ELECTORAL REGULATION RESEARCH NETWORK/DEMOCRATIC AUDIT OF AUSTRALIA JOINT WORKING PAPER SERIES

BACKGROUND PAPER ON AUTHORITARIANISM AND RELIGION

Matthew O'Rourke (Monash University)

WORKING PAPER NO. 49 (OCTOBER 2018)

Abstract

This working paper provides a background on the literature on authoritarianism and religion and was provided to participants of the Deakin Workshop on Authoritarianism held at Deakin University in September 2018, co-sponsored by ERRN.

****

Having examined the literature quite broadly around "state-society relations on authoritarianism across Muslim countries", I think there are several interesting directions our cluster can take our research. The areas I focused on, as recommended by Ihsan, were:

- Recent (2010-2018) reviews of authoritarianism;
- Recent (2010-2018) reviews of authoritarianism and religion;
- Recent (2010-2018) reviews of religion and political outcomes;
- Studies on religion and political legitimacy, regime legitimacy, instrumentalisation of religion as a tool of political legitimation;
- Use of religion for hegemony, hegemonic religion, social engineering and religion
- Studies on Islam and authoritarianism;
- Studies on Islam and populism.

Principally, there seems to be a lot of ambiguity around how different studies have approached "authoritarianism" itself. This is partly due to the different schools (political psychology, sociology, etc.) approaching the same issue differently but also because the act of making such a definition is obviously politicised. For example, the "F-Scale" and its derivatives are popular in older papers but have been criticised more recently. More recent iterations, such as the "Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) Scale", "Social Conformity-Autonomy (SCA) Scale" or "Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism (ACT) Model", address these criticisms but are themselves not without criticism. Other papers have simply regarded authoritarianism as "not-freedom" and – for example – used a country's ranking in Freedom House reports as a measure. The essence of this unfocused breadth of definitions is that our group will need to be quite clear and considered in how it defines "authoritarianism" and may have to either develop its own definition or explicitly choose one framework at the expense of another. How we want to approach this is very important.

Another consideration when approaching our research is its veracity and viability. Ahram and Goode make a strong case that standard methods of researching societies (they approach the issue from a social science background) break down in instances of authoritarianism. They point out that authoritarian regimes thrive on ignorance and uncertainty, going as far as suggesting that any regime from which it is possible to draw meaningful data and knowledge about their operation is necessarily *not* authoritarian. The first impediment is, obviously, accessing the data. The second impediment is the questionable quality and validity of what data we can access – "public artifacts" published by authoritarian regimes act as false friends to researchers, while coercing and managing the direction of their research. The third impediment is the heightened ethical concern around risks to both subjects and researchers. These issues are themselves the first major gap in the literature: developing a methodology specifically for researching authoritarian regimes. There is a call for such a methodology, and developing such

a thing may be necessary to even begin our research (just as refining our definition of authoritarianism may be).

Authoritarianism itself presents several gaps, for which Turkey may be used as a case study: for example, Duckitt et al. note that Romania has proved an outlier on several authoritarianism scales (ACT, RWA) and ascribe this to its tumultuous recent history, relative to the other (generally Western, first-world) countries studied. They believe that the current scholarly understanding of authoritarianism is calibrated for stable states where the rule of law is not in question (since it is generally defined as a preference for order over autonomy), and that therefore citizens of less-stable states may seem to express a predisposition for authoritarianism which is in fact a desire for the security many Western citizens take for granted. Applying the F-Scale and its derivatives to Turkey, with consideration for both this new understanding and Turkey's insecure history of coups, terrorism and turmoil, is another possible direction for our research. Offering a similar critique of existing scholarly understanding, Sarfati notes in a review of modernisation theory of democratic development that Turkey may well be an outlier that defies the predictions that the theory supposedly offers. Case studies – including comparative studies – are necessary to either support or revise the dominant theories. Ciftci notes that studies which have investigated attitudes towards democracy in Muslim-majority countries have tended to be narrowly focused on location or approach, and that a pan-Islamic examination of these attitudes is sorely wanting.

Weller et al. have already studied the relationship between religion and F-Scale authoritarianism in Israel, but their study was limited in the background of its participants and the scope of its applicability. Similarly, Fish examined the correlation between Islam and authoritarianism – defining the latter as a low ranking from Freedom House – but dismissed most commonly-accepted explanations as unsupported (discussed below). In essence, there is an opening here to examine the relationship between *Turkish* Islam and authoritarianism – in light of the many co-mingling variables: Turkey's Ottoman heritage and secular authoritarian founding, the suppression of Islamic expression under the military tutelage and the particular brand of "moderate" Islam espoused by Erdoğan and the AKP. Fish also identifies six variables that correlate to authoritarianism – economic development, sociocultural division, economic performance, British colonial heritage, communist heritage, and membership of OPEC – these are worth considering and potentially applying in the case of Turkey.

Fish identifies one particular factor that links contemporary practice of Islam with higher instances of authoritarian government: the polity's relationship with women. That is to say, "a low level of women's rights may produce lower levels of democracy". Donno and Russett accept Fish's general argument, while disagreeing strongly with many of his more concrete claims about the causal role of women's rights in democratic development. Their conclusion is that much more research needs to be conducted in this area before firm conclusions can be drawn. Given the historic convergence of women's rights and the suppression of religion in Turkey, and the current drift away from both under an authoritarian regime, this line of research has a great deal of potential and much to offer academically.

The next fertile ground for research is undoubtedly the ongoing electoral success of the AKP and its evolution over its time in power. Authors consistently refer to the AKP's style as "populist" and point to the growing number of entities it deems "elites" and "enemies" to be opposed. Park notes that populism is gaining traction worldwide, but Turkey's unique global

position and history mean that it may well experience this populism differently – certainly, it has already contributed to the erosion of civic institutions far faster than in the US or France. There is a need to determine whether Turkey experiences populism uniquely, what its current trajectory is, and what effect AKP populism might have on other regimes around the world. Ozpek and Yasar declare that it is populism, not ideology, that has most consistently guided the AKP's policies and actions, but question why – as in a healthy democracy – Turkey's civic institutions could not prevent this populism from spilling over into authoritarianism. They call for a critique of Turkey's illiberal Kemalist past and military tutelage as the main factors that have eroded these institutions and ultimately allowed the AKP to seize power. Kirdis and Drhimeur similarly call for an analysis of the factors that limit the growth of populism, and raise the question of how these factors failed in the instance of the AKP.

Following from this is the still-emerging scholarly understanding of "competitive" or "electoral" authoritarianism – where the trappings of democracy remain, but the state itself behaves in an authoritarian manner. Turkey currently seems like a clear example of this phenomenon. Shirah notes that the attempts of such regimes to retain democratic trappings can be self-defeating – allowing opposition groups to organise, for instance, or outraging the populace with clearly fraudulent elections – and thus the long-term viability of such a system is questionable. My own hypothesis would be that populism is what sustains such a system. Schedler's 2015 review of research into electoral authoritarianism similarly calls for further research into whether electoral authoritarian regimes will continue to flourish. There is room, therefore, to examine the survivability of Turkey's current system; whether Islamist populism can maintain it, or whether it will collapse either into democracy or full authoritarianism. Schedler also calls for a more *qualitative* approach to this question, noting that past studies have been almost exclusively *quantitative* and thus leaving a large gap in existing research.

Studies of the electoral performance and political viability of Islamist (or at least, outwardly Islamic) parties also offer several gaps to be pursued. Pepinsky et al. found that in Indonesia, Islamist parties only possessed a political advantage when their policies – particularly economic policies – were unclear. Similarly, Kirdis & Drhimeur found that a perceived lack of alternatives was decisive in the election of Islamist parties in Turkey and Morocco. Both call for broader studies that apply their methodologies to further countries, which would paint a much clearer picture of those factors not specific to Turkey that led to the repeated election of the AKP—perhaps also a comparative study between Islamic and non-Islamic parties in similarly circumstances and contexts.

Sources

Ahram, A. & Goode, J. P. "Researching Authoritarianism in the Discipline of Democracy", Social Science Quarterly, 97:4 (2016), pp. 834-849

Benstead, L., "Why do some Arab citizens see democracy as unsuitable for their country?", Democratization, 22:7 (2014), pp. 1-26.

Cesari, J., "Disciplining religion: The role of the state and its consequences on democracy", Journal of Religious and Political Practice, 2:2 (2016), pp. 135-154

Ciftci, S., "Modernization, Islam, or Social Capital: What Explains Attitudes Toward Democracy in the Muslim World?", Comparative Political Studies, 43:11 (2010), pp. 1442-1470

Colás, A., "The Re-Invention of Populism: Islamist Responses to Capitalist Development in the Contemporary Maghreb", Historical Materialism, 12:4 (2004), pp. 231-260

Donno, D., & Russett, B., "Islam, authoritarianism, and female empowerment: What are the linkages?", World Politics, 56:4 (2004), pp. 582-607.

Dubois, T., "Hegemony, imperialism, and the construction of religion in East and Southeast Asia", History and Theory, 44:4 (2005), pp. 113-131.

Duckitt, J. et al., "A Tripartite Approach to Right-Wing Authoritarianism: The Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Model", Political Psychology, 31:5 (2010), pp. 685-715

Feldman, S. & Stenner, K., "Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism", Political Psychology, 18:4 (1997), pp. 741-770

Feldman, S., "Enforcing Social Conformity: A Theory of Authoritarianism", Political Psychology, 24:1 (2003), pp. 41-74

Fish, M., "Islam and Authoritarianism", World Politics, 55:1 (2002), pp. 4-37.

Hadiz, V. & Teik, K. B., "Approaching Islam and politics from political economy: a comparative study of Indonesia and Malaysia", The Pacific Review, 24:4 (2011), pp. 463-485

Hadiz, V., & Robison, R., "Political Economy and Islamic Politics: Insights from the Indonesian Case", New Political Economy, 17:2 (2012), pp. 137-155

Hadiz, V., "A New Islamic Populism and the Contradictions of Development", Journal of Contemporary Asia, 44:1 (2014), pp. 125-143

Hadiz, V., "Imagine All the People? Mobilising Islamic Populism for Right-Wing Politics in Indonesia", Journal of Contemporary Asia, (2018), pp. 1-18

Hall, D. et al., "Why don't we practice what we preach? A meta-analytic review of religious racism", Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14 (2010), pp. 126-139

Hastings, B. & Shaffer, B., "Authoritarianism: The Role of Threat, Evolutionary Psychology, and the Will to Power", Theory and Psychology, 18:3 (2008), pp. 423-444

Kirdiş, E., & Drhimeur, A., "The rise of populism? Comparing incumbent pro-Islamic parties in Turkey and Morocco", Turkish Studies, 17:4 (2016), pp. 599-617

Lean, N., Jebnoun, N., Kia, M., & Kirk, M. (2014). Modern Middle East authoritarianism: Roots, ramifications, and crisis. Middle East Policy, 21(4), 163-165.

Lust, E., "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East" Studies in Comparative International Development, 46:2 (2011), pp. 163-190

Milton-Edwards, B., "The ascendance of political Islam: Hamas and consolidation in the Gaza Strip", Third World Quarterly, 29:8 (2008), pp. 1585-1599

Mohamad, M., "Religion and politics in Malaysian nation-building: A "double-movement" of hegemonic and plural Islam", Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 18:3 (2017), pp. 445-453.

Ongur, H., "Plus Ça Change … Re-Articulating Authoritarianism in the New Turkey", Critical Sociology, 44:1 (2018), pp. 45-59

Özpek, B. & Yaşar, N., "Populism and foreign policy in Turkey under the AKP rule", Turkish Studies, 19:2 (2018), pp. 198-216

Park, B., "Populism and Islamism in Turkey", Turkish Studies, 19:2 (2018), pp. 169-175

Peletz, M. G., "A tale of two courts: Judicial transformation and the rise of a corporate Islamic governmentality in Malaysia", American Ethnologist, 42 (2015), pp. 144-160

Pepinsky, T. B., Liddle, R. W. and Mujani, S., "Testing Islam's Political Advantage: Evidence from Indonesia", American Journal of Political Science, 56 (2012), pp. 584-600

Rahimi, B., "Democratic authority, public Islam, and Shi'i jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani", International Political Science Review, 33:2 (2012), pp. 193-208

Roberts, P., "Passive revolution in Brazil: Struggles over hegemony, religion and development 1964–2007", Third World Quarterly, 36:9 (2015), pp. 1663-1681

Rubin, A., "Turkish citizenship: the perils of hegemonic tendencies and the 'shadow of securitization'", Citizenship Studies, 21:8 (2017), pp. 872-888

Sarfati, Y., "How Turkey's slide to authoritarianism defies modernization theory", Turkish Studies, 18:3 (2017), pp. 395-415

Schedler, A., "Electoral Authoritarianism", in Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences, eds. Scott, R. & Kosslyn, S. (2015)

Shirah, R., "Electoral authoritarianism and political unrest", International Political Science Review, 37:4 (2016), pp. 470-484

Smith, P., "Anglo-American Religion and Hegemonic Change in the World System, c. 1870-1980", The British Journal of Sociology, 37:1 (1986), pp. 88-105

Solt, F., "The Social Origins of Authoritarianism", Political Research Quarterly, 65:4 (2012), pp. 703-713

Steele, J., "'Trial by the Press': An Examination of Journalism, Ethics, and Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia", The International Journal of Press/Politics, 18:3 (2013), pp. 342-359

Teik, K. B., Hadiz, V. & Nakanishi, Y., Between Dissent and Power The Transformation of Islamic Politics in the Middle East and Asia, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (2014)

Teymoori, A. et al., "Relationship between dimensions of religiosity, authoritarianism, and moral authority", Social Compass, 61:1 (2014), pp. 92-107

Tezcür, G. M. and Azadarmaki, T., "Religiosity and Islamic Rule in Iran", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 47 (2008), pp. 211-224

Tuğal, C., "Islamism in Turkey: beyond instrument and meaning", Economy and Society, 31:1 (2002), pp. 85-111

Volpi, F. & Stein, E., "Islamism and the state after the Arab uprisings: Between people power and state power", Democratization, 22:2 (2015), pp. 276-293

Weller, L. et al., "Religiosity and Authoritarianism", The Journal of Social Psychology, 95:1 (1975), pp. 11-18

Yesil, B., & Sözeri, E., "Online Surveillance in Turkey: Legislation, Technology and Citizen Involvement", Surveillance & Society, 15:3/4 (2017), pp. 543-549.

Yıldırım, İ. and Kuyucu, T., "Neoliberal Penality and State Legitimacy: Politics of Amnesty in Turkey during the AKP Period", Law & Society Rev, 51 (2017), pp. 859-894

Yilmaz, I., & Bashirov, G., "The AKP after 15 years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey", Third World Quarterly, (2018), pp. 1-19.

Zook, D., "Making Space for Islam: Religion, Science, and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia", The Journal of Asian Studies, 69:4 (2010), pp. 1143-1166