

Thesis abstract

Determinants of the Islamic revival and its political implications

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Culture and religion have only gained interests among economists in the last couple of decades. In fact, Adam Smith¹ was the first scholar to establish a link between religion and economics. Yet, the link may at first not be obvious. So the natural question to ask is how do religion and economics interact? There are many ways through which economics, religion and politics can be associated. Values and beliefs stemming from religion may affect individuals' preferences and thus their economic, social and political behaviours. Likewise, engaging and/or supporting religious political activism and parties may emanate from a rational choice. This dissertation contributes to the emerging literature of economics of religion focusing on Islam. It does so by providing empirical insights seeking to enrich understanding of this religion in ways that intersect political sciences and economics. First, it reveals that economic factors as redistributive considerations are crucial in explaining support for political Islam. Second, it shows that feelings of frustration are a plausible source of the revival of the Islamic culture among initially religious individuals. This suggests that Islam per se does not trigger considerable social

behaviours. Yet, it makes one feels closer to her/his group and further apart from other groups, thus reinforcing club-good effects. Finally, this dissertation argues that Muslims' attitudes towards women are not necessarily in the expected direction in terms of material deprivations as often portrayed in the literature. The empirical insights of this dissertation, that may challenge preconceptions attached to Islam, are the results of original field work. The first and second chapters use a representative sample of 600 Tunisians. The second and third chapters use lab-in-the-field experiments which combine both external validity of the field data and results from cautiously designed experimental games.

Render Unto Caesar: Taxes, Charity and Political Islam (joint with Gabriele Gratton and Pauline Grosjean)

In this chapter, we investigate the origin of political support for religiously affiliated parties. Using an original, nationally representative survey of 600 individuals, we show that support for Islamic parties in the first post-Arab Spring Tunisian election came from richer districts and individuals. We show that standard public finance arguments help explain this voting pattern better than other available explanations. Our model pre-

¹ Smith, Adam. 1979. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations: Books I–III*. New York: Penguin, 1776.

dicts that a voter's probability to vote for a religious party: (i) increases in income for the poorest voters, but possibly decreases in income for the richest; (ii) is greater for voters in richer districts; and (iii) increases with the voter's religiosity. Our empirical results align with our predictions and suggest that belonging to the middle class and living in a richer district together affect voting decisions more than being a religious voter. We test for other possible factors affecting voting, such as education, frustrated aspirations, or attitudes towards corruption. Finally, we document similar patterns in other key elections in the Muslim world.

Envy and the Islamic Revival: Experimental Evidence from Tunisia

In this chapter, I investigate the psychological factors at the origin of the Islamic revival, defined as the recent resurgence of Islamic culture and against previous trends of "westernization." I design and conduct a survey with an embedded lab-in-the-field experiment to test whether envy triggers popular support for the Islamic revival using a nationally representative sample of 600 Tunisians. Envious individuals who live in highly unequal environments and feel relatively poor are more likely to engage in religious and political activities. I trigger envy with a 2×2 design by interacting a priming video and low stakes. I find that individuals in the envy treatment donate a larger proportion of their endowment to a religious political charity, my measure of support for the Islamic revival. The effect is more pronounced among highly religious individuals but is otherwise less robust. The survey data

provide consistent results with my experimental findings. Overall, the results confirm the idea that envy is a key determinant of popular support for the Islamic revival, but its effect is conditional on the individual already being highly religious.

Are Muslim Immigrants Really Different? Experimental Evidence from the Lebanese Australian Community (joint with Danielle Hayek)

In this chapter, we investigate whether Muslim immigrants in a Western destination country behave differently from their Christian counterparts towards females and the poor. We test this by conducting a Prisoner's dilemma and a Dictator game with Lebanese Australians. Lebanese Muslims and Christians are comparable in all aspects but religion. Hence, using this sample allows us to isolate the role religion plays in shaping social attitudes as we are able to remove the effects of economic institutions of country of ancestry and hold constant all other factors such as ethnolinguistic groups. We find that when compared to Christians, Muslims are significantly more cooperative with the poor and that this effect is stronger when the poor recipient is female. The effect remains even after controlling for altruism.

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