Political Science Association Annual Conference. We thank Chris Barrie and Gabriel Koehler-Derrick for sharing data. Generous support for this research was also provided by the Program on Governance and Local Development at the University of Gothenburg, the Moulay Hicham Foundation, and the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with funding from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation.

This paper is part of a larger project, funded by the Moulay Hicham Foundation entitled ‘Governance and Local Development in the Middle East and North African Region.’ This paper will ultimately become a chapter in the final project’s edited volume.

Abstract

There is a well-documented gender gap in mosque use in the Islamic World, with men attending Friday prayer more frequently than women. However, we know little about whether a gender gap exists among those that use the mosque for non-religious purposes. Using original survey data from Tunisia, we find that men are generally more likely than women to use mosques for non-religious reasons. However, in areas further from the coast—where communities face considerably more social and economic disparities—the gender gap dissipates. In areas above the 60th percentile in terms of distance from the coast there is no gender gap in citizen preferences for mosque-based services. Our findings build upon existing work in two notable ways. First, our results suggest that individual and community-level factors jointly shape preferences for mosque-based services. Second, they suggest that mosques may be particularly important places for women in marginalized areas to address personal and community problems.

Keywords: Tunisia, mosque, marginalization, gender, local governance, social services

1. Introduction

In many countries, and across every religious tradition, citizens rely on houses of worship for a variety of purposes beyond simple religious practice. In contrast to other forms of institutional and associational life, religious institutions' ubiquity, centrality in neighborhood life, and extensive networks of social capital often make them ideal sites of citizen coordination and local governance. This research agenda has advanced notably in the Islamic world, where scholars have identified the ability of Islamist groups to leverage religious institutions for political mobilization as a part of their "Advantage" over non-Islamists (Cammett and Jones Luong, 2014). This paper seeks to expand this promising research agenda in two ways. First, we extend beyond electoral politics to examine when citizens prefer to use mosques for matters broadly related to civil society activism: to resolve a personal dispute, receive charity, or organize a protest or gather petition signatures. Second, we probe the variation in these preferences, identifying the conditions under which citizens turn to mosques to address these personal and community needs.

We answer these questions with original survey data from 1200 Tunisians, which we nest in 265 census districts (*mutamadiyat*, or "delegations"). Our principal findings lie at the intersection of gender and local state capacity. While we find some support for a recognized "gender gap" in mosque usage, in which women are generally less likely than men to utilize the mosque for these purposes, this difference is contingent on Tunisia's particular local development trajectories. Women's preferences for using the mosque to address these personal and community problems is strongly contingent on local levels of marginalization, roughly proxied by the distance of the respondent's delegation to the coast. The relationship is strong enough that, in areas above the 60th percentile, in terms of distance to the coast, the gender gap vanishes. One implication of our study is that community and individual level-factors *jointly* shape citizen preferences for mosque-based services.

To these ends, we first review the literature to highlight the emphasis on the politicization of mosques, either for electoral or contentious politics. We then narrow our enquiry to the realm of civil society, identifying in the process an expectation of differential usage based on gender, as well as local state capacity. A discussion of our research design and data follows, including a presentation of our results. We conclude by identifying the implications of our findings, including a discussion of how the Tunisian case imposes scope conditions on the generalizability of the findings.

2. Literature

Citizens around the world use houses of worship for a variety of important political and social functions. In African and Asian countries, organizations affiliated with churches monitor elections (Riedl, 2012; Oladipo, 2000; Goldman and Pascual, 1988) while in Latin America they have historically promoted indigenous causes (Trejo, 2009) and disseminated information (Smith, 2017). In a variety of contexts, citizens also use religious institutions to access educational services, community improvement projects, and reliable medical care (Clark, 2003; Gill, 1998; Hagopian, 2009). Sometimes individuals rely on these institutions' organizational capacity and social capital to spark social movements (Smith, 2014).

Scholars of the Islamic World have increasingly focused their attention on how mosques contribute to the "Islamist advantage," the perceived ability of Islamist parties to outperform their non-Islamist competitors (Cammett and Jones Luong, 2014). Key to these arguments are assumptions that, for ordinary Muslims, the significance of mosques lies beyond their place as a site of worship, but rather as a center of community life. For Masoud (2014), this allows Islamist parties and candidates to effectively use these institutions to disseminate information about politics, particularly policies they would pursue in office, to potential supporters. Meacham (2015) focuses on how religious institutions facilitate horizontal communication and coordination, encouraging the emergence of common knowledge that spurs mobilization.

This increasingly sophisticated research has improved understandings of politics in the Islamic World. Yet its emphasis on the electoral consequences of religious institutions offers relatively little insight into the broad spectrum of the less politicized ways citizens use mosques in local communities, including charitable provision, social organization, information gathering, and mass-elite interaction. Moreover, there is little empirical documentation of, and explanation for, this often highly localized variation in citizen preferences for mosque-based services. Why do some citizens rely on mosques for a variety of non-worship purposes related to local governance, while others simply use the mosque for religious events?

It is possible to extrapolate some guidance on which factors may lead to more demand for mosque-based services from the literature. On the one hand, materialist explanations generally document a national-level linkage between weakened state capacity and the emergence of a vibrant religious associational sector. For example, Carrie Wickham’s study of the Egyptian Islamic Movement identifies how a “parallel Islamic sector,” which included mosques and Islamic associations, grew where the state was absent, incubating an opposition movement among those who are underserved by the government (2002; see also Berman, 2003). And Brooke (2019) shows that the emergence of a vibrant universe of non-state social service providers, including religious associations and community mosques, was linked to the onset of national economic reforms that sapped the state’s ability to provide public goods. These accounts lead us to believe that citizen demand for mosque-based services operates as a type of substitute for state capacity: in areas where citizens are more marginalized vis-à-vis the state’s reach, demand for mosque-based services rises.

On the other hand, citizen demand for mosque-based services may be driven, not by citizen marginalization, but as a reaction to state overreach. For instance, Mahmoud (2011) traces the emergence of a women’s mosque movement and the proliferation of Islamic learning and social services in Egypt to concerns about the marginalization of Islam in society. Likewise, in Wolf’s (2017) analysis of the Islamist movement in Tunisia, she documents how decades of state repression of Islamic practices spurred an increase in demand for religious education and discussion groups in mosques, particularly among women. Religious institutions take up larger community roles where state-enforced secularism and the instrumentalization of religion for purposes of regime stability have closed off alternative avenues for religious expression (Feuer, 2018).

While a citizen’s willingness to use the mosque for certain non-worship functions is plausibly driven by economic and social marginalization, we also expect that these experiences – particularly with regards to mosque-based governance – will be contingent on gender. There is a well-documented “gender gap” in mosque behaviors. In Muslim majority and minority countries, women attend mosques for Friday prayer less often than men (as it is not considered a religious obligation for women),¹ rarely hold seats on mosque boards or management committees (Nyhagen, 2019;

¹ Dominant interpretations of the Shari’a rule the Friday prayer obligatory for all Muslim males to attend, but not women. Additionally, female attendance at Friday Prayer is discouraged by more conservative interpretations of Islamic law because it is a form of gender mixing (*al-Ikhtilaf*) (Katz, 2014). However, there are also mosque-based opportunities for female participation, including study circles (Mahmoud, 2011).

Shannahan, 2014), and are restricted from accessing particular leadership positions.² While we expect this general trend to carry over into the non-worship realm, there is very little empirical data to confirm this stipulation.

Broadening the question beyond mosque-based services and into the realms of informal and local governance provides further support for the gender gap expectation. Compared to men, we expect women to face multiple barriers to receiving help for their personal and community needs, particularly in marginalized areas. Belge and Blaydes find that in low-income areas of Cairo, only those women with high levels of social capital—ties to local elites—are likely to engage with state institutions (2014).³ This is in line with Benstead’s findings that Moroccan women, especially in rural areas, are less likely than men to make requests to the government for public service provisions (2016). Indeed, across the Islamic world, despite generally high rates of female education, women tend to be less politically engaged than men (Benstead and Lust, 2015; Bernick and Ciftci, 2014) and less likely to be employed (Moghadam, 2005). Taken together, this suggests that women are generally less likely to turn to the mosque for local governance-related services than men.

We derive our main expectations from the interaction between these two literatures, one on state capacity and local marginalization, the other on a “gender gap.” We specifically expect that the effects of gender on demand for mosque-based services will be contingent on local marginalization. In core – as opposed to marginalized – areas, women will have more opportunities to develop the kind of political or social networks that facilitate engagement with state institutions or non-religious organizations, such as bureaucracies, labor unions, interest organizations, local notables and brokers, and civil society institutions. In contrast, we expect that marginalized areas will feature fewer and weaker administrative opportunities and non-religious civil society institutions to function as possible alternatives to the local mosque. Under these conditions, women will be increasingly likely to use the local mosque to access these services. Put directly, *women will be more likely to access mosques for help with personal and community needs as the degree of local economic and social marginalization increases.* We furthermore posit that *the gender gap in mosque use for personal and community needs will narrow as the degree of economic and social marginalization increases.*

² Still, Bano and Kalmach (2012) document a global increase in Muslim women serving as religious leaders, oftentimes by teaching or leading prayer for women or creating women-only mosques (see also Nielsen, 2020).

³ Interestingly, they also find that, in general, religious elites are not used to settle disputes.

3. The Tunisian Case

Tunisia is a particularly relevant context to test these expectations. With more than 5,000 mosques across the country (Wolf, 2013), religious institutions are situated in diverse political, social, and economic settings. At the subnational level, there is considerable variation in state capacity and reported satisfaction with public services (Brixi et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2017). Most importantly, for this research, there is considerable variation in the social and economic marginalization of citizens.

Some of the starkest disparities concern coastal and interior regions. These disparities have roots in Tunisia's authoritarian past, where state-sponsored development programs heavily favored coastal regions (Berman and Nugent, 2015; Berman and Nugent, 2019). As a result, Tunisia's interior regions face higher localized rates of unemployment and poverty, along with lower per-capita income and fewer employment opportunities (Boughzala and Hamdi, 2014; Berman and Nugent, 2019). Nationwide, female unemployment is twice the rate of male unemployment. Even when women are employed, they generally receive lower salaries than men. These gender disparities are most evident in rural and interior areas (Boughzala and Hamdi, 2014; Moghadam, 2019). In some interior communities, the female unemployment rate is three times the rate for men (Moghadam, 2019).

The interior regions also suffer from social and political marginalization. Under authoritarian rule, Tunisia's leaders aimed to present the country as part of the Western world. The country's first president, Habib Bourguiba, launched reforms to dismantle traditional religious establishments and expand women's rights. Similar secular policies were enforced by his successor Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (Tripp, 2019). Political expressions of Islam were forced underground, state officials determined the content of sermons in mosques, and religious symbols—such as women wearing the hijab—were outlawed in public. Veiled women faced harassment, threats, and humiliation from security officials and secular women's associations (Wolf, 2017). Though both Islamist and leftist groups across the country were targeted by the state, security forces most heavily surveilled the interior areas, where disapproval with the regime and poor economic conditions made protests commonplace (Wolf, 2017). In the late 2000s, after a series of demonstrations in the interior, some activists described the region as largely cut off from the rest of the country due to the heightened security (Wolf, 2017).

It is not surprising, then, that the unprecedented wave of protests that ousted Ben Ali in Tunisia and threatened autocratic rulers throughout the Arab world originated in Tunisia's interior. Decades of

repression and economic hardship still shape political attitudes in the interior communities today. Several scholars note significant subnational variations in voting behavior – one of the key distinctions being between the underdeveloped, conservative interior communities and the more affluent coastal areas. These trajectories are reflected in patterns of political behavior: voters in the interior tend to favor Islamist parties and parties without ties to political elites (Van Hamme et al., 2016; Berman and Nugent, 2019).

4. Research Design and Data

We use original survey data collected in Tunisia in January 2020 to identify local correlates of mosque usage.⁴ Local enumerators conducted face-to-face surveys with 1200 Tunisians across the entire country. Alongside demographic data, enumerators also gathered respondents' locations, allowing us to identify contextual factors by nesting respondents in their census district (*mutamadiyat*, or delegations).

In this paper, we are interested in the conditions under which individuals report a willingness to use their local mosque to fulfill everyday local or community needs. Specifically, we asked respondents whether they would use their local mosque if they needed to resolve a personal dispute, receive charity, or organize a protest or gather petition signatures. Individuals responding that they would use a local mosque for at least one of these reasons are coded as a 1 (n= 255) and 0 otherwise. This is our dependent variable.

Our primary explanatory variables are gender and marginalization. Respondent gender is coded as either male (0) or female (1). To capture levels of marginalization, we conceptualize the aforementioned regional disparities between Tunisia's interior and coastal regions discussed in the previous section. This variable was created using a pre-existing shapefile, where we identified the centroid of each district and measured the distance from that point to the coast (in meters). We log-transform the resultant distance to normalize it.

Beyond these two main predictors, we also use the survey data to adjust for individual-level factors that may otherwise influence our results. We include the following common demographic covariates:

⁴ The survey was conducted by 121 for Research and Polling, and in collaboration with Robert Kubinec of NYU-Abu Dhabi and Sharan Grewal of William and Mary.

education level, age, employment status (unemployed/not), and whether the respondent reports living in an urban or rural area.

We also believe it is important to parcel out the effects of religious beliefs more broadly. We rely on three variables to do so. Our first is a basic “frequency of prayer” question, which we take as a general measure of the importance of religion to the daily life of our respondent. Second, we suspect that willingness to use the mosque for our three suggested non-worship purposes – resolving a personal dispute, receiving charity, or organizing a protest or gathering petition signatures – is also a function of an individual’s beliefs about the mosque’s place in society in general. To account for this, we include a response to a forced-choice question about whether they believe mosques should be used for purely religious purposes or broad social and community functions. Responses to our “mosque attitude” variable range from 1 (religious purposes only) to 10 (religious and other community needs). Finally, using the mosque for the specific types of non-worship purposes noted above may also be related to how often an individual uses the mosque for any form of non-religious activity. Therefore, we also account for how frequently respondents report visiting a mosque for non-religious purposes. Responses to our “non-religious visits” variable range from 1 (never) to 6 (every day). Table 1 reports the correlation coefficients for these three variables. The coefficients indicate only a weak correlation between the variables, which gives us added confidence that these variables are capturing different dimensions of religious beliefs and behavior. Table 2 provides summary statistics for all of our variables.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficients for Religiosity Variables

	Prayer	Mosque Attitude	Non-Religious Visits
Prayer	1	-0.09	-0.07
Mosque Attitude		1	0.12
Non-Religious Visits			1

Table 2: Summary Statistics

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std Dev.
Prefer Mosque-Based Services	0	1	0.21	0.41
Log Distance to Coast, meters	5.24	12.3	9.58	1.51
Female	0	1	0.5	0.5
Education	1	7	3	1.25
Unemployed	0	1	0.15	0.35
Prayer	1	5	3.9	0.5
Age	18	87	43.73	15.46
Mosque Attitude	1	10	2.95	3.28
Non-Religious Visits	1	6	1.33	0.92
Urban	0	1	0.7	0.46

5. Estimation and Results

Since our outcome variable is a binary measure, we rely on logistic regression models. Standard errors are clustered by delegation to account for possible covariance among respondents and to account for any unobserved delegation-level factors that may influence preference for mosque-based services. Given our expectations about the contingent effects of both gender and marginalization on our outcome variable, we test this claim using an interaction between gender and distance to the coast in our second model. Our above review of the literature leads us to expect a positive and statistically significant coefficient associated with this interaction term.

The first column (Model 1) in Table 3 presents an additive model in which preference for mosque-based services is regressed on gender and distance to the coast along with our control variables. Our main model, Model 2 in Table 3, presents the results of a model interacting gender with distance to the coast, which we take as a rough proxy for marginalization. This allows us to understand if the effects of marginalization and gender are conditional on one another.

Table 3: Predicting Preference for Mosque-Based Services

	Model 1	Model 2
Log Distance to Coast	0.014 (0.049)	-0.123 (0.067)
Female	-0.386 * (0.179)	-3.226 *** (0.891)
Education	-0.320 *** (0.080)	-0.326 *** (0.081)
Unemployed	0.039 (0.219)	0.049 (0.222)
Prayer	0.108 * (0.052)	0.109 * (0.052)
Age	-0.020 ** (0.006)	-0.020 ** (0.006)
Mosque Attitude	0.073 *** (0.021)	0.073 *** (0.021)
Non-Religious Visits	0.245 *** (0.072)	0.249 *** (0.074)
Urban	0.111 (0.175)	0.116 (0.175)
Log Distance to Coast x Female		0.296 ** (0.094)
Constant	-0.505 (0.632)	0.770 (0.781)
N	1119	1119

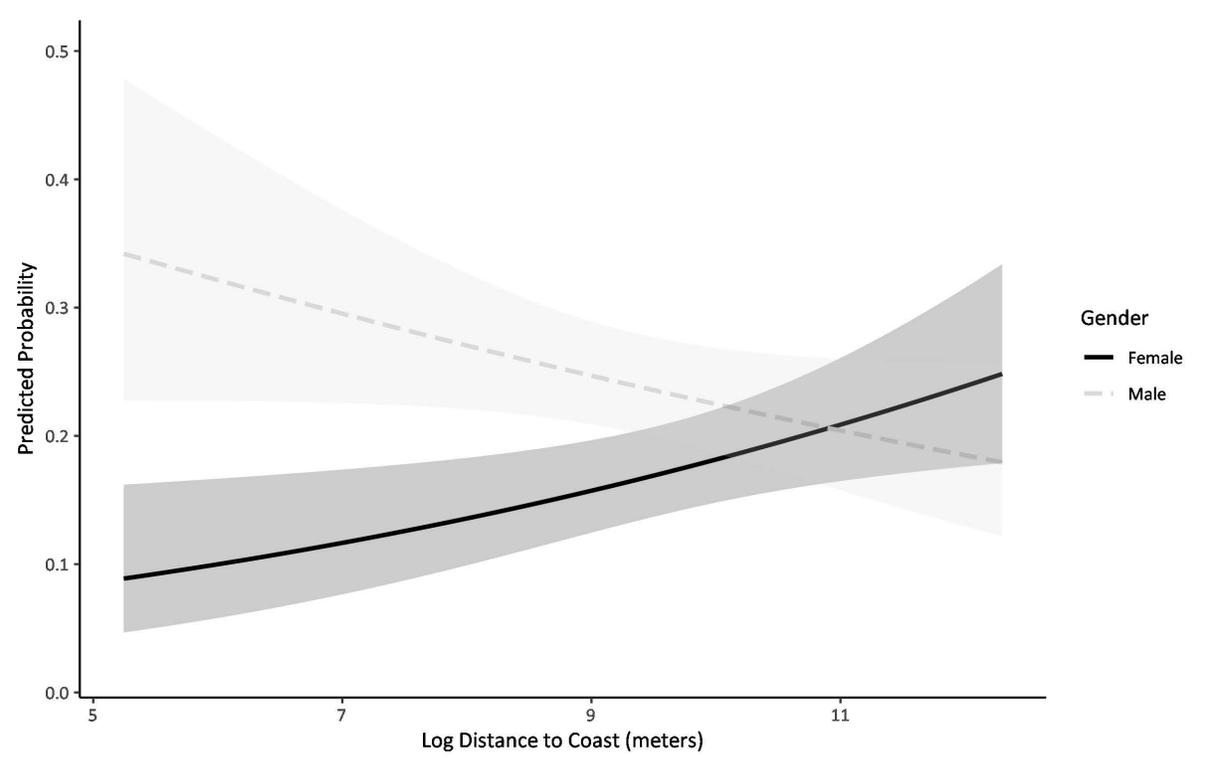
*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

Logistic regression, coefficients and standard errors. SEs clustered by delegation.

Results from Model 1 indicate that, on average, women are less likely than men to report a preference to use the mosque for these non-worship purposes. And notably, distance to the coast has no statistically significant independent effect on reported preferences. In Model 2, the interaction between gender and distance to the coast is positive and statistically significant ($p < .01$). This indicates that the association between distance to the coast and preference for mosque-based services is contingent on respondent gender—with distance to the coast only associated with statistically significant changes in mosque use among women.⁵

To visualize these results, Figure 1 shows the predicted probability of a preference for mosque-based services as a function of gender and distance to the coast. The predicted probabilities in Figure 1 are based on the results presented in Model 2, holding all other variables at their mean values (shaded areas represent predicted probabilities and 95 percent confidence intervals).

Figure 1: Preference for Mosque-Based Services by Gender and Distance to Coast

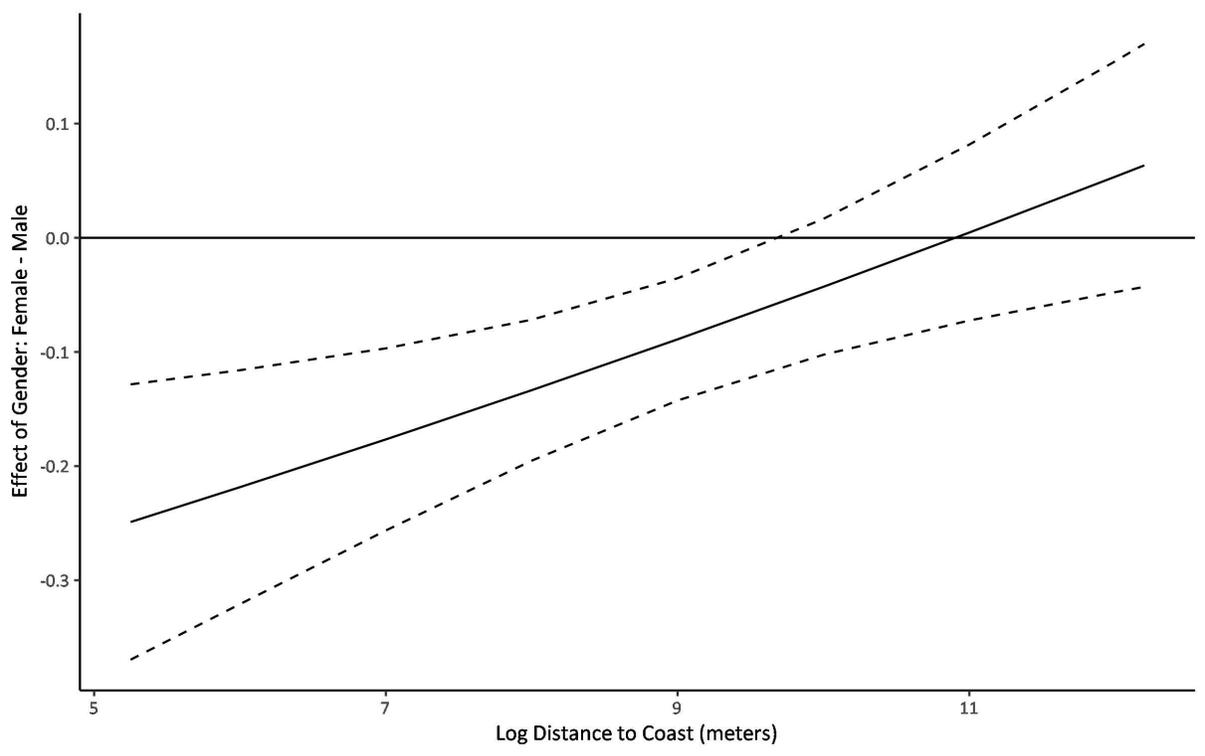


⁵ Based on Model 2 in Table 3, for women, the average marginal effect of logged distance to the coast is 0.02 ($p = 0.0138$). For men, the relationship between distance to the coast and mosque use for civil society reasons is less precise. The average marginal effect for men is -0.02 ($p = 0.0623$). The coefficient on our “log distance to coast” variable in Model 2 is negative, but also associated with a significance level above our 95% threshold ($p = 0.067$).

Figure 1 shows that the predicted probability of using the mosque for civil society reasons is 0.12 for women in areas closest to the coast (7.2 meters logged, the 5th percentile). Moving to women in areas furthest from the coast (11.9 meters logged, the 95th percentile), the predicted probability of using the mosque for at least one of the three civil society purposes doubles to 0.24. For reference purposes, downtown Tunis is 7.4 meters, logged, from the coast, in the 7th percentile. This is in line with our expectations that women in marginalized areas will be more likely to turn to the mosque when they are dealing with a personal or community problem, as compared to women in less marginalized areas.

Given our expectations about the gender gap in mosque use, it is useful to evaluate the average marginal effects of gender across the range of distances to the coast. Again drawing from Model 2, Figure 2 shows the effects of gender, whereby effects below zero indicate women are less likely than men to use mosques at that distance.

Figure 2: Average Marginal Effect of Gender (female = 1) across Distance to Coast on Mosque Use



Consistent with the literature, we identify significant gender differences in mosque use relatively close to the coast, with the predicted probability of using a mosque being greater for men than women.

However, the gender gap decreases as respondents are drawn from the more interior subdistricts. Indeed, once the distance to the coast reaches or exceeds 10 log meters (the 60th percentile), there is no significant difference between men and women. That 40 percent of respondents in our sample live in an area with no gender gap in mosque use for personal or community problems suggests a strong caveat to the notion of a gender gap in mosque usage.

Notably, the effect of the interaction between gender and our proxy for “marginalization” – distance to the coast in meters logged – is net the effect of a variety of individual-level factors, including education and employment status. Likewise, the inclusion of a frequency of prayer variable, a variable capturing attitudes about the place of a mosque in society generally, and a variable measuring the frequent mosque visits for non-religious purposes helps to allay concerns that our marginalization variable is simply tracking differential patterns of religiosity from the coast to the interior.⁶

6. Discussion and Implications

Our study provides some of the first systematic evidence that individuals’ self-reported preference to use mosques to solve personal and community problems is contingent on gender as well as local governance characteristics. Before discussing these results and their implications further, however, we should first highlight the drawbacks of our particular research design and data. Importantly, our survey measures respondents’ hypothetical choices rather than their concrete behaviors; we know their expressed preferences toward mosques but not their actual practices. On the one hand, this helps to capture general attitudes towards the various roles that individuals believe their local mosque is well-placed to take on. On the other hand, it does not provide us with grounds to make a strong inference about what Tunisian mosques do in practice. To do so would not only require us to describe the roles that various mosques play, by referencing administrative data for instance, but also to identify variation on the dependent variable: studying mosques that could theoretically assume these roles, but in practice do not (Ketchley and Brooke, 2020).

⁶ Our main findings in Models 1 and 2 remain substantively unchanged even when accounting for whether respondents voted for the Islamist Ennahda party in the 2018 municipal and 2019 legislative elections. We opt not to represent the results with these variables included because only 9% of respondents are coded as Ennahda voters as the majority of respondents did not vote or did not disclose their vote choice. The results in Models 1 and 2 also remain substantively unchanged after accounting for literacy rates across delegations.

We would ideally have more data on the reciprocal relationships that emerge between local populations, the type and frequency of their problems and concerns, and the adaptability of their houses of worship. For example, it may be that women in marginalized districts are both more likely to use the mosque when faced with personal or community problems *and* more likely to have these issues arise compared to women near the coast. Knowing this, mosques in the interior may have responded to this demand by devoting efforts to solving these problems. As with the prior argument, adjudicating this would require a different research design and data, and future researchers should be alert to possibilities to extend and potentially revise our findings.

Finally, we document a clear shift in the “gender gap” based on relatively localized contextual factors, specifically the documented divergence in development and local capacity that emerges the further the census district is from the Tunisian coast. We gain confidence in these findings from the fact that our results are robust to the inclusion of variables accounting for obvious alternative explanations, including a respondent’s socioeconomic status and religiosity. We can offer a few naïve explanations as to why these patterns exist.

Our intuition is that these differential patterns of demand for mosque-based services can be traced to differences in the underlying administrative and associational landscape: in areas where potential alternatives are more numerous or viable, women rely on the mosque comparatively less. In other words, women are more likely to use the mosque where fewer options exist, while men’s priorities are relatively inelastic to alternatives. There is some empirical support for this: while the relationship between distance to the coast and mosque use for civil society reasons among men is negative—indicating that men are less likely to use the mosque for these reasons when they live further from the coast. As noted in our results section, this relationship fails to reach statistical significance at the conventional 95% threshold. Our results may also be picking up differential historical patterns of state repression and surveillance. Under authoritarian rule, security forces disproportionately targeted interior areas (Wolf, 2017), which in turn made men in interior areas wary of using the mosque for the types of issues we measure. However, a truly compelling argument requires additional data on the overall picture of competing institutions, how these vary subnationally, and Tunisians’ assumedly differential views on the capacity of each to redress their particular grievances.

Despite these caveats, our findings have several relevant implications for the general literature on Middle East politics, as well as more targeted questions of community development and local governance. First, the aforementioned literature on the “Islamist Advantage” rests on a general assumption that mosques are powerful sites of mobilization for Islamist parties because a broad swathe of Muslims encounter these mosques in their daily (or weekly) activities. Our work, however, shows that in certain areas, and for specific population sectors, mosques are sites of community organization, while in other areas, and for other sectors of the population, the mosque’s role is more limited. This differential mosque-based contact implies potentially important downstream political effects that may help identify why some mosques are centers of Islamist mobilization while others are not.

Second, programs aimed at helping women resolve personal or community problems should consider where women feel comfortable receiving these services. Particularly in interior areas, our findings suggest that women have less experience using non-religious institutions to receive services. Development programs in these areas may find it useful to utilize religious networks to reach out to women and facilitate their inclusion in such programs.

Third, women have called for more gender-inclusive mosques (Alyanak, 2019; Nyhagen, 2019), and several countries have taken steps to increase women’s participation therein. In the early 2000s, both Morocco and Turkey started training and employing female preachers and spiritual guides to promote the state’s Islamic perspectives (Hassan, 2012; Rausch, 2012). These calls should be taken seriously as our data shows how, particularly in more marginalized areas, access and use of mosque facilities are vital for civic engagement and local governance. At the same time, while these initiatives may increase women’s access to mosque-based services and networks, they also have the potential to alienate some segments of the population that may be drawn to mosques because of their separation from the state.

7. Conclusion

Pairing an original survey of 1200 Tunisians with spatial data on local marginalization identifies the conditions under which individuals prefer to use the mosque to receive charity, fix a personal dispute, or organize contentious mobilization. In some respects, our work builds on existing findings that gender strongly conditions individuals’ relationships with the local mosque. In our sample, women are

generally less likely than men to use the mosque to solve personal or community problems. This finding, however, is conditioned by the local contexts of marginalization: the further from the developed regions of the coast, the narrower the gap between men and women's habits, to the point that the gender gap disappears. We tentatively argue that this relationship is driven by individuals' marginalization from state and non-religious civil society organizations. In the case of Tunisia, we argue that women in marginalized areas have weak, if not strained, ties to state and civil society organizations, increasing their demand for mosques-based services. More generally, these findings suggest that while religious institutions assume a variety of roles around the world, *who* uses religious institutions and for *which* purposes is locally dependent.

How should the Tunisian setting shape the argument? We speculate that three conditions are particularly relevant. First, while Tunisia does contain subnational variation in state capacity, it is still one of the more capacious Arab States, due in part to its small population and geographic size. In larger Arab states, particularly those with even greater variation in local governance capacity, the role of mosques for these particular tasks may be even more pronounced. Secondly, the Tunisian state for decades not only strongly repressed Islamist movements, most prominently Ennahda, but also hosted a strong non-Islamist counterweight in civil society, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT). The existence of such lively civil society organizations may decrease dependence on mosques for services. In fact, Ketchley and Barrie find that the presence of the UGTT seems to transform the characteristics of protest mobilization by reducing the importance of the local mosque as a coordination site (2020). However, the UGTT and other dominant civil society organizations in Tunisia have complicated ties to past and present state institutions. Therefore, variation in where Tunisian citizens engage in civil society activity cannot be separated from the country's particular political landscape.

Lastly, Tunisia is somewhat unique in that a hallmark characteristic of successive regimes was an emphasis on "State Feminism," underpinned by official policies and unofficial norms designed to promote women's equality to suppress political competitors (Tripp, 2019). As a result, women perceived as being part of an Islamic organization, or those merely wearing a hijab, experienced varying degrees of harassment, intimidation, and in some cases imprisonment (Wolf, 2017). One legacy of these policies may well be a reluctance of some women – whether due to personal conviction, perceived social stigma, or some combination of both – to approach the mosque for local governance

tasks. Meanwhile, other women may be reluctant to approach state or state-affiliated institutions for those same tasks.

More broadly, our work continues the task of shifting research on religious institutions in the Islamic world from generalized narrative to falsifiable argument. In this vein, we see a number of worthwhile extensions of this line of inquiry. First, as noted previously, our research design does not account for mosque-level variation in types of services provided, only in citizen use of those services. Collecting further data on this point would expand our understanding of the roles mosques play in their local communities. Our research also only tangentially connects to electoral politics. One possible hypothesis our work prompts is that individuals who access the mosque for more than just religious services are the ones most likely to support Islamist candidates, although this can be empirically assessed. And finally, we know little about how rates of female mosque participation vary across or within countries. Our work is the first to empirically show that there are instances in which the gender gap in mosque use actually closes. Using a nonrepresentative sample of Arab-American Muslims, Jamal provides evidence that there may be other areas where the gender gap in mosque use looks quite different than previously assumed (2005). She also notes that mosque participation increases women's political efficacy and engagement. More work is needed to fully understand the causes and consequences of women's use of houses of worship, especially in the Islamic world.

8. References

- Alyanak, O. (2019) "When women demand prayer space: Women in mosques campaign in Turkey," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 15(1), pp. 125-134.
- Bano, M., & Kalmbach, H. E. (eds.). (2012) *Women, leadership, and mosques: Changes in contemporary Islamic authority*. Leiden: Brill.
- Belge, C. & Blaydes, L. (2014) "Social capital and dispute resolution in informal areas of Cairo and Istanbul," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 49(4), pp. 448-476.
- Benstead, L. J. (2016) "Why quotas are needed to improve women's access to services in clientelistic regimes," *Governance*, 29(2), pp. 185-205.
- Benstead, L. J. & Lust, E. (2015) "Women's political participation in North Africa: Lessons from recent research" *Middle East Institute*. MAP Essay Series.
- Berman, C. E. & Nugent, E. R. (2019) "Regionalism in new democracies: The authoritarian origins of voter-party linkages," *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(4), pp. 908-922.
- Berman, C. E. & Nugent, E. R. (2015) "Defining political choices: Tunisia's second democratic elections from the ground up," *The Brookings Center for Middle East Policy*, Analysis Paper No. 28.
- Berman, S. (2003) "Islamism, revolution, and civil society," *Perspectives on Politics*, 1(2), pp. 257-272.
- Boughzala, M. & Hamdi, M. T. (2014) "Promoting inclusive growth in arab countries: Rural and regional development and inequality in Tunisia," *Brookings Global Working Paper Series*, Working Paper no. 71.
- Brixi, H., Lust, E., & Woolcock, M. (2015) "Trust, voice, and incentives: Learning from local success stories in service delivery in the Middle East and North Africa." *The World Bank*.
- Brooke, S. (2019) *Winning hearts and votes: Social services and the Islamist political advantage*. Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Brown, K. (2008) "The promise and perils of women's participation in UK mosques: The impact of securitization agendas on identity, gender, and community," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10(3), pp. 472-491.
- Cammett, M. & Luong, P. J. (2014) "Is there an Islamist political advantage?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17, pp. 187-206.
- Ciftci, S. & Bernick, E. M. (2015) "Utilitarian and modern: Clientelism, citizen empowerment, and civic engagement in the Arab World," *Democratization*, 22(7), pp. 1161-1182.
- Clark, J. (2003) *Islam, charity, and activism: Middle class networks and social welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen*. Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press.

- Debuysere, L. (2016) "Tunisian women at the crossroads: Antagonism and agonism between secular and Islamist women's rights movements in Tunisia," *Mediterranean Politics*, 21(2), pp. 226-245.
- Feuer, S. J. (2018) *Regulating Islam: Religion and state in contemporary Morocco and Tunisia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gill, A. (1998) *Rending unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the state in Latin America*. Chicago, I.L.: The University of Chicago Press.
- Goldman, R M., & Pascual, H. (1988) "NAMFREL: Spotlight for democracy," *World Affairs*, 150(4), pp. 223-231.
- Hagopian, F. (2009) *Religious, pluralism, democracy, and the Catholic Church in Latin America*. Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Harris, A., Kao, K., Lust, E., Ewald, J., & Holmgren, P. (2017) "Governance and Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa," *The Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD) Working Paper Series*, Working Paper No. 10.
- Hassan, M. (2012) "Reshaping religious authority in contemporary Turkey: State-sponsored female preachers" in Bano, M., & Kalmbach, H. E. (eds.) *Women, leadership, and mosques: Changes in contemporary Islamic authority*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 85-103.
- Jamal, A. (2005) "The political participation and engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque involvement and group consciousness," *American Politics Research*, 33(4), pp. 521-544.
- Katz, M. (2014). *Women in the mosque: A history of legal thought and social practice*. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press.
- Ketchley, N. & Barrie, C. (2020) "Fridays of revolution: Focal days and mass protest in Egypt and Tunisia," *Political Research Quarterly*, 73(2), pp. 308-324.
- Ketchley, N. & Brooke, S. (2020) "Mosques and Islamic activism." Working Paper.
- Mahmood, S. (2011) *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Masoud, T. (2014) *Counting Islam: Religion, class, and elections in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mecham, Q. (2017) *Institutional origins of Islamist political mobilization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2005) "Women's economics participation in the Middle East: What difference has the neoliberal policy turn made?" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(1), pp. 110-146.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2019), "Women and employment in Tunisia: Structures, institutions, and advocacy," *Sociology of Development*, 5(4), pp. 337-359.

- Nielsen, R. A. (2020) "Women's authority in patriarchal social movements: The Case of female Salafi preachers," *American Journal of Political Science*, 64(1), pp. 52-66.
- Nyhagen, L. (2019) "Mosques as gendered spaces: The complexity of women's compliance with, and resistance to, dominant gender norms, and the importance of male allies," *Religions*, 10(5), pp. 321-336.
- Oladipo, J. (2000) "The role of the church in poverty alleviation in Africa," *Transformation*, 17(4), pp. 146-152.
- Rausch, M. J. (2012) "Women mosque preachers and spiritual guides: Publicizing and negotiating women's religious authority in Morocco" in Bano, M., & Kalmbach, H. E. (eds.) *Women, leadership, and mosques: Changes in contemporary Islamic authority*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 59-83.
- Riedl, R. B. (2012) "Transforming politics, dynamic religion: Religion's political impact in contemporary Africa," *African Conflict and Peace Building Review*, 2(2), pp. 29-50.
- Shannahan, D. S. (2014) "Gender, inclusivity and UK mosque experiences," *Contemporary Islam*, 8(1), pp. 1-16.
- Smith, C. (2014) *Disruptive religion: The force in faith in social movement activism*. Philadelphia, P.A.: Routledge.
- Trejo, G. (2009) "Religious competition and ethnic mobilization in Latin America: Why the Catholic Church promotes movements in Mexico," *The American Political Science Review*, 103(3), pp. 323-342.
- Tripp, Aili Mari, (2019) *Seeking legitimacy: Why Arab autocracies adopt women's rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Hamme, G., Gana, A., & Ben Rebbah, M. (2014) "Social and socio-territorial electoral bases of political parties in post-revolutionary Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19(5), pp. 751-769.
- Wickham, C. R. (2002) *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, activism, and political change in Egypt*. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press.
- Wolf, A. (2013) "An Islamist 'renaissance'? Religion and politics in post-revolutionary Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18(4), pp. 560-573.
- Wolf, A. (2017) *Political Islam in Tunisia: The history of Ennahda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.