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Utilitarian and modern: clientelism, citizen empowerment, and civic engagement in the Arab world

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In this article, we examine the patterns of civic engagement in non-democratic and democratizing polities of the Arab world. The theoretical argument incorporates two perspectives: modernization theory and utilitarianism. Specifically, we use *wasta*-seeking behaviour and indicators of human capital and citizen empowerment to explain the micro-level foundations of civic engagement. We build on the implications of these approaches to explain the civic gender gap and women's status in Arab societies. The results of a series of multivariate estimations using the first wave of the Arab Barometer Survey show that clientelistic behaviour along with higher levels of education and employment status explain citizens' involvement in various forms of civic activities. We argue that the former helps sustain traditional authoritarian structures and the latter may help democratization by strengthening civil society. We also detect a civic gender gap and find that citizen empowerment and modernization may narrow this gap in accordance with the democratic norms whereas utilitarian behaviour may generate a similar effect to indirectly undermine the status of women. These findings provide new insights about the complex interdependence of human development, clientelistic networks, women's status, and democratization in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

Keywords: civic engagement; clientelism; modernization; *wasta*; Arab Barometer; gender gap; Arab world

Introduction

In advanced democracies, civic engagement is instrumental in forming a civic culture that nourishes effective governance and democratic legitimacy. This is the key ingredient for building a civil society conducive to increased political knowledge, trust, tolerance, and respect for pluralistic views.¹ This rationale, however, does not fully apply to the authoritarian and democratizing polities found in the Middle East. The lack of independent civil society along with the patriarchal culture has been linked to the lack of democracy in the region. Long before

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the Arab Spring, when the third wave of democratization missed the Middle East, some scholars of the region jumped on the bandwagon of civil society promotion for a cure.² However, keen observers of the region aptly concluded that the existing regimes did offer limited and state-controlled opportunities for civil society. As such, in these regimes, civil society helped authoritarian leaders to maintain civically motivated collective action threatening the status quo.³

The diligence of Arab citizens for civic involvement in Arab polities, as exemplified in instances such as the Arab Spring, makes the study of this topic timely and important. Why do citizens engage in civic activities in the Arab world when it is limited and controlled? Further complicating this issue is the fact that the status of women and traditional gender beliefs are cited among the main causes of the democracy gap in Muslim societies.⁴ Although women have been very active during and after the Arab Spring, gender-based differences in patterns of engagement have significant implications for understanding the civic culture and democratization in the region. The fact that there is very little understanding of these differences stands in sharp contrast to the widespread policy efforts (for example, United Nations (UN) gender mainstreaming policies) aimed at women's empowerment. Examining what motivates citizens in general and whether the patterns of civic engagement differ for women, in particular, will allow us to have a better understanding of civic culture in authoritarian and transitioning Arab regimes.

The literature on civic engagement and political participation in non-democracies has led to two explanations: utilitarianism and modernization. The utilitarian approach focuses on clientelistic behaviour, such as *wasta-seeking*,⁵ whereas the modernizationist approach focuses on the development of human capital, education, and citizen empowerment.⁶ Both approaches are highly salient and have significant implications for understanding the civic gender gap and women's empowerment in the Middle East. We follow in the footsteps of this literature and examine *utilitarian* behaviour embedded in traditional patronage structures and individual *modernization* reflected in advancement of human capital to explain civic participation. We argue that individuals will be more likely to civically engage thanks to their empowerment in accordance with the logic found in democratic politics, but at the same time the patronage/clientelist networks will provide a utilitarian venue for increased participation. While the former rationale may help develop a civic culture in an ideal democratic sense, the latter may undermine it by strengthening the traditional structures enhancing authoritarianism. Both approaches are instrumental in understanding the status of women and their empowerment as the same civic engagement patterns are likely to prevail for women. While advancements in human capital may increase women's civic participation, seeking utilitarian outcomes may generate the same effect only to indirectly enhance the traditional gender relations.

We test the implications of these theories for various forms of civic engagement, ranging from political interest to attendance at demonstrations and political campaigns. We use the first Arab Barometer Survey and examine individual

behaviour in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen. The results of our general model show that utilitarian behaviour and individuals' modernization explain a good deal of variation in civic engagement among Arab citizens. The same theoretical logic explains women's participation, but women lag behind men in the civic sphere. The civic gender gap narrows, however, if women use *wasta*, are highly educated, and have a public presence thanks to employment. Overall, the results provide new insights about the motivations behind civic engagement, women's empowerment, and the relation of these factors to democratization in Arab societies.

Civic engagement in the Arab world

We argue that civic engagement is a function of utilitarian and modernizationist factors in Arab polities. The utilitarian explanations focus on *wasta* and belief in regime legitimacy, emphasizing how the individual seeks to achieve personal goals. During the wave of political reforms in the 1980s and early 1990s in the Middle East, the existing regimes endorsed new opportunities for the creation of civil society organizations. However, this civil sector was largely infused into a bureaucratic and legal domain that allowed states to manipulate civic engagement by providing utilitarian incentives.⁷

Amaney Jamal⁸ argues that the creation of civil societies in non-democratic states does not lead to democratic citizenship, but rather becomes a tool of authoritarian regimes. In these settings, civic engagement does not make citizens more likely to support the cause of democratization or accountability. Rather, civil involvement may promote the existing power relations and prevent the emergence of a democratic culture. Jamal also finds that those who are engaged in civil organizations are neither more likely to hold values like trust, tolerance, and support for democracy nor have tendencies to be participant citizens. Civic engagement, under these conditions, may be an indicator of regime support. Jamal⁹ goes on to explain this puzzle with two related factors: the weight of the centralized state in the civic sphere and the structure of clientelistic networks in Arab polities. In regimes where a highly centralized state clientelism prevails, state-sponsored associations will have an asymmetrical advantage in accessing government resources and benefits over independent civic associations. Thus, a good number of civic associations will build close relations with the state clientelistic machine and draw utilitarian-minded engagers.

Past research about electoral participation in the Arab polities¹⁰ has found that people participate in elections to gain access to state resources and establish ties to a clientelistic network known as *wasta*. *Wasta* is an Arabic word derived from the word *waseet* which refers to "a person (or person's action) who intercedes through the use of influence to garner favour, often unmerited, for another person".¹¹ It is well known that *wasta* is a common practice in most of the Arab world, but it is by no means a mechanism unique to this culture. It is similar to other types of *favouritism* practices taking the form of nepotism, *guanxi*, *jeitinho*, or networking in other

settings.¹² Wasta, however, differs from these other practices where it is a “fairly tolerable, socially acceptable practice even when its use represents behaviour that is viewed as reprehensible and contrary to conscience, morality or law”.¹³

Wasta-seeking may motivate individuals to develop a civic activism that will better connect them to clientelist networks. Although many individuals will be critical of wasta on ethical grounds, it will nonetheless serve as an instrument that will provide benefits.¹⁴ Individuals may develop an interest in political issues, may become members of civic organizations, or engage in civic activities for the sake of gaining access to wasta. This mechanism, if proved, will be troublesome for development of a civic culture conducive to democracy. If individuals engage in wasta-seeking, this may strengthen the traditional authoritarian structures linking citizens’ interests to corrupt state authorities (that is, patronage/clientelist structures) and hence undermine an independent civil society. In effect, Lust-Okar¹⁵ has shown that wasta-seeking through competitive clientelism undermines democratic representation by turning elections from policy contests to races over access to state resources. A similar pattern may apply to the civil sphere and open civic action to the manipulation of the autocrats. In this setting, the act of civic engagement supports traditional authoritarian structures by connecting citizens to state resources rather than leading to an independent private sphere that makes the demands for better public policy and accountability possible. In Arab societies civic associations become instruments of wasta-seeking and serve as intermediaries between citizens as clients and political patrons as the agents of the state.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who utilize wasta are more likely to engage in civic activities.

A similar utilitarian logic can be instrumental in connecting beliefs about regime efficacy to civic engagement. We argue that individuals will be active in civic life if they advocate and lend legitimacy to the existing system. Those holding favourable views of the existing system will be more likely to engage to show their support and to continue to gain benefits provided through civic activities. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who hold strong beliefs about regime efficacy are more likely to engage in civic activities.

In addition to seeing a citizen as one who engages for purely utilitarian reasons, we also use theories of modernization to help understand civic participation and engagement. As far back as Lipset in 1959, scholars have argued that economic development leads to social and cultural changes that are necessary conditions for democracy.¹⁶ According to the classic modernization theory, the rise of democracy in developing countries is the result of an increasingly modern socio-economic and urban system that leads to greater education, employment, and wealth.¹⁷ Furthermore, advances in human capital may lead to a value change (that is, cultural modernization),¹⁸ which is more compatible with democratic

values. At the same time, as Inglehart and Welzel have recognized recently, traditions and religion may coexist with modern structures.¹⁹

While the bulk of the research on modernization theory has tended to focus on the spread and support for democratic values and structures²⁰ we believe that modernization can help to explain the presence of an engaged citizenry. Insofar as individual-level implications of modernization theory are considered, modernization generates improvements in the education and wealth of people. Citizens who appreciate civic and democratic values may emerge as a by-product of this process. The same reasons that lead to civic activism in modern societies may also be relevant in Arab polities. The explanatory logic will rely on the “resources model” which contends that participation hinges on social and economic resources like time, money, and civic skills.²¹ Our argument here does not establish a direct link from modernization to civic engagement. Rather, we argue that greater modernization will empower citizens by providing socio-economic resources like education and jobs and will make participation less costly for individuals in accordance with economic development and human capital arguments.²²

Hypothesis 3: Individuals with high levels of education are more likely to engage in civic activities.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals with employment status are more likely to engage in civic activities.

Taking modernization a step further, more recently scholars have focused on a cultural modernity that emphasizes beliefs about gender equality. As Inglehart and Norris²³ point out, industrialization leads to more women in the paid work force and higher literacy rates reducing differences between genders. Cultural modernization is the end product of economic modernization which ultimately leads individuals to appreciate civic presence and democratic norms. Holding egalitarian gender attitudes is an important sign of this cultural modernization. These attitudes are likely to make individuals more tolerant and more supportive of women’s social and economic participation. Since individuals holding egalitarian gender beliefs will also be more likely to be critical of existing regimes, and hence aware of the manipulative power of the state on civil society, this may result in scepticism of civic engagement. While, there is no empirical evidence to support this claim, the fact that the demonstrators in Tahrir Square, for instance, were composed of individuals from different spectrums including those with or without egalitarian gender views,²⁴ warrants further inquiry into this hypothesized relationship.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals holding egalitarian gender views are more likely to engage in civic activities.

Women’s civic engagement in the Arab world

Both *wasta* and modernization can be instrumental in explaining the civic gender gap in Arab states. Most Arab societies went through a modernization process and

a good number of them have higher income levels thanks to oil wealth. While most Arab states have medium to high human development index scores and high female literacy rates according to the Arab Development Reports,²⁵ women's labour force participation stands at 26.4%, lagging behind East Asia and Pacific (64.3%), Europe and Central Asia (50.6%), Latin America (51.7), sub-Saharan Africa (61%), and South Asia (34.7%). The average gender inequality index in Arab societies (0.6) is higher than in all other regions in the world with the exception of the average score for the least-developed countries (0.6). While we believe that the determinants of civic engagement should be the same for both men and women, we also acknowledge that the disadvantaged status of women makes them less likely to be active in the labour force and politics.²⁶ This phenomenon is not unique to women in the Arab world. A large literature has examined the reasons behind the low levels of political participation among women in other settings.²⁷ These scholars have provided structural, cultural, and agency-based explanations of the gender gap in civic engagement. As Inglehart and Norris succinctly put it,²⁸ "these explanations suggest that women don't participate as much as men because they can't, because they won't, or because nobody asked them".

All of these accounts are also relevant in Arab societies. Existing scholarship provides some clues about why women are less likely to engage in the Middle East. Debating the roots of authoritarianism in the larger Muslim world, Fish²⁹ argues that the treatment of women in Islamic societies and the discrimination of women in social and economic life is the main cause of authoritarianism in Muslim societies. Inglehart and Norris³⁰ tie the Muslim democracy gap to inegalitarian gender beliefs. Jamal and Langohr³¹ challenge both accounts and find that objective gender indicators do not matter for democracy and while carrying a weight for objective gender indicators; egalitarian gender beliefs are not linked to level of democracy. Ross³² argues that the gender gap in economic and political participation is a result of oil production and not Islamic values.

The lag in the status of women has consequences beyond women's participation in the labour force, politics, and government offices and such a gap is likely to have spillover effects on various forms of civic involvement. Some studies have already detected these spillover effects in the realm of attitudes. For example, Tessler³³ found that religious women are less supportive of democracy in Arab societies. Thus:

Hypothesis 6: Women are less likely to engage in civic activities than men.

Furthermore, we expect that women will be more like their male counterparts when they are more utilitarian and supportive of the existing regimes. Women will become more interested in politics, will start to become members of civic associations, or show up at demonstrations or attend campaign rallies to establish connections, with the end goal of extracting benefits from the system. Belief in regime efficacy will also make these women more likely to engage compared to those who do not advocate the existing system. A similar dynamic was confirmed by

Blaydes and Linzer³⁴ who found that Muslim women with fewer economic opportunities are more likely to support fundamentalist Islam for utilitarian goals. Thus:

Hypothesis 7a: The gender gap in civic engagement will decrease in magnitude for more utilitarian women.

Civic engagement for mere utilization of traditional clientelistic structures may have negative connotations for an independent citizenry seeking policy advantages. This kind of participation may undermine women's status in exchange for personal gain. However, women may also be participating thanks to increased education, employment, or the accompanying value change. Labour force participation, for example, will empower women by providing opportunities of engagement in public spheres where they can organize for their interests, become members of associations, or participate in politics.³⁵ In settings where women's empowerment is inhibited and their presence outside the home is discouraged, their participation in civic and political areas will be reduced.³⁶ Thus, the difference in the level of engagement between women who are empowered by obtaining education/employment and between men will decrease if women are employed and as their level of education increases. We also propose and test a narrowing gender gap between men and women due to cultural modernization.

Hypothesis 7b: The gender gap in civic engagement will decrease in magnitude for women with more education and employment status.

Hypothesis 7c: The gender gap in civic engagement will decrease in magnitude for women with egalitarian gender beliefs.

Data and variables

The first wave of the Arab Barometer Survey (2006–2008) includes many different items that allow researchers to empirically test the individual determinants of civic participation. These surveys were conducted in Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority. The sample size ranges from 717 in Yemen to 1300 in Algeria.³⁷ These countries represent different levels of modernization, human capital, and gender improvement.³⁸ For example, adult literacy rates range from 94.6% in Palestine to 56.1% in Morocco. According to 2009 figures, women's labour force participation is 37% in Algeria, only 16.5% in Palestine, and around 20% in other countries. The UN gender inequality index is highest in Yemen (0.769) and lowest in Algeria (0.412).

The surveys in hand have a high rate of missing data due to no responses. When all variables of interest are included in the empirical models, the rate of missing values reaches 40% due to list-wise deletion. This is likely to introduce bias and inefficiency in the estimated models. Thus, we imputed the data using the chained equations approach.³⁹ This approach is more flexible and superior to some other techniques by filling in missing values for multiple variables iteratively

in subsequent equations. We also tried different imputation models and re-ran all the analysis presented below. The results are generally similar but in some large imputation models there are minor differences. We also ran the models with non-imputed data. In these models, the results are highly significant in the expected directions. We created 20 imputations for the analyses.⁴⁰

Dependent variables

We used different items to capture attitudinal and behavioural forms of civic engagement corresponding to the major indicators commonly used in previous literature.⁴¹

As shown in Table 1, we include a measure of civic interest to capture the ability and willingness to follow and then be engaged in the civic realm. This variable measures the extent of interest and frequency of following news for each respondent. A second variable is associational membership and 17% of the

Table 1. Measures of civic engagement.

Variable	Questions	Distribution
Civic interest alpha = 0.80	Generally speaking, how interested would you say you are in politics?	2 = low interest
	4 = Very interested, 3 = Interested, 2 = Little interested,	3
	1 = Not interested	4
	How often do you follow news about politics and government in [country]?	5
Civic membership	4 = Very often, 3 = Often, 2 = Sometimes/ rarely,	6
	1 = Never	7
		8 = high interest Mean = 4.83
Sign a petition	Are you a member of any organization or formal groups? (A list of groups provided).	No = 83%
	1 = Yes 0 = No	Yes = 17%
Attend demonstration	Join together with others to draw attention to an issue or sign a petition	Never = 73%
	1 = Never, 2 = Once, 3 = More than once	Once = 9%
		More than once = 17.5%
Attend a campaign rally	Attend a demonstration or protest march	Never = 76%
	1 = Never, 2 = Once, 3 = More than once	Once = 9%
Attend a campaign rally		More than once = 16%
	During the last national elections in [country], did you attend a campaign meeting or rally?	No = 75%
	0 = No, 1 = Yes	Yes = 25%

respondents reported being a member of a civil society organization, including political parties, religious organizations, sport and entertainment clubs, cultural organizations, unions, or other voluntary organizations. As Norris and Krook⁴² point out, these types of measures are necessary given the interest in capital and volunteerism and the understanding that engagement is more than just political participation. We also use two questions to measure the respondents' frequency of involvement in signing a petition and attending a demonstration. According to the survey results, 26.5% of the respondents signed a petition and 25% of the respondents attended demonstrations at least once or more than once. Civic membership, signing a petition, and attending demonstrations are considered to be more active forms of civic participation relative to civic interest. Finally, we use a question measuring participation in a political campaign rally and according to the survey results, 25% of the respondents participated in a rally in the last legislative elections.

Independent variables

We now turn to the independent variables in the model. The first set of factors capture the idea that a civically engaged citizen is one who is more utilitarian. The second set of factors captures different indicators of human capital and cultural modernity. Finally, we include indicators of social capital along with religious and demographic controls. See [Table 2](#) for a description of the variables.

Utilitarianism

We include two measures of utilitarianism that capture belief in regime efficacy and the self-reported use of *wasta* by respondents. In each case, we expect that an individual who is more utilitarian will see both the benefit and the need to support the regime and use *wasta*.

Modernization

We include three measure of modernization in the model: education (seven-point scale), employment (dichotomous), and egalitarian gender beliefs (an index formed by three items). [Table 2](#) shows the details of these variables.

Control variables

While state manipulation of civil society is a widespread trend in the Arab world, it would be wrong to conclude that the authoritarian state apparatus constitutes a monopoly over the civil sphere. The civic activism of Islamist opposition movements and parties is well-documented.⁴³ Islamist movements are known to form a parallel civil sector by providing social services and replacing the government where it is inadequate.⁴⁴ Political Islamist ideology will increase the probability

Table 2. Description of independent variables.

Variable	Description	Type and range
Political Islamism	It would be better for [respondent's country] if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office. Men of religion should have influence over the decisions of government.	An index ranging from 1 (strong disagreement) to 8 (strong agreement) <i>Mean=5.01</i>
Religiosity	Would you buy a lottery ticket? (4-point scale). How important is it to your spouse that your son or daughter does not pray? (4-point scale). How often do you read the –Quran? (5-point scale).	Religiosity index ranging from 3 (not religious) to 15 (very religious) <i>Mean=9.28</i>
Political trust	How much trust do you have in the following (4-point scale): Prime minister, courts, parliament, police political parties.	Political trust index ranging from 5 (no trust) to 20 (a lot of political trust) <i>Mean=11.57</i>
Personal trust	Most people can be trusted or you need to be very careful in dealing with them.	Dichotomous 0=No personal trust 1=Personal trust (27%)
Egalitarian gender attitudes	On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do. A university education is more important for a boy than a girl. Men and women should have equal job opportunities and wages.	An index of three items ranging from 3 (strong ingalitarian attitudes) to 12 (strong egalitarian attitudes) <i>Mean=7.71</i>
Wasta	During the past five years, have you ever used wasta to achieve something personal, family related, or to resolve a neighbourhood problem?	0=No 1=Yes (29%)
Belief in efficacy	Citizens have the power to influence the policies and activities of the government. Our current courts always punish the guilty even if they are high-ranking officials. People are free to criticize government without fear. People can join political organizations like political parties without fear. (4-point scale: strongly agree–strongly disagree).	Index ranging from 4 (low support for regime) to 16 (high support for regime) <i>Mean=10.51</i>
Age	Age of respondent.	Continuous
Education	Level of educational attainment.	7-point scale
Employment	Employment status.	Dichotomous (1=employed)

that individuals will become more active in civic affairs. We create an index from two items asking about individuals' preferences for religious influence in government and use this as a measure of political Islam. Our models also include an index measuring religiosity as well as political and interpersonal trust to test social capital theories. Finally, we include an indicator of age and expect older individuals to be more civically engaged.

We first ran base models and then presented a series of estimations with the gender interactions. We also ran competing models of utilitarianism and modernization with non-imputed data. We did this to explore the explanatory power of each theory by comparing the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) statistics. We choose not to report this for several reasons. While modernization is a better predictor of associational membership and utilitarian incentives explain other forms of engagement more strongly, comprehensive models including indicators of both theories perform significantly better according to BIC statistics. In addition, since reliable measures of fit are not available with imputed data, we choose to report the more efficient estimations resulting from imputation. Furthermore, the results remain unchanged in all of these models with minor exceptions.⁴⁵ Two of our dependent variables (civic membership and campaign rally participation) are dichotomous, two others (signing petitions and attendance at demonstrations) have three categories, and civic interest is operationalized as a continuous variable. Therefore, we use logit, ordered logit, and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression estimations in our analyses.

Results

First we present the results of logit, ordered logit, and OLS regression estimations for the base models. Overall, the results (Table 3) show support for our main hypotheses. Many citizens who are seeking avenues for achieving personal goals are those individuals who are civically engaged. Across all five dependent variables individuals who indicate that they use *wasta* and have strong support for the regime are more likely to be civically engaged. Therefore, the empirical analysis confirms the applicability of arguments about clientelistic behaviour⁴⁶ and regime advocacy to civic engagement.⁴⁷ Engagement for such utilitarian incentives serves the goals of authoritarian rulers who utilize traditional patronage structures to control civil and political spheres. This, in turn, may undermine democratization in the region.

In addition to the utilitarian rationale, we find support for hypotheses 3 and 4, suggesting that modernization will make citizens more active in Arab politics. The statistical significance of education in all three models is in line with different variants of modernization theory, confirming that individuals with resources (education and jobs) are more likely to participate in the political and civic realm.⁴⁸ Public presence through employment leads to a higher level of engagement in the form of civic membership, attendance at a demonstration, and participation in a campaign rally. Finally, an indicator of cultural modernization, egalitarian

Table 3. Explaining civic engagement in the Arab world.

Variables	Civic Interest	Civic membership	Petition	Demonstration	Campaign rally
Utilitarian indicators					
Wasta	0.291*** (0.052)	0.518*** (0.080)	0.622*** (0.068)	1.914*** (0.348)	0.566*** (0.068)
Belief in efficacy	0.057*** (0.008)	0.043*** (0.013)	0.062*** (0.011)	2.504*** (0.349)	0.037*** (0.012)
Modernization factors					
Egalitarian gender attitudes	0.039*** (0.013)	0.037* (0.021)	0.027 (0.018)	0.524*** (0.071)	-0.014 (0.018)
Education	0.184*** (0.016)	0.150*** (0.025)	0.124*** (0.022)	0.032*** (0.012)	0.054** (0.022)
Employed	0.024 (0.049)	0.278*** (0.078)	0.043 (0.066)	0.050*** (0.019)	0.140** (0.068)
Gender					
Female	-0.553*** (0.049)	-0.538*** (0.080)	-0.673*** (0.068)	0.090*** (0.022)	-0.627*** (0.069)
Religious and demographic controls					
Political Islam	-0.081** (0.032)	-0.067 (0.050)	-0.055 (0.043)	-0.855*** (0.071)	-0.154*** (0.044)
Religiosity	0.016 (0.011)	-0.003 (0.018)	-0.022 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.069)	0.030** (0.015)
Age	0.157*** (0.018)	0.007 (0.029)	0.047* (0.024)	0.010 (0.009)	0.057** (0.024)
Political trust	0.025*** (0.006)	0.057*** (0.010)	0.010 (0.008)	0.012 (0.016)	0.010 (0.009)
Personal trust	0.126** (0.052)	0.060 (0.083)	0.032 (0.071)	-0.045 (0.044)	0.165** (0.071)
Constant	2.819*** (0.248)	-3.424*** (0.406)			-0.979*** (0.339)
Cut 1			2.121*** (0.337)	0.997*** (0.124)	
Cut 2			2.709*** (0.338)	0.310** (0.129)	
Observations	5692	5722	5695	5704	5745

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Fixed effects are available in a supplemental appendix. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Arab Barometer Survey, Wave 1.

gender beliefs, also predicts civic interest, civic membership, and attendance at a demonstration. Thus, the results confirm that not all of the participation one observes in the Arab polities may be due to wasta or regime advocacy.

Among the religious and demographic controls, political trust has a negative and statistically significant effect on three forms of civic engagement (civic interest, attendance at a demonstration, and participation in a campaign rally). We find no support for the hypothesis regarding religion (with the exception of the last model). This finding is consistent with studies showing that religiosity is not a significant predictor of democratic attitudes.⁴⁹

To demonstrate how much modernization and utilitarianism change the likelihood of civic engagement, we calculate the substantive effects of each variable holding other variables at their means using the multivariate models presented above. In Figure 1, the bars represent the average change in various forms of civic engagement when each indicator is increased by one unit (for ordered logit we calculate these figures for outcome 3, “the most frequent”). Wasta-seeking and increased levels of education have the largest substantive effects and thus are the two most important factors in explaining increased levels of civic engagement. The impact of employment status is larger for associational membership and participation in campaign rally. Perceptions of efficacy and egalitarian gender beliefs, while still important, have a lesser effect on civic engagement. Thus, both modernization and utilitarianism matter in determining the level of civic engagement, but these substantive effects vary across different civic activities. More interesting, however, is the large effect of gender on all forms of civic engagement. As suspected, a significant civic gender gap is in order in Arab societies.

Ceteris paribus women are less likely to engage in civic affairs than men. So, does this gender gap prevail for utilitarian women who are culturally modern and



Figure 1. Substantive effects of utilitarian and modernization indicators. (a) The bars represent percentage change when each indicator is increased by one unit of standard deviation. Percentage change is calculated from marginal effects associated with a one-unit increase. (b) The effects are transformed into percentages. For civic interest, the numbers represent percentage change based on the range of this variable.

who are empowered through education and employment? What are the implications of these theoretical perspectives for women's status in the Middle East? The results in [Table 4](#) lend mixed support to the interactive effects between utilitarian and modernization factors and gender.

As expected, *wasta* and belief in regime efficacy remain statistically significant in all models. Egalitarian gender beliefs matter for civic interest, demonstration attendance, and campaign rally participation whereas education leads to increased likelihood of associational membership and involvement in petitions and demonstrations. Surprisingly, employment does not remain significant when interaction effects are included in the models. When gender is interacted with indicators of utilitarianism and modernization, we still find statistical significance for different factors. For example, the interaction of gender (female) with employment status is significant and positive in models 2 and 5 (civic membership and campaign rally participation). Women with higher levels of education appear to be more interested in politics and are more likely to attend demonstrations. The interaction with perception of efficacy matters for signing a petition and for attending a demonstration. Finally, women who use *wasta* are more likely to become members of civic associations and to attend demonstrations (the coefficient for gender and *wasta* is significant but negative). For assessing the explanatory power of modernizationist and utilitarian approaches as they relate to gender, we calculate the predictive margins (average change) for interactive effects at different values of each indicator for both men and women holding other variables at their means. All marginal effects are statistically significant with the exception of gender beliefs in some models. We present the predictive margins with 95% confidence intervals in [Figures 2 and 3](#).

First, for both *wasta*-seeking and perceptions of efficacy a gender gap in all five forms of civic engagement appears to be the norm, but this gap is hardly uniform in our models. While gender differences remain in place for *wasta* users in civic interest, petition signing, and campaign rally participation, the gap narrows only slightly when it comes to demonstration attendance. A more interesting pattern emerges for associational membership, where the gender gap disappears with utilization of *wasta*. This finding shows that civil society organizations are exploited as passages to clientelistic networks⁵⁰ by both men and women. As for efficacy, a slightly different pattern is in order. While the gender gap remains steady as regime support increases for civic interest and attendance at demonstrations, the difference between men and women disappears at higher levels of belief in efficacy for signing a petition and participating in rallies. More interestingly, the gender-based differences are meaningless at any level of efficacy perception for associational membership. Overall, we find limited support for Hypothesis 7a.

As one can see in [Figure 3](#), indicators of classic and human capital variants of modernization theory increase civic engagement for all, but more so for men. However, this gender gap diminishes as individuals are occupied with more of these resources. For example, at higher levels of education the gender-based difference in civic engagement narrows down or disappears in civic interest, signing a

Table 4. Explaining the gender gap in civic engagement in the Arab world.

Variables	Civic interest	Civic membership	Petition	Demonstration	Campaign rally
Utilitarian indicators					
Wasta	0.850*** (0.114)	0.301*** (0.101)	0.645*** (0.085)	1.732*** (0.376)	0.641*** (0.087)
Belief in efficacy	0.057*** (0.008)	0.055*** (0.017)	0.042*** (0.014)	2.322*** (0.376)	0.027* (0.015)
Modernization factors					
Egalitarian gender attitudes	0.042*** (0.013)	0.035 (0.026)	0.043* (0.022)	0.416*** (0.088)	-0.010 (0.023)
Education	0.033 (0.031)	0.174*** (0.031)	0.070*** (0.026)	0.034** (0.015)	0.035 (0.026)
Employed	0.082 (0.067)	0.071 (0.098)	-0.026 (0.083)	0.036 (0.023)	0.039 (0.084)
Gender					
Female	-1.325*** (0.158)	-0.365 (0.467)	-1.525*** (0.394)	0.006 (0.039)	-1.034*** (0.388)
Female*Wasta	-1.179*** (0.211)	0.544*** (0.159)	-0.003 (0.137)	0.085*** (0.027)	-0.179 (0.138)
Female*Belief in efficacy	0.000 (0.000)	-0.029 (0.027)	0.056** (0.022)	-0.127 (0.085)	0.025 (0.023)
Female*Gender attitudes	0.000 (0.000)	-0.001 (0.042)	-0.046 (0.036)	0.286** (0.143)	-0.009 (0.036)
Female*Education	0.311*** (0.054)	-0.070 (0.044)	0.135*** (0.037)	-0.002 (0.023)	0.039 (0.037)
Female*Employed	-0.145 (0.103)	0.536*** (0.158)	0.178 (0.136)	0.032 (0.037)	0.286** (0.138)
Religious and demographic controls					
Political Islam	-0.076** (0.032)	-0.065 (0.050)	-0.050 (0.043)	-1.343*** (0.407)	-0.153*** (0.044)
Religiosity	0.012 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.018)	-0.025 (0.015)	0.320** (0.142)	0.029* (0.015)
Age	0.170*** (0.018)	0.001 (0.029)	0.048* (0.024)	0.010 (0.009)	0.057** (0.024)
Political trust	0.030*** (0.006)	0.055*** (0.010)	0.013 (0.008)	0.013 (0.016)	0.012 (0.009)
Personal trust	0.146*** (0.053)	0.050 (0.083)	0.035 (0.071)	-0.044 (0.044)	0.167** (0.071)
Constant	3.111*** (0.259)	-3.471*** (0.443)			-0.824** (0.368)
Cut 1			1.806*** (0.366)	1.025*** (0.125)	
Cut 2			2.396*** (0.367)	0.337*** (0.129)	
Observations	5692	5722	5695	5704	5745

Democratization

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Fixed effects are available in supplemental appendix. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Arab Barometer Survey, Wave I.

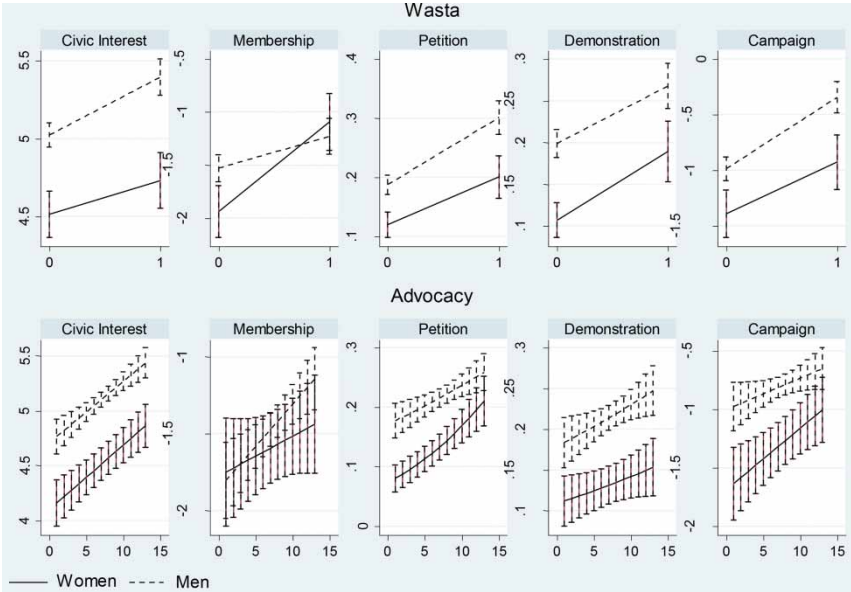


Figure 2. The effects of utilitarian indicators on civic engagement by gender.

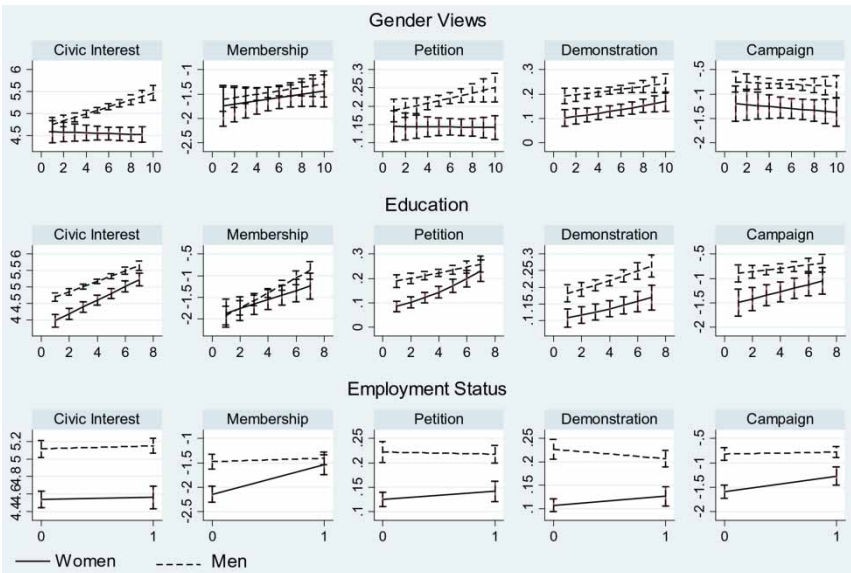


Figure 3. The effects of modernization indicators on civic engagement by gender.

petition, and participation in a campaign rally. Employment status brings women closer to men in all forms of civic engagement but civic interest. We do not find any conclusive evidence for the effect of gender beliefs on women's differential engagement. With increasing belief in gender equality, the gender gap widens for civic interest and signing a petition, and changes sporadically for associational membership and participation in campaign rally. Thus, while Hypothesis 7b is supported, Hypothesis 7c remains inconclusive. In the section to follow, we discuss these findings in the context of the existing literature.

Discussion

While existing scholarship on civic participation in the Arab world has focused on the use of *wasta*,⁵¹ the proponents of modernization continue to highlight the importance of human capital.⁵² Our analysis capitalizes on this debate and takes the next step by establishing linkages between these literatures and women's empowerment in relation to civic involvement. In this context, this article contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, we show that individuals who are *wasta*-seekers are more likely to engage in various forms of civic engagement beyond voting.⁵³ In non-democratic Arab polities, social capital may have a "dark face", where membership in civic associations is strongly related to regime support.⁵⁴ Our analysis confirms that beyond associational membership, a similar effect may be in play for other forms of civic engagement ranging from political interest to campaign attendance. These results may be troubling for those who promote civic engagement for increased democratization. It looks like participation in the civic realm may deviate from its core function, as seen in liberal democracies, and it may rather become a venue of access to material benefits distributed by authoritarian rulers. This arrangement, in turn, may undermine democratic ideals and allow the autocrats to manipulate civil society for their own survival.

Our second contribution relates to the relationship between individual-level implications of modernization and civic activism. We argue that modernization empowers individuals by providing education and jobs to create an appetite for civic behaviour. Thus, our findings confirm that education and employment will increase civic interest,⁵⁵ associational membership, and participation in demonstrations and political campaigns in the Arab world. It is this finding that should lead us to have more optimism for the consolidation of democracy. The Arab Spring demonstrated that a new generation of highly educated activists chanting universalistic slogans of freedom, dignity, and justice are the new driving force in Arab polities. These highly educated individuals may engage in civic affairs for demanding democracy and effective governance, and not for seeking patronage distributions.

Our third contribution concerns the implications of these findings for the civic gender gap and status of women in Arab polities. The analysis confirms that a significant gender gap is apparent in various forms of civic involvement in Arab societies. Women's activism lags behind men's in Arab civil society, but at the same time modernization helps narrow this gap to enhance women's status.

More educated women who have a public presence by being part of the labour force are as likely to get involved in the civic realm as men. On the flip side, when women use *wasta* or support the regime, the gender gap narrows in a limited fashion only for certain types of civic activities. While increased engagement is a positive sign for women's involvement, this type of activism represents the dark side of social capital which may strengthen the traditional authoritarian structures, consolidating women's inferior status in Arab societies.

Conclusion

In the research presented above we posit and indeed find that a civically engaged citizen is one who is both utilitarian and modern in Arab polities. Arab citizens who use *wasta* and those who believe in the efficacy of the existing political regime are more likely to be civically engaged. In these patrimonial societies, individuals who are more educated and employed are far more likely to be involved in various forms of civic activities. We argue that this poses a dilemma for democratization in the Arab polities. On the one hand, civic engagement may serve as a venue for utilizing clientelistic networks which in the final analysis help authoritarian regimes to survive and maintain control on society. On the other hand, highly educated individuals with more resources may voice their demands through civic involvement with a democratic mindset and hence facilitate democratization.

Our research also has important implications for the status of women in Arab societies. When a woman is highly educated and employed, she is almost equally likely to be as civically engaged as a man. This conclusion resonates with the findings of the first Arab Human Development Report⁵⁶ calling for empowerment of citizens for meaningful civic engagement and democracy. We do not exclude the possibility that highly educated individuals, women or men, may engage for utilitarian goals to undermine democratic values or hamper the advancement of women's status. However, we did not detect a strong empirical pattern of this sort when we ran additional analyses with interactive effects. Overall, then, civic engagement may be an instrument of both authoritarian goals and democratic demands. Human development and citizen empowerment, thus, may help citizens build a civic culture that strengthens democracy and subsequently women's status. However, as advocates search for a way to increase participation, and by extension democracy, this research suggests that we cannot assume that modernized individuals are automatically willing to look for democratic goals, but that a civically engaged citizen is partly a pragmatic individual who may use the civil sphere to benefit most from the traditional authoritarian structures.

Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here [<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.928696>].

Notes

1. Verba, Nie, and Kim, *Participation and Political Equality*; Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*.
2. Ibrahim, "Civil Society and Democracy"; Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East*; Singerman, *Avenues of Participation*.
3. Brumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy"; Schlumberger, "The Arab Middle East," 113–8; Wiktorowicz, "Civil Society as Social Control," 43.
4. Inglehart and Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations."
5. Jamal, *The Other Side*; Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism."
6. Inglehart and Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities"; Moghadam, *Modernizing Women*; Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy."
7. Wiktorowicz, "Civil Society as Social Control"; Albrecht and Schlumberger, "Waiting for Godot."
8. Jamal, *The Other Side*, 77.
9. Ibid.
10. Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism"; Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics*.
11. Gold and Naufal, "Wasta," 59.
12. *Guanxi* is a Chinese word which means connections and *jeitinho* is a common practice in Brazil which can be translated as "little way out" (Smith et al., "How Distinctive Are Indigenous," 335–6).
13. Gold and Naufal, "Wasta," 59.
14. Cunningham and Sarayra, *Wasta: The Hidden Force*.
15. Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism."
16. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy."
17. Coppedge, "Modernization and Thresholds of Democracy"; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*.
18. Inglehart and Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations."
19. Inglehart and Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities."
20. Ciftci, "Modernization, Islam or Social Capital"; Jamal, "Who are the Democrats."
21. Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, *Voice and Equality*; Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter."
22. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy"; Inglehart and Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities."
23. Inglehart and Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations."
24. Anderson, "Demystifying the Arab Spring".
25. The following statistics are obtained from the UNDP Arab Human Development Reports available at <http://www.arab-hdr.org>. The figures reported are the most recent statistics.
26. Ross, "Oil, Islam, and Women."
27. Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*; Verba, Nie, and Kim, *Participation and Political Equality*; Barnes and Kaase, *Political Action*; Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*; Inglehart and Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations."
28. Inglehart and Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations," 102.
29. Fish, "Islam and Authoritarianism."
30. Inglehart and Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations."
31. Jamal and Langohr, "Gender Status as an Impediment," 2.
32. Ross, "Oil, Islam, and Women."
33. Tessler, "Islam and Democracy."
34. Blaydes and Linzer, "The Political Economy of Women's Support for Fundamentalist Islam."
35. Chhibber, "Why are Some Women Politically Active?"

36. We also acknowledge that civic gender gap in the Arab World may be structured by the inability of some women to access *wasta*.
37. We used Muslim-only samples bringing the total number of observations to 6172.
38. All figures are taken from the UN Arab Human Development Report (2009) available at <http://www.arab-hdr.org>.
39. White, Royston, and White, "Multiple Imputation."
40. We used the MI command in STATA 12 for imputing the data. These additional analyses and the details of imputation results are available on request.
41. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Hill and Matsubayashi, "Civic Engagement."
42. Norris and Krook, "One of Us."
43. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*; Hefner, *Civil Islam*; El-Ghobashy, "The Metamorphosis."
44. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*.
45. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing to this robustness check. These additional estimations are available upon request.
46. Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism"; Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics*.
47. Jamal, *The Other Side*.
48. Brehm and Rahn, "Individual Level Evidence"; Hauser, "Education, Ability and Civic Engagement."
49. Ciftci, "Modernization, Islam or Social Capital"; Jamal, "Who are the Democrats."
50. Jamal, *The Other Side*.
51. Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism"; Jamal, *The Other Side*.
52. Inglehart and Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities"; Moghadam, *Modernizing Women*; Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy."
53. Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism"; Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics*.
54. Jamal, *The Other Side*.
55. Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, *Voice and Equality*; Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter."
56. Arab Human Development Report 2002.

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