

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

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.

¹³¹ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/west-bank-annexation-could-move-forward-as-early-as-july-623802>.

¹³² Brown, Wendy. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. MIT Press, 2017.

Hermann Notes

¹³³ Hermann, T. et. al., 2019. *The Israeli Democracy Index 2019*. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute

¹³⁴ For the Israeli Voice surveys entire data set see (idi.org.il).

¹³⁵ By the Economist Intelligence Unit political participation index Israel scores

¹³⁶ This trichotomy is hardly relevant for the Israeli Arab citizens as they put themselves almost totally on the Left.

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.

Marc Lynch Notes

¹³⁹ Marc Lynch, “Is There An Islamist Advantage At War?” APSA MENA Politics Newsletter 2(1), available at <https://apsamena.org/2019/04/16/is-there-an-islamist-advantage-at-war/>

¹⁴⁰ Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth R. Nugent, *After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transitions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Khalil Al-Anani Notes

¹⁴² Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (London: Penguin Books, 1966).

¹⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

¹⁴⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971)

¹⁴⁵ Roger Petersen, “Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

¹⁴⁶ See for example, Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); G.E. Marcus, “Emotions in Politics.”, *American Political Science Review*, 2000 3:1, 221-250, and Roger Petersen, “Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

¹⁴⁷ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁴⁸ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁴⁹ Interview, August 24, 2017

¹⁵⁰ Mustafa Menshaway, *Leaving the Brotherhood: Self, Society, and the State*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

¹⁵¹ Interview, November 12, 2017

¹⁵² Mada Masr, 9/9/2019 at <https://madamasr.com/en/2019/09/09/feature/politics/in-a-letter-from-prison-jailed-muslim-brotherhood-youth-call-on-prominent-public-figures-to-mediate-with-authorities-to-secure-their-release/>

Steven Brooke Notes

¹⁵³ Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*, (Cornell University Press, 2019); Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17 (2014), pgs. 187-206; Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani, “Testing Islam’s Political Advantage: Evidence from Indonesia,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 56:3 (2014), pgs. 584-600.

¹⁵⁴ Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Columbian Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*, (Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁵ Steven Brooke, “From Medicine to Mobilization: Social Service Provision and the Islamist Political Advantage,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:1 (2017), pgs. 42-61.

¹⁵⁶ Melani Cammett and Aytüğ Şaşmaz, “Political Context, Organizational Mission, and the Quality of Social Services: Insights from the Health Sector in Lebanon,” *World Development*, 98 (2017), pgs. 120-132.

Nicholas J. Lotito Notes

¹⁵⁷ The combined data include 352 groups, of which 38 (11%).