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Electoral Turnout in Muslim-Majority states: A Macro-Level Panel Analysis

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Abstract: High voter turnout gives legitimacy to the political system and strengthens the stability of a country. Since voter turnout matters, it is important to determine which factors boost electoral participation. While there is a vast literature on turnout focusing on institutional, socio-economic, and contextual indicators, there appears to be a shortage of scholarship on the relationship between religion and turnout. In our study, we evaluate the impact of the Islamic religion on electoral participation. Drawing on a large dataset that incorporates all legislative elections worldwide from 1970 to 2010 and controlling for compulsory voting, the electoral system type, the decisiveness of the election, the competitiveness of the election, the size of the country, the regime type and development, we find that Muslim-majority countries have lower turnout rates than majority non-Muslim countries. We also find electoral participation to be lower in countries where Islamic tenets are more strongly entrenched in politics.

INTRODUCTION

Great thinkers of the 19th century including Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx all maintained that religion would fade into oblivion with the end of the Industrial Revolution. However, today at the beginning of the 21st century, we can say with certainty that this thesis has been wrong. Attending church remains a popular pastime in industrialized western countries including the United States while, at the same time, new religious movements as well as fundamentalist religious groups have expanded across the globe. In addition, the past decades have seen numerous religiously motivated conflicts on various continents, be it in

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Bosnia, Sudan, or Afghanistan (Norris and Inglehart 2011, 2–3). In the words of Berger (19992, 2), "the world today with some exceptions … is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever."

Religious practices and institutions exist in nearly all countries across the globe, making it an embedded part of social life. Religion still plays a major role in shaping the political beliefs and democratic credentials of individuals. Citizens might relate to political candidates whom share their religion, or might simply be interested in determining whether candidates' policies fit with a particular doctrine. Despite this, the role of religion in influencing citizens' decision to turnout on Election Day has been largely overlooked (Gill 2001). Rather than focusing on religion, the scholarship, notably in comparative politics, has been concerned with evaluating the socio-economic and institutional indicators that influence turnout (Blais 2006; Jackman and Miller 1995; Franklin 2004). However, while many of the traditional studies on Western countries (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987) and more recent analyses concentrating on countries from the industrializing world (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Pintor, Gratschew, and Sullivan 2002; Endersby and Krieckhaus 2008) have linked electoral participation to compulsory voting, the electoral system type, or development, there is still a lacunae in the literature that looks at the impact of religion on aggregate turnout.

Does religion influence electoral turnout? Or more precisely, do certain religious affiliations hinder or promote citizens' likelihood to turnout on Election Day? Faced with declining turnout rates around the globe this question becomes even more important (Franklin 2004). In this article, we provide a first snapshot on the importance of religion on turnout by examining the influence of one religious doctrine, Islam, on citizens electoral participation. Equipped with an empirical dataset that covers turnout figures, as well as six theoretically informed covariates for all legislative elections between 1970 and 2010, for which data are available, we explore whether Muslim-majority countries have lower turnout than countries wherein Islam is not the dominant religion. Controlling for compulsory voting, the electoral system type, the decisiveness of the election, the size of the country, the regime type, material wealth, and time, we find that predominantly Muslim states register significantly lower turnout rates than majority non-Muslim states. In addition, we discover that the stronger the Islamic religion is entrenched in politics, the more detrimental the effects on turnout.

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The article proceeds as follows. The first section situates the study within the broad literature on electoral participation and offers some hypotheses on the possible relationship between religion and turnout. The second part introduces our novel dataset and presents the variables that undergird this analysis. Section three focuses on the statistical procedures employed for the panel analysis. In the fourth section, we explain the results of the article. The final section summarizes the main findings of the study and provides some avenues for future research.

THE EXISTING LITERATURE

A country's political culture,[1] or a society's value and belief system (Hill 1981; Wilson 2000) have been central in much of the theoretical scholarship in political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology. The term "political culture," however, is hard to define, and even harder to operationalize. Its fluid meaning across various studies as well as substantive areas demonstrates the slippery nature of the term (Inglehart 1988). In line with the dominant view in studies on citizen engagement (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972; Inglehart 1988), we opt for a narrow definition of political culture and equate the term with the orientation of a particular society's citizens toward politics, political participation, and perceptions of political legitimacy.

Embracing this narrow definition of political culture, traditional cross-country turnout studies (Verba and Nie 1972) have shown that election dynamics are embedded in specific features of a country's economic and social environments. By reporting a positive correlation between high levels of education and wealth with increased support for democracy, classical sociological works (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980) suggest that political participation increases as a country modernizes. Value change theorists (Inglehart 1990; 1997) add that as development advances the dominant values of a society change. According to this post-materialist thesis, the interests of citizens will shift from material values (e.g., social welfare) to post-materialist values (e.g., self-expression values) as a country grows affluent.

A quick glance at our data confirms this relationship. From the period between January 1970 and December 2010, turnout rates in 771 elections in less developed countries averaged 69 percent, whereas the mean participation rate in 371 elections in developed states stood at 78 percent. The correlation between wealth and democracy is widely accepted in the

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literature (Przeworski et al. 2000; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).[2] However, while there is a positive link between both increased wealth and high(er) education on turnout, it is important to note that there is no deterministic relationship between these concepts. Rather, many of the richest countries including the United States and Switzerland have comparatively low turnout rates that sometimes hover around 50 percent of all registered voters. Even more significantly, some states that are highly developed (particularly in various Middle Eastern countries, such as Bahrain) remain some of the most traditionalistic countries in the world. Because the indicator development does not capture these cultural differences, it is important to look for other cultural proxies that capture a country's value and belief system.

One additional cultural indicator that might impact political engagement is religious doctrine (Lipset 1990; Wood 1997). Considerable empirical evidence has shown that religious practices continue to bear strongly on a country's social and political development. Established religions, such as Islam, Christianity, are winning new converts (Keddie 1998; Stark 1999) while at the same time, new religious movements, including millenarian groups, are on the rise.[3] To support these developments, the World Values Survey reveals that over 75 percent of respondents in 43 countries place allegiance in some divine force (Gill 2001).

More importantly, religious convictions may have a profound influence on the behavior of believers. For that reason, religion has the potential to be a powerful mobilizing agent. For example, throughout human history, religion has been invoked to persuade individuals to rally behind a cause and to channel various forms of collective action, including political protests, terrorist acts, wars, and even conventional political participation (Gill 2001). Focusing explicitly on voting, Lijphart (1979) asserts that religion has a more significant influence on electoral behavior than class indictors even in rich developed countries. Given religion's capacity to motivate political participation, our study seeks to determine the impact of religion on turnout. In this article, we focus primarily on the Islamic religion and hypothesize that Islam may stifle turnout. To theoretically underpin our argument we start with Elazar's (1970) classic distinction of three political cultures: Moralistic cultures, which tend to encourage active citizen participation; traditionalistic cultures, which favor targeted participation of elites at the exclusion of masses; and individualistic cultures, which neither enable nor constrict participation through regulatory policies (King 1994, 119).

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Directly or indirectly referring to Elazar's (1970) categories, empirical research has shown that certain religious faiths, such as Protestantism, facilitate citizen participation while others, such as traditional Catholicism, do not (Kincaid 1980; Morgan and Watson 1991; Sharkansky 1969). More precisely, studies (e.g., King 1994, 118–119) suggest that we can expect "moralistic cultures" to promote civic engagement through laws and procedures that foster political participation in general, and high levels of voter turnout, in particular. In contrast, traditional societies may hinder citizens' involvement in the political process.[4] While we do not hold the belief that Islam is inherently incompatible with democratic values (for contrasting perspectives, see Weiffen 2004; Huntington 1996; Robinson 1997; Esposito and Voll 1996), we note that Muslim-majority states tend to be more traditionalistic than others. For one, there is often no separation between the proverbial "church and the state" in many Muslim dominant countries, such as Iran, and several Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are governed by Sharia law (Blaydes and Linzer 2008).

This article highlights three distinctive features of Islam, which might decrease turnout. First, the Islamic religion — typically in practice, has a formal, institutional element. In states, such as Yemen and Oman, religious institutions and experts are entrusted with the interpretation of divine scriptures and with dictating the rules of appropriate conduct to adherents. In these countries, religion profoundly directs and controls political behavior directly through religious police. Second, Islam can regulate behavior indirectly through cultural norms.[5] A strict or traditional interpretation of the Muslim religion, for instance, places constraints on conduct, appearance, and even discourse in both private and public settings (Bellin 2004). For example, Islamic cultures strongly require members to exhibit chastity, piety, and morality in personal appearance and behavior. This is reflected in the laws that exist in some states requiring women to veil in public places (Blaydes and Linzer 2008).

Third, in various Islamic countries, citizens who do not respect Islamic laws and traditions may be punished. For instance, a woman who is found to be unchaste may be shunned, condemned as an adulterer, or in extreme cases, sentenced to corporal punishment or death. In Islam, such punishments are derived from the *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence. Heretics and homosexuals continue to face similar treatment by different Islamic denominations across countries. Even if laws are not officially enforced, religious norms exist informally (e.g., blasphemy laws) in other officially secular predominantly Muslim countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and

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Turkey. Confronted with these entrenched religious values in politics, citizens might find it prudent to feign devoutness and to otherwise refrain from political engagement.

The emphasis on traditional values in some Muslim-majority states, including ideas about the role of women, patrimonialism, and the hierarchical structure of society, is not conducive to high political participation. In some Muslim states, such as Saudi Arabia, women are not considered to be full members of society (see Fish 2002). For example, in *Shari'a c*ountries, women are restricted in their rights, including the right to initiate a divorce, the right to expression (as their testimony counts as half of the testimony of a man's), and even the right to freely choose their life partners (as they are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men, whereas men have the right to marry non-Muslim women) (see Keddie 1990; Cherif 2010). Women are also underrepresented in political offices in Muslim-majority countries. For example, women only comprise 11.3 percent of the deputies in national legislatures in the Arab states — a percentage that is nearly half of the world's average of 20 percent (Inter Parliamentary Union 2011). These figures indicate that women in majority Muslim countries are not as integrated as men in the political process.

Adding to these structural constraints, several scholars (Putnam 1996; Hall 1999; Rothstein 2001; Blaydes 2006; Hay 2007) argue that citizens in Islamic countries may be disinterested in participating in conventional forms of political actions and distrustful of officials, government authorities, or even of the state's electoral practices. Even if religious leaders entice citizens to vote, turnout may still be low.[6] For example, in the early 1990s, the state-run media in Egypt brought in religious figures that urged participation in elections and even described non-voting as un-Islamic (Traub 2007; Blaydes 2006). However, despite these efforts, official turnout remained low (e.g., official reports of turnout figures never exceeded 50 percent in the 1980s and 1990s). Another case study by Hamdani (2005) suggests that a similar relationship between Islam and turnout may exist even outside the boundaries of Muslim-majority states. Focusing on the Canadian electorate, his study reports that Muslims are "one-third less likely to vote than the Hindus and Sikhs, with whom they share some key demographic characteristics, and about 40 percent less likely than the Jewish community which has the highest voter turnout rate" (Hamdani 2005, p. ii).[7]

Following the literature, we assume that Muslim-majority states will have lower rates of electoral participation than non-Muslim majority states. In addition, we explore the extent to which Islamic ideas are

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embedded in structures that either encourage or discourage active political participation. The orthodox view in political Islam tends to be strongly patriarchal and supportive of the institution of *Shari'a* law (Spierings, Smits, and Verloo 2009). The inclusion of such views, which meld together the church and the state, codifies norms in interactions, behavior, laws, and practices. For that reason, we hypothesize that the more deeply Islamic doctrines are embedded in a given society, the less likely it is for that society to encourage high volumes of electoral participation.

We evaluate both claims in a multivariate framework. To this end, we have constructed a large scale dataset that includes data on all legislative elections worldwide between 1970 and 2010 for which data are available.[8] In the next section, we operationalize our two variables of interest, Islam and turnout. In the subsequent part, we present our theoretically informed control variables (i.e., compulsory voting, the electoral system type, the decisiveness of the election, the size of the country, material wealth, the regime type of a country, and time), which might also have an impact on macro-level turnout and operationalize them. The final sections of the article discuss the statistical procedures, the results, and the conclusion, respectively.

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE — TURNOUT

We use the classical definition of turnout, and measure the variable in its standard way, as the percentage of registered voters that cast ballots in their country's national legislative election.[9]

The Independent Variable of Interest — Islam

To test our first hypothesis, which suggests that predominantly Muslim countries will have lower turnout than majority non-Muslim countries, we operationalize Islam with the help of a dummy variable. We code all countries in which more than 50 percent of the population adheres to some sect of Islam as one. Countries where less than half of the population identifies as Muslim are coded zero.[10] We deem this binary measurement in Muslim majority countries and non-Muslim majority states superior to a graded measure, because there is little variation in the percentage of Muslims within each of the two groups (see Table 1). Muslim majority countries average 84 percent Muslims and in roughly 70 percent of

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Table 1. The distribution of individuals with Muslim faith around the world

Percent of the Population that is Muslim	# of countries in our dataset
0–10 %	117
11–20%	18
21–30%	3
31–40%	3
41–50%	3
51–60%	6
61–70%	2
71–80%	3
81–90%	12
91–100%	16
Total	183
Total non-Muslim majority countries	144
Total Muslim majority countries	39

Islamic countries four out of five citizens are Muslims. In non-Muslim majority countries, Muslims only average 4 percent of the population and in 86 percent of non-Muslim states individuals adhering to the Islamic belief make up less than 1 in 10 citizens.

To examine our second hypothesis, we rely on the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) that assesses the degree of religiosity in countries (see Political Risk Services 2012). The ICRG indicator measures religion on a seven-point scale. Countries in which religious doctrine and state doctrine are basically inseparable are coded zero, whereas politically secular countries are coded six. The ICRG measure is, to our knowledge, the only indicator that measures the degree to which religion is entrenched in politics on an international scale. As such, the indicator is very comprehensive, covering more than 140 countries from 1984 to 2009 and thoroughly constructed, drawing on multiple sources such as, assessments of the respective constitutions and surveys of the population. For the purpose of this study, we include the ICPR Religion and Politics in its raw form and interact it with the dummy variable for Islam. This interaction term represents a measure of the degree to which Islamic tenets are practiced in a society.

The Control Variables

While the main purpose of this study is to test the influence of Islam on turnout, we also control for six theoretically informed covariates (that is, compulsory voting, the electoral system type, the decisiveness of the

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election, the size of the country, material wealth, and regime type) that might also affect turnout. We cluster the aforementioned six indicators in institutional, socio-economic, and contextual factors.

Institutional Variables

The first institutional variable in the analysis is compulsory voting laws. If voting is mandatory in a country, we can expect that turnout will be higher (Lijphart 1997; Lever 2008). To capture the dynamics of compulsory voting, we create a dummy variable and code all countries with mandatory voting laws zero and all other states one. To be included in the category compulsory voting states, countries must have credible sanctions for non-compliance in place. Data were collected from the International Institute on Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2011).

Second, we control for a country's electoral system type. Following the conventional wisdom in the discipline, we hypothesize countries with proportional representation to have higher turnout than states with plurality systems (Karp and Banducci 1999; 2008). A rather proportional system (PR) implies that the number of votes a party receives roughly translates into the number of seats a party gains. This indicates that regardless of the projected electoral margins of victory between the winning party and the runner-up, supporters of both parties have an incentive to turnout. The same applies to followers of secondary or tertiary parties; because of the relatively low hurdles to representation, the percentage of votes these parties normally gain roughly translates into seats (Selb 2009). In contrast, under the condition that a district is safe, supporters of the main parties have little to no incentive to cast their ballot because their vote will not alter the outcome. Similar dynamics are at stake for supporters of secondary parties; they too have little incentive to turnout on Election Day in a majoritarian system because they know that their vote will most likely not count. To capture the possible impact the electoral system of a country might have on turnout, we create three categories: proportional systems, mixed systems, and plurality systems. We use plurality systems as the reference category and create two dummy variables; one for PR systems and one for mixed systems. Data for the electoral system type of a country comes from the Inter Parliamentary Union (2011).[11]

Third, we add a control for the decisiveness of the electoral race. The motivational theory of voting suggests that more important elections (that is, the ones in which the legislature and the executive are elected

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at the same time) generate higher turnout than less formative elections (that is elections, which fill only part of the legislature) (see Abramson, Diskin, and Felsenthal 2007). We use the scheme elaborated by Blais and Dobrzynka (1998) to code the decisiveness of an election. We code an election as maximally decisive if all executive and legislative positions are filled in one election.[12] We code an election as partially decisive if one of the two chambers or the executive branch is elected on a separate day (e.g., the election in Mali where the president and the national assembly are elected on a different day). We code an election as minimally decisive, if there are separate elections for any of the two chambers or the presidency, or if not all legislative seats are filled at the same time (e.g., the United States midterm elections). To collect our data we relied on the same sources as for turnout.

Socio-Economic Variables

We control for two socio-economic variables: development and population size. Concerning the former, we expect to see a positive relationship between the level of wealth and the level of electoral participation. Highly developed countries are likely to strengthen a citizen's sense of autonomy and education; two factors that ought to foster an individual's political interest and political participation, including the likelihood to cast votes (Aart and Wessels 2005). To capture, development, we use the natural log of the indicator per capita gross domestic product. Data for the variable were retrieved from the United Nations (2011). Pertaining to the second indicator, population size, we hypothesize a negative relationship between population and the level of turnout. Two calculations entertain this hypothesis. First, in smaller countries, each vote is likely to count "more" than in large states (Downs 1957). Second, in small countries, there are likely to be closer ties between the electorate and the voters. This, in turn, is expected to lead to enhanced deliberation and increased accountability; two factors that should boost turnout (Geys 2006). In the model, we transform the indicator population size into its natural log. Data were collected from the United Nations Statistical Division (2011).

Circumstantial Factors

Finally, we add a control variable for regime type and expect democracies to display higher levels of conventional political participation at the polls

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than non-democracies. Free and fair elections are at the core of a democracy; they allow citizens to select their representatives and enable them to influence policy (Katz 1997). The open climate in a democracy should also encourage citizens to participate in the political process. In contrast, the shortage of political choices in hybrid and autocratic regimes coupled with the typically negligent posture of autocratic governments are factors that ought to discourage citizens from turning out on Election Day (Kostadinova and Power 2007). In the analysis, we distinguish between three types of regimes: democracies, anocracies and autocracies. To capture these three regime types, we create an ordinal variable and code democracies as one, anocracies as two, and autocracies as three. Data for regime type were retrieved from the Polity IV database (Marshall et al. 2002).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Our dataset comprises slightly over 1100 observations, which we cluster in a pooled design. Our sample dataset offers a good representation of all regimes that hold elections. Rich industrialized countries comprise less than 30 percent of all states included in our analysis, whereas medium or low developed countries account for more than two-third of the data. Pertaining to our main independent variable of interest, we classify 39 countries as majority Muslim.[10] Concerning our dependent variable turnout, we have wide variation. Official turnout numbers range from 21 percent for the 1994 legislative election of Guatemala to over 95 percent for some former or present communist countries such as Vietnam or Laos.

To model the relationship between Islam and turnout, we engage in a three-step process. First, we run an independent sample *t*-test to determine whether predominantly Muslim countries have lower turnout than predominately non-Muslim countries. Second, we test the same stipulation in a multivariate regression model. Having an unbalanced panel and autocorrelation in the data requires careful modeling procedures. We use multilevel modeling (HLM) because this technique controls for dependencies in the error structure (i.e., above average turnout countries, such as Belgium, frequently have consistently above average turnout and below average turnout countries, such as Mali, often have constantly low levels of citizen participation) (O'Connell and McCoach 2008). HLM is also insensitive to unbalanced panels rendering it a propitious choice for

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this analysis (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). In the equation (see Model 1), we have so-called "repeated measures," which implies that observations are nested within countries

Third, because the data structure does not change, we use the same techniques (HLM) for our interactive model (see Model 2). To capture some of the variance over time and to allow for a purer identification of the independent variables or fixed effects, we include a time variable coded zero for 1970 and 40 for 2010 to both models. Substantively, this time trend accounts for the decline in turnout that developed and, to a lesser degree, developing countries have experienced over the past decades. Our first HLM equation (i.e., model 1) has the following equation:

$$\text{Turnout}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(\text{D_Islam}_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(\text{D_Quotas}_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(\text{D_Proportional Representation}_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(\text{D_Mixed Electoral System}_{ij}) + \beta_{5j}*(\text{Decisiveness of the Election}_{ij}) + \beta_{6j}*(\text{Log GDP per capita}_{ij}) + \beta_{7j}*(\text{Log Population}_{ij}) + \beta_{8j}*(\text{Regime Type}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

RESULTS[13]

The independent sample *t*-test indicates that non-Muslim countries average 73.34 percent voter turnout, whereas predominantly Islamic countries average 64.05 percent. This difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and substantively relevant. While this nine-point gap in turnout suggests a possible negative link between Islam and turnout, it is necessary to test the robustness of this relationship in a multivariate framework. Models 1 and 2 (see Tables 2 and 3 — online supplementary material) displays the results of the multivariate pooled-time series analysis, featuring the Islam dummy variable as the main independent variable and turnout as the dependent variable. The model largely confirms the results from the *t*-test. The Islam dummy variable is statistically significant and demonstrates that predominantly Muslim countries register approximately 5 percentage points lower turnout than non-Muslim states.

Thus, our model seems to confirm that the Islamic faith tends to place more emphasis on traditions (e.g., hadiths), which may directly or indirectly hinder social and political involvement of certain cohorts of the population (e.g., women). This result is confirmed by many country examples. For example, North African and sub-Saharan African Muslim states, such as Algeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso have turnout rates that consistently range around 40 percent. Similar numbers can be found in other countries, including Pakistan and Djibouti.

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The coefficients of the control variables confirm some of the well-established relationships in the turnout literature (Franklin 2004). Unsurprisingly, compulsory voting significantly increases turnout. Countries that institute mandatory voting laws report approximately 10 points higher turnout rates than countries without such laws. Another rather strong relationship exists between the decisiveness of the electoral race and turnout. Compared to marginally decisive races, decisive elections typically see electoral participation rates that are, on average, 5 percentage points higher at the polls. There is also a positive, albeit weak, relationship between the material wealth of a country and turnout. However, our measure for material wealth, the logarithmic transformation of the per capita gross domestic product variable, is only significant at the 10 percent level. As expected, we also see that time has a negative impact on turnout. The model predicts that turnout has decreased by 0.3 points per year over the past 40 years.

In addition, the model has generated two rather surprising findings. First, the electoral system type does not impact turnout. Our equation predicts similar turnout rates across countries regardless if the country operates under a PR system, mixed system, or majoritarian system. While there is some recent support for this result (Blais 2006), our study yields another rather surprising finding. Non-democracies appear to have higher turnout than democracies (see Blaydes 2006). In fact, according to our turnout model there is a 6-percentage point gap between democracies and autocracies. At first glance, this result seems to defy the conventional definition, which is that democracies should have higher turnout (Schumpeter 1976). However, the finding may be explained by the tendency of some autocracies to report very high, and at times, manufactured turnout rates. For example, countries, such as Cuba, Laos, and Rwanda, officially record turnout figures that are consistently above 95 percent of all registered voters — a figure that is not even attained in countries with compulsory voting laws.

While the first model indicates that Islam negatively influences turnout, it still does not determine whether the intensity with which Islam is entrenched in society has an impact on turnout. In order to gauge this second relationship, Model 2 adds the ordinal six-scale Religion in Politics variable that measures the strength with which Islam is embedded in a state and displays the results of its interactive impact with Islam. The equation confirms our second hypothesis. It indicates that the strength of Islamic tenets matter both statistically and substantively. In detail, the model predicts that countries in which religious doctrine guides politics

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(e.g., those countries that rank one on the Religion and Politics indicator such as Sudan or Algeria during the 1990s) have approximately 15 percentage points lower turnout than non-majority Islamic countries.

However, the interaction term illustrates that the aforementioned gap narrows by 3 percentage points for every degree a Muslim country becomes "less religious." Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the strength of religion in Muslim majority states and turnout for a hypothetical Muslim majority country, where the elections are maximally decisive, held in a democracy under PR in 2010 in a country that has a gross domestic product per capita of 15,000 and a population of 50 million inhabitants. The figure highlights a more than 10 percentage point gap between very secular Muslim countries and very religious Muslim majority countries. Also when we compare very secular Muslim to non-Muslim countries, the gap is minute — one point. In reality, this implies that Islamic countries, where the Religion in Politics indicator has the second most secular rating (i.e., 5 percentage which is the highest ranking for secularity of any Muslim country in our dataset), have only around 2 percentage points lower turnout rates than the secular non-Muslim countries in the same category. In practice, this finding implies that Muslim states in which there is a strong separation between the state and the church, such as Turkey, have only slightly less citizen's turnout on Election Day than citizens in non-Muslim majority states. In this regard, the result of this second model indicates that it is less the Islamic religion per se, but rather the degree to which it is practiced and entrenched in politics that impacts turnout.

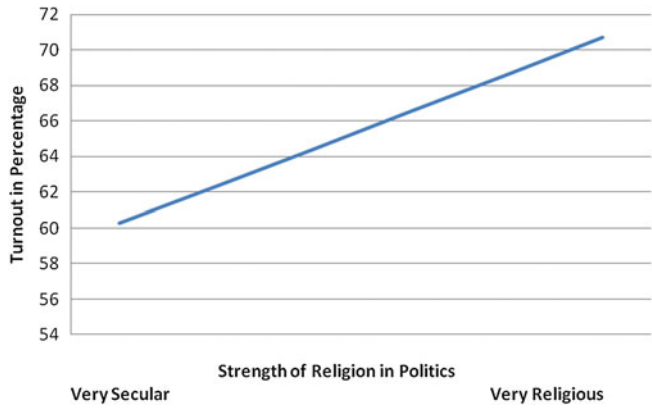


FIGURE 1. (Color online) Turnout in Muslim majority states.

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With regard to the control variables, the second model largely confirms the results from our first model. With the exception of the per capita gross domestic product indicator, which is not significant in the second equation, all other factors have a similar magnitude to the ones in the first model. This means that turnout is still driven by compulsory voting, the decisiveness of the election, and a non-democratic regime type. In addition, time has a negative impact on macro-level electoral participation.

CONCLUSION

This study adds to the vast literature on turnout (Blais 2006; Geys 2006). By further unpacking the impact political culture has on the most basic form of political participation, voting, we find that compared to other religious denominations, Islam has a negative impact on turnout. More precisely, we discover that compared to non-Muslim countries, predominantly Islamic countries have approximately 6 percentage points lower turnout rates. Our results indicate that the degree to which Islam is practiced also has a strong influence on electoral involvement. We find that rather secular Muslim countries, such as Albania have only 3 points lower turnout rates than non-Muslim countries, whereas this gap widens to more than 10 percentage points in countries where the Muslim doctrine is strongly entrenched in politics.

Because Muslim majority countries are distinct from other religions — more than 80 percent of the elections in Muslim dominant countries have been held under a non-democratic regime and, with the exception of wealthy renter states, the majority of Islamic countries are located in the developing world — we do not expect to see huge changes in turnout as these countries modernize. For one, many Muslim dominant countries, including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, have reached high levels of development, but remain dominated by traditional Islam. In addition, some of the Arab Spring countries, such as Egypt and Morocco, which have recently undergone some democratization and which held their first rather free multi-party elections in decades, did not see a real boost in turnout. Rather, official turnout rates remained around 50 percent in all three countries' inaugural democratic legislative elections (e.g., 54 percent for Egypt and 45 percent for Morocco). These participation rates are not only similar to turnout rates prior to democratization, but they are also below the average turnout rate for Muslim majority countries,

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which stands at around 64 percent. Given high abstention rates, traditional religious beliefs and practices, which implicitly or explicitly prevent the participation of various cohorts of the population, are not likely to dissolve in the short run.

Although our article thoroughly evaluates the impact of Islam on turnout, it leaves many questions unanswered. Our theoretical discussion and results strongly suggest that women in some Muslim majority countries are less likely to participate in the political process. Future research using individual level voting data should try to assess this claim. More generally, more studies are needed that extrapolate the beliefs and motivations of individuals, who vote and abstain in strongly religious Muslim countries. In highly religious countries such as those that offer religious parties with clear political mandates, we expect high turnout by those who are religious. In contrast, secular individuals and citizens of a minority faith might feel excluded by or alienated from the political system, especially as more than 80 percent of the elections in the Muslim world are undemocratic.

More broadly, our study provides a first foray into the effects that religion may have on turnout. More research is necessary in order to conclusively determine the impact that different religions and faiths have on political behavior. For example, further research could engage in a systematic comparison between Protestantism, Catholicism, and Confucianism and their impact on turnout. More narrow analyses could also look at different Islamic tenets (e.g., Shi'a Islam and Sunni Islam) and their relationship with turnout. Besides providing some initial answers on the study of religion in electoral politics, we hope that this article might be an interesting starting point in the study of religion and electoral politics.

NOTES

1. A more constructivist definition of political culture sees "political cultures as socially constructed normative systems that are the product of both social and psychological influences [with] prescriptive qualities that stipulate not only desired ends but also appropriate ways to achieve those ends" (see Wilson 2000, 264).

2. It is worth noting that the "resource curse" may also help explain the absence of democracy in oil rich countries, and poverty (i.e., no middle class) may account for the absence of democracy in some other Muslim states (see Tessler and Gao 2005). This is to say that religion and democracy do not necessarily have a deterministic relationship.

3. For a discussion on religious revival across the globe from Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, to Christian fundamentalism in Western Europe (e.g., Lee 2000; Lee and Simms 2007).

4. In examining the link between political freedom and various world religions, including Islam, Barro (1999) noted that Protestant countries were almost always "highly democratic" while Muslim

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ones were typically not. In his regression analysis, coefficients for Islam were negatively correlated with political freedoms (Barro 1999, 176).

5. In some states, the religious establishment is virtually indistinguishable from the state, wherein one might find *mutaween* or "religious police." In Iran, for example, religious police exert power given by the state.While in some Muslim countries, civil society activity has become activated by citizens' frustration with the unrepresentativeness of authoritarian governments (Tarrow 1996; Berman 1997), this increased engagement may not necessarily translate into support for liberal democracy or higher electoral turnout (Lipset 1990).

6. For a different perspective see Djupe and Green (2007). Focusing on the United States 2004 presidential elections, these two scholars report electoral participation rates of Muslim Americans of 85 percent.

7. We collected turnout data from the following three websites: the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=PW, Adam Carr's election archive (http://psephos.adam-carr.net/), the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) praline database on national parliaments: http://www.ipu.org/parline/. We also looked at the parliamentary site of each country to find additional data points, if we could not find the information on elections on the above mentioned websites.

8. Admittedly, the measurement of turnout, as the percentage of registered voters, is suboptimal. In some cases (e.g., Germany), where voter registration is automatic, the percentage of registered voters equals the percentage of eligible citizens. In other countries with non-mandatory voting registration (e.g., the United States), the percentage of registered voters is smaller than the percentage of eligible voters. Unfortunately, we have no data that accurately calculates the percentage of eligible voters per country. The IDEA website, as the most comprehensive website on turnout worldwide, only provides the voting age population. However, this number cannot be used to calculate the turnout rate of eligible citizens, because it includes adults in the voting age population that are not eligible to vote (e.g., foreigners). Nevertheless for the purpose our analysis the percentage registered voters is the most conservative measure of turnout given that the gap between the voting population and the number of registered voters is especially large in Muslim majority countries (e.g., 29 versus 49 million citizens for the 2010 legislative election in Egypt and 15 versus 21 million people for the 2007 legislative election in Morocco). This implies that actual turnout should even be lower in countries where Islam dominates.

9. Data for the variable Islamic religion come from the CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/library/ publications /the-world-factbook/. Majority Muslim countries included in this analysis: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Yemen.

10. To track down possible changes in the electoral system type, we used Reynolds, Reilly, and Ellis (2005).

11. Elections in a unitary, unicameral parliamentary system are all maximally decisive.

12. In an alternative model featuring only democracies, we regressed our Muslim dummy variable on electoral turnout. The results of this additional specification confirm our main result; that is the Muslim religion is statistically significantly and substantively negatively related to turnout. The model predicts that in democracy the Muslim religion depresses turnout by approximately 7 percentage points, which is even slightly stronger than in the model featuring all countries.

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