RESEARCH ARTICLE

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN POLITICAL LIFE: CRITICAL REVIEW AND EVIDENCE FROM EGYPTIAN SURVEY

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A B S T R A C T

A long tradition of research into political culture argues that greater support for core liberal democratic values leads to a rejection of destructive political activities and reduced support for violent politics. Policy makers have long drawn on this line of inquiry, arguing that democracy can reduce violent political activity such as terrorism. The aim of this survey was to study the attitude of a sample of Egyptians' attitude toward the impact of democracy in reducing political violence inside and outside the borders of the country.

INTRODUCTION

Literature review

Literature on political Islam and Islamist movements, which incorporates up to date empirical evidences to support its theoretical arguments, is lacking. Until now most research into political Islam can be divided into three general categories: The first investigates ideas established by key advocates and thinkers within the political Islamic movement, for example Roxanne Euben's *Enemy in the Mirror*. The second is a structural political economy perspective with correlates the rise of political Islam with the failure of post-colonial state development projects, for example Joel Beinin and Joe Stork's edited volume, *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report.* The third portrays the secular state being overwhelmed by a rising wave of extremism, for example Mary Anne Weaver's *A Portrait of Egypt: a Journey through the World of Militant Islam* (El-Ghobashy, 2000, p. 175).

I have picked four sources for literature review. The first is the book, *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* By Geneive Abdo. The second is a journal article called, *Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam* by Thomas J. Butko. The third is a journal article called, *what is political Islam?* by Charles Hirschkind. The fourth is an article published by the Economist called *Everywhere on the rise.*

I chose to review Abdo's book as it covers a number of topics, including: the role of the state in the Islamist revival, the nature of freedom under Islamic law, questions of veiling and female circumcision, and the compatibility of Islamic and secular law (Abdo, 2000). Abdo''s book is generally analytical and what is important about the book is how the author puts the rise of political Islam into a historical framework of the extension of state involvement in each chapter. *No God But God* is split into eight parts which investigate the social rise of Islam in Egypt between different groups: the impoverished Imbaba community, a typical birth place of Islamic extremism in the beginning of the 90s; the scholars of Al-Azhar university; professional unions (for example the union of engineers and doctors); university students and on campuses; elite and highly educated women; and the judiciary.

The variation of different social groups is supportive of the author's hypothesis that unlike in Iran where the state is the main advocate of Islamand unlike in Turkey where the separation between the secular and the spiritual are too profound, in Egypt there has been an all-encompassing, bottom up Islamization (Abdo, 2000). However, there is no numerical evidence to point us towards how support for political Islam has changed or increased, or even how much of the country supports different strands of political Islam. Abdo's book also suffers from being outdated, since it was published in 2000. Furthermore, the author seems to generalize the 'Islamized masses', without differentiating that different Muslims and Islamic groups within society may not all be seeking political Islam. Sometimes I feel as though the author is indicating that all those who are devout Muslims or who are striving towards Islam have the same political objectives and hold the same agendas.

The article R*evelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam* by Thomas J. Butko argues that political Islamic movements in reality are not a result of religious groups who are concerned with adhering to their faith. Rather, the author argues that these groups have political agendas and are revolutionizing Islam to suit their own agendas. According to Butko the advocates of such ideas

are working to de-legitimize the political hierarchy. The author's work attempts to prove that Islamic movements are focused on overthrowing governing regimes in pursuit of the acquisition of political, economic and social power (Butko, 2004).

This piece of literature as provides an interesting outlook on the topic. The author's hypothesis is that the rise of political Islam is equated with authoritarian rule and lack of political plurality. However, Butko's argument is that the primary reason for the rise of political Islam is a political one; it is that anti-government groups want to unify a revolutionary force to gain power. I feel like Butko generalized the rise of political Islam and linked it too much to the political struggle of Islamic organizations, ignoring the different strands of political Islam, how it changed and even how it matured within different groups in society. Having said this, the author also draws interesting comparisons between Antonio Gramsci's Marxist perceptions of the state and those of Islamist thinkers such as Sayyed Qutb (Butko, 2004, p. 48). Moreover I find that Butko's article provides a very strong theoretical approach to his thesis; he argues from a Marxist viewpoint and makes good mentions of economic implications and classism (Butko, 2004). The main problem that can be identified with this approach however is that by associating the rise of support for Islamist ideology and political Islam with economic disparities and class, Islamist movements are reduced to a result of the socioeconomic circumstances that apparently gave birth to them. The participants, advocates and thinkers of political Islam's unique voice will be ignored and we will begin to categorize them with the participants, advocates and thinkers of every socioeconomic struggle. Understanding the true depth of the struggle, rise and development of political Islam will need a much more refined strategy of analysis. We cannot always categorize people and ideas as something between Marxist and liberal.

What is political Islam?' by Charles Hirschkind is a very short piece of literature, however it serves as a very well informed and interesting article. Instead of simply looking into what political Islam is or means, Hirschkind offers a criticism to the contemporary framework used by most scholars when researching the topic of political Islam. What he also does is suggest ways to rethink this framework (Hirschkind, 1997). Moreover, Hirschkind compensates for where Butko limits himself. Butko raises an interesting point regarding the claim that Islamic activists are advocating Islam for political purposes.

He identifies a problem with this point and questions it by asking, "In what way does the distinction between the political and nonpolitical domains of social life hold today?" (Hirschkind,1997, p.13). He goes on to mention that numerous academics have argued that political Islam is merely the expansion of Islam from its proper place in people's hearts and into the political sphere of life. However, political Islam is rarely researched as a correlation to the rising power and involvement of the state into spheres of life it did not traditionally interfere with. Hirschkind points out that in order to pursue any social activism or community action, Islamic groups have to pursue political power. For example, the curriculum in both public and private schools in Egypt must be approved by the government, thus in order to

promote certain Islamic practices within the education system, either the state must agree or you enter into competition with the state. As a result of Hirschkind's way of rethinking the framework of discussion regarding political Islam, I felt that his ideas were much deeper and more informed than those of Thomas J. Butko, who placed too large a difference between the spiritual and political in Islam (Butko, 2004). Hirschkind's main argument is that the use of terms such as political Islam is insufficient as the termsuggests that something has been added to Islam and that political Islam is out of place.

Everywhere on the rise is an article about the rise of political Islam, published by the Economist. The article specifically focuses on the success of Egypt's Islamists. The author argues that this success marks a trend in the Middle East and that with Egypt being so influential it may provide an example to other countries in the region (Fayoum, 2011). The key reason I chose to review this article is because it was written following the 2011 revolution in Egypt. It takes a look at the contemporary issues surrounding the topic of political Islam in Egypt; it addresses many of the questions that have become common in the discussion surrounding Egypt's future. Moreover it differentiates between different Islamic groups and addresses the reason for their successful growth separately. The author draws our attention to the similarities and differences between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi movement and explains their goals. The article is short and it lacks much depth or detail, which is its main drawback (Fayoum, 2011). Moreover it does not examine the rise of Islamist groups within a historical framework or context and does not make a mention of how the groups it distinguished were born or how they developed. However, it serves as a good starting point and the author makes some very good points that if further researched and expanded.

METHODS

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited from governmental organizations and streets in 2 cities in Egypt (Benha and Cairo) between July and August 2012. A sample size of at least a 100 was aimed for and all consecutive employees were interviewed. Adults aged above 18 were included in the study. Participants were excluded from the study if they refused to share in the study or were not Egyptians. Twenty three refused to participate in the study, nineteen females and four males. All of these subjects were excluded and a final number of over 100 Egyptians participated in the study. The interviews lasted about ten minutes. Few of them agreed to record the interview or video tape it. The nature and scope of the study was discussed with each participant and verbal consent was obtained from all participants before the interview.

Measures

Data was collected by way of face to face semi-structured interview. A pre-designed questionnaire was used to extract socio-demographic and political information. A set of ten questions were incorporated in each interview. The questionnaire used as our study instrument was completely devised by us and has not been validated in any earlier study. However, a pilot analysis was undertaken on 10 individuals and then it was revised. We found the final form useful and easy to apply without leaving too many ambiguities.

Statistical Analysis

Analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 19). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize socio-demographic and political characteristics of the sample.

Chi square test was used in comparing non-parametric data. All statistical tests were considered significant at p=0.05. Regression analysis was used to investigate the predictors of people who believe that democracy will reduce violence.

RESULTS

The mean age of the group was 41.1 years, SD=11.8, range (19-67 years). The Majority of the sample was males (74.0%). The most frequent age group at time of presentation of the sample was 33-34 years (11 %) and 54-56 years (15%). All the subjects participated in the study were Egyptians, the highest level of education for the majority of them was University Education 87 (87%), 67 males and 20 females with no significant differences (x^2=3.2, DF=1, p=0.07), and living in urban areas 100 (100%).

Gender and political characteristics

Twenty six (26%) of the entire sample reported being members of political parties (2 females, 2%, and 24, 24%, males). Among this group 9 were members of Alnoor party (Islamic); 7 Freedom and Justice party (Islamic); 6 United Social party; 2 Wafd party (libral); 1 Tommorow (libral); 1 Karama party (libral). Most of were able to answer questions about the history of their party, with the exception of. There was significant differences of more males joining political parties (x^2=6.1,df=1, p=0.01).

Twenty out of the 26 were between the age of 25 to 43 years. Five (5%) participants were members of Islamic group (4 males, and 1 females), all of them were above 45 years of age and all of them were member of Muslim brotherhood.

There was no significant difference between gender in this issue (x^2=0.1, DF=1, p=0.8). Ninety three (93%) agreed on the democratic process (69 males and 24 females) with no significant differences (x^2=0.03, df=1, p=0.9). Eighty seven (87%) shared in the parliament election (66 males and 21 females) with no significant differences (x^2=1.2, df=1, p=0.3).

Eighty four (84%) shared in the presidential election (66 males and 18 females) with significant differences where males shared more (x^2=5.7, df=1, p=0.02). Eighty one (81%) believed that democracy will reduce violence as a way of expressing opinion within Egyptian borders (61 males and 20 females) with no significant differences (x^2=0.6, df=1, p= 0.5). Meanwhile 74% (56 males and 18 females) said that democracy will reduce aggression outside Egyptian borders with no significant differences (x^2=1.1, df=1, p=0.3).

Sixty percent believed that political Islam is an important part of the democratic process in Egypt (44 males and 16 females) with no significant differences (x^2=0.01, df=1, p=0.9). Finally, 78 % were optimistic about the future (60 males and 18 females) with no significant differences (x^2=1.1, df=1, p=0.3). Table 1 showsrelationship of gender to political.

Table 1 relationship of gender to political attitude (% within the same gender)

Variable	Male (%)	Female (%)	P
- Member of a political party	24 (32.4)	2 (7.7)	0.01
- Member of religious group	4 (5.4)	1 (3.8)	0.8
- Accept the political process	69 (93.2)	24 (92.3)	0.9
- Shared in the parliament election	66 (89.2)	21 (80.8)	0.3
- Shared in the presidential election	66 (89.2)	18 (69.2)	0.02
- Agree that democracy reduce violence inside Egyptian borders	61 (83.6)	20 (76.9)	0.5
- Agree that democracy reduce violence outside Egyptian borders	56 (80.0)	18 (90.0)	0.3
- Believe that political Islam is essential part of democracy in Egypt	44 (60.3)	16 (61.5)	0.9
- Optimistic about the future	60 (82.2)	18 (72.0)	0.3

Table 2 relationship of education to political attitude (% within education)

Variable	University graduate (%)	Non university Graduate (%)	P
- Member of a political party	25 (28.7)	1 (7.7)	0.1
- Member of religious group	4 (4.6)	1 (7.7)	0.6
- Accept the political process	81 (93.1)	12 (92.3)	0.9
- Shared in the parliament election	75 (86.2)	12 (92.3)	0.5
- Shared in the presidential election	74 (85.1)	10 (76.9)	0.5
- Agree that democracy reduce violence inside Egyptian borders	72 (83.7)	9 (69.2)	0.2
- Agree that democracy reduce violence outside Egyptian borders	65 (81.3)	9 (90.0)	0.5
- Believe that political Islam is essential part of democracy in Egypt	57 (66.3)	3 (23.1)	0.003
- Optimistic about the future	68 (80.0)	10 (76.9)	0.8

Table 3 predictors of reporting that democracy will reduce aggression

Variable	P	OR (95 % CI)
- Gender	0.5	2.18 (0.19-24.79)
- Education	0.03	13.64 (1.35-137.51)
- Age	0.8	0.98 (0.88-1.10)
- Member of a political party	0.7	76.18 (0.0-1.28)
- Member of religious group	0.08	0.33 (0.001-1.44)
- Accept the political process	0.20	6.19 (0.37-103.75)
- Shared in the parliament election	0.30	0.17 (0.005-5.21)
- Shared in the presidential election	0.05	31.47 (1.07-929.93)
- Agree that democracy reduce violence outside Egyptian borders	0.002	137.19 (5.73-3274.46)
- believe that political Islam is essential part of democracy in Egypt	0.4	3.69 (0.24-436.48)
- optimistic about the future	0.02	28.64 (1.88-436.48)

Education and political characteristics

Eighty seven (87%) of the entire sample were university graduate (20 females, 20%, and 67, 67%, males) with no statistical differences (x^2=3.2, df=1, p=0.08). twenty six memmbers of political parties (25 university graduat and one non university graduate) with no statistical differences (x^2=2.6, df=1, p=0.1). five were member of Islamic group (4% university graduate and 1% non-university graduate) with no significant differences (x^2=0.2, df=1, p=0.6). Ninety three agreed to support the democratic process (81% university graduate and 12% non-university graduate) with no significant differences (x^2=0.01, df=1, p=0.9). Eighty seven shared in parliament election (75% university graduate and 12% non-university graduate) with no significant difference (x^2=0.4, df=1, p=0.7). Eighty four shared in the presidential election (74% university graduate and 10% non-university

graduate) with no significant differences (=0.6, df=1, p=0.5). Eighty one reported that democracy will reduce violence as a way of expressing political opinion within the Egyptian borders (72%university graduate and 9% non-university graduate) with no significant differences (^{2}=1.6, df=1, 0.2). Seventy four reported reduction of violence outside Egyptian borders as a consequence of democracy (65% university graduate and 9% non-university graduate) with no significant differences (^{2}=0.5, df=1, p=0.5). Sixty believed that Islam should be essential part of democracy in Egypt (57% university graduate and 3% non-university graduate) with significant difference where university graduate believe in that more (^{2}=8.9, df=1, p=0.003). Seventy eight optimistic about the future (68% university graduate and 10% non-university graduate) with no significant differences (^{2}=0.07, df=1, p=0.8).

Predictors for reporting less violence as a consequence of democracy

In looking for predictors of the belief that democracy will reduce violence as a way of expressing political opinion, we conducted binary regression analysis with the question of do you believe that democracy will reduce violence as a way of expressing opinion among Islamic groups within Egyptian borders?, as a dependent variable and both demographic and other questions related to political attitudes as independent variables. The significant predictors were: being university graduate (nearly fourteen times more than non-university graduate); shared in presidential election (thirty one times more than those who did not share); with the belief that democracy will reduce aggression outside Egyptian borders, and with optimistic attitude to future (see table 3 for Odd Ratio and P value).

In conducting further regression analysis by controlling for age, education and gender there was no change in significant variables. Interestingly by removing one variable in each step both being optimistic about the future and reduction of violence outside Egyptian borders were highly significant (OR= 0.1, 95% CI=0.03-0.31, P=0.000; OR=0.1, 95% CI=0.03-0.36, P= 0.000).

DISCUSSION

In this study, males join political parties significantly more than females (p=0.01). However, both of them shared in the democratic process, either parliament or presidential election, with no significant differences. This is could be an inherent fear from the pre-revolution dictator regime which created sense of danger in the political process. Participants in the study reported high rates of younger age group sharing in the political parties, but older age group joining Islamic group. This could reflect that political oppression pushed people to be members in Islamic group as the only way of expressing the political activity in old days, but now with the freedom of forming political parties the younger age group prefer to join the political parties to express opinion and having political activity.

Pew Research Center in May 2012 found that Egyptians continue to voice confidence in democracy. Two-thirds consider it preferable to any other kind of government, while just 13% believe it doesn't really matter what kind of government rules the country. Roughly six-in-ten (61%) think democracy is best-suited for solving the country's problems, while only 33% say a leader with a strong hand would be better equipped for dealing with these challenges. This is consistent with our results where 93% of our sample agreed that democracy is the best way to run the country.

Also Pew Research Center reported that Egyptians want Islam to play a major role in society, and most believe the Quran should shape the country's laws, although a growing minority expresses reservations about the increasing influence of Islam in politics. In our study we found 60% believed that Islam showed be involved in the democratic process of the country. This was significant predictor factor in people reported that democracy will reduce violence. Interestingly it remained significant after controlling for all other factors.

A long tradition of research into political culture argues that greater support for core liberal democratic values leads to a rejection of destructive political activities and reduced support for violent politics. Policy makers have long drawn on this line of enquiry, arguing that democracy can reduce violent political activity such as terrorism. Unfortunately, there have been few direct tests of the hypothesis that mass-level support for democratic values correlates with the rejection of violence. Our results support this view where 81% of Egyptians agree that democracy will reduce aggression within Egyptian borders and 74% support reduction of aggression outside Egypt.

However, our results are inconsistent with Erica Chenoweth (2006) longitudinal analysis of 119 countries for the period 1975-97. She found support that terrorist groups prevalent in democracies and found support for the hypothesis that intergroup competition, motivated by the competitiveness of political regime, explains an increase in terrorist groups. The differences could be that our results represent a small Egyptian sample expressing their attitude without actual experience of democratic process. If Erica Chenoweth view is correct the question here will be why terrorist group are prevalent in democracies and why do individuals and groups resort to terrorist violence rather than legal channels to express their grievances? And is that going to be true in the new Egyptian experience after the revolution?

As this current work provides a starting point for investigation into attitudes regarding views toward the impact of democracy on violence, future analyses should incorporate additional explanatory variables, and analyze data from large group of publics after few years of democratic experience to answer the above questions.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. Firstly, limited sample size represents only urban population. Secondly, all our measures were self-reported. Thirdly, the participants were from two cities which are not national representation. Fourthly, I had very limited time during my summer holiday in Egypt. Finally, this study was carried out in 2012, much change have taken place and continues to take place since and future research should note these changes. However, the present study provides a good opportunity to examine very sensitive issues in an Islamic conservative society. Future research needs to assess the mechanisms that intervene between expressing political views and aggressive behaviors.

CONCLUSION

In this study, males join political parties significantly more than females (p=0.01). However, both of them shared in the democratic process, either parliament or presidential election, with no significant differences. Participants in the study reported high rates of younger age group sharing in the political parties, but older age group joining Islamic group. This current work provides a starting point for investigation into attitudes regarding views toward the impact of democracy on violence; future analyses should incorporate additional explanatory variables, and analyze data from larger group of the public.

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