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# What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts Against the United States?

Mark Tessler

Michael D. H. Robbins

*Department of Political Science,*

*University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

Findings from representative national surveys in Algeria and Jordan show that neither religious orientations, judgments about Western culture, nor economic circumstances account for variance in approval of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. Alternatively, in both countries, approval of terrorism against the United States is disproportionately likely among men and women with negative judgments about their own government and about U.S. foreign policy. Taken together, these findings suggest that approval of terrorism is fostered by negative attitudes toward actors considered responsible for the political and economic status quo. Given that Algeria and Jordan have had different experiences with respect to terrorism and also differ in demographic, political, and economic structure, identical findings from these dissimilar countries suggest that the observed relationships are not country specific and may apply more generally.

**Keywords:** *terrorism; attitudes; Algeria; Jordan*

Rebel organizations seeking to upset the existing political order have long recognized the importance of obtaining the support of their constituent populations (Kasfir 2002; Collier and Hoeffler 2000). Organizations involved in civil wars require at least a passively supportive society in which to hide and from which to obtain the resources necessary for survival (Weinstein 2005)—so, too, with organizations that use terrorism.<sup>1</sup> They need to obtain resources, hiding places, and infrastructure support as well as to recruit fighters (Kushner 1996). Societal support, whether implicit or explicit, is often a critical facilitator for terrorist organizations, allowing them to conduct operations more frequently and more easily (Ross 1993).

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The importance of popular support for terrorist organizations is recognized not only by scholars but also by counterterrorism specialists (Atran 2003a; Crenshaw 2000; Post 1987). Indeed, in a review of Homeland Security policies, Atran (2003b) argues that the most important line of defense against terrorism may be finding ways to reduce popular support for terrorist organizations and activities. The experience of Israel in forecasting and combating terrorism by Palestinian groups lends support to this assessment. According to Paz (1998), organizations such as Hamas are highly responsive to the will of the Palestinian people. Similarly, according to Ayalon (2002), former head of Israel's security services, reductions in Palestinian terrorism between 1995 and 2000 were not a consequence of Israeli security policies but rather a response to Palestinian public opinion. Because of the correlation between popular support and militant actions, Israel has been able to use public opinion surveys to forecast decreases and increases in Palestinian terrorism with substantial accuracy.

As the preceding suggests, an understanding of the determinants of popular support for terrorism has strategic as well as theoretical importance. Success in combating terrorism will depend to a substantial degree on the extent to which terrorist organizations are deprived of such support (Hoffman 2003). But while the importance of popular attitudes toward terrorist organizations and activities is generally recognized, there is little agreement about the determinants of these attitudes. Against this background, the present article uses survey data from Algeria and Jordan to construct an empirical model that tests hypotheses about the determinants of support for terrorism among ordinary citizens. The focus is on international terrorism, especially that directed at the United States. The model includes independent variables associated with alternate explanations of the root causes of support for terrorism.

## **Explanations of Support for Terrorism among Ordinary Citizens**

There has been little systematic research addressed to the question of why some ordinary citizens but not others support the activities of terrorist organizations that purport to struggle on their behalf. More common with respect to the Arab world are attempts to explain the strong anti-American sentiment that is pervasive in most Arab countries and research that focuses not on passive support for terrorism among Arab (and Muslim) publics but rather on the reasons that some groups and individuals actually carry out terrorist acts. The explanations offered by these analyses fall into two broad and competing categories, both of which suggest propositions that may also help to account for variance in popular attitudes toward terrorism. The first category focuses attention on religion and culture and includes assessments associated

with the well-known Clash of Civilizations thesis. The second argues that explanatory power is to be found primarily in political and economic considerations.

## Religious and Cultural Explanations

After the September 11 attacks, a University of Michigan survey found that 54 percent of a representative sample of Americans believed that the attackers had been motivated by a conflict between Christianity and Islam. This assertion, usually described as the Clash of Civilizations thesis, with emphasis placed on an alleged confrontation between Islam and the West, has been advanced by a number of prominent scholars to explain the anti-Western sentiment that is widespread in the Arab world (Pew Research Center 2005). It has been given particular currency by Samuel Huntington (1993, 1996), although Bernard Lewis, a well-known scholar of the Middle East, used the term earlier (1990) as well as more recently (2002).

Writing in "The Roots of Muslim Rage," Lewis stated as early as 1990 that "It should now be clear that we [in the West] are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—that perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage" (Lewis 1990, 60; see also Lewis 2002). Linking this thesis to violent conflict, Huntington (1996) writes of "Islam's bloody borders," where Muslims and non-Muslims bump up against one another and conflict results. He further asserts that an aggressive Muslim posture toward the West is rooted in the very nature of Islam and should not be understood as a product of Islamic fundamentalism or the militancy of a few Muslim extremists (pp. 210, 217).

While these assessments do not pertain directly to terrorism or even to passive support for terrorist activities, they offer an explanation of antipathy toward the West that is also found in some studies of terrorism. In accounts of Palestinian attacks against Israeli targets, for example, Moghaddam (2003) argues that perceived religious and value conflicts are key motivators for suicide terrorism; and Paz (2001) contends in the same connection that many Palestinian militants perceive an "eternal struggle" between Judaism and Islam.

Explanations that emphasize religion and culture are challenged by others, however. On one hand, a recent empirical study based on opinion surveys in five Arab countries "does not find evidence that a clash of cultures explains deteriorating relations between the West, generally, or with the U.S., specifically" (Hamarnah 2005, 97). On the other, with respect to religion in particular, the proposed connection between Islam and terrorism has also been called into question. According to a major study by Esposito (2002), the overwhelming majority of Muslims are appalled that violence is committed in the name of Islam. It is therefore essential, he argues, not to conflate the religion of Islam with the actions of those who hijack Islamic discourse

to justify acts of terrorism. Esposito's argument suggests that even if it can be established that Muslims who commit terrorist acts are themselves frequently influenced by religious ideas, it does not follow that deep religious involvement or conviction fosters a positive attitude toward terrorism among ordinary men and women.

There are also analyses that place emphasis not on Islam as a system of religious values and beliefs but rather, more narrowly, on Islam as a political ideology and agenda. These analyses do not endorse the view that aggression toward the West is rooted in the fundamental character of Islam. They do consider it significant, however, that a substantial proportion of terrorist attacks, and suicide attacks in particular, are carried out by groups and individuals who are religiously motivated and claim inspiration from political Islam (Atran 2002; Berman 2003). On one hand, the conception of Islam as a political community, a community of believers, encourages militants to struggle against the real or perceived enemies of that community. On the other, beliefs about how God intends this community to be governed give additional specificity to the group's platform and expose more fully those who, in the militants' view, are attempting to thwart its realization. According to this line of analysis, a political agenda attributed to Islam is central to the ideology and motivation of many terrorist groups.

There are only a few empirical studies that seek to determine the degree to which political Islam does indeed shape the thinking of Muslim terrorists, and the results thus far are limited and inconclusive (Merari 2002a; Merari 2002b; Barber 2003). But regardless of the degree to which terrorists are themselves motivated by an Islamist political ideology, it is possible that an embrace of political Islam fosters popular support for those who carry out terrorist activities, both generally and more specifically in the name of Islam. This is suggested by a study in Lebanon that found a correlation between support for political Islam and approval of terrorist acts carried out in the name of the religion (Haddad and Khashan 2002; see also Harik 1996). On the other hand, although militancy rather than support for terrorism is the dependent variable, findings from surveys in Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Kuwait found no significant relationship between support for political Islam on one hand and, on the other, an uncompromising attitude toward Israel and refusal to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict (Tessler and Nachtwey 1998; Tessler 2004). This finding was repeated most recently in a poll conducted in the West Bank and Gaza following the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections of January 2006 (Shikaki 2006).

In addition to religious involvement and support for political Islam, cultural preferences and predispositions may help to explain why some men and women support terrorist acts against the United States or other Western countries. The *Clash of Civilizations* thesis asserts that anti-Western sentiment among Muslims is fueled by antipathy to Western cultural values, and similar assessments have more recently been offered to explain the widespread anti-Americanism in the Arab and Muslim world. In making this connection, Garfinkle (2004) refers to "cultural anti-Americanism," mentioning perceptions about America's presumed "vulgarity, disrespect for elders and teachers, and countless variations on puerile promiscuity" (p. 203). Some observers

attach particular importance to the status of women and gender relations in this context, alleging, for example, that “the liberation of women in Western societies and especially the U.S. is a part of modernity detested in the Arab-Islamic world” (Glazov 2004).

Cultural factors are also frequently emphasized in writings about Islamist movements, whether or not such movements are assumed to engage in terrorist activities. According to a recent analysis in the *Rand Review*, “[Muslim] fundamentalists reject democratic values and contemporary Western culture” (Bernard 2004). Similarly, according to Paz (2003), Islamists believe in “a cultural clash of civilizations” and have sought with some success, especially among “intellectuals and highly educated Muslims,” to foster the view that conflict with the West is part of “a war of cultures” (p. 53).

As far as popular support for terrorism is concerned, the probable link, if there is one, is that distaste for Western cultural norms can produce antagonism toward the West—and perhaps even hatred if the United States and other Western societies are seen as imposing their culture and undermining the Arab and Muslim world’s own values and standards, thereby creating sympathy for those who attack Western targets. A related consideration is that a dislike of Western culture may dehumanize the West in the eyes of some Arabs and Muslims. Several studies argue that dehumanization of the enemy is a vital cognitive link in the causal chain leading an individual to support terrorist actions (Sprinzak 1990; Bandura 1990).

These possibilities about the explanatory power of attitudes and values relating to religion, political Islam, and Western culture, which will be subjected to empirical evaluation with data from Algeria and Jordan, are summarized in the following propositions about determinants of support for terrorism against the United States among ordinary citizens in the Arab world.

*Hypothesis 1:* Individuals who are more religious or have higher levels of religious involvement are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

*Hypothesis 2:* Individuals who are more favorably disposed toward the platform of political Islam are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

*Hypothesis 3:* Individuals who have a more negative view of Western culture, as reflected in opposition to interaction between women and men in the public sphere, are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

*Hypothesis 4:* Individuals who believe Western culture is having an injurious effect on their society are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

## Political Economy Explanations

Standing in opposition to analyses that attribute explanatory power to religion and culture are those that see political and economic considerations as much more important. Among these is the plausible view that terrorism is the product of socioeconomic deprivation. Public figures ranging from George W. Bush and Tony Blair to Shimon

Peres and Elie Wiesel have claimed that poverty is the main cause of terrorism. Scholars and policy analysts have also sometimes argued that a reduction in poverty and economic deprivation is necessary to combat terrorism (O'Neill 2002; Berribi 2003). These assessments imply that support for terrorism, as well as terrorism itself, is fueled by economic distress.

This argument has been weakened by empirical evidence, however. On one hand, studies of the characteristics of terrorists do not support the poverty and deprivation thesis. For example, Hassan (2001) conducted interviews with almost 250 members of organizations that use terrorism, including failed suicide terrorists and their families, and found that none reported significant economic deprivation. Profiles of 129 Hizbollah militants killed in action (Krueger and Maleckova 2002) and of 335 deceased Palestinian terrorists (Berribi 2003) similarly found no association between poverty and the likelihood of becoming a terrorist. On the contrary, both studies found that terrorists tend to be relatively well off by the standards of their societies, a finding that is consistent with what is known about the Al Qaeda members involved in the attacks of September 11 (Wilgoren 2001). Indeed, one study suggests that terrorist groups may actually reject would-be participants if they believe their motivation to be monetary rather than a commitment to the group's cause (Pedahzur, Perliger, and Weinberg 2003).

While personal poverty and deprivation appear to have limited explanatory power, it is possible that support for terrorism is fostered by perceptions about societal economic and political circumstances. This reflects a "sociotropic" explanation; as reported in many political attitude studies, views are often shaped far less by one's personal situation than by an assessment of societal or national well-being. Research also demonstrates that while personal relative deprivation is not strongly related to inter-group attitudes and behavior, in-group or fraternal relative deprivation can prompt rebellious behavior, particularly when such deprivation can be attributed to foreign or out-group action (Grant and Brown 1995; Guimond and Dube-Simard 1983).

A number of observers advance sociotropic analyses to explain membership in terrorist organizations and the conduct of terrorist acts. Some analyses are general and broadly conceptual. Their authors argue that militancy and activism, including Islamic activism, are embedded in a political and/or economic context that shapes decisions and behavior (Anderson 1997; Alexander 2000; Ismail 2001). Thus, for example, Wiktorowicz (2004) observes that the actions of Palestinian Hamas have varied over time in accordance with changing conditions (pp. 14-15). These include, as noted earlier, the degree to which there is public support for a campaign of armed struggle (Mishal and Sela 2000). Other authors focus more specifically on terrorism and its relationship to societal conditions. Moghaddam (2003) and Saleh (2003), both of whom examine the Palestinian case, emphasize the importance of collective distress and/or hopelessness in fostering terrorism, particularly when these are seen as linked to Israeli policies.



Both economic and political considerations are relevant in this connection. On one hand, poverty, corruption, and a growing gap between rich and poor may lead people to believe that the economic conditions of their country will get worse rather than better in the years ahead. Thus, as a recent data-based study reports, expectations about future economic conditions contribute significantly to militancy in Palestinian attitudes toward Israel (Nachtwey and Tessler 2002). On the other, deep anger is likely if people believe their community's political rights have been denied. As Fathali Moghaddam (2005) notes, writing more generally, feelings of deprivation may express themselves as popular support for terrorism as well as an increase in terrorism itself. He writes that unrealized aspirations have produced a "groundswell of frustration and anger" and led to "greater [popular] sympathy for extremist 'anti-establishment' tactics" (p. 163).

This situation is particularly likely to give rise to terrorism, and very probably to popular support for terrorist activities as well, when grievances are attributed to identifiable actors. With respect to terrorism itself, several analysts report that attacks against civilians are often seen as an appropriate and justified response to aggression by members of the targeted group (Munoz-Rojas 2003; Ginges and Merari 2003). Attitudes about terrorism appear to be influenced by a similar dynamic. Shikaki (2002) shows, for example, that support among West Bank and Gaza Palestinians for attacks against civilian Israeli targets varies in response to Israel's actions in these territories.

The actors to whom grievances are attributed may include Western countries and the United States in particular. Complaints about U.S. actions in the Middle East, whether justified or not, may thus help to shape attitudes toward international affairs among Arab and Muslim publics. This is suggested by several data-based studies, which offer evidence that anti-Americanism among Arabs and Muslims is fostered primarily by negative assessments of U.S. foreign policy (Telhami 2006; Tessler 2003). As Hamarneh observes in this connection, reporting on surveys carried out in five Arab countries in 2004, "Arabs disagree fundamentally with U.S. positions on issues such as the definition of terrorism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the war in Iraq" (p. 17). On the other hand, there are also analyses that dispute the proposed linkage between U.S. foreign policy and anti-Americanism (Rubin 2002), and this was the subject of considerable debate at a 2005 Carnegie Endowment roundtable (Lindberg 2005; see also WINEP 2003).

Domestic as well as foreign actors may be seen as responsible for an unsatisfactory status quo that fuels popular anger and associated acts of protest or rebellion. Research in Algeria and Jordan as well as other Arab countries offers evidence that support for antiestablishment Islamist movements is at least partly a response to the perception that national leaders are corrupt, authoritarian, and generally unconcerned about the welfare of ordinary citizens (Tessler 1997; Nachtwey and Tessler 1999). A study of Algeria, for example, described the political condition producing support for the Islamic Salvation Front as a "system of power, patronage and privilege that entrenched interests in the party, government and economy are unwilling to sacrifice



in the name of some larger good" (Entelis 1988, 52-53). The situation fueling public anger in Jordan has been described as "a system [where] cronyism is pervasive," with opportunities for enrichment channeled by insiders to "the same old faces, families and clans" (Amawi 1992, 27). Under such circumstances, the government is "often resented, if not hated, [and] this produces one of two reactions: either complete apathy, or at least passivity, or alienation and activism in some anti-establishment medium" (Suleiman 1987, 113).

While it is not self-evident that anger at domestic leaders would foster support for international terrorism, a connection is suggested by an insightful study carried out in Morocco during the war to liberate Kuwait following Saddam Hussein's invasion of that country in 1990. As in many other Arab countries, there were popular demonstrations in Morocco against the U.S.-led coalition seeking to expel Iraq's army from Kuwait. This was puzzling to some observers, since Saddam had invaded a fellow Arab country and was known to be a brutal dictator. Yet it was the United States and its coalition partners, which included the government of Morocco and other Arab countries, who were viewed as the real enemy. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi (1993), a Moroccan sociologist, investigated this apparent puzzle through interviews with young Moroccans and reported that "unshared wealth was the central theme of discourse." More specifically, U.S. and Arab leaders were seen as acting in concert to ensure the survival of a status quo that privileged the few while denying opportunity to the vast majority. Young Moroccans viewed the anti-Saddam coalition as a self-interested partnership in which American and Arab "enemies of the people" worked together to preserve a corrupt political and economic order (pp. 392-436).

This discussion suggests several hypotheses about the impact of political and economic factors on attitudes toward terrorism against the United States in the Arab and perhaps broader Muslim world.

*Hypothesis 5:* Individuals whose personal economic circumstances are disadvantageous are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

*Hypothesis 6:* Individuals who believe their country's economic situation is unfavorable are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

*Hypothesis 7:* Individuals who hold more negative views about the foreign policy of the U.S. and/or other Western countries are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

*Hypothesis 8:* Individuals who hold more negative views about their own political leaders or government are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

## Data and Methods

### Data and Cases

Data with which to test the hypotheses listed above are provided by attitude surveys carried out in Algeria and Jordan in mid-2002. More broadly based surveys

have also examined attitudes toward terrorism in the Arab and Muslim world, most notably those carried out by the Pew Research Center between 2002 and 2005. These surveys do not provide measures of many of the relevant independent variables, however. The surveys in Algeria and Jordan, by contrast, include questions about terrorism on interview schedules that probe much more deeply into attitudes relating to religion, culture, and issues of political economy.

The Algerian and Jordanian surveys both involved face-to-face interviews with representative national samples of adults over the age of eighteen. In Algeria, the survey was conducted by a team of scholars at the University of Algiers as part of the World Values Survey (WVS; <http://worldvaluessurvey.org>), with the country team adding questions pertaining to terrorism and world affairs to the standard WVS interview schedule. Stratified random sampling was used to select *communes*, the equivalent of counties in the United States. Quotas based on age and sex, informed by the 1998 national census, were employed to select respondents at the commune level. The survey was conducted in late spring 2002, and a total of 1,282 men and women were interviewed. The survey in Jordan, which was not affiliated with the WVS, was conducted in early summer 2002 by the Middle East Research group in Amman. Using a sampling frame provided by the government statistical office, a random sample of 1,000 respondents was selected and interviewed.

Although similar in some respects, Algeria and Jordan differ in important ways that are relevant to the present study. Accordingly, a comparison of the two countries involves features of a "most different systems" research design. Most important, perhaps, Algeria and Jordan differ with respect to their experience with terrorism. Algeria experienced prolonged civil conflict involving savage acts of domestic terrorism throughout the 1990s. On one side of this war were extremist Islamist groups, some of which were offshoots of legitimate political movements that had been suppressed by the government. On the other were not only the country's security forces but also militias and vigilante groups that were sometimes supported by the government. Most accounts assert that there was brutality on all sides, with the number of Algerians killed usually estimated at 150,000 or more (Martinez 2005; Hafez 2004; Tessler 2005). Some of the fighters were Algerians who had fought with Islamist forces against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, thus reflecting a global dimension to the violence and terrorism that convulsed the country for almost a decade. Given Algeria's direct and intense experience with the horrors caused by terrorist acts, it is possible that passive support for international terrorism will be relatively low.

Jordan's experience with political violence and terrorism is quite different. The country has experienced much lower levels of domestic terrorism than Algeria, and there had been no recent terrorist attacks in the country at the time the survey was conducted. On the other hand, at least half of Jordan's population is of Palestinian origin, making the country's citizens particularly sensitive and presumably sympathetic to the goals of the al-Aqsa intifada and the associated armed struggle that had been taking place in the West Bank and Gaza for almost two years at the time the survey was conducted. Given this combination of low domestic terrorism and a

strong connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jordanians may very well have a perspective on terrorism that differs from that of Algerians and most likely one that is at least somewhat more supportive.

Another very important difference concerns the relationship between religion and the state. In Jordan, the monarch is a direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad, which provides the king with a measure of political legitimacy. The constitution recognizes Islam as the official state religion, and Islamic institutions, such as religious endowments and trusts (*awqaf*), exercise considerable political influence. In Algeria, although the constitution also recognizes Islam as the state religion, ruling elites have a predominantly secular orientation, and the influence of religious institutions is limited and circumscribed. This is reflected, for example, in the formation in 1991 of the *Comité national pour la sauvegarde de l'Algérie*, an alliance of parties, unions, women's groups, newspapers, and other associations committed to limiting the role of religion in political affairs (Kalyvas 2000, 386).

Algeria and Jordan have also had significantly different experiences with political Islam. In Algeria, the 1991 parliamentary elections were canceled following an Islamist victory in the first round of balloting. Indeed, the *Comité national pour la sauvegarde de l'Algérie* was formed largely to press for this cancellation to prevent the Islamic Salvation Front from coming to power. In Jordan, by contrast, the Islamic Action Front won the parliamentary elections of 1989 and became the dominant force in the governing coalition. The parliament subsequently enacted a number of laws reflecting the party's Islamist orientation, including several that increased sex segregation in public life (Brand 1999). Many of these laws were deeply unpopular, contributing—together with a change in electoral procedures and some manipulation by the palace—to the poor showing of the Islamic Action Front in subsequent parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, the Front remains a prominent and very influential force in Jordanian political life (Sahliyah 2005).

Still other differences between Algeria and Jordan include regime type, ideological orientation, colonial history, and foreign alliances. Algeria is a republic with a strong president and a tradition of state socialism and militant involvement in Third World causes. The country had a long and intense colonial experience under the French, and ties to France remain strong four decades after independence. Jordan, by contrast, is a conservative monarchy, has a more laissez-faire ideological orientation, and was closely aligned with the West during the cold war. The country did not experience the disruption of traditional life associated with intense colonial domination, and its most important external relationships outside the Middle East are with Britain and the United States.

Finally, there are important demographic and economic differences between the two countries. Algeria is one of the largest and most populous countries in the Arab world. Additionally, its population contains a large number of Berbers, some of whom do not have Arabic as their first language. With respect to economic considerations,

Algeria has excellent water resources, abundant arable land, and substantial reserves of oil and natural gas. As such, despite current economic problems, it has the potential to be one of the most economically developed countries in the Arab world. The situation in Jordan is very different. It is among the Arab countries with the smallest population, and there are almost no Jordanians for whom Arabic is not the first language. Landlocked, largely desert, and possessing few natural resources, Jordan is also one of the poorest countries in the Arab world.

All of this suggests that a comparison of findings from Algeria and Jordan has the advantages and disadvantages of a research design involving dissimilar cases. There are of course some similarities between the two countries, such as the young age of their populations, high unemployment, and a rentier economic structure—based on petroleum exports in Algeria and remittances and aid in Jordan. But the differences are much more striking, and they involve factors that are particularly relevant for a study of passive support for terrorism among Muslim publics. Thus, as with other comparisons involving a most different systems research design, confidence in the generalizability of similar findings will increase, since they will have been found to apply under very different conditions. Alternatively, should the two countries yield dissimilar findings, it will not be possible to offer more than informed speculation about country-level factors that account for these differences.

The time period of the Algerian and Jordanian surveys also deserves mention. Both were carried out in late spring-early summer 2002, and the timing was probably fortuitous in at least some respects. The surveys followed the terrorist attacks of September 11 but not so closely as to reflect the shock of these events. Closer to the attacks on Washington and New York, sympathy toward the United States might well have been inflated, and antipathy toward terrorist organizations and activities might have been artificially low. On the other hand, given that the surveys preceded the U.S. invasion of Iraq by almost a year, responses were probably not influenced by the heightened anger at the United States and the heightened sympathy for the Iraqi resistance that later became widespread in the Arab world.

There is no completely normal temporal setting, however, and at least some aspects of this period undoubtedly had an impact on attitudes toward terrorism against U.S. targets. The most important of these is probably the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, which began in October 2001. Accordingly, as with any time-bounded study, the analysis must be replicated to determine whether observed relationships vary over time as well as space. And if so, attributes of the time periods associated with particular findings should be treated as conditionalities and incorporated into the explanatory models being developed. The importance of replication notwithstanding, however, spring-early summer 2002 would seem to be an appropriate period during which to investigate the determinants of passive support for terrorism against the United States in the Arab and Muslim world and thereby establish a baseline with which to compare any causal relationships observed in future studies.

## Variables and Measures

The Algerian and Jordanian surveys were conducted by different research teams using different interview schedules. As a result, although the two survey instruments asked many of the same questions, some attitudes and orientations pertinent to the present analysis are measured by items that are similar and comparable rather than identical.

The most important difference concerns the items used to measure attitudes toward terrorist acts against U.S. targets, the dependent variable in the analysis to follow. The measures not only possess face validity, however, they also appear to be conceptually equivalent, which is the critical consideration since determinants rather than levels of support for terrorism are being compared. In the Algerian survey, the dependent variable is measured by a single item that asked directly about the events of September 11. In the Jordanian case, two highly intercorrelated items ( $r = .315$ ;  $p \rightarrow .000$ ) have been combined to form an index measuring attitudes toward terrorist acts against U.S. targets. These items are given below:

*Algeria.* As you know, a group of religious extremists hijacked four civilian airliners in September and crashed them into buildings in New York and Washington, D.C., killing several thousand people. What is your opinion of this action? Strongly approve, approve, disapprove, strongly disapprove.

*Jordan.* As you may know, after the military campaign in Afghanistan began, some people called on all Muslims to join in armed jihad against the United States. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this call to armed jihad?

I would now like to read you the names of some international figures. As I read each one, please tell me whether you believe he is very trustworthy, fairly trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy, or haven't you heard or read enough about them to say?

—Al-Qaida leader Usama bin Laden

(The questions called for evaluations of ten different individuals. Among these, in addition to bin Laden, were United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, U.S. President George W. Bush, Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.)

Although different, the two measures are conceptually equivalent and operationalize the same normative orientation. And while neither uses the word "terrorism," the orientation measured in each instance is clearly approval-disapproval of terrorist acts directed at the United States. In the Algerian case, the item asks directly about a specific terrorist act—the attacks of September 11 on New York and Washington. In Jordan, while the questions do not ask about a specific act of international terrorism, the first item's inquiry about "armed jihad against the United States" references a type of activity of which the events of September 11 are the most dramatic and best known example. Moreover, the second item adds a degree of specificity and thus contributes

further to the equivalence of the Jordanian and Algerian measures. In calling for an assessment of Usama bin Laden, the item asks about the self-proclaimed architect of the September 11 attacks, a man who publicly claimed responsibility for this and other attacks on U.S. targets and who was in fact being hunted by American forces in Afghanistan at the time the Jordanian survey was conducted.

In this case, as in the case of several independent variables, measurement procedures need not be identical; relationships observed in Algeria and Jordan can be instructively compared as long as the operational procedures measure the same concept. Should different variable relationships be found in the two countries, it is much more likely that this is the result of country-specific conditions rather than differences in measurement. At the same time, following the logic of replication and a most different systems research design, finding identical or highly similar patterns in the two countries will further increase confidence in both the accuracy and the generalizability of these patterns.

Table 1 presents response distributions to these items. It shows that the central tendency of the distributions is different in Algeria and Jordan. In Algeria, responses are skewed in the direction of opposition to terrorism. Specifically, 77 percent of the respondents disapprove of the attacks of September 11, and of these, 58 percent disapprove strongly. On the other hand, 23 percent do approve of these attacks, and 45 percent of these individuals approve strongly. In Jordan, responses are skewed in the opposite direction. Specifically, 56 percent express strong support for armed jihad against the United States, and another 15 percent express some support. Similarly, 45 percent of the Jordanian respondents judge Usama bin Laden to be very trustworthy, and another 21 percent judge him to be fairly trustworthy. This higher level of support for terrorist acts against the United States may in part be a result of the particular questions asked. It may also, as suggested earlier, reflect the fact that Jordan has experienced much less domestic political violence and, at the time of the survey, was more directly affected by the Palestinian intifada. These latter possibilities suggest what may be a promising avenue for future cross-national research. Nevertheless, the different levels of aggregate Algerian and Jordanian support for terrorism against the United States and the reasons for the difference do not affect the test of hypotheses specifying individual-level relationships.

In the multivariate analysis to follow, responses to the Algerian survey item have been divided into the categories of "approve" and "disapprove" of the events of September 11, thereby forming a dichotomized measure. In the Jordanian case, respondents have been divided according to whether they do or do not both express strong support for armed jihad against the United States and consider Usama bin Laden to be very trustworthy, thereby creating a dichotomous measure in this case as well. The distribution of ratings on this dichotomized two-item index is also presented in Table 1, which shows that 33 percent of the Jordanian respondents both express strong support for armed jihad against the United States and judge Usama bin Laden

**Table 1**  
**Items Used to Measure Attitudes toward Terrorism**  
**in Algeria and Jordan**

---

**Algeria**

As you know, a group of religious extremist hijacked four civilian airliners in September and crashed them into buildings in New York and Washington, D.C. killing several thousand people. What is your opinion of this action?

Strongly approve	10.1%
Approve	12.5%
Disapprove	32.9%
Strongly disapprove	44.5%

---

**Jordan**

As you may know, after the military campaign in Afghanistan began, some people called on all Muslims to join in armed jihad against the United States. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this call to armed jihad?

Strongly support	55.5%
Somewhat support	15.0%
Somewhat oppose	5.4%
Strongly oppose	24.1%

I would now like to read you the names of some international figures. As I read each one, please tell me whether you believe he is very trustworthy, fairly trustworthy, not very trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy, or haven't you heard or read enough about them to say?

**Al-Qaida leader Usama bin Laden**

Very trustworthy	45.2%
Fairly trustworthy	21.3%
Not very trustworthy	5.0%
Not at all trustworthy	13.8%
Haven't heard enough	14.8%

(In addition to bin Laden, the question called for evaluations of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, U.S. President George W. Bush, Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.)

**Index Based on Items Taken Together**

Very high support for both jihad and bin Laden	33.3%
Not very high support for both jihad and bin Laden	66.7%

---

to be very trustworthy. This cutting point has been selected so that the variance to be explained in Jordan will be roughly comparable to that in Algeria.

Table 2 lists the items used in Algeria and Jordan to measure the independent variables in the eight hypotheses listed above. Four of these pertain to religion and culture: (1) religiosity or religious involvement; (2) attitudes toward political Islam;



(3) attitudes toward Western cultural norms, indicated by views about gender relations; and (4) views about the societal effects of Western culture. The others pertain to economic and political considerations: (5) personal economic circumstances; (6) assessments of the national economic situation; (7) views about U.S. foreign policy; and (8) assessments of domestic political institutions and leaders. Additionally, sex, age, and education are included in the model as control variables.

Most items possess face validity. In most cases, these items also correlate strongly with one or more similar items on the interview schedule, which offers evidence of reliability and increases confidence in validity. To maximize comparability, however, and also to minimize missing data, only one similar item from the Algerian and Jordanian interview schedules is used to measure each independent variable. Assessment of domestic political institutions and leaders is the only independent variable measured by an index composed of two or more intercorrelated items. In the Jordanian case, there is no item that asks directly about personal economic circumstances. An estimate is provided by questions that ask whether a respondent is employed (outside the home) and, if not, whether he or she is seeking employment. The interview schedules also require using somewhat different items to measure assessments of the national economic situation.

## Findings

To test the hypotheses listed above, Table 3 presents regression analyses showing the relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable for both Jordan and Algeria. The findings are strikingly similar for the two countries, which is all the more important given differences between the two countries in experience with terrorism; in political, economic and demographic character; and in the questions used to measure a number of the variables. That findings are similar despite these many differences, any of which might have produced dissimilar variable relationships in Algeria and Jordan, increases confidence in both the accuracy and generalizability of the patterns observed.

One important similarity is the absence of support for hypotheses that attribute significant explanatory power to religious or cultural factors. With respect to hypothesis 1, in neither Algeria nor Jordan are individuals with higher levels of religious involvement more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. Similarly, with respect to hypothesis 3, in neither country are individuals with a more negative view of Western culture, as measured by attitudes toward interaction between women and men in public, more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. And again, with respect to hypothesis 4, individuals who believe Western culture is having an injurious effect on their society are not more likely in either country to approve of terrorist acts against the United States.

**Table 2**  
**Survey Items from Algeria and Jordan**  
**Used to Measure Independent Variables**

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*Religiosity and Religious Involvement (Hypothesis 1)*

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- Algeria: How often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special holy days, once a year, less often, practically never, never.
- Jordan: How often do you visit a mosque? Hardly ever, only during religious holidays, only on Fridays and religious holidays, more than once a week, at least once each day, five times each day.

---

*Attitude toward Political Islam (Hypothesis 2)*

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- Algeria: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Religious leaders should have no influence over the decisions of the government: Agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.
- Jordan: Here are some pairs contrasting statements. For each pair, please tell me which one is closest to your own view: (1) Political leaders in our country should be selected solely by Islamic clerics. (2) Political leaders in our country should be elected solely by the people.

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*Values Pertaining to Gender Relations (Hypothesis 3)*

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- Algeria: For each of the statements listed below, would you please indicate whether you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly with the interpretation of Islam that is presented? It is a violation of Islam for male and female university students to attend classes together.
- Jordan: Now, I'm going to read you some statements about society. For each statement, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Men and women should not be allowed to work in the same place.

---

*Effects of Western Culture (Hypothesis 4)*

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- Algeria: Now, would you please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the United States and other countries? Exposure to the culture of the United States and other Western countries has a harmful effect on our country.
- Jordan: How much of a threat do you think American popular culture, such as music, television and films, is to our culture? Very serious, serious, minor threat, no threat at all.

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*Personal Economic Circumstances (Hypothesis 5)*

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- Algeria: People sometimes describe themselves as belonging to the working class, the middle class, or the upper or lower class. Would you describe yourself as belonging to the upper class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, working class, lower class?
- Jordan: Are you employed (outside the home)? If not, are you looking for employment?

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*Country Economic Situation (Hypothesis 6)*

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- Algeria: Generally speaking, would you say that Algeria is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
- Jordan: How would you describe the current economic situation in Jordan? Would you say that it is very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad?
- 

*(continued)*

*Assessment of American Foreign Policy (Hypothesis 7)*

- 
- Algeria: Now, would you please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the United States and other countries? Some U.S. policies toward other countries are good, and some U.S. policies toward other countries are bad. Disagree: almost all U.S. foreign policies are good. Agree. Disagree: almost all U.S. foreign policies are bad.
- Jordan: The United States often violates other people's human rights around the world. Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.
- 

*Evaluation of Domestic Political Institutions and Leaders (Hypothesis 8)*

- 
- Algeria: I am going to name a number of Algerian organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all? The government, the parliament, the military, the police.
- Jordan: I would now like to read you a list of some institutions in our country. As I read each one, please tell me how much confidence you have in each. Do you have a great deal of confidence, a fair amount of confidence, only a little confidence, or no confidence at all? The government, the legal system, the police.
- 

The one very limited exception to the conclusion that religious and cultural factors have little explanatory power concerns hypothesis 2, which proposes that persons who are more favorably disposed to the platform of political Islam are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. There is no support for this hypothesis in Jordan. In Algeria, the relationship is statistically significant, although not especially robust. More important, however, the direction of the relationship is the opposite of that proposed. In the Algerian case, men and women who are less favorably disposed to the platform of political Islam are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

A second similarity, equally or even more important, pertains to hypotheses that attribute significant explanatory power to political and economic factors. In neither Algeria nor Jordan do the data provide support for hypothesis 6, which proposes that individuals who believe their country's economic situation is unfavorable are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. By contrast, very strong support is provided by both the Algerian and Jordanian surveys for hypotheses 7 and 8. The former proposes that individuals who hold more negative views about the foreign policy of the United States are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. The latter proposes that individuals who hold more negative views about their own government leaders and institutions are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against the United States. In both Algeria and Jordan and for both hypotheses, the strength of the relationship is reflected in a *p* value approaching .000.

Only with respect to hypothesis 5 is there a difference in the findings from Algeria and Jordan. This hypothesis proposes that individuals whose personal economic circumstances are disadvantageous are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. Although the Algerian data provide no support for this hypothesis, a

**Table 3**  
**Logistic Regression with Support for Terrorism as Dependent Variable**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Algeria</i>	<i>Jordan</i>
Higher religious involvement	.056 (.0420)	.133 (.153)
Higher support for political Islam	-.193 (.085)*	.149 (.123)
Oppose gender mixing in public	-.027 (.068)	.179 (.104)
Western culture is harmful	.095 (.105)	.092 (.085)
Personal economic situation unfavorable	.097 (.095)	-.556 (.257)*
Country economic situation unfavorable	-.090 (.134)	.160 (.195)
Negative assessment of American foreign policy	.828 (.177)***	.221 (.088)**
Negative evaluation of domestic political institutions and leaders	.318 (.094)***	.286 (.088)***
Female Sex	-.134 (.209)	.326 (.257)
Older Age	-.289 (.094)***	-.021 (.008)***
Higher Education	-.063 (.045)	-.019 (.068)

Note: Dependent variable is coded 0 = lesser support for terrorism; 1 = greater support for terrorism. Table presents logit coefficients ( $\beta$ ) with standard errors in parentheses.

\*Statistically significant at .05 level. \*\*Statistically significant at .01 level. \*\*\*Statistically significant at .002 level.

statistically significant relationship has been found in Jordan. As in the case of hypothesis 2, however, the direction of this relationship is the opposite of that proposed. Jordanian men and women whose personal economic circumstances are more advantageous are more likely to approve of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

A final similarity between the findings from Algeria and Jordan concerns the demographic variables included in the regression models. In both countries, there is no significant difference in attitudes relating to terrorism between men and women or better and less well-educated individuals. By contrast, again in both countries, younger individuals are much more likely than older individuals to express approval of terrorist acts against U.S. targets. The strength of this relationship is again reflected in a *p* value approaching .000 in both the Algerian and Jordanian cases.

## Implications and Conclusion

Survey findings from Algeria and Jordan strongly suggest that religious and cultural orientations have little influence on individual attitudes toward terrorism against the United States, whereas considerations pertaining to politics—and perhaps to political economy more broadly—do possess substantial explanatory power. In neither the Algerian nor the Jordanian case is there support for hypotheses in which personal religious involvement, support for the platform of political Islam, opposition to Western values relating to gender relations, or a belief that Western cultural norms are injurious to one's society is an independent variable. These findings are in sharp contrast to what would be expected if, as claimed by the Clash of Civilizations thesis, Arab attitudes toward the United States are in substantial measure the product of a normative conflict between Islam and the West.

The data also indicate that factors with a specific economic focus have little explanatory power. In neither Algeria nor Jordan is support for terrorism against the United States more likely among individuals whose personal economic situation is disadvantageous. Indeed, there is some evidence, albeit limited, that support is more likely among men and women in more advantageous economic circumstances. Similarly, men and women with a negative assessment of their country's economic situation are no more likely than others to express support for terrorism against the United States. Thus, the data strongly suggest that neither personal nor societal economic circumstances, by themselves, are important determinants of attitudes toward terrorism directed at the United States and perhaps toward international terrorism more generally.

The significance of these findings lies in the evidence they provide about factors that do not have explanatory power. These analyses based on survey data from Algeria and Jordan thus indicate the inadequacy of explanations that attribute popular support for terrorism either to Arab and Muslim religious and cultural values or to unsatisfactory economic conditions. Since both types of analyses are frequently advanced, the significance of these negative findings derives in part from the doubt they cast on the unidimensional, overly simplified, and sometimes ethnocentric assessments of Arab attitudes and behavior that are common in the United States and some other Western societies.

The contribution of the preceding analysis is not limited to negative findings, however, regardless of how useful these may be in raising doubts about explanations that have frequently been proposed to explain support for international terrorism in the Arab and Muslim world. Equally important, if not more so, are insights about the independent variables that do have explanatory power: level of confidence in domestic political institutions and assessments of U.S. foreign policy. More specifically, men and women with less confidence in domestic political institutions and with stronger disapproval of American foreign policy are more likely than others to express approval of terrorism against U.S. targets.

There would seem to be an important conceptual link between the two independent variables with significant explanatory power, one that sheds light on a political dynamic that may play a particularly important role in fostering support for terrorism against the United States and perhaps against Western targets more generally. As suggested in the discussion of political and economic factors, both domestic and international political actors may be seen as committed to the perpetuation of a status quo with which at least some ordinary citizens are highly dissatisfied. Indeed, it is likely that those who are sufficiently discontent to approve of terrorist acts perceive a shared interest and perhaps even an explicit partnership between domestic and international actors devoted to preventing the kind of change that people believe would improve their life circumstances.

The data do not demonstrate that those who express support for terrorism against the United States have a conscious and fully articulated view along these lines. All that can be said with certainty is that negative assessments of both U.S. foreign policy and domestic political institutions are strongly associated with support for terrorist acts against U.S. targets. But the conclusion that such support is fostered primarily by antipathy toward powerful actors deemed responsible for the prevailing political and economic order, and that this is a consequence of antipathy toward both domestic and international political actors, constitutes a potentially important insight that is consistent with the evidence from two very dissimilar Arab countries. Accordingly, it offers an important line of inquiry for future empirical research.

The one important point to be added, which amplifies the preceding interpretation, is that younger men and women are significantly more likely than older individuals to express approval of terrorist acts against the United States and, if the preceding interpretation is correct, to have their views about terrorism shaped by anger at those believed to be responsible for the political and economic status quo. Given that personal economic circumstance is not related to attitudes toward terrorism, youth is probably not a proxy for economic uncertainty or distress. Indeed, in Jordan, support for terrorism against the United States is more likely among individuals, including young people, whose economic situation is relatively favorable. In any event, apparently, it is among younger persons that negative attitudes about those who exercise political power in the domestic and international arenas are most likely to produce approval of terrorist acts against U.S. targets.

What can be concluded from this interpretation is that support for terrorism against the United States does not flow directly from discontent with personal or even societal circumstances but rather from perceptions about who or what is responsible for the status quo and that this is the case among younger persons in particular. As emphasized, this pattern has emerged with striking similarity in two Arab countries that differ greatly in character and experience, thus increasing confidence in its accuracy and generalizability. Accordingly, while the broader political dynamic attributed to findings from Algeria and Jordan has been inferred, not demonstrated, it follows plausibly from the variable relationships observed in both countries and points to a

promising and potentially very important avenue for future research. Given recent terrorist attacks in several European countries, future research should also investigate whether the factors that account for variance in Arab attitudes toward terrorism against the United States are also determinants of attitudes toward terrorism against targets in other Western countries.

## Note

1. There is no standard and consistently employed definition of terrorism (O'Neill 2002; Shamir and Shikaki 2002). Further complicating matters, the term has strong political and normative connotations. For purposes of the present study, "terrorism" refers to politically motivated violence against noncombatant members of an "enemy" community; that is, action or threatened action that seeks to kill or injure civilians with the goal of altering the policies or behavior of the community to which the civilians belong.

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