

DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF THE SAME TREE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
SUNNI AND SHIA THEOLOGICAL DISPARITIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR
DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIZATION

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis initially examines the historical roots of the Sunni and Shia split and discusses how the different theological and governmental values that emerged out of the divide have the potential to change how each sect approaches ruling, hierarchy, and government.

It then traces the development of these theological differences into their solidification in modern-day usage by the two branches, and provides real world examples of how the history of the Sunni/Shia split both has and has not become realized in today's world. Finally, this thesis discusses the democratic proclivity of each specific relevant theological difference.

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Through your actions, you all have set the bar unattainably high.

The World is certainly a great and stately Volume of natural Things; and may be not improperly styled the Hieroglyphicks of a better: But, alas! how very few Leaves of it do we seriously turn over! This ought to be the Subject of the Education of our Youth, who, at Twenty, when they should be fit for Business, know little or nothing of it.

William Penn, *Fruits of Solitude*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It has become an unfortunate cliché, but in the post September 11th world Islam holds especial importance in the continuing and ubiquitous struggle to understand emerging social and political movements. It has been given unique treatment in policy circles, political rhetoric, and academia alike. Much of the Western discussion of Islam, especially in the United States, has centered on the compatibility, or lack thereof, between Islam and democracy. Specifically, scholars and politicians have focused on Islam's engagement with women's rights, religious and ethnic equality, and its conceptualization of democracy as a whole.

The ability for democratic governance systems and Islam to hold a mutually harmonious relationship is vital to the future of international politics, and thus the analyses previously performed on the subject matter are essential and important. After all, the potential success of new governments formed in Tunisia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Egypt all depend in part on how Muslims choose to interact with democracy. This thesis argues, however, that these examinations have missed a crucial sectarian nuance significant to the study of the connection between democracy and Islam. Sunni and Shia relations dominate much of the Muslim world, and while they are consanguineous members of the same branch of Islam, significant theological differences separate the two. A complete treatment of the ability of Islam as a whole to behave democratically would therefore include findings on if the dissimilarities between Sunni and Shia Islam have any hold on this relationship, and thus this is

exactly what this thesis sets out to answer. Understanding the complexity inherent to Islam is a fundamental first step in comprehending the implications that the religion carries for democratic prospects.

This thesis conducts a multilevel analysis of the theological differences between Sunnism and Shiism that are of particular relevance to democracy and democratization. It examines specific disparate theological tenets held by each branch, and how these beliefs may, in a theoretical context, contribute or hinder democratization efforts. It also examines the historical construction and foundation of these differences and how they contribute to contemporary beliefs and attitudes towards various governance structures and democratic or authoritarian values. Finally, it briefly examines how these theological differences play out in specific cases in Lebanon and Iraq through political parties and leaders.

These findings occupy a unique space in the literature that has not previously been explored. This thesis argues that specific dissimilarities between Sunni and Shia Islam have the potential to have significant implications toward the relationships between Sunnis and Shias and democracy, but that not all of these implications are realized contemporarily, or at least not in Iraq and Lebanon. It also finds that neither sect is inherently more democratic or antidemocratic than the other, but that each have specific beliefs that vary in their propensity to democratic values and democracy as a whole. It shows, therefore, that the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam do matter in terms

of democratic inclinations, and that future discussions about the relationship between Islam and democracy would do well to reflect this.

The second chapter is a review of the scholarly literature surrounding the dynamic between various religions and democracy, both in specific cases and in general. It also examines the factors that drive religiosity, such as existential security, charismatic leadership, and state mandated religions. The purpose of the literature review is to provide an analytical foundation from which to use for the following chapters. It does so by examining the various theological and empirical bases that scholars use to analyze different religions, methods that are utilized further on in the thesis.

The third chapter studies the implications of the history of the Sunni-Shia split for democracy. The history is crucial to understanding why Sunnism and Shiism exist as they do today, and also demonstrates why, for example, Shia value an authoritarian leadership structure while Sunnis prioritize community consensus. The history contextualizes the contemporary dynamics between the two sects and democracy and also analyzes the concept of *ijma*, or consensus building, which is of particular relevance to Sunni democratization efforts.

The next chapter examines specific contemporary theological divides between Sunnis and Shia and connects these dissimilarities to democratic propensity or disinclination. To cite some examples, it traces the contemporary disuse of *ijma* in the Sunni tradition, the tenet of *ijtihad* (judgment) that allows for modern reinterpretation of Islamic law by Shia leaders, with potential

democratic benefit, and how both sects view self-sovereignty and individuality on a theological basis.

The fifth chapter connects the previous discussions with real world examples in Iraq and Lebanon. It shows how the historical roots examined in chapter three are relevant in today's world, and ties in theological tenets with the democratic inclinations of various political leaders and parties. It also examines the areas in which the previous examples are not readily evident as being influential to democratic prospects.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In both theoretical and empirical terms, how do the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam differ in their approach and propensity towards democracy and democratization? The existing literature on the relationship between religion and politics is precise and exhaustive in many areas. For example, much has been written in regard to the connections between Catholicism and democracy as well as Confucianism and democracy, while the relationship between Islam and democracy has also enjoyed extensive scholarly attention, especially in the post September 11th world. Yet while the different branches within the Christian tradition have been separately examined as to their propensity to democracy and democratization, Islam has yet to be given the same nuanced approach. To best answer the question above, it is necessary to first examine the works dealing with different religions and their applied and theoretical relationships with democracy and democratization as a means to understand the historically best methods to examine religion and democracy.

This chapter first examines the literature on what drives religious participation, a matter relevant to this paper's thesis in that levels of religiosity and religious participation are often linked with a variety views on different moral and political issues. It then discusses how the literature shows that it is nearly impossible to provide a generalized view of how states act with religion, thus necessitating that any paper on the Sunni and Shia relations with democracy must be done on a specific case-by-case basis before developing any

overarching theme. I next examine how Confucianism, Catholicism, and the Judeo-Christian tradition in America all act with democracy structurally, theoretically and empirically. The existing literature on this is important because it provides a solid analytical foundation in which to examine the thesis topic in specific terms. I then move on to the interactions between democracy and Islam as a whole, an important matter in that this will allow for a better understanding of what structural and theoretical components of Islam may allow for an increased or decreased compatibility with democracy, which can then later be examined for their importance within each specific branch.

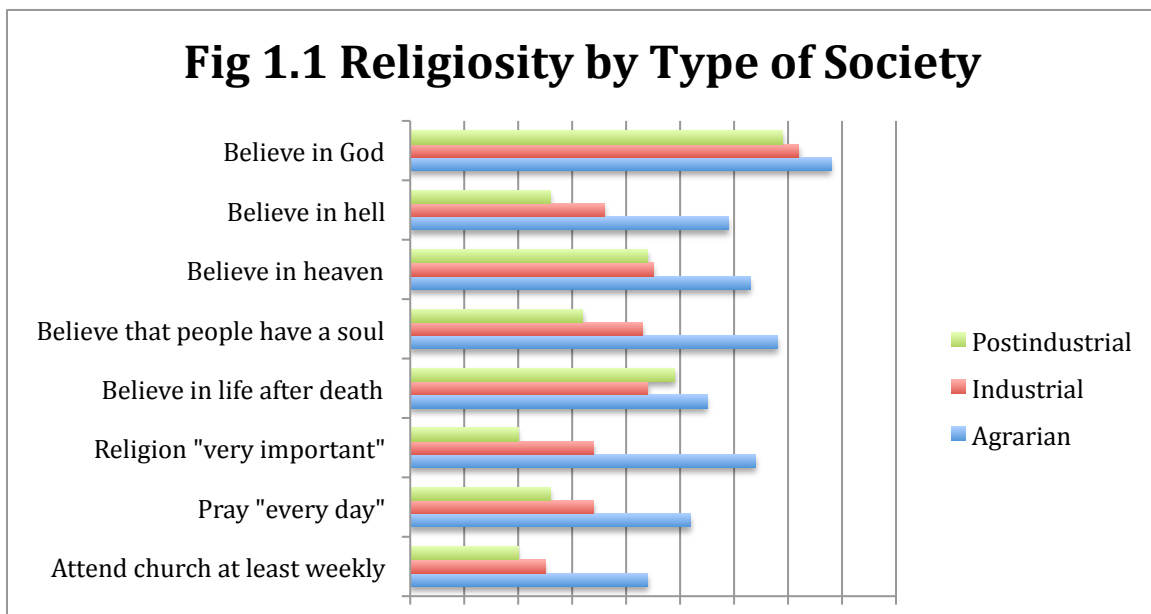
Religious Participation

Religious participation varies throughout the world across cultural, religious and socioeconomic groups. Norris and Inglehart identify various quantifiable traits that lead to societal modernization and the increase of secularization (Norris and Inglehart, 53). Equality in socioeconomic standing and advancements in human development lead to marked differences in what the authors call “existential security”, or the reduction of threats to survival and the increase of a person’s capability to make his or her life more profitable. Security is largely based off of human development rather than economic development. To extrapolate in general terms, religiosity on an individual basis decreases as human development qualities such as literacy, education, proper nutrition and health care quality increases, but does not necessarily decrease if private wealth alone increases (ibid, 54). “Private affluence can coexist with public squalor, and

wealth alone is insufficient to guarantee widespread security” (ibid, 54). Within first world nations, for example, some ethnic minorities and other sectors such as the elderly remain at risk of lessened existential security.

At the same time, the authors agree that there are other contingent factors that affect regional religiosity, particularly charismatic spiritual leadership, or the ability of a state to stamp out religions, such as in China, or to mandate a certain religion, such as in Saudi Arabia (ibid, 54). Still, in the long-term, the authors argue that human development levels are the defining factor driving religious participation in nations, and that religion as an important piece of daily life is reduced most significantly as nations “emerge from low-income agrarian economies into moderate-income industrial societies with basic welfare safety nets” that provide a margin of security larger than the agrarian societies (ibid, 54).

To support their argument, the authors measured evidence of religious behavior across agrarian, industrial and postindustrial societies in eight measures of religiosity (fig 1.1) (ibid, 57).



Source: World Values Survey, pooled 1981-2001

The study draws on 23 postindustrial nations, overwhelmingly western and Catholic and Protestant in their historically predominant religions, such as Austria, Finland and the United States; 33 industrial nations ranging from Catholic countries such as Argentina and Hungary to Orthodox and Muslim nations, such as Belarus and Turkey; and 23 agrarian countries with a broad range of historically predominant religions such as Albania, China, South Africa and Peru (ibid, 46).

This security axiom, then, demonstrates that decreased threats from an assortment of risks and dangers, such as natural disasters, poverty, humanitarian crises and human rights violations, all contribute to human security, and the absence of this security leads to increased religiosity (ibid, 14). The less secure a population feels, the more likely it is to turn to religion. The authors state that the security axiom shows that because societies differ in human security, this directly influences religious values, important indicators of which are the importance of religion and the importance of God(s) in a society (ibid, 5).

The cultural traditions axiom, meanwhile, is a secondary argument posited by the authors. It states that the cultural and social fabrics that make up societies are guided and linked with historical religious traditions that are imbedded even in citizens that have not attended church or stepped foot in a mosque. In this sense, religious values can be seen even in societies that are not predominantly religious. For example, "although only about 5% of the Swedish

public attends church weekly, the Swedish public as a whole manifests a distinctive Protestant value system that they hold in common with the citizens of other historically Protestant societies such as Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands "(ibid, 17). Religious participation can vary by country, but religious influence can also vary and it should not be assumed that largely secular societies experience little religious legacy and impact on daily and cultural life (ibid, 17). While human security impacts religious values, the cultural axiom states, religious culture affects moral beliefs within each society, such as attitudes towards gender equality and divorce (ibid, 15).

The authors conclude that the religious traditions of Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Catholics, among others, shape the values and beliefs of people living in societies where there has been a predominant religion long rooted in the cultural traditions and histories that it is practiced in (ibid, 219). It thus becomes hard to generalize about how religion impacts a country solely on the basis of church attendance or belief in a higher power, as even atheists and adherents to a minority religion are impacted by the impact of religious traditions and values on culture. The point to be made here is that it is not enough to analyze religious participation alone in any country or society, but also how religions have impacted cultural beliefs in more subtle ways. It is not only religious practices that must be compared, but also religious values in order to gain a more complete cross-national picture of religious influence and religiosity (ibid, 219).

Due to the osmosis effect of religion influencing cultural norms, historically Protestant cultures (for example) will show, and continue to show, values distinct from historically Catholic societies. These values leave a lasting impact on “religious beliefs and other social norms, ranging from approval of divorce, to gender roles, tolerance of homosexuality, and work orientations” (ibid, 220). Yet while religious cultures are useful in predicting certain beliefs centered on moral issues and governmental choices, such as how Islamic societies “remain deeply traditional” with regard to women’s equality, the religious cultures hypothesis is alone not enough to explain all cultural beliefs and values (ibid, 222). “Support for gender equality and tolerance of divorce, homosexuality, and so forth are not part of the Western Christian tradition” or even distinctly Western; they are instead strongly associated with higher levels of economic development and education (ibid, 222).

Religion and the State

Religion within the political sphere takes many forms due to varying political structures, religious and cultural beliefs and is therefore impossible to generalize cross-nationally. Within state legislative structures, vast arrays of laws are present in each state but cannot fully speak to the truth of religious participation in government. In the United States, for example, the only time religion is mentioned (where) is banning religious qualifications for holding office, yet “the US population is among the most religious of Western

democracies and it is very likely that without the zealousness of federal courts, religious legislation would exist in the USA" (Fox, 135).

In France, meanwhile, Fox classifies the interaction between the state and religions as "hostile". Religious organizations are not allowed to register and the state is allowed to dissolve religious groups for a variety of reasons (Fox, 136). Within the government, officials are not allowed to wear Muslim headscarves or large Christian crosses.

On the other side of the spectrum, Iran overwhelmingly has tied religion with the state, albeit solely Islam. Iran is constitutionally established as an Islamic republic, family law is based on a fairly strict interpretation of Islamic law, and all candidates for public office first face approval from Iran's supreme religious body, the Guardian Council. Religious minorities, on the other hand, are treated with general suspicion by the state and cannot proselytize. Conversion from religion is punishable by death, and the printing of bibles is severely restricted (Fox, 232).

Modernity has caused religion to evolve, and do so quickly. Among secular nations, religion can take the form of a response or protest to nontraditional ideals such as the rise of Hollywood and Western entertainment (Fox, 22). Mark Juergensmeyer argues, "the resurgence of religion in the third world is due to a failure of modern secular ideologies like liberalism, communism, socialism, and fascism" (Fox, 22). The failure of secular ideologies, closely associated and often intertwined with various governmental regimes,

leaves a political vacuum that encourages increased participation by cultural groups that are looking for alternative styles of rule (Fox, 22).

To defend against modernity, fundamentalist religions generally take one of two options (Fox, 23). The first is to reject modern values and practices and create an all-encompassing closed community with rules that govern all aspects of life, both public and private (Fox, 23). The second option looks towards defeating the regime, either through political tactics or violent strategies (Fox, 23). In either form, religious movements use “modern tools and strategies including modern communications, propaganda, mobilization, and organizational techniques as well as modern political institutions” (Fox, 24). Fox cites various Islamic parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah that have historically used both defensive options, either separately or in conjunction with each other. Fox’s theories occupy a different segment of the literature on religiosity from Norris and Inglehart in that Fox analyzes political mobilization and reactionary mechanisms in groups with increased religiosity, while Norris and Inglehart are specifically looking at the mechanisms that lead to increased religiosity within individuals.

It is thus difficult to provide an overarching view of the manner in which religion and politics connect with each other. What is easier to show is how specific religions engage in specific politics and, important to this paper, with democratic regimes.

Democracy and Religion in America

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote “while law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit, what is rash or unjust” (Reichly, 806). In this vein, Reichly, identifies two predominant theories surrounding religion and democracy in America. The first school of thought, commensurate with Tocqueville’s beliefs, postulates that the moral and ethical principles established by Judeo-Christian convictions in America stand as an important means of support for democracy in America and for general democratic values (Reichly, 801). Supporters of this belief cite the Founding Fathers’ strong belief in the value of religion, such that they created the First Amendment in order to protect religion, as well as religious drives for the abolition of slavery and for women’s suffrage, both of which helped perfect the American experience of democracy (Reichly, 801). The so-called Protestant ethic, such as equality, mutuality, and self-reliance, meanwhile, “provided the moral bedrock on which republican institutions were built” (Reichly, 801).

The second approach is wary of the influence of religion on democracies. Religions are inherently unaccommodating, democratic theorists say, as they all claim to know the ultimate truth about the workings of the universe and some higher power, and thus are generally not tolerant of other beliefs, evidenced by the civil violence in Lebanon, India and Northern Ireland (Reichly, 801). It is for these reasons, critics of religion say, that the Founding Fathers also created the

establishment clause to counter the free exercise clause, barring the federal government from the creation of a national religion (Reichly, 801).

The natural question that then arises is if religion is truly necessary as a foundation for American democracy. As noted, the founders of the United States were convinced of the necessity of religion as a moral base, some going as far as supporting the establishment of an official religion at the state level (Reichly, 802). In his farewell address, George Washington stated, “reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles” (Reichly, 803). In modern day times, it may be that Washington’s instincts were correct; in democracies such as Britain, Japan, Norway and France, low religious participation levels co-existed with the growth of political cynicism and indifference, although it is impossible to prove causation (Reichly, 803). And while in the United States more than 90% of Americans identify within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Reichly believes that the influence of religion is being quickly diminished thanks to modern shapers of opinion, such as the national media and the entertainment industry (Reichly, 803).

While religious influence in America was on the decline in the 1970’s, so were the tenets of personal responsibility and bases of mutuality that make democracy in America possible (Reichly, 804). “Violent crime, marital instability, abuse and abandonment of children, open traffic in hardcore pornography, births out of wedlock, and drug addiction, began rapidly to rise” (Reichly, 804). These developments could be argued to be damaging to

democracy, and the relationship between the decrease of religiosity and the increase of undemocratic morals is “at least suggestive of a causal relationship, though other factors have also undoubtedly been involved” (Reichly, 804).

If it is possible that religion in America is important to morals that are supportive of democratic politics, is it also possible that there are secular alternatives that would support democracy in the same way that religion has? Reichly finds no viable alternatives, believing philosophical views put forth by early political scientists such as Locke and Rousseau regarding the possibility of general good will towards others, to be idealized and overly optimistic (Reichly, 805). He instead advocates for a delicate balance to be struck between the free exercise of religion in America with the removal of religion as a campaign device. Religion and democracy, Reichly believes, are at once complementary and in tension with each other; democracy is reliant on religion for values that are hard to find sourced outside of religion and religion is reliant on democracy for its nurturing in a free atmosphere (Reichly, 806). Yet while some religions can be viewed as intrinsic to democratic values, others are seen as having considerable aporia in conjunction with liberal traditions.

Confucianism and Democracy

Samuel Huntington believes that people hoping for democracy in Confucian societies might as well stop wasting their time: “Almost no scholarly disagreement exists regarding the proposition that traditional Confucianism was either undemocratic or antidemocratic... Classic Chinese Confucianism and its

derivatives in Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and (in a diluted fashion) Japan emphasized the group over the individual, authority over liberty, and responsibilities over rights” (Huntington, 24).

Theoretically, Fukuyama finds that Huntington grossly exaggerates the undemocratic principles of Confucianism and instead believes that there is much within the Confucian tradition that can be viewed as democratic in nature. First, the examination system within Confucianism is meritocratic and implemented in modern-day Confucian societies as an egalitarian gateway to higher education and more equal income distribution (Fukuyama, 24). Confucianism emphasizes the importance of education, an important underpinning of democracy in that it tends to increase concern about noneconomic matters such as equality and political participation (Fukuyama, 25). In addition, Confucianism has historically coexisted with other religions better than many other belief systems, a important point in that liberal democratic values advocate for the inclusion of all religious beliefs and systems (Fukuyama, 25).

Other literature disagrees with Fukuyama’s theoretical analysis of Confucianism as not antidemocratic. Steven Hood argues that Confucianism is inherently anti-rights in its political and social orientation for a number of reasons (Hood, 854). Confucianism emphasizes heavily the importance of ancestral tradition and the superiority of ancestors over those living. Hood argues that this is a source of the belief that authority is infallible and a divergence from the philosophical concepts of natural rights (Hood, 855). There is no historical Confucian conceptualization of human beings as individuals who

can generate freedom and happiness for themselves. Instead, authority over individuals is stressed and is a “denial of conditions necessary to realize and enjoy rights” (Hood, 855). As for other scholars finding elements of democratic value within the Confucian canon, Hood believes such evidence is the result of the selective reading of Confucian thought in order to create a space for individuals separate from the state (Hood, 855).

Theoretical considerations aside, the true problem with Huntington’s argument, Fukuyama believes, is that it views Confucianism as an easily politicized religion such as Islam, which often binds together the two separate spheres of politics and social life in the legitimization of the power of the state over the life it governs (Fukuyama, 26). Political Confucianism, which advocated for a hierarchical system leading up to an emperor, has not existed since the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Fukuyama believes the “Confucian personal ethic” is the actual legacy of Confucianism. This personal ethic advocates for respect for the family, hard work and education. In fact, it is possible to argue that Confucianism was never political in nature, but that it instead was a type of intense “familism” that viewed the state apparatus as a larger part of the familial system (Fukuyama, 25). Therefore, while Confucianism maintains a personal ethic that is socially engaging, its breadth does not extend into the political sphere as Islam’s doctrine does.

The actual issue with democracy in Confucian Asia as Fukuyama sees it is the unattractiveness of Western democracy to the communalism of Asia, as well as the continued economic successes in Asia: “To many Asians, the social

problems currently plaguing the United States are problems of liberal democracy per se. To the extent that this perception continues, the future of democracy in Asia will depend less on the theoretical compatibility or incompatibility of Confucianism with democratic principles than on whether people in Asia feel that they want their society to resemble that of the United States” (Fukuyama, 32). Further, Fukuyama cites links between economic development in Confucian societies and the arrival of democratization and prodemocracy movements (Fukuyama, 21). What matters more than what Huntington views as the negative implications of the Confucian tradition is the modernization theory, Fukuyama states.

Modernization theory finds that there is a significant correlation between economic development and the increase of democracy and democratization, and Asia over the past 50 years has helped prove this theory correct, given developments in countries such as Japan and South Korea in which the two rapidly modernizing countries embraced democratic governance, Fukuyama argues. Fukuyama also posits that in Confucian societies the correlation between modernization and democracy cannot simply be explained in solely economic terms (Fukuyama, 22). Instead, there are distinctly noneconomic desires for recognition voiced among those looking for more democratic regimes (Fukuyama, 22).

While the modernization hypothesis may continue to be borne out, if East Asia continues to prosper while the United States and other Western democracies continue to experience economic and social problems, the Western

democratic model will remain fairly unattractive, regardless of Fukuyama's belief that there is no fundamental Confucian cultural obstacle in regard to democracy (Fukuyama, 32). In this regard, it seems that it would be better for Fukuyama to argue that Confucianism is, at best, a nonissue when it comes to its relationship with democratization since the author argues that what matters most for Asian democracy is either economic development or the demonstrably improved effects of democracy in the West.

Hood counters that hierarchy and political authority as a result of Confucianism can be found even in functioning democracies such as Japan and Taiwan. Parties such as Japan's LDP seek to foster Confucian values of harmony and cooperation through united fronts and the packaging of policies.

"Government leaders are respected for having greater information and insight into local and national conditions" and are expected to always act in a manner that is commensurate with the best interests of their subjects (Hood, 856).

Whether political authority was elected by free elections or not, Confucianism demands that the hierarchy in place be respected. Again, Hood emphasizes that theoretical considerations aside, Western-style democracy will remain unattractive to Eastern Asia as long as the West is plagued by high unemployment and crime (Hood, 856).

Catholicism and Democracy

Paul Sigmund identifies four basic responses in scholarly literature to the relationship between Catholic Church's leadership and democracy. The first

states that Catholicism is generally ambivalent to regime forms as long as the government provides for the general good of the people . The second, more critical view argues that the Catholic Church is unconcerned with government types, even if the regime is unjust and tyrannical, as long as the Church is left unhindered to proselytize and operate as it sees fit. The third maintains that as the Church is inherently quasi-monarchical and hierarchical in its functioning, it is more prone to sympathize and identify with governments that have regime types similar in operation to the Church. The final response holds that the moral values esteemed by the Church correspond heavily with democratic values and that Catholicism has gradually moved from the first position to the fourth in that it has moved from ambivalence to the support of democratic regimes on moral grounds (Sigmund, 530).

Sigmund argues that it was not until the first democratic wave in the late 1700-1800s in Europe that the Catholic Church was forced to make its first doctrinal assertion regarding politics (Sigmund, 531). As will be discussed later, the Church in this period was, in essence, negative towards democracy and democratization (Sigmund, 532). Yet there are identifiably democratic theological inclinations in Catholicism as far back as medieval times: “In the church-state conflicts between the spiritual and temporal powers, each side appealed to the role of people to weaken the claims of the other side, and in the constitutional crises of the church associated with the Conciliar Movement, conciliar writers used” democratic arguments, such as the tradition of *electing* both bishops and the pope, in order to limit the claims of the pope. The Conciliar

Movement itself lasted for nearly three hundred years, through the 16th century, and advocated for the final authority in theoretic and spiritual matters to be constitutionally vested in an ecumenical (general) council rather than the pope (Sigmund, 533-534).

Democratic possibilities aside, by the beginning of the eighteenth century the Church was in a well-entrenched position alongside traditional monarchies as a source of the state's power. In order to maintain its influence, the Church aligned with nondemocratic regimes as a means to maintain its influence. It was not until the French revolution that the Church found its privileges removed, although by the nineteenth century it had again found itself on the side of the monarchists in France with the restoration of the Bourbons (Sigmund, 535). France demonstrated the need for not only a "free exercise clause" as a necessary condition for democracy, but also a "no-establishment" principle, as "disestablishment becomes politically necessary for democracy wherever an established religion claims monopoly over the state territory, impedes the free exercise of religion, and undermines the equal rights of all citizens" (Casanova, *The Problem*, 68). It was especially vital to counter the Catholic Church in France because, at that time, it did not acknowledge the principle of freedom of religion (Casanova, 68). Indeed, it was not until much later that the Catholic Church interpreted its doctrine to allow others to worship God as they wished (Sigmund, 536).

Catholic popes first reacted strongly against democracy and popular sovereignty. Pius IX (1846-1878), for example, called "liberty of conscience as

an insanity and freedom of speech as injurious babbling” (Sigmund, 536). The Catholic leadership, especially the Papacy, would continue to run foul of democracy until after World War II, when a large “Catholic-based party committed to democracy” developed in France (Sigmund, 538). While during World War II the Church seemed eager to align with Hitler and fascist dictators in an attempt to consolidate power, Catholic political theorists after World War II began to promote democracy as the most acceptable form of government because it promoted the common good, and kept with the Christian belief system, namely, the ethical treatment of all humans (Sigmund, 540). Much of the remaining bloc of Catholic conservatives dissolved in the face of the changed stance of the Vatican’s position after the election of John Kennedy and the increased democratization of Latin America and Europe (Sigmund, 544). At the time, Latin America was replete with military rulers who had seized power and committed human rights offenses, and the Church found itself fighting a losing battle to maintain the traditional order while the region was moving irreparably towards democratic rule (Sigmund, 542). In stating its reasons for shifting its position towards being a defender of human rights, the Vatican, referencing the scripture, argued the “dignity of the human person” was commensurate with Christian values, and at the same time began to decentralize the Church, defining it more democratically as “the people of God” (Sigmund, 545).

Casanova argues that the Catholic Church’s identification with democracy perhaps wasn’t as much about the Catholic Church finally identifying itself with democracy as much as it was that democracy helped liberalize an unwilling

Church. Catholic political mobilization emerged at first as a means to help subvert liberalism and democracy in Europe in the pre and post World War II eras; if one were to focus “on Catholic ideology and doctrine [that argued for the maintenance and continuation of traditional hierarchy and governance systems], one was bound to conclude that Catholicism and democracy were indeed antithetical and irreconcilable”, yet electoral politics helped moderate fundamentalist political Catholicism [in Europe] by forcing Catholics to embrace democratic politics (Casanova, 69-70). Catholic parties “integrated masses of newly enfranchised voters into existing liberal parliamentary regimes, and both were deradicalised in the process, becoming part of the very institutions they initially rejected” (Kalyvas, 264).

Mikenberg finds that it is no coincidence that countries with fascist regimes in the interwar period of the twentieth century were generally all Catholic while countries without dictatorships were all Protestant. The cause of this, he argues, is doctrinal. The Catholic Church held onto its historical theocratic aspirations, while the Protestant Reformers spent most of their history battling against the Catholic vision. The Catholic Church “has been the historical antagonist to liberal democracy for much of Western modernity”, and it was not until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960’s that the two finally reached a reconciliation (Mikenberg, 895). Mikenberg points out that, regardless of motives or cause, the case of Catholicism shows that religious traditions are not fixed in their views towards democracy (Mikenberg, 904). As a result, further research on democracy and democratization, he argues, “needs

to take into account under which conditions such an antagonistic relationship between a particular religion and democratic principles and practice can be transformed into reconciliation” (Mikenberg, 904).

Islam and Democracy

The global discourse on Islam is in many ways similar to the old discourse on Catholicism, in that Islam is often said to be fundamentalist and incompatible with democracy (Casanova, *Catholic and Muslim Politics*, 89). Casanova finds reasons to be hopeful that the Muslim world and democracy can coexist. While the West dismisses Islam as an “essentially fundamentalist, antimodern, and antidemocratic religion”, Casanova argues that “The juxtaposition of Catholicism and Islam shows that the problem lies in simplistic depictions of a uniform “fundamentalist” Islam that fail to acknowledge the extraordinary diversity one finds among Muslim societies in the past and in the present”, and in the fact that every incrimination against Islam is nearly exactly the same as what was directed against Catholicism in the past (ibid, 100). Yet Catholic Christianity is now an integral part of Western democracy, and Islam has the potential to follow the same path in the east. The traits that many associate with political Islam, such as terrorist attacks and revolutionary violence, can also be easily found in the Catholic tradition and the near past of many Western countries (ibid, 100). Casanova argues that the modern authoritarian states commonly associated with Islam exist thanks to the support of Western nations and do not allow for the necessary public reflection on the compatibility of Islam and democracy in

the countries that need it most (ibid, 102). Meanwhile, the fragmentation of Islam, some scholars argue, may make Muslims more sensitive to democratic pluralism (ibid, 100).

The downside of a fragmented Islam is that it lacks a unified transnational community. There is a widespread globalization of Islam: “The proliferation of transnational Muslim networks of all kinds, transnational migration and the emergence of Muslim diasporas throughout the world” are all evidence of this (ibid, 93). The dissolution of the Caliphate has created political discord in the Muslim world, and the lack of a unifying power means that it will be much more difficult for Islam to accept democracy on a global scale than it was for Catholicism (ibid, 93). In other words, the Catholic tradition has a predominant school of theological reflection and a single line of authority that Islam lacks.

Yuchtman-Ya’ar and Alkalay find, through a multi-level analysis on data gathered by the World Values Survey, mixed results on the Muslim public’s response to democracy. While Western and Muslim publics both favor democracy over other forms of government by similar margins, and are content with democracy’s performance in their own countries, noteworthy differences between the two groups appear elsewhere (Alkalay, 125). For example, “more than four-fifths of those surveyed across all 11 Muslim majority countries in the sample either agreed (27 percent) or strongly agreed (54 percent) that unbelievers are unfit for public office” while in the 19 Western countries polled around a quarter of those surveyed (27 percent) agreed with the statement

(Alkalay, 125). In other words, it would appear that democracy is fine for many Muslims as long as it excludes nonbelievers from government, a fact rather antithetical to the basis of democracy (Alkalay, 125).

Yet the authors also argue that individual characteristics have a significant effect on democratic orientation. For example, the more schooling a person has had, the more prone he or she is to be favorable towards democracy. (Alkalay, 126). Higher income levels, younger age, and a lower level of religiosity all appear to have a positive impact on how someone views democracy (Alkalay, 126). The authors find that the gap in differences between Western and Muslim attitudes towards democracy *in general* can be attributed to the differences of distributions of individual characteristics. Regardless, it is harder in Muslim societies to find support for specific democratic characteristics, such as women's equality and freedom of expression, suggesting that Islam in general is hospitable to democracy in general, but inhospitable to liberal democracy (Alkalay, 129). Even at levels of human development that match, "non-Muslim societies are likely to host higher levels of support for liberal-democratic attitudes than can be found in similarly circumstanced Muslim-majority societies" (Alkalay, 130). 77.3 percent of Muslim-majority respondents, for example, agreed that politicians who did not believe in God were unfit to hold office, while only 40.6 percent of respondents in non-Muslim societies felt the same way (Alkalay, 130).

In order for Islam to become accepting of liberal democratic principles, the authors write, "democratic ideas will first need to receive legitimation on the

basis of Koranic texts and Islamic traditions” (Alkalay, 132). A significant body of scholarly work has done just that. Esposito identifies a few concepts in Islam that present themselves as solid basis for democracy and liberal democracy. *Tawhid*, for example, is the belief, simply put, that there is “no God but God”, and the God is the sovereign power (Esposito, 23). At first glance this may appear to repudiate the concept of popular sovereignty, as both Islamic and non-Muslim scholars have argues. But the democratic political system is easily framed within the concept of *tawhid*, as explained by a Sunni Muslim thinker: “The entire Muslim population runs the state in accordance with the Book of God and the practice of His Prophet... the executive under this system of government is constituted by the general will of the Muslims who have also the right to dispose it” (Esposito, 24).

This interpretation of *tawhid* has been used structurally in Iran. The “Deputy General of the Imam”, the position held by Ayatollah Khomeini after the 1979 Iranian revolution, is accountable to a consultative council and must have the support of the majority of its members. Because the concept of *tawhid* makes any human hierarchy impossible since underneath God all humans are equal, dictatorial systems have historically been dismissed as non-Islamic, and the label “king” has negative connotations (Eposito, 25).

Another concept important to contemporary Muslim understanding of democracy is that of the *khilafah* (Esposito, 25). At the inception of Islam, “the title of the leader of the Muslim community following the death of the prophet Muhammad was “caliph”, or *khilafah*”, the term literally meaning successor to

the prophet (Esposito, 25). By the beginning of World War I, the title of “caliph” carried connotations not only of the leader of the state but also of the Islamic tradition. Yet there is now a profoundly different understanding of the term. The opinion of one Muslim scholar, for example, is that “the authority of the caliphate is bestowed on the entire group of people, the community as a whole, which is ready to fulfill the conditions of representation after subscribing to the principles of [*tawhid*]” (Esposito, 26). The framework provided by the concepts of *tawhid* and *khilafah*, Esposito argues, emphasize the importance of the equality of human beings and are important perspectives in the context of democracy (Esposito, 27).

Like Esposito, Goddard examines the implications of how Islam, “as a set of belief and practice”, views democracy (Goddard, 3). As Sigmund did with Catholicism, Goddard identifies four points of view towards Islam’s philosophical compatibility with democracy. The first is that democracy is anathema to Islam (Goddard,4). The two are in such strong opposition to each other, those of this viewpoint argue, because the inherent relationship between Islam and the West is one of antagonism, and thus Islam can never accept democracy because to do so would be to accept the West as useful to humanity. Goddard cites the Egyptian Syyyid Qutb (1906-66) as representative of the view that democracy itself is in direct philosophical opposition to Islam and the concept of *hakimiyyat allah*, the sovereignty of God; human society should not govern itself, as it must be governed by God and no one else (Goddard, 4-5). Qutb views authentic Islam as a theocracy in the sense that God rules all.

Goddard argues against this viewpoint, since the phrase *hakimiyyat allah* “does not occur in the Qur’an, the Muslim scripture, nor in the Hadith... it is in fact a modern phrase which is essentially a reaction to secularism as an ideology” (Goddard, 5). In some ways it is disappointing that Goddard would choose this singular and easily dismissed example in order to illustrate the view that democracy is anathema to Islam; as we have seen, there are concepts within Islamic texts, such as *tawhid*, that perhaps argue better against the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

The second perspective finds that Islam and democracy are incompatible as they contradict each other. It is not a total dismissal, Goddard argues, but it does not “necessarily correspond precisely to democracy as understood in Western political philosophy but rather comes to be understood” as a theodemocracy, a democracy guided and ruled by God (Goddard, 6). In other words, it is the twisting of democracy, or Islam, or both, in order to make them more compatible but not authentic to their original intent. Goddard cites Abu’l-A ‘la Mawdudi (1903-79), the founder of Jama’at-i-Islami, who took the concept of *shura*, or consultation, and interpreted it in an expansive view to mean a council of advisers (Goddard, 6). This body would prevent arbitrary actions on the part of the rulers and could potentially be elected in Mawdudi’s interpretation.

The next view is more positive towards to democracy and argues “Islam as traditionally understood is quite compatible with democracy as it is understood in the twentieth-century world” (Goddard, 7). Goddard cites Mahmud al-‘Aqqad (1889-1964), an Egyptian intellectual, as a major purveyor of

this attitude. Al-'Aqqad found two concepts to support his argument, the first being the concept of *ijma*, or consensus, which is widely recognized by the Muslim community as a part of Islamic law. *Ijma* dictates that if the Islamic finds consensus on a particular point of law, it must become legally binding for all Muslims (Goddard, 7). *Ijma* thus lays the foundation and justification for representative democracy as the Muslim community would be able to choose their leader by consensus. The second concept, discussed in depth later in this paper, is that of *bay'a* (pledge of allegiance), which is necessary for the leader of the Sunni Muslim community to obtain from his subjects before he is legitimate. Al-'Aqqad found this as a precedent for an electoral democracy, although Goddard argues its original intent was to further support for an already established leader (Goddard, 7).

The final point of view is also the most optimistic and suggests that Islam and democracy are essential for each other. Goddard provides Bassam Tibi, a Visiting Fellow at Harvard, as a purveyor of this viewpoint. Tibi argues, rather weakly, that Islam is vital to ensuring world peace, and that "there can be no stable regional political order in Islamic civilization without some measure of democratization" (Goddard, 7-8).

Fereydoun Hoveyda chooses to trace the path of the Muslim world through history and the purported incompatibility between Islam and democracy. By the mid-nineteenth century, the West had slipped any remaining bonds of backwardness and committed itself to considerable progress in science and technology, while furthering the political importance of democratic and

liberal institutions (Hoveyda, 229). At the same time, fundamentalist interpretations of the Koran began to be the norm in the Muslim world, and hidebound Muslim philosophers dominated the religious and political landscape. The result was the Muslim world removing itself from the rest of the world and declining until it was finally colonized by European powers at the end of the nineteenth century. Hoveyda argues that the difference between the Muslim and Western world deepened as Muslims clung to their traditional ways and tried to “find solace and answers in the past” in response to the invasion of their countries (Hoveyda, 230).

The gap grew again after World War I in the face of women in the West fighting for equal rights, and the adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In many ways the values embodied by the Declaration, such as the rights of the individual, were antithetical to the historical traditions in the Muslim world, which valued a patriarchal structure within its social order. The authority of various Muslim religious leaders became threatened by this rapid modernization imposed by the West, and the logical response for many Muslims was an organized reaction against Western values (Hoveyda, 231).

Hoveyda cites all this to underscore his main point that there is “no basic incompatibility between Islam and democracy” (Hoveyda, 231). Instead, he argues, the antagonism between the two exists thanks to the West rapidly modernizing quicker than the Muslim world and the reactionary clergymen that “have kept Muslim nations outside the progressive trends of the rest of the

world” (Hoveyda, 231). In order to best encourage the growth of democracy in Muslim countries, Western nations should stop providing financial assistance to corrupt dictators and allow for Muslim reformist movements to help modernize autocratic regimes and (Hoveyda, 232).

The literature on the relationship between these various religions and democracy provides a useful base in which to examine the empirical, historical and theoretical implications of Islam and democracy. It also illustrates that there is no one best way in which to analyze a religion and its components, especially when the goal is to define its relationship to a system of governance. After all, this literature review includes scholars who examine disparate pieces of evidence that are tied to each other only by the religion that includes them. Yet there is also gap in the literature in that there is no serious, systematic examination of Sunni and Shia differences in the theoretical and empirical domains. Given the large differences between the two branches, which will be discussed in the next chapter, it is a mistake to assume that Islam and democracy can, or should be, generalized accurately without understanding the implications of the dissimilarities and similarities between the Sunni and Shia branches.

The chapters that follow fit well within the substance of the literature, but also circumvent some of the methods used for analysis. For example, while authors such as Yuchtman-Ya’ar and Alkalay discussed economic factors at length, these types of factors that could push Sunnis or Shias towards democracy are for the most part looked over except in Chapter 5, where the discussion centers on how Shia groups emerged out of economic marginalization. Instead,

this thesis favors an analysis based on specific theological principles, a type of analysis used by the literature on, for example, the Catholic Church and Confucianism. The niche that this paper occupies, then, is less empirical and more logical and theoretical.

Chapter 3: Implications of the History of the Sunni-Shia Split

Why History is Important

The history of the Sunni-Shia split is vital to understanding the modern-day democratic implications of the differences between the two sects in that it contextualizes how the contemporary issues of these disparities came to exist. The foundation of the disparities between Sunnis and Shias is of obvious importance as it still often largely governs their beliefs and differences to this day.

In this history there are no clear arguments for democracy, no mass elections, no enlightened clamors for religious freedom or women's rights or other liberal democratic principles. Instead, there are implications and tendencies that I examine that hint at democratic possibilities. The struggle, of course, is to identify differences that actually matter in terms of democratic potential and not to engage in concept stretching or overstate the importance of a historical issue.

In and of itself the split is hard to define, as it is still occurring to this day. There are no clearly drawn lines to signify when the schism began, and when it finally solidified, or if it even has. The periods I choose to examine are hopefully the most relevant to the very contemporary issue of whether one group or the other has a higher attraction towards democracy. This chapter discusses Muhammad's rise to power, the battle for succession that followed, and the importance that each group gave to how successors were chosen, which are then tied in with each aspect's relevance to democratic compatibility. This chapter

also examines the different approaches the two sects initially took towards various bodies of Islamic writings dealing with matters of jurisprudence and theology.

The Split

This history of the split is a heavily abbreviated version, condensed to include the most relevant factors in considering democratic implications. 1.3 billion Muslims live in today's world, the overwhelming majority of whom are Sunnis (Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 275). A mere 10-15% of Muslims, or 130-195 million people, identify themselves as Shia. The split between Shiism and Sunnism occurred near the onset of Muslim history, and each sect argues that it is the original orthodoxy (Nasr, 291).

Nasr argues that, "Shiism and Sunnism not only understand Islamic history, theology and law differently, but each breathes a distinct ethos of faith and piety that nurtures a particular temperament and a unique approach to the question of what it means to be a Muslim" (291). That this schism, so influential to each sect's understanding of itself, occurred in the time shortly following Muhammad's death highlights the importance of understanding this particular segment in Islamic history.

To understand Muhammad is to understand, at least in part, the main motivations behind why Sunnis and Shias exist as they do today. Muhammad was born in 570 C.E., orphaned while still in his infancy, and became a business manager for his eventual wife, Khadija, who worked in the caravan trade in

Central Arabia (Esposito, 6). They had three sons, all of whom died in infancy, and four daughters, the most notable being Fatima, who would later marry Ali, the fourth caliph and the first leader of Shia Islam. Muhammad would frequently retreat to a cave by himself for reflection and solitude, and it was in this cave in 610 C.E. at the age of 40 that Muhammad became a prophet. Over a period of 22 years, Muhammad received divine messages and transcribed them into what would become the Quran, or “The Recitation” (Esposito, 7).

Muhammad initially struggled to attract followers in a heavily polytheistic population. Among his earliest converts were Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, and Abu Bakr, his father-in-law (Esposito, 8). Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina in 622 in order to escape violence and persecution perpetrated against them by Meccans, primarily those belonging to the Umayyad clan (Esposito, 8). It was in Medina that the first true Islamic community (*umma*) was created. By the time of Muhammad’s death in 632, “all Arabia was united under the banner of Islam” (Esposito, 11).

Muhammad’s life provided strict guidance for his followers in all facets of life. He is remembered among Muslims as compassionate, righteous, honest and trustworthy (Esposito, 11). What Muhammad practiced became the norm for his followers, who sought to emulate his *Sunna*, or example (Esposito, 11). Muslims began to write down stories and observations on how the Prophet acted, and these traditions are now known as *Hadith*. The historical and contemporary Sunni and Shia differences surrounding *Hadith* provides an interesting basis

from which to view each sect's potential attitude towards democracy and will be discussed later on.

A debate over who would succeed the Prophet as leader quickly followed. For most Muslims in 632, the tribal traditions at the time dictated that the successor for Muhammad should be chosen by a council of elders (Nasr, 291). These Muslims were the forebears to Sunnis, and found justification in their belief from the words of Muhammad, who declared, "my community will never agree in error" (Nasr, 291). Sunnis believed "the successor to the Prophet would need no exceptional spiritual qualities but would merely have to be an exemplary Muslim" who was well acquainted with the religious and political needs of his community (Nasr, 291).

The Sunnis thus chose Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law and close friend, as caliph (Nasr, 291). Abu Bakr became the first of what is now known as the "Rightly Guided Caliphs". The following three caliphs were Umar ibn al-Khattab (624-644), Uthman ibn Affan (644-656) and Ali ibn Abi Talbi (656-661) (Esposito, 36). Abu Bakr and Umar strove to consolidate and expand Islamic rule in the Arabian Peninsula, and Umar appointed an election committee to choose his successor (Esposito, 37). This council chose Uthman, a weak leader who was assassinated by "a group of mutineers from Egypt" (Esposito, 37).

The fourth caliph, Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, drew heavy support from partisans who believed that the leadership of the Islamic community should be derived only from those related to the Prophet. A civil war developed during a challenge from Uthman's cousin Muawiya, who demanded

that Ali avenge the death of Uthman. Ali was assassinated by a group of extremists upset by the crisis enveloping the Islamic community, and Muawiya took power, beginning the reign of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) (Nasr, 308).

Sunni acceptance of the rule of Muawiya is further evidence of the emphasis Sunnis put on basic order over all else; for Sunnis, the rule of the Umayyad dynasty was acceptable because it was derived from the support of the community. The caliph was not the religious successor to Muhammad, but rather his political and military heir (Esposito, 43). In this manner, while the Umayyad rulers relied on Islam as a source of their power and legitimacy, they deviated from the Islamic practice of selection or election by developing a hereditary system to choose leaders. (Esposito, 41). Sunnis accepted this development as they positioned themselves as the caretakers of the Islamic leadership establishment as long as the faith was allowed to flourish unhindered, which the Umayyad dynasty allowed.

Shiism grew largely out of dissent to this view. The caliphate had become a monarchy under the Umayyads, with separate political and religious leadership, and the Shias traced this problem to the choice of Abu Bakr, rather than Ali, as the first successor to Muhammad (Nasr, 324). The dissenting Shias rejected the legitimacy of the first three Rightly Guided Caliphs, "arguing that God would not entrust his religion to ordinary mortals chosen by the vote of the community and that Muhammad's family- popularly known as *ahl al-Bayt* (people of the household)"- were the actual successors of the Muslim community "for the blood of the Prophet ran in their veins" and were imbued with the

personal and spiritual qualities given to Muhammad by God (Nasr, 324). That the Umayyads were not part of Muhammad's family and had also chosen to make the succession process one that was hereditary provided further evidence for Shias that the Umayyad dynasty had become a kingship and thus was not truly Islamic (Esposito, 41).

The actual function of the successor created additional strife between Sunnis and Shias. Sunnis argued that the successors to the Prophet were only inheriting his role as leader of the Islamic community and did not have to have the same special relationship to God. They viewed, and view, Abu Bakr as the legitimate successor to Mohammed because his rule was derived from the consensus of the Islamic community.

Shiism, meanwhile, does not put the same emphasis on the capability of the Islamic community to choose the correct leader. It is a more pessimistic outlook that emphasizes humans' fallibility and inability to lead themselves, unguided, towards salvation. In Nasr's words, "Just as humans could not find salvation until the Prophet took up the task of guiding them toward it, so after him people need the help of exceptionally holy and divinely favored people in order to live in accord with the inner truths of religion" (361). Since the Prophet held special divine properties so that he could understand the message of God, those related to him, Shias argue, hold these special qualities as well (Nasr, 361). We can therefore say, "the differences between Shias and Sunnis are thus not only political but also theological and even anthropological", in that these

differences govern how each group chooses its leader, which then affects many aspects of daily life for Sunnis and Shias (Nasr, 361).

Analysis of History

The very etymology of the groups provides a basis for analysis. Sunni is the familiar name given to the *ahl al-sunnah wa'l-jama'ah* (people of tradition and consensus) (Nasr, 343). Shia is the familiar name for *Shi'atu 'Ali*, meaning "followers of Ali". We'll first examine how the history of these followers of Ali impacts their potential to find democracy an appealing prospect.

As noted, Shiism deeply emphasizes the importance of divine and blessed leadership over consensus:

As in Sunni Islam, the [Shia] believe that only God is sovereign and his legislation is known through the Shari'a. Nevertheless, in comparative terms, the Shia belief in the divine right of succession and the inspired ability of the true Imams to be infallible guides demonstrates that the Shia view of the caliphate is closer, relatively speaking, to an idea of 'state sovereignty,'" in that the caliphate is not only a religious leader but a leader

of the entire state and its governance (Forte, 24). Indeed, Shia adherence to the infallibility of its leadership suggests a viewpoint consistently at odds with democratic principles, namely, the ability to question leadership. Shia insistence that the only legitimate successors to Muhammad are those related to the Prophet through blood or marriage undermines the democratic emphasis upon leadership chosen through popular sovereignty and instead is reminiscent of the principle of divine right to rule regularly employed by European monarchies.

Shia Imams (not to be confused with the same term employed for leaders of prayer in Sunni Islam), hold a special place in the lives of Shias. Because they are related to the Prophet, they are infallible and divine and rank only under Muhammad in terms of divinity and power. Yet for some fringe Shias, whose origins lie in early Islam, Ali and the Imams are outright “incarnations of the godhead”, truly divine in nature with a transitory corporeal presence (Goldziher, 184). Ali was elevated to the level of God by these groups, some even going so far as endorsing the heretical view that that the angel who approached Muhammad had done so accidentally, and had meant to deliver God’s message to Ali instead (Goldziher, 186).

I cite this to underscore the extremes to which Shias follow and believe in Ali and his descendants. Twelver Shia Islam, for example, is the largest sect within Shiism and follows the succession of twelve Imams after the death of Muhammad, beginning with Ali (Ithnā Asharīyah, *Britannica*). The twelfth Imam, or Mahdi, will reappear when the time is correct and bring salvation with him. Shia theology created an occultation of the Imam, who they believe has merely gone into hiding. In the interim, the Shia community is to “await his return and be guided by its religious experts”, the *mujtahids* (Esposito, 45). History has bound Shiism to this path, and it is evident how this worship of Ali and the Imams in general is antithetical to democracy, in that it is prohibitive of any outside leadership and thought. The legitimate successors to Muhammad are the only Muslims who can interpret the word of God, a fact that stifles independence and self-determination.. It should be noted that Islam offers

guidance for all aspects of life and that the reach of the Imams into the lives of Shias is thus comprehensive and substantial, thus magnifying the potential impact that Imams have in shaping Shia propensity to democracy.

To look at Shia Islam by its early history only, then, is to look at authoritarianism. The individual is discouraged, and submission to the ultimate authority of the Imams is required. The Shia conceptualization of who is best suited to interpret the word of God within the theological framework is thus antithetical to democratic principles. There is no room for democracy in a structure that insists upon the rule of a divine group of people who do not need to be legitimated by election since God has given them their legitimacy already.

On the other hand, one of the most encouraging components of Shiism in terms of democratic compatibility is that it is the party of dissent. Shias occupy a spot as a persecuted minority throughout much of history, one that dismissed the various tyrants and monarchs endorsed by the Sunni faith. "The true Shia is persecuted and wretched, like the family whose rights he maintains and for whose cause he suffers. People soon regarded it as the vocation of the Prophet's family to endure hardship and persecution" (Goldziher, 179). Ali's son Husayn, for example, rebelled against the Umayyads, and was slaughtered in 680. He has become a martyr in the Shia faith and a paradigm of the injustice and suffering that Shias have endured (Esposito, 43). It could be argued that this historical fact should make them more likely to respect minority groups and permit universal rights, an important component of liberal democracy.

The period of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs makes this evident in illuminating the stark contrast between Sunni and Shia Islam. Different methods were used for the appointment of each *Khalifa*, yet for each of the *Khalifas* the Muslim community was polled to develop consensus and ensure that it was the will of the community that each man would become *Khalifa*. The typical process involved “the selection of the best man through initial election, nomination and election through an electoral college, in all cases followed by a private *bayah* [oath of allegiance], subsequently the appointment confirmed through a public *bayah*. The course adopted in all cases was republican”, although victory of a candidate through plurality rather than majority was the norm (Iqbal, 16).

It is easy, thus, to connect Sunni belief at the time of Muhammad’s death with potential democratic compatibility. As noted, Sunnis believed that the Prophet had not appointed a successor or a means or method to appoint a successor, and that it was thus a responsibility of the community to find a leader best suited to the role (Iqbal, 14). Muhammad had declared, after all, that his “community will never agree in error” (Forte, 42). While the end goal of both Sunnis and Shias was to establish a community of faith, Sunnis were unique in that they believed the best method to do so was through the consensus of the community or through a council of elders, a system Umar created previous to his death (Iqbal, 14).

This electoral college was composed of the most likely candidates to succeed Umar and its members selected the *Khalifa* from among themselves. The relevance of this particular historical fact to democracy cannot be

understated. Consensus is in the very fiber of what composes the Sunni faith, and is a guiding principle of democracy as well. That in 600 C.E. Islam had developed a semi-democratic system based on consensus is a fact that rarely appears in the literature on the historical development of democracy, and that this method of choosing a leader is a cornerstone of Sunnism should be encouraging to those who dream of an Islamic state compatible with democracy.

Yet upon the assassination of Uthman, Ali refused to accept a private *bayah*, insisting that “if the Muslim community wanted to swear allegiance to him as the *Khalifa*, it should be openly done in the *Masjid-i-Nabvi*”, in Medina (Iqbal, 17). Ali introduced a prerogative that if he was not leading the congregational prayers, “the Imam mentioned his name in the *Khutba* and prayed for him” (Iqbal, 17). If Ali had not been assassinated in 661, it would have been interesting to view the method he employed to choose his successors. Shias, obviously, would have advocated for the leadership of someone directly related to Ali.

Although those who would eventually combine into Sunnism gradually splintered into different factions, all shared a common attribute in the rejection of the Shia assertion of blood succession only (Forte, 25). The caliph, or leader, of the Muslim community, “must possess knowledge of the law to the level of a jurist, he must be of good character sufficient to be a witness in court, and he must have administrative and military ability” (Schacht, 9).

But the Sunni faith could also best be summed up in the aphorism of: “Sixty years of tyranny are better than an hour of civil strife” and, as noted, this

was often the case in the history of Sunnism (Schacht, 13). Sunnis eschewed the controversial choice of Ali as the first successor to Muhammad in favor of stability, arguing that it was Abu Bakr was better suited to the task of leading. It was the avowal of the principle that the best leader was not necessarily someone who was divinely favored by God, but someone who could compel obedience from the community. We noted how Sunnis coalesced around the rejection of blood succession, but just as important to the construction of Sunni Islam was the opposition of “a party at the other extreme, the Kharijites, who said that the caliph served at the pleasure of the community, that the community could dispose of him at any time, and that a leader who was a sinner lost his legitimacy” (Forte, 25). The Kharijites argued that any Muslim was capable to lead provided that he was free from sin and had community support (Esposito, 42). The Kharijites followed a strict moral code and demanded purity, as a Kharijite scholar said, “In the same way, the state of purity is invalidated by what issues from the mouth by way of falsehood and slander that may be to hurt of one’s fellow. It is invalidated by spreading scandal that plants hatred and enmity among people. Anyone who has without just cause abused, cursed, or spoken evil of people or animals has ceased being in a state of purity...” (al-Mahruqi, 20).

Sunnis argued differently, believing that moral failings were an acceptable sacrifice to be made in return for a leader who brought stability (Schacht, 15). In spite of the emphasis of political doctrine that “there is no obedience in sin”, much of the Sunni emphasis on the rejection of Kharijite principles was a result of the violent revolt that the two groups led, and the

ability of strict obedience to leaders to combat this dissent (Lambton, 18). The Sunni rejection of Kharijite ideals was also a rejection of fundamental democratic principles, such as the right of the political community to dispose of a leader through peaceful means, and damages any potential argument to be made regarding historic Sunni compatibility with democracy. Even the most extreme form of removing a leader, the right of revolution, composes much of basis for the America Declaration of Independence, and was included in the constitutions of various states, including that of Massachusetts.¹

Further, while election may have been the favored method for choosing the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs, it was not the most legally dominant form after Ali's death (Forte, 26). Electors could be entirely removed from the succession process by the caliph if he named his successor in his will. It is easily demonstrated that the early Sunnis were more democratic than those that followed them. It was, after all, not until the rise of the Umayyad Empire that Sunnis departed from the Islamic practice of electing (or selecting through consensus) the successor of Muhammad.

This contradiction within the Sunni faith highlights the absolute necessity of contextual understanding and analyzing contemporary developments. It would be hard for a bystander to convincingly argue, even five centuries after the death of Muhammad, the exact path Sunnism would take in the millennia to follow simply from knowing the history of the split. There is nothing particularly promising about how the Sunnis historically developed and chose their leaders.

¹ Massachusetts 1780 Constitution, Bill of Rights, Art. 7.

Much of this development, as we have seen, was a result of fights over the consolidation of power; in this sense they were often both politically and religiously motivated. The implication here is that Sunnis were willing to adjust their beliefs in order to find a larger following of believers; one such example would be the sect's acceptance of the consensus of the community while disavowing the Kharajis. Aporia seems to be the predominant theme for the history of Sunni Islam.

Ijma

A complete history of the Sunni and Shia split not only includes the methods in which the sects chose their leaders, but also the specific theological principles that were developed by the two branches. Following the death of Ali and the succession of the Umayyad Empire, local jurists initially used *ra'y* (personal interpretation) to interpret the Qur'an and Sunna to situations demanding jurisprudence (Forte, 42). "*Ra'y*, however, led to diverse and conflicting results, and it was quickly supplanted by the technique of *qiyas* and *ijma*" (Forte, 42). These techniques became important to the Sunnis, who accepted the rule of the Umayyad Empire. *Qiyas* (analogical deduction) allowed for a more flexible method of coping with legal issues that arose through the use of previous rulings; interestingly, it is a form of reasoning used by legal systems the world around (Forte, 41).

The second technique, *ijma*, was a system of consensus building occupying a special spot within the Sunni tradition and proved to be a double-

edged sword. Sunnis view *ijma* as the third source of Islamic law and it is practiced primarily in a scholarly setting (Forte, 41). Sunnism, after all, is the party of consensus. Liberal democracy not only allows for consensus building, but for the continual examination and reexamination of principals and beliefs and theories. Voices, even those holding a minority opinion, are allowed an opportunity to be heard. “Yet at the moment that consensus was reached within Islamic laws further legal speculation was no longer permitted” (Forte, 41). The result was that it was a mere few hundred years after the death of Muhammad that the development of Islamic law had been significantly halted, a topic that will be discussed for its modern implications in Chapter 4 (Forte, 41).

Indeed, to this day “modern Muslim reformers find *ijma* one of their greatest obstacles” (H. Gibb, 77). Consensus-building quickly became a one-time opportunity for Sunnis directly after the death of Muhammad; in an odd form of consensus leading to tyranny, consensus would be formed and never relinquished. In modern-day terms, it would be as if Americans voted on a proposition to ban revisiting any previous laws enacted. We can connect therefore connect *ijma*, with a deep historical basis in the Sunni system of jurisprudence after the death of Muhammad, with heavily antidemocratic implications. *Ijma* today is linked with democratic possibilities, as will be discussed in the next chapter, but viewing it through the lens of history alone leaves little promise for democracy and democratization.

This concept of *ijma* is of vital importance to this chapter, as it highlights the essential difference between Sunni and Shia Islam in a historical context:

“the former is based on the *ijma*, and the latter on the authoritarian principal” (Goldziher, 191). As previously discussed, Shiism is based on part by the rejection of Sunni ideals and beliefs, and Shias find that, through the history we have touched upon, *ijma* “does not always match with truth and righteousness” (Goldziher, 191). *Ijma*, for example, could lead to the sanctioning of violence and injustice just as easily as compassion and peace. To be clear, *ijma* does not serve the same importance as it does in Sunni Islam.

History shows us this through the violence needed to establish the caliphate in accordance with the Sunni view (Goldziher, 191). In Shia Islam, *ijma* has some theoretical applicability, but for Shias, *ijma* cannot possibly be utilized without the guidance from the Imam. Perhaps the Shia distrust towards *ijma* is simply a reflection of an ugly, often unacknowledged aspect and danger of democracy, however, rather than *ijma* being inherently undemocratic. Consensus, as the Sunnis demonstrated in the struggle after Muhammad’s death, is not always an appealing prospect. Thomas Jefferson noted of this danger in warning of the possibility of the tyranny of the majority over the minority, a struggle that continues to this day for certain minority groups (such as homosexuals) in America and other democratic nations.

Conclusion

In these deeply theoretical grounds, it is exceedingly hard to resist arguing that there are very few historical facts that could not be viewed as both democratic and antidemocratic, especially with the knowledge that these

principles of the past can be manipulated at will according to how a person with a position of power within the Islamic community chooses to form a governance structure. *Ijma*, for example, was accepted by Sunnis, who valued consensus, but the principle itself could be interpreted and implemented in different ways; a democratic-leaning leader might use it as a basis for elections, while a more authoritarian type leader could argue that *ijma* was reserved for only a select group of scholars and not the broader community.

However, some facts do have significant implications for democracy, especially the manner in which Sunnis and Shias chose their leaders in the succession struggle after the death of Muhammad. Perhaps the best summation of how the history of the Sunni-Shia split has impacted their propensity towards democracy is as Goldziher noted: Sunni Islam is based on the principle of *ijma*, and Shiism based on principles of authoritarianism. Using this fact alone, of course, would not allow for an accurate and comprehensive analysis of democratic potential within the two sects. As noted, however, the history of the Sunni-Shia split provides a useful and necessary context for the differences between the two sects and allows for a better analysis of the contemporary implications of democracy for the two. Our next chapter will analyze how some of these historical differences, as well as other developments, have been carried out and interpreted in the contemporary governance structures of both sects.

Chapter 4: Contemporary Theological Differences

The largely theological differences between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims have been transformed into full-fledged political conflict, with broad ramifications for law and order, social cohesion, and government authority (Stern, Foreign Affairs).

Islamic theology matters in that it makes an appreciable impact not only in the theoretical domain but also in the real world. It provides the basis for much of how both Sunnis and Shias act politically and socially, and so before examining specific Islamic parties and governments, it is necessary to inspect the basis on which some of these political structures and beliefs reside. We have already observed how the Sunni-Shia split historically determined the disparate theological and personal values inherent to the two sects. We will now examine how these differences have solidified and shifted in modern times, and study the extent to which their inclinations are democratic.

It should be noted, however, that the similarities between the two sects outweigh the differences. Sunnism and Shiism, after all, are two branches of the same tree, “united in the Quran and the Prophet, the foundation of all Islam” (Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, 172). Day-to-day religious practices between the two are nearly the same, and the fundamental principles of Islam embodied in each faith are the same, placing Sunnis and Shias within the same orthodoxy of Islam (*ibid*, 172). The areas discussed in this chapter are therefore relatively narrow when compared to the large corpus of beliefs and norms that Sunni and Shia Islam share. Where the two branches differ,

however, they often differ strongly and in intertwined areas. This chapter examines such disparities in dimensions such as law, in governance, and in religious intermediaries, all with some clear-cut implications for democratic compatibility. It first discusses the different manners in which the two sects interpret the *Shari'ah*, how each view the individual, and finally how they implement and interact with governance structures.

Approaches to the *Shari'ah*

Islam is a religion that dominates not only the religious beliefs of Muslims- it occupies the political and social spheres as well. At the center of this characteristic is the *Shari'ah*. The *Shari'ah* in some ways can be seen as the opposite of the Western conception of law, in that it is law religiously understood not only as a Divine Law that governs universal moral practices and principles but also “how a man should conduct his life and deal with his neighbor and with God; how he should eat, procreate and sleep; how he should pray and perform other acts of worship” (Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, 88). It is comprehensive in its approach and thus offers guidance on all aspects of human life. In this manner law is part of the revelation in Islam, not a foreign element that was not sanctified by the ultimate authority, that of God (Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, 87). A Muslim is expected, and is indeed not a Muslim, until he or she accepts the *Shari'ah* (*ibid.*, 85).

Many, although not all, of the specific teachings taken from the *Shari'ah* differ little among the Sunni and Shi'ite schools (*ibid.* 85). The *Shari'ah* is derived from the Qur'an, pre-Arabian customs, the *Hadith* (attributions of Mohammad's sayings and actions) and the process of *ijma*, among other factors (Forte, 16-19). Politically speaking, however, God is the only legislator, and man does not have the ability to legislate and create laws outside of the *Shari'ah*; the void left, therefore, is exclusively how God's laws are executed (Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, 100). Much, of course, has been discussed on the *Shari'ah* as a whole and its relationship with democracy, and the literature as a whole has rightfully treated the *Shari'ah* as universally respected and followed throughout all of Islam, although it does not provide the basis for law in all Muslim countries. Any potential insights to be gained from differences between Sunni and Shia Islam are thus confined to how the two branches contemporarily choose rulers for their communities, and how this relates to the *Shari'ah* and its interpretation. Governance structures within the sects are crucial and obviously highly relevant when considering how Sunni and Shia Islam are dissimilar and alike in their attitudes to democracy and democratization.

We have traced the historical roots of *ijma*, or consensus building, and viewed how this system was virtually exhausted by Sunnis a few hundred years after the death of Muhammad. For Sunnis, legal scholarship is tied down by the concept of *taqlid*, following the examples of pious men (Forte, 17, 68). The

intellectual development of Sunni thought largely was stopped, as previously noted, by the fear of the misuse of *ijma* and the embracing of *taqlid* (Forte, 68).

Ijtihad (judgment) has been used historically and contemporarily to execute the *Shari'ah* "in the absence of any clear precedent" (Dutton, 33). It is a "dynamic, forward-looking component of the law" that allows for a modern understanding of the *Shari'ah* (Abd-Allah, 245). Sunni jurists practiced *ijtihad* in order to further the intellectual development of the *Shari'ah* (Forte, 17). Conservative Sunnis rejected its principles, insisting that society must instead "conform to the terms of the divine law objectively determined" (Forte, 68). Contemporarily, *ijtihad* has been the source of controversy for many within the Sunni community. "Many defenders of the *Shari'ah* are repelled when modern legislators attempt to justify new reforms by a tortuous reference to the *Shari'ah*. They prefer that the sacred law of Islam remained unsullied by modern reinterpretations" (Forte, 69). Yet just as passages in the Bible call for the stoning of adulterous women², much of the *Shari'ah* is simply outdated. Movements in favor of *ijtihad* within Sunni-majority countries have been rejected. In one case, Indonesians delegates (to what kind of gathering?) "called for the withdrawal of a paper which urged a new evolution of thought" and that also suggested ignoring Quranic texts that had proven to be outdated (Forte, 69). Similarly, a movement to bring back *ijtihad* was also refused in the country.

Twelver Shia governance is dominated by *mujtahids* (more on this system of governance later), those who have "attained a high stage of proficiency in the

² See John 8:1-11

science of the law and possess the other traditional requirements” (Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, 98). Every Shia must follow a *mujtahid*, who uses *ijtihad* to interpret the law on a generational basis, that is to say, how it best applies to the current environment. Shias, as noted previously, await the return of the twelfth Imam, and during his absence the *mujtahids* provide the needed guidance (Esposito, 45).

Sunnis, meanwhile, only respect early *mujtahids* as the source and basis for the interpretation of the *Shari’ah* (Zysow, 44). As with *ijma*, the gate is closed in many respects for *ijtihad* and Sunnis, in that *mujtahids* of “the highest ranks were not to be found after early centuries of Islam” (Zysow, 44-45). The four extant Sunni schools of jurisprudence are divided by which *mujtahid* each school of legal thought follows. The schools, named after the *mujtahids* they follow (all of whom lived from 700 C.E. to 860 C.E.), are the Hafanis, Malikis, Chafi’is, and Hanbalis, and they all view each other as mutually orthodox (Zysow, 46). We can thus trace a fundamental and multidimensional difference between Sunni and Shia Islam. Sunnis reject both *ijtihad* and the *mujtahid*, while Shias still use the process today.

An increased likelihood to turn to *ijtihad* can be both promising and worrisome when considering Shia Islam. *Ijtihad* can be used as a device to “sweep away those awkward provisions of *Shari’ah* that protected rulers, non-Muslims and ordinary people, that required strict procedures of proof, and that leaned presumptions in favor of the accused” (Forte, 242). It can, therefore, be used by fundamentalists and radicals to interpret the *Shari’ah* as they please,

and to bolster support for provisions that may, for example, condone acts of violence against minorities, or sectarian attacks.

On the other side of the coin are positive implications for democratization movements and for support for liberal democratic principles. The Shia process of continuously updating and interpreting the *Shari'ah* means that Shias have the potential to be more cognizant of modernization movements and potential democratization movements. The struggle, of course, is in ensuring that Shia leadership is attentive to democratization desires within its community. Additionally, as expressed in the literature review, it is certainly not a given that Muslims view democracy in a positive light. *Ijtihad* thus may not produce democratic results if either the leadership is not sensitive to a democratically-inclined community or is attune to its community but the community has not expressed desires for a more democratic system of governance. Again we see the Shia reliance raising their spiritual leaders to a level that is not seen in the Sunni faith. That Shias inherently believe that they are not all capable of interpreting the Qur'an and the *Shari'ah* is disturbing in its democratic implications, as it is easy to extrapolate this into a Shia belief that not all people are capable of ruling and thus are not all equal.

The Sunni rejection of *ijtihad* also has antidemocratic implications in that, as we saw in the case of Indonesia, it is a thought process commonly associated with resistance to change. At the heart of democracy, of course, is the constant processing and appraisal of various choices and actions that the political community decides upon. It is the “systematic and analytical

development” of policies and legal concepts that both democracy and *ijtihad* embrace, based on rational debate and thought, and so in turn the Sunni rejection of *ijtihad*, putting in its place *taqlid*, is not conducive to democratization. Indeed, in some ways the Sunni Islamic law is in a state of “stagnation.... Principally due to the notion... that the right to the exercise of private judgment ceased with the early legists, that its exercise in modern times was sinful” (Mullah and Hidadjatullah, xxviii). Instead, judgment has been left to men who lived shortly after the time of Muhammad and who cannot realize the demands of the current age (*ibid*).

It would be an encouraging sign, then, to see a renewed Sunni interest in *ijtihad*, in that it could be a sign of a possible movement to democratization or at least the justification of some liberal democratic principles. In the same manner as Shiism, however, the use of *ijtihad* is dependant upon the direction that the political community wishes to take it. Sunni reformers have often turned to *ijtihad* as a method for modernization. The Egyptian Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), for example, saw *ijtihad* as instrumental in overturning the centuries of stagnation that Sunni Islam was experiencing, regarding the “aura of sanctity that had come to surround the law of the legal schools” as an obstacle to the goal of modernization (Zysow, 49). Although the numerous attempts to revive *ijtihad* by Sunni Muslims have largely failed, any future efforts to increase its influence in the Sunni tradition should be viewed as encouraging in relation to democratic prospects.

The Individual and Self-Sovereignty

In a democracy, sovereignty is invested in the people, whether the governance structure is republican in nature or a direct democracy (that is to say, a government in which the people are intimately involved with the decision making processes involved in governance through ballots or other means). Sovereignty is not relinquished in a republic, but rather delegated to representatives, and thus it is vital to examine self-sovereignty in the Sunnism and Shiism in order to understand how the two sects interact with democratic principles.

Ash'arite theology points directly to the traditionalism and disavowal of self-sovereignty that Sunnis embody. Ash'arite theology is recognized as “the most widely accepted school of Sunni theology” and in many ways denies the idea of self-sovereignty (Stelzer, 166). In the Ash'arite approach, the values present in humans are a result of divine will. Moral values cannot be interpreted through one's self. As we saw historically, Sunni thought often values stability and unity over all else, indeed, it is “conceivable that the Ash'arites stress ‘tradition’... not only because they that this is *per se* to be preferred over reason, but because reference to tradition and revelation is of theological relevance, that is, of relevance for faith and its unity”, for unity of its believers in Sunni Islam (Stelzer, 167). In this ethical and theological approach, humans are seen as subjugated to Islamic law, bound by divine will. It is the rejection of the ideal of individual, emphasizing instead “;to say what

He says', 'to command what He commands', because, in the end, the correct interpretation of a divine word is known only by the divine speaker Himself" (Stelzer, 166). Sunnism is based partly on the firm belief that while responsible for their actions, humans "cannot create their own acts without divine intervention" and that there are consequently no other forms of sovereignty but God himself (Lucas, 80).

Although it does not compose the entirety of Sunni thought, Ash'arite theology offers a glimpse into the Sunni treatment of self-sovereignty, or lack thereof. In this form of Sunni thought, the individual is eschewed, with antidemocratic implications. Without overly conflating the two concepts, various philosophers, such as Rousseau, in setting the foundation for democratic governance, would argue that individual agency and morals are derived from within. Democracy is thus the result of the will of individuals, with self-sovereignty, to enter into a social contract. Ash'arite emphasis upon the idea that the individual is incapable of self-guidance and morality with the word of God is thus the rejection of the emphasis that democracy puts on self-agency and morality. Again we see the special importance that Sunnis put upon tradition, which in the case of the Ash'arite tradition trumps reason. It stresses obedience to the ultimate sovereign, that of God (Stelzer, 167).

A portion of Shia theology, meanwhile, can be seen as in strong opposition to Sunni theology. Shiism holds five central beliefs: the justice of God, the unity of God, prophecy, the Day of Judgment, and the imamate

(Sachedina, 75). As we have seen, Shias differ with Sunnis most strongly over the development of the imamate, but they also differ with Sunnis on details regarding other beliefs, such as self-sovereignty (Sachedina, 75). “The belief in the justice of God, for example, is similar to that of the Sunni Mu’Tazilis, rationalist theologians who were active” until the tenth century, when they were surpassed by the traditionalist Ash’arites (Sachedina, 75). For example, Shia Islam emphasizes the use of reason over tradition in that God’s endowment to humanity is that of the ability to reason, and that both good and evil are constructs able to be defined and analyzed through the use of rational thought. (Sachedina, 75).

By extension, this rational theology is corroborated through Shia jurisprudence, “the comprehensiveness of Islamic revelation, interpreted, and applied by use of reason” (Sachedina, 75). Along these lines, Shia theology provides the basis for *ijtihad* and is an excellent example of how Islam is a faith that extends into matters of jurisprudence and governance as well as personal religious habits.

In this manner we can view some portions of Shia theology as antithetical to Sunni theology, especially when compared to the Ash’arite theology. While Sunni theology places importance on tradition and following the examples of others, Shia Islam stresses the need for a rational, evolutionary based approach to interpreting the divine word. In terms of democratic propensity, Shia rationalism is encouraging in that it is not steeped in

traditionalism, and thus is relatively forward thinking. This suggests a promising proclivity towards alternative governance structures not widely used, as well as the ability to become more accepting of specific liberal democratic principles such as women's rights, universal suffrage, and the rights of minority groups and religions.

Again, however, the governance structure of Shiism stymies much of the democratic potential of its emphasis on reason and rationality. Not just anyone, after all, can “undertake the interpretation of the scriptural sources rationally”, and in this way Shiism shies away from placing importance on the individual and self-sovereignty (Sachedina, 76). As previously discussed, this lack of individualism can have antidemocratic implications, as it sets the foundation for Shias feeling as though they do not need to have individual agency and interpretation within their faith, an extension that can be possibly made to the attitudes Shias have towards governmental structures.

Governance

We have examined the historical roots of the Sunni and Shia faiths in terms of its governance, and noted the Shia reliance on intermediaries between the individual and God. Indeed, we can attribute the number of highly influential grand ayatollahs existing today within Shia Islam to the requirement that Shias must adhere to the teachings of a living *mujtahid* (Zysow, 46). Much of what needs to be said about Shia governance has already been said in the previous

sections on the *Shari'ah* and the history of Shiism and, in an attempt to avoid repetition, we will examine the actions of specific living ayatollahs in the next chapter. As noted previously, the Shia reliance upon *mujtahids* can have both positive and negative connotations, especially when considering the concept of *ijtihad*. Inherently, however, it is easy to view Shia Islam as a system based on authoritarianism. There is little room for individualism and self-sovereignty in a structure reliant upon unquestionable leadership.

Sunni governance, meanwhile, differs from that of Shia Islam. There is no “charismatically endowed hierarchy” in Sunni Islam as there is in Shiism (and there is not, of course, an overarching church such as the one that Roman Catholics belong to) (Goldberg, 11). Sunnis reject the *mujtahid* and instead adapt their ideology “to state structures, centralized authorities, and ruling regimes” while Shias have an increased likelihood to “adopt rebellious ideologies rejecting state structures”, in that their stringent requirements for leadership make them less apt to accept typical systems of governance (Khuri, 293). The four Sunni schools, however, contain the *ulama*, specialists in religious law and judicial matters, each who officiate based on which school of interpretation they belong to (Khuri, 294).

Sunni *ulama*, much like the clergy of the Christian faith, officiate over religious ceremonies and provide spiritual and life guidance when asked. Other religious officials hold positions in *Shari'ah* courts, offer advice on legal matters, and execute legal transactions (Khuri, 294). The four schools differ,

of course, but what is particularly relevant to this thesis is that Sunnis are able to essentially choose which school suits their particular political and social needs with relative ease? (Khuri, 295). While traditionally families, countries and ethnicities follow only one school of religious law (for example, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon follow the Shafi'i), a "Sunni Muslim who has daughters only and wishes them to inherit all his property opts for the Ja'fari law which provides for this" (Khuri, 294). States have followed this pattern historically as well. In one such case, the Ottoman Empire, home to many non-Muslims, chose to follow the Hanafi interpretation of the *Shari'ah*, as it is "the most permissive of all with regards to the rights of non-Muslims in an Islamic state" (Khuri, 294).

In many ways this process is a workaround to the Sunni problem of stagnation in the development of its interpretation of divine law. The ability to pick and choose the most politically convenient and acceptable interpretations of Islam allows for a large amount of flexibility, just as Shia Islam has with *ijtihad*. It is a dual flexibility as well- the individual is capable of choosing his social path through which school he picks, and the state is able to choose the laws and regulations it imposes on its citizens. While the rejection of *ijtihad* bodes ill for democratization, this process offers hope. Such was the case with the Ottoman Empire when it tried to extend more rights to its non-Muslim citizens, a perfect example of increased liberal democratic principles through the careful choice of the right Sunni school. Much as Sunni and Shia Islam are

branches of the same tree, it should be noted that the areas in which the Sunni schools differ are smaller than those that they agree in.

Khuri also notes that the religious authority structure, that of those within the *Shari'ah* courts and the *ulama*, among others, is often reliant on the power structure held by the state. "The opinions of high religious authorities are solicited, but the final decision rests in the hands of" the government, meaning that political policies are set by the government rather than religious leaders, which can be viewed as potentially a positive fact, depending on the state governance structure, given the Sunni emphasis on tradition (Khuri, 299). It is also interesting to note how Sunnis rely much less on a hierarchical religious structure than do Shias, and it is fascinating to view how the historical connotations of the Sunni support of the Umayyad Caliphate played out as expected into modern times through the Sunni advocacy of tolerating non-Islamic power structures, as long as they provide stability for Islam. Again, it is easy to be encouraged by the rather democratic value Sunnis place on the individual's ability to interpret God's word rather than depending on *mujtahids*, although in many ways it seems very contradictory with Ash'arite thought.

Conclusion

In many ways the history of the Sunni/Shia split seems to have been contemporarily realized. In the previous chapter I outlined the Shia emphasis on intermediaries through the relatives of Muhammad and Ali, and the importance given by Sunnis to stability and tradition. Much remains the same to this day,

with the Shia reliance upon the *mujtahid* as leaders and interpreters of the faith, and the Sunni reluctance to accept *ijtihad* as a means to modernize by analyzing the *Shari'ah* in a modern-day context. Again, we can view much of this as both democratic and antidemocratic; it is encouraging to view Shia acceptance of *ijtihad*, but discouraging to see their continued reliance upon authoritarian figures. Conversely, it is encouraging to see Sunni emphasis on the individual and its distance from a hierarchical system, but discouraging to see that the sect is resistant to *ijtihad* and other modernization means, as evidenced in the Ash'arite denial of self-sovereignty and advocacy of traditionalism; democracy cannot be realized if the faith is set in remaining in the status quo.

Finally, it would be a mistake to assume that the various components of the *Shari'ah*, and the methods through which it is executed by each sect, is absolutely binding and had been respected by Muslim-majority states. It is thus not necessarily a principle source for national legislation in states. The purpose of our next chapter, then, is to examine how various Sunni and Shia political parties and governments carry out Islamic law, jurisprudence and governance, if these differences become fully realized within state apparatuses, and what this means for democracy in the modern Muslim world.

Chapter 5: Theology in Action

Do theoretical and theological differences build formidable barriers or create streamlined paths in the search for an Islamic democracy or a democratic Islam? Do they matter at all, or are they insignificant when compared to the towering influence of state structures, governments, and the decisions of leaders who, regardless of Islamic affiliation, make choices based on retaining power, or on facets of political realism, or simply on the grounds of what they view as best for their people? This chapter takes a closer look at two countries- Lebanon and Iraq- with strong Sunni and Shia political parties and populations that are generally not politically marginalized. It examines political and religious leaders from both sides of the religious aisle, so to speak, in order to determine if there are conclusions we can draw from these two countries about the relationship between democracy and Sunni and Shia Islam in political practice. The contextual framework has already been laid out in the previous chapters, and it thus now important to see which differences, if any, are realized in the real world.

The debate, then, can be essentially boiled down to one of political constructivism versus realism. In the end, are these two approaches to politics contingent upon the social and historical constructs and differences between Sunnis and Shias, or are they instead governed by basic human nature and desires, or both? To best answer this question, this chapter has done its best to cite examples that can be tied back to the two previous chapters, examining Shia leaders and Sunni movements in Lebanon and Iraq.

Lebanon

Lebanon is composed of six major religious sects: Druze Muslims, Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, and Maronite Christians (Faour, 631). 28 percent of the population is Sunni, another 28 percent is Shia, and 22 percent Maronite Christian. In an effort to maintain religious equanimity, the prime minister of Lebanon is a Sunni, the speaker of the Parliament is a Shia, and the president a Maronite. The government is a parliamentary republic and holds elections generally regarded as free and fair (U.S. Dept. of State). Due to its liberal leanings and democratic system, Lebanon was once regarded, and to a certain extent still is, as the Switzerland of the Middle East, with Beirut as a sort of Paris of the Middle East (Esposito, 186).

This thesis has traced the historical roots of the Shia sentiment of social marginalization and as its status as a predominantly minority group throughout the world. In Lebanon, Shias searching for opportunities in employment, education and shelter solidified around a populist movement led by the Lebanese Shia cleric Imam Musa al-Sadr (Milton-Edwards, 55). In many ways, this movement became popular due to the failure of the Lebanese government to aptly provide opportunities for its citizens:

[The] root of the 'Islamic phenomenon' [is] the well known economic and demographic problems and the policy dilemmas they pose for government... There is a withdrawal of the state... unable to cope with the mounting burdens. This is where the Islamic economic and social sectors are moving in " (Zubaida, xvi).

Al-Sadr, born in Iran but with Lebanese roots, recognized the potential of Islam to address the social and political issues in the Muslim world. Trained in religious seminaries, he relocated to southern Lebanon in 1960 and rose through the ranks of the religious clergy (Milton-Edwards, 55-56). It was time in which Shias, while one of the largest religious groups in Lebanon, felt that the consociational democracy offered little to them in terms of addressing grievances and enjoying the privileges of a democratic system (ibid, 56). Indeed, this majority “formed the most impoverished elements of Lebanese society” (ibid, 56).

Recognizing the ability of the Shia community to mobilize quickly around its interests and its nascent attraction to populist social actions and movements, al-Sadr strove to act in a way that would engender a Shia revival. His doctrine centered on addressing the inequalities in Lebanese society and of putting the “have” and “have-nots” on equal footing through various mechanism. The first of this was a “social-based support system” called *harakat al-mahrumin* (the Movement of the Deprived) (ibid, 56). The movement, created in 1974, demonstrated and protested in order to bring the plight of the Shia to the attention of the Lebanese government.

The movement also worked on providing social programs to the Shia community, all done with the eventual goal that the Shi’a community would be better able to “demand its share of services and power from the state” (ibid, 56). These programs included literacy campaigns, schools, health services, vocational training and orphanages (ibid, 56). When the Lebanese civil war broke out in

1975, al-Sadr continued to emphasize his social programs and to maintain good relationships with the religious groups involved in internecine violence. Al-Sadr was “disappeared” in 1978 during a trip to Libya, but the foundation created in his name has continued his work towards

a society free of ignorance, poverty and disease, with equal opportunities regardless of differences of faith or sex, and an environment blessed by a growing dialogue between the contributions of the capable and the needs and expectations of the deprived; a dialogue built on participation and trust in one and in others.³

The Movement of the Deprived, therefore, is an encouraging sign for the relationship between Shiism and democracy in its ability to petition its government through largely peaceful means. It was reform based and strived to hold the government accountable through ways other than violence. There are obvious democratic implications in the way that al-Sadr approached the petitioning of the government, and the means he used are far from foreign to protesters in democracies the world around. It is only fair to note, however, that al-Sadr encouraged his followers to pick up weapons in the Lebanese Civil War (actions which were not necessarily antidemocratic; it was, after all, a civil war in which violence is inherent), words that created an armed wing of the Movement of the Deprived known as the Amal Movement (more on this group further on).

The question that remains, however, is if al-Sadr’s movement can be directly tied to the historical and theoretical underpinnings of Shiism that were previously identified as potential means for democratization. As was apparent

³ www.sadr-foundation.org

in the second chapter on the history of the Sunni/Shia split, Shias have often played the role of the minority, marginalized group. Even in al-Sadr's Lebanon, in which Shias were a large group, the community felt ignored and set to the side by the government. Meanwhile, a question that was left unaddressed in the previous chapter was how Shias would respond to their general status as the minority group, and so in this regard it is encouraging to see democratic actions taken to address a uniquely Shia sentiment. On the other hand, more violent groups such as Hezbollah have used the Shia history of being taken advantage of and preyed on by oppressors in their political rhetoric. Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general, gave a speech recently in which he compared contemporary Lebanese politics with Hussein's death. In the speech, the Sunnis were the oppressors and the Shia the oppressed:

“Oh Hussein, in these difficult times, we — men and women — despite all the challenges, dangers, threats, insults, and the determination and trickery of the enemy, and despite the scarcity of our supporters ... we will not abandon you, or your religion, or your flock, or your Karbala, or your objectives, even if we are killed and burned, and our wives and children are captured as yours were.”

In addition, it was discussed in a previous chapter that the Shia reliance on hierarchical system in governance could be both pro-democratic as well as antidemocratic, in that the direction the Shia community takes is heavily in the hands of religious leaders as to what political tactics and systems of governance they see as fitting. A leader with authoritarian sympathies, for example, might be more prone to support authoritarian governments and cite Shia theology that supported authoritarianism. In some ways Shias endorse the democratic

concept of one man, one vote, in which the Imam is the man, and he has the vote.⁴ What is then encouraging about al-Sadr is that he used his religious authority to lead, at least in part, a strongly prodemocratic movement with goals- such as equality- and means – such as protests and demonstrations- common to democratic organizations the world over. It is thus demonstrative of the Shia ability to support democratic governance ideals even with an authoritarian religious structure, a possibility that at first glance to the casual observer may seem unlikely.

Interestingly, al-Sadr called for the unification of the Shi'a community, a tenet this paper has attributed predominately to Sunni Islam. Rather than the Shia scholars being held socially far above the typical Shia, al-Sadr believed “that the scholar must not only preach and teach, but also reach out to the community” (Siblani). He argued that in order to liberate the masses, the *mujtahid* must not isolate himself from the community (Siblani). It was not necessary a reversal of the Shia doctrine previous discusses, but rather a reinterpretation of why the *mujtahid* are especially important to the Shia community and the role they must play. It is difficult to find quotes accurately attributed to al-Sadr in order to better understand his conceptualization of Shia ideology, but it is encouraging in terms of democratic potential that he was willing to understand the role of *mujtahids* in a new liberalized light, as it suggests that other Shias around the world could as well.

⁴ See Terry Pratchett, *Mort*

Make this its own paragraph and develop it further – it’s important: If the literature on al-Sadr is any indication, he was more apt to quote Martin Luther King than the *Qur’an*. In fact, conversely, that al-Sadr’s movement was so overwhelming secular is not totally a good argument for a Shia propensity towards democracy, in that al-Sadr did not use typical Shia mechanisms in order to justify his movement of equality. Indeed, the movement was often a conceptualization of democracy outside of the Islamic framework rather than in it.

But in the grand scheme of Lebanese politics, al-Sadr played only a part and, without making this section exclusively on the Lebanese Civil War, it would be purposefully misleading to list al-Sadr’s gentler efforts as emblematic of Shia politics in Lebanon without balancing them against the actions of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. While he initially embraced nonviolent, al-Sadr organized Amal in order to counter the other militias and sectarian violence that dominated Lebanon during the civil war (Esposito, 187). After al-Sadr’s disappearance in Libya in 1978, Amal, under the leadership of al-Sadr’s successor Nabih Berri, increased its pragmatic nationalist agenda with the ultimate goal of Shia parity (Esposito, 188). But with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the moderate Shia groups were alienated and more radical, Iranian-influenced militants became more attractive (ibid, 188).

Groups like Islamic Amal and Hezbollah called for an increase of Islam in politics and “engaged in a powerful reinterpretation of Shia Islam which supported a populist, militant, political activist movement of resistance and

protest” (Esposito, 189). Hezbollah’s political beliefs could aptly summed up simply as opposite to al-Sadr’s: while al-Sadr stood for “a more pluralistic, multiconfessional state and lay-dominated organization and has carefully eschewed a primarily Islamic path for Lebanon, Hezbollah.... Has more rigorously espoused an Islamic identity, theology, clerical leadership, and goal” (Esposito, 190). The Hezbollah motto “the Party of God will surely be victors”, a *Qur’anic* verse, speaks to its belief that their battle was one of God’s people against Israel, the West, and al-Sadr’s Amal (Esposito, 190). Hezbollah glorified the actions of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, and fought its way to power through violence, military operations, kidnappings, hijackings, as well as social programs (Esposito, 190).

Hezbollah embraced the belief that the abandonment of Islamic faith was the root of Muslim poverty (Milton-Edwards, 55). Islamic revivalism thus became paramount to Hezbollah’s politics, and was linked to Hezbollah’s populist message (ibid). However, Hezbollah’s conceptualization of revivalism was “less to do with the spiritual or cultural lineage of Islam” and more to do with providing outlets in which Muslims could make their voices heard (ibid). Hezbollah’s leadership is predominantly clerical in nature and was heavily influenced during the Lebanese civil war by Ayatollah Fadlallah, the groups spiritual figurehead. While in 1975 Hezbollah held considerable influence due to its “mastery of violence”, it also endorsed social measures. Fadlallah insisted, “The occupaton has to end and it can only do so by resistance... yet we have to

support the community through health, educational [sic] and a social point of view, to prisoners and orphans etc” (Milton-Edwards, 87).

It is hard to speculate how Lebanese politics would exist without the influence of the civil war, but what is certain is that there was an ideological shift to more militant and authoritarian politics, as evidenced by the emergence of Amal out of a group that was originally founded on secular and democratic principles. The contradiction between the Movement of the Deprived and Hezbollah speaks to the vulnerability of Shiism, and indeed religion as a whole, to being manipulated by those in power according to their wishes. What is absent from all these examples is the use of the theology this paper had identified as potential Shia justifications for democracy and democratization, that is to say, that there is no evidence that either Al-Sadr or Nasrallah chose to use theological concepts previously identified as potential means to democratize, such as *ijtihad*.

Neither Al-Sadr’s first group nor Hezbollah are necessarily bound immovably to Shia theology. Instead, “they are run by Lebanese in leadership, ideology, politics and direction”, and their beliefs mirror and are sensitive to those of their constituencies (Esposito, 190). All this suggests that, more than Islam itself, it is the wants, needs, and political beliefs of the community that determine a Shia leader’s path in Lebanon. This, perhaps, could be taken as a positive sign for the prospects of democracy in that if the Shia community embraces democracy, its leadership will as well but, of course, it is an entirely different story to make democracy attractive to a group of people who are

generally distrustful of Western democracies in the first place. Finally, on a similar note, the same problem of the Shia emphasis on authoritarian leadership, as discussed in the previous chapter, remains embodied in Hezbollah today with its heavy emphasis on clerical leadership.

Whereas the Shia community supported parties of its own, Lebanese Sunnis typically identify with the Sunni Islamic community throughout the world (Salem, 448). As a result, both before and after the civil war, the Sunni community has generally associated with parties with an Arab nationalist orientation (Khazem, 607). As with Hezbollah, Sunni-based militias existed during the war, such as Harakat al-Tawhid (Unity Movement). We have seen historically the Sunni emphasis on its community and the need to build consensus and unity within the community over other traits. Especially in time of the 1970's in Lebanon, but certainly continuing today throughout the Arab world, Sunnis became attracted to Islamic militancy and rhetoric as an answer to the poverty and lack of employment and community due to increased urbanization. While the Shias had a heightened sense of injustice and inequality, Sunnis felt removed from the bonds of kinship and neighborhood, the very fabric of the Sunni community, as increased urbanization meant that Sunnis found themselves increasingly alienated and isolated (Mackey, 218). The obvious answer to this anonymity was to turn back to Islam. "Cut off from the ties of kinship and neighbors that held the society of the villages together, rural refugees counterbalanced their deep sense of alienation" from the Lebanese

political and economic system with the certainty that they belonged to a community of Islam (Mackey, 218).

The turn of the Lebanese Sunnis to a more nationalized sense of community through the common bonds of Sunni Islam and Islam in general should thus come as no surprise. The problem with this emphasis is that the single unifying factor is that of Islam and sectarianism rather than secular principles, such as the ones embodied by al-Sadr. It should not be a stretch to postulate that the popularity of more radical Islamic principles within the Sunni community was because of the deep-seated historical importance of togetherness within Sunnis embrace, an aspect that this paper has outlined. In 2007, for example, militant Sunni Islam appeared in the form of Fatah al Islam. It offered itself as an alternative to the Lebanese government, the Lebanese Shia and Western democracy. Indeed, it declared war on all of them (Mackey, 251).

This is not to say, however, that secular Sunni groups do not exist as well. Future Movement, for example, is a Sunni backed secular party, that was established to “work on the consolidation of democracy based on respect for public freedoms and equality in rights and duties between citizens of one country”, among other liberal democratic principles (Movement Establishment). Both Shia and Sunnis have parties in the Lebanese parliament that hold liberal democratic values, but it would be intellectually dishonest, and very nearly impossible, to tie these parties’ values to their theological underpinnings.

Theological underpinnings, like *ijtihad* and *ijma*, should be distinguished as separate conceptualizations than the historical underpinnings that have

influenced how the two sects interact with different systems of government and leadership. In this manner, it can be argued fairly convincingly, then, that there are deeply historical reasons for how Sunnis and Shias act contemporarily in Lebanon today, and that these differences do have an impact on whether the sects act democratically or not. It would be nice to possibly conclude that, at least in Lebanon, the Sunni emphasis on an Islamic community and the Shia emphasis as the minority opposition and secular ideals means that Shia Islam is more democratic, but this would be misleading. One only needs to look at groups such as Hezbollah to disprove that statement, and modern-day Sunni groups such as Future Movement. It can be argued, however, that if Lebanon is any indication, the mechanisms in which initial radicalization occurs within Sunni Islam and Shia Islam could be said to be different. Shia radicalize through their leaders, while Sunnis do so through their communities. It should be fairly obvious why radicalization is antidemocratic: it is the rejection of accepting other points of view, the disavowal of secularization, and is often associated with militancy and terrorism. What is encouraging, however, is that the theological differences discussed in the previous chapters have in fact played out contemporarily.

Iraq

Iraq and Lebanon are similar in some ways- both have Muslim populations split between Sunnis and Shia, and both are culturally diverse (Mackey, 225). Like in Lebanon, it is impossible to succinctly detail the complexity of the political

atmosphere there, and it thus better to deal with specific political figures and movements more relevant to this thesis.

Iraq has enormous historical significance to Shia Islam. It was here that Hussein was killed, which developed the tale of “a righteous minority against a powerful but evil government authority”, a sentiment that we now see frequently evoked in Shia protests and politics (Cockburn, 17). Shia are the majority group in Iraq, although they did not gain control of their country until the fall of Saddam Hussein and his Baath party.

This thesis ignores the vast corruption, the political infighting, and the influence of outside groups such as Iran and Hezbollah that are all part of the Iraqi political experience, but it should be noted that they do exist, and that they play a significant role in Iraq’s politics but are less relevant to this thesis than are other facets of Iraqi politics. Aside from all these distractions, Iraq still provides an interesting case to analyze. The nascent democracy in Iraq is not of the homegrown variety. Instead, it was rather inelegantly forced upon Iraqis in the same manner that one might use to put a square peg in a round whole. Even still, Iraqis are more welcoming of democracy than one might expect. Even in the midst of exploding sectarian violence in 2004, a full 85 percent of Iraqis either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “Democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government” (of course, if they had been told they would face incredibly horrific sectarian violence for the next half-decade, they may not have been as welcoming) (WVS, 2004). When asked the question if the government should only implement *Shari’ah* law, around 54

percent of Iraqis said that it should, while about 21 percent neither agreed or disagreed, and around 23 percent disagreed (WVS, 2004).

These kinds of values are important, because much of the previous theoretical analysis centered on specific sectarian differences in the *Shari'ah* and its implications for democracy. It was noted that *Shari'ah* was not necessarily a principal source for legislation due to the nature of state apparatuses, but what we can look at is if the methods Sunnis and Shias used to implement their values within Iraq are democratic, and what specifically these values are. More specifically, it would not necessarily make a government undemocratic if it were to implement *Shari'ah* law- it would matter which parts of the *Shari'ah* one chose to enforce. It is also important to remember that democracy can potentially exist without every liberal democratic value present, although the bare minimum should be free and fair elections.

Muqtada Sadr quickly rose to prominence in the power vacuum that followed the fall of Saddam. He was the both the son and the son-in-law of two of the most important Shia figures and martyrs in Iraq (Cockburn, 18). His father, Mohammad al-Sadr, was a Grand Ayatollah in Iraq before being murdered. Sadr appealed, and continues to appeal, to the young Shias in Iraq who bristled at the conservatism of the elder clerical leaders in Iraq. Like al-Sadr in Lebanon, Sadr's movement was a populist one, bent on providing the basic necessities to a once ignored population. Sadr and his followers after the onset of the Iraq supplied water to thirsty Iraqis, money to pay for municipal workers, and guards to protect vital infrastructure (Shadid, 175).

Sadr's story in the chaos that followed the initial invasion is a long and often violent one, but what is crucial to understand is that he had, and has, a large cult-like following who were willing to fight for Sadr in his Mahdi Army and that he was able to heavily influence the 2005 Iraqi elections and nearly every subsequent election. His ability to influence the election results in 2005, for example, gained him "control over a large portion of the Shia alliance's seats in the parliament, [and] he became a king-maker- choosing the alliance's candidate for prime minister" (Nasr, 2543).

Take, for another example, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the leading senior cleric among Iraqi Shias (Nasr, 440). Where Sadr, brash and unstable, might have been the "bad cop" to Americans, Sistani, calmer and more composed, was the "good cop" (Nasr, 2527). Sistani's edicts would run the gamut from highly conservative to moderate to even possibly liberal. On contraception, for example, Sistani stated: " It is permissible for a woman to use [intrauterine devices] and other birth control devices provided that they do not pose serious harm to the woman's health" (sistani.org). On the other side, Sistani issued a fatwa against homosexuals, calling for them to be killed in the "worst, most severe way"(Buckley). Indeed, it was not until the fall of Saddam, and the implementation of democracy, that the extremely basic human right to life was desecrated for homosexuals (of course, Saddam was not well known for his respect of many other's lives) (Buckley). The plight of homosexuals in postwar Iraq is indicative of the danger democracy poses without protection for liberal democratic values, and it is further indicative of the contradictory nature

that the Shia system of leadership embodies. The stance of Shia leaders on democratic values is amplified greatly due to their vast followings, sometimes for the benefit of democracy, and sometimes as a disservice.

The example of al-Sadr and Sistani is therefore cited to provide evidence for the emphasis that Shia place on religious intermediaries and a heavily structured hierarchy, often to the detriment of democracy. Sadr also illustrates another point: sect-based groups such as his are undemocratic in some ways. Sadr did not provide for services with equality in mind. Instead, it was an effort to boost the Shia standing on the political playing field.

But Sadr and Sistani, for all their faults, are examples of the ability of the Shia leadership to mostly play by the rules of the games, in this case democracy. It shows the capability of a rigorous religious hierarchy to adapt to a system of democracy in the best way, by understanding it and participating in it. There should not be a fear of religion playing a part in a democracy, especially in the Arab world, where the alternative is often boycotts or violence. It has been shown to work throughout the world as well; religion often plays a part in the American experience of democracy, with Evangelicals throwing their support behind a singular presidential candidate every four years.

The values Sistani holds are not held by every Shia cleric in the world, or even in Iraq. Just as it was demonstrated that Sunnis could shift among the four Sunni schools of theology based on their own values, Shia can choose which religious leader best appeals to their values. This process is essentially democracy by proxy, or a sort of double representative democracy, as the

American Senate was before the Seventeenth Amendment was passed: Shias in Iraq support a certain religious leader, who then supports a certain candidate or candidates. The individual Iraqi Shia still votes, but he votes along “ayatollah lines”. The crucial part for Shias, therefore, is to make them more attracted to liberal democratic values and to the leaders that embrace them, such as al-Sadr in Lebanon. The problem is that this issue is entirely contingent upon a variety of factors: socioeconomics, perception of Western governments, and status as a minority/majority group. It can be hoped, although not demonstrated, that the Shia process of constantly updating interpretations of the *Sharia'ah* for the time period will make them more accepting of democracy.

While the second chapter identified the Shia identity of being persecuted as a potential positive for democracy given the fact that it may make Shias more welcoming towards other minority groups, the Shia community in Iraq has demonstrated a proclivity to vindictiveness (Hazran, 521). The history of Iraq, which is one of a constant bombardment of attacks against Shias, have reinforced the sectarian identity of the Shia (Hazran, 526). Shias have conducted ethnic cleansing campaigns in Baghdad and had a commanding influence in the state security apparatuses (Hazran, 525). The National Iraqi Alliance, a “sectarian-oriented bloc”, won the 2005 election and is at the forefront of the Shia political scene in Iraq (Hazran, 525). The group has, in part, rejected the legitimacy of the Arab nationalist movement, arguing that the Sunni elite used to “justify its political domination and its monopoly of national resources” (Hazran, 537). It is an argument that further divides the two groups in Iraq; rather than

identifying common grounds, Shias have chosen to focus on what separates themselves from Sunnis. Indeed, “the main explanation for the current crisis plaguing both [Iraq and Lebanon] lies in the fact that neither country can claim a unitary polity or a cohesive national community” (Hazran, 522).

The Sunni experience in postwar Iraq is an entirely different one, and harder to define due to its lack of prominent clergy to outline precise values. Further complicating matters, 60 percent of the two million refugees from the Iraq war are Sunnis, who are now spread out across the Arab world (Amos, 43). Sunni insurgent attacks became common in 2004, but after al-Qaeda’s bombing of the Shiite Golden Dome mosque in Iraq, and the revenge attacks that followed, it was Sunnis who paid the largest toll of the war, with an exodus of many of Iraq’s professional class (Amos, 57). A caveat, then: current-day Iraq may be in simply too radical of a situation to fairly examine the Sunni position in Iraq and its relationship to democracy: “Sunnis, in contact with relatives back home, deeply insecure and largely excluded from power at every level, waited for the Shiite-dominated government to show signs of political reconciliation”, but they still have little recourse (Amos, 181).

It is an odd reversal of roles for Sunnis. Shias were the oppressed and ignored demographic under Saddam, and now it is the Sunnis who feel persecuted. Nouri al-Maliki, the Prime Minister of Iraq, earned his stripes as a leader of an underground Shia movement under Saddam, and he is often viewed as strongly sectarian against Sunni politicians (Amos, 653). Iraq to this day is still heavily sectarian; “Baghdad became a Shiite-dominated city for the first time

in its long history. Communities were separated by religious identity and now lived behind protective blast walls. Many of the mixed neighborhoods that had been a feature of old Baghdad had been purged” (Amos, 695). The Sunni community has largely been shattered. Even Jalal Talabani, the President of Iraq and a Sunni, did not come to power on the basis of the Sunni Arab community as discussed in Lebanon. He is a Kurd, and has thus drawn his support from the Iraqi Kurdistan region (BBC News, Jalal).

At the same time, if there is one ray of light for drawing a connection between the Iraqi Sunni and the theoretical elements discussed, it is the Sunni community embodied in the Sunni Awakening movement. The Awakening began in the midst of the enormous amounts of violence that existed in Iraq in 2006 in the Anbar Province. Pressuring was mounting from all sides- from Americans, from the Iraqi Army, and from Shias (NYTimes, Awakening Movement in Iraq). The Sunni tribal leaders reached a decision out of self-preservation, to cease fighting with American troops and instead work with them in a variety of ways to both end sectarian violence and take on al-Qaeda in Iraq (ibid). Sunnis were paid by the American military to not fight Americans and to guard infrastructure, government buildings, and checkpoints (ibid). The Awakening became regarded as not simply important to the security of the country, but also as a means for Sunnis to gain some agency in the country’s politics.

The promise of the Awakening died in part in the parliamentary elections in 2010. “The Awakening presented no organized front in the election, and with much division and squabbling the dream of national political power died” (ibid).

The cynic would argue that any group of people, regardless of historic background, would come together if the alternative meant annihilation, and this example is not inherently democratic. There are no liberal democratic values present, no voting taking place, no discussion on human rights or ethics. It is, however, an example of the consensus building that Sunnis value, the ability of the Sunni community, however shattered, to come together to serve the common good. It is not a stretch to draw parallels between the actions of the Awakening and democracy, although no actual democracy took place. It was however, much like in a democracy, a community working together for self-preservation and for mutual benefit.

Without taking a political stance whatsoever, the Sunni case in Iraq should provide an example and a warning of how easily the bonds created by religion can be shattered by oppression and violence. The previous chapter outlined the importance of the community for Sunnis, their emphasis on consensus, and other theological tenets that were positive in their outlook towards democratization. All this does not matter if there is not a level playing field in which to reside. In her book *Eclipse of the Sunnis*, Amos outlines the crippled Sunni diaspora. Her outlook is bleak, and highlights a Catch-22; without the return of Sunnis to Iraq, there cannot be peace and true democracy, but without peace, Sunnis will not return to Iraq. The question that was first posed

in this chapter was one of constructivism versus realism. The answer, at least in the case of Iraq, is that constructivist differences between Sunnis and Shia, that is to say, the historical reasons they are different, matter, but only when they have been put in the hands of basic human nature. In other words, the differences exist because of history and theology, but it thanks to human nature that the result of these differences is highly negative for democracy in Iraq. There is no single theological difference that exists that makes one sect more democratic than the other; instead, it is that the differences exist at all.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This goal of this thesis was not to demonstrate that the relationship between Islam and democracy could and should only be analyzed on a specific sect-based examination, but rather that it was a gaping hole in the literature that no one had bothered to look into. I believe that this has been shown, and that it has also been established that it is crucial to understand the divide that separates the two as it does govern some very real-world consequences. This thesis outlined the history of the Sunni-Shia split after the death of Muhammad, the battle for succession that followed through the four caliphs, and the development of the Shia value of the importance of legitimate rule and the Sunni emphasis on community and basic order. It then traced the importance of the actual function of the successor to Muhammad for the two sects, and the importance of this difference to democracy. It then followed the development of *ijma* through the ages and its importance to Sunni Islam before falling into disuse, and its potential to serve as a basis for democracy.

We then examined the *Shari'ah* and the different approaches Sunnis and Shias took to the corpus of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence. Shias place emphasis on *ijtihad* and the continuous reinterpretation of the Qur'an, a potentially positive sign for democratization efforts, while still continuing their use of authoritative leaders, known as *mujtahids*, among other titles. Sunni Islamic law, meanwhile, has been relatively stagnant and resistant to change, and its Ash'arite approach stresses tradition and the rejection of the individual, placing in its stead the supremacy of God. It was also noted that, unlike in Shia

Islam, there is little hierarchy inherent to Sunni Islam, and that Sunni Muslims have the ability to interpret God's word for themselves and the potential to change schools of thought if need be, all with positive implications for democratization. There is plenty, then, that separates Sunnis from Shias.

It is apparent that, at least in the cases this thesis has explored, the theological literature discussed before is largely irrelevant to the democratic propensity of contemporary Shia and Sunni parties and leaders. References to Islam were plentiful by the numerous leaders previously cited, but we encountered none of the sect-specific theological principles identified beforehand, such as *ijtihad* or *ijma*. It is also entirely possible that the wrong differing components of the two sects were identified as potentially influential in the process of democratization, and that thus the analysis of this thesis simply missed the theological mark. Regardless, I have found nothing to suggest that this is in fact the case, and I would argue that this should be construed as evidence of absence, rather than an argument from ignorance. It is, meanwhile, certainly discouraging that some very obvious theological sources to support democratization have fell to the wayside.

This should be contrasted, however, with some very demonstrable impacts of the differences of power dynamics and governance structures with historical roots. The previous chapter hypothesized that the Shia relationship with its clergy left it up to the leaders as to the attitude towards democracy and democratic principles Shias develop. The cases of al-Sadr, Hezbollah, and Sadr

have demonstrated this as likely. It is evidence of history, with the glorification of the Twelve Imams, leaving an indelible mark on the Shia psyche.

There are not significantly more democratic Sunni parties than Shia parties, or vice versa, in the world today. There are some Shia leaders who are more earnestly democratic than Sunni parties, just as there are some Sunni leaders who are more bent on democratization than their Shia counterparts. The takeaway from this is that Sunnis and Shias will all act in a manner that best suits them, and work within the electoral and governmental structures they are faced with in the most efficient manner possible. In other words, if the two sects are faced with a democracy, they will most likely work within the democratic mechanisms to bring change if they are able to have a sense that fair play and equal participation will enable them to pursue their own self-interests. Likewise, in a dictatorship, a sectarian push for democracy is dependant on whether Sunnis and Shias feel as if their ideological interests are already being respected. In Iraq, the evidence shows that democracy has failed largely because it is not a democracy with a level playing field; the mechanisms in which an equitable system of representation should be based on have not worked. Instead, Sunnis feel discriminated against and incapable of retaining a sense of agency in the Iraqi government. One need only witness the wake of the March 2010 parliamentary elections to see this causal relationship. Because the Awakening suffered the defeat that it did, Sunnis once again were denied political re-empowerment, and turned back to assassinations, bombings, and general murder (NYTimes, Awakening Movement in Iraq). The violence, fueled

by Sunni dissatisfaction, continues to this day, as evidenced by the death of 40 people in February 23 of this year.

The simultaneously marvelous and terrifying facet of religion is that it allows a person to have an incredible amount of moral and political flexibility depending on the lens they view it through or the opinions they hold. Religion “permits” Christians to speak out against war and commit horrendous atrocities. Similarly, religion allows Hindus to advocate for nonviolence and also to perpetrate murder. Theology is in a constant state of flux, of evolution and devolution, and it is battered and molded and transformed contingent upon the opinions and desires and motivations of whoever is in power. It can be used for democratic purposes, and just as easily for authoritarian purposes. Sunni and Shia Islam are no different.

Perhaps the only conclusion that the reader should, and indeed can, draw is this: that in the grand, overarching scheme of split between Sunni and Shia Islam, the differences are small, and although they have the potential to be large and also positive for the prospects of democracy in Islam, what has always mattered the most, and will continue to matter the most, is general constituent attitude (within the Shia hierarchical structure, for example, a more democratically-inclined constituency may support a more democratically-inclined leader), and the attitude political leaders and governance systems containing Islamists take towards democratic principles. It is frustrating that the two sects do not use the means cited in this paper as a way to push for democracy. The ability is there, and much of what is lacking is the desire.

It should be seen as fairly conclusive, then, that as far as Sunnis and Shia are concerned, differences in theology are not the most important characteristic in the acceptance of democracy and democratic values. An entire thesis in and of itself could be dedicated to the socioeconomic, regional and political contexts in which this desire for democracy is lacking. These facets were briefly discussed in the literature review for this thesis. For Islam specifically, scholars cite the growing antagonism between the West and the Muslim world, as well as the quicker modernization of the West when compared to the Muslim world (Hoveyda, 230). There is a historical hostility between the two cultural and political regions that stretches back for much of history, past even the First Crusade to the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the 11th century, but we can easily identify the European colonization of the Muslim world by the end of the nineteenth century as the advent of the contemporary divide between the two worlds. Wars and peaceful movements for independence followed, from Tunisia to Algeria to Mesopotamia.

Perhaps, or at least in part, the desire for democratization is lacking because of the unique Muslim experience of the rule of colonial powers who, while democratic at home, did nothing to achieve their stated interest in the modernization of their colonies. Rather than finding appealing these nations that were ostensibly the model for democratic governance, Muslims began an organized retreat from modernization efforts and Western values (Hoveyda, 231). The divide, such as it is, can be potentially defined not by democratic values but by a Western versus Muslim ideology. The incompatibility is not

between Islam and democracy, but by the West playing into the hands of more radical Islamic groups that offer solace and answers to a rapidly changing world and Western countries that conveniently and constantly fit the mold of aggressors. In a terrible case of irony, the West has poisoned the well of democracy from which Muslims must first drink, so to speak.

The recent events of the Arab Spring, meanwhile, illustrate the ability of Muslims to fight against dictatorships in non-Islamist terms. In Tunisia, for example, enormous pressure drove President Ben Ali's dictatorship out of power. The case of Tunisia, a relatively secular country, is interesting because of Tunisians were protesting a government that, while a dictatorship, had largely eliminated Islamist movements in the country (Angrist). Islamic groups in Tunisia now have an increased ability to participate in its governmental processes. Indeed, its leaders "have taken pains to praise tolerance and moderation, comparing themselves to the Islamic parties that govern Turkey and Malaysia", although Islamic groups have certainly also caused friction in Tunisia over the past year (Fuller, Next Question for Tunisia).

How Muslims view the West is thus crucial to making democracy more attractive to Sunnis and Shias alike. It is an extraordinarily complex subject, and in America alone there has been extensive research performed on what specifically should be done governmentally. It should be uncontroversial to state that the West should no longer financially support dictatorial regimes, as it simply associates Western ideals with autocracies. Further, democracy that comes naturally, that is to say, from within, rather than at the front of an

Abraham's tank has proven to have the potential to be more resilient. Western democracy is unlikely to meld perfectly with Muslim cultures and ideologies; if Muslims instead use concepts cited in this thesis, then all the better, for they have the ability to link Islam and democracy in an authentic manner and to thus better make democracy a more appealing concept as an Islamic-based form of governance. The international community should support not only secular parties, but Shias and Sunnis that support democratic values; the perceptions of a certain representative of Florida's 22nd district notwithstanding, such Islamic leaders do exist, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, and these types of people are certain to make democratization more palatable to the Muslim world.

Socioeconomics matter as well; the higher the income level a person has, the younger and better educated a person is, the more likely he or is to be favorable towards democracy (Alkalay, 126). It could very well be that these individual characteristics have more control over the potential democratization of the Muslim world than the theological aspects of even Islam as a whole have.

The information in this thesis thus does offer a few useful prescriptions, some less obvious than others. The theological differences between Sunnis and Shia can matter for more than reasons and excuses for sectarian violence. They can be used positively for democratic movements, and government's intent on democratizing the Middle East should point to theological concepts such as *ijtihad* and *ijma* as means to achieve democratic governance. The literature review of this thesis noted that in order for democracy to become acceptable in the Muslim world, "democratic ideas will first need to receive legitimation on the

basis of Koranic texts and Islamic traditions” (Alkalay, 132). This thesis has thus found some very specific ways in which this can be achieved for both branches of Islam. It is not hard to envision a government in a predominantly Sunni nation using *ijma* as the basis for democracy; democracy is, after all, a form of consensus. Likewise, *ijtihad* could be invoked as a reason for creating amendments or for any law requiring modernization or updating. The worrisome fact is that all democracies require checks and balances within their framework, something that no amount of finagling of Islamic theology will provide for. For example, while in “classical Islamic statecraft, the *ulama* provided the sole checks and balances on the ruler”, scholars argue that the Muslim dilemma of today is that there lacks a system of accountability within Islamic principles (Mehmet, 73). Islamic principles need to be “replaced by a new system of checks and balances limiting political authority: people’s power’, or the accountability of the ruler directly to the subjects” (Mehemt, 73). There must therefore be a desire, external from Islamic precepts of jurisprudence, for equality and mutual respect among all people in order for democracy to work.

Although it was not possible to demonstrate that all of these theological tenets specific to Shiism and Sunnism have been used in contemporary democratization efforts in the Muslim world, it is interesting to note that scholars seem to attribute specific beliefs to Islam in a whole in their discussions of the relationship between democracy and Islam. Goddard, for example, used the concept of *ijma* in order to argue that Islam and democracy are compatible, but failed to acknowledge the vastly different approaches the two sects take

towards *ijma*. The issue is not that these scholars do not know that these differences exist, but that they choose to present specific tenets as inherent to Islam as a whole. At best, it is misleading while at worst it is dishonest.

It was noted “the differences between Shias and Sunnis are... not only political but also theological and even anthropological”, and indeed the very fabrics of the two branches are different (Nasr, 361). Shias, after all, are the party of dissent and the followers of Ali, and Sunnis are the people of tradition and consensus. Therefore, it should have been impossible to fairly pass judgment on Muslims and democracy without the comprehension that these differences might have had some effect on analyses. Indeed, it is astonishing that such differences were glossed over or mutually attributed in scholarly works. The studying of the relationship between democracy and Islam as a whole is an important field, but it is imperative to understand that beneath such a general approach remain hidden some very meaningful differences that have powerful implications for the future of Islam and democracy. It is an extremely complex world that we live in today, and efforts to oversimplify it can only lead to more misunderstandings, a dangerous outcome for us all.

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