

OUR MISSION

The Middle East and North Africa Politics Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) was established in 2018 to support, develop and publish research on the politics of the MENA region. It seeks to fully integrate the rigorous study of the politics of the Middle East with the broader discipline of Political Science. It serves as an institutional home for the community of political scientists dedicated to the Middle East. This Newsletter is a forum for discussion of research and issues of interest to the community, and is produced with the support of the Project on Middle East Political Science.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

A Note from the Section Chair

We are delighted to present the Spring 2020 of the APSA MENA Politics Newsletter. The MENA Politics Section continues to thrive in the second year since its creation, with a rapidly growing membership, a popular Twitter feed (@apsamena), a diverse array of panels at the APSA Annual Meeting, three Section Awards to be announced, and a robust set of programming to support Section members, such as the annual MENA Junior Scholars Research Workshop. We look forward to continuing to grow and evolve over the coming year, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This issue of the Newsletter features a fascinating glimpse at publication trends for Middle East research in top Political Science journals, and three special sections, each with its own guest editor. The first special section, organized and edited by Lisel Hintz, examines the intersection between domestic politics and foreign policy in Turkey. The second special section, organized and edited by Nadav Shelef, looks at the state of democracy in Israel. Finally, the third special section, organized and edited by me, presents papers from a workshop on Islamist movements at war.

We hope you enjoy the research and analysis presented in this edition of the MENA Politics Newsletter. We look forward to featuring a major symposium on Gender and Politics in the Middle East and North Africa in a coming issue, and welcome your suggestions and proposals for special sections in future issues. Over the coming year, the Section will elect new officers, rotate the Newsletter Editorial Board, and search for a new Newsletter Editor. We plan to continue to innovate with new ways to reach out to and support Section members grappling with the global pandemic and escalating challenges to academic research in the field.

Marc Lynch

Chair of the MENA Politics Section and Newsletter Editor

Perna BalaEddy

Newsletter Assistant Editor

NOTE FROM APSA

Hello from APSA's Department of International Programs. We hope you and your loved ones are staying well, safe and healthy wherever you are. Like many of you, the APSA staff is now working remotely and many of our plans and programming for the coming months have been significantly impacted by the rapid spread of coronavirus.

With the disruption in working, teaching, and research created by the pandemic, APSA has developed a [COVID-19 resource page](#) to provide updates and support to our members. We've also launched a beta version of [APSA Educate](#), which is an online library for political science teaching and learning materials. All materials on Educate are open resources and available without charge. You can easily search for, submit, and save educational materials (such as course syllabi) to your personal library. Another useful resource is [APSA Preprints](#) – which is a free-to-access prepublication platform dedicated to early research outputs in political science and related disciplines. It offers rapid turnaround times and allows for quick dissemination of working papers. Especially given the rise in journal review times, preprints may be a good option for scholars looking to stake an early claim to their research, obtain a DOI, and solicit feedback from peers. For example, some scholars have already started posting research around COVID-19.

As for APSA's MENA Programming, some projects are still going forward while others have been postponed. The 2020 APSA MENA Workshop on [“Securitization and Insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa,”](#) scheduled for June in Rabat, Morocco has been postponed indefinitely. We are in discussion with co-leaders, Samer Abboud (Villanova University, USA), Zaynab El Bernoussi (Al Akhawayn University, Morocco), Omar Dahi (Hampshire College, USA), and Salim Hmimnat (Mohamed V University, Morocco) about a virtual program this summer to offer research feedback and thematic discussions prior to an in-person workshop at some point in the future.

Congratulations to all who were accepted to present at the Junior Scholar Research Workshop this year's [APSA Annual Meeting](#), which is scheduled to take place from September 10-13 in San Francisco, CA. As part of our annual programming, we are collaborating with the MENA Politics section and POMEPS to offer travel grants for 5 early-career scholars to attend the MENA Research Development Group (RDG) on September 9, which features a full day of research feedback and professional development discussions.

APSA renewed its partnership with IQMR and ICPSR to support scholars based in Arab MENA countries to undertake rigorous training in qualitative and quantitative methods. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, IQMR decided to [postpone](#) this year's activities and organize a double-sized program in 2021, while ICPSR decided to run its summer program [virtually](#). We have notified the 8 scholars selected for these two programs that we will defer our support to next year if they remain interested.

The [departmental collaboration initiative](#) continues to attract interest from faculty members and departments at Arab Universities. APSA is working with Alexandria University, Egypt and

University of Tunis El-Manar on tailored programs to local support graduate students and faculty members. We are also planning to convene a strategic planning workshop for faculty members from across the Arab world to share experiences and best practices on organizing projects within university departments.

Finally, the Arab Political Science Network (APSN) has postponed its annual Research Development Workshop scheduled for June in Beirut, Lebanon until further notice. However, APSN conference travel grants are still open until **June 18, 2020** for workshops and conferences that will take place later in 2020 or early 2021. APSN is also expected to be present at the APSA Annual Meeting in September and at MESA in October.

If you are interested in the learning more or getting involved with the APSA MENA Project, please contact us at menaworkshops@apsanet.org.

Best to all in the coming months and stay well!

Ahmed Morsy and Andrew Stinson
APSA MENA Project
American Political Science Association

THE MIDDLE EAST IN POLITICAL SCIENCE JOURNALS

What Do Political Scientists Study on the Middle East?

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a large, diverse region comprising at least 22 countries, with broad variation with respect to religion, language and ethnicity, economic systems and resource endowments, regime type, forms of social organization and state-society relations, and other factors. ^{i,ii} Anyone who teaches introductory survey courses on the region is (perhaps painfully) aware of the breadth of knowledge and expertise required to do justice to the region. In this piece, we take a close look at political science scholarship on the Middle East, focusing on what researchers study in terms of country coverage and the predominant topics addressed using cases from the region.

Our analyses are based on an original, comprehensive dataset of journal articles on Middle Eastern cases in comparative politics and international relations from 2000 through 2019 in a set of leading mainstream political science journals. Our sample of publications includes the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *World Politics*, *International Organization*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. This captures a set of widely cited general disciplinary journals; including security-focused journals such as *International Security* or *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, or other specialized journals such as *Party Politics* or *World Development* would likely have changed some of our findings on the margins.

We included articles on Arab countries, Turkey, Iran and Israel, along with publications covering aggregates such as the “Arab region,” “Middle East,” or “North Africa”. We dropped articles that do not entail at least one-third of the empirical evidence based on MENA cases. Our coverage spans the last two decades (2000 through 2019), which allows us to see trends over a period encompassing major events such as 9/11 or the Arab uprisings that have attracted global attention among policy-makers and scholars alike. The resultant dataset covers 20 years, 13 journals, 290 unique authors, and 222 articles, of which 113 are single-authored papers and 109 co-authored.

To contextualize our findings, it is important to note that Middle East focused research in the discipline does not constitute a large proportion of all published articles in mainstream political science journals. The discipline as a whole has witnessed a trend towards increased publishing in peer-reviewed journals over the past two decades. By our count, total articles published in the journals in our dataset have nearly doubled over the past 20 years, rising from 322 articles in 2000 to 649 in 2019. MENA-focused scholarship has also increased during this period, but not at the same rate. From 2000 to 2019, the number of articles per year focusing on the Middle East rose

from 4 to 18 articles, with a peak of 22 articles in 2016. As a percentage of journal content, this amounts to an increase from 1.2 percent in 2000 to 2.8 percent in 2019. As would be expected, articles on the region spiked after the Arab uprisings in 2011, but the proportion of published research on the Middle East remains marginal, as articles on the region never exceed 4 percent of total articles in the selected journals. Due to lack of data on coverage of other global regions, we cannot benchmark this finding in cross-regional comparative perspective. Nonetheless, for a region with at least 22 countries, this seems strikingly low.

What do political scientists study in the Middle East?

Descriptive analyses of our data present a picture of what political scientists study in research on the Middle East. In this essay, we focus on which countries receive the most scholarly attention and, among them, which topics are the primary subjects of research. Together, the results trace how scholarship on different countries in the region - or on the region as a whole - links to broader research programs in political science and how this has evolved over time.

Which countries? Geographic coverage of MENA-focused articles in political science

Which MENA countries or country groupings occupy the most publication “real estate”? Regional and multi-country coverage are the two most popular geographic categories with about 24 percent and 14 percent of geographic share, respectively.ⁱⁱⁱ Looking at articles focusing on one country (or a single conflict) within the region, Israel, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Turkey have the largest share of articles. Israel accounts for about 14 percent of all articles, Israel-Palestine about 10 percent, and Turkey about 7 percent. This is surprising given that Arab countries constitute the vast majority of countries in the region and yet none are represented in the highest shares of scholarship on the Middle East. (Although Palestine is an Arab country, the Israel-Palestine category only encompasses articles that focus on dyadic relations between the two countries - not on politics in Palestine itself.) Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq are the next most frequently studied countries, and receive the largest share of coverage among Arab countries in the dataset. Of the total share of articles in the dataset, those about 6 percent focus on Egypt, 5 percent on Lebanon, and 4.5 percent on Iraq.

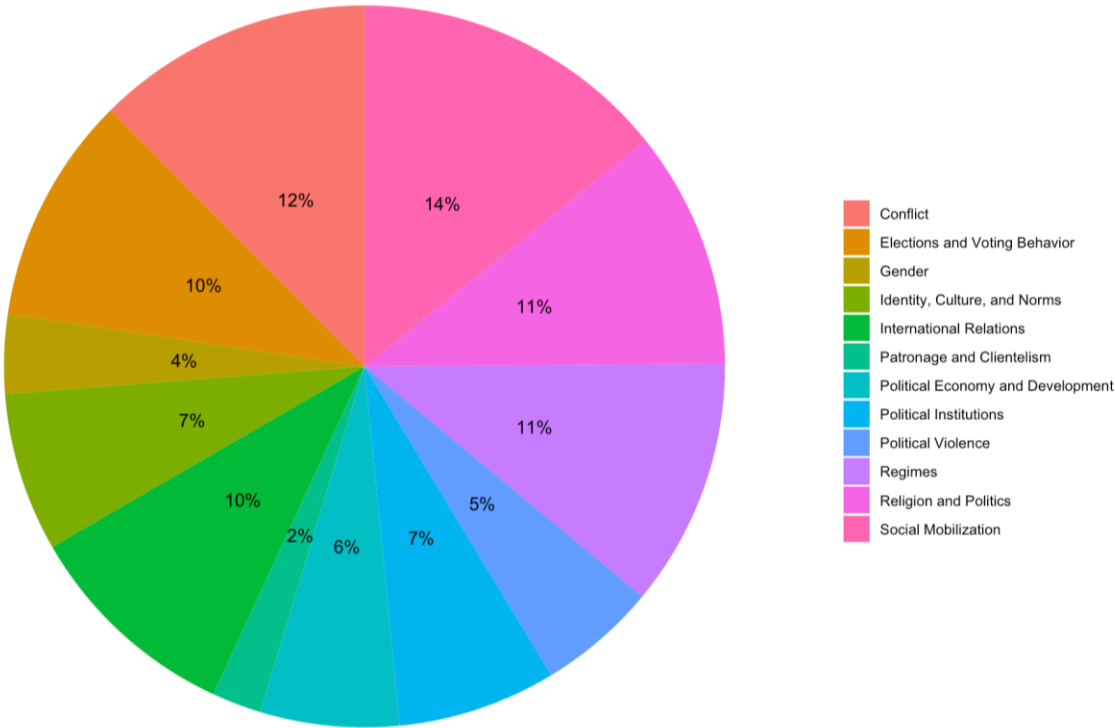
How has coverage of individual countries or country groupings evolved over the past two decades? Mirroring the geographic distribution of articles, regionally-focused and multi-country articles remain the most numerous over time. Those with a general regional focus increased substantially from 2009 to 2012, when they peaked and then gradually decreased, plateauing in recent years. Coverage of Tunisia and Egypt, both of which were the first movers in the Arab uprisings, did not immediately increase after 2011, no doubt reflecting the time lag required for data collection and analysis. In 2014, articles focusing on Egypt began to increase, with a steady albeit gradual climb since then. Coverage of Tunisia started to increase more recently, in 2017, but exhibit an uptick in the last two years covered in our dataset. Over the study period, published research on Israel and Israel-Palestine has remained relatively constant over the study period. In particular, articles on Israel peaked in 2009 and then remained high from 2013 to 2016, with a slight decrease in more recent years. Research on Israeli-Palestinian relations reached a high point in 2007, with a

marginal increase since 2013. Finally, coverage of Syria also shows some interesting trends. While no articles on Syria were published from 2000 to 2015, since then the country has received more extensive scholarly attention, likely as a result of the war and the ongoing refugee crisis.

Which topics and where?

Based on the full range of substantive areas of research addressed by the articles in the dataset, our coding scheme encompasses 12 different topics: Political regimes, which includes democracy, authoritarianism, and regime transitions; religion and politics, which includes political Islam; social mobilization and civil society; gender; political economy and development; patronage and clientelism; international relations, which includes interstate relations in the region, the foreign policy of MENA states, and anti-Americanism among Middle Eastern publics; political violence, which largely centers on studies of terrorism; conflict and conflict resolution, which includes international and civil wars; identity, which largely entails research on ethnic and sectarian politics; elections and voting behavior; and political institutions. This approach enables a detailed look at the array of research programs treated in scholarship on the Middle East, although we concede that some of these topics could be combined to generate a more aggregated coding scheme.

Figure 1: Topics in MENA-focused articles in selected political science journals, 2000-2019



The largest number of articles focuses on social mobilization and conflict, with 30 and 28 articles covering those topics respectively. Confirming the importance of the research program on persistent authoritarianism in the Middle East, articles on this topic constitute about 11 percent of

all MENA-focused publications in the selected journals. If research on political institutions and elections and voting are merged in - a logical coding rule in an alternative, more aggregated classification scheme - then scholarship on political regimes would constitute by far the largest share of scholarship on the Middle East in political science journals.

Conversely, the smallest share of MENA-focused articles center on the topic areas of gender and patronage and clientelism. The relatively low proportion of publications on the latter topic may seem surprising, given the growing importance of research on clientelism in the region in the past decade. In part, this finding may arise because of overlap with the category of “political economy and development.” In addition, because our coding criteria classify the primary topic based on the outcome in question, we may downplay the weight of this research program in MENA-focused political science scholarship.

The evolution of topics covered in MENA-focused scholarship exhibits variation in the rise and decline of distinct research programs. Research focusing on social mobilization and regimes spiked dramatically after the Arab uprisings in 2011. The widespread protests across the Arab world and their aftermath attracted broad attention from global media outlets, mirrored in the increase of academic work published on mobilization, civil society, persistent authoritarianism and emerging democracies immediately after 2011. Additionally, articles on social mobilization peaked again in 2018, likely as researchers carried out and analyzed additional data collection initiatives.

A similar initial spike did not occur in articles focusing on elections and voting behavior at the same point in time. Articles on this topic remained stable after 2011, with an increase between 2013 and 2015. Two factors are noteworthy here: first, the large share of articles on electoral politics in Israel and, second, the time lapse between mass mobilization and political change, on the one hand, and the holding of elections after incumbent autocratic regimes were ousted or at least conceded some political liberalization measures, on the other. Furthermore, publications on elections dropped in 2016 and remained low until 2019. Articles covering conflict in the region rose in 2016, increasing from 4 articles in 2015 to 9 articles in 2016. The geographic areas responsible for increased scholarly attention on conflict are Iraq, Israel and Israel-Palestine, and Syria, with less coverage on other conflict-affected countries such as Libya and Yemen.

Finally, articles focusing on political economy and development increased slightly after 2010. This is likely due in part to widespread demands by protestors for economic and social rights in addition to civic and political freedoms during the Arab uprisings. Nonetheless, political economy and development remain relatively marginal topics in MENA-focused scholarship, despite their importance in daily life to citizens in the region.

Which countries or groupings of countries generate the most empirical material for different research programs? A large share of articles on conflict and political violence are based on studies of Israel and Israel-Palestine, which collectively account for about 83 percent of articles on political violence and about 39 percent of articles on conflict. An additional 21 percent of all articles on conflict are based on studies of Iraq, while 11 percent focus on Syria. Research focusing on Israel also constitutes a large part of the research on elections and voting behavior, making up

roughly 44 percent of all articles on this topic. Lastly, articles on the region as a whole account for the overwhelming majority of articles on political regimes, and multi-country and region-wide studies generate much of the empirical material for publications on social mobilization and religion and politics. Of particular note, Egypt alone accounted for 13 percent of articles written on social mobilization.

Although the share of articles on the Middle East remains strikingly low, it has more than doubled in the past two decades. (Again, let's not get carried away here: The share of MENA-focused articles in the selected journals only amounts to about 4 percent of the total.) However, the distribution of country coverage and the array of research topics are uneven across scholarship on the Middle East.

The majority of articles in our dataset focus on the region as a whole or sub-regional aggregates such as the Levant, North Africa or the Gulf. Looking at scholarship on individual countries, Israel and, next, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict account for a major share of research, followed by scholarship on Turkey. In part, this may reflect data availability since, until recently at least, these countries and contexts generated more off-the-shelf data and may have offered more permissible research environments, depending on the precise topic in question. Arab countries constitute a lower share of published research in mainstream political science journals, with the highest proportion based on findings from Egypt. (Again, we do not mean to imply that Egypt or any Middle Eastern country, for that matter, accounts for a high proportion of scholarship in political science empirical research as a whole.)

Our analyses of over-time trends also point to the evolution of research programs in the region, with social mobilization, elections, and conflict becoming increasingly important in the wake of the Arab uprisings and the eruption of conflict in Syria and other countries in the region. These patterns will likely evolve as a result of the further tightening of restrictions on research activities by autocratic regimes, the constraints on data collection posed by the novel Coronavirus pandemic, and evolving research methods, some of which will actually facilitate data collection under different conditions.

RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

INTRODUCTION: DOMESTIC POLITICS IN TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY/TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY, INSIDE OUT

By **Lisel Hintz**

Turkey's foreign policy over the past several years has been characterized as increasingly unilateral, aggressive, and risk-tolerant, from the purchase of a NATO-incompatible missile defense system from Russia to its clashes in Syria and Libya with Moscow-backed fighters. These policy shifts, and the anti-Western rhetoric that accompany them, became starkly evident in the wake of the July 2016 coup attempt. Ankara's hostility toward the United States had been aroused by American support for a Syrian Kurdish militia against ISIS that Turkey deems a terrorist group. It was exacerbated by the Obama administration's hesitation immediately to condemn the coup plotters and Washington's ongoing refusal to extradite Fethullah Gulen, the Pennsylvania-based cleric Turkey blames for the failed putsch.

These policy and attitude shifts follow a pattern sketched in my recent book: they are not merely responses to a changing security environment but rather reflect earlier processes of internal and external contestation over what it means to be Turkish and what Turkey's domestic and foreign policy priorities should be.⁴ By taking its fight over Turkey's national identity to the foreign policy arena in the early 2000s, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was able to use EU conditionality levers to weaken and then reconfigure domestic institutions that opposed what I term its Ottoman Islamist understanding of Turkishness.

This symposium offers novel insights into this pattern of intersecting domestic politics and foreign policy in Turkey. **Ferhat Zabun** analyzes the role of the coup attempt in creating distrust of US intentions as well as the role of so-called "Eurasianist" influences on Turkey's policy of strategic ambiguity in balancing its relations with

the United States and Russia. **Sinem Adar** argues that the trauma of the coup attempt may have generated new motivations for militarization, but that without the earlier expansion of the domestic defense industry, these motivations would not have translated into a more "hard power"-oriented foreign policy. **Sibel Oktay** demonstrates the importance of getting our definitions right with her China-focused exploration of the Nationalist Action Party's lack of the policy leverage normally attributed to coalition partners. **Sercan Canbolat** presents a novel Turkish operational code analysis tool (TOCA) for studying the impact of AKP leaders' audience based adjustments in their speeches on foreign policy. Together these contributions offer a glimpse into a rich emerging literature on Turkish foreign policy.

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UNDERSTANDING TURKEY'S INCREASINGLY MILITARISTIC FOREIGN POLICY

By **Sinem Adar**

Since 2016, Turkish foreign policy has markedly shifted from soft power policies of the early 2010s towards a hard power approach manifesting at numerous fronts. These include unilateral military incursions into Northern Syria in 2016, 2018 and 2019, and the deployment of Turkish warships to guard drilling activities in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It also includes the signing of EEZ and military supports agreements with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), along with shipments of arms and contributions of Turkish troops and Syrian fighters to support the GNA in late 2019. Turkey's new military bases in the Middle East and North Africa, including in Qatar, further underline this hard power shift. These moves line Turkey firmly up against rivals from Russia to United Arab Emirates to Greece.

Scholars and experts have offered numerous explanations for Turkey's increasing use of military power. Some emphasize President Erdoğan's efforts to maintain domestic popularity.⁵ Others point to Ankara's attempts to recalibrate Turkey's position in a changing regional order, especially given the increasing insufficiencies of soft power politics to do so.⁶ Still others highlight identity-based shifts rooted in Islamist, neo-Ottomanist, and nationalist ideologies.⁷ As important and influential as these factors are to understand Turkey's changing foreign policy, they are not sufficient to explain the timing of this shift, nor how it compares with earlier periods in which threats of military invasion and cross-border operations played a significant role. This short essay focuses on the effects of the 2016 coup attempt to shed light on the question of timing, and provides insight into continuities and ruptures with the past.

A focus on domestic factors is a useful lens for understanding Turkey's foreign policy choices.⁸ Domestic events can strongly shape perceptions of threat, attitudes toward alliances, and definition of interests. The 2016 coup attempt shows how such domestic events bring familiar characteristics of Turkish politics into sharper relief, not only providing the ruling elites with the justification for a shift to hard power but also triggering a re-configuration of intra-state alliances in ways which placed narrow interests in the driving seat of foreign policy.

Still, as important as the coup attempt was for vindicating and mobilizing militarization, without the growth of the defense industry since the 1980s, a shift to a militaristic foreign policy would not have been practically possible. Reinforcing Ankara's self-perceptions of power, an indigenous military-industry complex motivates the ruling elites' reckless readiness to simultaneously fight at different fronts. In short, Turkey's new expansionist foreign policy has been enabled not only by the coup attempt but also by the decades-long developments in the defense industry.

The coup attempt: justification and

mobilization of militarization

In a speech he delivered in October 2016 to *muhtars* – locally elected heads of villages and city neighborhoods, President Erdoğan announced that Turkey's national security policy had fundamentally changed: "We have lost many generations in the fight against terrorism and in fratricides. We no longer want to carry the can. From now on, we will not wait until the threats are at our borders. We will no longer wait for the terrorist organizations to attack us; yet we will beat them to death wherever they mobilize."⁹ An attempt to pull up Turkey by its own bootstraps, Ankara's military incursion into Al-Bab (Syria) in 2016 was, Erdoğan noted in the same speech, part of this new policy. Based on the idea of "defending the territory and area" (*savunma sathı*), the new policy, he continued, was an adoption of the military strategy that had brought victory in the Turkish Independence War during 1919-1923.

Hard power is not exactly new, given Ankara's historical record. Military threats in 1998 to invade Syria due to its support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), cross-border operations in Iraq throughout the 1990s, the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and threats in 1936 and 1937 to invade Syria over a border dispute issue illustrate this. Linking the foreign to the domestic enables an understanding of how Turkish foreign policy has, since the establishment of the republic in 1923, been shaped by a collective anxiety over the state's perseverance (*devletin bekası*).¹⁰ The coup attempt accentuated this anxiety, providing the justification for the necessity of using hard power to defuse threats. The belief that the West, particularly the US, did not show enough solidarity with Turkey during the coup attempt added to an already existing sense of loneliness that had been triggered by disagreements over US support in the fight against ISIS for Syrian Kurdish forces, which Turkey considers an offshoot of the PKK. Combined, these anxieties intensified the sense of an increasing need for self-help and independency.

The coup attempt has also been central in re-configuring alliances within the state apparatus, making narrow interests more central to foreign policy choices. The ground for this was somewhat

laid following the June 2015 parliamentary elections, when, for the first time since 2002, Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its parliamentary majority due to the Kurdish and left-leaning Peoples' Democratic Party's (HDP) unprecedented passing of the 10% electoral threshold. Lacking the votes for a single-party government, the AKP went into a de facto alliance with the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and ramped up its own nationalist rhetoric. Soon after, the so-called Peace Process with the PKK came to a halt, armed conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK resumed, and AKP regained its majority in the November 2015 snap elections thanks to the votes that it gained from the MHP base. MHP's support to the AKP has since then been the key in Turkey's transition from a parliamentary system to a presidential one providing Erdoğan with expansive powers.

The MHP is, however, not alone in its support to Erdoğan. Following the coup attempt, the AKP incorporated various political and security factions that share a strong commitment to Turkey's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, despite partisan and ideological differences. Even though the background negotiations and compromises that led these factions to support President Erdoğan against the coup plotters will remain unclear in the near future, it is clear that the coup attempt presented these various groups a unique opportunity for logrolling. Erdoğan's personal ambition to remain in power conveniently overlapped with the increasing national security concerns as well as power aspirations of these actors, bringing Ottomanist ideals side by side with Eurasianist¹¹ and ultranationalist ones. By positioning himself as the embodiment of the will of "those who truly belong to the nation" (*yerli ve milli*) and as the charismatic defender of Turkey's territorial integrity, President Erdoğan became in July 2016 the "commander in chief" of Turkey's so-called second Independence War.¹² Since then, the AKP's militarism has intensified, going beyond a sole focus on preventing the so-called Kurdish threat at the Syrian border.

Defense industry as the enabling factor

Expansionist foreign policy aspirations do not necessarily imply an actual or perceived capacity to act on them. Without the cumulative growth in the defense industry over the last four decades, a pronounced shift to the current hard power approach would not have been possible. If the US embargo on arms sales following Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 was the first moment when Ankara realized the importance of a native defense industry to protect national interests, the end of the Cold War prompted a further recalculation that necessitated modifying Turkey's position in a changing world order. The volatile situation in the neighboring countries and the armed conflict with the PKK prompted Turkey to continue its defense investments during the 1990s. The same period also witnessed the establishment of new joint ventures between Turkish and Western companies.

Building on these earlier developments, the industry continued to grow rapidly under the AKP rule. Between 2010 and 2018, part of the period that overlapped with the seeming "soft power" era, Turkish military expenditure increased steadily from 13 billion USD to 22 billion USD.¹³ Aviation and defense exports rose from an annual 1.388 billion in 2013 to 2.035 billion in 2018,¹⁴ with around 60 percent of the aviation and defense products currently produced domestically.¹⁵ These developments are an evident source of pride for government officials. At public events, for instance, they often praise home-made drones produced by Baykar Savunma, a firm owned by the family of President Erdoğan's son-in-law, Selçuk Bayraktar, and by Turkish Aerospace Industries. The latter was first established in 1984 as a joint venture between Turkish and US partners, and restructured in 2005 with the acquisition of foreign shares by Turkish partners.¹⁶ Turkish drones have attracted international attention in the last few years, especially following their increasing deployment in Syria and Libya. The Turkish navy has also been an important pillar of Ankara's power aspirations in recent years, evidenced particularly by maneuvers in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁷ In short, the growth over time of an indigenous defense industry and, equally if not more important, the sense of power that it has reinforced in Ankara generates an

aggressive stance and readiness for military action in multiple spheres.

Is Turkey's militaristic foreign policy sustainable?

Ankara's recent foreign policy choices were prompted by the coup attempt, which not only provided justification for the necessity of an increased militarism beyond national borders, but also placed foreign policy choices in the hands of narrow interests. A full understanding of these choices would, however, be incomplete without taking into account the changes in the defense industry since 1980s. The sustainability of Turkey's hard power approach in the medium-to-long term is highly questionable, however, given the limitations that domestic factors also can pose. The rapid weakening of state institutions since the coup attempt, Erdoğan's growing legitimacy crisis in the aftermath of the 2019 municipal elections, the fragility of intra-state alliances, and last, but not least, a growing economic crisis – one that COVID-19 is already exacerbating – risk a clash between aspirations and realities.

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UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL ISLAMISTS' FOREIGN POLICY RHETORIC IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE: A TURKISH OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS APPROACH

By Sercan Canbolat

In January 2009, then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan stormed out of a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "I will never come back to Davos after this," he uttered in protest after sparring with Israeli President Shimon Peres. He kept his promise: Erdogan has not partaken in the forum since 2009. As Lisel Hintz notes, after the Davos

incident, many Muslim and Arab audiences in addition to his domestic supporters referred to Erdogan as the "conqueror of Davos," and increasingly viewed him as both a powerful regional leader and a protector of the Muslim world.¹⁸

Individual leaders have played an outsized role in Turkish politics. From the founding fathers like presidents Kemal Ataturk and Ismet Inonu to military general Kenan Evren to modern Islamist leaders such as Ahmet Davutoglu and Erdogan, Turkish politics is dominated by high-profile personalities. As powerful as individual-level factors can be, my research demonstrates that they are conditioned by audience effects. In my research, I focus on how foreign policy rhetoric by Turkey's Islamist leaders is conditioned by audience type: domestic vs. international. Such bifurcation allows a specification of the effects of audience on rhetoric, while providing insight into otherwise puzzling divergences in positions articulated by Justice and Development Party (AKP) leaders.¹⁹

This short essay draws on an at-a-distance analysis of the speeches Erdogan and former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu gave in Turkey (in Turkish) and abroad (in English), I demonstrate that 1) leaders alter their foreign policy profile and political beliefs depending on the type of their audience; and 2) idiosyncrasies of individual leaders make more difference than any overarching Islamist political ideology. While the 'automation turn' in political psychology has addressed many challenges associated with the study of political leaders from a distance, such as the paucity and low quality of text corpora as data,²⁰ automated at-a-distance analysis of verbal statements of political leaders to create leadership profiles has remained largely confined to English-language texts.²¹ To overcome this limitation, I employ a novel Turkish operational code analysis (TOCA) scheme, which is compatible with the Profiler Plus software and operational code analysis research program in the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA).

The remainder of this essay consists of three parts. First, I explain TOCA and underscore its

added value in the study of leaders and foreign policy decision-making in MENA. Second, I account for the need for, and significance of, factoring leader psychology in our understanding of Turkish politics and foreign policy. Lastly, I apply TOCA to illustrate how Turkish Islamists' sometimes confoundingly contradictory foreign policy rhetoric is contextually dependent on the nature of their audiences.

Profiling Leaders in Turkish: Introducing a New Tool

Since the introduction of automated coding schemes for leadership profiling in 1998, FPA research using leadership trait analysis (LTA) and operational code analysis (OCA) has made great advances with an increasing volume of research from seven publications in 1998²² to ninety-nine publications in 2019.²³ The diminished coding costs of using automated coding schemes for LTA and OCA—which run on Profiler Plus²⁴ and profilerplus.org—and advancements in the reliability and comparability of speech data played a major role in the development of leadership studies within the field of FPA.²⁵ Nevertheless, this automatization process, which rests on the analysis of verbal statements of leaders to create leadership profiles, has remained largely constrained in terms of language of text as data because the coding schemes can only process English-language texts. By confining both the quality and quantity of available data, language-boundedness of the automatization efforts has hampered the application of automated leadership profiling techniques beyond the Anglosphere.

Such limitations also militate against the scope of FPA research because most people in the world do not speak English as their first language. According to Ethnologue's projections, only 378 million of approximately 7.5 billion people speak English as their first language making up only five percent of the world population.²⁶ The problem for automated leadership assessment tools and FPA in general is that many texts are not available in English. Neither machine translation applications, e.g., Google Translate, nor human translation offer a suitable solution, because of issues that render machine translation substandard and the

cost of high-quality human translation exorbitant.

My colleagues and I recently developed a novel Turkish coding scheme for leadership analysis, called TOCA, to contribute to efforts in addressing the afore-mentioned void in Turkish studies.²⁷ TOCA allows future researchers to address novel empirical questions and to revisit established insights using a more rigorous and contextualized methodology. The TOCA provides a handy and pertinent tool to address the following research questions, which prove perennial in scholarly discussions of Turkey: 1) How do Turkish leaders' idiosyncratic political beliefs influence their decision-making? 2) How do beliefs of Turkey's secular leaders differ from those of political Islamists? 3) How do political beliefs of key decision-makers influence certain high-stakes Turkish foreign policy decisions such as the Cyprus issue, the second Gulf war, Syrian civil war, and the Kurdish issue?

There are three main utilities of TOCA and non-English coding schemes in general:²⁸ 1) TOCA augments the size of Turkish text as data on which leadership profiles can be constructed; 2) TOCA is instrumental in generating more precise and contextualized profiles of Turkish leaders because they are predicated on leaders' words in their native tongue; and 3) non-English coding schemes expand the scholarship on political leadership beyond the Anglo-North American core and contribute to the efforts in decentering the FPA and, by extension, the International Relations (IR) field.

Contributions of Leader Psychology in Understanding Turkish Politics

Since the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923, most Turkish political leaders have come to power with a lofty vision. For instance, while Bulent Ecevit wanted to see a Turkey "where humanistic values had preeminence," Suleyman Demirel sought to "create a Great Turkey." Personalized tug-of-war between certain Turkish leaders, such as the Bulent Ecevit-Suleyman Demirel and Tansu Ciller-Mesut Yilmaz rivalries, has had far-reaching effects on the country. Heper

and Sayari note that Turkish politics has always been “a stage for leader-based politics,” as the Islamic tradition exalts the role of a strong and charismatic leader in maintaining order, enables personalities to shape domestic politics and foreign policy.²⁹ Kesgin argues that individual leaders, prime ministers, and now presidents have enjoyed both legal powers defined by the Turkish constitution and informal powers derived from their personality and charisma.³⁰ By focusing on certain decision-makers and their leadership traits in media coverage and framing of politics, the Turkish media also plays a key role in personalizing politics.³¹

The audience factor has become ever more rampant in populist and polarized political systems, with Turkey being one of the primary cases of this phenomenon.³² While the audience effect impinges upon Turkish leaders’ rhetoric in general, the effect may be more pronounced in the foreign policy realm due to its double-sided audience, that is domestic vs. international. For example, Erdogan’s foreign policy speeches in Turkish have been the most vitriolic and belligerent during critical electoral cycles such as the 2015 and 2018 general elections and the 2017 constitutional referendum. TOCA allows us to contrast leaders’ political beliefs when they deliver speeches in their native Turkish language at home with those delivered in English abroad in the same temporal domain.

Table 1 below depicts Davutoglu and Erdogan’s contrasting political belief scores conditioned by the audience effect, which are also compared to world and rogue leadership norming groups. First, Davutoglu’s political beliefs are akin to those of average world leaders when he addresses domestic audiences, but his speeches in English exhibit a regression in all of his beliefs placing his profile between mainstream and rogue leadership norming samples. While the decline is evident in all three beliefs, his *perception of control* score fell almost by half in his foreign policy speeches abroad. Unlike Erdogan, Davutoglu has a command of English and chose to speak in English when he was before foreign audiences instead of seeking translation help.

Second, Erdogan’s foreign policy profile abroad is like an average world leader as his three belief scores point to a more cooperative leadership in unison. His *nature of political universe* and *strategic direction belief* scores featuring his speeches in English are even higher than those of the average world leader. However, when he addresses domestic audience in Turkish, Erdogan views *political universe* and others in more negative terms and he is inclined to employ more aggressive strategies to accomplish foreign policy goals. In his domestic speeches, furthermore, Erdogan attributes more control to himself in managing foreign policy events vis-à-vis others. On the eve of most elections, Erdogan embraced hawkish foreign policy themes in his campaign speeches such as threatening the Syrian government and Kurds with military operations, but those themes are more pronounced in his domestic speeches in Turkish than in those targeting Western and Arab Spring-struck countries.³³ Erdogan’s following words back in 2012 as the Turkish premier are illustrative: “İnşallah biz en kısa zamanda Şam’a gidecek, Emevi Camii’nde namazımızı da kılacağız.” (God willing, we will go to Damascus very soon, and will pray in the Umayyad mosque, too).³⁴

Table 1. Davutoglu and Erdogan’s master belief scores in English (E) and Turkish (T) materials compared to norming groups on state leaders³⁵

	Rogue Leader Average	World Leader Average	Davutoglu (E)	Davutoglu (T)	Erdogan (E)	Erdogan (T)
Nature of Political Universe	0.151	0.301	0.225	0.315	0.331	0.201
Strategic Direction	0.25	0.401	0.321	0.401	0.425	0.281
Perception of Control	0.18	0.224	0.188	0.374	0.207	0.302
Speech N	52	164	30	30	40	40
Years			2014-2016	2014-2016	2016-2019	2016-2019

Source: Own depiction.³⁶

While they hail from the same ideology and political party lines, the stark differences between Erdogan and Davutoglu conditioned by the audience type are notable. Table 1 above shows that while addressing domestic audiences,

Erdogan employs harsher and more hawkish foreign policy rhetoric toward other countries. Yet, Erdogan switches to a much softer tone when he addresses foreign audiences in the same time frame and about the same topic. By contrast, Davutoglu's speeches at home in Turkish are more dovish, while those in English have a more conflictual tone. Consistent with the results above, President Erdogan uses self-effacing language about himself populated by modest utterances such as "Kardeslerim, bu fakir hiçbir zaman Sultan olma gayretinde olmadı." (My brothers, this destitute person (I) never tried to become a Sultan).³⁷ As Cagaptay notices, the findings give further credence to "the effects of populism and audience" on Turkish leaders' foreign policy rhetoric.³⁸

The results lend support to the argument that there is no single monolith political Islamist leadership in foreign policy and individual leaders sometimes matter more than a presumed ideology of the ruling elite. This preliminary research also indicates the necessity and utility of factoring the audience effect in the study of political leaders and foreign policy. A quantitative content analysis of Erdogan and Davutoglu's statements delivered in Turkey and abroad also suggests that political leaders are adept at projecting contrasting leadership profiles depending on their main audience. As Kesgin cautions, while the variability of personality traits can be a personality trait itself, further research is warranted to evaluate the validity of such argument.³⁹

The preliminary findings from Erdogan and Davutoglu's speeches before domestic and foreign audiences suggest this would be a fruitful line of research and contribute to our understanding of political leaders and their foreign policy decisions. In that sense, TOCA should be considered as a stepping-stone to opening novel research avenues in leadership studies and non-Western FPA. Specifically, future students of Turkish politics and foreign policy might work on such potentially statistically significant differences between English and Turkish text corpora and help disentangle the relationship between populism, audience effects, and decision-making in Turkish studies.

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TURKEY'S PHANTOM COALITION: THE AKP-MHP PARTNERSHIP AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

By Sibel Oktay

The June 2015 parliamentary election was nothing short of a watershed moment for Turkish politics. The incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since its ascent to power in 2002. Surprising many, the defeat quickly brought back talks of an old tradition that had shaped the country's politics for decades preceding AKP: coalition governments. Today, many consider the recent alignment between the AKP and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) a governing coalition; however, evidence from Turkish foreign policy shows that this is not an accurate description..

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's disdain for coalition politics is well known. "We know that Turkey loses under coalition rule," he said in the wake of his party's electoral loss as he alluded to the unstable and short-lived string of coalition governments throughout the 1990s. "Coalition is not a project," Erdogan warned, "it is a nightmare."⁴⁰ Further to the AKP's right on the political spectrum, the MHP was similarly unenthusiastic about the possibility of governing together with the AKP. That same night, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli signaled firmly that they would rather have an early election than participate in a coalition with the AKP.⁴¹ Little did Bahçeli know that in the November election later that year his party would first be decimated in the parliament and then eventually splintered, and that a partnership with the AKP would save his party's fortunes.

The AKP-MHP partnership has become the new status quo in Turkish politics since then. In 2017,

the MHP openly supported the constitutional referendum that introduced presidentialism and gave President Erdogan sweeping powers with little legislative oversight. In subsequent national and local elections, the two parties ran on joint ballots, dubbing their ticket the “People’s Alliance” (*Cumhur Ittifaki*).⁴² Today, the two parties are frequently considered coalition partners.⁴³ Furthermore, some argue that the AKP maintains its dominance in Turkish politics only because of MHP, as it provides Erdogan and his party with the necessary votes in the parliament. In effect, they argue, Bahçeli and his party hold the reins to Erdogan’s rule.⁴⁴

These observations misunderstand the nature of the AKP-MHP relationship. For one, the AKP and MHP are not coalition partners from a technical standpoint: the MHP and Bahçeli remain fully outside the governing apparatus with no official control. Second and more importantly, their *de facto* relationship also defies the coalition dynamics that we otherwise expect to see. European minority cabinets, for instance, routinely engage in coalition politics to build legislative majorities with parties that do not formally participate in government.⁴⁵ In countries like Denmark where minority rule is observed frequently, these parties become *ad hoc* junior coalition partners that effectively enjoy veto power.⁴⁶ This is not the case in Turkey, either.

The true nature of this relationship is evident particularly in the foreign policy domain. As a long pedigree of scholarship and my forthcoming book on coalition politics and foreign policy-making show, junior parties usually enjoy considerable influence over foreign policy through various mechanisms in coalition settings. Had the AKP-MHP partnership been a coalition (either *de jure* or *de facto*), then the MHP as the junior party would have enjoyed greater leverage in the foreign policy domain. The party could have engaged in two strategies, specifically. First, it could engage in logrolling to attain side-payments by yielding to the AKP’s foreign policy agenda to get other concessions in return. Second, it could engage in hijacking and turn its hawkish preferences into government policy. Neither of these mechanisms works for the MHP.

In the remainder of this essay, I will provide an overview of the research on coalition foreign policy and how the MHP lacks these two key levers to shape current Turkish foreign policy towards China’s treatment of the Uighur community in Xinjiang, which, at least until recently, had been a central foreign policy agenda item for the party.⁴⁷

Coalition Politics and Foreign Policy

Multiparty governments are observed frequently in Europe as well as in different parts of the world including India, Canada, and Australia. While the formation, termination, and the public policy outcomes of coalition governments have been studied for a long time,⁴⁸ how coalitions behave in the foreign policy domain received little attention until more recently. In a number of influential contributions, scholars of foreign policy dissected coalitions to theorize how these actors make decisions, the circumstances under which their decision-making is curtailed or facilitated, and the behavioral outcomes of these processes.⁴⁹

A central component of the research on coalition foreign policy concerns the role of junior partners. Junior partners, sometimes called critical, or pivotal, junior partners, are defined in this literature as parties that are indispensable to the survival of the government.⁵⁰ Several researchers have concluded that critical junior partners in coalitions often enjoy a disproportionate influence over foreign policy-making.⁵¹ Since they hold the necessary number of parliamentary seats to keep the government afloat, junior partners in minimum-winning coalitions can sway policy-making in the direction that they prefer. This is known as the ‘blackmailing’ or ‘hijacking’ potential of the junior partner. Junior party hijacking is observed frequently in foreign policy. For instance, these parties end up increasing the coalition’s likelihood of conflict initiation, especially when they are positioned further to the right of the government along the ideological spectrum.⁵² In short, research shows that hawkish junior partners can turn their governments into hawks.

The second way in which junior coalition partners participate in foreign policy decision-making is through logrolling. This mechanism broadly captures ‘voting alliances’ in the parliament: parties vote for each other’s proposals in order to receive future side-payments in the form of office or policy.⁵³ In coalitions, logrolling is observed when a junior partner concedes to the policy preferences of the senior partner in return for policy concessions or cabinet portfolios. For instance, a junior partner (D66) in the incoming Dutch coalition yielded to the senior partner’s (the Christian Democrats) preference to join the U.S.-led war coalition in Iraq in 2003 in return for cabinet portfolios.⁵⁴ Similarly, the late Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had to make policy concessions to the United Torah, his junior coalition partner, in order to secure their support for the Gaza withdrawal in 2005.⁵⁵ Through logrolling, in other words, junior parties not only shape foreign policy, but they also get what they want in return, be it in the form of policy or office seats.

The AKP-MHP Partnership in Foreign Policy

The ‘hijacking’ and ‘logrolling’ mechanisms therefore constitute important levers for junior partners to participate in the foreign policy process. They should also help us make sense of Turkish foreign policy under the “People’s Alliance.” To what extent do we observe these mechanisms at play in Turkish foreign policy decision-making and outcomes? Does the MHP take advantage of these strategies to influence foreign policy?

To answer these questions, I turn to a recent foreign policy debate in Turkey: the country’s response to the treatment of the Uighurs in China. We know that far-right junior parties may tend to stay muted if the foreign policy issue falls outside their scope.⁵⁶ I choose this episode precisely because it is central to the MHP’s otherwise meagre foreign policy platform. As Hintz explains in her book on foreign policy and identity politics in Turkey, the MHP champions Pan-Turkic Nationalism and is a natural advocate of the Uighur community, which has ethnic ties to the Turks.⁵⁷ As opposed to other foreign policy issues

such as relations with the United States or the European Union, the Uighur community falls squarely under the MHP’s umbrella. This is a key foreign policy area where we should see MHP assert itself. It is also a low-stakes foreign policy issue compared to ongoing national security crises surrounding the war in Syria and its implications for relations with the U.S. and the EU.⁵⁸ If the MHP’s position remains irrelevant even in this high-meaning-low-stakes context, in other words, the party should be far less visible in others.

China’s discriminatory behavior against the Uighurs in Xinjiang has received ample attention from the international community.⁵⁹ In Turkey, the MHP has been an outspoken advocate of the Uighurs. In 2015, the youth wing of the party had held a mass demonstration in Istanbul and ended up beating a group of Korean tourists, mistaking them for Chinese.⁶⁰ The AKP, on the other hand, has remained rather muted. This is especially staggering considering in 2009 Erdogan had called the mass killings of Uighurs in Xinjiang a genocide.⁶¹ Although foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu recently expressed Turkey’s concerns over China’s treatment of the Uighur community, he couched these remarks within a broader debate of human rights.⁶² A few months later in June 2019, the Turkish parliament struck down a motion to investigate China’s treatment of the Uighurs in Xinjiang with the AKP votes. Surprisingly, the MHP abstained.⁶³ It is clear that the Uighur episode exposes the MHP’s inability to hijack the AKP’s foreign policy towards China or engage in some form of logrolling to keep it appeased. Even though this has been a salient issue for the party, it has been unable to either pull the AKP’s position toward overt criticism of China’s policies (hijacking) or concede to the AKP’s official position in exchange for other policy preferences (logrolling).

The Uighur episode is therefore an important demonstration of how the MHP’s partnership with AKP defeats the expectations of coalition foreign policy. The party wants Turkey to adopt a resolved response against the treatment of the Uighurs in China. To this day, however, this demand has not yet been met in any shape or form. The defeat of the parliamentary motion with AKP’s votes, with

MHP abstaining, painfully reveals the MHP's failure to influence Turkish foreign policy. The Pan-Turkic Nationalist vision of the MHP has similarly stopped short of influencing Turkish foreign policy toward the Tatars in Crimea following the Russian invasion. Moving forward, scholars of Turkish politics and foreign policy could explore these two cases in comparative perspective.

Conclusion

The AKP-MHP relationship is a strange one. Although Bahçeli often fiercely defends Erdogan's policies in Libya, Syria, and particularly the Turkish military's excursions into northeastern Syria, his party has no leverage over less critical foreign policy issues, such as the treatment of Uighurs, that are in fact of key interest to their core constituency. Even though Turkey cannot afford to alienate China for economic reasons, this should neither stop the MHP from speaking out nor prevent the AKP from appeasing the MHP for domestic consumption.

To be sure, the political system in Turkey has morphed into a regime that is impossible to assess by the standards of advanced industrial democracies. Scholars have argued convincingly that the country now demonstrates all aspects of competitive authoritarianism in a super-presidential regime under the heavy hand of Erdogan.⁶⁴ Expecting coalition politics to play out as they do in European parliamentary systems might be a stretch. One could argue, in fact, that the peculiarity of the Turkish regime could help answer why the MHP continues to stay in this seemingly losing game. Erdogan and the AKP control the state and media apparatus with a tight grip that creates a heavily tilted playing field against opposition groups like the MHP. Further, we know that mainstream parties can quickly shift their policy positions and accommodate the issues of niche parties, thereby weakening the latter's electoral fortunes.⁶⁵ The AKP did just that in the summer of 2015, when its hard nationalistic turn following the collapse of the Kurdish peace process essentially made the MHP's opposition void. These two dynamics have left little room for the MHP to assert itself as a credible veto player.

In sum, the AKP's parliamentary majority depends on maintaining the MHP's support, while MHP needs to stay close to AKP to escape another electoral carnage like the one in November 2015. So, for now, the MHP resembles a life vest. The party keeps the AKP afloat in the parliament while carving a much-needed role for itself, since this is preferable to collecting dirt and grime under the seat. Their alignment remains an electoral alliance for the time being, nothing more. As a scholar of coalition politics and foreign policy, I caution analysts and Turkey watchers against calling the AKP-MHP partnership a coalition. It doesn't look like a coalition, and it certainly does not act like one, especially in the foreign policy domain.

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STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY: EXPLAINING FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE ERDOGAN PRESIDENCY

By Ferhat Zabun

On 27 February 2020, at least 34 Turkish soldiers were killed in Syria's Idlib province.⁶⁶ In response, Turkey started a military operation against the Syrian army of Bashar al-Assad.⁶⁷ This escalation of conflict jeopardized Turkey's fragile, yet until recently improving, relationship with Russia. Concurrently, US-Turkey relations remained extremely tense, due in part to concerns over "hostage diplomacy,"⁶⁸ the S-400 purchase from Russia,⁶⁹ and Turkey's incursion into northern Syria. This raises an interesting and important puzzle about how Turkey managed to allow its relationship with Russia and the US to deteriorate at the same time. I argue this spiraling of diplomatic and military relations on both fronts is the unintended result of strategic ambiguity in Turkish foreign policy.

The main purpose of strategic ambiguity is to create a balance between states so that no

asymmetrical relationship could emerge with either of them. The policy of strategic ambiguity stems from domestic factors, but the success or failure of the policy is constrained by the structure of international politics, which affects countries in different ways in proportion to their relative capabilities. As I explore in my research, Turkey's policies toward Russia and the US fit this model well. On the one hand, Turkey, as a NATO member, purchased a Russian air defense missile system and established a close relationship with Russia. On the other hand, it could not risk alienating the US due to path-dependent interests stemming from their 60-year alliance. This policy of strategic ambiguity is a result of domestic motivations of actors in Turkish politics. Given the lack of escalation on either side, strategic ambiguity served its purpose until very recently. However, the Turkish army's military confrontation with the Russian-backed Syrian army and US-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria shows that the policy of strategic ambiguity has started to become destructive for Turkey.

What is Strategic Ambiguity?

Ambiguity is a constant in international politics, but that is not the same as strategic ambiguity. When a leader sends signals to the international community, different states could interpret the signals in different ways; however, these different perceptions do not necessarily mean that the leader has created this ambiguity on purpose. To illustrate, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan described the downing of a Russian jet by a Turkish warplane in 2015 as a mistake. He said "it is really thought-provoking that our relations with Mr. Putin came to the current level from a very different point and Putin sacrificed Turkey due to a mistake or fault by a pilot."⁷⁰ However, he did not elaborate on whether it was a mistake or fault by the Turkish or Russian pilot. This kind of ambiguity seems to have arisen as a result of misunderstanding because the Turkish presidency made a statement that Erdogan meant the Russian pilot only in one hour without observing the possible effects of the ambiguity.⁷¹

My research focuses on ambiguity that is deliberately created to maintain a balance

between states without taking sides. During World War II, for example, President Ismet Inonu secured a defensive alliance with Britain and France without breaking Turkey's entente with the Soviet Union. By also supporting the policy of negotiating with Hitler and Mussolini, while refraining from taking sides with anyone until an Allied victory proved likely, his use of strategic ambiguity protected Turkey from the destructive effects of combat.⁷²

Conventional wisdom from political science holds that ambiguity ends up fostering conditions for war more easily than cooperation.⁷³ Scholars advance two main perspectives. Firstly, they treat strategic ambiguity as a discursive strategy of policy-makers use in drafting of a diplomatic text.⁷⁴ The main purpose here is to create an ambiguous text that could be interpreted by the conflicting parties differently within the scope of their own national interests and thus helps facilitate agreement. I demonstrate elsewhere, for example, that strategic ambiguity on key issues including continuity of the Cypriot state and federation/confederation of its governance helped Turkish and Greek Cypriots sign the (now defunct) Annan Plan.⁷⁵ Crucially, although strategic ambiguity made an agreement possible at the time, it did not lead to constructive effects in the long term; Greek Cypriots later rejected the plan in a referendum.

Secondly, political scientists treat strategic ambiguity as a practice of foreign policy through which states attempt to create a balance between other states without taking sides.⁷⁶ I engage this point here to argue that the foreign policy of strategic ambiguity in this realm similarly has short-term effects on cooperation but can be destructive in the long-term. I use the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism (NCR) to advance my argument. Examining foreign policy through an NCR lens enables us to take domestic factors into consideration as independent variables along with structural incentives to explain the practice of strategic ambiguity.⁷⁷ Structural effects are important in shaping state behavior; however, they are insufficient in accounting for the observed variance both across and within states that neoclassical realism

captures with its focus on internal factors.

To determine the kinds of state behavior that can produce strategic ambiguity within the scope of this framework, I turn to the structural realism of Walt: “weaker powers have essentially three choices in a unipolar world: they can (1) ally with each other to try to mitigate the unipole’s influence, (2) align with the unipole in order to support its actions or exploit its power for their own purposes, or (3) remain neutral.”⁷⁸ I argue that if a state is sending other states mixed signals and is pursuing at least two of these strategies at the same time, then strategic ambiguity is at work. However, we need to focus on NCR’s domestic factors to explore why a state would do so. Therefore, in the rest of this essay, I enumerate the domestic factors that led Turkey to pursue a policy of strategic ambiguity.

Domestic Sources of Strategic Ambiguity: The Case of Turkey

During the tenure of President Erdogan, who became prime minister in 2003 and president in 2014, Turkey attempted both to ally with the unipole (the US) in order to exploit its power for its own national interests and to ally with Russia to mitigate the unipole’s influence. Even though it seems to have helped create the balance between these two great powers until very recently, Turkey has started to see destructive effects of the policy of strategic ambiguity with the latest attacks on Turkish army in Syria. This foreign policy is a result of domestic motivations of actors in Turkish politics.

The current tensions between the US and Turkey may mark a nadir in their relationship, but the NATO allies have a tumultuous past. Major sources of friction included the US withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey during the Cuban Missile Crisis, US attempts to prevent (1963) and later sanction (1974) Turkey’s intervention in Cyprus, and the Turkish parliament’s 2003 rejection of a proposal to allow the US to operate from Turkish bases during the Iraq War. The 2016 coup attempt is the critical difference in how Turkey has approached strategic ambiguity.

Turkey was never willing to risk its strategic alliance with the US at any of these critical junctures in the manner it has since the coup attempt. I focus here on the reason why Turkey decided to establish close Russian ties and thus mitigate the influence of the US in a form of strategic ambiguity.

The 2016 coup attempt became a critical moment for US-Turkey relations when Erdogan blamed US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, who is the leader of an Islamic community called the Gulen movement, for the bloody attempted coup and requested his extradition from the US.⁷⁹ Since this request has thus far been refused, Turkey has shifted blame for the coup attempt to the US. The coup attempt was a critical moment leading Turkey to look for alternative alliances. Immediately after the coup attempt, Erdogan proclaimed: “Turkey would be unable to continue its strategic allegiance with the US if it continues to harbor the exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen.”⁸⁰ Since then, he has sent mixed signals about Turkey’s strategic alliance with the US. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jim Risch put it well: “Every move he makes, every sentence he utters, points us in a different direction.”⁸¹

Another factor in domestic politics shaping the government’s new hostility towards the US is the alliance between the US and the Kurdish militia groups in Syria. The Turkish government views the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the militia group that helped the US fight against the ISIS, as a terrorist group. The government points to the close relationship between the PKK, designated as a terrorist group not only by Turkey but also by the US, and the YPG. Therefore, the Turkish side’s main argument is that the US has been indirectly helping the PKK and acting against the national security concerns of Turkey.

These two factors led Turkey to look for alternative alliances to mitigate the influence of the US and did not directly give rise to a close relationship with Russia. One of the factors behind the attempt to balance US influence with Russian ties is the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government’s alliance with so-called Eurasianists.⁸² Some members of this pro-Russia

cohort were imprisoned during the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* trials by police and judiciary members affiliated with Gulen movement during the period of loose alliance between the movement and the AKP. Erdogan used this tension not only in the war against Gulenists but also as a way of tilting towards Russia. Compounding this dynamic is the AKP's alliance with the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). This party not only supported hostility towards the US because of the latter's close relationship with Kurdish groups vehemently despised by the MHP, but also facilitated Erdogan's authoritarian drift by playing the role of key actor in the parliament. Just after the 2016 coup attempt, it was MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli who initiated the discussion of switching to a highly consolidated presidential system and whose voters' support nudged Erdogan over the line to win the referendum approving the switch.

Within the scope of the theoretical framework used here, these domestic factors gave rise to the policy of strategic ambiguity in Turkish foreign policy. While the political tensions with the US about the Gulen movement and support for Kurdish forces in northern Syria led Turkey to distance itself from the US, the Eurasianists and MHP's support for President Erdogan helped Turkey enter into closer military and political relations with Russia. This policy of strategic ambiguity was useful in the sense that Turkey could create a balance between the US and Russia without any military escalation with either of them.

However, these domestic sources cannot explain the success or failure of the policy; here, structural realism's systemic incentives fare better. In a (at least for now), unipolar world in which there is greater freedom of action for the US and greater obstacles to counterhegemonic balancing,⁸³ the US has the power to punish those countries that try to join the opposition. These constraints make it infeasible, in the long-term, for Turkey to pursue a foreign policy of strategic ambiguity. Turkey found itself isolated after the Turkish army's military confrontation with both the Russian-backed Syrian army and the US-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria. In a twist that would be ironic were it not for

implications regarding the sustainability of strategic ambiguity laid out here, Turkey's February request for the US deployment on its southern border of precisely the Patriot missile system that Ankara passed up in favor of the S-400s went unfulfilled.⁸⁴

The argument here can also be applied to other countries within the scope of the theoretical framework of NCR. However, the fact that strategic ambiguity has had destructive effects on Turkish foreign policy does not necessarily mean that it will have similar effects on all the countries. Structural constraints – the determinant factor in the success or failure of the policy of strategic ambiguity – are different for each country in proportion to their relative capabilities in the system. The more capable a country is, the more successful the policy will be. The foreign policy of strategic ambiguity is risky for such a middle power as Turkey located in one of the most unstable regions in the world.

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RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: ISRAELI POLITICS

INTRODUCTION: THE STATE OF ISRAELI DEMOCRACY

By Nadav Shelef

Even before the Covid-19 crisis, Israel had experienced unprecedented levels of political instability in the last two years. Most notably, Israel held an unprecedented three national elections between April 2019 and March 2020. At the same time, for all of the churn, all three elections effectively ended in a tie between Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party and his opponents. This tie was only broken under the cover of the Covid-19 crisis and a near consensus that *any* government was better than a fourth election. Together, these provided an impetus for the two largest parties, Blue White and Likud, to form a coalition government which kept Netanyahu at the helm. Although there are some notable changes in the government (like the exclusion of the religious-Zionist parties from the government and the cooptation of the Labor party into it), its basic orientation appears to remain remarkably stable despite three elections in a single year.

The combination of deadlock, electoral instability, and little resolution raise important questions beyond the Israeli case: What does this combination tell us about the quality and prospects of Israel's democracy? Will Israel follow Turkey, Hungary, and Poland down the path of reduced democracy, or not? What are the implications for democratic norms, relations between different groups in Israel, and between Israelis and Palestinians? What accounts for the odd combination of volatility and stasis in Israeli politics?

The essays collected in this section address various aspects of these questions. Using a series of public opinion surveys, Tamar Hermann shows that while there is surprisingly little evidence of systematic "election fatigue", a significant

minority of Israelis do not have faith in the fairness and integrity of their political system – a condition that poses a threat to the quality of Israeli democracy.

Lotem Bassan-Nygate and Chagai Weiss zero in on the causes of the deep affective polarization in Israel and explore ways it might be reduced. On the one hand, they show that Jewish Israelis are divided into two hostile political camps and that this affective polarization has been increasing over Netanyahu's last decade in power. They also provide convincing evidence that the repeated elections over the last year likely exacerbated this affective polarization even more. At the same time, they suggest that grand coalitions, like the one currently in place, can reduce affective polarization in the public at large. This lesson is one that is relevant in the growing number of deeply polarized countries around the world.

Meirav Jones and Lihi Ben Shitrit turn to examining a longer-term transformation in Israeli political discourse that may help explain the persistent power of the Israeli right. Specifically, they show that Israelis as a whole are increasingly coming to understand the meaning of "sovereignty" in ways that are less consistent with democratic norms than in the past. While they focus on the genesis and application of this discursive turn in the context of discussions over the Trump Administration so-called "deal of the century," this discursive turn may also underlie the delegitimization of the Israeli judicial system and the radicalization of the religious parties in Israel.

Finally, Michael Freedman's essay concludes this section by addressing the latter issue. He focuses on sociological changes among the Jewish religious public to explain the increasing radicalization of the once politically quiescent ultra-orthodox parties and the fragmentation and concomitant loss of organized power of the religious Zionists. His conclusion that the interaction between the decentralization of

religious authority, on the one hand, and voter demand for religiously sanctioned parties and the institutional structure of the religious political parties, on the other, shapes relative radicalization and the power of religious parties resonates well beyond the case of Israel.

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IT'S US OR THEM: PARTISAN POLARIZATION IN ISRAEL AND BEYOND

By Lotem Bassan-Nygate and Chagai M. Weiss

Jewish Israelis are divided into two hostile political camps: center-left- and right-wing supporters. This division, which political scientists often refer to as partisan polarization, is clearly reflected in recent campaign advertisements which emphasize an “us” vs. “them” mentality (see Figure 1). The severity of partisan polarization is also reflected in public opinion, with a plurality of Jewish Israeli respondents in a recent survey identifying the tensions between the left and the right as the most acute cleavage in Israeli society, even more than that between Jews and Arabs.⁸⁵ Recent media reports further emphasize this pattern, which is strikingly apparent from the words of a right-winger, interviewed during a recent support rally for Prime-Minister Benjamin Netanyahu:

“All of you together, all the left-wing supporters... You don’t have a heart, you don’t have emotions, you have nothing... You are just ungrateful traitors.”⁸⁶

Such animosity, often conceptualized as affective polarization, can be measured by the gap between in-party affect and out-party dislike.⁸⁷ Figure 2 uses this measure, based on party feeling thermometers from the Israeli National Elections Studies, to provide a systematic overview of

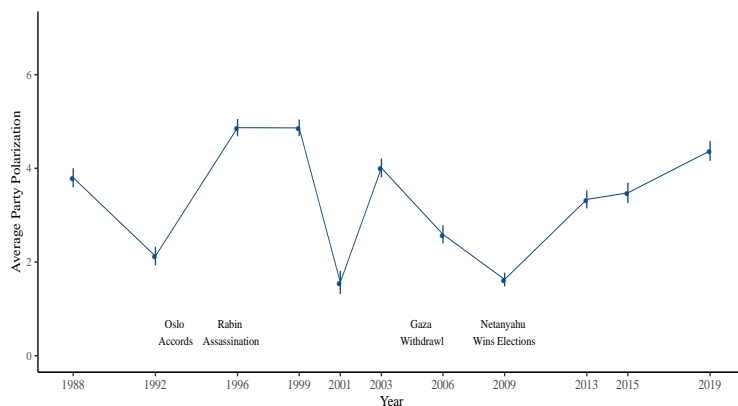
affective polarization in Israel over the last eleven election cycles (1988-2019). It reveals several interesting patterns.



Figure 1: 2015 Zionist Union (top) and Likud (bottom) Campaign Advertisements – Both advertisements employ the same slogan “It’s us or them/him.”

First, affective polarization reached an all-time high during the mid-nineties, following the Oslo accords and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing extremist. Second, since Netanyahu took office (for the second time) in 2009, affective polarization seems to be on a steady rise. The temporal variation depicted in Figure 2 raises a myriad of questions regarding the causes, effects, and remedies of affective polarization in Israel.

To address these questions, and to encourage scholars of Israeli politics to engage in the study of polarization, we follow three steps. First, we provide a brief account of existing theory and evidence regarding polarization. Second, we describe the nascent literature on affective polarization in Israel, including our recent study which leverages natural and survey experiments to identify institutional causes and remedies of polarization.⁸⁸ Lastly, we conclude with an overview of fruitful paths for future research on affective polarization in Israel, and the Middle East more broadly.



*Red denotes Likud governments, blue denotes Labor governments, and green denotes center/unity governments.

Figure 2: Affective Polarization in Israel over time - Each point estimate represents an average polarization scores amongst voters from a given study of the INES. We measure affective polarization at the respondent level by identifying respondents as either right- or left-wing supporters (employing a common 7-point ideology scale), and subtracting their affect towards the leading out-party from their affect towards the leading in-party. We focus on the two right (left) leading parties during this time period: Likud and Labor.

What Do We Know About Affective Polarization?

Polarization seems to be endemic to modern democracy. Existing theory and evidence from American and comparative politics suggest that political campaigns,⁸⁹ elite ideological polarization,⁹⁰ economic inequality,⁹¹ selective repression,⁹² media consumption,⁹³ and majoritarian electoral institutions,⁹⁴ all contribute to affective polarization. While affective polarization may have some limited virtues, such as enhanced political participation,⁹⁵ scholars have focused for the most part on its adverse social consequences. These negative consequences include challenges to governance,⁹⁶ economic discrimination,⁹⁷ social sorting, and homophily.⁹⁸ The negative consequences of polarization have motivated scholars to search for potential remedies which may depolarize partisans.⁹⁹ Thus,

empirical evidence suggests that correcting misperceptions and stereotypes regarding party supporters,¹⁰⁰ and increasing the salience of a shared national identity as an alternative to a divisive partisan identity,¹⁰¹ can decrease affective polarization. That being said, efforts to emphasize partisan ambivalence or to employ psychological self-affirmation techniques seem to be ineffective in reducing polarization.¹⁰² Taken together, the existing literature, which has for the most part examined the American electorate,¹⁰³ points to institutional as well as psychological causes, effects, and remedies of polarization.

What Do We Know About Polarization in Israel?

The right-left divide has become a dominant cleavage within Jewish Israeli society since the 1970s.¹⁰⁴ This cleavage is closely associated with polarizing debates about whether or not Israel should withdraw from occupied territories.¹⁰⁵ In recent years there has been a growing scholarly interest in exploring polarization amongst the Israeli public. Garrett et al. demonstrate that exposure to co-partisan media outlets is associated with increased affective polarization, and Tsfti and Nir investigate the mechanisms linking selective media exposure with increased polarization.¹⁰⁶ More generally, Shamir et al. present a longitudinal investigation of polarization trends since the late 1980s, and call for future research to consider the causes and effects of polarization in Israel.¹⁰⁷

We follow Shamir et al.'s call for action in our recent working paper, and employ natural and survey experiments to study the effects of electoral competition and cooperation on affective polarization in Israel.¹⁰⁸ Leveraging the random assignment of survey respondents to interview dates over seven national election studies, we demonstrate that enhanced electoral competition, measured by interview date proximity to an election, increases the gap between in-party affect and out-party dislike. This is an alarming finding, as electoral competition is a central component of democratic practice, yet it seems to have negative externalities for partisan intergroup relations. Therefore, we further ask: what political arrangements might offset the externalities

imposed by elections, and alleviate polarization?

To answer this question, we implemented a unique experiment in which we leveraged the ambiguity around coalition formation in Israel's 22nd Knesset (2019), to shape survey respondents' perceptions regarding the likelihood that a unity government will form in the near future. At the time, it was unclear whether the two leading parties (Likud and Blue White) would form a broad unity government, a narrow coalition led by one or the other, or lead Israel to a third election. Leveraging this uncertainty, we informed subjects in the treatment group that political experts expect that a unity government will form in the near future. Subjects in the control group were told that a narrow government is expected to form.¹⁰⁹

The results of this experiment demonstrate that information regarding cross-party cooperation in the form of a unity government can depolarize the electorate; specifically, respondents who are informed that a unity government will form in the near future, report warmer attitudes towards supporters of competing parties. In interpreting our evidence, we emphasize that elites, and the political arrangements they make, play a central role in shaping polarization. Indeed, we demonstrate that electoral competition and cooperation at the elite level has direct effects on mass partisan polarization. More so, we demonstrate how methodological approaches previously used by scholars of intergroup relations, can be adapted to identify the effects of endogenous institutional variables on polarization.¹¹⁰

Moving Forward: An Agenda for the Study of Polarization in Israeli Politics and Beyond

Our study takes a first step in evaluating the institutional causes and remedies of polarization in Israel.¹¹¹ While our evidence sheds light on several consequential questions, it suggests a number of paths for future empirical research.

1. Does the emergence of centrist parties depolarize voters?
2. How does exposure to violence and conflict affect partisan polarization?

3. Can institutional and electoral reforms (i.e. changing electoral thresholds, or alternating between proportional representation and split ticket voting) influence polarization?
4. Do mass-protests attenuate partisan polarization?

In some regards, Israel is unique to the Middle East, as its relatively stable and competitive electoral institutions facilitated the emergence of strong partisan identities. However, exciting research from Tunisia and Egypt exploring the emergence of political polarization between opposition movements and parties suggests that both affective and ideological polarization are relevant in multiple countries throughout the region, especially those experiencing democratic transitions.¹¹² Our research suggests that democratic transitions that introduce electoral competition may serve to polarize existing (or newly formed) identities, and that the adaptation of “kinder and gentler” forms of governance, may mitigate such externalities.¹¹³

Finally, returning to the Israeli case, it is evident that polarizing discourse has become central to the political arena in recent years. While in our research we focus on citizen's attitudes towards one another, one may wonder if polarized attitudes translate into polarized policy. Anecdotal evidence from Israel suggests that it does. Indeed, right-wing ministers and members of Knesset have targeted cultural centers associated with the Israeli left such as the Barbur gallery in Jerusalem, as well as human right groups such as Breaking the Silence, using both administrative and legislative means.¹¹⁴ Whether these policies are a cause of mass polarization or its effect is yet another fascinating question begging rigorous empirical research.

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RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN ISRAEL

By Michael Freedman

Jewish religious political parties have historically played an important role in Israeli politics. Religious political parties receive on average about 20 percent of the vote. Israel's Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system gives strength to the religious political parties and enabled them a large, often disproportionate, impact on national politics, frequently, determining whether the Israeli coalition tilts to the left or right. Three main political parties represent the diverse religious Jewish communities in Israel: the Jewish Home (Religious Zionism, or "modern Orthodox"), Shas (*Sephardic* Ultra-Orthodox), and United Torah Judaism (*Ashkenazi* Ultra-Orthodox).

However, recent sociological changes such as greater exposure to the internet have led to a decentralization of religious authority in Israel. The decentralization of religious authority in Israel interacts with two major factors, which cause the political fragmentation of the mainstream religious Zionist party and causes the radicalization of the Ultra-Orthodox parties. These factors are voter demand for religiously sanctioned parties and the institutional structure of the religious political party. Notably, the changing fortunes of Israel's religious political parties have serious implications for Israeli democracy.

Religious parties in the Middle East, including Israel, rely heavily on clerics for legitimacy and popular support. Religious leaders tell their followers to vote en-masse for specific parties – and people do so with the expectation that they are fulfilling a religious commandment.¹¹⁵ Thus, capable religious leadership translates into political power. However, recent developments in mass communications have weakened the authority of religious leaders, with the

introduction of religious radio stations, more newspapers, and the internet. In turn, public exposure to the numerous sources of media, online information, and opinions fragment support for religious authorities.¹¹⁶

Observers note a similar pattern in Israel where greater exposure to mass media and the internet, among other important sociological changes such as upward social mobility,¹¹⁷ has had an impact on the nature of religious authority ([link](#)). Religious leadership was centralized in the past, and religious parties, especially the ultra-orthodox ones, relied on religious authorities to espouse their politics. For instance, Shas was able to rely on Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef and the Ultra-Orthodox *Ashkenazi* parties relied on one, agreed-upon "great rabbi of the generation" (*Gadol Hador*), such as Rabbi Shach. But, with increased information comes increased choice; today there is no clear religious leader in either of the ultra-orthodox camps. There are many leading rabbis – but no one, centralized figure. Religious communities are more fragmented, have greater competition between religious leaders, and are less united in their choice of a leader.

This decentralization of religious authority has impacted the religious political parties in different ways. Israel's main religious Zionist political party split into the Jewish Home and the New Right in the run-up to the April 2019 elections. Further splits followed with six political parties competing for votes from the religious Zionist community. After the April 2019 elections, several smaller parties did not run again, and pragmatic alliances were formed between the different political parties (*Yamina*). This alliance was unstable, and the party split after the September 2019 elections. Only after several months of contentious negotiations did the parties agree to run together for the March 2020 elections ([link](#)). They won only 6 seats, with many potential voters moving to other parties such as Netanyahu's Likud party.

Historically, the Ultra-Orthodox parties were comfortable serving in right-wing and left-wing coalitions (including Shas support for Oslo, without which the Oslo Peace Accords would never

have been signed). However, during the 2019 elections, Shas identified strongly with the right-wing parties. In addition, the leadership has made more policy demands in the religion and state realm. These demands alienate potential right-wing partners (such as Avigdor Lieberman's Yirael Beitenu party popular with extreme right wing but secular voters) and are seen as disconnected from the average supporter of the party ([link](#)).

Two main factors explain how decentralization of power within religious leadership shapes the contemporary political fortunes and positions of Israel's Jewish religious political parties.

Religious voters' demand for religiously sanctioned parties: Voters for whom a religiously sanctioned party is critical are less likely to move to a secular party, while voters for whom religious sanction is less important are relatively more likely to do so.

The institutional structure of the political party: Some religious political parties include formal institutions run by religious leaders who make decisions for the party (including, for example, the composition of the list or how the party should vote on important decisions), while other parties may affiliate with a religious stream (such as religious Zionism) and defer to religious advisors, but the decision of the latter are informal and non-binding.

The table below maps Israeli political parties

	High voter demand for religious sanction	Low voter demand for religious sanction
Formal religious institutions	United Torah Judaism	Shas
Informal religious institutions	National Union, Otzma , Yehudit, Noam	Jewish Home; New Right; Zehut

based on these factors.

Weakening of the Religious Zionist Parties

Religious Zionist voters historically placed less importance on religious authority than do typical religious parties in the Middle East. Political leadership would occasionally consult with specific religious leaders, but did not treat their decisions as binding. However, disagreements over several religious issues, including the religious nature of the state, religious gender equality (especially support for female prayer at the Western Wall), support for illegal settlements, and female political leadership, have polarized the community.

These divisions became especially prominent during the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, which was seen by many members of the religious Zionist community as a betrayal by the state to settle the land of Israel.¹¹⁸ While most community leaders ruled that it was illegal for religious soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate settlements, other leaders called for mass refusal and promised that the expulsion would never happen since it went against the divine will ([link](#)).

Reflecting the divisions within the community, religious Zionist political parties then split between a more liberal group that believes their political influence is hampered by the involvement of religious leaders in politics and a more conservative group that believes that political parties need to submit to the authority of religious leaders. The Ultra-Orthodox parties have even campaigned for these religious Zionist voters, with messages such as "Judaism without compromises" ([link](#)). In turn, different religious leaders from these two sub-communities endorse different parties. This spread of religious Zionist voters over several parties, including larger parties such as the Likud, lowers the overall electoral strength of the community.

Radicalization of the Ultra-Orthodox Parties

Despite high religious fragmentation, formal religious bodies allow Ultra-Orthodox parties to largely maintain their electoral power, despite divisions within religious streams (e.g.: Lithuanian versus Chasidic). This is due to the

fact that the Ultra-Orthodox parties set up a Rabbinic body which is composed of key leaders from the different streams who settles divisive issues such as the order of the candidate list. Furthermore, the party does not allow for primaries or women to run for political leadership.

In contrast, in local city elections where there is no formal religious body to bridge the gaps, religious disagreements have political consequences. For example, in the most recent municipal elections in Jerusalem, the Ultra-Orthodox parties ran competing lists and publicly backed different candidates for mayor ([link](#)). For example, secular Mayor Nir Barkat lost the Jerusalem elections in 2003 and was only successful in 2008 because one ultra-Orthodox Hasidic sect refrained from voting for Barkat's religious competitor.

Yet, this consensus comes at a cost. Rabbinic consensus generally adopts the most *extreme* position in order to avoid a split, which gives extremists great power.¹¹⁹ For example, several uncompromising and unpopular demands in the religion and state realm, such as the directive to not perform infrastructure work on the Sabbath and to close all grocery stores on the Sabbath, originated from the head of the Gur community. This legislation was ultimately pushed by the ultra-orthodox parties, despite strong internal opposition, in order to prevent a formal split within the political party.

In summary, political parties with formal religious institutions are more likely to survive. These parties are also more likely to be run by Jewish law and are less likely to hold by several democratic norms. The combination of political flux and intransigent demands among Israel's religious political parties leads to less electoral stability and was an important contributing factor to repeat elections in Israel ([link](#)). Due to the religious community's large birth rates, these political parties are likely to gain more political power in the future, becoming increasingly reliant on more extreme political views in order to maintain the peace among religious leaders.

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THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY IN ISRAEL'S SOVEREIGNTY DISCOURSE

By Meirav Jones and Lihi Ben Shitrit

One week before Israel's second round of general elections in September 2019, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that should he be re-elected, he would act immediately to "apply sovereignty" over the Jordan Valley in the West Bank.¹²⁰ The talk of "sovereignty" only intensified with the Trump Administration's "Peace to Prosperity" plan, which was celebrated by the Israeli right (and center) for its endorsement of Israel applying sovereignty over at least 30% of the occupied West Bank, including the Jordan Valley and all Israeli settlements.¹²¹ While the term "sovereignty" rings of legitimacy, "applying sovereignty," or "*hachalat ribonut*," has become the acceptable Hebrew phrase for the annexation of the West Bank without bestowing citizenship on its majority non-Jewish – Arab-Palestinian – residents. In fact, the Hebrew term for sovereignty, *ribonut*, is currently used almost exclusively in this context, raising serious questions about the compatibility of *ribonut* with democracy.

In our ongoing research project, we explore the extent to which *ribonut* has become synonymous in Israeli public discourse with annexation of land and domination. We make two main arguments. First, this now common notion of sovereignty is incompatible with the dominant Western understanding of sovereignty as self-rule and as the highest order of command within a defined territory. Second, even in the Israeli context, the understanding of sovereignty as domination represents a shift from the way sovereignty had been understood since the establishment of the state. We further argue that the current meaning of sovereignty in Hebrew was consciously registered in the Israeli political imagination by a political movement that emerged from the settler

movement with the disengagement from Gaza in 2005. We bring the vision of this group to light and find that if Israel is to live up to its democratic aspirations, it must resist the conceptual work being done by the “Sovereignty Movement” and reclaim the term sovereignty as self-rule and as the highest order of command within a given territory with recognized borders.

While our work is on the changing meaning of sovereignty in Israeli discourse, these transformations resonate more broadly in the treatment of annexation and domination by the international community. For example, Trump’s “Peace to Prosperity” plan perpetuates inequality between the non-sovereign people (Palestinians) and the sovereign state (Israel) by legitimating annexation and downplaying sovereignty as self-rule within a defined territory.¹²² Though the understanding that sovereignty cultivates equality may need revising,¹²³ replacing a vision of sovereign equality with one of sovereign domination is a problematic outcome for world politics.

Sovereignty in Israeli discourse

The transformation of the meaning of sovereignty in Hebrew is evident in the ways it is discussed in traditional and contemporary contexts. Historically, *ribonut* in Israel’s public discourse did mean sovereignty, or self-rule within recognized territorial boundaries. In fact, the hegemonic discourse of political Zionism was framed around the modern European model of the nation-state, with Jews constituting a national collective possessing the right to self-determination within a demarcated territory. To the extent that Israel accepted the partition plan voted upon by the UN in 1947, it accepted the fundamentals of self-rule within limited borders, including the existence of sovereign states on the either side of those borders. Israel was also defined from the onset as a democracy; hence the obsession over demographics from the early years of the state as only a Jewish majority would preserve the state’s Jewish character. Efforts to establish a Jewish demographic majority, including the deplorable expulsion of much of the Arab population in 1948, followed to some degree

from principles of Westphalian sovereignty and particularly its logic of partition and separation from difference and its imagining of largely-homogenous self-ruled entities. The traditional modern understanding of sovereignty accepted in the early years of the state is still reflected in the definition of *ribonut* in the authoritative Hebrew dictionary and thesaurus, *Rav-Milim*,¹²⁴ where *ribonut* is synonymous with “*sovereniut*” (which is “sovereignty” transliterated), and other synonyms are self-rule, self-government, autonomy, equal rights, freedom, independence, and other terms for liberty and self-rule.

Yet the Hebrew definition of “*ribonut*” in Wikipedia— a critical and accessible source of information for students and the general public, and one that can reflect popular understandings of terms more quickly than conventional dictionaries¹²⁵— has sovereignty as “the unique right to exercise the highest authority over a geographic territory or a group of people”.¹²⁶ Self-rule and freedom are obliterated from this definition, and sovereignty is about ruling *over*. This difference is not simply due to the way Wikipedia treats sovereignty more generally. Wikipedia in English defines sovereignty as “the full right and power of a governing body over itself, without any interference from outside sources or bodies,”¹²⁷ thereby emphasizing self-governance. Other differences between the Hebrew and English Wikipedia entries are that while international recognition is the key to sovereignty in English, it is portrayed as unnecessary in the Hebrew entry. Furthermore, while the English definition provides a history of the idea and practice of sovereignty from ancient through medieval to modern times, the Hebrew definition forgoes this in favor of a section on “colloquial uses of *ribonut*,” based largely on quoting Israeli generals.

The political ideal of “ruling *over*”, rather than self-rule, also has a history in the state of Israel since before its founding. In Mandate Palestine there was a concept of political authority that competed with *ribonut* as then understood, and this was the concept of *adnut*. While both *ribonut* and *adnut* draw on names of God from biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, *adnut* also describes a

particular human relationship: the relationship between master and slave; domination. *Adnut* was promoted by influential groups who rejected partition and sought to conquer and rule the entire biblical Land of Israel and control its population; agendas that resonate with the agenda of *ribonut* today, as reflected in the Wikipedia entry but more precisely in the publications of the “Sovereignty Journal” and other publications of the “Sovereignty Movement” we will soon introduce.¹²⁸ It is ironic that while the agenda of *adnut* was considered by Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion as threatening Israel’s sovereignty, the heirs to the idea of *adnut* today are shaping how sovereignty/*ribonut* is used in Israeli public discourse.

That the current Hebrew Wikipedia entry dates to 2006 is no accident. This was the year after Israel withdrew from the interior of the Gaza Strip (known as “the disengagement” in Israel). The disengagement is relevant in this context because, among its other implications, it demonstrated the possibility of partition and border-setting without granting the Palestinians sovereignty over territory and therefore reduced the importance of Palestinian sovereignty for Israel’s realization of its own sovereignty. The disengagement was also a turning point for the Settler Movement and the methods it employs to promote annexation and reject Palestinian sovereignty, turning to conceptual work and political lobbying alongside acting on the ground. It was in the wake of the disengagement that the idea of the “Sovereignty Movement” was conceived, which was essentially an idea to redefine sovereignty such that the concept itself would reject partition; this, we find, was critical to shaping how sovereignty is understood as domination in Israeli political discourse today.

The Sovereignty Movement that spearheaded the change in how *ribonut* is understood in Hebrew and the proliferation of its use was established in 2010 by “Women in Green,” a high-profile group of activists in the Israeli settler movement.¹²⁹ The movement’s founding objective was to articulate a clear political theory and vision that could be communicated to the Israeli public and the international community and to promote that

vision through formal legislation. It sought to create a situation in which further disengagement, partition, and the establishment of a Palestinian state would not be viable not only because it would be impractical (due to settlement construction), but conceptually untenable. Through reconceptualizing the term “sovereignty” as control over land, the movement implied – and continues to imply – that Israel is not fully sovereign so long as it does not control the entire territory of the biblical land of Israel.

The success of the movement is unmistakable. First, as the examples from the online dictionaries discussed above showed, sovereignty in Hebrew is now increasingly associated with annexation. In 2018 an addition was made to the Wikipedia entry “*ribonut*” which is a cross-reference to “Sovereignty: A Political Journal”; the journal of the “Sovereignty Movement.” By 2020, all free online dictionaries in Hebrew defined *ribonut* according to the Wikipedia definition, such that sovereignty in Hebrew in internet research does not mean self-rule, but rule *over* a territory or people. This spread suggests that this understanding of sovereignty is now the dominant one in Israeli public discourse.

In that vein, the ubiquitous roadside signs calling for “sovereignty now” are immediately understood by passers-by as calls for annexation. Second, while sovereignty was hardly discussed in Israel in the past, since 2010 the issue of sovereignty has risen exponentially in new reports, almost exclusively with the meaning of *adnut*.¹³⁰ A third mark of success is the extent to which democracy is excluded from sovereignty discourse. Of 10,600 news reports discussing “sovereignty” in 2010 through 2019, only 1,800 discussed democracy. Fourth, the Sovereignty movement has moved from the margins of the settler movement into mainstream society and politics. Its increasing legitimacy is evident in its endorsement by the major religious youth movement (Bnei Akiva), the adoption of the principle of annexation by the ruling Likud party’s Central Committee, and the participation of 39 of 120 Knesset members, ministers and deputy ministers as authors, contributors, or interviewees in the Sovereignty Journal. Finally, the movement’s power is evident

in the current moment, when both major parties agree on “applying sovereignty” to the Jordan Valley, with *ribonut* being a central theme of coalition negotiations.¹³¹

Conclusion: The Evolution of Sovereignty

The meaning of sovereignty is changing not only in Israel but worldwide. While the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have been considered a period of “sovereignty in crisis,”¹³² our times raise the question of what comes next. With globalization, “sovereignty as domination” and the acceptance of paternalist power-structures in international politics may be one of two viable alternatives for the international arena, the other being a radical rethinking of sovereignty and a move to post-sovereignty and partnerships between peoples irrespective of their territorial possessions. But paternalist power structures are not only about international politics; they are about democracy itself. Israeli discourse reveals that when sovereignty comes to mean domination, sovereignty ceases to become a national right and an expression of national freedom, and becomes a tool for subjection. Those who care about the future of Israel/Palestine and about democracy should be attuned to sovereignty discourse in Israel and its implications.

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HOW MANY IS ONE TOO MANY? ISRAELI ELECTIONS 2018 - 2020

By Tamar Hermann

Between 2018-2020 Israel set a national – perhaps even international - record by holding (at least to the date of this writing) four election campaigns in 18 months:¹³³ one municipal (October 2018) and three national (April and

September 2019, March 2020). The municipal elections were conducted on time and showed no indication of the upcoming saga. Yet, the following three national elections were all inconclusive. For the first time in Israel's history, after both the April and the September rounds none of the largest parties' leaders (Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud and Benny Gantz of Blue and White) was able to assemble a majority-based coalition. Thus, new elections had to be called upon. As a result, Israelis have lived in a protracted elections campaign since late 2018. In addition to the elections, this period was dominated by the legal process focusing on Prime Minister Netanyahu—which resulted in three indictments against him. Netanyahu's case has so dominated the political arena that the common wisdom in Israel is that the three elections were all about the public sentiment “for or against Bibi” while all strategic issues have been neglected. At the same time, Israel has been experiencing for several years now a low level of public trust in the political institutions (Hermann et. al, 2019). Are the frequent elections the last straw that may break the camel's back, i.e., are Israeli citizens losing their political patience and interest in the democratic process?

This paper briefly discusses Israeli public opinion on three relevant topics:

1. Are the elections interesting?
2. Are the elections fair?
3. What are the elections all about?

The data presented below is taken from the Israeli Voice monthly public opinion polls project, conducted by the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research in the Israel Democracy Institute.¹³⁴

Are the elections interesting?

Israelis are known for their high political awareness and engagement.¹³⁵ However, when the second round of elections was called for September 2019, many predicted that a large number of Israelis would stay at home because of electoral fatigue or as protest. This did not happen; in fact, the national turnout increased

between April and September from 68.5% to 69.4%. The increase was especially visible (from 49.2% to 59.2%) in the Israel Arab sector where voter turnout is historically lower than in the Jewish sector.

And yet, there were some warning signs of elections fatigue. For example, in the Israeli Voice survey of August 2019 and again in January 2020 the following question was presented: "In about another month and a half, elections will be held for the Knesset. Compared to the campaign for the previous elections in XXXX, are you following the current campaign to the same extent, less, or more?" The optional answers were: 1) Following the current campaign more; 2) Following the current campaign less; 3) Following it to the same extent; 4) Don't know. In January almost half of the respondents (48%) reported that they follow the current campaign less, compared to 41% in August. Only 12% reported in the later poll that they follow the elections more than in the past (compared to 17% in August). The number of those reporting that they follow it to the same extent was about the same in the two surveys.

Segmentation of the answers to this question by the three main political blocs (self-positioning, Jews³⁶) – Left, Center or Right³⁷ -- show significant differences: the majority in the Left (53%) reports that they are as interested as they were in April. On the Right, the majority reports that they are less interested than previously (52%). Like in many other issues, the Center is somewhere in between: here a plurality (47%) report that they are less interested than in the past. Age appears as a major factor in this regard: while 63% of the youngest age cohort (18-34 years old) is less interested in the current elections, amongst the oldest age cohort (55 years old and above) the majority (51%) says that their level of interest stays the same. Only 34% of the older groups report that they are less interested in the elections than before.

Are the elections fair?

Cases of interference with the votes counting were suspected and investigated more than once in

Israel. These cases were mostly uncovered in ultra-Orthodox largely populated neighborhoods and in Arab towns and villages. There used to be a consensus that these were "local initiatives" and that, by and large, Israeli elections were fair. However, after the 2015 elections, a group of concerned activists sensed that something had gone wrong. Based on a meticulous analysis of the formal outcomes compared to the timeline of the voting, the possible number of voters per a time unite, etc., they reached the conclusion, which they shared then with a number of academics, data analysts and media professionals, that the official reports were improbable: that Likud was allocated significantly more votes than it had actually received. This argument did not get much attention at the time, but with the growing grassroots distrust of the political establishment in the following years it seems to have better resonated with the public's ear: more than a few Israelis now doubt the fairness of the elections.

Thus, since early 2019 the following question was presented in five Israeli Voice surveys: To what extent do you have or not have trust in the integrity of the Knesset elections, meaning that the results to be announced will accurately reflect how the public voted?" In all measurements the finding were highly disturbing: on the average a bit over one third of the Israelis (34.3%) appear skeptical regarding the accuracy of the official reporting of the results or are even convinced that they were distorted (March 2019 - 27.5%, April 2019 – 32%, August 2019 – 43%, September 2019 – 32%, January 2020 – 37%). In all five surveys, skepticism and distrust regarding the fairness of the elections was significantly higher amongst the Israeli Arab respondents; in the January survey it amounted to 52%. Segmentation of the Jewish sample in the same survey by political blocs showed that the number of the doubters was the lowest in the Left (29%) and somewhat higher in both the Center and the Right (33%). Segmentation by level of religiosity (Jews) also produced some interesting results: amongst the ultra-Orthodox 47% doubted or totally rebutted the integrity of the elections, among the religious – 35%, the traditional religious – 41%, the traditional non-religious – 25% and the secular – 33%. In other words, the two sectors in

which manipulations of the votes counting have been more prevalent, i.e., the Arab and the ultra-Orthodox are also the more skeptical regarding the elections integrity.

What are the elections all about?

What is the main reason for voting for one party and not for another (usually of the same bloc as inter-bloc shifts are usually quite uncommon)? In February 2019 and in January 2020 the following question about priorities was presented to the Israeli Voice survey interviewees: "What, in your opinion, is the main issue that will affect how Israelis vote in the upcoming Knesset elections?" The options were: 1) The cost of living and of housing; 2) The security situation; 3) The Netanyahu investigations; 4) Religion and state issues; 5) Jewish-Arab relations in the country.¹³⁸ In early 2019 a plurality of the respondents (30%) pointed to the security situation as the main reason for voting for a specific party. Second came the cost of living and housing (22%) and third – the Netanyahu investigations (19%). However in January the order changed somewhat: the Netanyahu investigations jumped to the top (32%), cost of living and housing stayed second (21%) and the security situation dropped to the third place (17%). This may indicate that indeed the elections are all about "for or against Bibi".

The difference between Jews and Arabs in this regard reflects the disparity in their respective situation as Israeli citizens: while the Jews put on top Netanyahu investigations (34%) as they are more troubled by the corruption issue, the Arabs, who struggle with much lower living standards pointed to the cost of living and housing as the top priority for making the electoral decision (33%). The differences between the three political blocs voters (Jews) are also significant: in the Center 47% put Netanyahu investigations on top, as this is the principal issue addressed by the main party of this bloc – Blue and White. So did 45.5% of the Left who would like to see Netanyahu out for a wide variety for reasons, not only corruption. However, only 28% of voters on the Right put the Netanyahu investigations on top. This can be explained by their shared view that the court case against Netanyahu is a judicial plot

by his opponents who failed to topple him twice electorally - in April and September.

Despite the unprecedented repetition of the 2019-2020 election campaigns, Israelis still develop and hold solid views on the political processes related to the elections. Indeed many follow the campaigns less closely than before, particularly the younger citizens, but this may change when election-day is right around the corner. Indeed, a significant number doubt the fairness of the elections, but the majority does not. Much depends now on the development of the Netanyahu court case. If he stays in office for a few more years, it may well derail Israel democracy off track. However, if he departs office, there is a significant potential for recovery as the public is still highly politically engaged.

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RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS AT WAR

INTRODUCTION: ISLAMISTS AT WAR

By Marc Lynch

Islamist movements have been deeply involved in a wide range of civil wars over the last decade. How, if at all, has their involvement differed from the role played by non-Islamist groups? How has their participation in these wars changed these movements, whether in terms of strategy, ideology, organization or external alliances? Do different types of Islamists – Sunnis and Shi'ite, Muslim Brotherhood organizations and salafi-jihadists, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State – engage differently with wartime conditions? In an earlier contribution to this Newsletter, I laid out the case for the rigorous study of Islamist participation in war.¹³⁹ This special section presents a number of the papers presented at the January 2019 Project on Middle East Political Science workshop.

The contributors to the workshop were asked to approach the question of Islamist participation in wars through the lens of their own research focus. Steven Brooke, drawing on his research on the social services provided by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, asks whether the mechanisms by which Islamists gained political advantage in stable authoritarian contexts also operate in war zones.¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Nugent draws on her research on the impact of state repression on Islamist radicalization and moderation to consider how warzones might impact their ideology and behavior.¹⁴¹ Nicholas Lotito, in his contribution, uses conflict data to demonstrate differences in how effectively Islamists fight compared with non-Islamist counterparts. Khalil al-Anani asks whether prison conditions are conducive to rethinking Islamist ideology and strategy. Morten Valbjørn and Jeroen Gunning, in their contribution, carefully examine the logic and theoretical framing for understanding the operation of such mechanisms, especially those related to identity.

These short essays help to frame an important new research programme with questions and puzzles which cut across disciplinary and methodological orientations.

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PRISON, EMOTIONS, AND IDEOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON EGYPT'S CRUEL AND OVERCROWDED PRISONS

By Khalil Al-Anani

Does prison affect ideology? And if so, how does it shape individuals' worldview and stance from critical issues such political participation, democracy, violence, war, etc.? If we consider ideology as a socially constructed reality, in Berger and Luckman's words, then prison, as a space and experience, can become a key factor in creating, altering, or maintaining it.¹⁴² However, this process of constructing or changing ideology doesn't occur or operate on vacuum. Several factors are in play including personal experiences, emotions, grievances, which can have significant impact on ideology.

This memo focuses on emotions as an intermediate factor in shaping individuals' worldviews and ideology, particularly in peculiar settings such as prisons. Ideology, broadly defined, can be viewed as a constellation of ideas that stem from our senses, sentiments, feeling, and what we make of the surrounding world. Put differently, our senses are the underlying ingredients of our ideas, beliefs, and ideology. Without delving further into the debate over the definition(s) of ideology, it is important to stress its role in informing and directing one's behavior and actions.

In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, French philosopher Michel Foucault stresses the devastating and lasting impact of prison on human body, mind, and soul.¹⁴³ For him, prison is not merely a control and disciplinary tool but also it redefines and delineates power relations, which in turn have a strong impact on individuals' conception of the world. Likewise, as Antonio Gramsci reminds us in his *Prison Notebooks*, ideology is the "science of ideas," which "had to be broken down into their original "elements", and

these could be nothing other than "sensations."¹⁴⁴ Thus, as Roger Petersen points out, "the role of emotions should be examined within the context of the real-life experiences that generate them."¹⁴⁵ Emotions in politics is not something new in scholarship particularly in the study of social movements¹⁴⁶, however, it is still understudied in the case of Islamism.

In Egypt, thousands of individuals have been languishing in prison for the past seven years, including political activists, opposition leaders, NGO's members, and ordinary people. Some of them have been undergoing different experiences that impact their feelings, sentiments, beliefs, and worldviews. Methodologically, while it is extremely difficult to conduct field research in Egypt, let alone with political prisoners, it is significantly important to make sense of their personal experiences and how they shape and construct their world of meanings. Over the past three years, I have been collecting data about political prisoners in Egypt (former and current), particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, in an attempt to draw a clearer picture on the ongoing ideological and political changes within the movement especially among the youth. These data were collected through different methods including online interviews using different technological and communicative tools; prisoners' blogs, notebooks, and social media accounts; and human rights organizations' reports.

In this memo, I focus on a 110-page-long notebook that was leaked from an Egyptian prison at the end of 2018. The notebook reveals significant

changes in the worldviews of those who drafted and wrote it. One of them is serving a life in prison sentence in one of Upper Egypt's prison after standing before a military trial and four others have been in a pre-trial detention for almost six years now. I had the opportunity to chat with a couple of these people which gave me an inside look into the circumstances of writing and sharing this notebook in prison. I have chosen to keep their identities anonymous to protect them from potential repercussions.

The *Notebook* is called "The Shock" (*as-sadma*) and considered by this group of members to be a radical revision (*muraj'a jazriyya*) to the Brotherhood's ideology, discourse, and political tactics. The *Notebook* is composed of twenty epistles that were written between 2015-2017. Before analyzing the *Notebook*, two points are worth mentioning. First is that while those who wrote the *Notebook* claim that an early draft of the *Notebook* was shared and discussed widely within the Brotherhood, the impact of this *Notebook* on the rank-and-file is still unknown. Second, while these members stress that there was no political pressure from the state to issue this *Notebook*; one cannot dismiss such pressure giving the cruelty of the current regime. In fact, there is a great interest of the regime to use this "ideological" revision to deepen divisions within the Brotherhood and vindicate the brutality against its members. The regime believes that more pressure on the Brotherhood could lead to ideological revisions such as what happened with Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyya in the late 1990s.

The content of the *Notebook* revolves around three key themes. First, it presents a profound and critical revision of the Brotherhood's ideology, with harsh criticism of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb's views and of the very idea of Islamizing state and society. Second, it rebukes the Brotherhood's leadership for its political blunders, particularly after taking power in 2012 and after the coup of 2013. Third, it offers personal accounts of their decision to abandon the Brotherhood ideologically and organizationally. The *Notebook* reveals significant changes in these members' views and perception of themselves, the Brotherhood, and the world.

On ideology, the *Notebook* criticizes the Brotherhood's views on social and political change and describes them as "unrealistic." Moreover, it considers the Brotherhood as a "useless movement that caused a lot of problems to the entire Muslim world." The *Notebook* goes on to blame al-Banna's "bottom-up" strategy for change which led, according to the *Notebook*, to "catastrophic mistakes." As one of the *Notebook's* contributors points out, "the problem with al-Banna's views on change is it created a parallel organization that competes with society and seeks to take over which was not only naïve but also problematic."¹⁴⁷ Another contributor criticizes the indoctrination and socialization process of the Brotherhood which, according to him, tends to focus on "religious and preaching" components without giving attention to political learning except during elections seasons.¹⁴⁸

On the role of leadership, the *Notebook* holds the Brotherhood's leaders responsible for the mistakes and problems that occurred after taking power in 2012. One of the contributors believes that the presidential election of 2012 was an "entrapment" for the Brothers, who should have not run for the presidency. The *Notebook* blames the Brotherhood's leadership for rushing into power without serious and transparent deliberations. It refers to the power centers in the movement and how the conservative wing pushed the movement away from the objective of the January 2011 uprising. The authors also believe that Morsi's presidency was hijacked by the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau (*maktab al-irshad*) which undermined Morsi and distorted his image as an independent president. Moreover, the authors of the *Notebook* believe the coup of 2013 was not inevitable and it could have been avoided had Morsi agreed to accept the opposition's demand of holding early presidential elections. They invoke the decision of Turkish Islamist and former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to step down after being pressured by the military in 1997. "Had Morsi done what Necmettin Erbakan in 1997, he could have saved many lives and maintained the democratic transition," one of them said.¹⁴⁹

This particular group of young members has decided to leave the Brotherhood. While there are different reasons behind this, prison plays an important role in shaping these members' decision to do so.¹⁵⁰ This role can be either as a result of reflection or despair and disillusionment. As one of the Brotherhood's members puts it, "in prison, I have time to rethink, reflect, and decide for myself without organizational or family pressure."¹⁵¹ While some members abandoned the entire ideology of the Brotherhood, others decided to disassociate themselves from it organizationally. This abandonment has become a pattern in the past few years. Several interviewees have expressed the feelings of frustration, discontent, and loss. Some of them decided to leave the Brotherhood and others went beyond and abandoned religion itself and became atheists.

Clearly, prison, as a space and experience, has given young Brotherhood an opportunity to rethink and reassess not only their leadership's political strategy over the past few years but also to reflect on the movement's very basic ideas, slogans, and beliefs. Recently, four letters have been issued and leaked from prisons by a wider group of young Brotherhood.¹⁵² The letters emphasize and convey similar views to what was mentioned in the *Notebook*.

Notwithstanding, ideology is not something static or immutable, for Islamists as well for as any other actor. It is not clear why certain changes occur in certain contexts/times/spaces (i.e. war, prison, exile, etc.) or why some individuals/members can be more prone to change than others. Therefore, explaining Islamists' ideological and political changes requires a careful understanding of these circumstances and settings. Similarly, while studying Islamism as a collective actor is important, understanding Islamists as human beings with emotions, feelings, sentiments, and different personalities is crucial to understand the underpinnings of their worldviews and how they evolve over time.

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WAR, DISPLACEMENT, AND THE ISLAMIST ADVANTAGE

By Steven Brooke

Two interrelated features of the contemporary Middle East are ongoing insurgencies and the extensive internally and internationally displaced populations. At the same time, there is a growing literature on the “Islamist advantage,” the idea that certain (inherent?) characteristics of Islamist groups privilege them over their non-Islamist competitors in such interrelated realms as organizational durability, electoral prowess, mobilization capacity, and social service delivery.¹⁵³ In addition to (or perhaps as a cause of) these more concrete outcomes, scholars have also theorized that Islamist groups’ ideological orientation may create a perception that their actions are in some diffuse way “better” than similar actions carried out by non-Islamists. How does work on the “Islamist Advantage” function (or not) in the region’s unfortunately prominent cases of insurgent governance and refugee flows?

To the extent that there is such an “Islamist advantage,” it has implications for insurgencies. In cases around the world, scholars have documented how insurgents strive to create territory-based structures of order.¹⁵⁴ They do this in a variety of ways: they build or repurpose institutions involved in goods provision, such as public order, utilities, and market regulation. They co-opt local notables and personalities, using these actors’ local reputations and capabilities to bolster to their own operations. And in many cases, insurgents develop order through coercion: repressing competitors, punishing collaborators, enforcing rules, and generating social and organizational cohesion. For our purposes, we include a particularly prominent subset of these insurgent groups: Salafi-oriented Jihadists. These are headlined, of course, by the Islamic State and its affiliates, which seized territory and built up complex

bureaucratic institutions both in Syria and in various other conflict zones around the region.

The literature on the “Islamist Advantage,” however, has almost exclusively focused on non-violent groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, and neglected the ways that such an advantage might manifest under wartime conditions. But this concept has obvious ramifications both for insurgent governance in general and for the ways in which insurgent groups and civilian populations interact. One expectation is that these groups would be “better” at governing territories and populations than non-Islamist groups, for example, by being more efficient or less corrupt. Yet the mechanism for why this might be so is something that would have to be uncovered. On the one hand, it may be that a tighter organizational structure--- often theorized to be a characteristic of Islamist groups--- facilitates the type of coordination necessary to govern large swathes of territory. On the other, Islamist groups may benefit from the perception that some aspect of their rule is fundamentally more legitimate than that of non-Islamist groups. Particularly when trying to identify the interaction between rebel governance and civilian populations, this factor might ensure local compliance--- and therefore stability--- at a higher rate than for groups boasting another type of identity.

As with insurgencies, it seems likely that relief work among refugee populations is an area in which the “Islamist Advantage” is relevant. But unlike the focus on salafi-jihadists, service provision to displaced populations would seem to be the main (but not exclusive) province of Muslim Brotherhood-style political Islamists. These types of groups have long histories in exactly this type of activity in conflict zones from Afghanistan to the Balkans to the current conflict in Syria. They are also active in a full spectrum of operations, from simple distribution of short-term resources such as food and clothing to affected populations, all the way to full-blown provision of educational and medical services. Given how a key ongoing interest in the “Islamist Advantage” literature concerns social service provision, extending the study to relief work among

displaced populations is a natural area for further research.

An area of both practical and theoretical interest concerns efficacy of service delivery. Do displaced individuals perceive the assistance they receive from Islamist groups to be better than the assistance provided by non-Islamist groups?¹⁵⁵ Relatedly, is it?¹⁵⁶ Do the answers to these questions depend on the particular *type* of aid provided (schooling versus medical care, for instance)? Does ideological sympathy precede, follow, or not matter for Islamist groups' provision of services? This type of interaction is not only important in the immediate moment, but it also has potential to initiate long-term relationships that will prove relevant to a variety of postwar political and social outcomes. For example, would geographic areas or social blocs that have been exposed to Islamist groups' relief activities be more likely to support Islamists in future elections or contentious mobilizations? Would these areas be more likely to be punished as regimes retain control?

The above notions are not meant to be exhaustive. But one key implication from both of the above scenarios is the need to be explicitly comparative, both between various types of "Islamist" organizations *and* between these organizations and non-Islamist ones. Take, for example, the idea that Islamist groups benefit from a built-in perception of legitimacy, manifested by evidence that Islamist political order is perceived as inherently better than non-Islamist political order, or a perception that Islamists' services to displaced populations are better than those provided by non-Islamists. A natural point of comparison here would be to "ethnic" organizations, for example by leveraging a comparison with Kurdish organizations. If the "Islamist Advantage" extends to rebel governance and/or relief work, how does it compare with an "ethnic" advantage?

In conditions of both civil war and insurgency, civilians pay high costs. When they remain, they are often subject to coercion as combatants attempt to (re)construct political order. When they flee, they put themselves at the mercy of a

patchwork of states and organizations to obtain basic necessities. In the contemporary Middle East, Islamist groups are often involved in both of these equations, which provide us as scholars the opportunity to extend the study of the Islamist advantage to conditions of civil war and population displacement.

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ISLAMISM IN CIVIL WAR

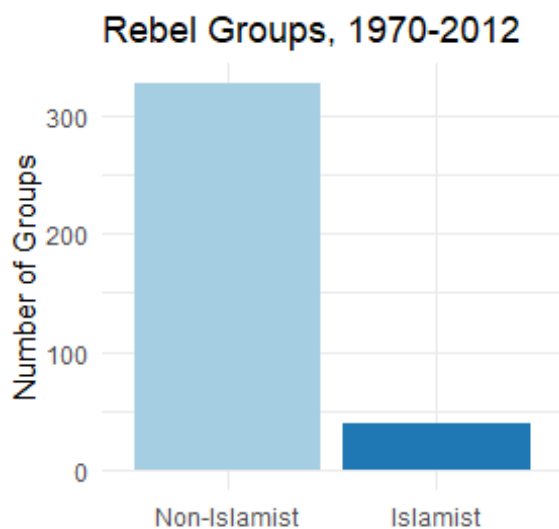
By Nicholas J. Lotito

Political violence perpetrated by Islamists is most often considered in the context of terrorism, rather than insurgency or civil war. While the global *jihadi* movement, including al-Qaeda and Daesh, has been the most high-profile perpetrator of transnational terrorism in recent memory, the automatic association of Islamism with terrorism is both politically and conceptually problematic. Moreover, studying Islamist terrorism in isolation assumes that terrorism follows a unique causal pathway relative to other forms of political violence.

An alternative approach is to consider Islamist violence through the lens of civil war. Not all Islamist violence occurs within civil wars, but the most deadly campaigns of Islamist violence have occurred within broader armed conflicts such as the civil wars in Iraq and Syria. The context of those civil wars offers a useful comparison set for examining Islamist and non-Islamist tactics and organization. Do Islamists fight differently within civil wars? In particular, are Islamists more likely to use terrorism than non-Islamist rebel groups?

In this short essay I present an exploratory data analysis of the use of violence by Islamist groups in civil wars. The data comes from the Dangerous Companions Dataset (San-Akca 2016), which is based on the UCDP Armed Conflict Dataset (Allansson, Melander, and Themnér 2017). These datasets allow us to assess the prevalence of Islamism within the broader universe of civil war combatants (hereafter rebel groups or nonstate armed groups). Finally, I conclude with a

discussion of the benefits and limitations of cross-national data analysis of conflict in the Middle East.



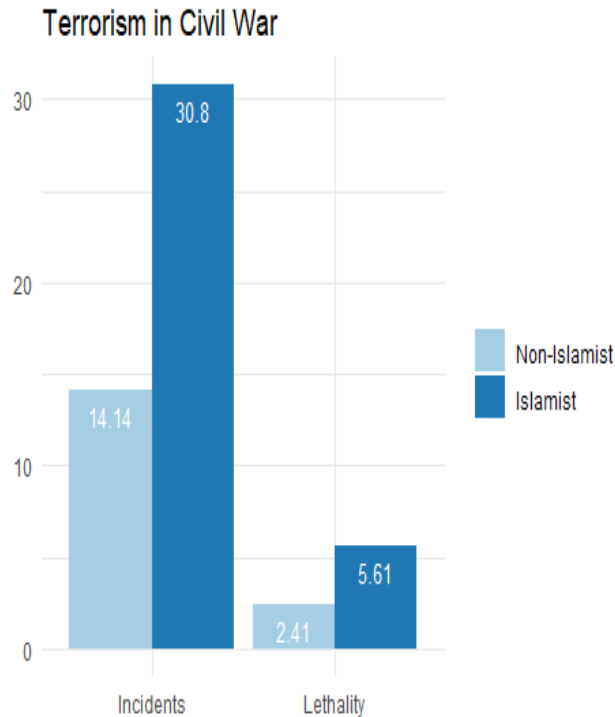
San-Akca's data include 367 rebel groups active from 1970 to 2012. Of these, only 40 (11%) are Islamists, defined as groups advocating the establishment of an Islamic theocracy. However, within the 22 countries targeted by at least one Islamist group, Islamists represent 42 of 128 rebel groups (33%)—a substantial proportion. These numbers suggest that although Islamists represent only a small proportion of rebels worldwide, they are nevertheless an important source of rebel activity in Muslim countries. This essay does not seek to explain their involvement in civil wars, but rather how they behave within those wars.

Terrorism is a common tactic in civil war contexts, but not all nonstate civil war combatants employ terrorism. Until recently, data limitations have prevented scholars from empirically studying the use of terrorism within civil wars (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008; Polo and Gleditsch 2016; Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2018). To remedy this, Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin (2020) introduce a new data set, Terrorism in Armed Conflict (TAC), which combines information from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the UCDP Dyadic Dataset. Below, I combine TAC with the Dangerous Companions data discussed above. The combined data describe the annual number of terrorist attacks committed by each rebel group, as well as the number of fatalities resulting from

those attacks.¹⁵⁷

First, I consider whether the *quantity* of terrorism differs between Islamist and non-Islamist rebel groups. As a first approximation, I compare the annual average number of terrorist incidents attributed to Islamist and non-Islamist groups, respectively.¹⁵⁸ On average, Islamist groups commit 118% more terrorist attacks per year than non-Islamist groups. A one-tailed t-test indicates that the difference in means between Islamist and non-Islamist groups is statistically significant ($p = 0.09$). Thus, the data offer preliminary support for the hypothesis that Islamist rebels use terrorism more often than their non-Islamist counterparts.

Next, we might wonder whether the *nature* of terrorism differs between Islamists and non-Islamists. One indication of the nature of attacks is their *lethality*, i.e. the number of fatalities per terrorist incident. Comparing the average lethality of Islamist and non-Islamist groups, I find that terrorist incidents attributed to Islamist groups are 133% more lethal than attacks by non-Islamists in the data. The difference-in-means is less significant ($p = 0.101$), but suggestive of an association.



While these exploratory analyses are far from definitive, they offer a point of departure for considering whether Islamists fight differently within the context of civil wars. Additional analyses might consider whether Islamists are more likely to receive foreign financing than non-Islamist groups, and whether such support translates into a greater willingness to use terrorism, consistent with previous findings (Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2018).

This preliminary analysis points to the potential benefits for research on the dynamics of political violence in the Middle East by drawing on the vastly increased quantity and quality of open-source data available on conflict. In addition to traditional dyadic data, which codes information at the level of the conflict between two sides, the improvements in computing power and web-based data have led to a proliferation of event data (Sundberg and Melander 2013). Scholars have also worked to integrate data on ethnic politics (Vogt et al. 2015), contentious politics (Asal, Cousins, and Gleditsch 2015), and conflict events (Donnay et al. 2019). These combined data sources expand the range of testable hypotheses and allow researchers to model the multiple causal pathways

present in dynamic conflicts. Furthermore, the embrace of geographic information systems (GIS) has improved the accuracy of conflict event data and is enabling research on the microfoundations of conflict within a large-*n* framework (e.g., Sundberg and Melander 2013). These advances could be invaluable for research on questions central to Middle Eastern politics. For example, integrated data can help researchers to map the different forms of violent and nonviolent political mobilization that have grown out of the Arab Spring or to address the causes and consequences of displacement and forced migration (e.g., Bove and Böhmelt 2019).

Two common pitfalls of cross-national approaches are data quality and arbitrary definitional choices. First, most large data sets rely on open media sources (and often only those available in English), which leads to systematic biases in event reporting (Borzyskowski and Wahman 2019). In the Middle East, where language barriers and media censorship both limit coverage, it is especially important to account for potential reporting bias. Second, data projects include or exclude events, groups, and phenomena on the basis of sometimes arbitrary definitional choices. For example, the choice of fatality threshold for civil war case selection can produce artificial or incomplete results (Anderson and Worsnop 2019). A related problem results from researchers' decision to classify two actors (e.g., rebel groups) as independent when, in fact, they are part of the same movement, resulting in frequent model misspecification and other challenges to statistical inference (Cranmer and Desmarais 2016). Many concepts central to the study of Middle East politics are politicized and highly contentious – for example, terrorism or *shari'a* (Fair, Littman, and Nugent 2018) – heightening the need for caution when deploying existing data sets.

The TAC dataset analyzed above accounts for these challenges in two principal ways: first, TAC offers researchers the ability to tailor these definitions and group-affiliation choices on a per-project basis. Applying area expertise, I was able to cross check the quantitative data against my qualitative knowledge of key actors, forms and patterns of violence, and group dynamics, to

ensure the data was picking up what I thought it was. Second, TAC provides information on the specific relationships between groups in the data. This feature allowed me to test my conclusions against the inclusion or exclusion of certain affiliate groups that are common in the Muslim world: the armed wings of political parties like Hamas, splinter factions, umbrella coalitions like al-Qaeda, and more.

In conclusion, researchers can often mitigate the pitfalls of cross-national analysis by carefully reviewing the underlying data and making appropriate modeling choices to account for potential biases. These and other data transparency measures are essential to empowering researchers to deploy context-specific knowledge and make theoretically motivated decisions around concept specification and measurement. Nowhere are these considerations more essential than in studies of subjects like Islam and terrorism, where essential concepts are contested and politicized. Applying these principles, scholars can avoid drawing simplistic or essentializing conclusions from the data.¹⁵⁹

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ISLAMIST RADICALIZATION AND CIVIL WAR

By Elizabeth R. Nugent

Do war conditions radicalize Islamist political actors? If so, how? And are Islamist actors radicalized differently from non-Islamist actors under the same civil war conditions? In this piece, I explore what lessons scholars interested in studying Islamists under conditions of civil war can draw from existing literature on Islamist actors, radicalization, and use of violence.

First, it is helpful to define the terms of the question. In political science, ‘radicalization’ is used to refer to a variety of changes, including shifts in ideology, rhetoric, and approaches to

out-groups (Schwedler 2011). I focus here on *behavioral* radicalization, in which actors shift from engaging in politics peacefully, perhaps through elections or protest, to engaging in politics through violence. A civil war is “any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropole, (b) the active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides” (Small and Singer 1982, 2010, though see Sambanis (2004) for a detailed discussion of the many complications created by this seemingly straightforward definition).

Scholars have extensively researched the causal mechanisms through which the political behavior of Islamist actors is shaped by the broader economic, social, and political environment in which they operate during periods of ‘normal’ (i.e. non-wartime) politics. A prominent strand of literature analyzes the way in which behavioral radicalization begins with conditions of political and social exclusion. Economic deprivation and social alienation, particularly relative to other groups, have long been identified as necessary factors for pushing actors towards violence (Gurr 1970), and studies of Islamist radicalization similarly find these elements to be important in this process (Ansari 1984, Ayubi 1991, Sivan 1985, Dekmejian 1995).

Existing literature on Islamists has analyzed how political and social exclusion shapes these actors’ ideologies and worldviews (Wickham 2013; Ashour 2009; Schwedler 2006) and politically-relevant identities (al-Anani 2016, Nugent 2020). These identities and worldviews, in turn, affect political behaviors including official rhetoric (Tezcur 2010a, 2010b; Kurzman and Naqvi 2010), political strategies (Clark 2006; Schwedler and Clark 2006; Brown 2007), affect and relative preference positioning with regards to competing groups (Nugent 2020), and internal organization (el-Ghobashy 2005; Shehata and Stacher 2006, al-Anani 2016).

While deprivation is necessary for the process of radicalization, it is alone not sufficient to cause actors to embrace violence. Deprived and excluded groups must “also feel like militant action is the

only option available to them” (White 1989). This is where repression and the broader political environment factors into the equation. Islamists embrace violence in contexts where they face “exclusionary and repressive political environments” that limit the availability of peaceful means of political contestation (Hafez 2003). This is not unique to Islamist actors; groups of various ideological persuasions are similarly radicalized by these same contexts. However, because the Muslim world is predominated by authoritarian regimes and accompanying repressive policies (Nugent 2020), Islamist actors are well represented in empirical studies of radicalization.

Do these same explanations for Islamist in periods of ‘normal’ politics help us understand Islamists in civil war environments, both in how they come to engage in civil war as well as how they are affected? If so, would we expect Islamist movements and organizations to respond in the same manner as non-Islamists to similar civil wartime conditions?

To begin, it appears that dominant explanations for behavioral radicalization during ‘normal’ politics provide significant explanatory power for understanding why Islamists turn to violence against the state or civilians in conditions of civil war. Policymakers often try to paint individuals motivated to violence, particularly those violent actors espousing religious ideologies or attached to religious groups, as having a deficient psychopathology (Silke 1998). However, the political usage of violence in civil war is a group activity (similar to arguments about terrorism summarized in Crenshaw 2000). As such, explanations of group-based grievances of economic (relative) deprivation and social exclusion, coupled with a repressive and exclusive political environment, are likely to account for the mobilization and participation of groups in civil wars. For example, the political expulsion of Islamist candidates and parties from elections accompanying the 2013 coup in Egypt correlates with subsequent patterns of anti-state and anti-Christian violence (Nugent and Brooke 2020).

The social psychological mechanisms underpinning this process explain how

radicalization obtains. When groups experience violence that targets them as such, as may occur in the lead up to civil war or during it, they further distance themselves from non-targeted groups in how they define themselves and more strongly identify with that exclusive identity. This has predictable effects, such as decreasing positive affect towards non-targeted groups, polarizing preferences, and decreasing the likelihood of cooperation with non-targeted out-groups (for example: Durkheim 1912, Brewer 1979, Tajfel et al 1971, Turner 1978, Schuman and Scott 1989, Schuman et al 1997, Brewer and Brown 1998, Wagner, Kronberger, and Seifert 2002, Bastian et al. 2014). Many rebel groups started as political movements that were radicalized due to political opportunity structures, and Islamist groups are no different.

However, beyond the process of radicalization, existing Islamist scholarship leaves unanswered a number of important questions relevant to Islamism in civil war contexts. Does the sequencing of events matter for radicalization? For example, is the process and pace of adopting violence the same for a group that contested elections that were then foreclosed and a group that never had the option of contesting elections? Are Islamist groups more persistent or violent, differently or better funded, when participating in civil wars? Are they differently or better funded by international actors? Are civil wars involving Islamist groups unique in the presence or number of foreign fighter participants?

These persistent questions are likely driven by latent assumptions about Islamist exceptionalism. In early studies, analyses put forward essentialist claims that Islam’s content uniquely legitimates the use of violence against other actors. However, rebellious movements inspired by secular ethnonationalist, socialist, and right-wing ideologies have all been mobilized to violence under similar conditions (Sprinzak 1990, Rabbie 1991, Della Porta 1992). Scholars would benefit from comparing Islamist and non-Islamist actors, as well as civil wars both involving and excluding Islamist groups, to determine whether Islamist radicalization is unique, or to demonstrate its similarities with other marginalized and repressed

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ISLAMIST IDENTITY POLITICS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

By Morten Valbjørn and Jeroen Gunning

Do identities matter for explaining the behavior of Islamist actors in war zones? If yes, then what is the relative importance of identities as opposed to the structural context? Is it necessary to pay attention to the “content” of identities or can different identities basically be treated as alike? To address these questions, it can be useful to revisit similar debates in other parts of the social sciences, including International Relations, civil war studies and (critical) terrorism studies. From those well-developed literatures, we highlight four distinct ways of framing discussions on identity politics which are relevant to consider in the present context.

The first of the four frames revolves around the (relative) importance of *ideational* vs. *material* factors. This debate is often framed in “either/or” terms, so the discussion ends up being about whether material or ideational factors mean everything or nothing. This dichotomous framing can be seen in the civil war literature, where greed is juxtaposed to grievance in explaining the onset of unrest, and in some versions of the neorealist vs. poststructuralist traditions in IR.¹⁶⁰ These debates are frustrating; both material and ideational factors must be taken into account but each is alone insufficient. The analytical imperative is to specify the *relative importance* of material and ideational factors and on how they intersect. Illustrating this, in a discussion about the role of Arabism during the Nasser era, Raymond Hinnebusch argues that Egypt’s regional influence at that time cannot be understood without taking into account Nasser’s use of the

Arabist card. But at the same time, he suggests that the long-term outcome of identity-driven foreign policy depends on its congruency with the material balance of power in the region and the nature and degree of global systemic pressures.¹⁶¹ In other words, the role of ideational factors is conditioned by material factors. In a similar way, Constructivists have pointed to the role of ideas in specifying the influence of material factors.

When used to explain the behavior of Islamists in conflict settings, this first framing raises the basic question about whether Islamist combatants are mainly shaped by ideology or by factors more general to wartime conditions. For instance, should Islamic State’s extreme violent practices be attributed to (a specific interpretation of) Islamic doctrines or is it more relevant to pay attention to factors such as state failure, political exclusion and marginalization and how violence shapes religion?¹⁶² Would similarly-placed groups with a different identity behave similarly, or does the unique ISIS identity produce unique behavior? Or alternatively, is it more fruitful to forge a middle way by arguing that any comprehensive account of ISIS must recognize the role of material greed and grievances as well as theology?¹⁶³

The second framing drawn from the broader literature shifts the focus from “whether” ideational factors matter to “*why*” and “*how*” they matter. As IR Constructivists have long since established, acknowledgement of the importance of ideational factors does not necessarily translate into agreement about where they matter in the causal equation. It has also been important among scholars studying Middle East international relations, which traditionally has been perceived as “dripping with identity politics.”¹⁶⁴ There is a considerable tradition of discussing whether identities shape actors’ basic world views and inform their goals, whether their influence mainly concerns the specific ways they are pursuing their interest by enabling or constraining certain forms of behavior, or whether their role is limited to after-the-fact legitimations.¹⁶⁵

In the part of the civil war literature concerned with “*how*” rather than “*whether*” ideology matters for armed groups, it is possible to find a

similar discussion. Sanin and Wood, for instance, have distinguished between a so-called “weak” and “strong” research agenda.¹⁶⁶ The former mainly draws on an instrumental rationality and points to how militant groups adopt ideologies instrumentally to adapt means to ends. Thus, ideology can enable armed groups to socialize combatants with heterogeneous motivations into a coherent group, dampen principal-agent challenges, prioritize competing goals and coordinate with external actors. The latter adopts a more encompassing perspective and focuses on normative and emotional commitments among at least some combatants and examines how these must be taken into account in order to understand the emergence, evolution and behavior of a group.

Some of the analytical tools offered by this second framing invite a discussion about exactly how ideas and identities matter for Islamist combatants in conflict settings. As Cottee puts it, “religion matters in Jihadist violence, but how?”¹⁶⁷ In other words, does an Islamic ideology play a major role in the shaping of militant Islamists’ ultimate motives and notions about who they are and why they fight. Or is the role limited to a shallow *ex post facto* rationalization serving to give a veneer of rectitude to actions informed by other motives. Or is it rather so that while an Islamist ideology may not be the root cause, it constitutes a moral, cultural, and intellectual resource delimiting the scope of what is permissible and hence more or less likely. Hamas in different periods has legitimized both suicide bombings and ceasefires with reference to Islam. This demonstrates how these Islamic resources may allow for multiple interpretations, even if the number of convincing interpretations may not be infinite.¹⁶⁸

The third framing drawn from the literature asks about *whether all identities necessarily matter in the same way*. In other words, can all identities be perceived as basically alike, or is it necessary to distinguish between different kinds of identities? Is there something unique to Islamist identities which matters in war zones? By drawing on some of the classic debates on ethnic politics, Brubaker made a distinction between a “diacritical” and “normative ordering power”

approach to the role of identities.¹⁶⁹ According to the former—ethnic, religious, tribal or national identities can basically be treated as alike. Their relevance is limited to being a distinction marker useful for the drawing of borders between in/out-groups, but they are considered “culturally empty” in the sense that all identities basically will work in identical ways. A second approach emphasizes the normative ordering power dimension of some identities, directing attention to the *content* of specific identities. Identities have substance. They carry a normative dimension associated with certain worldviews and notions of the good society, which in turn has implications for our views about who we are, likely friends/enemies, threats, and appropriate behavior. As a consequence, different identities cannot be treated alike and it is necessary to pay attention to what Barth called “cultural stuff.”

In wartime contexts, discussions about the “content” of identities often have revolved around the religious/non-religious distinction. In terrorism studies, there is, for instance, a considerable tradition of discussing whether, why and how it makes sense speaking of a distinct kind of “religious terrorism.” Based on a critique of influential figures such as Rapoport, Juergensmeyer and Hoffmann; Gunning and Jackson highlight some of the conceptual and empirical challenges in distinguishing between so-called “religious” and “secular” violence.¹⁷⁰ Others have accepted the concept of “religious violence”, but disagree over how it differs from the non-religious. Some have suggested that the two are profoundly different from each other and argued that religious terrorism is utopian, anti-modern, anti-democratic, inflexible, irrational, and unconstrained.¹⁷¹ Others, such as Brubaker, argue that attention to religious beliefs, practices, structures, and processes provides important insights, with a set of modalities and mechanisms specific to religiously informed violent political conflict. These might include the social production of hyper-committed selves, the construction of extreme otherhood and urgent threat, mobilization of rewards, sanctions, justifications and obligations, the experience of profanation and translocal expandability. However, he emphasizes that none of these

modalities and mechanisms are uniquely religious, although others have argued that they make religion particularly salient during conflict.

It thus remains useful to question whether – and if so why – it makes sense in conflict settings to distinguish between non-religious and religious armed groups or will other kinds of analytical distinctions be more useful? Lynch has discussed a number of specific mechanisms through which Islamists in conflict settings may hold *specific* (dis)advantages compared to other actors, for instance, whether they are better at attracting external support due to universal ideology but worse at forming tactical coalitions due to ideological distance.¹⁷² As an alternative to the religious/non-religious distinction, others have suggested a distinction between nationalist/strategic and ideologically/utopian based violence.¹⁷³

Finally, in the fourth framing, the question about the role of the “content” of identities more narrowly focuses on (different currents in) Islam(ism). In a discussion in IR about securitization and religion, Sheikh, for instance, has criticized Bagge Laustsen and Wæver¹⁷⁴ for leaning too heavily on a Western-centric – or more specifically Protestant Christian – understanding of religion. She calls against this background for greater attention to how religion has been conceptualized in quite different ways, including in the Islamic world.¹⁷⁵ Based on this framing, the question about the “content” of identities becomes less about a religious/non-religious distinction and moves to a *more narrow focus on Islam and its place in Islamism*. Over the past decades, this framing has given rise to a huge and multifaceted literature on differences – and similarities – between Islam and Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism¹⁷⁶ and on whether, how and why Islam matters for *Islamists*. Part of this debate has been concerned with the very contested questions about whether Islam as such is more or less violent than other religions¹⁷⁷ and whether it at all makes sense claiming that the final aim for all Islamists is “the conquest of the world by all means.”¹⁷⁸ Another part has moved beyond whether Islam as such is a “religion of war” or “religion of peace” to look at how Islam is interpreted in multiple ways and therefore focus

should be directed at “Muslim politics.”¹⁷⁹

It is important in this context, then, to distinguish between different types of Islamisms rather than lumping all together.¹⁸⁰ This has given rise to a large debate on how to typologize Islamism and how different militant Islamisms use and justify violence in different ways. Some distinguish between groups fighting within a delimited territory as part of what is considered national resistance vs. groups involved in some larger battle between “Islam and the West” or for the establishment of a caliphate (i.e. “resistance/irredentist/nationalist” vs. “revolutionary/doctrinal”);¹⁸¹ others differentiate between groups associated with national liberation, transnational Islamists fighting the “Far Enemy” and domestic insurgency against an incumbent regime representing the “Near Enemy”.¹⁸² Hegghammer offers an even more finely grained typology. Half of the ten forms of Islamism in his preference-based typology are violent, but associated with very different “rationales” as they are respectively state-, nation-, umma-, morality- and sect-oriented.¹⁸³

One notable blind spot in the discussion of the varieties of militant Islamism has been its predominantly Sunni-centric nature.¹⁸⁴ Most attention has traditionally been devoted to Sunni Islamist groups, e.g., AQ, Islamic State or various forms of militant Salafism, or the Muslim Brotherhood. When Shia Islamists have gained attention, it has often been assumed that they are either completely subservient to Iran, or that they are no different from their Sunni counterparts, with Hamas and Hezbollah equivalent examples of “Islamist National Resistance”.¹⁸⁵ However, there is a growing acknowledgement of the need to bring in (the study of) “the Other Islamists”, the Shias, into the broader Islamism debate and to examine whether, and if so why and how Sunni and Shia Islamists differ from each other.¹⁸⁶ In view of the prominence of both Shia and Sunni Islamists in conflict settings during the recent decade, e.g. Syria, Yemen, Iraq, it is time to revisit not only claims about how Shia Islamists appeared to be less violent than their Sunni counterparts, but also questions about whether violence in sectarianized conflict settings is more brutal and whether there is anything distinctly

“Shia” or “Sunni” in Shia and Sunni Islamists when situated in violent contexts.¹⁸⁷ While the latter question can be addressed by focusing on doctrinal differences per se, e.g. Shia/Sunni conceptions of jihad, martyrdom etc.,¹⁸⁸ it can also be approached by comparing various Shia and Sunni Islamist combatants on the varying role of sectarianism, how their members are mobilized and groups organized, how violence is legitimized, the importance of religious networks and clerics, how they attract foreign resources and links to

external patrons (e.g. Saudi-Arabia, Qatar, Iran) or how intra-sect rivalries are played out (e.g., in Iraq or Syria).¹⁸⁹

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Endnotes

Cammett and Kendall Notes

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- ⁱⁱ Teele, Dawn Langan, and Kathleen Thelen. 2017. "Gender in the Journals: Publication Patterns in Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (2): 433–447.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Articles coded as "multi-country" are those covering 2 to 3 countries; articles coded as "regional" focus on the MENA as a whole or a sub-region, such as the Gulf, the Levant, and North Africa.

Hintz Notes

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Adar Notes

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Canbolat Notes

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³⁵ The norming sample scores on rogue and average world leaders are courtesy of Stephen Benedict Dyson (personal

communication, May 6, 2018) and Akan Malici (personal communication, April 5, 2018).

³⁶ For the operationalization of variables used in this research, see the following: 1) Nature of Political Universe (P-1) Index: % Positive Other Attributions minus % Negative Other Attributions. Varying from -1 (the most conflictual) to +1 (the most cooperative); 2) Strategic Direction (I-1) Index = % Positive Self Attributions minus % Negative Self Attributions. Varying from -1 (the most belligerent) to +1 (the most cooperative); 3) Perception of Control (P-4) Index: Self Attributions divided by [Self Attributions plus Other Attributions]. Varying from 0 (the least self-control) to 1 (the most self-control). Source: Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer, and Michael D. Young, "Systematic Procedures for Operational Code Analysis: Measuring and Modeling Jimmy Carter's Operational Code." *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1998): 175-189.

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Oktay Notes

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⁴⁷ The party’s most recent election manifesto that is available on their official website is from 2011. The document highlights that the MHP considers “relations with the Turkic communities around the world a foreign policy priority” and spends several paragraphs outlining the party’s vision towards an institutionalized relationship with Turkic communities in Central Asia and the Balkans. Source: *MHP Election Manifesto 2011*, p. 183. Retrieved from https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhp2007/kitaplar/MHP_2011_SecimBeyannamesi.pdf

MHP, among other Turkish nationalists, also calls the Xinjiang region ‘Eastern Turkistan’—a clear reference to the ancestral roots of Central Asian Turks.

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the entire territory. It is comfortable with redemption, and among its activists are those who work towards the construction of the Third Temple in our times. One member of the steering committee of the movement, Geula Cohen, was herself a member of the Lehi from 1943 until the movement split up, and on the website of the Sovereignty journal she is listed as a Lehi fighter.
<http://ribonut.co.il/AboutSection.aspx?NewsHomeItemId=3&lang=2>

¹²⁹ <http://www.ribonut.co.il/?lang=1>

¹³⁰ Exponential rise in the use of the term in news (through google search, April 7,2020) in two-year blocks seen in a preliminary search for ribonut (in Hebrew) on Google under the “News” tab. 2008-2009: 43 mentions, not with the meaning of domination. 2010-2011: 149 articles mentioning ribonut with the meaning of domination; 2012-2013: 289 articles; 2014-2015: 646 articles 2016-2017; 1210 articles. 2018-2019: 5320 articles.

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¹³⁵ By the Economist Intelligence Unit political participation index Israel scores

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¹³⁷ The three blocs are very different in size: about 55-60% identify with the Right, about 15% with the Left and 25-30% with the Center.

¹³⁸ When the two surveys were conducted the Deal of the Century was not yet on the table and relations with the Palestinians were hardly on the agenda of any party as the matter seemed dead ended.

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