

The Influence of the Tools of Liberalism and the Clash of Civilizations on Arabs' Perceptions of the United States of America

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Abstract

Adopting the Tools of Liberalism and Clash of Civilizations theories of international relations, this study examines the perceptions of 25,406 Arabs in 11 Arab countries as expressed in an Arab Barometer survey exploring their perceptions of violence against the United States (US), American citizens as "good," President Donald Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East, increasing economic relations with the US, and welcoming American foreign aid. As aspects of the Clash of Civilizations theory, this study examines religiosity, religious ritual practices, and political Islam and, as aspects of liberalism, this study explores the roles of online media as well as perceptions about US foreign aid in the prediction of the criterion variables. The findings suggest that religious indicators, and aspects of the Clash of Civilizations generally, were negative predictors of the perceptions, while social media and motivations for US foreign aid as aspects of liberalism, positively predicted the perceptions. The study discusses the results in relation to implications for policy makers.

Keywords: liberalism in international relations, Clash of Civilizations, political Islam, foreign aid, vertical and horizontal media, Asia Barometer

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Perceptions that are created by different social agencies, including the media, influence how one group of people perceive another group, and also influence how one country's government treats another country's government (Movahedi et al., 2020). As an example of such perceptions, Zopf (2018, p. 189) stated that, "Arab and Middle Eastern Americans have been racialized not only as brown and foreign but more specifically as anti-American Muslim terrorists." Those racial perceptions have generated mistrust and accordingly affected the type of feelings and actions of Americans toward Arab Americans in the United States and the policies that the U.S. government pursues toward Arab governments in the Middle East. Following the events of September 11, 2001, perceptions, stereotyping and prejudice of various social agencies fed actions of gratuitous violence against American Arabs and Muslims (Sheridan, 2006). Even American political leaders were struggling to distinguish ordinary Muslims from terrorists who used Islam in their extremist political ideology and acts (Braunstein, 2019). This negative U.S. domestic perception of Islam and Muslims shaped U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy in the Middle East (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018).

Similar negative perceptions of the other have even appeared among Arabs in the Arab region. However, some scholars distinguish the negative attitudes and perceptions that the Arabs hold of the United States as a government and foreign policy and those of the United States as a country and people (Rugh, 2017). Many polls reveal that the majority of Arabs favor the United States for its development, values, and democracy, but at the same time criticize it for its foreign policy, which they believe disempowers Arabs, and this produces anti-American perceptions among the Arabs (El-Nawawy, 2006). This suggests that sources of anti-American attitudes are political and not cultural or social (Furia & Lucas, 2008; Tokdemir, 2017).

Hashem (2005, pp. 69-71) argues that Arab public opinion is not monolithic, and he provides a socioeconomic perspective that categorizes Arabs and their sentiments toward the United States into three types of persons. The *common person* has some high school education, works in a local job with little or no connection with the outside world. They rely mainly on government operated radio and TV and local social, cultural, and religious agencies as sources of political news and information and for their views about the world. These people feel that Americans are immoral and

“lusty callous creatures” and do not differentiate between the United States as a people and country and the United States as a government and its foreign policy. Religiosity plays a major role in those individuals’ anti-American perceptions, leading them to believe that America’s wars on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq were religious and against Islam. The *professional person* has a university education and works in a job connected to the world and the West and relies mostly on newspapers and the Internet in addition to radio and TV as sources of news and political information. This person perceives Americans as good and thinks that American media manipulate and produce negative perceptions of Arabs and Muslims. Although they believe Americans are good, they also believe that America’s imperial and oil interests generate U.S. economic activity in the region which overrides humanitarian interests. They question why the United States supports democracy and human rights in the United States but not in the Arab world. They are also influenced by religious rhetoric and theorize the Arab-U.S. relationship along the lines of the Clash of Civilization notion. Finally, the *learned person* is educated and well read, and engages in many aspects of media globalization, works in a job that is related to global markets, and is knowledgeable about Western experiences and literature. These people believe that the Arabs themselves are to blame for not developing democracies, and political and economic institutions that respect human rights, justice, and equality, comparable to those found in developed nations.

Even though the United States has used soft power and public diplomacy to alter negative perceptions of the United States among people in the Middle East, mistrust of the United States persists among the Arabs. The present study examines three main sources, suggested by the literature (e.g. Glas & Spierings, 2021; Whidden, 2020), as among those affecting the negative perceptions Arabs hold of the United States. It examines (1) religiosity, (2) U.S. foreign aid in the Arab world, and (3) the media as factors influencing perceptions. It studies how those perceptions link to perceptions of (1) justification of violence against the United States, (2) Americans as good people, (3) President Donald Trump’s foreign policy, (4) stronger economic relations with the United States, and (5) U.S. foreign aid. Perceptions of President Trump’s policies in the Middle East can be considered as Arabs’ perceptions toward the U.S. government. Indeed, the literature suggests that the Arabs have less hostile

attitudes toward Americans and the United States as a country, which is related to its popular culture, education system, commercialism, and quality American products, in comparison to the U.S. government. It is the U.S. government that the majority of Arab have negative perceptions of (Rugh, 2017).

This study uses liberalism and the Clash of Civilizations theories of international relations. The predictor variables this study employs are related to those theories. For example, aspects of liberalism include foreign aid and online/social media, which were founded or discovered mainly in the United States, and have been found to positively alter Arabs' perceptions toward the United States (Kamal et al., 2013). On the other hand, religiosity is grounded in the notion of the Clash of Civilizations. This study employs three indicators of the Clash of Civilizations. Unlike other theories of international relations, these two theories deal with the perceptions that form public opinion. For example, liberalism suggests that negative perceptions can be altered by U.S. foreign aid and different American funded offline and online media projects in the region. The Clash of Civilizations suggests that cultural divisions and religions generate perceptions and antagonistic attitudes.

This study connects aspects of liberalism (online media and U.S. foreign aid) and aspects of the Clash of Civilizations (religiosity, political Islam, and practicing religious rituals) with Arabs' perceptions of violence against the United States, American citizens as "good," President Donald Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East, increasing economic relations with the United States, and welcoming U.S. foreign aid. Relating these two theories to the criterion variables is important because a substantial body of literature and polls in the Arab region suggest that religion or Islam and American foreign policies toward the Middle East are the causes for feelings of hostility. For example, a Pew Research Center poll found that the "dislike" perception remained greater toward the United States than to China or Russia. The U.S. foreign policies that triggered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. unilateral sanctions on Arab countries like Iraq and Libya, support for Israel at the expense of Arab countries, and Islam, are the main roots of hostility (Rosentiel & Kohut, 2005). Similarly, Sitaula (2019) identified three variables as causes of hatred against the United States in the Middle East: US support of Israel, support of oppressive regimes,

and U.S. involvement in Arab regional affairs. In a Global Attitudes Project and an Arab Barometer survey, Glas and Spierings (2021) found that American interventions, U.S. foreign policies, and religiosity increase political and social hostility to the United States, especially among Arabs, and this negative perception is higher among more religious Muslims and less among impoverished citizens and less religious Muslims. Those results indicate the importance of religion, U.S. foreign policies, and new media in shaping perceptions of the United States. Such perceptions can support a spiral into greater mutual violence, similar to the events of 9/11 and its aftermath.

This study is empirical in nature. Instead of examining theories of liberalism and Clash of Civilizations in general terms based on theoretical arguments, it statistically relates the tools that define each theory or the mechanisms and arms that different countries employ in relation to each theory in order to attain their international relations objectives. The study explores those tools or mechanisms in relation to five different criterion variables.

The U.S. Application of Liberalism in International Relations in the Arab Region

The theory of liberalism in international relations has guided how one country should treat others, and that treatment eventually impacts the perceptions of people in other countries. The theory suggests that a government's main responsibility is to safeguard individual freedoms and encourage the dynamics of free politics, human rights, and the practice of civil liberties, rather than acts of violence or military intervention (Meiser, 2017). The practices in a country influence how it conducts its international relations worldwide. According to Keohane (2012), the role of a politically and economically strong country like the United States is to advance liberal ideas and practices around the world and to advocate human safety, freedom, welfare, and liberty, which ultimately nurture a free, peaceful, and prosperous world. By spreading democracy and human rights around the world, liberalism in international relations will be less costly, as it does not require military intervention that creates enemies. The outcomes for the United States and other democracies will be to neutralize enemies and create a safer world (Jervis, 2020). Instituting democracies and freedom in countries where "free and fair elections, rule of law and protected civil liberties" are upheld will mean that local people can run their own lives and

concentrate on internal affairs and their locality, instead of the enemy outside (Meiser, 2017, p. 22). International conflicts may eventually be contained within a pluralistic exchange of ideas (Travis, 1994).

Several tools are available to support a liberal view of international relations. By using *soft power* rather than coercion (Nye, 1990, 2008), a country can promote its “culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye, 2008, p. 96). Foreign aid, which is one of the oldest tools of soft power that can create favorable perceptions and attitudes, includes “resource flows provided by official agencies with the intent to promote economic development” (Apodaca, 2017, p. 3). They are meant to “facilitate economic development, alleviate poverty, and improve human welfare” (Apodaca, 2017, p. 4). Also, they mitigate “human rights violations, disease, population growth...and the growing gap between the rich and the poor” (Apodaca, 2017, p. 4).

The US has spent \$346 billion dollars on foreign aid in the Middle East and Africa (MENA) since 1946 (Sharp et al., 2020). However, scholars have noticed that instead of using U.S. foreign aid as a way to enhance the objectives of liberalism and humanitarianism, the aid has often been used for imperial political ends and geostrategic purposes of building or maintaining military bases and strengthening alliances or protecting allied regimes. In the Middle East specifically, aid has also been used to reward or alter the behaviors of specific authoritarian regimes (Apodaca, 2017). Even though aid has been useful in some developmental and humanitarian projects, in many contexts, it has generated unfavorable images among the Arabs who think that U.S. aid helps Arab regimes to keep power and oppress people, and this eventually hinders the development and welfare of Arab countries (Almezaini, 2012; Tokdemir, 2017).

Based on the previous review, the first hypothesis is:

H1: Individuals who believe that U.S. foreign aid is led by motivations that benefit Arab countries in terms of developing their economies, enhancing their internal stability, empowering Arab civil society organizations, and improving

the life of ordinary Arab citizens are less likely to justify violence against the United States, and more likely to view Americans as good, to support President Trump's policy in the region, and support U.S. foreign aid and economic relationships with the United States.

In addition, and as part of soft power, public diplomacy has been used to promote cultural attachment and spread positive information (Rugh, 2017). The United States has employed different tools of public diplomacy such as student exchange programs, international exhibitions, foreign cultural centers, visits for scholars and artists, and friendship organizations (Gilboa, 2000). Also, experts have advised that the United States should reduce hostile perceptions by funding news media and agencies in Arabic, to spread pro-American messages to Arab audiences (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004). As a result, the U.S. government allocated about \$100 million dollars in early 2000 to operate *Sawa* radio and *Alhurra* TV (El-Nawawy, 2006).

According to the 2005 Pew Global Attitudes Project, which surveyed more than 90,000 people in 50 nations, including Arab and Muslim states (Rosentiel & Kohut, 2005), those news media have not been fully effective. The United States faces many obstacles regarding its image in the Middle East because it is challenged by conservative Islamism and Arab transnational media, which represent the United States negatively. Criticizing the U.S. funded media projects, Nisbet and Myers (2011) argued that they need to produce a congruent message. El-Nawawy (2006), suggests that the media outlets have mainly promoted a one-sided propaganda message to advance the American point of view, rather than being conduits of mutual exchanges of opinions (El-Nawawy, 2006).

Scholars have used the typology of vertical and horizontal media to study the influence of traditional and new media. While vertical media consists of TV, radio, and newspapers, horizontal media includes the Internet and social media, such as X, formerly known as Twitter, and Facebook. Two main dimensions are used to characterize each medium: source of information and level of opinion exchange they allow for the audiences (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001; Pinkleton et al., 1998; Ragas & Roberts, 2009; Vargo et al., 2014; Weaver et al., 2010). Shaw and Weaver (2014) argue that information and news in vertical media are transferred from the top (source)

down (general audiences). Horizontal media involve ordinary people disseminating news and information to other people with closer socioeconomic ties in their bonding communities. The second dimension relates to the use of feedback and exchange of opinions that horizontal media allow, which is limited or non-existent in vertical media, as communication is only one-way.

Mass media has historically been vertical top-down, and a few owners and professionals determined what news and information to circulate to audiences, how to address the community, and how to frame issues and events. In horizontal media, ordinary people are the gatekeepers and disseminators of information. Receiving information from people similar to themselves, online horizontal media form virtual communities serving specialized interest groups and engaging people in discussions about issues most related to them (Ragas & Roberts, 2009; Shaw et al., 2006). Both vertical and horizontal media play important roles, according to Weaver et al. (2010), who examined their influence on voters in North Carolina during presidential primaries. Vertical media were important in increasing awareness about issues and horizontal online media were effective in re-contextualizing those issues.

Since vertical media in Arab countries are operated and controlled mainly by Arab governments, the current study explores horizontal media as a means of liberalism. These have been thought to influence Arabs' perceptions of the United States. Al-Kandari (2010) argues that traditional Arab vertical media generally spread conspiracy theories about the United States in the region. Those media reinforce the idea that Israel was implanted by Western powers and backed by the United States to inhibit development by fueling conflicts with Israel. However, new online horizontal media are influential in modern Arab politics, as witnessed during the Arab Spring. Those media have helped to change the mindsets of many Arabs by informing them about liberal politics practiced around the world. They can compare their political and human rights conditions to those of people in developed nations and start to reject their local conditions. Many Arabs rejected those conditions and decided to revolt against their regimes and overthrow them during the Arab Spring. Horizontal media allow Arabs to view Western democracy and liberty in a new light. They can observe the lifestyles of Westerners and conduct frank online discussions, allowing them to

discover an alternative version of the West, different from the one that traditional Arab media have long communicated (Aouragh, 2015; Khondker, 2011).

Recent studies of Arab public opinion have generally found that young Arabs perceive the United States more favorably (Arab Center Washington DC, 2017). Many young Arabs have a preference for American popular culture and Western products (Abdulrahim et al., 2009). Colista and Leshner (1998) argue that people around the world view American media and content that relates America to modernity and progress, and that its people enjoy liberty and freedom. Pells (2002) suggested that American media rarely include divisive politics and ideologies, which draw international audiences, however, the Western mass media in the political landscape of the Trump era has played a role in fostering civil divisiveness and obscuring policy clarity where the social media has intensified and expanded these divisions (McHale, 2019). The content revolves around commercialism and consumption that tends to decrease ideological extremism (Cook, 2013). A lot of content on social media includes American popular culture icons, including Hollywood and its culture, fashion, lifestyle, and American and Western products (Kamal et al., 2013). Viewing such media is likely to be associated with positive perceptions of the United States. In social media, even politics are more likely to revolve around local affairs and less likely to be about international affairs (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Thus, conflicting international perceptions are less likely to cause misunderstanding between nations. Based on the previous discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Individuals who frequently use horizontal online media are less likely to favor violence against the United States and more likely to perceive Americans as “good,” to support U.S. foreign aid, and having economic relationships with the United States.

The Clash of Civilizations as a Theory of International Relations

Although the United States uses the tools of liberalism in international relations in the Arab region, many believe that those tools cannot eradicate the cultural division that causes negative perceptions among Arabs and Americans alike. Samuel Huntington (1993, 2011), who proposed his Clash of Civilizations theory in

international relations, suggests that, due to cultural incompatibility dividing Muslims and Westerners, future conflicts are likely to occur. Increased exchange between cultures and civilizations will not necessarily and positively enhance this exchange or increase cultural awareness; it might even generate tension and conflict (Huntington, 1993, 2011). Those differences in language, religion, values, preferred social institutions, and people's self-identification are so ingrained in societies that they can further drive the Arabs and Muslims away from Westerners (Huntington, 1993).

As a component of the Clash of Civilizations, religion probably remains the strongest force in the lives of many Arabs that causes anti-American sentiments (Al-Kandari, 2011). Many mainstream Arab-Muslim societies do not separate Islam from politics, economics, law, or society. Conservative Muslim religious rhetoric views history as a continuous struggle between believers and non-believers and represents the United States and the West as sources of all evil. In fact, many of the recent violent acts involving Muslims and Westerners have been interpreted in religious terms. In the Middle East, wars on terrorism have been equated with the Christian Crusades of the Middle Ages, and terrorist acts have created Islamophobia in the West (Khan et al., 2018). However, Zhirkov (2014) found that anti-American sentiments caused by religion are highest among Arabs who live under more oppressive regimes and in countries where scores on human development indices and socioeconomic status are low.

During the George W. Bush administration, many Arab Muslims perceived the United States as the strongest ally of Israel in the Middle East. They believed this support for Israel is part of Evangelical Christianity as the U.S. foreign policy supported Israel and a Jewish State in the promised land (Baumgartner et al., 2008). Berger (2014) studied the factors shaping Muslim public opinion on political violence (terrorist attacks) against Americans (military and civilian) in the three most populous Islamic countries (Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia) and found that U.S. policies toward Israel, oil in the Middle East, and the United States's intention to weaken and divide Arabs and Muslims were the main factors influencing support for attacks on U.S. military targets. On the other hand, having negative views of U.S. freedom, culture, people, and the domestic Arab Muslim political *status quo* triggered support for attacks on U.S.

civilians. Unfavorable Arab sentiments toward the United States have fluctuated during different U.S. presidencies. Kumar (2010) argued that the administrations of Bush Senior (George H. W. Bush) and Bill Clinton avoided this Clash of Civilizations, while the administration of Bush Junior (George W. Bush) embraced it. The Trump administration, which allowed the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, has been viewed as very supportive of Israel (Erdoğan & Habash, 2020).

This study relates the Clash of Civilizations to three predictors. First, religiosity is based on an individual's self-categorization as religious, moderately religious, or nonreligious. Second is political Islam, which is the "modern phenomenon that seeks to use religion to shape the political system. Its origins lie in the perceived failure of the secular ideologies of nationalism and socialism to deliver on their promises of anti-imperialism and prosperity" (Akbarzadeh, 2020, p. 1). This study employed items that relate support for Islam's involvement in politics to operationally define political Islam. Finally, conducting religious ritual practices is defined in relation to the frequency of conducting prayers, going to mosques, and similar Islamic religious rituals.

Recent studies have indicated strong correlations between different aspects of religiosity in the Middle East and holding negative perceptions of the United States. Islam, has been cited as a main root of hostility toward the United States (Rosentiel & Kohut, 2005). Similarly, Glas and Spierings (2021) found that religiosity among Arabs has increased political and social anti-Americanism. Those negative sentiments are strongest among religious Muslims and weaker among less religious Muslims. In light of the previous discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Individuals who adopt political Islam, are religious in general, and conduct religious ritual practices more often will justify violence against the United States, do not view Americans as "good," oppose the policies of President Trump in the region and U.S. foreign aid, and do not support economic relations with the United States.

Methodology

Arab Barometer Project (ABP)

This study utilizes the Wave 7 survey data of 2021 of the Arab Barometer Project (ABP) (Arab Barometer, 2021), the largest available source of public opinion in the Middle East region. As part of the Global Barometer Survey Project, the ABP has conducted research in waves every few years since 2006. The ABP collects data and makes them available for research, policymakers, and debates about important issues influencing the Arabs. It is supervised and operated by a non-profit and non-partisan Steering Committee of leaders and academics in leading Arab institutions in collaboration with Princeton University and the University of Michigan. The Steering Committee supervises the entire research process from survey creation to data assessment and assembly, and data cleaning to ensure the quality of obtained information before it is released to the public. A specialist U.S. team supervises the day-to-day operation. To date, the project has conducted six survey waves for about 55 nationally representative face-to-face samples from 2006 to 2020.

Survey

Covering the populations of 11 Arab countries², the ABP survey covers the subjects of governance and politics, economic conditions, gender equality and the rights of women, religiosity, international affairs, and many other issues. The questionnaire is constructed by research teams in different Arab countries in cooperation with the project's Steering Committee. Some new questions are added to each survey wave, but all questions are originally based on the first 2006 survey wave. When new items are added or old items are revised, project teams subject the items to pilot testing of the reliability of scales in split samples. The survey includes about 250 survey statement items and questions. It usually takes 45 minutes to complete. All survey items, which are in Arabic, are based on the English survey version. They are translated by bilingual experts in an iterative process that ensures that the exact

² These 11 countries are: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jourdan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen.

wording and meaning is not lost in the Arabic version.

Sampling

The ABP draws probability samples representing citizens over 18 years old who are interviewed in their homes. The research teams employ multistage stratified sampling to select samples in proportion to the size of the population in each stratum. Households are selected using random walks in which an arbitrary starting point is selected. A systematic skip pattern that jumps to the *n*th dwelling is applied to construct the sample. Respondents are selected based on the Kish grid technique or most recent birthday. These complex techniques guarantee randomization and better representation of the population. The project's target sample is at least 1,200 individuals in each country to achieve a margin of error of plus or minus 3%. Recent survey samples have included 2,400 respondents from each country. All surveys are paper-based and conducted in face-to-face interviews, but computer assisted personal interviews have been used in about half of the samples since the fourth wave.

Criterion variables

This study explores five criterion variables. Each was assessed and measured using a single item. The first criterion was violence against the United States. It was assessed using the following statement: "Violence against the United States is a logical consequence of their interference in the Arab region." Respondents reported their attitude using a 4-point Likert-type scale of from 4 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*).

The perception of Americans as being "good" people, regardless of U.S. foreign policy was assessed using the following statement, "Irrespective of U.S. foreign policies, most ordinary Americans are good people." Similarly, respondents indicated their attitude utilizing a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly agree* (4) to *strongly disagree* (1).

Perception of President Donald Trump's foreign policy toward the Arab world was measured using the question: "Do you think the foreign policies of the United States's President Donald Trump have been very good (4), good (3), bad (2), or very bad (1) for the Arab region?"

Strengthening economic relations with the United States was gauged using, “Do you prefer those future economic relations between your country and the United States to...”. Response options were “Become stronger than they were in previous years” (3), “Remain the same as they were in previous years” (2), and “Become weaker than they were in the previous years” (1).

Finally, the perception of foreign aid from the United States was assessed using the question item, “Do you want foreign aid from the United States to increase (3), decrease (1), or remain the same in the future (2)?”

Predictor Variables

Religiousness was assessed using religiosity, performed religious ritual activities, and the political Islam scale. For religiosity, respondents indicated being “Religious” (3), “Somewhat religious” (2), or “Not religious” (1). The religious ritual activities scale was averaged to reflect performing the following religious activities: “Pray on time,” “Attend Friday prayer,” “Attend Sunday services,” “Listen to or read the Quran daily,” and “Before making a key decision, do you pray istikhara?” Respondents responded using *Always* (5), *Most of the time* (4), *Sometimes* (3), *Rarely* (2), or *Never* (1).

Finally, the political Islam index consisted of the following items: “Religious leaders should not interfere in voters’ decisions in elections” (item reversed), “Your country is better off if religious people hold public positions in the state,” “Religious clerics should have influence over the decisions of government,” “Religious practice is a private matter and should be separated from socio-economic life” (item reversed), and “Today, religious leaders are as likely to be corrupt as nonreligious leaders” (item reversed). Respondents expressed their opinions about the statements using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly agree* (4) to *Strongly disagree* (1). The Cronbach’s alpha reliability score for this index was 0.62. The level of reliability could be attributed to the fact that the study covers respondents in 11 Arab countries that have various religious predispositions. Also, the involvement of Islam in politics varies across Arab countries. While some prefer some types of secularism such as in Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria, others are less restrictive in involving Islam in politics.

Perceptions about foreign aid included items assessing the perceptions of respondents of the motivation behind Western countries' aid. They asked respondents if aid was meant for: "Economic development in your country," "Internal stability in your country," "Empower civil society organizations in your country," and "Improve life of ordinary citizens in your country."

All the online media variables were subjected to a factor analysis using the principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. The analysis extracted two factors according to Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(55) = 19302, p < .001$). The factors were usage of social media applications (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, Telegram, and WhatsApp) (approximate eigenvalue = 2.5), and time spent using new media (the Internet and social media) (approximate eigenvalue = 1.5) (see Table 1).

Table 1 Rotated Factor Analysis of Media Components

Factors	1	2	KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy
Instagram	.64		.76
YouTube	.63		.79
Twitter	.61		.79
Snapchat	.60		.78
Telegram	.55		.80
WhatsApp	.40		.79
Social media		.80	.69
Internet		.78	.68

Regarding the response options for using social media applications, respondents were asked about the social media they actively used. Respondents indicated their response as "Yes" (1) or "No" (0) for using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. For time they spent on online media per day, the respondents reported their usage by selecting one of the following options: *Not at all* (1), *Up to 2 hours* (2), *Up to 5 hours* (3), *Up to 10 hours* (4), and *10 hours or more* (5).

Finally, demographic predictors included country, gender, age, income, and education (see Table 2).

Table 2

Profile of Respondents (N = 25406)

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Predictors</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Demographic predictors			Religiosity		
Country			Not religious	3081	12.4
Algeria	2332	9.2	Somewhat religious	12907	51.8
Egypt	2400	9.4	Religious	8953	35.9
Iraq	2461	9.7	Foreign aid motivation: Economic development		
Jordan	2400	9.4	Yes	13181	55.6
Lebanon	2400	9.4	No	10533	44.4
Libya	1962	7.7	Foreign aid motivation: Internal stability		
Morocco	2400	9.4	Yes	12265	51.4
Palestine	2493	9.8	No	11589	48.6
Sudan	1758	6.9	Foreign aid motivation: Empower civil society org.		
Tunisia	2400	9.4	Yes	13255	57.5
Yemen	2400	9.4	No	9804	42.5
Gender			Foreign aid motivation: improvement of life of citizens		
Male	12715	50.0	Yes	11986	49.8
Female	12659	50.0	No	12090	50.2
Age			Non-categorical predictors		
18-24	5320	21.0		Mean	SD
25-35	6764	26.7	Support for Political Islam	2.9/4	0.7
36-45	4914	19.4	Religious practices	4.0/5	4.4
46-110	8368	33.0	New media usage (Usage)	3.5/5	0.8
			Social media applications (Time)	1.0/6	1.3
Income			Categorical criterion variables		
Below median	10598	46.7		n	%
Above median	12119	53.3	Economic relations with the US		
Education			To become stronger	9997	42.3
No education	2705	10.7	To remain the same	6308	26.7
Elementary education	3447	13.6	To become weaker	7320	31.0
Basic education	3456	13.6	Level of US foreign aid		
Secondary education	6623	26.1	To increase	12315	51.4
Tertiary education	2688	10.6	To decrease	7598	31.7
Bachelor	5391	21.2	To remain the same	4067	17.0
Masters+	1060	4.2	Non-categorical criterion variables		
				Mean	SD
			Violence against US	2.9/4	0.9
			Americans are "good" people	2.6/4	0.9
			Perception of President Trump	2.0/5	1.1

Note. Variations in sample's total numbers are due to missing values.

"Violence against US" and "Americans are 'good' people" had more positive values than "Perception of President Trump." The average mean of "Violence against US" was 2.9 out of 4 and "Americans are 'good' people" was 2.6 out of 4. The average mean of "Perception of President Trump" was 2 out of 5.

Statistical Analyses

Two sets of statistics were used. The first included two binary logistic regressions (BLR). A BLR is conducted to find the predictors of criterion variables that are binary in nature, having two options. They were conducted for those criterion variables that were categorical. Those criterion variables were “strengthening economic relations with the US” and “attitude toward receiving of U.S. foreign aid”. Even though the variables “strengthening economic relations with the US” and “level of U.S. foreign aid” included criterion variables with three options, the option “remaining the same” was not considered in the analysis since it did not reflect a change in attitude. In the regressions, criterion variables were placed in the dependent variable block while predictor variables in the covariates block. The predictor variables were either categorical or non-categorical.

The second set of statistics was multiple linear regressions (MLR). An MLR is used to assess the predictors of a criterion variable that is interval in nature. This test distinguishes between categorical predictors and predictors that are interval in nature. In this study, those criterion variables that were subject to MLR were violence against the US, Americans being “good” people, and evaluating President Trump’s policies toward the Middle East. Those criterion variables were included in the dependent variables block, while the categorical predictors were entered in the block of fixed variables and interval predictors in the covariates block.

Results

Strengthening Economic Relations with the United States

The first BLR was conducted to predict strengthening economic relations with the United States (*Deviance* = 12,629.36, *AIC* = 12,693.36, R^2_{McF} = 0.087). Of variables related to the Clash of Civilizations, political Islam was a negative predictor of strengthening economic relationships (β = -0.186, p < .001, odds ratio = 1.204). In relation to liberalism, time spent on the Internet and social media (β = 0.153, p < .001, odds ratio = 0.858) positively predicted strengthening the relations. Also, the

respondents support of strengthening economic relations was predicted by U.S. foreign aid for the motivations of economic development ($\beta = 0.253, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.288), internal stability ($\beta = 0.265, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.303), empowering civil society organizations ($\beta = 0.331, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.392), and improvement of life of ordinary citizens ($\beta = 0.340, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.406). (See Table 3)

Receiving American Foreign Aid

The second BLR was conducted to explore attitudes toward receiving U.S. foreign aid (*Deviance* = 11,381.21, *AIC* = 11,445.21, $R^2_{McF} = 0.068$). Of the Clash of Civilizations predictors, while religious ritual practices ($\beta = 0.199, p < .001$, odds ratio = 0.820) positively predicted receiving US foreign aid, political Islam ($\beta = -0.284, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.328) and religiosity ($\beta = -0.187, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.206) were negative predictors. As for liberalism, usage of various social media applications ($\beta = 0.132, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.141) and time spent on the Internet and social media ($\beta = 0.212, p < .001$, odds ratio = 0.809) positively predicted strengthening the relations. Also, the respondents support of strengthening economic relations was predicted by the U.S. foreign aid for motives of economic development ($\beta = 0.253, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.288), internal stability ($\beta = 0.265, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.303), empowering civil society organizations ($\beta = 0.331, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.392), and improvement of life of ordinary citizens ($\beta = 0.340, p < .001$, odds ratio = 1.406). (See Table 3)

Table 3

Binary Logistic Regressions of Strengthening Economic Relations with the United States (N = 10291, df = 31) and Attitudes Toward Receiving American Aid (N = 8961, df = 31)

Predictors	Strengthening economic relations with the US				Attitudes toward receiving U.S. aid			
	B	P	Odds ratio	χ^2	B	p	Odds ratio	χ^2
Demographics								
Gender	-.07	.114	0.93	0.44	.03	.506	1.03	2.50
Age								
25-35 - 24 years old or less	-.16	.004	0.850		-.15	.011	0.86	
36-45 - 24 years old or less	-.17	.009	0.84	12.44	-.11	.097	0.89	18.55
Above 45 years old - 24 years old or less	-.27	<.001	0.77		-.23	<.001	0.79	
Education								
elementary education - no education	-.07	.700	0.94		-.08	.679	0.92	
basic education - no education	-.26	.112	0.77		-.22	.225	0.80	
secondary education - no education	-.32	.040	0.72		-.43	.013	0.65	
tertiary education - no education	.04	.789	1.05	28.94	-.26	.154	0.77	50.62
Bachelor - no education	-.08	.624	0.93		-.33	.056	0.72	
Masters+ - no education	.19	.285	1.21		-.55	.006	0.58	
Income	-.00	.987	0.99	14.20	.14	<.001	1.15	e-4
Clash of Civilizations predictors								
Religious ritual practices	.04	.277	0.96	29.93	.20	<.001	0.82	1.18
Political Islam	-.19	<.001	1.20	45.73	-.28	<.001	1.33	20.91
Religiosity	-.03	.408	1.03	25.69	-.19	<.001	1.21	0.68
Liberalism predictors								
Social media applications (Usage)	.04	.134	0.96	131.2	.13	<.001	1.14	76.97
Internet and social media (Time)	.15	<.001	0.86	17.46	.21	<.001	0.81	2.24
Motivation: Economic development	.25	<.001	1.29	11.41	.19	<.001	1.21	22.24
Motivation: Internal stability	.27	<.001	1.30	13.74	.22	<.001	1.24	23.49
Motivation: Empower civil organizations	.33	<.001	1.39	19.12	.24	<.001	1.28	40.04
Motivation: Improving life of citizens	.34	<.001	1.41	23.08	.28	<.001	1.32	38.41
Model Fit measures	Deviance = 12,629.36, AIC = 12,693.36, R^2_{MCF} = 0.087, R^2_{CS} = 0.111, R^2_N = 0.150				Deviance = 11,381.21, AIC = 11,445.21, R^2_{MCF} = 0.068, R^2_{CS} = 0.088, R^2_N = 0.199			

Note. Values represent the log odds of “Foreign aid to decrease vs to increase.”
 Values represent the log odds of “Economic relations to become weaker vs to become stronger.”

Violence Against the United States

The first MLR explored the predictors of violence toward the US, $R^2 = .037$, $F(31, 12031) = 14.871$, $p < .001$. Of the Clash of Civilizations predictors, religious ritual practices ($\beta = -0.039$, $t = -2.884$, $p = .004$) was a negative predictor of violence against the United States, while religiosity was a positive predictor ($\beta = 0.145$, $t = 10.497$, $p < .001$), as were usage of social media applications ($\beta = 0.086$, $t = 7.466$, $p < .001$), and when the motivations of foreign aid were for economic development ($\beta = -0.054$, $t =$

2.542, $p = .011$), internal stability ($\beta = -0.050$, $t = 2.542$, $p = .020$), and improving life of ordinary citizens ($\beta = -0.094$, $t = 4.309$, $p < .001$). (See Table 4)

Perceiving Americans as “Good” People

The second MLR explored the predictors perceiving Americans as good people ($R^2 = .065$, $F(31, 11433) = 25.040$, $p < .001$). Of the Clash of Civilizations predictors, religious ritual practices ($\beta = -0.058$, $t = -4.359$, $p < .001$) and political Islam ($\beta = 0.145$, $t = 10.497$, $p < .001$) were negative predictors of perceiving Americans as good. For the liberalism factors, usage of social media applications ($\beta = 0.041$, $t = 3.580$, $p < .001$) was a positive predictor and time spent on the Internet and social media ($\beta = 0.041$, $t = 3.580$, $p < .001$) was a negative predictor. Finally, the perceptions that the motivations for foreign aid were for economic development ($\beta = 0.065$, $t = 3.104$, $p < .001$), internal stability ($\beta = 0.083$, $t = 3.920$, $p < .001$), empowering civil society organizations ($\beta = 0.082$, $t = 3.949$, $p < .001$), and improving life of ordinary citizens ($\beta = 0.098$, $t = 4.598$, $p < .001$) were all positive predictors.

Perception of President Trump

The last MLR explored the predictors of perceiving the policies of President Trump positively, $R^2 = .081$, $F(31, 12099) = 34.345$, $p < .001$. Of the Clash of Civilizations predictors, religious ritual practices ($\beta = 0.050$, $t = 3.143$, $p = .002$) was a positive predictor while religiosity ($\beta = -0.048$, $t = -3.003$, $p = .003$) was a negative predictor of perceiving President Trump's policies in the Middle East in a positive light. For the liberalism factors, usage of social media applications ($\beta = 0.120$, $t = 8.963$, $p < .001$) was a positive predictor and time spent on the Internet and social media ($\beta = -0.064$, $t = -8.181$, $p < .001$) was a negative predictor. Finally, when the motivations for foreign aid were perceived to be for economic development ($\beta = 0.082$, $t = 3.332$, $p < .001$), internal stability ($\beta = 0.060$, $t = 2.392$, $p = .017$), and improving life of ordinary citizens ($\beta = 0.071$, $t = 2.794$, $p = .005$) they were positive predictors. (See Table 4)

Table 4

Multiple Linear Regressions of Violence against US (N = 12062), Americans are “Good” (N = 11464), and Perception of President Trump (N = 12090)

Predictors	Violence against US			Americans “good”			President Trump		
	B	T	p	B	T	p	B	T	p
Demographics									
Gender	-.01	-0.44	.659	-.07	-4.07	<.001	.08	3.91	<.001
Age									
25 - 35 - Less than 25	-.01	-0.05	.959	-.04	-1.69	.091	-.05	-1.84	.066
36 - 45 - Less than 25	-.01	-0.12	.906	-.05	-1.98	.047	-.16	-5.36	<.001
Over 45. - Less than 25	.01	0.17	.862	-.01	-0.58	.562	-.16	-5.37	<.001
Education									
Elementary education - no education	-.25	-3.67	<.001	-.07	-1.08	.282	-.13	-1.63	.103
Basic education - no education	-.18	-2.79	.005	-.07	-1.02	.309	-.22	-2.82	.005
Secondary education - no education	-.17	-2.59	.010	-.06	-1.00	.318	-.22	-2.93	.003
Tertiary education - no education	-.17	-2.60	.009	.03	0.43	.666	-.22	-2.89	.004
Bachelor - no education	-.14	-2.25	.025	.02	0.25	.799	-.21	-2.78	.006
Masters+ - no education	-.14	-1.99	.047	.10	1.48	.138	-.22	-2.60	.009
Income	.01	0.64	.523	-.01	-0.96	.340	-.04	-2.76	.006
Clash of Civilizations predictors									
Rreligious ritual practices	-.04	-2.88	.004	-.06	-4.36	<.001	.05	3.14	.002
Political Islam	.01	0.56	.573	-.20	-12.77	<.001	.03	1.79	.074
Religiosity	.15	10.50	<.001	.01	0.79	.427	-.05	-3.00	.003
Liberalism predictors									
Social media applications (Usage)	.09	7.47	<.001	.04	3.58	<.001	.12	8.96	<.001
Internet and social media (Time)	-.01	-1.28	.202	-.06	-8.72	<.001	-.06	-8.18	<.001
Motivation: Economic development	-.05	2.54	.011	.07	3.10	.002	.08	3.33	<.001
Motivation: Internal stability	-.05	2.32	.020	.08	3.92	<.001	.06	2.39	.017
Motivation: Empower civil society organizations	-.01	0.49	.628	.08	3.95	<.001	.01	0.23	.817
Motivation: Improvement of life of ordinary citizens	-.09	4.31	<.001	.10	4.60	<.001	.07	2.79	.005
Model's statistics	$R^2 = .073, F(31,12031) = 14.87, p < .001.$			$R^2 = .064, F(31,11433) = 25.04, p < .001.$			$R^2 = .081, F(31,12059) = 34.34, p < .001.$		

Discussion and Conclusion

Adopting the international relationship theories of liberalism and the Clash of Civilizations and the vertical and horizontal media typology, this study sought to examine the roots of anti-American perceptions among Arabs. This section discusses the results in relation to those theories and derives some practical implications for U.S. foreign policy makers.

The sample is generally supportive of violence against the United States, though the survey item measuring people's attitudes does not indicate the type of violence or directed to whom. This support of violence is critical. Most probably, support of violence is directed against U.S. military or economic interests and not American citizens, because the majority of people in the sample viewed Americans as "good" people. This is also supported by the fact that respondents greatly disapproved of President Trump's foreign policies in the region. This is in line with those who suggest that Arabs' anti-American sentiments for the U.S. government and foreign policy should be separated from sentiments for Americans in general (Rugh, 2017).

These results are very important. According to the liberal theory of international relations, using foreign aid in the economic development and welfare of other countries can eventually reduce worldwide tension and conflicts. If the respondents believed that aid was benevolent and directed toward charities, civic organizations, or ordinary people, they had favorable views of the United States. On the other hand, if they perceived aid to be directed toward Arab governments, they supported receiving U.S. aid and establishing greater economic relations with the United States. This means that they favored the United States for economic reasons rather than favoring Americans and their values of justice, liberty, and democracy. Indeed, scholars have criticized the U.S. government for giving aid to authoritarian Arab regimes that constantly oppress their populations. Accordingly, Arabs might view the United States as part of the oppression because it feeds oppressive regimes and Arabs' lack of development. U.S. policy makers need to pay close attention to this and use media news sources to inform the Arabs that U.S. aid is directed toward the welfare of Arabs and economic development (Almezaini, 2012; Apodaca, 2017; Tokdemir, 2017). They also need to reduce support for Arab regimes and be more critical of their oppression of Arab citizens. The United States should not be seen as backing the oppressors of Arabs.

In relation to the notion of the Clash of Civilizations, the results indicate that those who practiced more religious activities were less likely to support violence against the United States, viewed Americans as "good," and favored having economic relationships with the United States. Conversely, those who embraced political Islam

were less likely to view Americans as “good” and favored having less economic relations with the United States. This result is very interesting and important. It differentiates between a religion as religious duties and values that support peace and prosperity between nations, and a religion as politics and ideology. Islam as a religion, like other religions, teaches peace and mutual cultural awareness and closeness. In the Quran’s Alhujrat Ayah 13, Allah says “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you people and tribes that you know one another.” Those teachings of Islam have been underused and ignored by many dogmatic Muslim clerics who advocate a political and isolationist version of Islam that views human history as a struggle between believers and non-believers (Esposito, 2002, 2003). As an implication for policy makers, clerics from both U.S. and Muslim sides could meet in order to focus on the religious commonalities that bring people closer. They should communicate with ordinary people in the media and in different cultural and educational entities.

Finally, and in relation to media, the results show that online media in general predicted positive perceptions of the United States. This suggests that the United States should utilize horizontal media to promote peace in the Middle East based on a frank exchange of ideas, rather than showing itself as a meddler. Those media are more appropriate for gaining political news and information and conducting debates. Indeed, the literature on the Arab Spring identified the influential role of those media in toppling many Arab regimes. Importantly, those who used horizontal media were more likely to disapprove of violence against the United States and perceive Americans as “good.” It is ironic that the United States, which created the majority of those horizontal media, is not using them effectively to reach the Arabs, but at the same time, use of those media by Arabs, unintentionally and indirectly, influences their perceptions of the United States in a positive direction.

In conclusion, the hypotheses of this study were confirmed. The international relations theories of liberalism and the Clash of Civilizations can be adopted to study the way perceptions of the United States are shaped in the Middle East. Aspects of the Clash of Civilizations, especially religion, and aspects of liberalism, such as online media use and U.S. foreign aid, were found to be responsible for shaping different

perceptions of the United States. The results indicate that different theories of international relations can be used differently in different contexts. For example, the United States can apply one theory of international relations in its relations with one country, but use another theory or combination of theories in its relations with another country.

There are some practical implications for how Americans should approach Arab public opinion. Americans need to publicly disassociate themselves from Arab regimes. The United States is perceived to support dictatorial regimes that oppress Arabs. The United States also needs to inform the Arabs more about its foreign aid and that it requires Arab regimes to channel that aid to projects that benefit ordinary Arabs and organizations that help those Arabs, rather than supporting political regimes and organizations, such as the military and police secret services. Finally, the Americans need to connect with Muslim religious figures. By doing so, they may find ways to remove issues of hostility that usually lead to negative perceptions of the United States.

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