

Do Economic Voting Travel to Muslim Countries?

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Abstract: The economic voting literature has mainly originated from western countries and proven to be a relevant concept of voting; but we still do not know the extent to which economic voting occurs in Muslim countries. This study argues that economic voting does not travel to Muslim countries, especially when incumbents shift the focus to godly reasons.

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The economic voting literature (Downs 1957; Duch and Stevenson 2008; Fiorina 1978; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000) suggests that citizens are able to engage in the accountability process either through the selection of the most competent leader (the selection model) (Ferejohn 1986) or through rewarding good performance and punishing bad performance (the sanctioning model) (Kramer 1971), rather than a comparative assessment of all available political actors. The economic voting literature also presents the types of economic conditions that voters consider. In the line of this research, pocketbook (or egotropic) voting refers to the rational evaluations of the government or the incumbents based upon an individual's personal financial situation (Fiorina 1978). On the other hand, sociotropic voting refers to the assessments of supporting or punishing a government or incumbents based on the status of the national economy as a whole (Kiewiet 1984; Lewis-Beck 1986). Therefore, this literature takes elections as meaningful mechanisms to ensure the democratic process, as citizens can hold the elected representatives accountable. However, an emerging literature questions the heterogeneity in economic voting both individual levels such as cognitive heterogeneity (Gomez and Wilson 2006), political knowledge (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999, p. 44), gender stereotypes (Carlin,

Carreras, and Love Forthcoming) and racial stereotypes (Han Tuncez Working Paper), and contextual factors, such as clarity of responsibility (Lewis-beck 1986,1988; Duch and Stevenson, 2008), exposure to globalization (Hellwig 2014). This paper argues that religion is another factor causing heterogeneity in the economic vote. The proposed mechanism is the idea of predestination of Islam working as a perceptual screen to affect analyzing political misconduct and economic shock or incompetency.

Religion influences political behavior in both directly shaping views on political issues (through doctrinal affinities) and indirectly implying support for specific policies and regimes (through the organizational support and mobilization of religious authorities and institutions). A long-standing tradition sees religion as essential to voting behavior (Lijphart 1979). Grzymala-Busse (2012) argue that comparative politics has much to gain from a serious consideration of faith, doctrine, and religious hierarchies, however, social scientists have either empirically ignored or undertheorized the differences within religions. She further argues that the incorporation of religion to comparative politics “invites us to take doctrine seriously, both as a source of unique identity and as a powerful demarcation of institutional preferences” (Ibid. p.438).

With the increasing effect of political Islam, politicians frequently use this idea in Islam, when something bad happens, it comes from the god or the country is destined to experience a particular shock. Leaders appeal religious commitments to shift the focus. If this is the case, after of a political misconduct or an economic shock, the likelihood of voting for the incumbent party and the approval rates should either stay the same or increase as levels of religiosity increases.

The implications of this paper speak to economic voting literature as well as accountability literature. If religion works as a “perceptual screen” when it comes to voting economically, how

do we expect the classical definition of accountability mechanism to hold true when it comes to punishing the incumbents? What does it mean for the quality of democracy if citizens cannot properly “throw the rascals out.”?¹

Given that Islam nurtures strong faith in “Qadar” (predestination), as one of the six articles of faith, we do not know how this affects perceptions of Muslim voters when they attribute credit and blame on the ballot box. To illustrate, after the crane crash in Mecca in 2015, the Saudi court ruled that neither the injured will get any compensation, nor the damages caused to the Grand Mosque will be compensated because the disaster was caused by natural reasons and there was no human element behind it (No blood money for Makkah crane crash victims 2017), despite numerous reports indicating negligence. Similarly, after the Soma (a district of Manisa, Turkey) mine disaster in 2014, which resulted in three-hundred and one casualties, the incumbent party declared that it was a natural disaster and came from the God. Therefore, in Muslim countries, it may be easier for incumbents or authorities to channel blame to godly reasons, and there might be institutional complementarities facilitating this, as demonstrated in the crane crash case. This might bring about contextual differences regarding the strength of the economic vote. Furthermore, on the individual- level, controlling for other relevant variables, future research can unravel whether citizens with the high levels of religiosity are less willing to punish the incumbents when they believe their economy is predestinated to experience shocks.

Method and data: I would like to use the Arab barometer as they have good questions asking about levels of religiosity as well as hypothetical vote and approval. I would like to identify widely known corruption incidents for each country then use the method of difference in difference with ordered logit regression to see whether religion has an effect on pre-and post-incident approval.

¹ Phrase coined by V.O. Key (1966), in his book *The Responsible Electorate*.

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