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Education and Voter Response to Principled Trade-Offs in Muslim Democracies

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Abstract

We contribute to the policy trade-offs literature by focusing on a principled trade-off that juxtaposes a widely desired objective with a moral belief and by examining how education conditions voters' responses to this trade-off. Through survey experiments in Indonesia and Tunisia, we examine how voters respond to a liberal initiative to relax alcohol restrictions to raise revenue for social security and a conservative initiative to tighten alcohol restrictions even if it decreases social security revenue. We find that voters opposed the liberal initiative and that more educated voters supported the conservative initiative more than their less educated counterparts. These findings highlight the powerful constraints of moral beliefs even in the context of a trade-off with a common good and support the socialization perspective of education that portrays education as an institution that socializes individuals in the society's dominant values—whether liberal or conservative—as opposed to simply a force for liberalization.

Keywords

political trade-off, voter behavior, survey experiment, Muslim societies

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How do voters in religiously conservative societies respond to a policy proposal that, in the pursuit of a common good, engages in a pragmatic economic approach that violates a principled religious norm? How does education, widely regarded as a force for liberalization, condition voters' evaluations of this trade-off between pragmatism and religious principle?

Policy trade-offs are widely studied. Yet, studies have focused on Western democracies and examined narrow trade-offs that concern choosing between economic objectives

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(Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2017; Häusermann et al., 2019; Jacobs, 2016). Another scenario of trade-offs with no less important consequences has received less attention: one that pits a widely valued pragmatic objective against a widely held moral consideration.

To what extent voters are willing to forego pragmatic benefits in exchange for maintaining moral beliefs (or seek benefits by abandoning such beliefs) when the two conflict is unclear. Recent studies on moral beliefs examine trade-offs using partisan issues where competing groups having diverging objectives (Ryan, 2017; Skitka and Morgan, 2014). Such a divergence creates a zero-sum situation where one group's gain is another's loss. We know less whether moral considerations would trump pragmatic objectives when the trade-off is non-partisan and if the pragmatic benefits are widely desired across the ideological spectrum.

We contribute to the policy trade-offs literature in three ways. First, instead of juxtaposing pragmatic objectives, we juxtapose a pragmatic (economic) objective with a principled (religious) consideration. We employ survey experiments to examine how voters respond to a liberal policy initiative to relax alcohol restrictions to raise revenue for social security and a conservative policy initiative to tighten alcohol restrictions even if it means a decrease in revenue for social security.[1]

Second, we examine two Muslim-majority countries that, at the time of the study, were considered democratic: Indonesia and Tunisia; hence promising insights into trade-offs and their electoral consequences in non-Western societies. We also take into account the importance of party ideology (Grewal et al., 2019; Pepinsky et al., 2012). In addition to positions on the alcohol/social security trade-off, we varied the ideology of the political actor as either secular or Islamist. This approach enables us to inquire whether secular or Islamist actors have more leeway than the other when it comes to trade-offs.

Third, we examine how education relates to voter response to the trade-off, hence connecting the literature on trade-offs and the literature on the political effects of education. That education predicts political attitudes and behavior is well documented (Campbell, 2009; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). However, it is unclear how education would relate to evaluations of a trade-off when the trade-off is between pragmatic objectives and moral beliefs.

Our focus on the two Muslim countries affords us a unique position to answer this question. While early research has declared education "the universal solvent" (Converse, 1972: 324) that brings about the demise of the so-called primordial values such as religion (Iannaccone et al., 1998), more recent research has problematized this claim. As opposed to a force of liberalization, education systems in conservative societies can serve as an institution that socializes students in conservative values (Thomsen and Olsen, 2017; Weil, 1985). It is thus an open question whether, when confronted with a trade-off between pragmatic benefits and principled religious norms, more educated individuals would weigh the pragmatic benefits more heavily as the liberalization perspective suggests or follow the religious norms as the socialization perspective suggests.

Our findings are two-fold. First, in both countries, endorsing the liberal initiative (relaxing alcohol restrictions to raise funds for the social security system) is electorally costly. The effect of endorsing the conservative initiative (tightening alcohol restrictions even at the risk of decreased social security revenue) is more mixed with the effect being positive in Indonesia but slightly negative in Tunisia. Second, related to voter education, we find that higher educated voters in both countries are more supportive of the conservative initiative than their less educated counterparts. This pattern is not due to higher educated voters being more wealthy and less likely to view social security as important.

Altogether these findings affirm the powerful constraints of moral beliefs in political trade-offs (Delton et al., 2020; Ryan, 2014; Skitka and Morgan, 2014). They also add to

these studies by highlighting the powerful constraints of moral beliefs even in a trade-off with a widely desired pragmatic benefit. Finally, these findings also lend credence to the perspective of education as an institution that socializes individuals in the dominant values of the society, whether liberal or conservative.

Understanding Trade-Offs

Policy trade-offs are widely studied. Yet, the focus has largely been on pragmatic trade-offs—deciding whether to forego an objective (incurring a cost) to obtain another objective (attaining a benefit). For example, voters may need to choose between social programs and budget deficits (Busemeyer and Garritzmann, 2017; Häusermann et al., 2019), economic inequality and protecting the environment (Armingeon and Bürgisser, 2021), or between security, economic, and electoral reforms (Lotito, 2019). Similarly, governments need to allocate finite resources to different sectors craving for funding (Adolph et al., 2020; Jacobs, 2016). However, pragmatic trade-offs are not the only type of trade-offs. A second type of trade-off, principled trade-off, arises when a desire to achieve an objective conflicts with a moral belief.

Pragmatic Benefits versus Moral Beliefs

Decision making often involves not only cost–benefit calculations, but also a contemplation on whether or not the decision would violate one's moral beliefs (Colombo, 2021; Tavits, 2007). A principled trade-off arises when the achievement of a pragmatic objective violates a moral belief or the upholding of a moral belief hinders the attainment of a valued objective.

Our conceptualization of principled trade-offs is different from Fiske and Tetlock's (1997) taboo trade-offs. While taboo trade-offs involve deciding the values of objects of distinct categories (e.g. the price of one's child), principled trade-offs concern choices from the same category, which in our case is public policy. As we detail below, the two policy choices in our principled trade-off scenario are common and desirable when assessed individually. They create a trade-off because of the different reasons they are valued—one for its pragmatic benefits and the other for its conformity with moral beliefs.

Existing studies on moral beliefs show that approaching an issue from a moralistic perspective corresponds to a greater opposition to compromise and a higher willingness to forego personal benefits if that means hurting the opposition (Arceneaux, 2019; Del Ponte et al., 2021; Delton et al., 2020; Ryan, 2017). There are three reasons why a moral approach to trade-offs can hinder compromise and severely constrain options.

The first relates to the perceived universalism that moral conviction brings to an issue (Skitka and Morgan, 2014). Individuals approaching an issue from a moral standpoint would regard their attitudes objectively true. Opinions are treated as facts and disagreements become intolerable. This hinders perspective-taking essential for compromise and critical thinking needed to navigate difficult trade-offs.

The second reason concerns the emotions moral beliefs invoke. Moralized political attitudes tend to invoke powerful emotions, and moral reasoning in general cannot be separated from emotions (Skitka and Wisneski, 2011; Tangney et al., 2007). Indeed, Garrett and Bankert (2020) show that emotions aroused from regarding political issues as moral issues are responsible for affective polarization and partisan hostilities among the American voters.

The third reason concerns perceptions of fairness (or lack thereof). Because regarding an issue as a moral question leads to a perception of a universal, objective truth and invokes strong emotions, individuals with moralized attitudes are less constrained by norms regulating social interactions such as fairness and reciprocity. The primary consideration is no longer whether the outcome of a trade-off is fair and offers the greatest benefits for all. Rather, the most important consideration is whether the outcome is in accord with one's moral beliefs (Skitka and Morgan, 2014). In the context of a principled trade-off, this tendency would correspond to a higher willingness to reject a compromise that actually benefits all involved parties if that compromise is perceived as violating one's moral beliefs.

Areas of Improvement

Three areas of improvement are evident from the review above. The first concerns the lack of insights from non-Western societies. Polities outside Western democracies often are not characterized by strong ideological and partisan attachments (Johnston, 2006). Instead, political competition may be based on clientelistic and personalistic appeals (Hicken, 2011). This means issue attitudes might not be divisive enough to be moralized and may not be powerful enough to constrain political choices.

The second concerns issue types. Studies have focused on partisan issues, such as social security and same-sex marriage (Ryan, 2014, 2017), interparty attitudes (Del Ponte et al., 2021; Garrett and Bankert, 2020), genetically modified food and animal welfare (Clifford, 2019), marijuana legalization (Luttrell et al., 2019), or civil liberties (Davis and Silver, 2004). Partisan issues are limited as they are a zero-sum game—one group's gain is another group's loss.

It is unclear whether moral beliefs would matter when the trade-off is between a moral belief and a non-partisan policy that is widely desirable. Compromising on one's belief to support a widely desirable policy would not advantage the opposition because the opposition does not exist or is not well-defined. In fact, a willingness to compromise on this type of trade-offs might be the moral thing to do as it could benefit the broader public.

Our study improves these limitations by focusing on two Muslim democracies (Indonesia and Tunisia) and by focusing on an issue that is non-partisan and has a wide public support: affordable healthcare and social security. We contrast this pragmatic objective with a moral belief concerning prohibition of alcohol in Islam.

Our study also responds to a third area of improvement: a lack of attention on heterogeneous effects or moderating variables. We know little about how the effects of moral beliefs vary across individual characteristics and situations. The few studies that tap on the topic have focused on ideology or personality (Arceneaux, 2019; Ryan, 2017; Table 5) or on how the issues themselves are framed (Clifford, 2019; Domke et al., 1998). Beyond these exceptions, it is unclear what and how other individual or contextual characteristics condition the influence of moral beliefs in a trade-off.

We contribute to this question by focusing on education. Education is significant for two reasons. From a practical standpoint, education is often regarded as a remedy for various social ailments (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020; Nie et al., 1996). Policies aimed at improving sociopolitical lives often include educational reforms. Examining how education matters in principled trade-offs would inform us of the potential consequences of generally well-meant policies aimed at improving citizens' levels of education.

From a theoretical viewpoint, education is related to two factors that influence the extent to which moral beliefs shape political opinions: cognitive ability and values system. Education helps individuals to sharpen their cognitive skills. The more individuals rely on analytical thinking to approach a political issue, the more their positions would reflect utilitarian cost–benefit considerations more than black-and-white moral considerations (Derryberry et al., 2005; Greene et al., 2008; Patil et al., 2021).

At the same time, education is also an institution where individuals learn about politics and the world around them, including the notion of right and wrong (Nucci, 2001). This means that education is fundamental in shaping one's moral views and can shape how individuals approach a trade-off that involves a moral belief. These dual roles of education in cultivating cognitive skills and socializing values have different consequences to which we now turn.

Education and the Tale of Two Effects

Scholars have debated what the effect of education on political attitudes actually is. Two competing perspectives are prevalent: the liberalization perspective and the socialization perspective. The liberalization perspective is best reflected in Converse's remark that education "is everywhere the universal solvent, and the relationship is always in the same direction. The higher the education, the greater the 'good' values of the variable" (Converse, 1972: 324).

Subsequent studies support this claim. Education has been linked to higher civic engagement (Campbell, 2009; Galston, 2001), political knowledge (Carpini and Keeter, 1997; Grönlund and Milner, 2006), and trust and tolerance (Borgonovi, 2012; D'Hombres and Nunziata, 2016; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). According to this view, education nurtures liberal attitudes through its effects on cognitive skills (Bobo and Licari, 1989). Schooling enables individuals to think independently and critically assess social phenomena, relying less on stereotypes and emotions and more on rational thinking. Educated individuals are more willing and able to engage in perspective taking and value the merits of opposite viewpoints, making them less dogmatic (Huijgen et al., 2017; Reason, 2011).

This view of education suggests that, in the face of a principled trade-off, education should be related to more valuing of the pragmatic consequences of the policy and less on a black-and-white judgment concerning its morality. This does not mean that educated people abandon moral judgments. It simply suggests that education "liberates" people such that they would be more open to policies with positive public consequences, even if the policies themselves deviate from their moral beliefs.

Another viewpoint on the effect of education emphasizes the socializing effect of education (Coenders and Scheepers, 2003; Selznick and Steinberg, 1969). The socialization perspective contends that, more than simply instilling liberal values, the educational system exposes students to and socializes them in the values and norms of the society.

Educational systems in liberal democracies are more likely to nurture liberal norms than educational systems in autocracies are. Indeed, Weil (1985) notes that: "The impact of education on liberal values is weaker, nonexistent, or sometimes even reversed in non-liberal democracies . . . compared to countries which have been liberal democratic for a long time."

There is ample support for the socialization perspective in the literature. Paglayan (2021) documents instances of authoritarian regimes using education to promote acceptance of status quo. Rosenfeld (2021) suggests that education under authoritarianism plays

an important role in generating a middle class with conservative attitudes, including support for authoritarianism. Wang and Froese (2020) find that higher education leads to more support for restricting political activities of religious leaders and institutions in the communist China. Cross-national studies find that the positive effects of education on acceptance of homosexuality, support for gender equality, acceptance of ethnic outgroups, and acceptance of foreigners are weaker or even reversed in non-democratic countries (Coenders and Scheepers, 2003; Thomsen and Olsen, 2017; Zhang, 2022; Zhang and Brym, 2019).

What this perspective of education suggests in the context of a trade-off between pragmatic benefits and moral beliefs is that education can actually lead to more black-and-white moral reasoning, at least in non-democratic or non-liberal societies. This is because the education system in these societies places a heavier emphasis on adherence to authority and norms more than the education system in liberal societies does.

The Present Study

We examine a trade-off that involves an economic dimension (revenue for social security) and a religiously inspired moral belief (consumption of alcohol) in the context of two Muslim-majority democracies, Indonesia and Tunisia. Religiously inspired moral beliefs are largely absent in the study of policy trade-offs. This is despite religion serving as a source of norms and moral beliefs that affects voters' sociopolitical attitudes and constrains their policy preferences (Albertson, 2015; Grzymala-Busse, 2012; Ysseldyk et al., 2010).

The Cases

We situate our study in the context of Muslim-majority countries. While the political relevance of religion has been documented across countries, it is particularly strong in the context of Muslim-majority countries where the levels of religiosity are high and the governments are deeply involved in religious matters (Fox, 2020). These factors increase the likelihood of religious norms being an important moral consideration for voters regardless of ideology.

We focus on Indonesia and Tunisia as our cases of interest. First, these countries represent two distinct Muslim-majority societies. Tunisia, as a Middle Eastern and North African country, is widely studied in the scholarship of Islam and politics (Ciftci, 2018; Driessen, 2018; Grewal et al., 2019). However, equating Islam to the Arab world can lead to a false equivalence (Stepan and Robertson, 2003). Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority society that comprises about 13% of the world's Muslims offers a setting where Islam as the dominant religion mixes with local, non-Arab culture.

Second, at the time of the study, both Indonesia and Tunisia were examples of Muslim democracies. Ever since the collapse of Soeharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, Indonesia had had four national elections that were both peaceful and free. Similarly, Tunisia was the beacon of hope in the Arab world following the Arab Uprisings, having had three democratic elections, before falling back to authoritarianism following the coup in 2021. The relatively democratic nature of the countries means that voter preferences mattered and politicians would consider these preferences when crafting their positions. This would be different in autocracies where the notion of trade-offs is less consequential due to the weaker public opinion constraints.

The Hypotheses

From the preceding review we derive several hypotheses. Our first prediction is that, given strong religious norms among Indonesians and Tunisians, we expect opposition toward policies that involve violating a moral belief. Voters would react negatively to liberal initiatives or initiatives that, although having positive economic consequences, are against religious values.

> **H1 (Electoral Penalty of Liberal Initiative):** Voters evaluate liberal initiatives negatively.

This opposition to liberal initiatives, however, does not necessarily mean a support for conservative initiatives or initiatives that *further reaffirm* religious norms at the expense of economic considerations. Voters might perceive existing policies as already optimally restrictive and consider more restrictions unnecessary. Our expectation, however, is that a conservative initiative would still appeal to Indonesian and Tunisian voters.

In Indonesia, Islamist agendas and agendas ostensibly aimed at improving "morality" are popular and widely employed by candidates and parties (Buehler, 2016; Tanuwidjaja, 2010). In Tunisia, while being known as less conservative than several other Muslim-majority countries (see Figure 1), socially conservative agendas are nonetheless still popular. This is evidenced, among others, by the strong opposition to an attempt to reform the inheritance law to give equal inheritance to men and women (Grewal, 2018).

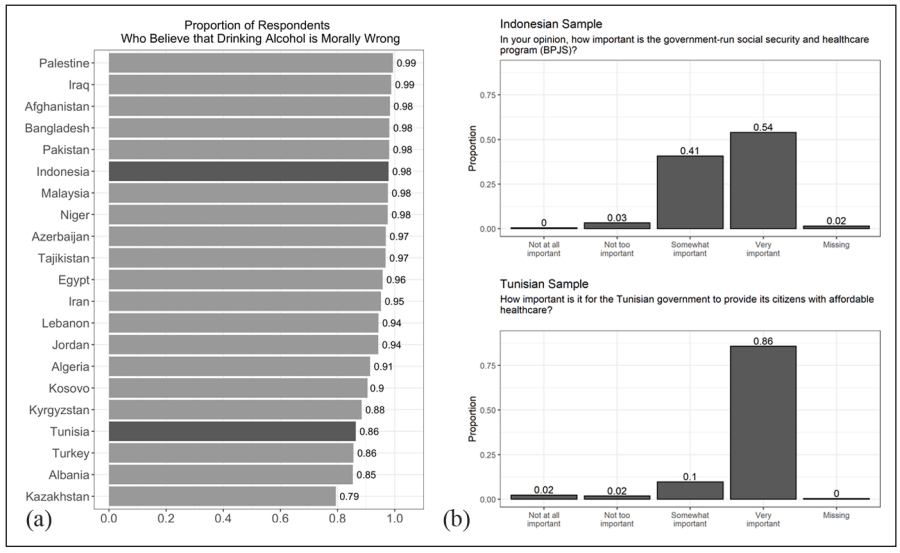

Figure 1. Attitudes Toward Alcohol Consumption and Social Security Programs. (a) Attitudes Toward Alcohol Consumption (Pew Research Center, 2013). (b) Support for Social Security Programs (Own Surveys).
There is an almost universal opposition against alcohol and a universal support for social security programs. This showcases how the two issues are non-partisan and non-polarizing, and sets the stage for our trade-off scenarios.

H2 (Electoral Benefit of Conservative Initiative): Voters evaluate conservative initiatives positively.

On the effects of education, given the debate on the liberalizing and socializing effects of education, two predictions are evident. The first prediction follows from the liberalization perspective or the notion that education should lead to more liberal attitudes and less simplistic moral reasoning. Given the strong religious norms in our cases, we do not expect these liberal attitudes to mean a complete turn-around where education makes individuals support liberal initiatives or oppose conservative initiatives. Rather, we expect this liberalizing effect to manifest among more educated respondents either as a smaller electoral penalty for endorsing liberal initiatives, a smaller electoral benefit for endorsing conservative initiatives, or both.

The second prediction is based on the socialization perspective or the notion that education primarily socializes individuals in the dominant values of the society. Here, we are interested in the religious norms that permeate both societies. Accordingly, following the socialization perspective, we can predict that, relative to less educated respondents, more educated respondents would exhibit either a stronger electoral penalty for liberal initiatives, a stronger electoral benefit for conservative initiatives, or both.

H3A (Liberalization Hypothesis): Compared with less educated respondents, more educated respondents should exhibit either a weaker resistance to the liberal initiative, a weaker support for the conservative initiative, or both.

H3B (Socialization Hypothesis): Compared with less educated respondents, more educated respondents should exhibit either a stronger resistance to the liberal initiative, a stronger support for the conservative initiative, or both.

The Issues

Our experiment provided a hypothetical description of a new political party that either proposes a liberal initiative, a conservative initiative, or neither. We used a new party to minimize the possibility of respondents' views on existing parties influencing their readings of our treatments.[2] To emphasize the trade-off, we explicitly described the liberal initiative as aiming to relax alcohol restrictions to raise revenue for social security and the conservative initiative as aiming to tighten alcohol restrictions despite the potential loss of social security revenue.

Two features of our treatment are noteworthy: novelty and realism. Concerning novelty, our trade-offs are different from ones examined in existing studies because they juxtapose a widely held moral belief against a widely valued policy (Al-Ansari et al., 2016; Bird, 2015). Here, the moral belief concerns the impermissibility of alcohol. Several verses in the Qur'an and hadiths (prophetic traditions) clearly forbid alcohol. One verse, for example, states that "They ask you about wine (intoxicants) and gambling. Say, 'There is great evil in both, as well as some benefit for people—but the evil outweighs the benefit'" (Qur'an 2:219).

That the prohibition is explicitly stated in the canonical texts (*nass*) arguably contributes to the relatively universal opposition against alcohol among Muslims and in Muslim-majority societies. On the individual and attitudinal levels, with the explicitness of the texts and the virtual consensus on the topic among ulema, it would be challenging for the

average Muslim to deny the impermissibility of alcohol. As Figure 1(a) shows, there are indeed overwhelming negative attitudes toward alcohol in Muslim-majority countries (see Figure 1(a)). On the policy level, negative attitudes toward alcohol among the Muslim populace and pressures from Muslim organizations arguably contribute to restrictive policies on its consumption and distribution (Buehler, 2016).

The widely valued policy, however, is concerned with the practically universal support for social security programs (see Figure 1(b)). Social service provisions and social justice are popular and positively valued objectives in Muslim societies (Brooke, 2019; Cammett and Luong, 2014; e.g. Çiftçi, 2022). However, while these programs are widely supported, they are about policy preferences more than about moral beliefs.

Social justice is a constant theme in authoritative Islamic texts. The Qur'an and hadiths, for example, mention wealth distribution and means of looking after the poor, such as through zakat and sadaqah. Yet, they do not explicitly prescribe that such social assistance is the sole responsibility of the government. They also do not prescribe that the government must arrange for a particular type of social security and healthcare program.

In that case, while social justice may be a moral belief, a government-run social security program that is the focus of our study is not. It is a policy preference. Some Muslims may believe that social assistance is the responsibility of the government while some others believe that it is the responsibility of the society. Indeed, even when Islamist movements provide social services, they often tie these services to political support or mobilization (Brooke, 2019; Cammett and Issar, 2010). That attitudes toward social security programs are policy attitudes, in turn, mean that our trade-off truly pits a widely held moral belief (on alcohol) against a widely held policy preference (on government-run social security).

Concerning realism, our treatment corresponds to the political reality in both countries where alcohol taxes already provide the state with a reliable source of revenue. Alcohol taxes annually contributed about USD 520 million to the Indonesian government with the number increasing every year (CNN Indonesia, 2020). In Tunisia, annual state revenues from taxes on alcoholic beverages exceeded USD 150 million in 2018, a 250% increase from the last decade (OECD. Stat, 2018). Taxes on alcohol products are also easier to implement compared with, for instance, income tax (Bird, 2015).

Furthermore, it is not inconceivable in both countries for politicians to take a rather relaxed position on alcohol sales to reap the fiscal benefits. The government of Jakarta, for example, owns significant shares in a beer company, and receives annual dividends from it, despite divestiture promises by the Islamists-backed governor. Similarly, the Islamist Ennahda leadership in Tunisia reassured the industry after the revolution in 2011 that alcohol sales would not be banned (Amara, 2012). Indeed, Tunisian local brew Celtia recorded some of its strongest increases in consumption in the first 2 years of the revolution, while the Ennahda-led Troika government was in power (Ghorbal, 2017).

The realism is also validated when we think of alcohol policies as a spectrum. On the one end of the spectrum are countries that implement a total (or near total) prohibition of alcohol, for example, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. On the other end are countries that have open attitudes toward alcohol and little or no problems raising revenues from alcohol sales—no Muslim societies may fit this description, but Western countries would be good examples. Our cases would lie in the middle of this spectrum, which are ideal for our trade-off scenarios. The scenarios arguably would not have realism in contexts where alcohol sales are either fully banned or not controversial at all.[3]

Having two policy treatment groups (the liberal and the conservative initiative groups) to compare with a control group enables us to examine how these policies may have

different effects. We do not have to assume that rejecting a relaxation means a support for more restrictions (or vice versa). This follows studies on issue framing. Whether a question is framed as a gain or a loss potential (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Mercer, 2005) or as relaxing or tightening alcohol regulations can elicit different responses that are not always opposites of each other. A person might be strongly opposed to a relaxation of alcohol regulations, but indifferent to the idea of making the regulations stricter than they already are.

The Confounders: Ideology and Economic Status

We account for two factors that might affect how voters evaluate a trade-off. The first factor is the political actor's ideology—who engages in the trade-off? Studies on issue ownership suggest that voters associate certain issues with certain parties and perceive the owner of an issue as more authoritative on that issue (Egan, 2013; Petrocik, 1996). As our trade-off involves a religiously inspired moral belief, it is plausible that voter response to this trade-off would depend on whether the party proposing the trade-off is Islamist or non-Islamist.

It is possible that the electoral penalty for endorsing the liberal initiative would be weaker for an Islamist than a non-Islamist party because Islamist parties "own" religious issues. When an Islamist party relaxes alcohol restrictions for the purpose of strengthening social security, voters might be less likely to think of the trade-off as an attack to their religious values. Our study accounts for this ideological factor by describing the party proposing the trade-off as either Islamist or non-Islamist.

Another confounder that we consider is socioeconomic status. Is education simply a proxy for higher socioeconomic status? If that is the case, support for or opposition to the two initiatives would simply reflect the extent to which the voter needs affordable social security. Higher educated voters, who likely have higher economic status, might endorse the conservative initiative and oppose the liberal initiative because they are not in need of social security. Conversely, lower educated voters might oppose the conservative initiative and support the liberal initiative because they are dependent on the social security system.

Our study accounts for this possibility through three approaches. First, we show that virtually all respondents in both countries regardless of education consider an effective social security system important. Second, we show that our results hold up even with the inclusion of an extensive set of covariates, including income. Third, we show that our results do not replicate when we substitute education with income. All these suggest that it is education, not income, that is responsible for the empirical patterns we discover below.

Data and Methods

To test these hypotheses, we carried out two original surveys in Indonesia and Tunisia. The Indonesian survey was conducted in the capital Jakarta in November 2016. A stratified random sampling was used to sample eligible voters. Urban wards (kelurahan) were sampled and used as the primary sampling unit. A list of neighborhoods (*Rukun Tetangga*) was obtained from each ward and households were selected from each sampled neighborhood. One respondent was then selected from each household. A total of 1195 respondents were interviewed face to face, of which 1047 were Muslim.

The nationally representative survey in Tunisia was fielded in December 2017. It covered all governorates, which were proportionally broken down by population size into sectors (imadah) as the primary sampling unit. Households were randomly selected from

each sector and one respondent was chosen from each household. Nine hundred respondents were interviewed face to face, of which 894 were Muslim. In the Online Supplemental Appendix we show that the characteristics of our samples resemble those of other surveys and the official statistics.

Our experimental design crossed a three-level policy treatment (liberal initiative, conservative initiative, or neither) with a two-level party ideology treatment. The two-level ideology treatment (Islamist vs the nation's ideology Pancasila in Indonesia and Islamist vs secular in Tunisia) means that we do not have a true control for party ideology. This should not harm our study as Indonesian and Tunisian voters indeed perceive secular-religious divide between parties (Fossati et al., 2020; Wegner and Cavatorta, 2019). Furthermore, our interest is in examining how ideology conditions voter response to a trade-off, not in examining Islamist electoral advantage which is already widely studied (Grewal et al., 2019; Pepinsky et al., 2012).

Our three-level policy treatment was identical in Indonesia and Tunisia with the exception of the baseline group (Table 1). The Indonesian baseline was that the party intending to maintain the status quo whereas the Tunisian baseline simply gave respondents no information about alcohol policies. We intentionally chose "relax" and "tighten" to convey neither a complete deregulation or a complete ban of alcohol. This should reduce the likelihood of respondents attaching an extreme interpretation to our treatments.[4]

In both countries, it is not unrealistic for an Islamist party to advocate relaxing alcohol restrictions or a secular party to advocate putting in more restrictions. Buehler (2016) shows that most of the local elites who passed sharia bylaws in Indonesia, which often include restrictions on alcohol, came from secular parties. Similarly, an Islamist party being open to relaxing alcohol restrictions is also not implausible.

Islamist parties in Jakarta have been tight-lipped about the provincial government's keeping shares in and receiving dividends from a beer company, as mentioned above. Realizing the economic potential of alcohol sales, local elites who advocate for sharia laws often are opposed to a complete ban on alcohol (Buehler, 2016: 25). Even Islamist parties understand the utility of alcohol sales to generate revenues and might advocate it, even if only subtly.

Similarly, in Tunisia, while Salafis occasionally promote the idea of alcohol restrictions, the ban of alcohol has not been a significant policy position even among Islamists. If anything, the Tunisian government actually raised alcohol taxes on several occasions (e.g. in 2013, 2015, and 2022) to increase revenue and as a response to the crumbling economy. In short, both in Indonesia and Tunisia, it is not inconceivable for parties to pursue policies that seem to be at odds with their ideologies.

Our dependent variable is a binary variable that captures whether the respondent would vote for the described new party. An intention to vote for the party was given a score of 1 and an intention not to vote for the party was given a score of 0. Respondents were excluded from the analysis if they refused to answer the question. Across all experimental categories, 21.5% of the Indonesian and 15% of the Tunisian respondents would vote for the new party, 65% of the Indonesian and 80.5% of the Tunisian respondents would not vote for the party, and 13.5% of the Indonesian and 4.5% of the Tunisian respondents refused to answer the question.

To ensure comparable operationalizations in both countries, we represent education with a binary variable that indicates whether or not the respondent had a high school degree. Using a continuous measure of education does not change the substantive

Table 1. Treatment Wording.

Indonesia:
Suppose that there were a new political party. You do not know much about the party's programs except that the party is based on
- [Islam]
- [Pancasila]

and that it
- [wants to continue the current policies regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages]
- [wants to relax the current policies regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages to raise revenue for the social security system]
- [wants to tighten the current policies regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages even if that means decreased revenue for the social security system]

Would you vote for the party? (Yes / No / Don't Want to Answer)

Tunisia:
Suppose that there were a new political party. You do not know much about the party's programs except that it is a(n)
- [Islamist]
- [secularist]

party
- [no additional sentence]
- [and that it wants to relax the current policies regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages to raise revenue for the social security system]
- [and that it wants to tighten the current policies regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages even if that means decreased revenue for the social security system]

Would you vote for the party? (Yes / No / Don't Want to Answer)

findings and is available in the Online Supplemental Appendix. About 65% of the Muslim respondents in Jakarta and 51.5% in Tunisia had high school education.

Our survey experiments, like other survey-based studies, face the issue of social desirability. Do voters respond to our scenarios in the same way as they would in the real life? Our experiments illuminate, with a high degree of causal validity, how voters would behave on a normative level when confronted with a trade-off situation. Normative responses may be similar or different from real-world behavior (Incerti, 2020). However, normative responses highlight what voters regard as desirable or undesirable, and thus are a critical first step to understand how voters approach a principled trade-off (McDermott, 2011).

Results

We employed logistic regression models to test the hypotheses, separately for the Indonesian and the Tunisian data. We employed sampling weight provided in the Tunisian data. As religions other than Islam in both countries do not have as strong opposition against alcohol consumption, leading to our non-Muslim respondents being unlikely to perceive a trade-off between alcohol and social security, we analyzed only Muslim respondents. Table 2 presents results from the logistic regression models.

Columns 1 and 2 present the treatment effects from Indonesia and Tunisia. Figure 2 translates these estimates into predicted changes in the probability of voting for the party. In the Indonesian sample, on average, the Islamist party receives 7.7 points higher support than the Pancasila (non-Islamist) party. The number is slightly higher in Tunisia with the Islamist party being favored by 10.50 points. Endorsing a relaxation of alcohol

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models of Voting for the Party.

DV: Vote for Party	Indonesia	Tunisia	Indonesia	Tunisia	Indonesia	Tunisia
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Islamist	0.542**	0.803***	0.442	1.066**	0.802*	1.075**
	(0.182)	(0.234)	(0.302)	(0.340)	(0.319)	(0.341)
Lib. Initiative	-1.871***	-1.873***	-2.704***	-2.276***	-1.308**	-1.391**
	(0.343)	(0.341)	(0.753)	(0.534)	(0.488)	(0.460)
Con. Initiative	1.520***	-0.513*	0.745*	-0.958**	1.700***	-0.207
	(0.195)	(0.250)	(0.312)	(0.368)	(0.307)	(0.387)
High School (HS)			-0.511	-0.171		
			(0.379)	(0.398)		
Islamist × HS			0.123	-0.732		
			(0.381)	(0.450)		
Lib. Initiative × HS			1.188	1.100		
			(0.851)	(0.678)		
Con. Initiative × HS			1.223**	1.233*		
			(0.402)	(0.490)		
Islamist × Lib. Initiative					-1.005	-0.755
					(0.694)	(0.658)
Islamist × Con. Initiative					-0.300	-0.504
					(0.399)	(0.505)
Constant	-1.704***	-1.463***	-1.378***	-1.451***	-1.863***	-1.624***
	(0.187)	(0.203)	(0.286)	(0.288)	(0.253)	(0.260)
Observations	858	853	857	853	858	853

DV: dependent variable.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

policies, even if intended to raise revenue for social security, is electorally costly. This position led to a 26.8 points lower support in Indonesia and 24.5 points lower support in Tunisia.

The effect of tightening alcohol policies, at the risk of decreased revenue for social security, is more mixed. The treatment led to 21.7 points higher support among the Indonesian respondents but a slight decrease of support (6.7 points) among the Tunisian respondents. This might reflect Indonesians' stronger anti-alcohol attitudes and Tunisians' opposition to excessive religious regulations. As Figure 1 shows, Tunisia is one of the least conservative Muslim-majority countries on this issue. Tunisians might perceive moderate Islamists favorably; yet, they can be resistant to policies perceived as an effort to further Islamize the society.

Next, we test whether education conditions the effects of ideology and position on alcohol policies. We interacted the dummy variable representing high school education with each of the treatment dummies. The results are presented as Columns 3 and 4 in Table 2. Figure 3 visualizes these logistic coefficients as marginal effects.

The results from this interaction model are similar in both samples. In both the Tunisian and Indonesian data, we find no significant interactions between education and the liberal initiative treatment. The negative effect of relaxing alcohol policies is the same between respondents with and without high school education. To the contrary, in both samples, we find a positive and statistically significant interaction between education and

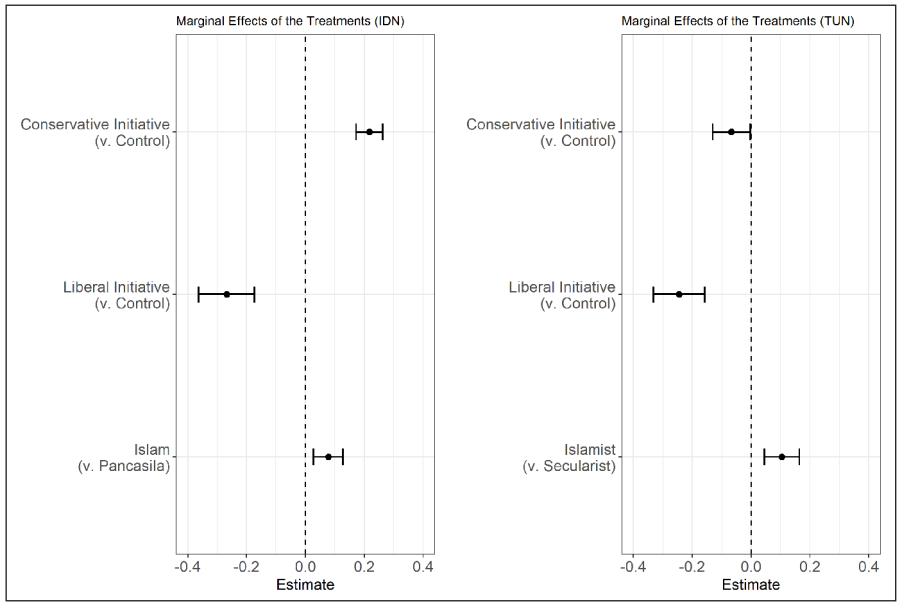

Figure 2. Main Effects of the Treatments on Voting Likelihood.
The liberal initiative is electorally costly in both Indonesia and Tunisia. The effects of the conservative initiative are more mixed—positive in Indonesia but slightly negative in Tunisia. In terms of ideology, respondents in both Indonesia and Tunisia favored an Islamist party more than a non-Islamist party.

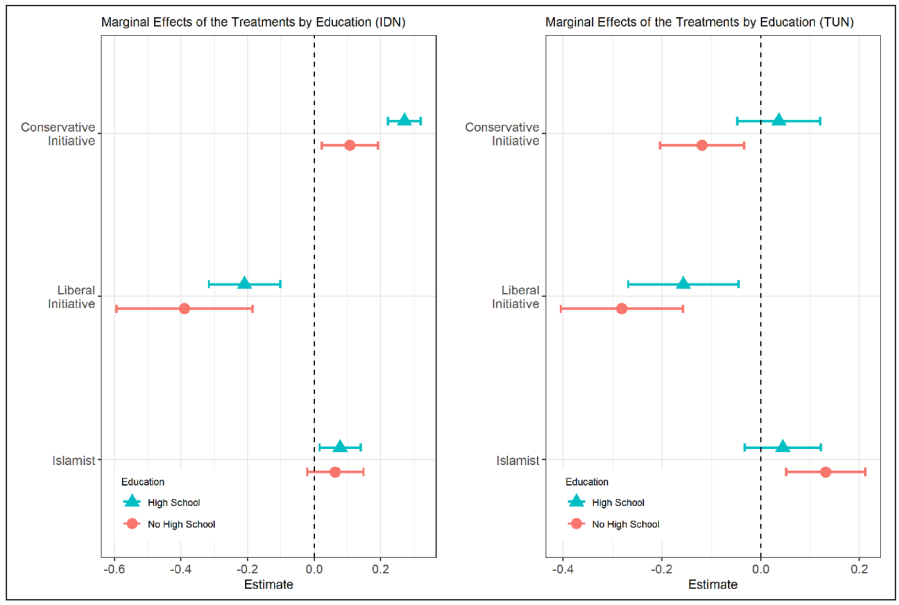

Figure 3. Treatment Effects by Education Level.
Both in Indonesia and in Tunisia, the magnitudes of the negative effect of the liberal initiative are the same among high school graduates and non-graduates. However, the positive effect of the conservative initiative is stronger among high school graduates than non-graduates, offering evidence for the socialization hypothesis.

the conservative initiative. This positive interaction suggests that high school graduates evaluated the party that wants to tighten alcohol policies more positively than non-high school graduates did.[5]

How robust are these results to the influence of party ideology and the possibility that education simply reflects social status? To probe the moderating role of ideology, we interacted the party ideology treatment with the party position on alcohol policies, presenting the results as Columns 5 and 6 of Table 2. None of the interaction effects are significant. This suggests that the main effects of alcohol policies in Columns 1 and 2 are largely similar for the Islamist and non-Islamist parties.

To test the possibility that education simply acts as a proxy for social status, we present in the Online Supplemental Appendix regression models that incorporate demographic and political control variables. Results from these models are substantively identical to our models in Table 2. In another robustness test for social status available in the Online Supplemental Appendix, we also interacted income with the treatments. We find no similar interaction effects as ones in Table 2. This affirms that, while education and socioeconomic status might be correlated, our results are not driven by education simply serving as a proxy for such status.

To connect these results to our hypotheses: Our results highlight the negative effect of the liberal initiative. Advocating a policy that is against a religiously inspired moral belief (advocating a relaxation of alcohol regulations), even in exchange for a widely desired pragmatic benefit, elicits a negative response from the voters. Our results also support the socialization hypothesis. Compared with less educated voters, more educated voters are more supportive of the socially conservative initiative of making alcohol regulations stricter.

We find no evidence for the liberalization hypothesis. The interaction between education and the liberal initiative is not statistically significant in both samples, suggesting that high school graduates are not more open to the liberal initiative than non-high school graduates.

Furthermore, in none of our samples are more educated voters supportive of the liberal initiative. Taken together, our evidence suggests that, as opposed to a device for an across-the-board liberalization, education serves more as an institution that socializes individuals to the norms and values of the society where they belong, which in our case are norms regarding the immorality of alcohol consumption.

Discussion

We examine how voters respond to a trade-off between a pragmatic benefit and a religiously inspired moral belief and how education conditions these responses. We find that trading off a religious norm (prohibition of alcohol) for an economic goal (strengthening the social security system) is electorally costly. We also find that higher educated voters are more supportive of tightening alcohol restrictions, even if such a move would reduce revenue for social security.

These findings contribute to our understanding of policy trade-offs and the political consequences of education in two ways. On trade-offs, we highlight moral beliefs as a potent source of political constraints. Moral beliefs constrain political actors by discouraging compromise (Arceneaux, 2019; Ryan, 2017). We add to this by showing that moralized attitudes also limit the policy options that politicians can opt for in the pursuit of an otherwise valued goal. Our respondents believed that it is important for the government

to provide a robust social security system. Yet, despite this support, they are unwilling to attain this valued goal through a policy they deem violating their religious belief (relaxing alcohol restrictions).

This finding showcases the difficulties of governing in a polity where a significant number of issues are approached as moral matters. Our study focuses on a religious issue. But, moralized attitudes can also result from other cleavages, such as ethnicity, ideology, or even national identity. There is evidence that how an attitude becomes moralized is more about how it is framed than about what policy domain it is in (Clifford, 2019; Luttrell et al., 2019).

The importance of political processes in influencing what attitudes become moralized suggests a potential research avenue that connects the literature on trade-off, moralized attitudes, and polarization in comparative contexts. What types of attitudes are more likely to be moralized in polities where parties are not ideologically distinct and party-voter linkage is more clientelistic than programmatic? Are moralized attitudes in weakly institutionalized polities more or less immutable than similar attitudes in more institutionalized polities?

The second implication concerns the effects of education. As opposed to education being a universal solvent that unequivocally improves the quality of political life, we show that the effect of education is context dependent. In less liberal contexts, education could hinder liberalization by serving as a socialization institution that instills in the students the society's dominant conservative values, as opposed to independence and critical thinking.

While this finding contradicts ones obtained from Western societies that document the liberalizing effects of education, it is not new in the context of Muslim societies. Studies on the effects of education in Muslim countries have shown how education may contribute to stronger beliefs that terrorist attacks against the United States are justified (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2004), traditional gender stereotypes (Asadullah, 2016; Islam and Asadullah, 2018), or confessional divides (Leirvik, 2004).

A caveat is in order. We do not argue that education does not matter or that it does not have beneficial effects on democracy. Even our findings show hints of these salutary effects. The more educated respondents were less opposed to the liberal initiative than the less educated respondents (although the interactions were not statistically significant). This suggests that even in conservative societies education still shapes liberal attitudes. It is just these effects are overshadowed by conservative values that education participants are exposed to in the system.

Author's Note

M Tahir Kilavuz is also affliated to Harvard University, USA

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Supplementary Information

Additional supplementary information may be found with the online version of this article.

Contents

Notes

1. While in Western contexts bigger social programs are generally understood as liberal and smaller programs as conservative, our use of liberal and conservative initiatives refers to the position on alcohol restrictions.
2. Both Indonesia and Tunisia have multiparty systems and it is quite common to see new parties every few years. After the first democratic election in 1999, Indonesia has had four legislative elections (2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019) and each of these elections featured multiple new parties. The Tunisian experience was the same. New parties emerged between the 2011 and the 2014 elections, which led some observers to recommend measures to "force a drastic reduction in the number of political parties" (Ottaway, 2021).
3. Alcohol tax is certainly not the only "sin tax" or morally controversial strategy to fund social programs. Lotteries and gambling are another example. In Turkey, the national state institute, *Milli Piyango İdaresi*, regulates lotteries since 1939 and raises money for programs such as defense industry, higher education, and social services (Milli Piyango İdaresi, 2023). In countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, the state provides gambling licenses to international hotels in return of significant gaming taxes (Gallaway and Tottenham, 2019). The recently initiated Emirati lottery, justified by the Abu Dhabi Religious Authority, is another example (Hammond, 2020). We focus on alcohol policies for two reasons. First, it fits our cases' Muslim contexts better. While gambling is forbidden or strongly discouraged by all or most religions, alcohol prohibition is particularly strong in Islam. A distinctively held moral belief should exert more influence on attitudes as it serves as a marker that most optimally differentiates one's ingroup from another group (Brewer, 1991). Second, around the world alcohol taxes seem to be more common than gambling or other sin taxes. Indonesia, for example, allows alcohol consumption and sales but completely bans gambling. Tunisia allows gambling but only in brick-and-mortar casinos and only for foreigners. We nonetheless encourage future research to replicate and extend our study using other issues.
4. The attentive reader might note that some respondents could interpret less restrictions as lower alcohol taxes and more restrictions as higher alcohol taxes. This interpretation would harm our study by voiding the trade-offs—for example, the conservative initiative would achieve the goals of both restricting alcohol and raising revenue for social security. This is unlikely given our treatment wording in the native languages. Our use of "relax" (*mempermudah* or يسهّل) and "tighten" (*memperketat* or يصعّب) made clear that the policy was about alcohol distribution, not about lowering or raising alcohol taxes (see Online Supplemental Appendix).
5. The reader might point out that the non-high school respondents in Indonesia were supportive of the conservative initiative while their Tunisian counterparts were opposed to it. One explanation is that Islamist agendas targeting morality are more widely utilized as political strategies in Indonesia, leading to Indonesians being less resistant to (if not supportive of) the ideas. The same is not true in Tunisia where opposition to alcohol itself is weaker (see Figure 1), making an agenda to restrict alcohol less appealing than it is in Indonesia. This lower utility of alcohol restriction in Tunisia became even lower when the respondent considered that it could entail a decrease in social security revenue, leading the non-high

school graduates (who were more likely to be impacted by such a decrease) to be opposed to the conservative initiative.

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