

Robert Hefner @ CERJ - 12 mai 2009

Drawing on recent comparative research, including his own, on political participation and democratization, Robert Hefner analyzes the course of democratic change in contemporary Arab and non-Arab Muslim-majority countries. He notes that, when speaking of non-Arab Muslim countries, there is no so-called “democratic deficit”.

However, democratic consolidation in the Arab world is experiencing more serious challenge. Hefner emphasizes that all democratization is path-dependent, and thus culturally inflected to an important degree. A “culture bound” feature of democratization in Muslim-majority countries, then, will likely continue to be sustained by public debates over gender roles and freedom of religion.

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Rethinking Islam and Democracy: Global Comparisons, Contrasting Trends

Comparative framework for understanding Islam and democracy. There is a staunch battle about Islam and democracy in the US.

End of the Cold War: raised hopes for democratization but then breakdown of the political process in Algeria in 1991, terrorist violence, 9/11 led many of us in the US to conclude that Muslim countries are the great exception to the democratizing trend of our age.

Huntington wrote 15 years ago in *Foreign Affairs: The Clash of Civilizations*. Not a momentary incompatibility but a civilizational incompatibility between Islam and democracy. One of the important preconditions of democracy in the West and everywhere is a vigorous separation of Religion and State and yet there is no such separation in Islam.

Today: a far more nuanced and incisive understanding is necessary.

Four points:

1. When empirical measures are referenced, it turns out there is no democracy deficit. In the part that happens to be Arab, there is a greater deficit.

2. In most Muslim majority countries, the Muslim public views democratic institutions quite favorably.
 3. That being said, a significant portion of the Muslim public has non-liberal ideas on: women, non-Muslims and questions of religious freedom (particularly as regards dissident Muslims).
 4. As the process moves forward, the political culture resembles Muslim or civil democracy more than Atlantic liberal democracy.
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1. *Is there in fact a democracy deficit in the political performance of the 47 Muslim majority countries of the world?*

Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson¹ drew on two of the richest data sets on democracy. Limited their discussion to **electoral competitiveness**. To qualify as making progress in the field of democracy, a country had simply to fulfill two conditions:

- a. the gvt sprang from fair elections
- b. it is able to fill the most important political offices without being second-guessed by non-elected authorities

It is a very circumscribed measure of democracy, but all the more useful. 1973 to 2002 comparison. Results: startling. 29 non-Arab Muslim countries: more than a third enjoys competitiveness for at least three years. Arab Muslim countries: not a single country experienced 5 consecutive years of electoral competitiveness. **Non-Arab countries are 20 times more likely to be electorally competitive than Arab ones.**

Developmentalist thesis: per capita income increases → chances for vigorous electoral contest increases

31 percent of the non-Arab Muslim countries are electoral over-achievers relative to their level of economic development. Turkey, Senegal, Mali, Bangladesh, Indonesia...in these countries there seems to be no democracy deficit at least when it is measured by electoral competitiveness.

2. *Support for democracy as expressed in public opinion surveys in Muslim majority countries*

Survey data is a vital compliment to sociological research!!

If Huntington and others like him were right, we would find not only poor democratic performance but a public inclined to reject democracy on the grounds of its incompatibility with Islam. Since the 1990s a number of important surveys have been carried out, Gallup, Pew Public Service, etc.

¹ Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson, "An 'Arab' More than a 'Muslim' Electoral Gap," *Journal of Democracy*, Oct. 2003, pp. 30-44

The data indicate that in most Muslim majority countries a solid majority of the respondents believe that democracy is a good form of government and should be implemented in their country.

Arab Muslim world: same public inclination toward democracy!!

Pippa Norris and Ron Inglehart²: no significant differences between the public in the West and in Muslim countries in praise for democracy. Generally very supportive but some countries are exceptions: Saudi Arabia, Libya...Gulf countries.

3. *The public's ambivalent attitude towards issues such as fully equal rights for women, attitudes towards non-Muslims and Muslim dissenters.*

So they don't have these positive ideas, so does that mean you do not support democracy?

Let's focus on one of these issues: WOMEN. Gender practices vary enormously in Islamic countries. Which shows us that Islam is not the singular determinant of Muslim gender realities. It matters everywhere but in a complex, socially embedded and contextually ambivalent manner.

Guardianship and authority is generally an attribute of men in all these countries.

Norris and Inglehart: the real clash of cultures concerns not democracy but women and sexuality. They explain the difference between West and Muslim with reference to Inglehart's model of modernization and post-modernization. His model implies that gender differences have less to do with religion than with society's level of socio-economic development.

Brief aside: Norris and Inglehart's (WORLD VALUES SURVEY) argument is based on the argument that as a society modernizes, gender cultures develop in a similar fashion. Reduction of fertility brings about the education of girls and expands women employment opportunities. Next phase: shift toward greater gender equality, higher status for women. A more permissive and liberal sexuality ensues. This pattern is generalizable to the entire world. This phase of post-modernization has not yet been attained in the Muslim world.

Higher education and heightened public participation are already a fact in some Muslim countries. Gender is already among the most fluid, fast-changing and contested fields in the Muslim world. It is not the unchanging realm they are suggesting.

*The Obvious aspects of Ritual*³: often the most difficult to conceptualize. Sociologists of Western religion differ as to what has happened since the 60s. Vital role in the US

²Pippa Norris, Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge University Press, 2004 ; "Islam & the West: Testing the Clash of Civilizations Thesis", KSG Harvard Faculty Research Working Papers, April 2002

compared to decline in Europe. Precipitous secularization and de-christianization of public and private institutions (McCloud) is recent! Muslim world at the same time: spectacular increase in piety - mosque worship, men's beards, morals policing, women's headscarves, etc.

Changes in women's roles have become the central focus of debate. The dispute touches on things such as the head-scarf. Meaning and uses of the veil are not unequivocal. Jenny White observed that in Turkey, young women see veil as voluntary and empowering...

Women were central players in the student groups in Indonesia in 1998 helped overthrow Suharto. In Iran, women activists played a key role in Islamic revolution and post-Khomeini movement for cultural reform.

It is generally believed that women must be barred from exercising any kind of authority over men... but this is not the case everywhere. Turkey, Indonesia are different.

Conclusion for point 3: it would be a mistake to say the transformation is a but a variant of a liberal emancipatory progress that took place "earlier" in the West. There are commonalities but differences remain. The most salient: contrasting biography of RELIGION in the late-20th century. In the West (Europe, Canada, Australia): changes in women's roles have taken place against a backdrop of secularization (Hugh McCloud). By contrast, Muslim countries have their share of secular feminists, but the real action lies among the pious Muslim women and men determined to work out a new deal for their fellows that is not liberal-secular but more participative. Women's equality and dignity and the need for all the leaders to adopt a more pro-active approach to the demands of their faith.

We should see the cultural and religious specificity. The changing nature of gender based the imprint of the educational opportunities, but there is also an Islamic revival that reaches into deepest recesses of public life. Educated women are the future!

4. More piety and non-liberal commitment to publicly enforced modesty will be combined with greater female public participation

Public support for democracy in Muslim countries but Arab Muslim countries have weaker support for effective democratic practices.

The public culture will continue to verge on certain matters:

More citizens but not secularization but increasing pressure for the state to play a heightened role in personal belief and comportment

Do not misrecognize the place of religion in Modern Western democracies. Separation was not the norm during most of the 19th and 20th centuries. Extensive collaboration

³ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, Berkeley, California, 1979 : North Atlantic Books, Essay 6 : « The Obvious Aspects of Ritual », pp. 173-221

between Church and State have established special arrangements for the management of religion.

Jonathan Fox⁴: examined the extent of separation of religion and state between 1990 and 2002 in 152 states with populations of over one million which are included in the Religion and State (RAS) database. His results showed that when using a strict interpretation of separation of religion and state – no state support for religion and no state restrictions on religion – no state has full separation of state except the United States.

As economy progresses, the State becomes more, not less involved in the management of religious affairs. Muslim societies are not the great exception therefore, however they may be a counter-current to secularist understandings of liberal democracy.

It goes without saying that bringing religion into any public sphere bears challenges. Has its risks. Inimical to religious freedom which is an aspiration for pluralists.

Conclusion: Muslim democracy is not a civilizational impossibility, it is unfolding before our eyes. It will not be the end of history nor resolve the tensions that surround the intense profession of faith in plural societies.

Western observers can assist democratization in the Muslim world if they acknowledge that:

1. momentous shift is taking place
2. its outcome will not be made in the West but will bear the imprint of Islam

Discussion - Questions

Jean Leca -or the conceptual MONSTER !

Un anthropologue qui cite avec respect des sondages d'opinion: c'est rare! Bravo.

1. Ces deux articles de Stepan et Robertson leur ont assuré une réputation indélébile de anti-Arabe. Des qu'on parle d'une spécificité arabe dans un domaine on est taxé d'anti-arabisme.
2. Raison de critiquer Norris et Inglehart. Ils sont convaincus que le développement économique apporte le déclin de la religion. Il manque un chaînon dans leur argumentation.
3. Pas d'accord : la déchristianisation est un phénomène beaucoup plus ancien que années 60s. C'est la déchristianisation qui produit le christianisme libéral.

⁴ Fox, Jonathan. and Sandler, Shmuel. "World Separation of Religion and State in the Twenty First Century" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Mar 17, 2004

Questions : Supposons qu'une jeune femme veut ne pas porter de voile (elle est en désaccord) car pour elle c'est un symbole de domination. Supposons, toujours dans la démocratie musulmane, un Musulman qui se met à tenir des propos sur l'Islam pour dire que c'est une religion idiote. Qu'est-ce qui se passera alors ? Comment faire face à des situations de choc avec un récit comme le votre qui est contextuel, historique, nuance, soigneux, mais qui vous permet de faire des conclusions singulièrement optimistes.

Point aveugle : les relations internationales. L'Islam traditionnel est une politique religieuse. Tout était codé en termes religieux. Mais la religion était enchâssée dans des cultures et l'ennemi était hors du territoire de l'Islam.

Has religious politics been replaced by ideological politics ??!!!

Du coup la religion se tourne contre la culture locale. L'ennemi est donc à l'intérieur. Les relations internationales interviennent. Nid de l'autoritarisme. Nous avons un ennemi à l'intérieur qui a un allié à l'extérieur. Voilà la source de l'autoritarisme arabe.

Hefner's Response: definition of democracy - minimalist is best because it is praxiological. Stepan doesn't think it's minimal. And I agree with him. The conditions and the possibility of holding free and fair elections are much vaster than just free and fair elections. That is why the Stepan Robertson minimalist definition is not so minimalist as you may think.

My question: what about democracy and its relationship to freedom. Is what you call "Muslim democracy" going to be characterized by an abundance of positive freedoms rather than the negative ones? Freedom to be educated, freedom to participate in the political decision-making process, rather than negative freedoms, or liberties, to the expansion of which we are used to in Western democracies?

It is important to see when and in what conditions sharia was inculturated.

Democracy and modern science are not western in origin.

The biggest challenge will be respecting minority rights.

What is the definition of citizenship? People's views on this question will largely define what they think of democracy.