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Islam and Islamism

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The 2011–12 Arab uprisings and their aftermath breathed new life into the study of Islam and politics in the Middle East, a sphere of inquiry that connects comparative political science with the study of religion in public life. In the wake of the uprisings, Islamist parties assumed a share of power through elections in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's rise was curtailed within two years, as the military overthrew President Mohammad Morsi and subjected the organization to a campaign of violent repression that continues to this day. Tunisia's Ennahda and Morocco's Party of Justice and Development, by contrast, continued to participate in governance, the former as part of a democratic government and the latter as a leading parliamentary party under a ruling monarchy. Beyond the transitions, different Islamist trends played key roles in insurgencies in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, often finding themselves on different sides of the conflict. Both violent and nonviolent Islamists were forced to respond to the sudden emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, in terms of both its extreme ideology and its demonstrated capabilities. This rush of developments has offered a tremendous amount for political scientists to engage with, challenging long-standing assumptions and hypotheses while offering intriguing new possibilities.[1]

MENA political science came to these developments with a strong, well-developed base of theoretical and empirical knowledge about Islam and politics. This starkly contrasted with the neglect of religion in much of the rest of the field. "Religion has long been peripheral to the concerns of most political scientists," argued Eva Bellin more than a decade ago.[2] Anna Grzymala-Busse, looking beyond the Middle East, titled a review of scholarship in this field "Why Comparative Politics Should Take Religion (More) Seriously."[3] In a quantitative study of articles published by high-ranking political science and sociology journals between 2000 and 2010, Steven Kettel found that

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the "volume of political science publications involving religion is relatively small."[4]

Religion, and particularly the political implications of Islam, have been more central to the political science of the Middle East and North Africa, however. The articles which Kettel did find dealing with religion disproportionately dealt with "Islam/Muslims" (approximately 21 percent) and (the disproportionately Middle East–specific) "violence, conflict, and terrorism" (22 percent). But MENA political scientists were far more engaged with the politics of religion. Prior to the Arab uprisings, Islamist political movements made up some of the most important and widely studied opposition actors in the region, while policy interest in Islamist extremism and terrorism after 9/11 guaranteed interest in new studies of Islamist ideologies, organizations, and strategies.

The historic neglect of religion by political scientists outside the MENA can be explained by the near-hegemony of the "secularization thesis," which held that the political salience of faith would wane as societies became more developed and modern.[5] Industrialization, urbanization, and the attendant processes of occupational specialization and education, the reasoning went, would turn individuals away from folk beliefs and religious superstition toward modernity and rationality. This began to change with the rise of fundamentalist movements across many of the world's major religions, including Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, that inspired a major research program on comparative fundamentalist movements in the 1980s and 1990s.[6] The new era of identitarian populism that gripped Europe and the Americas around 2016 challenged the idea that the West had transcended the kinds of identity-driven politics that plagued much of the Arabic-speaking, Muslim-majority world.

Many observers who downplayed religion in the West simultaneously blamed Islam for the political pathologies of the Middle East, including its economic underdevelopment (see Chapter 6), its relative lack of freedom and abundance of authoritarian regimes (see Chapter 2), and its production of global terrorism (see Chapters 5 and 8). David Landes, for instance, proposed that "Islam has long exercised a retardative influence on Arab intellectual and scientific inquiry."[7] Two of the most influential early 1990s popular readings of international relations made similar assumptions. Francis Fukuyama concluded that Islam is "very hard to reconcile with liberalism and the recognition of universal rights,"[8] while Samuel Huntington warned of a "Muslim propensity toward violent conflict," which, he mused, might

emerge from the fact that Islam is an "absolutist faith" that "merges religion and politics," "draws a sharp line between those in the *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and those in the *Dar al-harb* (Abode of War)," and "dictate[s] war against unbelievers."[9]

Some scholars found evidence for such claims about Islam. For example, one study found Muslim-majority countries have less efficient governments and lower provision of public goods as well as lower economic growth.[10] An early quantitative study of the causes of democratic emergence and survival found "a strong negative effect of Muslim culture on democracy."[11] Practically every large-*N* analysis of the causes of democracy conducted in the twenty years since then found a negative relationship between measures of the size of a society's Muslim population and the likelihood that it will be a democracy.[12] Similarly, an analysis of all civil wars conducted between 1940 and 2000 found that "Islam has played a larger role in contemporary religious civil wars than either Christianity or Judaism."[13] But, as will become apparent in this chapter, many of the most important contributions of the subfield were ones that rebutted such claims of Islam's inherent violence, authoritarianism, and economic lassitude after 9/11.

The post-2001 debates about Islam reappeared in new form after the Arab uprisings. These uprisings, which saw millions of Arabs take to the streets to protest authoritarianism, corruption, and police brutality, awakened new research possibilities. The rise and, in some cases, fall of Islamist movements in the post-2011 transitions revitalized disputes about the compatibility of Islam and democracy, with some authors returning to classical tropes of the distinctive relationship between Islam and politics to assert its uniqueness and others highlighting the institutional and political dimensions of transitional failure. The political polarization around the question of Islamism and the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization by several Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia also revived long-running debates about the definition of moderation and the possibility for Islamists to moderate through political inclusion. And the emergence of ISIS generated scholarship that sought to explain the origins, ideas, and future of religious extremism.[14]

This chapter takes up this rejuvenated research agenda through the lens of a robust existing literature. It proceeds as follows. First, we review the hypotheses that Islam facilitated the persistence of authoritarian over democratic regimes, either by inculcating in Muslims antidemocratic political values and/or explicit preferences for authoritarian politics or simply because Muslims chose to vote for inherently undemocratic Islamist political parties. We then turn to the scholarship on Islam and political violence, and specifically to debates over the role of Salafi-jihadism in inspiring violence. We conclude by identifying how political shifts in the region have opened up new areas of scholarly work.

Before proceeding, it is important to note three limitations of this survey. First, this is primarily a review of the political science literature. The work of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have proven exceedingly valuable to the study of religion and politics in the Middle East, and the neglect of much of that scholarship here is not intended to devalue that work, but only to focus this review on scholarship that speaks primarily to political science. Second, this is a review of the English-language literature on religion and politics. All of the works discussed here build on and benefit from work by social scientists in the Middle East and writing in its languages, and a full accounting of the scholarly literature on religion and politics in the Middle East must include such work. Finally, the focus is on Islam, not Christianity and Judaism, though we conclude with a call to build on important comparative work on religion by scholars such as Yüksel Sezgin and Lihi Ben Shitrit.[15] In fact, the literature tends to focus not even on all of Islam but on scholarship on Sunni Islam, and we applaud the emergence of new research programs designed to more fully engage Shia politics.[16]

Islam, Authoritarianism, and Democracy

Does Islam promote authoritarianism or inhibit democracy? If so, what are the mechanisms by which it has such effects? The idea that Islam shapes Muslim political institutions predates the political science discipline. Montesquieu concluded that "a moderate government is most agreeable to the Christian religion, and a despotic government to the Mohammedan."[17] Alexis de Tocqueville similarly argued that Islam was incapable of producing or adapting to modern democratic government.[18] The historian Elie Kedourie, for his part, declared that "the idea of democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam."[19]

Debates about this hypothesized relationship between Islam and democracy gained traction during the so-called Third Wave of Democracy of the late 1980s. It seemed puzzling to political scientists that the Muslim-majority Middle East seemed to be the only region of the world untouched by the

Soviet Union's collapse and the proliferation of new democracies. In the MENA, autocrats either sailed on undisturbed, brutally squashed any democratic openings (as in Algeria), allowed brief openings which quickly passed (as in Jordan and Tunisia), or were replaced by Islamists (as in Sudan). In a statistical analysis, M. Steven Fish found a negative correlation between having a Muslim majority and a country's average Freedom House rating from 1991 to 2001.[20]

Observing this unusual pattern did not itself answer the question of the role Islam played. Fish found most of the variation was poorly explained by most popular hypotheses, although he found some was explained by the poor status of women in Muslim countries. Daniela Donno and Bruce Russett found less support for the proposed mechanism of female disempowerment.[21] Other scholars do find, however, that the democracy deficit is more of an Arab phenomenon than an Islamic one, suggesting that either those countries practice a distinctive form of Islam that is especially antidemocratic, or that religion is irrelevant.[22] Donno and Russett also point to the potential for change in the valence of religion: "[b]efore 1980 countries with large Catholic populations were even less likely than Islamic ones to have democratic governments," but after a wave of democratization in southern Europe this relationship "subsequently turned strongly positive."[23]

MENA scholars built on this debate in part by generating and analyzing individual-level data that enabled them to test hypotheses about the relationship between Islam and democracy more systematically. For instance, by analyzing small-sample survey data from cities in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and the West Bank collected between 1988 and 1996, Mark Tessler found little correlation between individual commitment to Islam and antidemocratic attitudes (see Chapter 9).[24] Indeed, high-quality survey data routinely found that Arabs had highly favorable attitudes toward democracy.[25] Amaney Jamal found that surveys conducted in Egypt and Jordan revealed vast majorities of respondents supported both Islam and democracy.[26] A study of attitudes in ten Muslim-majority countries by Sabri Ciftci found little evidence of a relationship between religiosity and support for democracy.[27]

These findings sorely challenge notions of Islam as rendering individual Muslims inherently undemocratic. Moreover, scholars such as Michaelle Browers, Charles Kurzman, Andrew March, and Nathan Brown have documented the ways in which Arab and Muslim intellectuals have increasingly reconciled their faith with the growing global legitimacy of democracy and freedom.[28] For instance, during the Mubarak era, the Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi declared democracy "an acceptable means of curbing the excesses of dictatorship and trimming the claws of political domination."[29] This can be observed behaviorally as well. Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal find that Tunisians and Egyptians who reported religious behaviors—specifically, regular reading of the Qur'an—were more supportive of democracy, more concerned with ameliorating inequality, and more likely to protest in the service of these goals than their less religious counterparts.[30] At the same time, the persistence of the correlation between authoritarianism and Muslim-majority populations and the fact that the Arab uprisings did not lead to democracy suggest that future research on the relationship between Islam and regime type should attend to alternative, non-public-opinion mechanisms by which Islam might influence political institutions.

Islamist Political Parties

A second puzzle which consumed MENA political scientists and policymakers was the repeated electoral success of Islamist political movements and parties, such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Morocco's Party of Justice and Development, Jordan's Islamic Action Front, and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front. This trend could suggest that parties with an Islamic character would be particularly attractive electorally to Arab voters. Or it could be that other features of Islamist parties, such as a reputation for integrity or their ability to provide social services, might explain their success.

Much of the scholarship on religion and politics in the Middle East, then, was dedicated to evaluating these claims and to exploring the phenomenon of political Islam more broadly. Here we review three major lines of inquiry. The first attempted to identify what Islamist parties wanted and believed, whether they were serious in their stated commitment to democracy, and how they behaved once in office. The second tried to assess the effects of such electoral participation on those movements. The third attempted to understand why citizens so frequently cast their ballots for such parties.

The first research stream focused on the importance of ideas, ideology, and identity. How did Islamists understand democracy, and were their religious convictions compatible with the demands of procedural and/or liberal democracy? The fear that Islamists embraced democracy only tactically was most clearly articulated by former U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, Edward Djerejian, who warned that the

United States was "suspect of those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance. While we believe in the principle of 'one person, one vote,' we do not support 'one person, one vote, one time.'"[31] As Steven Cook put it in a discussion of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, "there is scant evidence that the Brothers or their affiliate organizations throughout the region are embracing the principles of democracy. It is more likely that these groups are seeking to use democratic procedures in order to advance an antidemocratic agenda."[32] But Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi's study of forty-eight Islamist party platforms over forty years revealed that "Islamist parties have transformed since the 1980s, publicly endorsing democracy and women's rights and de-emphasizing shari'a and jihad."[33] More important, there exists no empirical case of an Islamist party behaving along the lines that Djerejian's "one person, one vote, one time" quip suggests, while examples of the region's militaries stepping in to quash democratic openings are numerous.

If the first line of inquiry focused on explicating ideas themselves, a second research area focused on causal questions about the effects of political inclusion on those views. A wide range of scholars explored the circumstances under which Islamist organizations undergo "moderation," defined in Jillian Schwedler's influential formulation as "movement from a relatively closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives."[34] The term "moderation" has long been controversial, viewed as normatively laden and imprecise. Brown notes that Islamist participation in "the admittedly feeble electoral mechanisms of the region . . . can have profound effects on both their ideology and their organization," but he prefers to label these changes "politicization" rather than "moderation."[35] For similar reasons, Quinn Mecham and Julie Hwang refer to "political normalization," which refers less to what parties believe than to how they behave.[36]

One of the most powerful drivers of moderation was thought to be inclusion in the dominant political regime, usually by means of participation in the limited political space provided by many authoritarian regimes. Mona El-Ghobashy argued that the Muslim Brotherhood's "energetic capitalization on Egypt's sliver of electoral competition for seats in Parliament, the professional unions, and municipal councils has had an especially profound effect on their political thought and organization."[37] In particular, she notes that the movement's political engagement led it toward "revamped views on women's rights, parties and political pluralism, the role of Egyptian Copts, and the morality and utility of political violence." Similarly, in his study of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Party of Justice and Development in Turkey, Mecham found that the party "strategically moved toward the centre," both because Turkey's highly secular military would not countenance a more traditionally religious party and because "the party was motivated by democratic incentives, recognizing that the majority of Turks had consistently voted for centrist parties." Thus, he argues, the party's moderate turn "was a direct response both to horizonal constraints and democratic incentives in a moderately religious society."[38]

There were, of course, several rejoinders to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. Many, such as Khalil al-Anani, critique the "mechanical and linear thrust" of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, which is rarely borne out in the real world.[39] There is no consistent pattern to how parties change in the tumult of politics. In their study of the ideological evolution of Tunisia's Ennahda party, Francesco Cavortata and Fabio Merone argue that it is not inclusion that drove that party toward moderation, but exclusion.[40] Schwedler found little correspondence between political inclusion and Islamist moderation in Yemen's Islah Party and Jordan's Islamic Action Front; "inclusion" produced moderation in the latter case, but not the former. Elsewhere she writes, "Changes in political opportunity structure provide the strategic logic for Islamist groups to participate, but those incentives do not always lead to ideological moderation, let alone in consistent or predictable ways."[41] Gunes Murat Tezcur similarly notes the wide variety of disparate contexts in which so-called moderation can occur, further undermining any deterministic relationship between political conditions and Islamist ideological change.[42] Similar questions have been raised in Morocco by Matt Buehler, Esen Kirdis, and others.[43] The logic works quite differently in the Gulf rentier states, notes Courtney Freer, where the incentives for moderation or radicalization vary.[44]

The insufficiency of political inclusion or exclusion to explain Islamist democratic commitments led some scholars to direct our attention to other sources of Islamist ideological change. In his study of Islamist parties in Morocco, Turkey, and Egypt, Kadir Yildirim argues that Islamists transformed into "Muslim Democrats" when a pious bourgeoisie emerged that combined religious conservatism with a commitment to democracy and free markets.[45] In a study of the voting records and life trajectories of Islamist MPs in Tunisia, Sharan Grewal finds that exposure to life in the secular, democratic West caused shifts in Islamists' ideological preferences, rendering them more tolerant, secular, and liberal—and willing to vote accordingly in the legislature, even if this meant bucking their co-partisans.[46] These

and other works of scholarship direct our attention to the wide variety of mechanisms through which the beliefs, values, and normative commitments of individual politicians are shaped, and the equally wide variety of factors to which they might be endogenized.

A major question unresolved by the inclusion-moderation hypothesis was whether the ideological changes that seemed to result from political participation were sincere and permanent. Carrie Rosefsky Wickham suggests that genuine ideological change is possible. In her study of the Muslim Brotherhood and breakaway Wasat Party, she argues that "limited institutional openings can be sufficient to generate strategic incentives for moderation and create opportunities for political learning, or experience-driven change in individual leaders' core values and beliefs."[47] Movements like the Muslim Brotherhood contain multitudes, and while some movement elites hold firm to old orthodoxies, others "break out of the insular networks of movement politics and interact on a regular basis with government officials and leaders of other civil and political groups" and undergo "self-conscious shifts" in beliefs and profound ideological changes that render them more liberal and democratic. But Shadi Hamid contends that the ostensible moderation of the Muslim Brotherhood during Egypt's authoritarian period was "forced" and situational and was quickly abandoned once a genuine opening in the political system presented itself.[48]

The debate over what drives Islamist moderation and whether it is sincere or strategic will continue to prove difficult to resolve, suggesting that future scholars should focus on measuring and explaining party behavior rather than on attempting to divine normative commitments. As Vickie Langohr noted, for some, the simple fact that Islamist parties across multiple countries had continued to participate in elections despite repeated setbacks has already proven their democratic commitments.[49] For others, commitments to democratic procedure are only part of the point. Democracy requires, in this view, commitment to pluralism and liberal values, and thus the substance of their political program renders them inherently antidemocratic: "Islamists seek ultimately to implement shari'a, shari'a itself is inherently undemocratic, and thus Islamists are, a priori, opponents of democracy because they intend to use their power, regardless of how legitimately they may have obtained it, to implement undemocratic policies."[50] As would later be observed in the aftermath of the Arab Spring—particularly in Egypt, where an elected Muslim Brotherhood president found himself repeatedly battling the judicial branch of government before being ousted in

a military coup—what to some looked like Islamist defenses of democracy would look to others like assaults upon it.

Of course, Islamist parties have a broader range of possible trajectories than simply moderation or radicalization. As with any political party, Islamist ones could adopt a liberal or conservative political platform for either ideological or strategic reasons. Whichever is chosen, its failure could lead them to tack in the other direction. The presence or absence of even more religious competitors, such as the Salafi parties which emerged in Egypt in 2011, could compel more religious political behavior for purely electoral reasons. In Jordan, as Joas Wagemakers has detailed, the movement fractured under government and popular pressure, creating competing movements appealing to different societal constituencies.[51]

As Islamists find themselves excluded from power and political participation, old questions about the role of inclusion and repression in Islamist ideology formation have taken on new urgency. If the prospect of political inclusion had nudged the Brotherhood in a more liberal, democratic direction prior to the Arab Spring, can its complete excision from political life now be expected to drive it toward violence? The effects of repression, as Elizabeth Nugent has demonstrated, are not linear, with some forms more likely to generate acquiescence than resistance.[52] The course of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the coup has received increasing attention in the literature thus far, with seven years of evidence now offering insights into the effects of fragmentation, strategic defeat, state violence, and psychological trauma.[53] These experiences can draw on comparative research from the experience of Islamist movements in exile, such as Tunisia's Ennahda and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.[54]

And then, of course, there is the question of what Islamists would do with power should they win it through elections. Islamist movements that have seized power through revolution (Iran) or military coup (Sudan) have adopted broad Islamization policies. Repeated electoral victories by Turkey's Justice and Development Party initially produced a socially conservative but politically relatively liberal government which, over time, degenerated into corruption and repression despite its avowed religious commitments. In Egypt, an elected Muslim Brotherhood government struggled to govern in the face of resistance from the military and growing popular opposition; it is difficult to draw any inferences about what it might have done with real state power over the longer term had it been given the opportunity to govern. But in Tunisia, the Islamist Ennahda party self-moderated, opting for coalition

governments both for ideological reasons rooted in the beliefs of its leader Rashed Ghannouchi and out of practical concerns about societal backlash, international reaction, or a military coup.

Why Do Islamists Win?

A second strand of scholarship focuses on understanding why voters cast ballots for Islamists in the first place, and whether enough voters would do so in free and fair elections to bring Islamist parties and politicians to power. These questions have been driven by two concerns. The first was intellectual: the Arab appetite for religious political parties was seen (rightly or wrongly) as a rare thing in the modern world, and several scholars were keen to understand the causes of this departure from the secularization thesis. The second concern was political: insofar as Islamist parties were feared to be antidemocratic, anti-Western, or both, great urgency was placed on determining whether they would dominate any potential democratic openings.

There have been two broad approaches to the question of who votes for Islamists and why. The first held that there was something special about Islamism and Islamist discourse that gave these parties a political advantage over nonreligious parties. The extreme version of such arguments was that Islamic doctrine demanded the fusion of religion and state, and thus believers would naturally offer their suffrages to parties that promised to achieve it.[55] But such arguments were unsatisfactory given the observed variation in Islamist electoral performance. As Tarek Masoud pointed out, "If Islam is sufficient to explain why Islamists win, then we would observe little variation in Islamist success over time and space. Instead, we see that not all Muslims vote Islamist, and those who voted Islamist in one election may not do so in another."[56] Mecham's study of variation in Islamist electoral mobilization in Turkey found that support for that country's main Islamist party is both volatile and not primarily drawn from ideological confederates.[57]

A more moderate version of the argument that Islam conferred advantages on Islamists was situational. In this approach, Islamists won not because of their ideas but because they represented the only available opposition to an existing regime. By virtue of their exclusion from power, Islamists could enjoy a reputation for being independent and noncomplicit in the sins of a long-ruling regime. Should this be correct, one would expect that the Islamist advantage would fade in relative terms if the political field opened to multiple viable contenders—which does seem to be the case in transitional countries such as Libya and Tunisia.

Others argued that the advantage that Islam conferred on Islamist parties had little to do with the substance of religion, and more with what religion represented or signaled. In an experimental study of voting behavior in Indonesia, Tom Pepinsky, William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani argued that Islamists' religious character served as an informational shortcut that enabled materially minded voters to choose good representatives of their interests in the absence of information about parties' concrete economic platforms.[58] Similarly, Brown argues that Islamists' use of religious rhetoric enabled them to "convey a spirit of probity and piety."[59] Mecham and Aisha Ahmad show, in different contexts, how Islam can serve as a focal point to bring together disparate groups across otherwise distant tribal, regional, or class lines.[60]

Another approach focused on individual psychology. In line with earlier research on the appeal of religious fundamentalism, Wickham emphasized how authoritarianism, repression, and exclusion strained educated young Egyptians psychologically, throwing them into a state of Durkheimian alienation that rendered them uniquely receptive to the appeals of religious parties offering certainty and a return to faith. Neil Ketchley and Michael Biggs's finding that Islamist activists tend to be drawn from among high-achieving students is consonant with this hypothesis, even though they do not link this to the Durkheimian narrative.[61] In an experimental study conducted in Tunisia, Grewal and his co-authors found evidence to suggest that exposure to economic strain increased experimental subjects' demand for religion and, consequently, their likelihood of voting for Islamist parties.[62] In this telling, voters support Islamic parties because material circumstances increase the value of religion in their daily lives.

An alternative set of arguments points not to what Islamist parties *are* but to what they *do*. In these accounts, Islamist electoral victories were not about Islam at all, but instead were the result of much more quotidian factors, such as party organization, strategy, and tactics.

One strain of literature emphasized the advantages that accrued to Islamist parties by virtue of their embeddedness in a broader religious movement (rendering them what Herbert Kitschelt called "movement" parties).[63] Wickham, for example, describes a large "parallel Islamic sector" that comprises charitable societies, cultural organizations, and businesses.[64] The "social embeddedness of Islamic networks," she argues, constitutes a major asset for Islamist movements: "the presence of Islamist networks at

the local level where people lived, studied, and worked made them highly accessible and minimized the social distance between participants and nonparticipants."[65] This somewhat unique ability to draw on these movement affiliates may help religious parties mitigate long periods of organization building and realize a key advantage in the tumult of transition.[66]

Others have emphasized Islamists' provision of social services to voters.[67] Nearly two decades ago, Sheri Berman described how "private, grass-roots, voluntary associations run by Islamists became important providers of social goods normally associated with the state."[68] From this general logic flowed two mechanisms by which the provision of services might work to generate support for Islamist parties. the first, social services generated Islamist support in a straightforward, clientelistic exchange of goods for votes.[69] However, some regional specialists have cast doubt on this hypothesis. Janine A. Clark's study of Islamist social service provision in Egypt, Yemen, and Jordan found precious little evidence of such clientelism: "[T]he long term political significance of ISIs [Islamic social institutions] lies in the horizontal, and not the vertical, ties that are forged in ISIs and through their activities. Vertical ties to the poor do exist in ISIs; however, they are weak. It is the middle class, not the poor, that benefits from charity activities."[70] Steven Brooke lends additional empirical support to this finding in his study of Islamist social service provision in Egypt. Analyzing the locations of the branches of one of the Muslim Brotherhood's key social service vehicles, the Islamic Medical Association, reveals that the organization's "facilities were disproportionately located in middle-class areas," a counterintuitive finding given the presumption that giving social services would render poorer voters a more enticing audience for Islamist movements.[71] In her study of Islamism in the rentier states of the Arabian Peninsula, likewise, Freer argues that the importance of welfare provision to Islamist success is heavily dependent on context. In countries where government-provided healthcare and other services are of high quality and broadly accessible, MENA scholars have therefore pointed to other—organizational and ideological—sources of Islamist prominence and appeal.[72]

If Islamist social services do not work in a straightforwardly clientelistic manner, how, then, have they helped generate impressive electoral victories in some countries? Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones-Luong argue that the effect is primarily reputational.[73] Social service provision helps Islamists "foster a reputation for being uniquely competent, trustworthy, and pure vis-à-vis the alternatives. It is this reputation for good governance that enables Islamists to amass popular support and make electoral gains beyond those segments of the population with which they have come into direct contact or enjoy ideological affinity."[74] In a survey experiment conducted on a nationally representative sample of Egyptians, Brooke offers evidence for this proposition, finding that respondents who were randomly exposed to information about the Muslim Brotherhood's service provision were "more likely to indicate a willingness to vote for Muslim Brotherhood candidates for elected office than those in the control group."[75]

Given the positive reputational and, by extension, electoral impact of social services, why are the Middle East's Islamists the ones who put the most effort into providing them?[76] Regional experts have generated an array of answers. One is that Islamists' embeddedness in traditional religious organizations and charities grants them an inherent advantage.[77] Mona Atia notes that government repression of the Brotherhood and its "fixation on the Brotherhood as a political threat actually enhanced the Brotherhood's legitimacy while enabling it to receive credit for the work of numerous independent local Islamic associations."[78] Brooke, however, notes the important role of state policy in creating opportunities for Islamists to engage in service provision. Bread riots in Egypt in the late 1970s sent the country's president in search of a way to allay Egyptians' suffering while not straining the state's already strained budget. The decision was made to "shift the state's social welfare responsibilities onto a revitalized civic and associational sector," with significant government support.[79]

An alternative answer to the question of why Islamists outperform other parties in service provision focuses on the organizational attributes of Islamist parties. Al-Anani has documented the procedures by which the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt produces committed activists who are precisely the type of party activist to put in the hard work of building social service operations. In order to ensure that its activists are of high quality, al-Anani explains, "membership in the Brotherhood and other Islamist movements is highly selective. Those who seek to join must possess certain traits and attitudes that allow them to advance the movement's objectives and abide by its rules and regulations." Once selected, initiates are subjected to a rigorous process of *tarbiyya*, or socialization, in which even fairly low-level members of the movement "are required to undertake . . . significant duties, such as memorizing chapters of the Qur'an, reading the Brotherhood's literature, and becoming engaged in local activism such as providing social services and assistance to the poor or organizing literacy campaigns."[80] It

stands to reason that such an intensive emphasis on selecting and training party members would have benefits beyond the ability to provide services, enabling Islamists to run more disciplined and effective electoral campaigns than their rivals, and thus reap more votes on election day.

The focus on social service provision and party organization in explaining Islamist support should not relegate the substantive experience of religion—as faith, tradition, identity, and experience—to the margins of our explanations of the phenomenon. For instance, Avital Livny argues that Islamist parties' discipline and organization is attributable less to recruitment and selection methods and more to the ability of religion to provide group members with a shared identity that renders them more capable of collective action in both the political and economic spheres.[81] James Dennison and Jonas Draege find that voters in Tunisia who voted for Ennahda were primarily driven by social policy preferences traditionally associated with religious conservatism.[82] Based on such variegated findings across cases, MENA scholars have concluded that the quest to divine asingle cause of Islamist success may be futile. As Masoud points out, "A voter casting a ballot for the Muslim Brotherhood may be defending the shari'a, expressing gratitude for social services, choosing a trustworthy steward of the economy, responding to a particularly well-run parliamentary campaign, or . . . striking a blow against an authoritarian regime. Or he or she may be doing some subset of these things simultaneously."[83] The causes of Islamist support there vary across time and space, and researchers must always be mindful of the social and political contexts.

MENA experts have hence widened their empirical aperture to include contexts in which Islamists have long operated but have been long ignored by scholars, such as in the Arabian Gulf countries.[84] They are also moving away from a focus on Muslim Brotherhood–affiliated movements to exploring the political behavior of more ultra-Orthodox Salafi political parties and movements, whose structures, ideologies, and social bases depart from those of more studied Islamist parties.[85] Finally, scholars are attending to the question of whether Islamists' superior organizational abilities also make them better at governance, a possibility suggested by Mara Revkin's work on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria[86] and by Lisa Blaydes's finding that Egyptian women in a poor Cairo neighborhood that was "governed" by Islamist militants over a brief period in the late 1980s and early 1990s today experience better reproductive health outcomes than other similarly situated women.[87]

Islam and Violence

Finally, the decades since the September 11, 2001, attacks offered ample reason for scholars to delve into questions surrounding the relationship between Islam and violence. But as old ideas about the inherent violence of Islam circulated anew, scholars like Kurzman remind us that there are more than a billion Muslims in the world and that global Islamist terrorists have recruited fewer than 1 in 100,000 of them since 9/11.[88] This should be weighed not in absolute terms, but relative to the frequency of such radicalization in other religions and in nonreligious categories (ethnic groups or far-left/far-right groups). Similar questions might be asked about the ratio of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members who turned to violence after the 2013 military coup, compared to what might have been expected of a non-Islamist organization.

Again, a key issue relates to the relative significance of ideas as opposed to strategic incentives.[89] Did Islamists engage in, or refrain from, violence because of their beliefs, or because they were faced with a strategic environment which encouraged such behavior? Were Islamists disproportionately involved in insurgencies because of their ideology, or because civil war and failed state situations drove people toward religion? The use of suicide attacks by Hamas and the Islamist State could be an expression of deeply felt moral commitments to jihad, or it could be an effective tactical response to inferior military technology. Does the impetus to violence lie in Islam generally, or in specific forms of Islam such as Salafism or Muslim Brotherhood thought? How would one assess such competing hypotheses?

The importance of ideas versus context inspired a widely discussed debate among French academics. Gilles Kepel argues that the problems lay with the spread of Salafism, with a distinctive set of ideas which are behind what he calls the "irruption" of jihadism.[90] In contrast, Olivier Roy argues that "terrorism does not arise from the radicalization of Islam, but from the Islamization of radicalism"—that is, the religious rhetoric, symbols, and even aims of so-called Islamist militants are epiphenomenal.[91] In his rich study of transnational Islam, Peter Mandaville finds evidence for both points of view. On the one hand, he argues that Muslims—particularly those in the West—who "search for a universal idiom of Islam" can find themselves embracing "a universalism defined, religiously, in salafi terms—and politically, in terms of Muslim struggles the world over: the umma as a righteous community under assault." On the other hand, he observes, in line with Roy, that

> many individuals come into radical circles having already decided that they want to undertake violent jihad. Some, in fact, may only very recently have become Muslim, or "reactivated" a previously dormant sense of religiosity. Thus, it is not salafism itself or the authority of religious scholars that serve as the "radicalizing agents," but rather prior life experiences and worldviews that have culminated in a decision to actively seek participation in political violence.[92]

In their study of the Egyptian militant Islamic Group (Gama'a Islamiyya) and its war against the Egyptian state from 1990 to 1998, Mohammad Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz offer a rational account of Islamist violence, in which violence "becomes most likely where regimes attempt to crush Islamic activism through broad repressive measures that leave few alternatives."[93] A similar argument is made by Mecham in his study of Islamic activism around the world. He finds that the repression of Islamist actors in Algeria in the early 1990s intensified a preexisting religious-secular divide in the country, closed off alternative avenues for protest against the regime, and "transformed Islamist mobilization from voting to violence."[94] A similar rationality to Islamist violence is identified by Mia Bloom in her study of suicide bombing—a terror tactic often mistakenly identified as specifically Islamic. Although organizations such as Hezbollah and Palestine's Hamas routinely engage in suicide bombing and provide it with religious justifications, Bloom argues that "there is nothing inherently dysfunctional about the Islamic faith per se that predisposes its adherents toward violence." Instead, she finds that "there is a spectrum of religious affiliation and degree of religiosity" among perpetrators, and that the decision to employ this spectacular technique of irregular warfare is primarily tactical.[95]

In an influential early study of Islamist violence against Muslim regimes and associated domestic targets, Saad Eddin Ibrahim investigated the backgrounds of Islamic militants in Egypt. He warned that the role of Islam per se should be carefully considered but should not "be exaggerated, mystified, or metaphysicalized."[96] In approximately four hundred hours of interviews with thirty-three imprisoned Egyptian Islamic militants over a two-year period, he and his colleagues found that militants—who were often highly educated—were driven by a "sense of national crisis" brought on by "foreign encroachment," coupled with a "status incongruity," which he described as "strong achievement motivation, with justified high aspiration, yet little economic and political opportunity."[97] But these conditions are fairly generic. What causes individuals undergoing them to engage in militancy on behalf of religion as opposed to some other ideology? Later scholarship on Islam and militancy put Islamist organizations, rather than Muslim individuals, as the units of analysis, and asked why they would engage in violence as opposed to other forms of contention.

Other scholars take Islam and Islamic ideology more seriously as a cause of violence, but they begin from the recognition that Islamic justifications of or exhortations to violence are produced by political actors who deem it rational. For instance, Richard Nielsen focuses our attention on clerics who articulate a jihadi ideology that invites Muslims to wage war at home and abroad. He notes a wide variation in clerical beliefs about the acceptability of violence and the conditions under which jihad is permissible—from those who counsel quiescence and obedience to rulers to those who exhort followers to martyrdom. He argues, based on a richly informed quantitative analysis of clerical career paths, that this variation is a function of unequal opportunities for career advancement. Specifically, "when the ambition of a cleric to become an academic" in one of the Middle East's centers of Islamic learning "is blocked by failure on the cleric job market or by state repression, those clerics whose ambitions are blocked are at much greater risk of becoming jihadist."[98] In his study of the rise of the phenomenon of "foreign fighters"—Arabs who went to Afghanistan to join the insurgency against the Soviets and later affiliated with al-Qaeda—Thomas Hegghammer points to the role of "marginalized elites employed in nonviolent international organizations," such as the Mecca-based Muslim World League. He writes that these Saudi-based activists, "[s]eeking political relevance and increased budgets . . . propagated an alarmist discourse emphasizing external threats to the Muslim nation . . . and established a global network of charities for the provision of inter-Muslim aid," both of which "enabled Arab activists in 1980s Afghanistan to recruit foreign fighters in the name of inter-Muslim solidarity."[99]

Research Horizons on Islamist Politics

As this review of MENA scholarship around Islam and politics suggests, two sets of concerns have had outsized importance. The first was to refute or complicate a Western image of Islam as universally or monolithically leading to autocracy, underdevelopment, and violence. The second was to recover

an understanding of Muslims as complex political actors with a multiplicity of identities, affiliations, ideologies, and allegiances. Regional experts have been remarkably successful in these goals, while also contributing in important and as yet underappreciated ways to broader political science literatures on democratization, party politics, economic development, and conflict.

Although scholars must always be wary of allowing their attention to be directed by contemporary political events or the concerns of policy elites in Western capitals, recent developments have nonetheless opened new areas of inquiry for the study of religion and politics in the Middle East. The first is the authoritarian regression that has taken place in the aftermath of the popular uprisings that swept the Arab world in 2011 and beyond. We have already noted the potential implications of this constriction of political space on the thought and behavior of Islamist parties, but there are potential impacts on individual behaviors and beliefs as well. In the most recent wave of the Arab Barometer, analysts found that an increasing number of citizens in ten of eleven countries surveyed declared themselves nonreligious in 2018–19 when compared to surveys conducted in these countries in 2013.[100] Are these expressions of irreligiosity sincere or driven by social desirability bias in a set of regimes in which religiosity is looked on with suspicion? If they are sincere, what drives them? Have the religious sentiments of Arabs been driven by politics—specifically, by a distaste for the Islamist parties perceived to have failed in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings? What is the relationship between these developments and the post-Islamism hypothesized by Asef Bayat, which expected the appeal of politicized religion to diminish as Islamists gained power?[101]

A second political development that promises to change the study of politics and religion in the Middle East is the seeming susceptibility of advanced, industrialized Western polities to a kind of religiously inflected populism that mirrors in many ways the Islamist politics that have consumed scholarly attentions for so long. Anyone who witnessed the spectacle of an American president—Trump—using force to clear a square of protestors so that he could stand in front of a house of worship and brandish a holy book must conclude that the political deployment of religion is not just something that happens "over there," in less developed polities outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is our hope that this realization will open the door to genuinely comparative work that brings religious politics in advanced industrialized democracies into closer dialogue with the phenomenon as it exists in Arabic-speaking, Muslim-majority countries.

Finally, as research on Islam and politics progresses, our hope is that scholars will increasingly decenter dysfunction and explore the full range of political, social, and economic impacts of religion and religious doctrine. The political influence of faith has not all been negative, and to assume that it is would be to pay unwitting heed to a by-now discredited secularization thesis that equates progress with the abandonment of faith. For instance, scholars have recently identified the ways in which feminist activists have deployed Islamic rhetoric, symbols, texts, and concepts in an effort to free women of patriarchal strictures.[102] It must also be noted that Islamist movements and parties have brought large numbers of previously marginalized people into political processes throughout the region, although of course that record has been mixed. As Muslims in the MENA and beyond work to achieve equality, dignity, justice, and the right to participate in politics, it is inevitable that they will deploy and adapt religious discourses for emancipatory purposes. How they undertake this, how states respond, and whether they are successful are all areas for future inquiry.

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