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Challenging the State: Transnational TV and Political Identity in the Middle East

ERIK C. NISBET and TERESA A. MYERS

Several scholars have linked the growth of transnational Arab TV in the Middle East over the past decade to a rise in transnational Muslim and Arab political identification at the expense of national political identity. However, a theoretical context for understanding how media exposure may influence political identification in the Middle East at an individual level of analysis has been lacking, and to date very little quantitative evidence has been presented. Our article addresses this gap by presenting a theoretical framework for linking individual media use to political identity in the Middle East and then employing this framework to quantitatively test the association between transnational Arab TV exposure and individual political identification using a set of cross-national surveys conducted in six Middle Eastern states between 2004 and 2008. We find evidence that exposure to transnational Arab TV increases the probability of transnational Muslim and Arab political identification at the expense of national political identities, though the influence of transnational TV on identity salience varied significantly across levels of education. Theoretical implications for the role of media in political socialization and identity salience, as well as implications for American foreign policy, are discussed.

Keywords public opinion, political identity, Middle East, Arab television, foreign policy

The mass media have long been linked to the historical development and emergence of national identities and the modern nation-state by creating bounded spaces of political communication and discourse. However, in this era of media globalization, as mass media institutions evolve beyond national boundaries and create transnational spaces of political discourse and mobilization, what are the implications for how audiences may politically define themselves within these new information environments? Furthermore, how do media, as a resource for mediated identity formation, interact with other agents of political socialization like education?

These questions have been especially salient in the Middle East with the growth of transnational satellite television channels like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have documented the rise of a new transnational Arab "public sphere," the evolving nature of Arab news content, and the perceived influence of these

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new information sources on political and religious identities in the region, generally at an institutional and societal level of analysis (e.g., Cherribi, 2006; el-Nawawy & Gher, 2003; Lynch, 2006b; Seib, 2007, 2008; Telhami, 2002). However, to date, very little quantitative evidence has been presented that demonstrates an association between long-term individual news exposure to these transnational news channels and individual political identification within the Middle East as argued by these scholars.

This article tackles this gap in several steps. First, drawing upon previous scholarship on the relationship between media and identity, we develop a generalized theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between new forms of transnational television news and political identity at an *individual level* of analysis. Second, we apply our theoretical framework to develop a hypothesis about how the emergence of transnational TV news in the Middle East over the last 8 years has impacted political identification among Arab audiences and how growing transnational identities may displace state-centric political identities in the region. Third, we employ public opinion data collected from a series of cross-national surveys to test our hypothesis and quantitatively demonstrate how individual exposure to transnational Arab TV news may influence political identification in the Middle East over time. We conclude by discussing how our findings add to the understanding of media's role in international relations and implications for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

Political Identities and the Mass Media

Political identities may be best understood as forms of collective social identities situated in a political context—"the social categories, attributes, or components of the self-concept that are shared with others and therefore define individuals as being similar to others," resulting from the "interplay between cognitive processes and social or cultural influences" (Monroe, Hankin, & Van Vechten, 2000, p. 421). In a sense, political identities may be best viewed as forms of individual schemas that organize information about our political location, status, and social relationships and make some aspects of our collective lifeworld—nation-state, culture, race, gender, language, religion, nationality, class, and so forth—more politically applicable than others (Howard, 2000; Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990).

Scholarship has shown that the mass media may shape the relative *salience* of competing political identities through a combination of social and psychological mechanisms. For example, several scholars have argued that the mass media historically played a pivotal role in the rise of nationalism (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Calhoun, 1988; Deutch, 1966; Habermas, 1989), with "mediated communication . . . of central importance" in the formation of a political identities centered on the nation-state (Schlesinger, 2000, p. 104). This scholarship focuses on how the communicative and interactive processes, within the confines of a modern nation-state bounded both by political territory and culture and/or language, increase the salience of a common national identity, shared consciousness, or imagined community (Schlesinger).

From a psychological viewpoint, the creation of these interactive, discursive, identity-based communication spaces led to media audiences being presented "hegemonic" social representations embedded within media messages, which in turn become internalized as collective identity frames that "make it possible for us to classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviors, and to objectify them as parts of our social setting" (Moscovici, 1998, p. 214). This concept of a hegemonic system is aligned with the concept of "banal nationalism," in which subtle cues in everyday media discourse reinforce the salience of identity schemas (Billig, 1995; Hutchenson, Domke, Billeaudeaux, & Garland,

2004; Law, 2001). As Hutcheson and his colleagues argue, "these and other commonly used signifiers are the foundation for the mundane yet persuasive and . . . politically necessary construction of national consciousness in modern societies" (p. 47). This process of mediated identity formation may also be conceptualized as a "spiral of identity" in which the media influences the salience, or chronic accessibility, of privileged political identities in reinforcing spirals (Slater, 2007).

Furthermore, when considering media influence on identity formation, previous scholarship suggests that television, compared to other forms of media, is a potentially powerful influence on mediated identity formation as it "undermines" the traditional relationship between physical location and access (Meyrowitz, 1985). "Electronic media begin to override group identities based on 'co-presence' and they create many new forms of access and 'association' that have little to do with physical location," writes Meyrowitz (p.144). In other words, electronic media such as television may become a "symbolic place" in which individuals forge their collective political identities. Furthermore, these "symbolically placed" identities may be fluid. At any one time we have many competing social "selves" based on shared social, political, cultural, and geographic attributes—and if the "symbolic location" of our identity shifts, then the salience of a particular social identity may shift relative to other competing social identities (Meyrowitz, p. 144). In this sense, mediated collective political identities have the potential to be rooted within a "symbolic space" not necessarily bounded by traditional national borders or political institutions, but rather socially located in shared regional, cultural, linguistic, or religious contexts for example.

Thus, processes of mediated identity formation, spurred by the growth of regional and global television, are no longer necessarily limited to promoting the formation of national political identities, but may have become *transnational,* increasing the salience of identification with a group not uniquely confined to a nation-state. For instance, Schlesinger (2000) argues that a "discursively linked community" and communicative space created by the mass media and bounded by a sense of European identity is a key factor in the development of a strong collective European political identity. Lynch (2006a) and Cherribi (2006) both argue that a similar process is taking place within the Arab public sphere with the growth of transnational television outlets like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya and a corresponding rise in transnational Muslim and Arab political identities.

Mediated processes of identity formation may be conceptualized as a form of secondary political socialization building upon and interacting with primary and unmediated political socialization processes promoted by educational, familial, political, or other institutional agents of socialization. Primary socialization agents, such as education, may be assumed to strengthen attachment and loyalty to state-centric identities as they are often controlled or influenced by the state. As Erikson and Tedin (2006) note, the stability of a nation-state rests on the ability of its agents of socialization to produce "feelings as to the rightness, the oughtness, [and] the legitimacy of the political order. . . . In virtually all nations, this task is assigned to the schools. They are the agent of political socialization over which the *government has considerable control* [italics added]" (p. 142). Mediated secondary socialization, however, is unlikely to produce the same state-centric result; rather, the effects of mass media on identity salience are likely dependent upon the context and content of the medium itself. Those stations that are *national* are likely to promote (either explicitly or implicitly) the salience of national political identity, while those that are *transnational* are more likely to promote the salience of some form of transnational (Muslim or Arab) political identity.

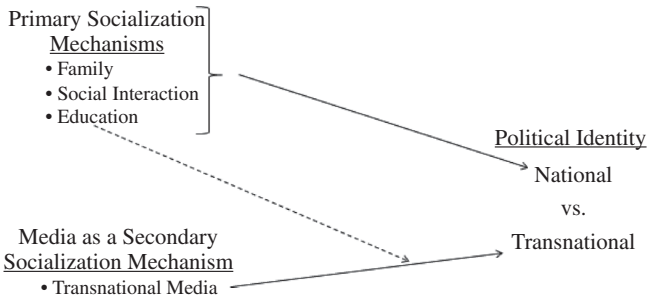

Figure 1. Effects of primary and secondary socialization mechanisms on political identity.

Interestingly, it may be that education behaves uniquely in this process. As a primary and unmediated mechanism for identity formation, it likely increases the salience of a national rather than a transnational political identity and promotes higher levels of political sophistication and participation within state political institutions, which in turn also reinforces socialization into state-centric political identities. However, as education and increased political sophistication allow individuals to receive and integrate more cues from mass media into their schematic representations of the social world (e.g., Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Nisbet, 2008; Zaller, 1992), this may moderate the impact of media as a secondary political socialization process. In the context of attention to national media, those individuals with higher levels of education will be more likely to pick up the national identity cues in national media, presumably leading to even greater national political identification than among those with lower levels of education. However, in the context of attention to *transnational media*, those individuals with higher levels of education will also be more likely to pick up the transnational cues, leading to those individuals with higher education showing an even greater effect of attention to transnational media on their likelihood of indicating a *transnational political identification* in comparison to those with lower education levels (see Figure 1 for a summary).

In summary, we propose that media have historically played an important role in socialization and political identity formation within nation-states through a combination of social and psychological processes. However, as media globalization continues and transnational media develop new political communication spaces that transcend traditional nation-state boundaries, there is a potential for audiences who rely heavily on these new transnational media to develop strongly held political identities that are no longer nation-state-centric. Instead, these emerging political identities are symbolically situated in a transnational "imagined community" defined in collective terms such as language, ethnicity, religion, and region. In other words, transnational media may increase the salience of alternative collective political identities at the expense of nation-state-centric identities. Lastly, as a form of secondary socialization, this influence of media may be moderated by levels of educational attainment, such that those with more education demonstrate an increased influence of the effects of transnational media on preference for a transnational political identity.

Transnational Media in the Middle East

The combination of political liberalization and diffusion of satellite TV and Internet technology in the Middle East during the late 1990s led to a relatively open, transnational,

electronic communicative space that some scholars herald as a "new" Arab public sphere (Ayish, 2002; Eickelman & Anderson, 1999; Hafez, 2001; Lynch, 2006b; Rugh, 2004). Previous to the emergence of this transnational public sphere, most mass communication in the Middle East was structured along national lines and characterized by low levels of press freedom, with most mass media tightly controlled either directly or indirectly by the national governments (Ayish; Rugh). Lynch notes two key structural characteristics of this new Arab public sphere. First, it is differentiated from the traditional conception of a public sphere in that it is "disembodied" from any formal political structure or institution (i.e., the state) and is unbounded by sovereign borders. Second, Lynch argues that this public sphere encompasses an ongoing discourse within the region that primarily focuses on issues of foreign policy and international politics—and the role of national or religious identities within these arenas. For example, a recent research report by Media Tenor found that nearly half of all reporting on Arab transnational TV channels like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya focused on international politics (Media Tenor, 2006).

Transnational Arab TV news channels that are not explicitly government-controlled (or "liberal-commercial" transnational TV stations, as Ayish, 2002, categorizes them), such as al-Jazeera, have several content characteristics that differentiate them from other explicitly, government-owned national TV stations in the Middle East (Lynch, 2006b; Miles, 2005; Rugh, 2004). For example, al-Jazeera has a high degree of sensationalism and technically alluring formats compared to traditional Arab news. Sensationalism is embodied in al-Jazeera's choice of "video films and images employed in Afghanistan, Iraq conflicts and by the network's 'sensational screaming debates' on live talk reports" highlighting casualties and consequences for Arabs and Muslims (Ayish, p. 148; Lynch). Second, al-Jazeera has continuously focused its news and commentary on political reform within the Arab world, questioning the legitimacy and policies of Arab states, sometimes leading it to be temporarily banned by Arab governments (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002; Lynch; Rugh).

Third, its news values often deviate from the "Western notion of objectivity" in that al-Jazeera explicitly attempts to present information from an Arab or Muslim perspective that challenges what the news organization views as a dominant Western perspective embodied in news broadcasts from other international news sources such as CNN International or the BBC (Ayish, 2002; Lynch, 2006b; Zayani, 2005). Compared to other channels, al-Jazeera provides a highly discursive, interactive message system through its many talk shows and call-in formats. Lynch argues that these formats transformed previously passive Arab audiences into active viewers who directly or indirectly participate in this discourse with high levels of engagement. Lastly, the popularity of al-Jazeera has inspired dozens of transnational TV stations to emerge in the region since 2003 and emulate its reporting and content style, with al-Arabiya being the most successful and now one of al-Jazeera's primary transnational competitors (Telhami, 2005, 2006, 2008).

Transnational Identity in the Middle East

Some scholars and policymakers have cited the resurgence in transnational (Muslim and/or Arab) identity within the region as one of the consequences of these structural changes in the Arab public sphere, especially since the onset of the U.S. war on terror and involvement in Iraq. Historically, the Middle East has had three competing social identities: Arabism, Islamism, and state identity (Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, etc.). This competition for social and political identification has been well documented across a variety of texts (see, for example, Anderson, 1986; Choueri, 2000; Dawisha, 2003; Dawn, 1988; Razi, 1990; Telhami & Barnett, 2002). Simply put, in the second half of the 20th century the historical and cultural

legacies of the Ottoman Empire and Western colonialism left a still unresolved contest among three principal sources of political identity and political loyalty: Islam, Arabism, and the local state. In fact, Muslim and Arab political identification has become increasing salient for Arab publics over the last few years. According to a recent 2008 cross-national survey across six Arab states, when asked what their most important identity was, 39% cited a national identity, 36% cited a Muslim identity, and 29% cited an Arab identity (Telhami, 2008).

Several scholars have attributed growing transnational political identification to changes in the Arab public sphere. For example, el-Nawawy and Gher (2003) argue that al-Jazeera has broadened both pan-Arab and pan-Muslim political interaction and perceived connectedness due to its broadcasts of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, which they term the "al-Jazeera effect." Lynch (2006a, 2006b) asserts that the new Arab public sphere has promoted transnational political identities and mobilization around issues such as Iraq and political reform. Cherribi (2006) argues that al-Jazeera's primary goal is to "build a global Muslim identity, mobilize a shared public opinion, and construct an imagined transnational Muslim community" (p. 121). Consistent with Cherribi, a recent research report released by Media Tenor (2006) shows that Arab satellite TV stations frame news coverage of Islam mostly within a political context. New media such as the Internet and satellite TV have also led to a transnational Muslim political identity and community that is outside of state control and where local political disputes "take on transnational dimensions" according to Eickelman and Anderson (1999). In El Oifi's (2005) view, Arab nationalism is "very prominent as a unifying sentiment" on al-Jazeera broadcasts, with the common Arabic language providing a communication tool that facilitates "transnational mobilizations which are often at odds with the logic of Arab states keen on forging national identities and political cultures" (pp. 72–73).

In this sense, transnational satellite TV has "radically transformed the *sense of distance* [italics added] among Arabs and Muslims, bringing them together in real time and in a common language alongside intense images and a shared political discourse" (Lynch, 2006b, p. 41). Accordingly, Lynch writes that "local issues are reframed—cast in terms of a wider grand narrative" (p. 35) that deterritorializes political discourse and places it within a shared transnational symbolic space in which political identities may be situated. Thus, territory or political institutions do not bound this communicative political space, but rather it is bound by language (Arabic) and religion (Islam), with interior communication promoting transnational, rather than state-centric, political identities. Individuals embedded within this new transnational communicative space are immersed in a cohesive message system of hegemonic Arab and Islamic symbols and narratives (Lynch; Zayani, 2005). Over periods of extended exposure, these representations and narratives may be internalized and increase the salience, or chronic accessibility, of transnational political identities (Muslim, Arab) at the expense of state-centric identities (Egyptian, Jordanian, etc.).

Hypothesis/Research Question

Though several scholars have attributed the growth of transnational Muslim and Arab political identities in the Middle East at the expense of national identification to the changing nature of the regional information environment, to date no quantitative scholarship directly linking individual exposure to transnational Arab TV to the salience of individual transnational Muslim or Arab political identities has been presented. Therefore, taking our explicated theoretical framework and considering the structural changes in media and

identity we have discussed in the Middle East over the last several years, we propose the following hypothesis for quantitative evaluation.

H1: Increased exposure to transnational Arab TV will increase the probability of an individual expressing a transnational identity (Muslim or Arab) relative to a national political identity.

Furthermore, as discussed above, we recognize that factors such as education may increase the probability of state-centric political identification while at the same time increasing the ability to process and receive political cues, and thus such factors may play a moderating role in the relationship between media exposure and identity salience. Therefore, we propose the following research question for evaluation.

R1: Does educational attainment moderate the relationship between transnational Arab TV exposure and the probability of individual transnational (Muslim or Arab) identification?

Methodology and Analysis

Data Collection

We tested our hypotheses by employing data collected between 2004 and 2008 by Zogby International and Shibley Telhami at the University of Maryland and acquired by the authors for secondary analysis.[1] The surveys were conducted across six Arab countries—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates—and each took place approximately a year apart in October of 2004, 2005, and 2006 and February of 2008. The combined data set contains a total of 14,949 interview responses. The advantage of employing survey data collected across multiple years is that we may fully evaluate the stability and validity of the relationships we explicate over time and understand possible contextual (regional) dynamics rather than simply rely on one point in time. Probability household sampling of selected urban areas was employed within each country and weighted to produce representative samples.[2] Interviews were conducted face-to-face by local interviewers. The full descriptive results of the survey are available online at http://www.bsos.umd.edu/sadat.

Data Coding

Nominal dummy variables (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco were included with the UAE comprising the reference group) corresponding to each country sample were coded as controls for any country-level variance associated with individual-level variables. Likewise, nominal dummy variables (2005, 2006, and 2008 were included with 2004 comprising the reference group) corresponding to each survey year were also coded to account for variance across survey years. Due to the small number of contextual units (six for country and four for time), we opted for a fixed effects model controlling for country and year rather than a full multilevel (mixed) model. Furthermore, since our primary focus was on the competing dynamics between national, Arab, and Muslim political identities, we excluded the small number of Christian respondents (7.3% in the weighted sample) from our analysis in order to focus on processes of identity and opinion formation among Muslim respondents only.

Beyond indicators of country and year, three sets of variables were included in the data analyses: (a) demographic controls, (b) transnational media use, and (c) political

identity. Demographic controls included in the analyses were age, gender, and educational attainment.[3] Measures of transnational media use included transnational media choice, transnational media exposure, and Internet access.[4] A respondent's political identity was reflected by a single variable indicating a national, Muslim, Arab, or mixed political identity.[5]

Predicting Political Identification

In order to examine the relationship between transnational media and the likelihood of indicating a transnational political identity such as Muslim or Arab rather than an identity as a member of one's own nation, a multinomial logistic regression was run predicting an individual's political identification from his or her exposure to transnational media and Internet access, controlling for age, gender, education, country of origin, time, and preference for transnational media. National political identification was the reference category, and identification as a Muslim, Arab, or some mixture of national, Muslim, and Arab were the three other categories (see Tables 1, 2, and 3 for results[6]). This multinomial

Table 1
Predicting Muslim identification versus national identification

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	−0.013***	−0.014***	−0.010***
Gender	−0.493***	−0.514***	−0.499***
Education	−0.233***	−0.230***	−0.378***
Egypt[a]	0.369	0.524	0.564*
Jordan[a]	−0.615	−0.538	−0.465
Lebanon[a]	−2.002***	−1.905***	−1.852***
Morocco[a]	0.043**	0.061	0.114
Saudi Arabia[a]	1.298***	1.308***	1.340***
Wave 2, 2005[b]	−1.698***	−2.881***	−3.154***
Wave 3, 2006[b]	0.210*	1.533***	1.359***
Wave 4, 2008[b]	−0.366***	0.353	0.050
Internet access	−0.692***	−0.699***	−0.266
Trans. media choice	−0.112**	−0.081*	−0.082*
Trans. media exp.	0.213***	0.239***	−0.003
2005 × Trans.		0.254***	0.311***
2006 × Trans.		−0.254***	−0.222***
2008 × Trans.		−0.158***	−0.100*
Educ. × Trans.			0.058***
Educ. × Internet			−0.260***
Intercept	1.225***	1.012**	1.578***

[a]United Arab Emirates is the reference category.
[b]Wave 1, 2004 is the reference category.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 2
Predicting Arab identification versus national identification

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	−0.002	−0.003	−0.002
Gender	−0.347***	−0.372***	−0.375***
Education	−0.135***	−0.129***	−0.099
Egypt[a]	0.628	0.761*	0.774*
Jordan[a]	−0.163	−0.119	−0.107
Lebanon[a]	−1.219*	−1.153*	−1.155*
Morocco[a]	−0.178	−0.170	−0.162*
Saudi Arabia[a]	0.840*	0.846*	0.848*
Wave 2, 2005[b]	−1.540***	−2.370***	−2.382***
Wave 3, 2006[b]	−0.254*	0.910**	0.911**
Wave 4, 2008[b]	0.173	0.915***	0.949**
Internet access	0.252**	0.241**	0.437
Trans. media choice	0.031	0.053	0.048
Trans. media exp.	0.069**	0.102*	0.110
2005 × Trans.		0.196**	0.196**
2006 × Trans.		−0.226***	−0.228***
2008 × Trans.		−0.164**	−0.173**
Educ. × Trans.			−0.002
Educ. × Internet			−0.051
Intercept	−0.688	−0.903*	−0.996

[a]United Arab Emirates is the reference category.
[b]Wave 1, 2004 is the reference category.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

logistic model simultaneously estimates the models for the comparisons among all categories of the outcome variable (in this case, identification; Long, 1997). Three models were estimated. The first model predicted political identification from all demographics, transnational media exposure, transnational media choice, and Internet access. The second model added interaction terms, allowing the effect of transnational media to vary across each year, in an effort to model variation in real-world events that may alter the effect of exposure to transnational media (e.g., the Israel-Lebanon conflict in 2006). Finally, the third model added terms interacting education with both exposure to transnational television and Internet access. For each multinomial model, the percentage of total Nagelkerke (1991) variance explained (pseudo R^2) was calculated as an indicator of model fit: 19.2% in Model 1, 21.1% in Model 2, and 21.9% in Model 3.

Considering first the likelihood of choosing Muslim versus national political identification (see results in Table 1), as hypothesized (H1), results indicate that increased exposure to transnational media was associated with an increased likelihood of identifying as a Muslim rather than with one's nation ($b = .213$, $p < .001$). This relationship between exposure to transnational media and the likelihood of identifying as Muslim varied by both year and education. At the mean level of education, the effect of transnational media was .197 ($p < .001$) in 2004, .508 ($p < .001$) in 2005, −.025 (*ns*) in 2006, and .097 ($p < .05$) in 2008 (see Figure 2).

Table 3
Predicting mixed identification versus national identification

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	−0.007**	−0.008***	−0.006**
Gender	−0.073	−0.094	−0.085
Education	−0.187***	−0.185***	−0.341***
Egypt[a]	0.254	0.407	0.426
Jordan[a]	−0.222	−0.142	−0.096
Lebanon[a]	−0.386	−0.295	−0.262
Morocco[a]	0.241	0.268	0.302
Saudi Arabia[a]	0.517*	0.531*	0.552*
Wave 2, 2005[b]	−0.512***	−1.346***	−1.626***
Wave 3, 2006[b]	0.529***	1.853***	1.685***
Wave 4, 2008[b]	0.798***	1.302***	1.002***
Internet access	−0.233***	−0.248***	0.425**
Trans. media choice	−0.187***	−0.166***	−0.162***
Trans. media exp.	0.186***	0.208***	−0.023
2005 × Trans.		0.190**	0.246***
2006 × Trans.		−0.255***	−0.224***
2008 × Trans.		−0.112**	−0.056
Educ. × Trans.			0.053**
Educ. × Internet			−0.182***
Intercept	0.399	0.228	0.888**

[a]United Arab Emirates is the reference category.
[b]Wave 1, 2004 is the reference category.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

The analysis showed that education substantially reduced the likelihood of identifying as Muslim compared to national political identification ($b = -.233$, $p < .001$; see Table 1, Model 1). Also, when adding the interaction between education and transnational media exposure, across all years, those individuals who were more educated demonstrated a stronger relationship between exposure to transnational media and their likelihood of identifying as a Muslim rather than as a member of their own nation (R1). To illustrate this pattern, in 2004, the effect of transnational media on the probability of identifying as a Muslim was lower among those individuals at one standard deviation below the mean in education ($b = .111$, $p < .01$) and higher among those at one standard deviation above the mean in education ($b = .283$, $p < .001$; see Figure 3). As Figure 3 illustrates, across all levels of transnational media exposure, those with more education were less likely to identify as a Muslim; however, the difference between those with relatively lower and those with relatively higher education on their probability of indicating a Muslim political identity decreased as the level of transnational media exposure increased. This pattern of results demonstrates a convergence of Muslim identification at higher levels of exposure, consistent with a "mainstreaming effect" (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Zaller, 1992) on perception.

The relationship between Internet access and an individual's likelihood of politically identifying as a Muslim also depended on education. As the level of education increased,

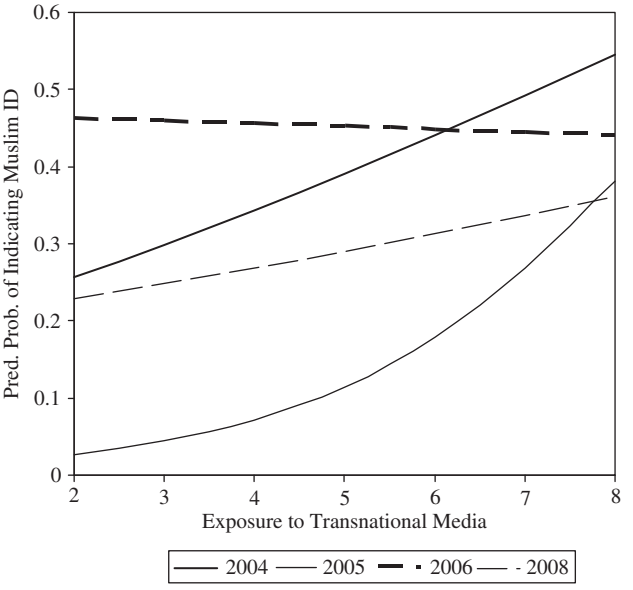

Figure 2. Effect of exposure to transnational media on the predicted probability of indicating Muslim identification, by year.

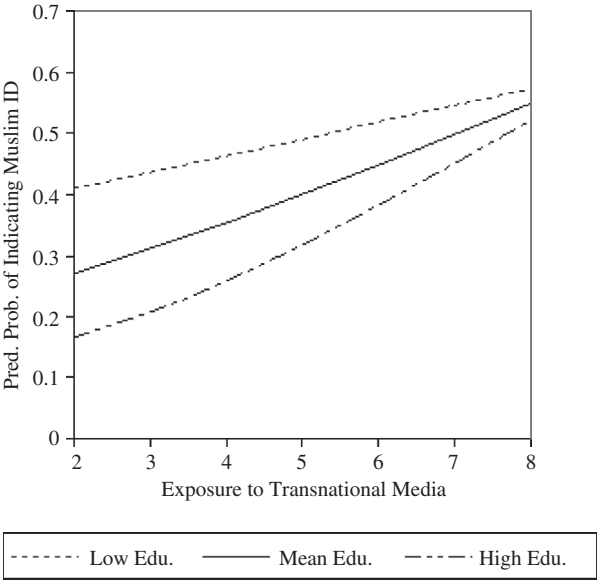

Figure 3. Effect of exposure to transnational media on the predicted probability of indicating Muslim identification among those of different education levels. Relationships are shown in 2004, with all other covariates at their mean.

the relationship between access to the Internet and the likelihood of identifying as a Muslim became more negative. For those with relatively less education (1 standard deviation below the mean), having access to the Internet was associated with a decrease in the likelihood of self-identifying as a Muslim ($b = -.246$, $p < .05$); this was true even more so among those at the mean level of education ($b = -.633$, $p < .001$), and most strongly so for those with relatively more education (1 standard deviation above the mean; $b = -1.020$, $p < .001$). In other words, Internet access was associated with a widening of the gap in Muslim versus national identification across levels of education, the mirror image of transnational television.

The story is slightly different when predicting the likelihood of identifying as an Arab rather than as a member of one's own country (see Table 2). After including all controls, it was found that access to the Internet was unrelated to the likelihood of identifying as Arab in comparison to identifying as a member of one's nation. As was the case with Muslim identification, the relationship between exposure to transnational TV and the likelihood of identifying as Arab varied by year. At the mean of education, in 2004 those who watched more transnational media were more likely to identify as an Arab ($b = .162$, $p < .001$). The effect was stronger in 2005 ($b = .408$, $p < 001$), negative in 2006 ($b = -.125$, $p < .01$), and negligible in 2008 ($b = -.070$, *ns*). Though overall education somewhat reduced the likelihood of identifying as Arab as compared to a national political identity ($b = -.135$, $p < .001$, including all controls except for the interactions), it did not moderate the effect of exposure to transnational media ($b = -.002$, *ns*) or Internet access ($b = -.051$, *ns*) on an individual's likelihood of identifying as an Arab.

Discussion

Limitations of the Study

Before we discuss the results and implications of the above analyses, some considerations regarding the study should be noted. First, there are some noteworthy measurement limitations. For instance, television exposure was measured on a daily basis, rather than average number of hours per day. Other key media measures, such as level of attention to specific types of TV content, exposure to specific national or government-owned TV stations, and measures of other types of media use like newspaper readership, were lacking. Additional survey items combined with more granulated measurement would allow a fuller analysis of media use patterns within the Arab public sphere and their possible relationship with both identity and public opinion. In addition, more robust measures of Muslim religiosity, social identification, and social distance would be helpful. Nevertheless, the data employed for this study include the most comprehensive and robust set of measures collected over time that is publicly available and relevant for our analysis.

The cross-sectional nature of our data does somewhat hamper the study. The optimal design would be a longitudinal panel, especially in regard to the long-term impact of media use and transnational identity formation. A longitudinal design would allow (a) a better evaluation of social identity formation over time through interpersonal and mediated processes of social representation and (b) a more causal explication of the direction of the relationship between media use and political identification. However, collecting longitudinal data within the Middle East is extremely difficult. We attempted to compensate for this limitation by analyzing 4 years of cross-sectional data to evaluate the variation and stability of explicated relationships over time.

Furthermore, we only tested associations between variables and cannot make strong causal statements regarding the direction of the relationship between media use and political identity. However, due to the obvious inherent difficulties in collecting either experimental or longitudinal survey data within the region, cross-sectional designs such as this study are the best available indicators to test how the deep structural transformations of the information environment over the last 10 years may be associated with identity and public opinion among Arab audiences. As such, our study allows a unique and important look into the dynamics of media use and identity formation in the Middle East.

Our argument is that exposure to transnational media, such as al-Jazeera or al-Arabiya, leads an individual to indicate a transnational (Muslim or Arab) identity rather than a national identity. One evident alternative explanation for the relationship between a preference for a transnational identity and exposure to transnational media is that those for whom a Muslim or Arab identity is more salient simply choose to watch transnational media more. In order to rule out this alternative "self-selection" hypothesis, we included a measure of media selection/choice as a control in our analysis. Results showed that *selecting* transnational media for news predicted a lower likelihood of identifying as Muslim compared to national identification (but was unrelated to the likelihood of identifying as an Arab rather than with one's nation), while increased *exposure* increased the odds of Muslim and Arab identification. Equivalently, among those with the same preference for al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya as their news source, more time spent watching these transnational stations was associated with an increased probability of indicating a transnational political identity. We argue that this pattern of relationships strengthens the evidence that greater exposure to transnational media uniquely influences transnational identity formation, rather than our findings merely representing a process of self-selection bias into transnational media. Nevertheless, our inability to capture the longitudinal process of how identification might be related to choice of media preference and subsequently to increased exposure merits consideration, and as in any study such as this one that utilizes cross-sectional survey data, the usual caveats about overstating causal relationships should be observed.

Theoretical Considerations

This study has theoretical implications for our understanding of the role transnational TV may play in the emergence of competing political identities. First, it has demonstrated how mass media use may be associated with the salience of transnational political identities that are disembodied from any one state's political institutions at an *individual level of analysis*. The rise of global and regional mass media pushes scholars to consider deliberative spheres that are no longer necessarily coterminous with nation-states, but yet may substantially impact domestic political identities, public opinion, and political mobilization. This study provides a theoretical framework for understanding processes of mediated identity formation in a globalized media environment. The emerging transnational identity in Europe and the historically competing transnational identities in the Middle East provide opportunities for scholars to systematically and quantitatively assess what factors influence their development as well as their social or political impact on public opinion and political behavior over time.

This study also provides insights into the interplay between primary and secondary influences on political socialization and identity salience. Education may be a powerful agent of socialization, but this article and previous scholarship (e.g., Moy & Pfau, 2000; Nisbet, 2008; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999) has shown across a range of contexts that media, especially television, may be an equally powerful agent of political socialization

and identity formation—even "overpowering" other agents of socialization like education (as our results indicated that among those exposed to transnational media on a daily basis, education makes very little difference in their preference for a transnational identity).

In order to understand the full theoretical implications, we must place our results within their historical and cultural context of the three competing political identities in the Middle East: Arab, Muslim, and the state. Of these three, state-centric identities are historically the most recent and often considered the weakest, with Muslim and Arab identities having stronger cultural and historical roots—and thus being more likely to be promoted by familial, cultural, or religious institutions. On the other hand, education is an asset of the state and, as our study demonstrates, spreads and deepens nation-state identification over Muslim and Arab political identification. Yet, to borrow a concept from Shanahan and Morgan (1999), the center of "gravity" within the emerging transnational media environment in the Middle East appears to be Muslim identity, not the state. Exposure to identity and political cues in transnational television "pulls" audiences toward this center, undermining the primary agents of national political socialization like education—and in turn possibly weakening the long-term political viability and institutional capacity of states in the region.

Though not a primary focus of our article, we found that Internet access was associated with widening gaps in identification across levels of education, rather than closing gaps in identification across levels of education as with transnational television. This difference may be explained by the attributes of each medium (e.g., Eveland, 2003); whereas transnational television is a passive medium with low user control and homogeneity of content, the Internet facilitates high user control and greater heterogeneity. In this sense, individuals may self-select information and considerations that reinforce their predispositions, including a greater degree of political identification with the Internet than with transnational TV exposure. Thus, with one medium we have convergence (transnational TV) and the other polarization (Internet) of political identification. At the same time, we should also note the possibility that divergence between TV and the Internet may be a methodological artifact, with only Internet access, rather than overall use or exposure, measured within the available data; thus, direct comparisons between each medium in this study should be cautioned.

In addition, the year-by-year variations in the relationship between transnational media exposure and both Muslim identification and public opinion are noteworthy. For instance, for 3 out of the 4 years, transnational TV exposure increased the salience of Muslim identity compared to national identity (with 2006 as the exception; see Figure 2). There is no clear explanation for this nonrelationship in 2006, except for possible ceiling effects given that the predicted probability of Muslim identification at low levels of media use was much higher in 2006 compared to the 3 other years. Yet, this begs the question of why Muslim identification had such a high base probability in 2006. The 2006 survey was conducted only a month after the formal conclusion of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war—leading to the possibility that this highly visible conflict between Israel and Hezbollah increased Muslim solidarity and identification in the region, with feelings persisting for some time.

Communication of Identity and Foreign Policy Implications

The theoretical framework developed in this study and its findings provide a pathway to integrate theoretical perspectives from the fields of communication and international relations. Most previous research on the role that media plays in international relations has taken a rationalist (e.g., Keohane, 1986, 1989; Krasner, 1978; Moravcsik, 1997; Walt, 1990; Waltz, 1979) perspective that views international relations and foreign policy driven

by a rational pursuit of material self-interest and power dynamics. As a consequence, most of the existing scholarship on media and international relations or foreign policy has focused on how media communicate interests between elites and/or influence perceived interests among mass publics (Brewer, Graf, & Willnat, 2003; Entman, 2004, 2008; Gilboa, 2000, 2008; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Soroka, 2003; and Zaller, 1992, are just a few examples).

However, there is an alternative set of theoretical perspectives on international relations and foreign policy, commonly termed constructivism, that focus on how ideational factors drive international relations through collective and intersubjective identities, values, and beliefs that shape and define perceived interests, policies, and behaviors (e.g., Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001; Hopf, 1998; Huntington, 1996; Wendt, 1999). In this view, identities, values, and beliefs are neither fixed nor primordial, but are rather dynamic over time and socially constructed through processes of mediated and unmediated social interaction (Chafetz, Spirtas, & Frankel, 1999; Finnemore & Sikkink; Wendt). In addition, Rousseau (2006) argues that most constructivist approaches hold *communication* of central import and "whether communication is tacit or verbal, it is the mechanism through which individuals create domestic societies and states in an international community" (p. 41).

Though most constructivist approaches to international relations typically assume an intersubjective or social ontology that rejects an individualist ontology or aggregation of subjective beliefs, some scholars argue that a "cognitive psychological analysis of world politics is compatible with the constructivist program" (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001, p. 79). Furthermore, Rousseau (2006) asserts that the difference between an intersubjective and individualist ontological approach is a continuum, rather than a binary choice, and that the analysis of aggregated individual beliefs is an important element to understanding ideational factors in international relations. This article thus may be viewed as an exemplar of approaching the constructivist role of media in international relations from an individual perspective by examining how *media influence the salience of competing collective identities*, which in turn may drive the perceived interests and foreign policy of state actors.

For example, the rise of transnational media in the region, corresponding shifts in the salience of collective political identities, and the possible long-term weakening of the state all may have significant implications for both Arab states and U.S. foreign policy. Though state, Muslim, and Arab political identities are not mutually exclusive and may be blended in different manners and proportions by political elites and entrepreneurs to support state-building projects, the potential for tension and conflict among these different political identities remains—and may be exacerbated by evolving political conditions (Telhami & Barnett, 2002). For instance, a 2007 survey found that large majorities of Muslims in four Muslim countries (ranging from 73%–92%) believed a primary goal of the U.S. was to weaken and divide the Muslim world (Kull, 2007a). The poll's sponsors concluded that "a new feeling about the US . . . has emerged in the wake of 9–11 . . . a perception that the US has entered into a war against Islam itself" (Kull, 2007b). More recently, the 2008 Zogby International/University of Maryland survey results showed that unfavorable opinions of the United States varied significantly by form of political identification, with 50% of respondents who cited their national identity as the most important expressing a very unfavorable opinion of the United States, compared to 70% of those who cited Arab and 80% of those who cited Muslim as their most important identities (Telhami, 2008). Furthermore, some research suggests that these negative perceptions about the United States may be partly driven by reliance on transnational Arab media (Nisbet et al., 2004; Nisbet & Shanahan, 2008).

These opinion trends and growing Muslim identification pose challenges for the United States, as previous scholarship has shown that Arab states are responsive to mass opinion and reinterpret state interests in order to maintain their political legitimacy and minimize the need for coercive force, especially when faced with choices about American foreign policy (Lynch, 1999; Telhami, 1993, 2002). In this sense, the communication of identity by transnational Arab media may present a direct challenge to American foreign policy if it creates a context where the collective political identities upon which state legitimacy rests come into conflict with each other. If Arab states are increasingly forced to redefine their policies and behavior in congruence with the perceived interests of a growing transnational Muslim political identity among their publics, the United States may have to revaluate traditional foreign policy strategies and public diplomacy efforts currently based on individual state interests rather than transnational collective interests. Furthermore, the United States may be challenged to enact foreign policy within a regional context dominated by collective transnational identities whose interests may be more opposed, or at least less amenable, to U.S. foreign policy goals compared to state-centric identities.

Notes

1. The selection of the University of Maryland/Telhami survey data for our analysis was based on several factors. First, the data required to quantitatively evaluate our hypothesis/research question needed to be publicly available for academic analysis, include measures of transnational media exposure/use and measures of political identification, and preferably not be limited to one Middle Eastern country in order to increase regional generalizability. After an exhaustive search, the University of Maryland/Telhami survey was the only data source we identified that met these criteria. In addition, the added benefit of this data set was that it had consistent measurement over a 4-year period, and thus the stability of the relationship between media exposure and political identification could be evaluated to some degree over time and in a dynamic context.

2. The survey data were pooled across both years and countries, and therefore we employed a secondary weight that accounted for both population distribution across the six countries for each year and sample bias within each individual country for each year. Surveyed areas/regions, total sample sizes across years, and sample sizes by year for each country were s follows:

- Egypt (Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor): total sample, 3,290; 2004, 850; 2005, 800; 2006, 800; and 2008, 840
- Saudi Arabia (Dammam, Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca): total sample, 3,000; 2004, 700; 2005, 800; 2006, 750; and 2008, 750
- Jordan (Amman, Irbid, Al Zarqa): total sample, 1,950; 2004, 400; 2005, 500; 2006, 450; and 2008, 600
- Lebanon (Beirut, Beqaa, Mountain Lebanon, North Lebanon, South Lebanon): total sample, 2,100; 2004, 400; 2005, 500; 2006, 600; and 2008, 600
- Morocco (Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech, Tangier): total sample, 3006; 2004, 700; 2005, 800; 2006, 700; 2008, 756
- United Arab Emirates (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah): total sample, 1,603; 2004, 386; 2005, 217; 2006, 500; and 2008, 500

3. Age was measured with a continuous variable, with a respondent range of 18 to 76 years of age ($M = 34.7$, $SD = 11.6$). Education was measured on a 6-point scale ranging from elementary school or below to graduate studies, with the mean level being secondary education ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.5$). Gender was dummy coded, with women coded high (48.8%).

4. Measures of transnational choice and exposure were created to assess how much respondents self-selected into the two most popular regional transnational TV stations (al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya) and how often they watched both channels. Transnational media choice was assessed by combining two open-ended measures asking respondents to name the first and second TV channels they

turned to for international news. Based on responses, separate measures were coded for al-Jazeera ($M = 1.2$, $SD = .90$) and al-Arabiya ($M = .33$, $SD = .59$) ranging from 0–2 (with 2 indicating a first choice, 1 a second choice, and 0 neither a first nor a second choice). In turn, these two measures were added together to create an indicator, ranging from 0–3, of whether respondents were likely to choose transnational TV for international news ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 1.1$). A second set of questions asked respondents how many days a week they watched each station on a 4-point scale (0 = 0–1 days, 4 = every day). The scores for al-Jazeera ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.2$) and al-Arabiya ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 1.2$) were combined into one overall measure of exposure to transnational television ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 2.0$, $r = .41$). Lastly, Internet access was assessed by a single indicator of whether the respondent had regular access to the Internet or not (50.4%). Though a formal discussion and hypothesis regarding the relationship between Internet access and political identification was not included in the literature review, we included Internet access in our statistical model as a key control variable to ensure we differentiated the relationships between TV exposure and political identity from possible relationships between reliance on "new media" and political identification.

5. Respondents were categorized into one of four types of political identity based upon responses to two questions about identity on the surveys. The first question asked respondents, "When you think about yourself, which of the following is your most important identity?" The second question asked whether respondents believed that their government should base its decisions mostly on what is best either "for their country," "for Arabs," or "for Muslims." Respondents who indicated that their most important identity was their nationality and believed that their government should do what is best for their country were coded as having a nation-centric political identity (30.4%). Likewise, respondents who cited "Muslim(s)" or "Arab(s)" to both questions were coded as either having a transnational Muslim (20.9%) or transnational Arab (8.6%) political identity, respectively. Lastly, respondents who did not match on both questions were coded as having mixed identities (40.1%).

6. Results are presented in Table 3 for the comparison of identifying as some mixture of national, Arab, or Muslim identity but are not discussed as they are not of primary theoretical interest.

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