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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The attitudes of the members of two Moroccan Islamist movements concerning the civil state principles assessed through a counterargument task

Hicham Khabbache¹, Ali Watfa², Eisa Al-Balhan³, Joël Candau⁴, Djilali Bouhmama³ and Nicola Luigi Bragazzi^{5*}

Abstract: The aim of this work was to explore how the members of two representative Moroccan Islamist movements (one against the government and the other with previous political and administrative experiences) could deal with the civil state principles, when facing a counterargument task. The results showed that the political association had a significant impact on different civil state principles (secularism, separation of powers, political pluralism, elected governmental institutions, and participative governance), whereas other principles (acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy) were considered to constitute the strong identity core of an Islamist party and were, as such, rejected by both movements. A significant gender effect could be found only for the principle of secularism.

Subjects: Political Psychology; Social Movements; Religion & Politics

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Islamism can be considered as a by-product of the globalization, relatively unknown to the Arabic world until the sixties-seventies. This is true especially for Morocco, which has always been immune from Islamism until the May 2003 Casablanca attacks. These and subsequent upheavals have recently forced the King Mohammed VI to implement the separation of powers and the adoption of other democratic principles. The aim of this work was to explore how the members of two representative Moroccan Islamist movements (one against the government and the other with previous political/administrative experiences) could deal with the civil state principles, when facing a counterargument task. It was found that the political association significantly impacted on different civil state principles (secularism, separation of powers, political pluralism, elected governmental institutions, and participative governance), whereas other principles (acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy) constituted the strong identity core of an Islamist party and were rejected by both movements. A gender effect could be found only for the principle of secularism.

Keywords: counterargument task; attitude change; Islamist movements; convergence theory; divergence theory

1. Introduction

1.1. *The insurgence of Islamist movements*

Islamism can be considered as a by-product of the globalization, relatively new and unknown to the Arabic world until the sixties-seventies (Black, 2011; Simbar, 2009). These decades were, indeed, characterized by the Arab-Israeli wars (1967 and onwards), the Malay-Chinese riots in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1969), the Pakistan-Bangladesh civil war (1971), the Arab oil embargo (1973), the Lebanon's civil war (mid-70s), and the Iranian Islamic revolution (1978–1979) (Esposito, Fasching, & Lewis, 2008). These important geopolitical events contributed to Islam playing a major role not only in the public life, but also, and especially, in the public, international arena (Beeley, 1992; Simbar, 2009). The sixties-seventies were also the years in which Arabic leaders, such as Anwar Sadat (1918–1981) in Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi (1942–2011) in Libya, Jaafar Muhammad an-Nimeiry (1930–2009) in Sudan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928–1979) and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1924–1988) in Pakistan, began to make frequent references to Islam in their political initiatives, differently from the previous elites and leaderships, like Taha Husayn (1889–1973) and Ali Abd al-Raziq (1866–1966), in Egypt, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), in Turkey, among others (Esposito et al., 2008). The latter had, indeed, devised and implemented secular reforms and plans, in the efforts of modernizing their countries (Esposito et al., 2008).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Islam has begun to gradually emerge within the collective Muslim consciousness thanks to the theoretical works of philosophers and thinkers such as Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (*"Ikhwan al-Muslimi"*), Mawlana Abu'l-A'la al-Maududi (1903–1979), founder of the Islamic Society (*"Jamaat-i-Islami"*), and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966). Even though some seeds of their thought can be found in the works of al-Mawardi (972–1058) and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), their treatises paved the way for a systematic, coherent explanation and vision of Islam not only as religion (being, as such, relegated to the private life), but, above all, as politics, and, therefore, an element integral to the societal life. The Wahhabi (*"muwahiddun"*, the Unitarians) in Saudi Arabia, the Sanusi in Libya, the Mahdi in Sudan, the Padri in Sumatra (Indonesia) and the Fulani in Nigeria (West Africa) can be considered some of the predecessors of the modern Islamist movements (Esposito et al., 2008).

Muslims began to question the Western political and cultural hegemony and to challenge the efficiency and the equity of its values, such as liberalism and democracy. These had not been able, indeed, to guarantee fundamental rights, justice, dignity, progress and prosperity to everybody, resulting, instead, in much innocent blood being shed during the two major World wars, in political, social, moral decadence and decline, and in rising inequality (Esposito et al., 2008).

On the other hand, the failures of both Arabic secular parties and "reformist" ones (founded by leaders such as Muhammad Abduh—1849–1905—, Sayyid Ahmad Khan—1817–1898—, and Muhammad Iqbal—1876–1938) to produce an authentic Islamic-based political, moral, economic and societal project, preserving traditions and conjugating them with modern and progressive values, while counteracting/minimizing tendencies to "westernize" Islam, had become apparent (Esposito et al., 2008).

As a response to these events, Islamism was born, as "a specific reaction to modern social and economic conditions, rapid urbanisation, the dislocation of traditional communities and crafts, unemployment and anomie" (Black, 2011), "a product of clashes of interests, of colonialism, Islamic and Western, process of de-colonization, and the materialization of modern dictatorial Muslim states supported by Western neo-colonial powers" (Simbar, 2009).

In the recent years, the 2011 turbulent uprisings in the Arabic world have further contributed to dramatically change its geopolitical framework, leading to initial hopes and enthusiasm for the collapse of corrupted authoritarian governments and a “transition” to democracy (McManus, 2016). These protests have been the reaction to an increasingly perception of rampant corruption and widespread moral decline, rising poverty, unemployment and maldistribution of wealth. In most Arabic countries, these turbulences have resulted in the proliferation of Islamist movements (Bouyahya, 2015).

Some of these have arrived through election to the helm of power, but have eclipsed few months afterwards, such as the movement of Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt. Others have accepted to share the power with the old regime, like “*Ennahda*” (in English, the “Renaissance Party”) in Tunisia, or with the monarchy, such as “*Jamaa Al-Adala Wat-Tanmiya Party*” (in English, the “Justice and development” or JDP movement) in Morocco (Khabbache, 2014). Indeed, Islamist movements are not a monolithic reality, but a pluralist, fast-moving and continuously changing reality (Bouyahya, 2015). For instance, Darif (1992) classifies Islamists into radicals, syntheticals and reformists, whereas Ismail (2003) speaks of militant, conservative, and moderate parties. Okasha (2008) uses the labels of radicals, non-participants, and moderates. The political context is fundamental in shaping and re-shaping their ideologies (Bouyahya, 2015). It seems that the new political situation has obliged, at least, some Islamist leaders, who had accepted to share the authority with the official regimes, to reassure the public opinion that they had abandoned the initial plan of implementing the caliphate state in accordance to the Prophetic principles (leadership—“*khilāfa*”—, law—“*shari’a*”—and community of believers—“*ummah*”), and that they had adopted, instead, the civil state principles (“*dawla madaniya*”) (Khabbache, Candau, & Jebbar, 2012).

1.2. The Islamist movements in Morocco

This is particularly true for the Moroccan reality, where, differently from the other Arab countries, such as Algeria and Tunisia, Islamist entities have been relatively unknown until the nineties (Bouyahya, 2015). Morocco has always been proud of its moderate Maliki brand of Islam, trying to export this model to neighboring countries, such as Mali, Guinea and Nigeria (Abouzzohour & Tomé-Alonso, 2019), and has considered itself as being immune from Islamism—the so-called “Moroccan exceptionalism” (Wainscott, 2017), until the May 2003 Casablanca attacks.

These and subsequent attacks, including the 2011 upheavals and, in particular, the street protests during the weeks following 20 February (the so-called “20 February Movement”) have recently forced the King Mohammed VI (born in 1963) to deliver a speech on 9 March, committing himself to pursue constitutional reforms that, three months later, would have led to the separation of powers and the adoption of other democratic principles (McManus, 2016).

Given its recent insurgence, the phenomenon of Moroccan Islamism has been less studied with respect to the other Islamist movements, especially in terms of acceptance and/or adoption of Western values. With this regard, the present work is an attempt to understand to which extent two representative Moroccan Islamist movements are able or not to accept the principles of civil state even though these apparently contradict their politico-religious convictions and ideology.

The first Islamist movement, the JDP, founded by Abdelkrim Al Khatib (1921–2008), after being expelled from the “*Mouvement populaire démocratique et constitutionnel*” (in English, the “Popular Democratic and Constitutional Movement”), is in agreement with the monarchy system, and has arrived to the government after the Arab Spring, even though with a limited power. Established in 1967, it was formally and legally recognized in 1996, after the constitutional reform of the King Hassan II (1929–1999), which allowed its members to enter the Moroccan political life taking part into different government instances (Parliament, ministers and first ministers, and municipal communities). After changing different times its name and being re-branded, from being a minority in 1997, the JDP grew to become the third and second political force, at the 2002 and 2007 polls, respectively (Willis, 2012). In November 2011 Abdelilah Benkirane (born in 1954), the leader of the JDP, became

the Prime Minister of a coalition government (Brake, 2017). The rise of the JDP to the Presidency has represented “an exceptional achievement for a political party with roots in a contemporary Islamist movement that was initially influenced by Muslim Brotherhood teachings”, for an Islamist party, which has become “a legitimate, full-fledged political actor without provoking the type of political instability seen in other countries” (Hamieddine, 2016). The JDP has, indeed, not jeopardized the country’s political balance or the monarchy’s relations with the European Union (Hamieddine, 2016) and, on several occasions, it has explicitly stated that the principles of civil state are completely in congruence with the principles of the Islamic tradition. The JDP aims at contributing to the establishment of a democratic society with an efficient justice and a modern welfare system (Khabbache, 2014), adopting progressive and moderate positions on different societal and political issues (Belal, 2012; Bouyahya, 2015). According to some scholars, the “managerial” aspect of the JDP, its pragmatism, ideological flexibility, gradualism and willingness to cooperate with the different stakeholders have been the keys of its success (Catusse & Zaki, 2010; Masbah, 2014), as well as the use of the new information and communication technologies, like the Web (Hussain & Howard, 2016).

Differently from the JDP, the second movement, “*Jamaa Al Adl wal Ihsane*” (in English, “Justice and Spirituality Movement” or JSM), founded in 1981, the largest oppositional movement, is definitely against the Moroccan monarchy system, and still believes, as stated by the leader Abdesslam Yassine (1928–2012), in the dream of the Islamic state or caliphate. The JSM is a conservative political party, in that it maintains the Islamic traditions, refusing to negotiate their political convictions and positions with the Moroccan regime (McManus, 2016). However, some scholars, such as Zakia Salime, have challenged such a static, monolithic and predictable vision of the Islamist party, stating, for instance, that, when dialoguing with the Moroccan feminist movement during the reform of the code on family law (the so-called “*mudawanna*”) after 1992, the JSM had been able to cope with concepts like modernity, progress, emancipation and women empowerment (McManus, 2016; Salime, 2011).

1.3. Attitudes of the Moroccan Islamist movements towards the civil state

Having briefly overviewed the history and nature of the two Moroccan Islamist movements under study (the JDP and the JSM), our aim is to explore their psychological and cognitive attitudes towards the principles of the civil state. From a theoretical standpoint, political attitudes, like any social attitudes, can be influenced to various degrees by cultural matrices including one’s own set of beliefs, systems of values, ideas and practices, as well as social representations and religious ideologies. These play an important role in shaping the collective and shared memory of the different political and social groups (Candau, 1998), contributing to their identity.

More in detail, scholars have explored whether it is possible to predict the political behavior through political association, and whether there is a strong convergence between belonging to a political association and believing in its ideology. Two major theories have been elaborated in order to answer these questions: the convergence theory and the divergence theory. The first approach maintains a strong convergence/congruence between political belonging and political attitudes (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Cohen, 2003; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). The second one states that a divergence between the attitude and association is possible, in that individual attitudes may shift according to the context and circumstances (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). Individuals are, indeed, endowed with cognitive flexibility, which can be defined as a range of attitudes, ranging from acceptance to mixed attitudes and conditional acceptance and, finally, rejection. Cognitive flexibility enables members of a given political association to change their opinion and attitudes when they face particular situations.

1.4. Predicting political attitudes through political association: the convergence theory

According to the convergence theory, there is a strong congruence between the political belonging and the political behavior. This is well represented by a study by Cohen (2003), who demonstrated that the sense of political belonging rigidly channeled the individual attitudes. USA republicans and democrats were exposed to a tricky task, in which they were

misinformed and told that a strict-offered project of welfare policy had been proposed by the democrats whereas a generous project had been presented by the republicans. Participants tended to prefer the plan allegedly proposed by their party, only on the basis of the political association and regardless of the content of the plan. Moreover, using non verbal measures in interview situations, Carney et al. (2008) found that political belonging had an impact not only on political attitudes of the partisans, but profoundly influenced their everyday behavior. For instance, liberals were more open to new experiences than conservatives, who were more resistant to change. Conservatives had stronger implicit preferences for tradition over progress, stability over flexibility, traditional values over feminism, conformity over rebellion, and order over chaos. Conservatives appeared more likely to accept inequality than liberals, implicitly favoring high-status groups over their low-status counterparts (see also Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) performed a meta-analysis pooling 22,818 subjects from 88 samples and 12 countries. Authors found that the main features characterizing conservative attitudes were the resistance to change, the tolerance for inequality, and some psychological factors like fear and aggression, dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty avoidance, need for cognitive closure, and terror management.

Mixed attitudes (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2009) can be adopted when some but not all principles concord with one's own belief system. Rejection (Augoustinos et al., 2009) can occur in case of disagreement with one's own principles, despite the level of strength or realism of a given argument, without a desire to negotiate one's own convictions or to adopt a middle/mixed position (Khabbache, 2012, 2014). Furthermore, this resistance to attitude change (Khabbache et al., 2012) can be noticed, especially, when facing embarrassing situations. In this case, some scholars speak of a regressive attitude (Khabbache et al., 2012). According to Greenberg and Jonas (2003), when conservatives deal with some embarrassing and aversive situations, they tend to express more radical positions than their usual attitudes.

1.5. Predicting political attitudes through political association: the divergence theory

Differently from the convergence theory, using the divergence theory Conway et al. (2015) proved that conservative mind is not simpler than the liberal mind, and, at least on some issues, liberals are more dogmatist and less rigid than conservatives. Kaikati, Torelli, and Winterich (2013) demonstrated that conservatives may align their donation decisions with the generosity of liberals, and, hence, increase their generosity when anticipating accountability to an audience of liberals with whom they share a salient common identity. Tetlock (1984) found that the reformist and progressive members of the UK Labor party used dichotomous reasoning, when handling some political affairs. Using content analysis, Tetlock and Boettger (1989) found that the leaders of Gorbachev reformist party in Soviet Union were more rigid, less flexible, and more extremist in dealing with some political issues, than the traditionalist Soviet politicians.

Furthermore, according to the divergence theory, the same individuals can express different opinion about the same political issue in laboratory *versus* out of laboratory, in chat-rooms *versus* everyday life (Khabbache, 2012), alone *versus* in a group (Crisp & Turner, 2010, p. 161), or when coping with an unexpected event.

1.6. Aim of the study

Based on the above described theoretical framework, the following research questions were formulated: i) which Islamist movement is more predisposed to accept the principles of the civil state, the JSM, which apparently exhibits a conservative profile, or the JDP, which qualifies itself as a moderate and progressive movement? ii) Which Islamist movement is more predisposed to negotiate with such principles, after facing criticisms and observations from the interviewer? iii) Furthermore, given the emerging role of females in Islamist movements, sub-analyses were carried out adopting a gender perspective.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Sample

A convenience sample of 100 subjects (50 politically associated with the JSM versus 50 associated with the JDP) from a middle-class socio-cultural *milieu* were recruited. The sample comprised of 75 males and 25 females (43 males and 7 females politically associated with the JSM, 32 males and 18 females associated with the JDP). At the time of the interview, all the subjects held at least a university degree; mean age was 27.3 ± 6.3 years (range 18.0–55.0 years).

Each participant agreed to take part into the survey. The study protocol was approved by the Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fez, Morocco, and the survey was conducted according to the 1964 Helsinki ethical Declaration and its subsequent amendments.

2.2. Experimental procedure

Psychological and cognitive attitudes, and, in particular, cognitive flexibility, of the two Islamist movements (the JSM and the JDP) were investigated by means of the counterargument task (CAT) situation (Khabbache, 2014). CAT elicits an aversive psychological state, named by Festinger (1957) cognitive dissonance. Given that individuals strive toward consistency, to escape from the sense of inconsistency, subjects can have mainly three options. The first one is trying to make the different ideas becoming, fully or at least partially, congruent (this behavior is termed as acceptance). The second option arises when the background is not so clear-cut concerning the possibility of translating/reframing a principle in order to legitimate/accept it. This, therefore, leads to a kind of mixed attitudes and conditional acceptance. The third option arises when subjects face a big gap between their conception and principles, with the impossibility to find any indication or argument for filling this gap. This leads to a kind of behavior termed as rejection.

In practical terms, each individual was administered a semi-structured interview (length approximately 1 hour), which took the form of a CAT, inquiring the subject's attitudes, regarding the possibility of coexistence/compatibility between Islam and the principles of the civil state. The interview comprised of 8 items, each one on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 “totally disagree” to 5 “totally agree”), in order to quantitatively assess the strength of agreement to the explored topic (before CAT), and, after CAT, the attitude changes. More in detail, the domains explored by the interview are reported in Table 1.

2.3. Statistical analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was carried out on the 8 items of the questionnaire. Different PCA runs were carried out, both before and after CAT. First, an exploratory PCA was performed: after checking the loadings, items were deleted in cases of unsatisfactory loading (that is to say, values less than 0.45) or loading without a sound theoretical explanation. Different PCAs were, therefore, conducted iteratively until the achievement of a satisfactory, clearly interpretable solution, which could be replicated before and after CAT.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for repeated serial measurements (pre-post design rmANOVA) was performed with the commercial software “Statistical Package for Social Sciences” for Windows (SPSS version 24, IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

Figures with p-values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

3. Results

3.1. Principal component analysis

From the PCA, before CAT, three principal components emerged explaining up to 53.79% of the total variance. This structure was replicated after CAT, with three principal components extracted explaining up to 55.25% of the total variance. The first component (that was termed “separation of

Table 1. Structure of the questionnaire administered. In the first step, the participant is asked whether he/she agrees/disagrees about a certain topic and, in the second step, in case of agreement/disagreement, he/she is exposed to a counterargument task (CAT)

Item	Domain	CAT
Item 1	Separation of legislative, executive and juridical powers	<i>In case of agreement:</i> there exist some Islamic contexts in which no separation of powers occurs (see, for instance, Iran or Saudi Arabia) <i>In case of disagreement:</i> in different situations of the history of the Caliphate, judges could express opinions contrasting with the views of the Caliph
Item 2	Secularism	<i>In case of agreement:</i> a secular community is without guidance and has lost its Islamic roots and identity, with the risk of becoming infidel and atheist, especially if it claims that religion is unnecessary within (or incompatible with) the daily civil life <i>In case of disagreement:</i> the <i>hadith</i> * on the "pollination and affairs of this world", reported by Sahih Muslim, Sunan Ibn Maja, Sahih Ibn Hibban, and Musnad Ahmed as well as by other sources and reputed scholars, apparently allows the separation between religion and civil/political affairs
Item 3	Democracy	<i>In case of agreement:</i> democratic societies are vulnerable for seditions and chaotic situations. Furthermore, the governance of a council made up of wise, selected, highly reputable scholars would be preferable to the opinion of the mass <i>In case of disagreement:</i> the election of Abū Bakr al-Siddiq to Caliph apparently is in favour of democracy and its principles
Item 4	Pluralism	<i>In case of agreement:</i> partisanship could lead to sedition and betray the Islamic political message and the true Islamic identity <i>In case of disagreement:</i> there exist different episodes of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), in which he legitimated different opinions among the companions
Item 5	Elected governance	<i>In case of agreement:</i> Abū Bakr recommended Omar as Caliph, who, in his turn, recommended Othman at the Caliphate <i>In case of disagreement:</i> the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) did not recommend anybody at the Caliphate, neither Ali nor anyone of his companions

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Item	Domain	CAT
Item 6	Participative governance	<i>In case of agreement:</i> this principle is completely unknown to the history of the Caliphate and, in particular, of the Rightly Guided Caliphs <i>In case of disagreement:</i> the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) contributed to the establishment of advisory, participative organizations
Item 7	Elected governmental institutions	<i>In case of agreement:</i> religion is fundamental in organizing Islamic life according to the principles of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him). Without the guardianship of the clergy, it is impossible to achieve Islamic goals within the political life <i>In case of disagreement:</i> Muslims conquering other lands and countries did not replace the local governments and institutions, in case of acceptance of Islam as religion
Item 8	Acceptance of an elected non Muslim governor	<i>In case of agreement:</i> accepting non Muslim governors would lead to increasing corruption and illegality <i>In case of disagreement:</i> during the history different Caliphs built strong relationship with non Muslim governors, nominating them also as consultants and advisors

**Hadith* is an Islamic report describing the words, actions, or habits of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him).

powers and participatory governance”) comprised of items 1, 4, 6 and 7, whereas the second component (termed “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy”) comprised of items 3, 5 and 8. Item 2 loaded on the third component (“secularism”). Before CAT, loadings ranged from 0.51 (item 6) to 0.74 (item 7) for “separation of powers and participatory governance”, and from 0.74 (item 8) to 0.80 (item 5) for “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy”. Item 2 loaded on “secularism” with a loading of 0.67. After CAT, loadings went from 0.50 (item 7) to 0.79 (item 4) for “separation of powers and participatory governance”, and from 0.60 (item 5) to 0.84 (item 8) for “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy”. Loading of item 2 on “secularism” yielded a value of 0.78. Further details are reported in Table 2.

3.2. Repeated measures ANOVA analysis

The results of rmANOVA conducted on the extracted components revealed an effect of association for “separation of powers and participatory governance” and for “secularism”, but not for “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy”. More in detail, these findings indicated that the JDP members expressed more positives attitudes than JSM associates concerning questions of secularism, separation of powers, pluralism, elected governmental institutions, and participative governance, but not concerning acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy (Tables 3 and 4).

The CAT effect was significant for all the components (“separation of powers and participatory governance”, “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy” and “secularism”), increasing all the scores. The interaction between affiliation and CAT was not statistically significant for “separation of powers and participatory governance” and “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy”, whereas resulted borderline for “secularism”(Table 3).

Table 2. Principal components and respective loadings resulting from the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) before and after the counterargument task (CAT)

Item	Principal Component		
	Separation of powers and participatory governance	Acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy	Secularism
Before CAT			
Item 7	0.74		
Item 1	0.61		
Item 4	0.57		
Item 6	0.51		
Item 5		0.80	
Item 3		0.78	
Item 8		0.74	
Item 2			0.67
After CAT			
Item 4	0.79		
Item 6	0.67		
Item 1	0.53		
Item 7	0.50		
Item 8		0.84	
Item 3		0.77	
Item 5		0.60	
Item 2			0.78

Table 3. The political association and the counterargument task (CAT) effects via analysis of variance (ANOVA) for repeated serial measures (rmANOVA)

Effect	Separation of powers and participatory governance		Acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy		Secularism	
	F	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value
Association	5.03	0.027	0.51	0.478	7.39	0.008
CAT	65.40	<0.001	118.66	<0.001	105.60	<0.001
Association X CAT	2.56	0.113	0.94	0.335	2.93	0.090

Concerning gender, no significant impact on “separation of powers and participatory governance” or on “acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy” could be computed. There was, instead, a significant effect on “secularism”, with females reporting higher scores than males (Table 4).

4. Discussion

Our findings seem to suggest that the convergence theory, positing a strong relationship between political association and political attitudes (Carney et al., 2008; Cohen, 2003; Jost et al., 2008), is able to explain, at least partially, some but not all the attitudes of the Islamist parties.

JDP members gave significantly different replies compared to JSM members, accepting elected governmental institutions and separation of powers, being more positively predisposed to secularism, pluralism and to a participative government. Concerning the other domains of the questionnaire, instead, it was not possible to detect any significant difference in the attitudes and/or attitudes changes between the two groups. The reasons that lead JDP members to deal with some domains more positively than JSM affiliates could be better understood when taking into account the political organizational chart of each movement and its effect on their political

Table 4. The means and standard deviation of positives attitudes in function of the political association (Justice and development or JDP, and Justice and Spirituality Movement or JSM), gender and the counterargument task (CAT) effects. The questionnaire comprises of 5-point Likert-type items (from 1 “totally disagree” to 5 “totally agree”)

Population	Separation of powers and participatory governance	Acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy	Secularism
Before CAT			
All population	11.53 ± 3.42	6.82 ± 2.80	1.57 ± 0.54
JDP	12.38 ± 3.86	6.92 ± 2.84	1.66 ± 0.52
JSM	10.68 ± 2.71	6.72 ± 2.79	1.48 ± 0.54
Male	11.29 ± 3.14	6.91 ± 2.78	1.49 ± 0.53
Female	12.24 ± 4.17	6.56 ± 2.90	1.80 ± 0.50
After CAT			
All population	13.30 ± 3.09	8.73 ± 2.66	2.41 ± 0.89
JDP	13.80 ± 3.05	9.00 ± 2.84	2.64 ± 0.75
JSM	12.80 ± 3.08	8.46 ± 2.48	2.18 ± 0.96
Male	13.27 ± 3.04	8.64 ± 2.59	2.33 ± 0.92
Female	13.40 ± 3.32	9.00 ± 2.90	2.64 ± 0.76

positions and instances. For example, the JSM movement has a strong, hierarchical pyramid organization structure, being managed by a leader who has a kind of sacred status. On the contrary, JDP members are democratically elected, instead of being designated/nominated and are, as such, encouraged to deal more positively with and to accept elected governmental institutions (Khabbache et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the JDP has played different public political roles and its active participation in the public political sphere allows it to deal more openly with the principles of participative government and secularism. Differently, the JSM constantly debates the legitimacy of the Moroccan political system and prefers to remain isolated, which does not permit it to update its political vision and plans, assuming a more pragmatic approach. This said, the divergence theory, claiming the possibility of some mismatches between affiliation and political attitudes (Conway et al., 2015; Kaikati et al., 2013; Tetlock, 1984; Tetlock & Boettger, 1989), seems to be more appropriate in explaining only the second domain of the questionnaire (“acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy”). For example, JDP members, despite their liberalist profile, firmly refuse a non Muslim governor as well as the principles of democracy, both before and after CAT (indicating a kind of latitude of rejection or regressive attitude).

On the other hand, JSM members, despite their conservative profile, can accept or deal with some civil state principles, such as separation of powers, and participative governmental institutions, reading them under Islamic lenses (active participation—“*hisba*”—, dialogic consensus “*ijma*”—, consultation—“*shura*”—, consultative assembly and participative governance—“*majlis al-shura*”).

It seems clear that the two Islamist movements, despite their differences, share the same core of the Islamic state representation, for example refusing being governed by a non Muslim governor. More in detail, two levels of acceptance/rejection of negotiable *versus* non negotiable civil state principles can be observed. Principles such as separation of powers, secularism, political pluralism, participative governance, and elected governmental institutions, can be reconciled with the religious concept of Islamic state, making cognitive efforts in order to interpret and re-interpret religious knowledge at the light of the civil state principles, thus “islamizing modernity”.

On the contrary, principles like acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy appear to be not negotiable and constitute the strong core of the Islamist movements, regardless of their specific political *manifesto* and *agenda*.

Summarizing, our empirical data give a complex, nuanced view of the Islamist movements. The convergence theory, at least for the two Moroccan Islamist movements under study, can explain some but not all of the attitudes concerning the civil state principles, whereas for some principles considered not negotiable there occurs a degree of attitudinal uniformity, with a small, negligible impact of the association effect. Specifically regarding this strong identity core, there seems to be a dominant orientation ideology: according to Bourdieu (1997), this functions as a sort of common sense, a kind of unquestioned truth, and a set of undisputed beliefs, which plays a major role in guiding and shaping perceptual and explanatory *schemata* of individuals in order to produce a common view of societal actions and similar political attitudes (Chabrak & Craig, 2013).

In our case, this dominant, transversal ideology is the statement and affirmation of Islam as the best political, economic and social model, and an excellent example of good governance and administration. Islam is the only way to guarantee a kind of balance between a selfish liberalism and an authoritarian socialism. Only Islam appears to be the remedy against the moral, political, economic and societal problems that plague the contemporary society. It is not only a matter of being Muslim (*versus* non Muslim) and believing (or not) in Islam, but of practicing pious and self-righteous behaviors (being Muslim and, as such, a correct person *versus* not being Muslim and, as such, a bad person) (Klein & Epley, 2016). This statement is constantly widespread through the

new information and communication technologies (Loza, 2007), as well as by school text-books, thus reaching also ordinary people (Khabbache et al., 2012).

Concerning the impact of gender, it is interesting to notice that female subjects reported higher scores than the male counterparts, even though statistically significant only for the third principal component (secularism). As maintained by Gerami (2018), Islamism is generally challenged by gender arrangements, modernity, deterritorialization and globalization, with women behaving as agency of resistance, change and subversion against the traditional rhetorics of a patriarchal masculinity and the narrative of oppression, segregation and seclusion. The recent female activism is pushing traditional Islamist movements to embrace a new *agenda*, and to negotiate their historical values, recognizing the increasing role of women within the Arabic societies and implementing compromises before unprecedented (Abdellatif & Ottaway, 2007).

The incorporation of women within the Islamist movements is contributing to re-shape their organization, calling for more gender equity, rights and challenging traditional practices of male domination and female subordination. A more “secular” society represents one of the objectives women intend to achieve and fight for. Women are contributing to make Islamist movements more multi-faceted and complex than what commonly thought (Gerami, 2018).

4.1. Limitations

Despite its novelty, the present study is not without limitations. The major shortcoming is given by the small sample size employed. Moreover, attitude change could be investigated only using a limited lot of time (approximately 1 hour *per* participant), while its persistence throughout time could not be assessed. As such, the present investigation should be considered as exploratory and further studies are warranted.

5. Conclusion

The goal of the present study was to examine the impact of political association on attitudes and on change in attitudes concerning the civil state principles, when the subjects had to face CAT. The political association had a significant impact on different civil state principles (secularism, separation of powers, political pluralism, elected governmental institutions, and participative governance), whereas other principles (acceptance of non Muslim governors and democracy) were considered to constitute the strong identity core of an Islamist party and were, as such, rejected. A significant gender effect could be found only for the principle of secularism.

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