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Democratic Culture and Islam Intellectual Origins and Macro-Context

Abstract. Most theories about the negative relationship between Islam and democracy rely on an interpretation of the Islamic political tradition. More positive accounts are also anchored in the same tradition, interpreted in a different way. While some scholarship relies on more empirical observation and analysis, there is no single work which systematically demonstrates the relationship between Islam and democracy. This study is an attempt to fill this gap by defining Islam empirically in terms of several components and democracy in terms of the components of democratic culture-social capital, political tolerance, political engagement, political trust, and support for the democratic system-and political participation. The theories which assert that Islam is inimical to democracy are tested by examining the extent to which the Islamic and democratic components are negatively associated.

This study found that Islam defined by two sets of rituals, the networks of Islamic civic engagement, Islamic social identity, and Islamist political orientations (Islamism) does not have a negative association with the components of democracy. The only negative relationship is found between Islamism and tolerance toward Christians.

Keywords: spiritual culture, new values, world landmarks, Islamic culture.

A global tendency in the post-cold war period is the increase in the number of democratic or democratizing regimes. However, this tendency does not occur in most predominantly Muslim states (Freedom House 2002, Lipset 1994, Huntington 1997, 1991). On the basis of Freedom House's Index of Political Rights and Civil Liberty in the last three decades, Muslim states have generally failed to establish democratic politics. In that period, only one Muslim country has established a full democracy for more than five years, i.e. Mali in Africa. There are twelve semi-democratic countries, defined as partly free. The rest (35 states) are authoritarian (fully not free). Moreover, eight of the fifteen most repressive regimes in the world in the last decade are found in Muslim states. This is a significant finding. In virtually every region of the world – Asia, Africa, Latin America, the former USSR, and Eastern Europe – the democratic tendency is strong. Authoritarian politics has been declining in non-Muslim states, while in Muslim states it has been relatively constant. Moreover, the collapse of the USSR was followed by the rise of new nationstates, six of which have Muslim majorities: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Within these Muslim countries, based on the Freedom House index, authoritarian regimes have emerged, while within their non-

Muslim counterparts in the former USSR democratic regimes have been the norm [1, p. 205].

Cyprus is also an interesting case. The country is divided into Greek and Turkish Cyprus, and their democraticness varies. The Greek side is more democratic. One aspect of the third wave of democratization, to quote Huntington (1991), is the rise of democratic regimes in Eastern Europe. However, two predominantly Muslim countries, Albania and Bosnia, have been the least democratic in the region.

Students of Islam commonly acknowledge that the Arab World or the Middle East is the heart of Islamic culture and civilization. Islam has been almost identical with the Arab world. Muslim elites, activists, or intellectuals from this region, compared to other regions, are the most willing to articulate their Islamic identity, solidarity, and brotherhood as reactions against non-Muslim culture and politics. Unfortunately, most regimes of the region are authoritarian. The question is: why is democracy rare in Muslim states, even in the current period of global democratization? If democracy is introduced to a Muslim state, why is it likely to be unstable or unconsolidated? Is this phenomenon associated with Islam? Some students of Muslim society and of political science believe that Islam is responsible for the absence of democracy in the Muslim world

(Huntington 1997 1991, 1984; Kedourie 1994, 1992, Lipset 1994, Lewis 2002, 1993, Gellner 1994, Mardin 1995).

However, this claim has rarely been tested through systematic observation on the basis of measures of the two critical concepts, i.e. Islam and democracy, and how the two may be systematically associated. This study intends to fill this gap through elaboration and testing of the arguments of the scholars who have preceded me. The claim that Islam is responsible for the lack of democracy or for unstable democracy in predominantly Muslim states must be evaluated as a problem of political culture in which political behavior, institutions, and performance are shaped by culture. The political culture approach is necessary to assess the core arguments and the logic underlying the analysis of Huntington and other critics of Islamic democracy. At the same time, Huntington and the others are not systematic in the way in which they construct their argument, nor do they provide satisfactory evidence to support their claim. This study is designed to approach the issue more systematically by deploying the civic culture perspective laid out initially by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963). In its focus on attitudes, beliefs, and orientations, this perspective is the closest to Huntington, while being scientifically more persuasive. Almond and Verba's Civic Culture is the first work which addresses systematically the problem of democracy from the political culture perspective. They define political culture as psychological orientation toward social objects, or as attitudes toward the political system and toward the self as a political actor (Almond and Verba 1963). This orientation includes individual knowledge or belief, feelings or affection, and evaluation or judgment of the political system in general, political inputs and outputs, and one's own role within the political system. Variation in these orientations and attitudes are believed to shape political participation and to effect democratic stability.

Almond and Verba believe that variation in political orientations produces three types of political culture: parochial, subject, and participant. In parochial political culture structural differentiation, for example between the religious and the political, is absent. People are unable to orient themselves towards structurally differentiated political systems. Individuals who adhere to this political culture tend to be apathetic or alienated from the political system. Unlike parochial culture, subject political culture tends to make people active towards structurally

differentiated political systems in general and towards the output side of the system, but passive towards the political input side. As with the parochial, the subject is characterized by an absence of orientation towards the self as a participant in the input side of the political process [2, p. 878].

Finally, the participant is characterized by the presence of orientations not only toward the structurally differentiated political system in general and the output side of the system but also toward the input side and the self as an active participant. The participant, however, does not eliminate either the parochial or the subject. The participant orientation is an addition. Therefore, participants do not necessarily leave their primordial orientation. For example, a devoutly religious individual can be an active participant, supporting specific government policies and articulating his or her views as to what the government should do. This mixed political culture is believed to have a positive impact on democratic stability. Almond and Verba's civic culture is in fact not merely participant political culture, but participant political culture *plus something else*, i.e. activism plus passivism, when viewed as a whole. The result is moderate, rather than radical, political behavior.

The orientation is not toward revolutionary but rather toward gradual change in the society and polity.

The civic culture syndrome has been strongly criticized (Barry 1970, Pateman 1971, Muller and Seligson 1994, Tarrow 1996) but remains resilient, at least in the scholarship of democracy in the developed nations.¹ The increase in the number of democracies in the world has raised the question of the extent to which the new democracies can become stable or consolidated. In attempting to answer this question, a significant number of studies have turned back substantively to the civic culture syndrome. Inglehart even proclaimed «the renaissance of political culture» in which political culture is believed to be a crucial factor to explain democratic stability (1988). Or, as a counter to Skocpol's idea of «bringing the state back in,» he suggested the idea of «bringing the people back in» to explain political phenomena, especially democratic stability (1997) [3, p. 89]. Regardless of their conclusions, Norris' *Critical Citizens* (1999) or her *Democratic Phoenix* (2002), for example, are studies about global support for democracy and political participation among people which are theoretically guided by the civic culture syndrome. Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993) is probably the most cited recent work which

revives the idea of civic culture to explain democratic performance. It has brought back not only Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* but also Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* which emphasized the importance of political culture, and specifically civic association, for American democracy. All of these works argue that political culture cannot be ignored in democratic studies. Accordingly, I will discuss the issue of the relationship between Islam and democracy in this introduction according to the logic of the civic culture research tradition. Democratic culture and behavior are understood as composed of several components: secular civic engagement, interpersonal trust, tolerance, political engagement, support for democratic system, and political participation. The claim that Islam is inimical to democracy can therefore be evaluated by exploring the extent to which Islam has a negative relationship with support for secular civic engagement, interpersonal trust, tolerance, political engagement, and political participation in addition to support for the democratic system. Before discussing these issues, I will offer a brief overview of how religion and democratic culture have generally been addressed in social science.

Religion and Democratic Culture

All important works on the association between political culture and democracy recognize the role of the religious factor. Tocqueville revealed how religion (values and association) positively influenced American democracy, while Putnam found that Catholicism in Italy has a negative relationship with democratic performance. Inglehart (1999, 1997, 1988) in a multi-national study found that difference in religious tradition produces difference in interpersonal trust as a crucial component of democratic culture, which in turn affects democratic stability. Why and how does religion shape political culture? The influence of religion on culture depends on the importance of religion in a society. If religion is important to a person, it may influence his or her way of viewing and evaluating other aspects of human life. The more important a person considers religion in his or her life the more likely he or she is to view other aspects of life from a religious perspective. This likely impact of religion on politics lies in the nature of religion itself, *i.e.* «a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of the general order of existence and clothing these conceptions

with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic» (Geertz 1973, 30). The religious and the political interact because the latter also deals with individual moods, motivations, and interests. Religion acts to establish long lasting moods and motivations because it is a system of values. Value change does not occur easily since it is rooted in metaphysical beliefs (Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere 1995, 76) [4, p. 475].. This does not mean that values cannot change, or are presumed to be changeless essences. They are not changeless essences but rather patterns of belief that are relatively stable in time and place, and therefore may have a relatively independent impact on human attitudes and behavior (cf. van Deth and Scarbrough 1995, 37). Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere (1995, 77) argue that «value change may be better understood as a complex process of einterpreting old, highly abstract value concepts. «...conceptualizing value change as a process of changing interpretations in the process of value change.» In addition, value change may occur without corresponding social change. To change a value system requires among other things a reinterpretation of old concepts. Conflict frequently occurs, in which conservative interpreters may prevail, stabilizing and legitimating old values in the process. There is no essentialism in this understanding of value, but rather a stabilization of particular values through the maintenance of dominant interpretations (cf. van Deth and Scarbrough 1995, 37). Which interpretation is dominant in a community is a matter of empirical observation rather than speculation.

Social scientists are split into three camps regarding the relationship between religion and politics. [5, p. 278-279]. The first camp claims that religion is a conservative force that constrains social and olitical change, *i.e.* political modernization. The second claims that the significance of religion in politics declines as modernization succeeds. The third believes that religion, at least indirectly, contributes to political modernization. Social scientists have traditionally treated religion as a source of political stability.³ It is believed to provide supernatural justification or legitimacy for inequality in society. In the Marxian perspective, for example, religion is «the opium of the people» in the sense that it makes us unaware of real problems faced in daily life by redirecting attention from our current condition to something else, to the elusive other world. Religion is believed to alienate people from this world. This characteristic of religion in a community of unequals tends to make religion pro

status quo because the inequality is metaphysically justified.⁴ It discourages citizens from participating in politics. This Marxian perspective is similar to the modernization or political development theory in the 1960s, in which religion is likely to discourage people from orienting themselves to politics. Religion is believed to be an element in a traditional parochial political culture (Almond and Verba 1963). Modernization theorists argued that modernization, characterized by social differentiation or division of labor and by rationalization in society, makes the role of religion in society, and especially in the polity, decline (Billings and Scott, 1994). However, structural differentiation does not necessarily make religion insignificant in politics. The compensatory characteristics of religion may also be transformed into “a politically activating religion when infused with a community, rather than an individual, spirit.” (Leege 1993, 15). Religion is believed to have power to create social solidarity, produce a sense of community. This sense of community may in turn function to mediate collective action, which is crucial in democracy [6, p. 265].

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is the *locus classicus* for the argument of the indirect role of religion in democracy. Among Americans, as Tocqueville witnessed them, religion helped resolve the existential problem, i.e. fear of nothingness, because religion brought the idea of eternity and hope (2000, 284). Religion also justifies equality and freedom, which cannot be realized if religion mixes directly with political affairs. In his words, «When religion seeks to found its empire only on the desire of immortality that torments the hearts of all men equally, it can aim at universality; but when it comes to be united with a government, it must adopt maxims that are applicable only to certain people. So, therefore, in allying itself with political power, religion increases its power over some and

loses the hope of reigning over all» (284). That is how Americans, according to Tocqueville, perceived religion. In this sense, religion is crucial to politics, but the two are not mixed. Religion itself inspires or even constitutes the separation of church and state. «In so far as a nation takes on a democratic social state», according to Tocqueville's interpretation of the Americans' mores, «it becomes more and more dangerous for religion to unite with authority; for the time approaches when power is going to pass from hand to hand ... when men, laws, and constitutions themselves will disappear or be modified daily ... Agitation and instability are due to the nature of democratic republics» (285).

References

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Демократиялық мәдениет, ислам интеллектуалының пайда болуы және макро-контекст

Мақалада ислам мәдениеті негізделген функционалдық және қоғамдағы демократия ерекшеліктері қарастырылған және Ислам мәдениетінің экономикалық жүйесінің жеткен жетістіктердегі орны талқыланған.

Түйін сөздер: сопылық, рухани мәдениет, жаңа құндылықтар, дүниетанымдық бағдарлар, ислам мәдениеті.

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Демократическая культура, происхождение интеллектуала ислама и макро-контекст

В статье рассматриваются принципы демократии как система функционирования Исламского общества, а также описывается роль культуры демократии в успешности Исламской экономической системы.

Ключевые слова: духовная культура, новые ценности, мировоззренческие ориентиры, исламская культура.