Article

Communal Religious Practice and Support for Armed Parties: Evidence from Lebanon

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Abstract

Does religion inevitably promote support for militant politics? Using a new and unique data set compiled from a nationally representative survey in Lebanon, we examine the conditions under which communal religious practice may serve to promote support for or opposition to armed parties. We argue that this relationship, far from being unidirectional and consistent, depends on the interests of the individual sectarian group. For groups engaged in conflict, communal prayer may increase support for arming political parties. For noncombatant groups, however, religion tends to promote opposition to such militarization. Using both observational and experimental evidence, we demonstrate that communal religion increases the salience of group interests through both identity and informational mechanisms. For regular worship attenders, communal religious practice increases the salience of sectarian identity. For non-attenders, informational primes about sectarian interests have the same effect. Among noncombatant groups, this increased salience leads to opposition to armed parties whose presence would threaten the livelihoods and security of those on the sidelines.

Keywords

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Does communal religious behavior promote support for militant politics? The recent spread of militant Islamist groups in several parts of the Arab and Muslim worlds has led to widespread speculation that religious practice in this region tends to promote militant attitudes. However, to date, no systematic empirical study has examined the link between communal prayer and support for political militancy in any part of the post–Arab Spring Middle East. Various aspects of religion have long been theorized to be associated with militancy. Studies exploring this relationship have largely focused on either the doctrinal beliefs of religious faiths or on individual piety and have sought to determine whether these aspects predispose certain individuals or religious groups to be either more violent or more supportive of violence (Appleby 1999; Hall 2003; Hassner 2009; Juergensmeyer 2003, 2008; Wellman and Tokuno 2004). In this article, we focus instead on the predictive power of the *institutional* aspects of religion—namely, the effect of *communal* religious practice—on support for militancy. We argue that the communal aspect of religion is among the most important factors in determining how religion influences attitudes toward militant politics, particularly in contexts where political identities are defined in sectarian terms. Importantly, we find that communal worship increases support for militant politics for some groups but has the exact opposite effect for others.

We test these claims with original data from Lebanon, a context which is both militarized as well as and in which the relationship between religion and violence has significant political consequences. Lebanese political life has long been defined by the presence of subnational armed political parties and influenced by political and military developments in Syria. Although most political parties were officially demilitarized at the end of the civil war, Hezbollah and other less well-known militias aligned with major political parties remain important actors in Lebanese politics. In addition, Lebanese politics were largely dictated from Damascus during the three-decades long Syrian occupation of the country. The recent turmoil in Syria has again brought both the presence of armed militias and the influence of political developments in Syria to the forefront of Lebanese political debates, as the violence has spilled over considerably into Lebanon and has taken on an increasingly sectarian tone. An important question arising from Lebanon and Syria's current crisis is the degree to which members of Lebanon's various religious sects support increased militancy through the arming of political parties, and how group interests, made salient by the communal aspects of religion, affect these attitudes.

This article examines the conditions under which the communal aspect of religion may induce or impede support for armed political parties through an original nationally representative survey conducted in Lebanon between December 12, 2013, and January 10, 2014. Because the salient identity division in Lebanon is a religious-sectarian one, we hypothesize that *communal* aspects of religion, operationalized as frequency of attendance of communal worship, will increase the salience of group identity and therefore promote political attitudes closer in alignment with the interests of the individual's sect. We find that communal religion does *not* always promote support for militant politics. Although regular participation in communal

religious practice is robustly associated with an increase in sectarian identification, and sometimes increases support for militant politics, it sometimes has exactly the opposite effect. This duality is present even within the same country.

We argue that the reason for this inconsistent relationship is not cultural or doctrinal differences between religious groups, but rather the different interests held by these groups in their social, economic, and political environments. These interests are more salient for regular communal worship attenders who are consistently provided with information about the interests of their group through repeated exposure in homogeneous, identity-charged worship environments. For groups actively engaged in and hoping to emerge victorious from conflict, we expect a nonnegative relationship between communal worship attendance and support for arming political parties. By contrast, when the interests and livelihood of a person's sectarian group are threatened by the presence of armed parties—and that group does not have a clear motivation for participation in or potential benefit from the conflict—then communal religious attendance will tend to decrease support for armed parties. We find that for Lebanon's "bystander" sect—its Christians—measures of communal worship attendance have a fairly consistent anti-militancy effect.

Using an original information priming experiment, we test our proposed mechanism. We demonstrate that the anti-militancy effect of communal worship attendance among Christians is a function of *information*, providing nonattenders with information about the interests of their sect moves their attitudes into closer alignment with the attitudes held by attenders. By providing information about the interests of the sectarian group, these primes raise the salience of sectarian identity and provide information that nonattenders would otherwise be less likely to possess. These findings represent an important contribution to the study of militant attitudes, suggesting that religion—specifically its communal aspect—remains an important determinant of attitudes toward militant politics but perhaps not always in the expected ways.

The article proceeds as follows. We first review the existing literature on religion and violence, providing justification for why we focus on the communal and institutional aspects of religion. We then discuss the Lebanese context, demonstrating why it provides a useful test of the relationship between communal religion and support for arming political parties. Next, we present our theory and hypotheses. We then present our results, including those from the information priming experiment testing our proposed mechanism, and discuss the implications of our findings.

Religion and Militant Politics

Much of the literature on religion and militancy suggests that while this relationship is complex, religion often promotes violence and communal conflict. Although virtually every faith tradition promotes peace in its official teachings, most have at least some history of violence; as Wellman and Tokuno (2004, 291) write, "there are patterns within religion that tend toward conflict and even violence" and "religious violence ... may not be inevitable, but it should surprise no one." A number of

scholars have focused on how violence is justified within the textual and theological foundations of the tradition, and how it is employed in ritual practice, notions of justice, and symbolism of the religious tradition. Juergensmeyer (2008, 213) writes that "religious symbols and historical narratives are steeped in blood" and that "any attempt to understand the violence of contemporary religious rebels must begin with an understanding of the violence inherent in religious symbolism and tradition" (see also Juergensmeyer 2003). Religious justifications have been provided for communal violence in the form of civil wars, defensive wars, and genocides (Hall 2003). Further, Toft (2007) and Fox (2002) have documented that roughly one-third of civil wars between 1940 and 2000 have involved religion, and the number of instances of religious conflict has increased over time.

However, "religion" is a broad concept. In existing studies, the term is used to represent any number of different meanings. Some scholars have focused on the social history of religious faiths. Others have dichotomized what "religion" includes into its ideational aspects, related to text, dogma, or individual beliefs, and its institutional forms, related to communal behaviors. Elsewhere, particularly in studies looking at individual-level factors, "religion" often includes three analytically distinct aspects of religion, namely, belonging, beliefs, and behaviors. Belonging refers to individual identification with a faith (Layman 1997), beliefs include doctrinal or literal interpretations of religious text (McDaniel and Ellison 2008), and behaviors encompass both individual (such as frequency of prayer) as well as communal behaviors including communal worship attendance or voluntarism at places of worship (Smidt 2013; Campbell 2004; Olson and Warber 2008).

When broken down into its various components, a number of aspects of religion have been found to be positively related to militancy. Much of this literature is more descriptive than causal. Some scholars have focused on doctrine, demonstrating how violence is justified within the textual and theological foundations of various faith traditions, and how it is employed in ritual practice, notions of justice, and symbolism of the religious tradition (Juergensmeyer 2008, 2003). Writing about the growing "menace" of modern terrorism, Marty (2005, 6) claims that "most of these terrorists act in the name of some religion or other." Islam in particular is viewed as a faith especially prone to violence, and this claim is justified by pointing to the teachings contained within its doctrine. For example, Jackson (2007, 405) observes that a "core narrative" of scholarly discourse on this subject is that "'Islamic terrorism' is motivated largely by religious or 'sacred' causes rather than political or ideological concerns."

When it comes to religion at the individual level, a number of studies have demonstrated little or no relationship between religion in various forms and support for militant politics (Tessler and Robbins 2007; Tessler and Nachtwey 1998; Furia and Lucas 2008; Fair, Ramsay, and Kull 2008; Shapiro and Fair 2010). However, religion as operationalized as a group-level, identity characteristic is theorized and often found to demonstrate a positive relationship with violence. Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers (2014) find that certain elements of religion, including religious groups' grievances, promote armed conflict. Danzell (2011, 100) finds that religious parties

are among the most likely groups to use terror when fighting regimes that are in power. Hassner (2009) argues that competition over sacred spaces in which groups have a vested interested makes interreligious conflict between groups highly likely.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the nature of the relationship between religion and militancy depends on which aspect is considered and which operationalization is used. In addition, the literature suggests a positive relationship between group-level aspects of religion and violence. However, a close reading of existing theories and literature—and more importantly, one that adequately separates out the various components of religion—suggests that while the group-level institutional and communal aspects of religion may be the most important in thinking about its relationship with behaviors such as violence, there is evidence and theoretical reason to question whether this effect always *increases* support for violence and militancy.

A renewed focus in recent scholarship on communal religious behavior and related communal institutions that impose interests and constraints on individual actors reintroduces "the role of interests ... as critical to the analysis of religion and politics" (Gill 2001, 120), equally if not more important than beliefs and values for understanding how and why religious groups behave politically. Philpott (2013) notes that religion can promote violent communal conflict in two different ways. First, religion shapes and defines the identities and loyalties of those groups engaged in conflict, not dissimilar to other ideologies such as nationalism (Juergensmeyer 2003). Here, religion exerts an influence separate from its theological content, and it defines various sects as distinct groups, based on beliefs. However, "once religion has defined a community, it is other motives and forces that send it into combat—the desire for national self-determination, revenge for historical injustices, or economic motives" (p. 401)—in other words, interests. Toft (2007, 103) identifies 40 percent of the post-1950 civil wars as ones in which religion shapes the identity of involved participants, though other material motivations tend to propel the conflict. Alternatively, religion can shape the goals, "ends," or interests of combatant communities, and the goal of these religious groups is to control or redefine the relationship between religion, competing religious establishments, and the state. Here, political theology matters. The extent of the "integrationist character," or ideas about the relationship between religion and state (Philpott 2013, 399-403), and the mismatch between these beliefs and the current system propel armed clashes.

This second influence suggests that institutional design and strategic interests, more so than doctrinal teachings or affiliations, explain religious groups' behaviors—such as when they are incompatible with democracy (Esposito and Voll 1996; Kalyvas 2000; Robinson 1997). In these studies, interests motivating the various behaviors of religious actors include political power, control over certain aspects of society or law, or financial gain. Interests and institutions may be even more important in situations of significant religious pluralism or religious tension, where more ethnocentric and exclusive narratives of religion are promoted at the expensive of more ecumenical and inclusive narratives (Corstange 2012). This last statement might be particularly true of sectarian discourse in countries such as Lebanon, in which religious institutions

of varying types (including parties, churches, and other groups mobilizing on religious discourse) differentiate not only between different faiths and their interests but also between worship attenders and nonattenders.

Existing empirical studies similarly suggest that the communal practice of religion may have strong predictive power for attitudes toward political militancy. Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan (2009) find that although regular prayer has little relationship with support for martyrdom or out-group hostility, attendance at religious service is positively associated with both of these forms of militancy. Thus, religion not only shapes potential combatant communities by distinguishing and defining them in opposition to other groups, as Philpott (2007) suggests, but also provides information to and builds social capital among potential militants and supporters through communal worship experiences. In this context, Durkheim's distinction between "beliefs" and "rites" is important, and the latter concept refers to the group dimension of religion, which Durkheim (2001, 46) argues "must be something eminently collective." Smith (1996) identifies several features of communal religion that facilitate social movement activism, including, potentially, militant politics: trained and experienced leadership resources, financial resources, congregated participants and solidarity incentives, and preexisting communication channels, among others. It may be that religious groups are also particularly well equipped to engage in conflict or to organize the types of beliefs and behaviors that make conflict more likely. As part of their economic theory of religious extremism, Iannaccone and Berman (2006, 125) argue that "since organized violence is an extreme form of cooperative production, sectarian groups can be singularly effective terrorists should they choose that path to political power."

As a result, we choose to focus our inquiry on the religious institution of communal worship because existing theory and studies suggest that this particular aspect of religion possesses characteristics that make it an especially potent force for motivating support for militant behavior. We theorize religion as a phenomenon that is distinct from other forms of identity. In some ways, religion in this account looks very much like ethnic identity as a form of objective classification. However, an important distinction in discussing religious identities here is between *identification* and *identity* (see Hardin 1997). Simply being a *member* of a given group by objective standards (identity) is not sufficient to feel subjectively part of that group or to hold preferences in close alignment with the interests of that group (identification). Rather, we will show that *identification* (or, in our parlance, the *salience* of group identity) is a tremendously important factor in determining individuals' attitudes toward armed parties. The institution of communal prayer—a feature unique to *religion* rather than other forms of identity—has a powerful effect on identification and in turn plays a large part in directing citizens' political preferences. In this sense, while religion contains many elements that are similar to those found in ethnicity, class, gender, and other forms of identity, it also contains the uniquely powerful feature of communal prayer.

The communal aspect of religion is more likely to build social capital and raise group consciousness among group members when compared to religion's other

dimensions (Putnam 2000, 74). While many scholars focus on the effect of religious social capital on different nonviolent political behaviors, these characteristics may also build the cohesion necessary for forming a militant group. Scholars have long noted the potential for religious institutions to politically mobilize citizens, most thoroughly in the United States (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). Participation in religious institutions has been demonstrated to increase levels of civic skills, political efficacy, and political knowledge (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Putnam 2000). This argument is similar to studies of civil society in the de Tocqueville tradition, in which nonpolitical voluntary associations are identified as sites in which individuals learn values such as tolerance, pluralism, respect for the law as well as civic lessons about such topics as their right to be represented and their potential political roles in society (Diamond and Plattner 1996). Religious institutions have also been documented to play a more direct role in political mobilization (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Jamal 2005). Other scholars have argued that religious institutions bring together similar individuals—possessing similar characteristics in terms of background, socioeconomic status, historical experiences, and opinions—which instills or strengthens group consciousness in a way that empowers political participation and mobilization (Harris 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1996).

These findings provide the theoretical basis for why an exploration of the relationship between religion and violence should focus on *communal* aspects of religion. However, though the positive effects of increased group consciousness and social capital on outcomes related to political mobilization have been well documented, the literature suggests that under certain conditions, increased group consciousness can similarly decrease cooperation between groups and promote group protectionism and related defensive behaviors. Jamal (2007) has argued that civil society organizations under nondemocratic regimes may not serve a democratizing role but rather reinforce preexisting patterns of clientelism and promote tolerance of nondemocratic practices, as associations that are permitted to exist and survive in these contexts are most likely somehow connected to the regime. Extrapolating from this argument, if religious organizations can serve as agents of democratic socialization in democratic contexts, membership in these organizations may serve similar socialization roles that reaffirm and perpetuate out-group distinctions and discrimination in other sectarian and highly divided contexts.

The creation of group consciousness frequently involves the creation of a sense of relative group deprivation and group defensiveness against the other. Miller et al. (1981, 495) argue that the salience of group consciousness "involves the acceptance of the belief that fundamental differences exist between the interests of one's own group and those of the dominant group. Relations between the groups are thereby perceived as antagonistic and social barriers as illegitimate, resulting in a sense of relative deprivation and discontent with one's position in society." Participation in places of worship strengthens group consciousness by providing interactions with and information from similar individuals of the same group, which also increases the salience of relative group status. While a heightened collective sense of group

deprivation can foster political mobilization, it can also foster defensive attitudes and behaviors. Thus, in Lebanon, religious associations may serve as agents of sectarian socialization. They provide opportunities for interaction with other sectarian group members, which build social capital among and strengthen the salience of group identity for participants. Importantly, they most likely only build "bonding" social capital, or ties *within* the group rather than between groups (Putnam 2000). These behaviors also provide information about the group, its interests, and its status of relative deprivation or privilege (or the potential for future relative deprivation) to individuals who regularly participate in these religious associations through communal worship. This increased group consciousness and information may create the potential for increased political participation but may also foster defensive attitudes against other groups or in protection of group interests. The logic of these claims is similar to that presented by Varshney (2003). Since communal prayer by definition only fosters ties *within* sects, it may tend to promote hostility toward other groups. Communal worship, then, appears to be the mechanism through which religion shapes religious communities' collective behavior not only potentially creating within-group social capital and the potential for political mobilization but also providing information and creating defensive attitudes toward other sectarian groups.[1]

Taken together, the literature discussed earlier suggests that religion may have a fairly consistently positive relationship with violence. However, another line of scholarship suggests that the relationship between religion and violence is far more complicated. While acknowledging that "it would be ludicrous to minimize the recurrent threat of religious violence," Appleby (1999, 8) argues that religion can also play a powerful peace-building role, a duality that he calls "the ambivalence of the sacred." Philpott (2007) suggests that the link between religion and violence depends on the political theology of the group as well as the institutional context in which they find themselves. Canetti et al. (2010) find that the association between religion and support for political violence is only found in the presence of deprivation and psychological resource loss.

It seems that there may not be a simple unidirectional relationship between religion and support for political violence. In this study, we argue that sectarian interests condition the link between religion and support for armed parties. Indeed, religion sometimes does increase support for these parties, but sometimes it has precisely the opposite effect. Instead of focusing on doctrines of individual sects, we argue that the interests possessed by sectarian groups in their particular political contexts determine how communal religious practice will affect attitudes toward armed parties. Following Appleby (1999), we argue that this relationship is complex and not unidirectional, rather different interests can lead to different outcomes.

Communal Religion and Armed Parties in Lebanon

Lebanon is an ideal setting for analyzing the relationship between communal religion and support for armed parties because of the influential roles of both forces

in Lebanese politics. First, as a multireligious country, Lebanon allows us to analyze how different religious groups can demonstrate distinct relationships between religion and support for armed parties, even while operating within the same political structures and institutions. When Lebanon's last census was conducted in 1932, Christians were a demographic majority. While no official figures currently exist, it is almost universally accepted that today Christians represent less than 40 percent of the population. The largest single Christian sect (Maronites) is estimated to constitute about 21 percent of the population, compared to about 27 percent for both Sunnis and Shi'a.[2] The reality of demographic change and the uncertainty that comes with it makes inter-sectarian conflict a salient issue in contemporary Lebanon. Second, religious identity is highly crystallized in Lebanon, with every citizen assigned a largely immutable (in formal terms, at least) sectarian identity at birth. With a weak state and almost constant political conflict, non-state actors have taken over much of Lebanon's public goods provision. Many of these actors are explicitly religious in nature and cater heavily to one sect or another. Third, the ongoing Syrian conflict has spilled over considerably into Lebanon, and the conflict has taken on an increasingly sectarian tone as it has progressed. Like most issues in Lebanon, the interests of Lebanese citizens in the conflict are determined in no small part by their sectarian affiliations as well as their individual religious behaviors.

In addition, armed political parties are a salient feature of Lebanese politics. The country's most defining and devastating experience mixing weapons and politics occurred during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990). As the Lebanese government disintegrated, militias became the representatives of the interests of and provided security and services to Lebanon's sectarian groups and their various factions, divisions driven by political, ideological, and strategic considerations. Each sect was represented by at least one powerful militia, which not only contested the military battles of the civil war but were political organizations providing security and services to their constituents (Katz 1985; Fisk 2001; Mackey 2013).[3] Although political parties were officially demilitarized after the civil war, the status of armed parties remains a central topic in Lebanon. Lebanon's exception to the disarmament demanded by the various agreements ending the civil war is Hezbollah, which publicly remained armed and claimed the right to do so because of its status as a "resistance force" to Israeli occupation, a claim that has grown increasingly contentious following the 2000 Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.[4] Three additional events—the implication of Syria and Hezbollah in the February 2005 assassination of Sunni former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, which killed 19 other people; the summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, resulting in 1,191 Lebanese (mostly civilian) and 159 Israeli (mostly soldier) deaths; and the May 2008 skirmishes between Hezbollah fighters and militiamen allied with the Future Movement and the Hariri family in West Beirut, resulting in 81 deaths and marking the first time that Hezbollah had used weapons against other Lebanese since the civil war—further escalated tensions over Hezbollah's armed status. These incidents resulted in two resolutions issued from the United Nations Security Council, numbers 1559 and

1701, and the Doha Agreement, signed in 2008, all reiterating the Ta'if Accords' call to disarm parties, and the Syrian withdrawal.

The salience of the armed political party issue is not limited to Hezbollah or even to Shi'a parties, and the clash between Hezbollah and the Future Movement militiamen provides evidence that Hezbollah is not the only remaining armed party in Lebanon. The combination of Hezbollah's continued armament and spillover from the Syrian conflict has increased the salience of this issue in the most recent years, as violence from the Syrian conflict has spread into Beirut and Tripoli, and Lebanese factions have divided along traditional lines for and against the Syrian regime. Sunni Muslims have largely supported the rebels, while Hezbollah and the Shi'a have primarily sided with the Asad regime. Both sides have provided support in many forms, including sending fighters and financial support across the border. Lebanese Sunni involvement in Syria was initially claimed to be limited to a few Salafi or radical groups, but subsequent developments suggested that Sunni involvement has likely been far deeper (Asfura-Heim, Steinitz, and Schbley 2013).

Theorizing Communal Religion and Support for Militancy

Existing literature suggests that communal religion may be positively correlated with militancy in various ways, but this relationship is not always so clear. We theorize that the relationship between communal religion and support for militant politics—in this case manifested as support for armed political parties—is far more complicated than previous single-directional claims would imply. As Fox and Sandler (2004, 36) note, religion "is both a common justification for war and the basis for those who advocate peace" (see also Appleby 1999). Following this line of thinking, we suggest that religion is neither always pro- nor anti-militant and that the relationship between these variables depends on the interests of the group in the sociopolitical context in which they find themselves.

First, we argue that this relationship is conditional on the *salience* of religious group identity. Indeed, there is no reason to expect a relationship between religion, manifested as either religious identity or ideology, and support for armed politics, among populations or individuals for whom this identity is not salient. Communal religious practice will increase the salience of sectarian identity for regular worship attenders, as they receive information and forge bonds with other worshipers who increase the salience of group interests for the individual. Furthermore, when an individual is reminded of group interests, he or she will be more likely to form an opinion about armed politics based on sectarian interests.

In addition, *exposure* to conflict may serve as an additional conditioning variable that further heightens the salience of group interests. If a religious group is not heavily exposed to the tolls of a conflict, then it is likely that religious cues will have little to no effect on attitudes toward militant politics. However, if the religious group is highly exposed to the conflict, it is much more likely that communal religious attendance will play a significant role by pushing believers' attitudes into closer

alignment with the interests of their sects. In providing information and heightening the salience of sectarian identity, communal worship attendance will therefore be likely to influence attitudes toward armed parties only to the extent that the religious group's economic and security interests are endangered by the conflict.

Further, we posit that the relationship between religion and support for armed politics, far from being unidirectional and consistent, *depends on the interests* of the individual sectarian group. Groups that are engaged in conflict and have something to gain from arming parties may be moved by communal religion to support armed politics. These religious groups may be militarily or demographically superior to other groups or have interests that will be benefited from armed conflict. However, for noncombatant groups, particularly those that would be threatened by militarizing politics based on their relative strength, size, and group interests, we would expect religion to promote *opposition* to this militarization.

The link between security and economic interests in present-day Lebanon is very strong, particularly in the specter of the Syrian conflict. By 2013, foreign investors had begun withdrawing their investments in Lebanese banks—the economy's most important sector—due to security concerns (Khashan 2013, 75-76). Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh (who is a Christian) has stated that the refugee crisis alone is costing Lebanon US$8 billion per year and that the crisis "is a burden on Lebanon, its economy, and its social stability" (*Ya Libnan* 2014). Christians, with higher levels of wealth[5] than other sects and far too small of a population to hope to "win" the Syrian conflict in any sense, can only lose from continued militarization in Lebanon. As a result, and in contrast to Sunnis and Shi'a, their "group interest" should promote opposition to armed political parties.

We present a number of hypotheses based on existing literature and the ongoing events in Lebanon. Our first focus is on the role of information provided in worship contexts. Communal worship provides attenders with information about their group interests, and this information is important in increasing the salience of group identity. By talking with others before and after services and receiving political messages from clergy, attendees know more about the interests of their group and in turn are likely to possess a heightened sense of sectarian group interest. We hypothesize that for regular worship attenders, communal religious practice will increase the salience of sectarian identity, as they receive information and forge bonds with other worshipers who increase the salience of group interests for the individual. We hypothesize that for non-attenders, informational primes—both in the experimental setting and in real political contexts—about sectarian interests may serve the same purpose. When an individual is reminded of group interests, either through the conditioning effect of religious worship or in a temporary manner mimicking this information provision, he or she will be more likely to form an opinion about armed politics based on sectarian interests.

Information about the nature of the Lebanese context suggests that groups will be affected differently by heightened group consciousness. In other words, the direction of the effect will vary by group. The escalation of the Syrian conflict since March 2011 has created something of a sectarian arms race in Lebanon among both Sunnis and

Shi'a, both of whom are involved in the conflict and are hoping to gain military advantage over the other. Hezbollah's continued armament, and its ability to significantly influence the Syria crisis, has likewise pushed Sunni parties to pursue arming themselves in order to avoid being placed in a militarily inferior position relative to Hezbollah and its allies. It might be argued that the Future Movement's military defeat by Hezbollah in 2008 should make Sunnis oppose arming political parties, however, there is an abundance of evidence that this is not the case. In October 2012, before much of the large-scale Lebanese involvement in Syria had begun, the commander of the Future Movement's military wing admitted, "I wish I could establish a group as well-organized and professional as Hezbollah" (*al-Akhbar* 2012). Ahmed Fatfat, a leading Sunni MP and anti-Syrian politician, has similarly remarked that "Now, because Hezbollah has arms, everyone wants arms."[6] Sunni (Future Movement) MP Mouin Merhebi has recently advocated funding militias in the conflict-ridden largely Sunni city of Tripoli in order to "protect the city" (*al-Monitor* 2014c), lending credence to the widespread claims that the Future Movement has supported Sunni militias in both Lebanon and Syria. While Lebanese Sunni militias are generally militarily inferior to Hezbollah, the Syrian conflict has made noninvolvement an unfeasible option for Sunnis, and Sunnis now have strategic needs to arm themselves, if for no other reason than to defend themselves. We therefore hypothesize that communal practice will *increase* support for armed parties among both Sunnis and Shi'a.

Christians, the other major sectarian group in Lebanon, find themselves in a different position. While both Sunnis and Shi'a have strong incentives to arm political parties due to their involvement in the Syrian conflict (and fears that the other side will gain a military advantage), Christians may have considerable reasons to believe that arming political parties could threaten their interests in Lebanon. As Hadid (2014) notes, Christians have largely remained "on the sidelines" in a conflict that has taken on increasingly sectarian undertones.[7] As the wealthiest group in Lebanon, both historically and to a lesser extent presently, Christians have a considerable amount to lose from the spilling over of the Syrian civil war into Lebanon. Christians, once the majority of the Lebanese population, are now believed to make up less than 40 percent of the population[8] (US State Department 2011). Thus, it is unlikely that Christian groups could muster the number of fighters necessary to hold their own in the event of an outright sectarian conflict and their interest lies in avoiding the militarization of Lebanese politics. Public positions of Christian political leaders reflect these preferences. In March 2014, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea (well known for his desire to be the president) declared his willingness to put aside his presidential hopes and support his long-standing bitter rival Michel Aoun if Aoun was to force Hezbollah to disarm, saying, "Let Hizbullah say that it will withdraw from Syria and hand over its arms to the state once General Aoun is elected as president and I will seek to secure General Aoun's election as president" (*an-Nahar* 2014). While the Lebanese Christian community remains divided on many key issues, virtually all political parties realize that engagement in the Syrian conflict would be disastrous for Christian parties.

Even Aoun, a Hezbollah ally, has objected to Hezbollah's presence in Syria, calling it simply an "individual initiative" (*an-Nahar* 2013).

As a result of these divergent interests, we expect the relationship between communal prayer and support for armed parties to differ across sects.

> **Hypothesis 1:** Communal religious practice will tend to increase support for armed parties among Sunnis and Shiʿa but decrease support for armed parties among Christians.

We have also suggested that exposure to conflict matters. Since Sunni and Shiʿa involvement in the conflict is heavily influenced by ideological and broader geopolitical interests rather than quotidian livelihood or security concerns, we expect that the level of exposure to the conflict will be less influential than it is for Christians who are generally more concerned about security and less concerned about wider visions of the region. Consequently, we expect the effect of communal prayer to be relatively constant for Muslims (i.e., *not* dependent on exposure[9]), while for Christians, exposure may prove necessary for any connection between religious practice and attitudes toward armed parties. Worship attendance will have a stronger effect when individuals are directly exposed to the conflict. In Lebanon, this includes citizens who are located closer to the Syrian border, where refugees are clustered and violence sometimes spills over. In these areas, group interests, such as economic security and personal safety, are highly salient due to the ongoing violence and threat to those interests, even for the "bystander" sects we previously outlined. The effect of communal prayer for Christians will therefore vary based on the extent to which individuals' economic and security interests are directly endangered by the conflict.

> **Hypothesis 2:** Communal prayer will decrease support for armed parties among Christians who live in areas that border Syria but will have no effect among Christians in non-border areas.

Furthermore, we have argued that communal prayer serves an informational role that, in turn, heightens the salience of group identity and pushes individuals' attitudes into closer alignment with the interests of their sect. Consequently, for individuals who are *not* regularly exposed to this type of information (i.e., nonattenders), informational primes of a similar sort may affect their attitudes similarly to communal practice. Presumably, attenders will not be affected by these primes, since they have already been exposed to similar information and experienced the resultant increase in group identity. If places of worship increase group consciousness among attenders (as found by Jamal 2005 and others), then we should expect that attenders would less likely be moved by our informational prompts and have a higher baseline. As a result, we hypothesize that, if the information mechanism we suggest is at work, our information primes will only influence nonattenders.

Hypothesis 3: The information prime will decrease support for armed parties among non-attending Christians but will have no effect among attending Christians.

Data

To assess hypotheses, the relationship between communal religious practice and support for armed parties, we examine data from an original nationally representative survey in Lebanon conducted between late 2013 and early 2014.[10] The survey used a multistage area probability sample covering all eight governorates and all twenty-five of Lebanon's districts in order to ensure proper representation. Surveys were conducted face to face using traditional pen-and-paper methods. The response rate for this survey was over 85 percent. The sample was stratified by sect such that 402 respondents were selected from each of the main sectarian groups, namely, Christian,[11] Sunni, and Shi'a. The three groups included (Christian, Sunni, and Shi'a) were chosen for several reasons. First, these groups constitute the vast majority of Lebanese citizens. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA 2015) estimates that these three sectarian groups account for about 95 percent of the Lebanese population. Second, the political incentives of smaller groups are less clear: the Druze, for instance, may support armed parties because of their small size but may also find larger parties such as Hezbollah to be a sufficient threat to deter them from such support. Third, these three sectarian groups are the major actors in Lebanese politics.

Our main dependent variable, support for armed parties, asks respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: "Given the current security instability in Lebanon, it is appropriate for political parties to arm themselves."[12] Our observational analyses rely on a question asking respondents how frequently they attended church or mosque; this question asked "Other than weddings or funerals, how often do you attend religious services at a church or mosque?"[13] Response categories included "never," "rarely," "around once per month," "around once per week," and "more than once per week."

We measure the concept of armed party support by asking respondents about support for the *principle* of armed political parties, rather than support for particular parties who happen to be armed. This distinction is important because many armed parties, especially in Lebanon, are also important providers of goods and services. Consequently, it is not ideal to measure support for militancy by asking respondents about support for these parties, because respondents may simply support these parties for reasons that have nothing to do with militant politics.

Results

Before discussing the results of analyses testing our hypotheses, we first note that the frequency of communal prayer is robustly associated with adherence to group-
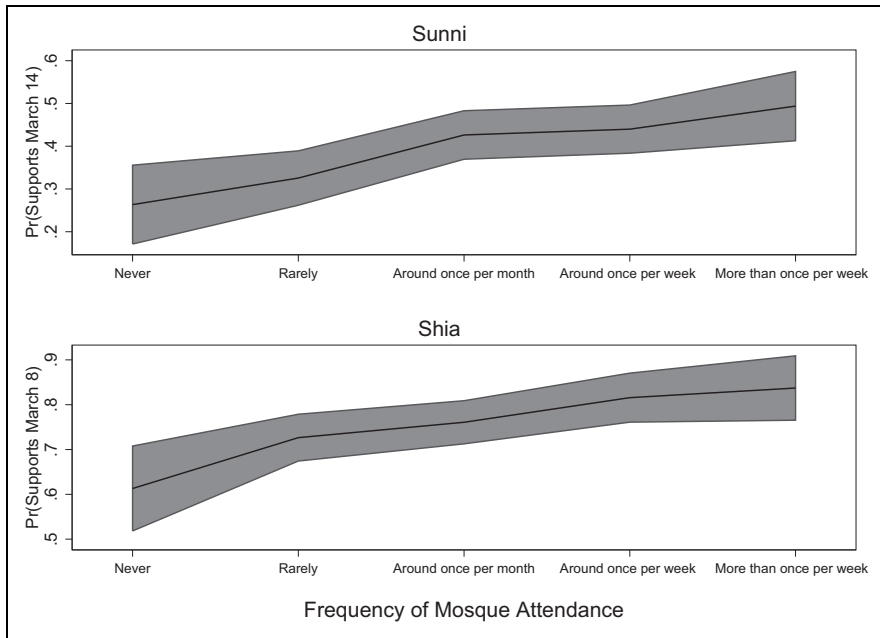
Figure 1. Frequency of communal prayer and bloc identification.

motivated political attitudes of a variety of forms. Perhaps most importantly for our
analyses, it is useful to demonstrate that church/mosque attendance is associated
with greater identification with political groups, provided that the individual's sect
is heavily identified with one group or the other (this relationship is similar to the
"constraints" identified by Snell 2014, with respect to party identification in Amer-
ican congregations). To this end, we fit logistic regressions (controlling for the vari-
ables describedsubsequently) predicting identification with the bloc associated with
the individual's sect. For Sunnis, the dependent variable is identification with the
March 14 movement, which is led by the major Sunni Party (the Future Movement).
For Shiʿa, the dependent variable is identification with the March 8 bloc, which con-
tains both major Shiʿa parties (Hezbollah and Amal). Christians are heavily divided
between these two blocs, so there is little reason to expect church attendance to pro-
mote identification with one bloc or the other. Figure 1 displays predicted probabil-
ities of identification with the relevant blocs according to the frequency of mosque
attendance (results for Christians are omitted for the purpose of space; as expected,
no clear patterns emerged). As this figure demonstrates, mosque attendance is
closely associated with preferring the bloc associated with the respondent's sect. For
Sunnis, the most frequent attenders are about twice as likely to identify with March
14 compared to "never" attenders.[14] Among Shiʿa, 61 percent of "never" attenders
support March 8, compared to 84 percent of the most frequent attenders. These

differences are sizable and highly statistically significant, suggesting that mosque attenders are indeed substantially more likely to support the bloc associated with their groups' interests.

These results highlight an important precaution that must be taken when assessing attitudes toward armed parties in Lebanon: expressed support for a particular armed party or bloc (such as Hezbollah) may have little or nothing to do with the respondent's views about the *principle* of armed parties themselves. As a result, the results presented earlier may simply be artifacts of mosque attenders' higher levels of embeddedness in clientelistic networks associated with political parties. In order to avoid this problem, we ask respondents directly about the *principle* of armed political parties rather than any particular party. Asking the question in this way allows us to trace the relationship between communal prayer—working through group interest—and attitudes toward armed political parties without the contamination caused by political clientelism.

Sectarian differences are apparent in the baseline levels of support for armed parties. Seventeen percent of Christians agreed with the statement described earlier, compared to 21 percent of Sunnis and 37 percent of Shi'a. These proportions correspond closely to theoretical expectations: Christians (the smallest and wealthiest of the three groups) are the least likely to support armed parties, and Shi'a (Hezbollah's base) are by far the most likely. The latter result is more than likely due to the fact that Hezbollah (one of the two main Shi'a parties along with Amal) possesses a large and influential military wing, as we have detailed earlier in this article. Sunnis express higher levels of support for armed parties than Christians, but still well below the levels demonstrated by Shi'a. Of course, these patterns cannot be assessed without consideration of the context of the ongoing and increasingly bloody (and sectarian) Syrian civil war. The involvement of both Sunni and Shi'a militias in Syria has led to Sunni–Shi'a conflict in Lebanon of a fairly unprecedented form. Deeb and Harb (2013, loc. 1076) state that "in 2005, after the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, these [Sunni–Shi'a] tensions came to the foreground and, *for the first time in Lebanese history*, began to take the form of Sunni–Shi'i sectarian conflict" (emphasis added). The Syrian conflict has heightened these tensions considerably. Sectarian Sunnis and Shi'a are *both* likely to believe that the Syrian civil war creates the need for armed parties because the civil war has drawn a rather clear line between the two Muslim communities. We therefore expect that communal religious practice, which heightens the salience of group identity and pushes believers toward political attitudes that are more closely aligned with the interests of the sect, should tend to increase support for arming parties among both Sunnis and Shi'a. For Christians, who have remained largely on the sidelines in the Syrian conflict, this effect is not likely to be present. Indeed, the effect may even be negative to the extent that Christians believe that armed parties will threaten their existence rather than preserve their security. Much Christian discourse regarding the Syrian conflict has emphasized security and livelihood concerns rather than ideological preferences for either the regime or the opposition. *Al-Jazeera* (2013) quotes a

Lebanese nun in a border town as stating, "The refugee problem is affecting our lives, down to the tiny details" and the mayor of a border town as saying, "I feel bad for the Syrian people ... [they] have been victims twice now: suffering from the rebels as well as Bashar. But for them—and for us as well—we prefer Bashar." These sentiments, shared by many in border areas, are not driven by any affinity for the Assad regime but rather by a wish for stability and security. As the experience of the conflict so far has shown, the proliferation of armed parties tends to have a destabilizing effect on the area. Consequently, Christians should in general have reasons to oppose the existence of such parties.

To test the hypotheses we outlined earlier, we fit a series of regressions predicting support for arming political parties (coded in a few different ways as robustness checks) according to he frequency of communal prayer and a set of control variables. Our baseline model is specified as follows:

$$\text{Support for ArmedParties}_i = \alpha + \beta \text{Practice}_i + \gamma \mathbf{X_i} + \varepsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

where i indexes individuals and $\mathbf{X_i}$ is a vector of individual-level covariates. Separate models are run for each sectarian group in order to allow for the coefficients of each explanatory variable to vary across sects.

Table 1 presents these results. The first three models use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for our dependent variable, which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Models 4–6 use ordinal logistic regression to account for the fact that the dependent variable is not precisely continuous. Finally, the last three models dichotomize the dependent variable such that respondents are scored as 1 if they agree or strongly agree with the statement and 0 otherwise. In each of these specifications, the coefficient on frequency of communal prayer (scaled 1–5)[15] is statistically significant at conventional levels and in the direction predicted by our theories.[16] For Sunnis and Shi'a, communal prayer makes respondents more likely to support arming political parties because these groups are at the center of the ongoing conflict and are likely to see arming parties as a way to protect their interests. Christians, however, are likely to view armed parties as a threat. Since Christian parties are generally far less militarized than Muslim (particularly Shi'a) parties in Lebanon, the prospect of armed political parties is dangerous for them. Further, since Christians have largely remained separate from the Syrian conflict, the benefits of armed parties in that arena are not applicable to them.[17]

Consequently, and as expected, church attendance tends to decrease the level of support for arming political parties among Christians. It is important to note that our other religious variable, self-reported religiosity, is a poor predictor of support for armed parties. This variable is only marginally significant in one model (model 7), and its coefficient is in the opposite direction from the communal religious practice variable. This tendency suggests that the *communal* aspect of religion is a far better predictor of attitudes toward militant politics, which in turn indicates that

Table 1. Frequency of Communal Prayer and Support for Arming Parties.

	(1)	(2) OLS	(3)	(4)	(5) Ordinal Logit	(6)	(7)	(8) Logit	(9)
	Christian	Sunni	Shi'a	Christian	Sunni	Shi'a	Christian	Sunni	Shi'a
Frequency of communal practice	−.03** (.02)	.04*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)	−.21** (.10)	.23*** (.08)	.27*** (.08)	−.37** (.15)	.40*** (.11)	.42** (.09)
Female	−.05 (.03)	.01 (.03)	−.05 (.03)	−.22 (.20)	−.01 (.21)	−.36 (.23)	−.57* (.32)	.05 (.29)	−.09 (.27)
Age	−.00 (.00)	−.00 (.00)	−.00 (.00)	−.00 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	−.00 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	−.01 (.01)
Education	.00 (.01)	−.02 (.01)	−.03* (.01)	.02 (.10)	−.20** (.08)	−.18* (.10)	.05 (.13)	−.03 (.11)	−.20 (.12)
Unemployed	.04 (.04)	−.05 (.04)	−.01 (.04)	.30 (.26)	−.28 (.25)	−.04 (.27)	.14 (.41)	−.43 (.40)	−.19 (.34)
Income	−.00 (.00)	.00** (.00)	.00** (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00*** (.00)	.00** (.00)	−.00 (.00)	.00* (.00)	.00*** (.00)
Religious person	.05 (.04)	.05 (.05)	.06 (.04)	.31 (.28)	.40 (.33)	.34 (.30)	.67* (.41)	.12 (.55)	.25 (.39)
Constant	.33*** (.12)	.14 (.13)	.45*** (.12)				−.81 (1.11)	−2.80** (1.26)	−1.38 (1.03)
Observations	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402
(Pseudo) R²	.018	.077	.077	.006	.034	.028	.032	.065	.080
AIC	157.60	185.08	115.08	1,134.24	1,085.96	1,202.83	369.67	403.92	502.90

Note: Standard errors within parentheses. AIC = Akaike information criterion; OLS = ordinary least squares.
*p < .1.
**p < .05.
***p < .01.

networks and the information they provide, rather than doctrinal values, serve as the link between religion and militant (or nonmilitant) attitudes.[18]

Lebanese Muslims—both Sunni and Shi'a—find themselves deeply entrenched in the Syrian conflict on both sides of the border. As a result of this entrenchment, the strong pro-militant effect of mosque attendance for both sects is largely unconditional, at least with regard to the variables we identify as important in the Christian case. In other words, communal religious practice has a consistent pro-armed parties effect among both Sunnis and Shi'a regardless of other factors (border residence, informational primes, etc.). The unconditional effect is likely a result of several factors. First, there is a high degree of within-sect agreement among Lebanese Muslims regarding the Syrian conflict. Shi'a largely supports the regime and Sunnis largely support the opposition, while such attitudinal unity does not exist in the Christian community. Moreover, political and clientelistic networks in Lebanon are highly sectarian, and these networks tend to dictate attitudes regarding the conflict fairly clearly. Finally, Muslim discourse on the Syrian conflict tends to invoke grander visions of the region rather than quotidian concerns of survival and livelihood, as is the case for Christians. *Al-Akhbar* (2014) reports that even the Lebanese presidential election, seemingly a domestic issue, is dictated heavily by competing visions of Lebanon's role in the regional system: Sunnis (allied with Saudi Arabia) versus Shi'a (allied with Iran). Meanwhile, "Christians, the Maronite clergy, and Maronite presidential candidates will have no choice but to stand on the sidelines again."[19] As a result, we expect and find that the effect of communal prayer on attitudes toward armed parties to be largely consistent within Muslim sects and therefore not sensitive to conditioning factors. Consequently, the remainder of our analysis will focus primarily on Lebanese Christians.[20]

It is possible, of course, that the link between communal prayer and support for armed parties among Sunnis and Shi'a is due to the fact that communal prayer may simply increase support for *particular* armed parties. The most obvious example of this possibility is Hezbollah who provides a large number of goods to the Shi'a community across Lebanon. It is plausible that communal prayer may simply increase access to these goods, increasing support for Hezbollah and, by doing so, increase support for unnamed "armed parties." To assess this claim, we run robustness checks adding indicators of support for the main party for each community: Hezbollah (Shi'a) and the Future Movement (Sunni).[21] If the link between communal prayer and attitudes toward armed parties is simply due to an association with particular parties, then including these measures should erase any relationship between communal practice and support for armed parties. However, this is not the case. Including an indicator for Hezbollah support in the Shi'a model does not substantially affect the results, and the coefficient on attendance in this model is 0.034 with a p value of .005. Meanwhile, the coefficient on the Hezbollah indicator is positive as expected but not statistically significant at any conventional level. Results are very similar for Sunnis when including an indicator for support for the Future Movement. In this model, the coefficient on attendance is 0.04 with a p value of .001. The future indicator, as expected, has a

positive and significant relationship with support for armed parties, but its presence in the model does not attenuate the effect of religious attendance.[22]

We have argued that for Christians, who have remained largely on the sidelines in the Syrian conflict (and its Lebanese spillover effects), the primary concern regarding armed parties will be related to the threats posed to their livelihood.[23] Consequently, it is likely that the effect of church attendance on attitudes toward armed parties will be conditional on the level of exposure to the Syrian conflict. We operationalize this exposure by coding an indicator variable that captures whether or not the respondent lives in an area that borders Syria. We code this variable at the level of the *qadaa* (district), of which there are twenty-five in Lebanon. This unit is appropriate for use in coding this variable because (1) Lebanon is a small country (only about 10,000 km^2) and (2) the *qadaa* is a widely used administrative unit in the country. Thus, respondents are coded as 1 if they live in a *qadaa* that borders Syria and 0 otherwise. Since border areas tend to be far more heavily exposed to the Syrian conflict through militia presence, influx of refugees, and other factors, we expect that the effect of church attendance will be dependent on whether or not the respondent lives in a border area.

Figure 2 displays the United Nation's estimate of the number of refugees in each of Lebanon's *qadaas* in November 2013 (note that these numbers are widely believed to be underestimates, especially in border areas, due to lack of monitoring and/or reporting of refugee influx). As this map illustrates, border areas are substantially more heavily affected by refugee influx in terms of the raw number of refugees present. This effect is magnified by the fact that many of these areas are not as heavily populated as urban areas in other parts of the country, so these figures would be even more substantial on a per-capita basis. Since border areas are much more heavily affected by the refugee crisis, we expect that the effect of church attendance on attitudes toward armed parties will be especially noticeable in these areas.

We test this hypothesis by running an OLS regression of the same form as those presented in Table 1 but adding the Syrian border indicator variable as well as an interaction between this variable and our indicator of weekly church attendance.[24]

Figure 3 provides strong support for Hypothesis 2. Among respondents who reside in a border *qadaa*, weekly church attendance decreases support for armed parties by 0.17 points on our 0–1 scale (*p* value .02). No such effect exists, however, for respondents in non-border areas, and the corresponding effect here is 0.02 points. This effect is nowhere near statistical significance. These findings suggest that the impact of communal religious practice on support for armed parties in the Lebanese context is highly dependent on the level of exposure to the ongoing Syrian conflict.[25]

We have argued that Lebanese Christians are highly concerned about the economic and livelihood effects of the Syrian conflict. But is it really the case that Christians believe that they have more to lose than other sects from instability or the emergence of a hostile regime? While the sensitivity of this issue prevented us from asking respondents about this issue directly, we can measure inter-sectarian differences in attitudes toward redistributive politics indirectly. To that end, Table 2
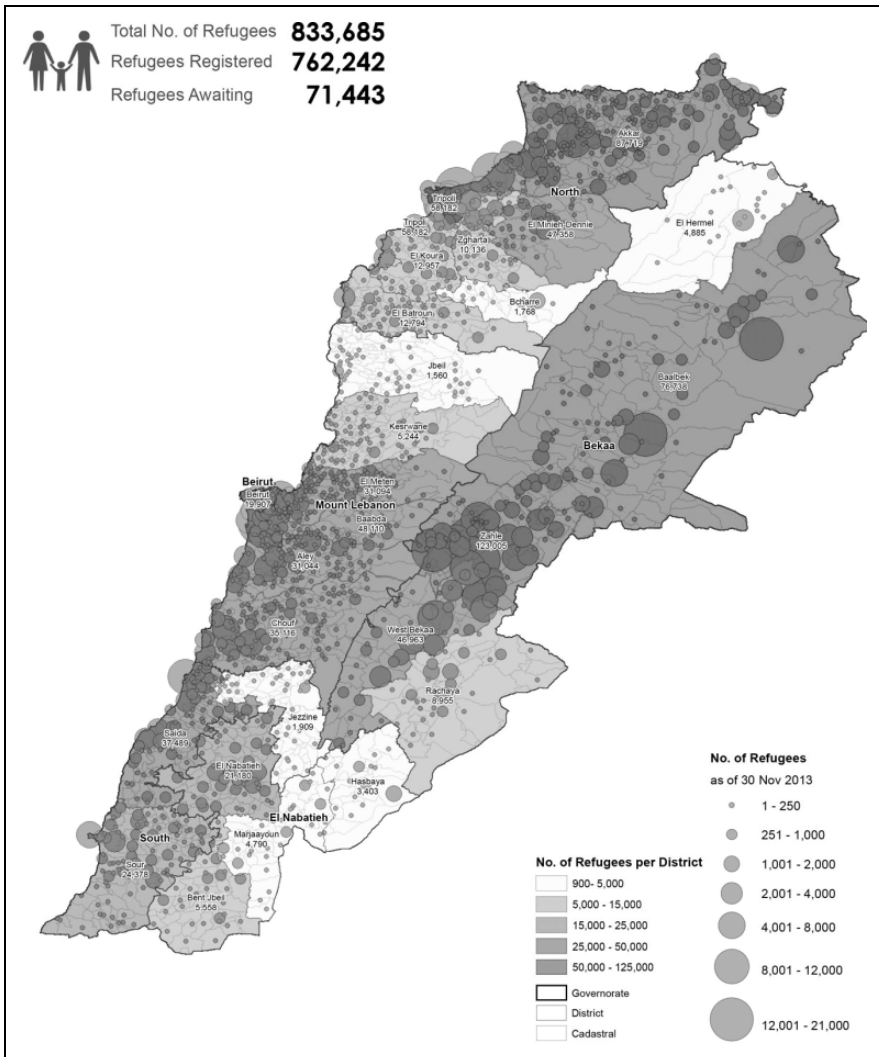
Figure 2. Number of refugees by *qadaa*. *Note:* The border with Syria stretches from Akkar in the North to Hasbaya in the South. *Source:* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, November 2013.

presents the results of a series of ordinal logistic regressions predicting support for redistributive political policies (the statements presented to respondents are provided below the table). These questions are each somewhat different from the others, but each one captures a dimension of redistributive politics. These models reveal that both Sunnis and Shiʿa are substantially more likely to favor government-led
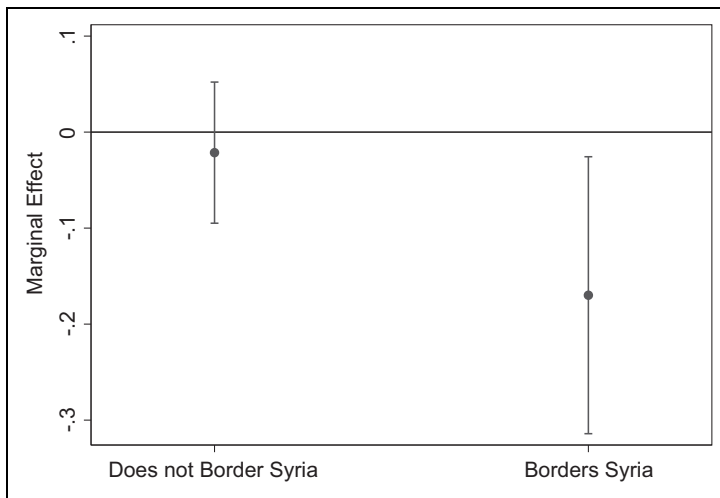
Figure 3. Marginal effect of weekly attendance by border status (Christians).

Table 2. Support for Redistribution, by Sect.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sunni	1.15*** (0.17)	0.72*** (0.14)	0.78*** (0.16)	0.79*** (0.15)
Shi'a	0.80*** (0.16)	0.75*** (0.14)	0.49*** (0.15)	0.65*** (0.14)
Observations	1,180	1,180	1,180	1,180
Pseudo R^2	.032	.025	.017	.023
AIC	1,968.70	2,674.12	1,924.20	2,539.65

Note: Standard errors within parentheses. Controls: Gender, age, education level, income, and employment status. Christians are the reference group. Question wording: Model (1): "The government should work to improve income equality between Lebanon's sects"; Model (2): "Wealth inequality is a major problem in Lebanon"; Model (3): "The government should work to close the gap between the rich and the poor in Lebanon"; Model (4): "Economic inequality is a major problem in Lebanon."
*$p < .1$.
**$p < .05$.
***$p < .01$.

redistribution than are Christians, presumably because Christians remain the wealthiest group in Lebanon despite their decreasing size, and any program that increased redistribution would presumably tax Christian wealth and distribute it in Muslim communities. The presence of armed groups is both a result of and a contributing factor to the weakening of the Lebanese state. Christians are likely to feel that these armed groups pose a threat to their wealth. In the absence of a state-led redistribution mechanism (which Sunnis and Shi'a are both much more likely to support), armed militias may use violence to redistribute wealth and resources toward their own sects.

Experimental Results

We have suggested that the key mechanism through which church attendance influences attitudes toward armed parties among Lebanese Christians is *information*, which increases the salience of religious group identity and related interests for communal worship attenders. Christians who attend church regularly are likely to be exposed to a Christian-focused narrative of the Syrian conflict. By listening to sermons and discussing these issues with their co-religionists, they are likely to both (1) view the Syrian conflict more closely through a Christian lens and (2) possess greater levels of information about how the conflict has affected (or might affect) the Christian community.

To assess whether or not these informational effects influence respondents' attitudes toward armed parties, we embedded an information priming experiment in this survey. In the control group, respondents were not presented with any prime and were simply asked to respond to the next set of questions. In the treatment group, however, respondents were first presented with a brief statement highlighting the interests of their group. Since we have suggested that most Christians are primarily concerned about stability and livelihood concerns rather than grander visions of how the region will be structured, we designed this prime to focus on economic/redistributive concerns. The prime for the treatment group was, "As you may know, by some estimates, Lebanese Christians are currently 40%[26] wealthier than Lebanese Muslims on average."[27] This prime is meant to approximate the type of group-centric information that might be obtained through weekly church attendance. We expect that weekly attenders will generally be more informed about the state of their sect in Lebanon and therefore will not be moved by this prime. Nonattenders, however, may find this to be new information and may therefore be pushed in the direction that church attendance tends to push respondents. In other words, this information prime will substitute for the information provided by church attendance and make nonattenders more closely resemble attenders in their attitudes. Although this experiment was administered to Sunnis and Shiʿa as well, the primes demonstrated no meaningful effect—since Christians have remained largely on the sidelines in the Syrian conflict (which is currently the overwhelming issue in Lebanese politics and divides Sunnis and Shiʿa from each other rather than from Christians), priming Muslims with relative poverty compared to Christians is relatively ineffective.[28]

Figure 4 presents the average treatment effects of our income priming experiment separated by weekly attendance. These results present an interesting trend in support of Hypothesis 3: the income prime significantly decreased support for arming political parties among nonweekly attenders (by over 0.16 points on our 0–1 scale, with a *p* value of .006) but had no effect whatsoever on weekly attenders. It is likely that the reason for this divergence is the different informational settings of attenders and nonattenders. Weekly attenders (whom we have shown to be less supportive of arming political parties, which would presumably endanger
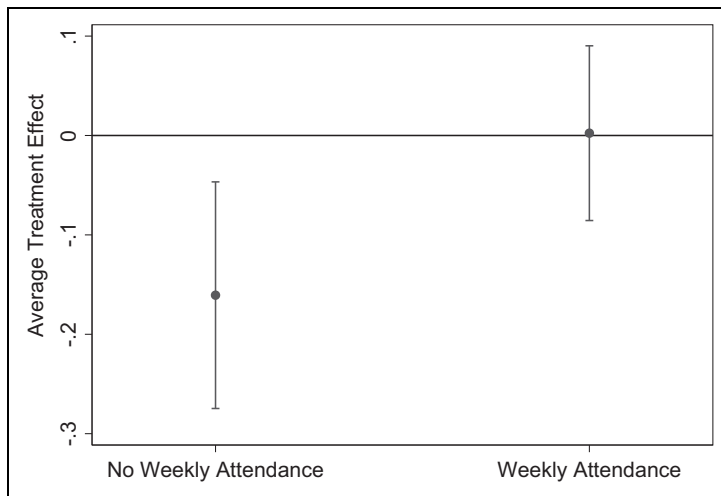
Figure 4. Income prime treatment effects (support for armed parties) by weekly attendance (Christians).

the relatively less-armed Christian community) do not respond to the information priming experiment because the information may be less surprising to them. Attending weekly church services exposes Christians to others of their own sect by definition, and worshipers often discuss political and economic issues with other worshipers either before or after services, to say nothing about the possibility of politically oriented sermons. It appears, then, that this information priming serves a similar function among nonattenders as communal prayer does for weekly attenders. In this sense, it creates an informational "catching-up" effect. Weekly attenders are not influenced by the information treatment because they already have access to stronger sources of information to which they are exposed to at least a weekly basis.

But how does this increased information transform into attitudes? We suggest that these informational primes heighten the salience of sectarian identity, similar to church attendance. To measure the salience of group identity (which might also be called "linked fate"; see Dawson 1995), we asked respondents in both the treatment and control group the following question: "How close do you feel to members of your church?"[29]

If information increases the salience of group identity, then the treatment effect of the information prime on group identification should depend once again on whether or not the respondent attends church. For attenders, the prime will have little effect, since they will tend to exhibit high levels of group identification precisely because they attend church. For nonattenders, however, this information should have a significant effect, likely strengthening group identity.

Figure 5 displays the average treatment effects of the income information prime by weekly attendance, this time considering closeness to members of one's church as
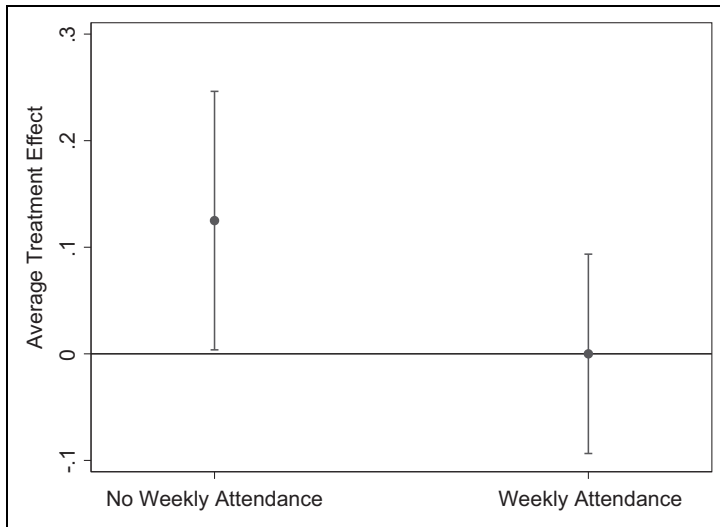
Figure 5. Income prime treatment effects (closeness to church) by weekly attendance (Christians).

the dependent variable. This figure demonstrates that for weekly church attenders, the prime had no effect whatsoever on group identity. This result is to be expected for the reasons mentioned earlier. For nonattenders, however, this information priming substantially increased group identification. Among nonattenders, those in the treatment group were 12.5 percentage points more likely to report closeness with their church compared to those in the control group. It is evident, therefore, that this information priming served to heighten the salience of group identity, which we have argued to be a powerful mechanism linking religious behavior to attitudes toward armed parties. Similar to the effect identified earlier regarding attitudes toward armed parties, this information priming pushes nonattenders in the direction dictated by their group's interest. Weekly church attendance demonstrates an analogous effect. Using the same specifications as in Table 1, with the exception of the dependent variable (church closeness instead of support for armed parties), we estimate the effect of weekly attendance on closeness to members of one's church. Weekly attenders are thirty-four percentage points more likely to report feeling close to members of their church than are nonattenders, and this difference is hugely statistically significant (t statistic $= 9.55$; full results are omitted for the purpose of space but are available from the authors upon request). It seems, therefore, that church attendance increases the salience of group identity through the mechanism of information, which in turn drives individuals toward attitudes more closely in alignment with those of their sect.

Conclusion

Our results provide evidence that the relationship between religion and support for militant politics is complicated and conditional, even within the same country context. We have demonstrated that communal religious variables can either increase or decrease support for armed parties. This effect depends on a key intervening variable—group interests and their salience to individual group members—that must be considered in order to more fully understand how religious behaviors condition attitudes toward armed parties. Religious communal attendance provides important *information* that raises the salience of group identity for participants, both of which tend to push respondents' attitudes into closer alignment with the interests of their sect. For nonattenders, informational primes serve a similar purpose, demonstrating the importance of information in this relationship. The interests of the specific sectarian group to which the respondent belongs determine whether communal religious practice proves to have a pro- or anti-militancy effect.

This article makes several important contributions to the study of militant politics, religion and politics, and political behavior more generally. First, we demonstrate that the relationship between communal religious behavior and support for militant politics is not constant, rather it depends on specific group interests and thus can either promote or impede militant attitudes depending on what a group stands to gain or lose in a given context. In doing so, we add a new dimension—sectarian interests—to the study of religion and militant attitudes. Second, we demonstrate that religion, through communal religious practice, provides believers with information about the interests of their sectarian group, particularly in places where religious identity serves as a salient and meaningful division among citizens. Consequently, communal worship attendance may not increase social capital and levels of trust across groups through democratic socialization processes but rather serve as a venue for within-group sectarian socialization, by increasing the salience of group consciousness and interests, and related defensive attitudes. Contrary to the assumption that cultural or theological differences explain the divergent relationships between religion and support for militancy, we suggest that religion affords believers with information that in turn tends to promote group-focused attitudes toward political issues. Third, we show that *exposure* to conflict is an important conditioning variable and that conflict affects the relationship between religion and political attitudes differently for combatant groups and for uninvolved "bystander" groups.

Future research should expand upon these findings in several ways. First, additional methods should be used in order to address the possible endogeneity issues present in some of the abovementioned findings. It is not possible to "exogenize" communal prayer but more can be done to isolate the effects of communal religion independent of other factors. For these purposes, experimental methods will likely prove very useful. Moreover, the theory presented here should be tested in other contexts for the purposes of determining how well it explains other cases. Even within

Lebanon, it would be useful to examine smaller groups (such as the Druze and Alawis) who may possess different incentive structures from those of the larger groups. Finally, future studies should more thoroughly address the ways in which the different dimensions of religion (personal piety, theological beliefs, etc.) influence militant attitudes, and how these dimensions interact with political and sectarian factors.

The long-standing tendency for conflicts to take on sectarian undertones in Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere where religion remains a salient political divide is unlikely to disappear in the near future. We argue that a better understanding of the mechanisms through which religious behaviors translate into sectarian-influenced attitudes reveals far more complexity in this relationship than has been previously theorized. Religion appears to promote militancy *only when there are incentives for it to do so*. As Appleby (1999) has suggested, the effect of religious behaviors on militant politics is not invariant: depending on the circumstances, religion can be a strong force for either militant or anti-militant political attitudes.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Supplemental Material

The supplemental materials are available at http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0022002715590880.

Notes

1. For experimental evidence that religion (in various forms) promotes pro-in-group but anti-out-group attitudes, see Johnson, Rowatt, and LaBouff (2012), Parra, Joseph, and Wodon (2011), and Galen (2012).
2. Though unofficial estimates suggest that the Shi'a proportion may be significantly higher (US State Department 2011).
3. The most powerful of the Maronite Christian militias was the Kata'eb Regulatory Forces. The militia was founded in 1937 as the military wing of the right-wing Lebanese Christian Kata'eb party, also referred to as the Phalangists. The Kata'eb forces later merged with a number of different Maronite groups to form the Lebanese Forces, although this union crumbled over alliances with Syria. The Shi'a were first represented by the Amal Movement's military wing (directly translated as "The Battalions of the Lebanese Resistance" in English but commonly referred to simply by the name of its political affiliation). The 1982 defection of a more hard-line group, displeased

with the decision of Amal leader Nabih Berri to negotiate with other officials in the wake of the Israeli invasion, resulted in the creation of Lebanon's most infamous and enduring militia, Hezbollah. The main Sunni militia was the Independent Nasserite Movement referred to as al-Mourabitoun. The militia promoted a Nasser-inspired Pan-Arabism and drew support and allies from a number of different sects, but its officer corp was comprised of Sunnis. The Progressive Socialist Party, headed by the Jumblatt family, was the main Druze militia. A plethora of other Lebanese militias, claiming to be more secular but representing the interests of specific sectarian factions based on ideological or geographic divisions, and heavily funded by outside actors such as Israel or Syria, included the Lebanese Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and the South Lebanon Army.

4. Harik (2005) has documented that the party's armed status was largely accepted by competing political actors throughout 1990s, as Israel continued to occupy southern Lebanon and many national figures saw its value in the absence of a strong national Lebanese army. However, the May 2000 withdrawal, for which Hezbollah and its resistance wing took credit, created an issue for the party's continued armed status. By the party's own logic, this status was only justified as long as the Israeli occupation continued. The party appears to have recognized its now tenuous position and adopted a less antagonistic political position within the parliament during this period (Nugent 2010).

5. Measures of income are notoriously unreliable in Lebanon (see Corstange 2013), but more appropriate indicators of wealth suggest that Christians indeed enjoy higher privilege than Muslims of either major sect. Using the number of hours per day in which citizens' electricity is cut off (a frequently used measure), the median Christian experiences two fewer hours without electricity per day compared to the median Muslim. This measure is especially relevant to the topic considered in this article since electricity relies on infrastructure that is likely to be sensitive to political stability and security.

6. Remarks to author, Beirut, March 27, 2014.

7. In March 2014, al-Monitor (2014b) reported that "Lebanese Christians are deeply divided about the Syrian issue, yet none of the concerned Christian parties have called for fighting in Syria to help the Christians there. All of them agree on militarily dissociating themselves from Syria, contrary to Lebanese Shiites and Sunnis, who got involved in the Syrian war since the first moment in different forms and in close cooperation with regional intelligence organs."

8. This number combines all of the subsects of Christianity. The largest individual Christian sects, Maronite Christians, represent about 21 percent of the population. Lebanon has not conducted an official census since 1932, likely because of Lebanese Christians' fear of losing the privileges afforded to them by the National Pact, which was built around demographic assumptions that no longer hold.

9. We acknowledge that border status is an imperfect proxy for exposure to the Syrian conflict, but pretesting revealed that other questions about exposure to the conflict were far too sensitive to be used in the full survey. As such, we use the border indicator as a measure of exposure to the conflict. We expect this variable to matter for Christians but not for Muslims for a few reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, the increasing Sunni–Shi'a tensions throughout the Middle East have mobilized many Muslims around their sectarian identities regardless of their particular exposure to the Syrian conflict. Additionally, Lebanese

Muslims (both Sunni and Shiʻa) are in general far more exposed to the Syrian conflict than are Christians. Muslims are over 78 percent more likely to live in a border area compared to Christians, and even those in non-border areas are highly likely to have family members in border areas. Thus, it would be difficult to find a "control" group within the Muslim sample. While many Christians are significantly less affected by the conflict than others, a parallel group among Sunnis and Shiʻa would be very difficult to identify.

10. The survey was designed by Hoffman and implemented by Information International, a Lebanese survey and consulting firm headquartered in Beirut. The experimental module was designed by Hoffman and Nugent.

11. Christian subgroups were sampled in proportion to Interior Ministry figures regarding their population shares, so the sample proportions of each Christian denomination are representative of their population proportions.

12. Arabic wording:

من المقبول للأحزاب السياسية أن تقوم بتسليح أنفسها بسبب عدم الاستقرار الأمني الحالي في لبنان.

13. Arabic wording:

باستثناء الأعراس ولمآتم، كم مرة تحضر نشطات دينية في الكنيسة أو المسجد؟

14. It should be noted that although the majority of Sunnis do not claim to identify with March 14, this does not mean that they support March 8. The plurality of Sunni respondents chose not to provide a bloc identification.

15. These results are robust to the use of a binary "weekly attendance" measure instead of our continuous measure or to the inclusion of *qadaa* (district) fixed effects.

16. These effects are also sizable. An increase in our attendance measure from "never" to "more than once a week" is associated with an increase of 0.16 on our 0–1 scale of support for armed parties among Sunnis, an increase of 0.15 increase among Shiʻa, and a decrease of 0.13 among Christians. Since logistic regression coefficients are difficult to interpret, we also calculate marginal effects of our attendance variable on the binary version of our dependent variable. These calculations use the observed values approach (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). For this alternative specification, weekly attendance leads to a predicted increase of ten percentage points among Sunnis, a twenty percentage point increase for Shiʻa, and a nine percentage point decrease for Christians.

17. As robustness checks (omitted here for the purpose of space constraint), we also fit these same models while controlling for a variety of indicators of religious chauvinism or extremism (support for allowing other religions to practice their faiths, support for allowing religious conversion, support for allowing interreligious marriage, belief that Christianity and Islam have a lot in common), in case these types of attitudes are driving both attendance and support for armed parties. However, this appears not to be the case: the estimates on our attendance variable remain similar across models regardless of the inclusion of religious extremism measures.

18. Alternative measures of religiosity provide similar results. Using "importance of religion" yielded comparable trends to those found when using self-reported religiosity.

Using a question in which respondents were asked whether they draw "comfort and strength" from religion yielded a significant effect of this variable for Christians and a marginally significant effect for Shi'a, but in both cases, these effects were in the opposite direction from that of communal practice. In each of these specifications (as well as a baseline specification that does not control for any other religious variables), the coefficients on communal prayer are quite stable and significant at the .05 level or better. Likewise, results are not sensitive to the inclusion of a control variable indicating the frequency with which the individual prays at home or at work (personal prayer). These results are available from the authors upon request.

19. These developments are perhaps ironic, given that the Lebanese National Pact of 1943 requires that the president be a Maronite Christian.

20. Tests of the conditioning hypotheses presented subsequently almost universally return null results for Muslims, as expected. These results are available from the authors upon request.

21. No such analysis is plausible for Christians because (a) the relationship between communal prayer and armed party support is negative for Christians and (b) the Christian community in Lebanon is highly divided on the issue of party support.

22. We have also run a number of robustness checks that test whether our findings are simply due to a correlation between mosque attendance and religious/political intolerance, and the results (available upon request) show that this is not the case.

23. Al-Monitor (2014a) quotes a Christian political leader in a border area as stating, "It is not weapons that protect us ... it is our wisdom and mind that can protect us. Everybody wants the Christians to be on their side."

24. The results presented for these models are robust to the use of a binary-dependent variable, an ordinal-dependent variable, or a continuous measure of church attendance rather than a binary weekly attendance measure. Results of these specifications are omitted for the purposes of space but are available from the authors upon request.

25. We have also run the same models replacing border status with (1) United Nations figures of the number of refugees in each *qadaa* and (2) coarse measures of "extra" deaths in 2012 compared to 2011, intended to proxy for exposure to violence in each *qadaa*. In both cases, the findings support the trend that exposure to the conflict significantly increases the antimilitancy effect of communal prayer for Christians (full results available upon request).

26. This figure is derived from the first wave of the Arab Barometer survey.

27. Arabic wording:

كما قد تعرف، فإن المسيحيين اللبنانيين حالياً ، حسب بعض التقديرات، أكثر ثراءً من المسلمين اللبنانيين بمعدل ٤٠ %.

28. With the benefit of hindsight, we realize that it may have been more interesting to also prime respondents with Sunni/Shi'a relative income figures or to tailor each prime to the respondent's sect.

29. Arabic wording:

إلى أي مدى تشعر أنك قريب من أفراد كنيستك؟

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