

Bread (Rawls) + Freedom (Sen) = Social Justice?

Religion and Economics in the Egyptian Spring

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Abstract

Many observers were surprised when Egyptians took to the streets first to overthrow the Mubarak regime, in early 2011, and then to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood government, in mid 2013. Bayesian Network analysis of public opinion surveys is used to uncover dependence structures in respondents' attitudes. The analysis shows that the revolutionary moment leading up to 2011 was characterized by confounding of Islamism with redistributive egalitarianism, which was at the heart of Nasserist rhetoric that led to a failed experiment in socialism. Muslim Brotherhood leaders had subscribed to this form of Islamism in the early twentieth century, but embraced less egalitarian models in later decades. Therefore, they pursued the same neoliberal economic policies of the Mubarak era, and likewise faced the wrath of an angry public. Data analysis shows that strong views favoring (re)distributive justice drive Egyptian anti-secularism. Unlike in Turkey and Malaysia, theories of justice enshrined in today's neoliberal economic policies were strongly rejected in Egypt, where the middle class has fallen behind. The solution for Egypt cannot be reduced either to institutional reforms and rule of law, as most economists would suggest, or return to socialist policies of the 1960s, as others have suggested. A viable social contract, grounded in neoliberal economics, but respectful of Egyptians' desire for greater redistribution, may be viable.

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I Introduction: Economic Discontent

Even as the frequency and intensity of demonstrations against neoliberal economic policies began to rise in 2005, international financial institutions were commending Egypt on her implementation of economic reforms, and encouraging her to resume the pace of privatization and institutional reforms that started in 1991.¹ This mindset and economic policy advice had followed the general outlines of the updated neoliberal agenda that formed the new “Washington consensus,” the market-fundamentalist predecessor having lost intellectual ground to the post-Washington consensus (WC-II), as Joseph Stiglitz began to call it as early as 2004. Stiglitz (2008) reviewed the failures of market fundamentalism and described WC-II as complementing pro-market policies of the original consensus with strengthening of state and market institutions, as well as paying attention to issues of distribution, not only growth.

The poetic slogan of the Egyptian uprising in 2011 was “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice” (*‘eish, hurriya, ‘adāla igtima’iya*). Popular sentiment maintains that these three objectives remain unreachable as ever, despite surprisingly populist measures taken by a series of recent governments to set not only minimum wages, but also maximum wages for public sector employees. Redistributive interpretations of “social justice” have long been challenged by the libertarian streak in neoclassical economics,² which was canonized by Dani Rodrik (2007) as the “one economics” that allows for different recipes only by identifying different institutional bottlenecks that hamper growth in different countries. Likewise, Acemoglu and Robinson’s celebrated account of *Why Nations Fail* (2012) explained failure of the Egyptian regime by bad institutions in the form of self-perpetuating extractive corruption that biased incentives away from growth-inducing savings and investment patterns. Thus, mainstream economics today restricts “social justice” to commutative justice and the need for institutional reform to limit corruption, with redistributive justice limited to Rawlsian safety nets for the poor.

¹See, for example, glowing endorsements in the mid 1990s, as successive IMF credit programs were justified by these reforms; <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/1996/pr9650.htm>. Even as late as the 2010 Article IV consultation, a few months before demonstrations led the military to allow the overthrow of the ruling regime, the IMF was celebrating the minimal effect of the financial crisis on Egypt and her intention to return to growth-inducing reform; <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2010/021610.htm>.

²von Mises (1985) wanted to reclaim the “liberal” label for free market advocates (Bockman, 2011, explains the Socialist capture of liberalism after the great depression), and von Hayek claim that “social justice” was a vacuous concept and a ploy to justify government coercion, see Bankston (2010).

The timing of the 2011 uprising surprised most observers precisely because they did not fit the growth-centered institutional-economics narrative. GDP growth had in fact accelerated under the “government of technocrats” led by Ahmed Nazif (2005-2010) and a dream team of economists headed by then IMF darling Youssef Boutros Ghali and his close associates, which earned Egypt recognition by the World Bank and International Finance Corporation in 2008 as the “World’s top reformer.”³ Moreover, the spate of lawsuits that followed the military-backed overthrow of the Mubarak regime in February 2011 have, so far, uncovered minimal distortions, growth-choking, corruption of the sort described by Acemoglu and Robinson.

It appears that the very success of the Mubarak regime in producing economic growth with minimal social safety nets, following WC-II policies that international financial institutions have prescribed to this day, sowed the seeds of the regime’s demise. Little attention has been paid to the role of religion and its influence on attitudes toward “social justice” in Egypt and similar-minded countries. In this regard, Kuran’s (2012) argument that provisions in Islamic laws (of inheritance, partnership, etc.) discouraged consolidation of wealth, investment, and growth, leading to a *Long Divergence* between Europe and the Islamic world, can be explained in part by cultural rejection of some of the more egregious inegalitarian aspects of capitalism.

The literature on compatibility of Islam and capitalism is an old one, which, like Kuran’s analysis, has aimed to integrate both scriptural/doctrinal and historical/empirical analysis, ranging from Rodinson’s (2007) analysis in the 1960s, when capitalism was indeed denigrated in Egypt and much of the Islamic world, to Marlow’s (1997) clever analysis of the interplay between the sacred and the temporal in dealing with Islam’s unquestionably egalitarian ideals.

My approach in this paper is mainly empirical, focusing attention on public opinion surveys to understand the genesis of the revolutionary moment in Egypt, which coincided with the relative economic success during the period 2005-2010, and resulted in a predictable if unanticipated alliance between leftist and Islamist leaning popular movements to unseat the ruling regime. In the event, this leftist-Islamist alliance was broken when the election of an Is-

³As Minister of Finance, Ghali was considered one of the most successful worldwide, earning him the elected post of Chairman of the prestigious International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) in 2008. That was the same year Egypt moved from being recognized as the region’s top reformer for the two previous years to the world’s top reformer, see <http://go.worldbank.org/WNY4FV7VA0>. Hanieh (2013) identifies these very celebrated “doing business”-rated neoliberal reforms, which included measures that worsen worker conditions to boost private sector profitability, as the true roots of revolt.

lamist, Muslim Brotherhood dominated, government (due mainly to the organizational power of the latter and its experience in elections as domesticated soft opposition to Mubarak's dominant National Democratic Party) pursued the same neoliberal policies of their predecessors.

This was predictable, despite the continued belief in some corners that the Muslim Brotherhood stood for distributive justice, e.g. Wickham (2002, p. 210), because the leftist leanings of the early twentieth century Brotherhood, which shaped Nasser's vision and were adopted under the banner of Arab Socialism, with occasional appeals to Islam being a "100% socialist religion," gave way to capitalist leanings under Sadat's 1970s open door policy; see Said Aly and Wenner (1984). Thus, when Hassan El-Turabi gained power in Sudan, he implemented (as per Owen, 2004, p. 168) "Islam-IMF" policies of privatization, subsidy reduction, etc.

The failure of neoliberal policies in Egypt surprised most analysts, despite the well-known rise of Islamism in the country, because, as many had noted, other Islamic countries – most notably Malaysia and Turkey – had experienced significant success pursuing neoliberal policies under the watch of Islamist governments. The empirical analysis of opinion surveys in this paper will highlight important differences in public sentiments that explain why the same model that worked for Malaysia and Turkey could not have worked for Egypt, where the confounding of egalitarian and Islamist thought has had a long and deeply-rooted history.

With the Leftist-Islamist coalition broken, Egypt continues to struggle for a coherent economic agenda that can be sustained long enough to bear some economic fruit. Section 2 covers the economic seeds of discontent, showing that the simple WC-II formula, steeped in Rawlsian conceptions of social justice that are focused mainly on protecting the poorest classes, still failed to produce sufficient growth to sustain an authoritarian bargain. Section 3 shows that, contrary to popular belief, the lower classes in Egypt fared reasonably well relative to comparator countries, unlike the middle class, which fell behind significantly relative to the rich class during the neoliberal policy period. Section 4 is the core of the paper, where Bayesian-Network analysis of public opinion surveys is used to uncover the mindset of Egyptians that gave birth to the revolutionary moment. Section 5 concludes with discussion of the absence (and, perhaps, impossibility) of an Islamic theory of justice, as argued by Khadduri (1984), which may differ from the Western theories advanced by Rawls, Sen, and others, and would facilitate social contract formation and identification of a feasible and palatable growth path with proper modes of inclusiveness.

2 The Economic Roots of Discontent: Falling Behind

Economic discontent in Egypt stems from two sources. The first is the country's disappointing overall economic performance – repeatedly falling behind one emerging economy after another, which has made the authoritarian bargain difficult to accept. The second is the growing divergence between the top class and the rest under the authoritarian neoliberal regime.

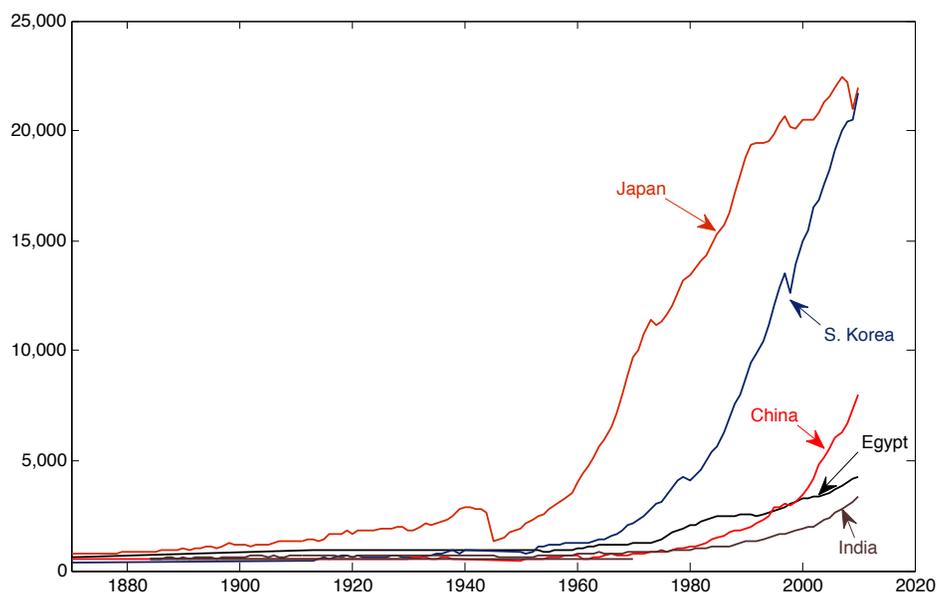


Figure 1: Real (1990 international GK\$) per capita GDP; Egypt, Japan, Korea, China, India. *Data Source:* Maddison Project Database

The Egyptian economic narrative during the Nasser era compared the country's performance to those of Japan and South Korea. Circa 1880, many believed, the Egyptian economy was poised to build on its agrarian base toward industrialization and growth, just as Japan's economy had done during its first take-off before World War II. Egyptians blamed failure to industrialize and experience significant growth on extractive British colonialism, which aimed to keep the country an exporter of primary goods and importer of manufactured goods from English factories. Having lost the opportunity to join Japan's growth trajectory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the narrative continued, it was possible to keep up

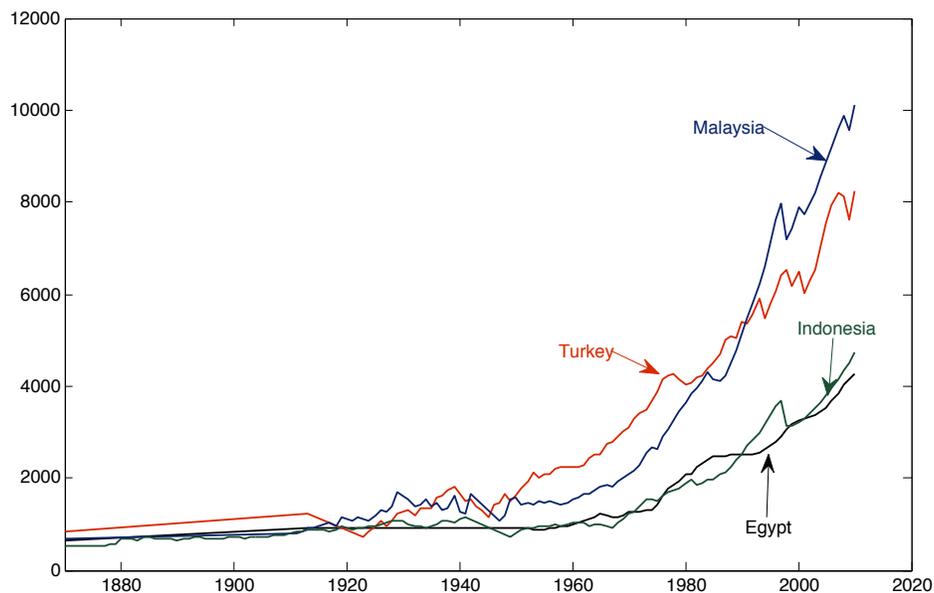


Figure 2: Real (1990 international GK\$) per capita GDP; Egypt, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia. *Data Source:* Maddison Project Database

with South Korea, which had an economy quite similar to Egypt's in the early 1960s; see El-Ghoneimi (2007, introduction) for an interesting comparison. Many have blamed the humiliating defeat in 1967, and Sadat's abandonment of the Nasser-era import-substitution industrialization policies, for failure to keep up with South Korea's economic performance.

As shown in Figure 1, Egypt later lost ground to China, whose real per capita income overtook Egypt's by the turn of the century, despite Egypt's adoption of restructuring reforms during the 1990s to spur economic growth. Part of the reason for Egypt's lethargic growth during the 1990s was the IMF program aimed at inflation reduction, but a large part was also due to the very low oil prices, which only began to recover in 1998, and the concomitant decline in workers' remittances as well as direct and portfolio investments from GCC countries. Despite its best efforts to mimic the growth model of China (and, to some extent, Dubai) by courting foreign direct investment, overall investment remained anemic in Egypt starting with the adjustment program in 1991, as shown in Figure 3, contributing to relatively weak growth, and the prospect of having its per capita income overtaken by India within the next

few years. Most importantly, Egypt's domestic savings, as shown in Figure 4, declined significantly starting in the late 1980s, and have not recovered since, in large part, again, due to the decline in workers' remittances as oil prices collapsed in the late 1980s. In this regard, it was impossible for foreign direct investment, portfolio investment, and debt financing to fill the savings gap needed to boost investment toward sustainably high growth rates.

The Dubai model was not as applicable as the Mubarak regime had assumed, because Dubai had a secondary claim on petrodollar flows, made obvious by the Abu Dhabi bailout during the global financial crisis, whereas Egypt, at best, had a tertiary claim. In the meantime, countries that have overtaken Egypt in the past few decades, and India, which is poised to overtake it soon, have financed their investment and growth primarily with domestic savings. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, respectively, countries posting high growth rates had posted investment and savings rates, respectively, in excess of one third and one quarter of their gross domestic products, whereas recent Egyptian rates have been less than half these levels. Foreign direct investment can, at best, provide an additional boost of one to five percent of GDP, but cannot substitute for domestic savings to finance the bulk of growth-inducing investment.

Cross-country growth regressions, which have been popular in the Economics literature over the past two decades, have shown that saving, investment, and growth rates were not hampered by having a majority Muslim population. These results were driven in part by the relative success of countries like Malaysia, Turkey, and Indonesia, whose per capita incomes have also overtaken Egypt's, as shown in Figure 2, often under the rule of Islamist-minded, and often corrupt, regimes that have succeeded with variations on neoliberal economic policies.

No doubt, Turkey was a beneficiary of closer ties to Europe, while Malaysia and Indonesia were beneficiaries of the Asian "flying geese" phenomenon, especially starting in the late 1980s, when sharp appreciation of the Japanese Yen allowed a number of Southeast Asian countries to attract investment and build comparative advantages first for regional and then international trade. These were advantages that Egypt's relatively limited relationships with Europe, the United States (mainly through the qualified industrial zones textiles export agreements for products with significant Israeli inputs), and the Gulf Cooperation Council, could not match. Section 4 shows an additional factor: Egyptian Islamism has had a different flavor from Turkish and Malaysian Islamism, according to which Egyptians have favored greater egalitarianism that made neo-liberal policies less palatable, ultimately leading to revolt in 2011.

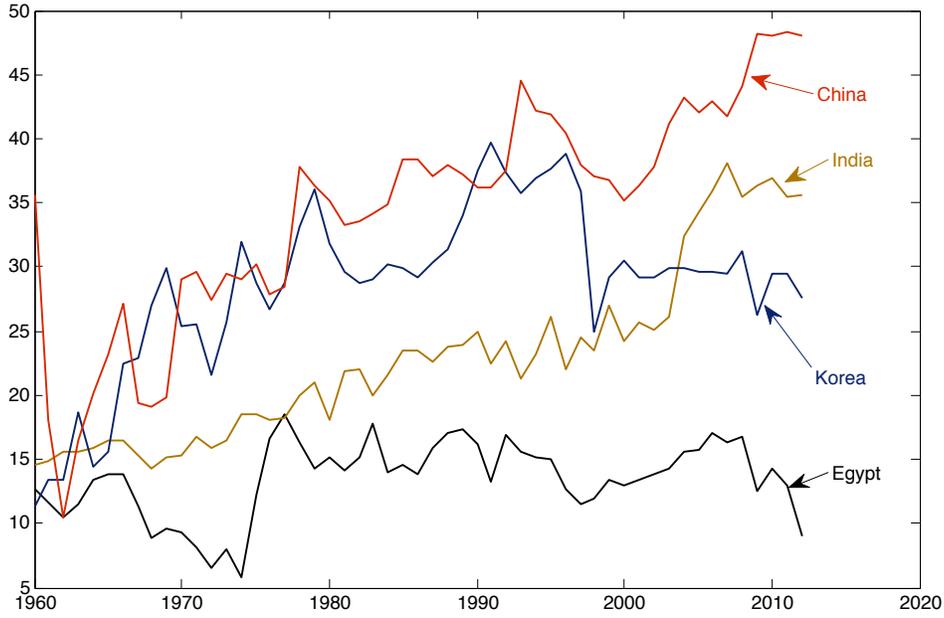


Figure 3: Investment (Gross Capital Formation) as Percentage of GDP: China, Egypt, India, and Korea. *Data Source:* WB, WDI.

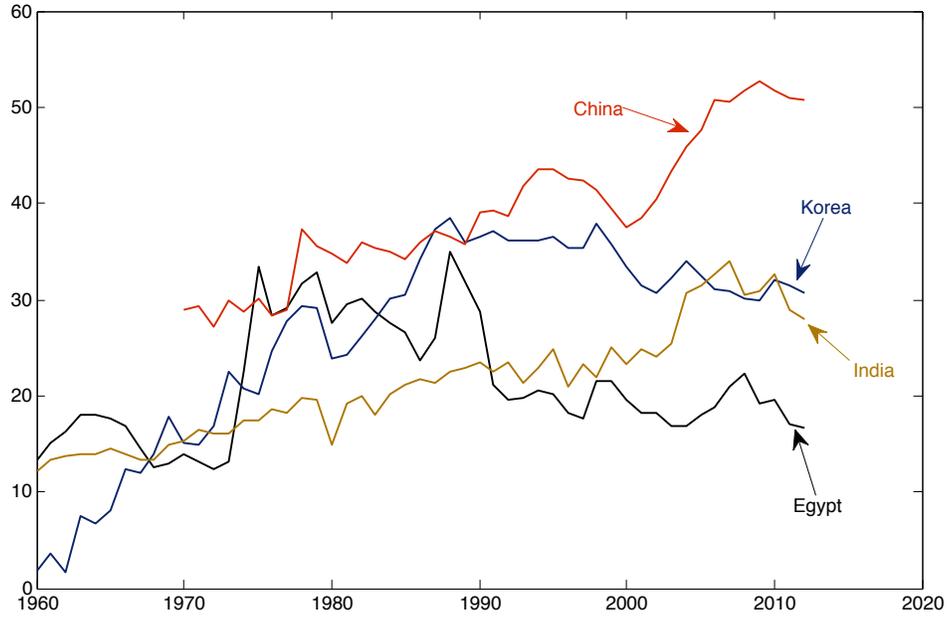


Figure 4: Domestic Savings as Percentage of GDP: China, Egypt, India, and Korea. *Data Source:* WB, WDI.

3 Inequality and Social Justice

Before turning to empirical evidence on egalitarian and religious attitudes in Egypt and comparator countries, it is important to review the patterns of income inequality experienced along the Egyptian growth path leading to 2011. Figures 5 and 6 show, respectively, average Egyptian per capita incomes by decile, and the ranks of Egyptian income deciles among 1,090 pseudo-countries constructed from the deciles of 109 countries whose GDP data are available in the Penn World Tables and whose income distribution by decile is available via the United Nations University – World Institute for Development Economics Research database.⁴ It is clear from Figure 5 that the gap between average per capita income of the top decile and the rest of the population started to grow much faster after the IMF-sponsored stabilization and restructuring program began in 1991. In the meantime, Figure 6 shows that this increasing inequality starting in 1991 is not atypical relative to the rest of the world: The relative worldwide ranks of all Egyptian income deciles remained roughly unchanged for the two decades following that restructuring program, unfortunately stagnant at the vanishing middle-income club of an increasingly polarized global income distribution, see El-Gamal and Ryu (2013).

More interesting is the comparison of relative performance of the various income classes. The international financial institutions' (IFI) brand of policy – neoliberalism with social safety nets to protect the poorest classes – was steeped in the Rawlsian *Theory of Justice* (published in 1971, with a refined restatement in Rawls (2001)). The distributive justice component of the Rawlsian theory is the (maxmin) “difference principle,” whereby, at the original position, behind a veil of ignorance as to which position in society each individual will take, all will prefer equality, unless inequality is justified by making the worst off in society better off. As Bankston (2010) has argued, this theory was shaped by the post-WWII American experience under which Rawls developed his thought, coinciding with the civil rights movement and the social drive for government to intervene for the protection of the most disadvantaged “classes” (not just individuals) in society (where this categorical disadvantage may have been based on race, gender, wealth, education, sexual orientation, etc.).⁵

⁴Data are available, respectively, at https://pwt.sas.upenn.edu/php_site/pwt71/pwt71_form.php, and http://www.wider.unu.edu/research/Database/en_GB/wiid/.

⁵Of course, with very few exceptions, post-enlightenment philosophers have mostly expressed strong agreement that governments should care for the poor – as first advocated by Kant, c.f. Fleischacker (2004).

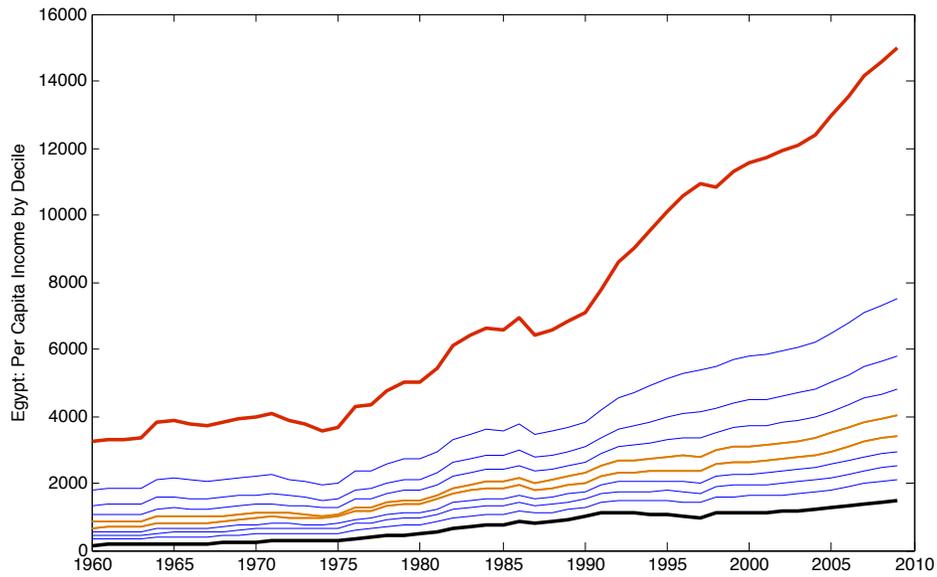


Figure 5: Egypt's Per Capita Income by Decile (2005 PPP Dollars).
Data Source: PWT 7.1 and WIID2C

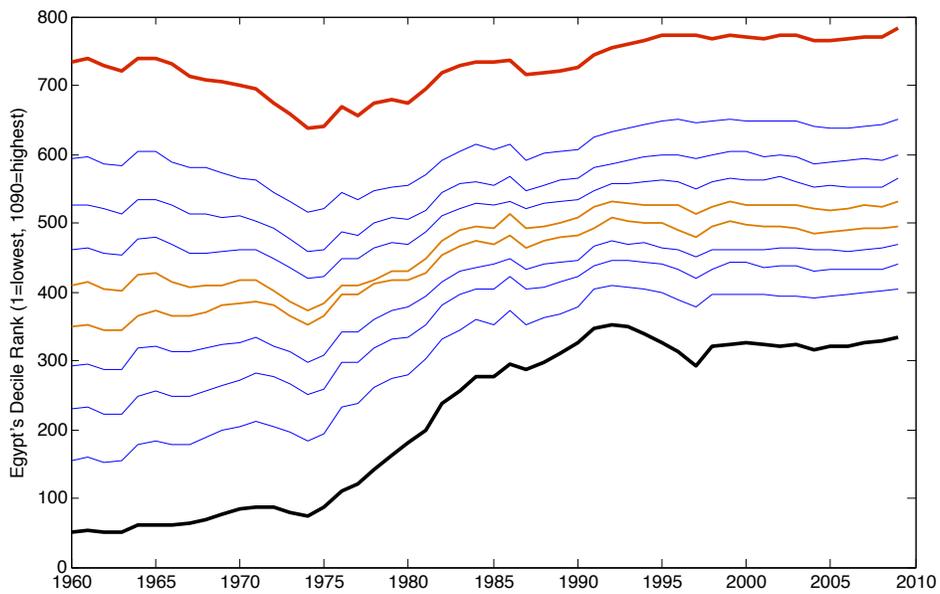


Figure 6: Ranks of Egyptian Income Deciles' Per Capita Income Among 1090 Deciles of 109 Countries. *Data Source:* PWT 7.1 and WIID2C

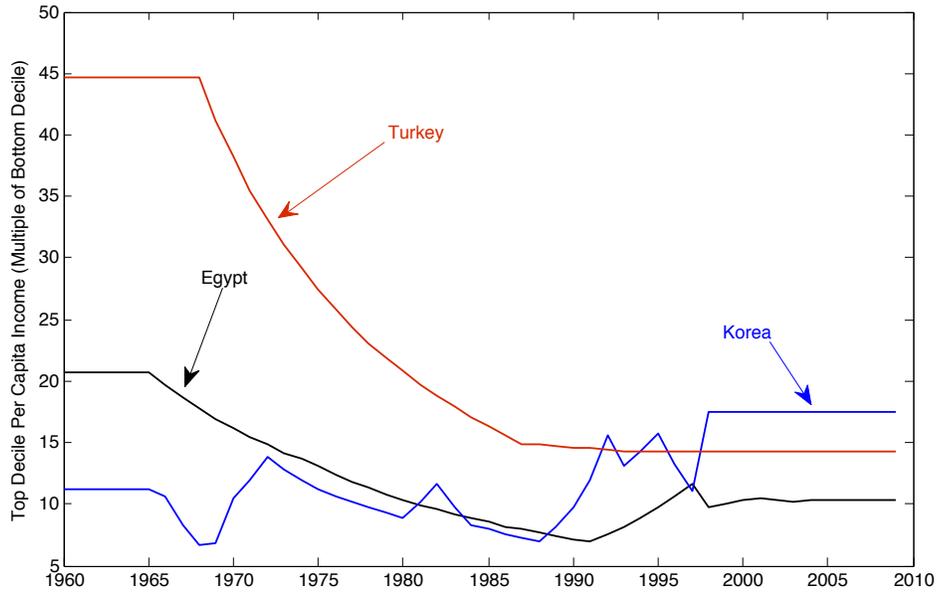


Figure 7: Ratios of Top Decile Per Capita Income to Bottom Decile Per Capita Income.
Data Source: PWT 7.1 and WIID2C

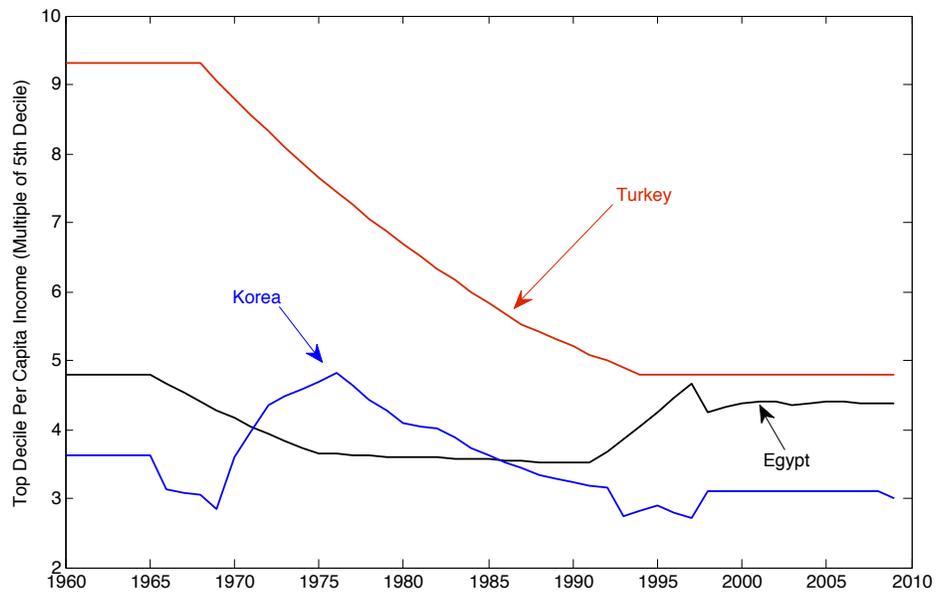


Figure 8: Ratios of Top Decile Per Capita Income to Fifth Decile Per Capita Income.
Data Source: PWT 7.1 and WIID2C

Centrality of the Rawlsian difference principle is reflected in the IFI and Egyptian government statements on food and fuel subsidies, which all seem to agree should target only the lowest strata of society (“who deserve it,” *al-mustahiqqīn*). However, the Egyptian middle class is at least as dependent on these subsidies, to make ends meet, as the poor. This begs the question of how the lowest and middle strata of Egyptian society fared leading up to the 2011 revolt, and whether income inequality between the rich and the poor were the primary driver of revolt, as opposed to income inequality between the rich and the middle class.

Figure 7, which shows the ratio of average per capita income of the top decile to the bottom decile, illustrates that the bottom decile in Egypt fared better not only than Turkey, which started with massive inequality but has seen this inequality decline drastically during the 1970s and 80s, but also relative to Korea, which is the primary exemplar for successful inclusive growth. In this regard, the Nasser legacy had led to reduced inequality between the top and bottom deciles starting in the 1960s, which was only reversed with the 1991 restructuring program. However, the level of inequality between the top and bottom deciles has continued to be lower than its counterparts in Turkey and Korea (as measured by this ratio, which has been the focus of surprising debates about the imposition not only of minimum, but also of maximum wages, which some would like imposed also on the private sector).

Where the growth in Egyptian inequality has been clearest is illustrated in Figure 8, which shows the gap between the rich and the middle class by plotting the ratio of the average per capita income of the top decile to the average per capita income of the fifth decile. Although the relative plight of the Egyptian middle class remains better, in absolute terms, than the Turkish middle class, the latter has made great progress catching up to the richer classes since the 1960s, whereas the Egyptian middle class has lost most of the ground that it had gained between the 1960s and the early 1990s. In the meantime, the relative performance of the Egyptian middle class compared to its Korean counterpart is far too stark to be explained by simple Kuznets curve arguments. In this regard, upward mobility of Islamist-minded middle classes in Turkey (those who were disadvantaged vis a vis the secular elites with military connections) and Malaysia (the traditionally poorer ethnic Malay) has facilitated adoption of neoliberal policies that promised higher incomes in the future, see Roberts (2003).

The finding that the Egyptian middle class was impacted worse than the poor is consistent with the pattern of the January 2011 revolt, which was led by relatively well educated youth

who were well versed in the use of the internet as well as traditional tools of mass mobilization. The poverty rates in Egypt, which are similar to those in India and other emerging markets,⁶ are deplorable, and were used extensively in the rhetoric of the 2011 revolt, but the latter was hardly the equivalent of European peasants' revolts of earlier centuries. This was a revolt by youth who have seen sky-high levels of unemployment for their age group, with no hope of improvement, and neoliberal policies that eroded the public-sector-job safety nets that were available to the previous generation. Most of them had acquired secondary and tertiary education, but saw very bleak prospects for employment or upward social mobility.

The notion of social justice on the mind of protesters seemed to be closer to the *ex post* equality of opportunity enshrined in the work of Sen (2009), rather than the *ex ante* institutional approach advocated by Rawls. Regarding the few monopolistic dynasties with close connections to ruling elites, which crystallized the lack of opportunities for upward mobility, protestors demanded not only better institutions and rule of law (Rawls), or improved prospects for equal opportunity (Sen), but also outright remedial income redistribution.

This may also explain the surprising failure of then familiar scare tactics that presented political Islam, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, as the only alternative to the Mubarak regime, especially within the domain of democratically viable alternatives. The biggest surprise of all during the 2011 revolt was the acceptance by egalitarian-minded youth activists and older Nasserists of an alliance with Islamists, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, to overthrow the Mubarak regime. This alliance was predicated on an egalitarian drive assumed to be shared by Islamists, as we shall see in data analysis of opinion surveys at the “revolutionary moment,” which started around 2005 with demonstrations in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra, the epicenter of labor movement of textile workers impacted by neoliberal policies and mobilization of April 6 and other youth activists. As it turned out, predictably, the Muslim Brotherhood of today was led by millionaire capitalists with business connections to GCC countries that are at least as strong at the Mubarak regime's, and who, thus, also subscribed to the IFIs' neoliberal economic agendas, c.f. Hanieh (2013). Hence, their rule was very short lived.

⁶According to the World Bank's World Development Indicators, the percentage of the population below the national poverty line was 22% in Egypt in 2008, and 29.8% in India in 2010. Other similar statistics were the adult literacy rate (72% in Egypt in 2010, 63% in India in 2006), and percentage of population 0–15 years of age (31.3% in Egypt, 30.2% in India in 2011). The staggering figure for Egypt was the youth unemployment rate, which has hovered around or above 25%, more than double its Indian counterpart.

Public opinion surveys are studied in the next section to understand the relationship between views on democracy, redistributive egalitarianism, and the role of religion in politics. Advocates of Durkheim and Weber's "secularization hypothesis," who thought that increasing incomes and education levels will reduce the role of religion in society, saw their hypothesis rejected by data from all corners of the world, save for the European continent on which the hypothesis was based, see Toft et al. (2011). Despite lack of secularization, democracy had been accepted by the leading figure in reconciling Islamic orthodoxy with modernity, the enigmatic Jamal Al-Din, born in Asadabad, Iran, who called himself Al-Istanbuli in Afghanistan and Al-Afghani in Turkey and Egypt. Jamal Al-Din had accepted democratic institutions based on the Islamic principle of consultation (*shūra*) and advocated for an elected parliament to advise the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, see Keddie (1983). His thought also ignited multiple strands for modern Islamism, which continue to this day: (1) modernist rationalist apologetics of Muhammad 'Abduh and his students, adopting neo-Mu'tazilite rationalism familiar to Jamal Al-Din's through his Iranian education,⁷ which is responsible in part for the civil codes in Egypt and other Arab countries; (2) harder line traditionalist approaches of Rashid Rida, Al-Mawdudi, and broader Salafi movements; and (3) activist groups who adopted a nationalist reformer and/or violent interpretation of Islamism, including the Muslim Brotherhood and its many religious, social, political, and militant offshoots.

However, none of these groups had succeeded in producing an Islamic theory of justice, despite the latter being perhaps the most central concept in Islam. Books by political intellectuals such as Sayid Qutb (2000) and legal scholars such as M. Hashim Kamali (2002) merely catalogued practical manifestations of the Islamic principle of justice, relying heavily on the juristic literature and its interpretation of Islamic scripture. Thought on "Islamic economics" found socialist, capitalist, or "third way" leanings in the Islamic canon, picking instances that encourage or discourage private property, mildly-regulated pursuit of the profit motive, and the like, depending on the political sentiments of their authors and the times and circumstances in which they lived. Khadduri (1984) and Rosen (2000) have both pointed to the practical-philosophical centrality of the principle of justice in Islamic thought, and also to the

⁷See Keddie (1983) for a thorough history of Jamal Al-Din, his early education, and his influence on various trends in modern Islamic societies, Dekmejian for general treatment of Islamic revival movements, and Khalid (1969) on Neo-Mu'tazilism.

absence of a formal *theory* of justice, in the sense of axioms and theoretical propositions, and attributed such absence to the pragmatic approach pursued by Islamic jurists and judges, who deemed justice to be defined by context, rather than abstract principles.

Thus, Khadduri (1984) pointed out that deep legal and social thinkers like Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun ultimately found the principle of justice in their own actions as judges applying the law. Modern-day traditionalists aim to find justice in literal application of the “*Shari‘a*,” leading, for example to anachronistic adoption of medieval legal stratagems in so-called Islamic finance, and grossly imperfect engagement with modern political processes based on the principle of “consultation.” An egalitarian interpretation of justice is inherent in the tradition, as argued by Taha Hussein in his analysis of the grand schisms that created the Shī‘a and Sunni factions in Islam, even as he, and more recently Marlow (1997), traced how those who insisted on applying the initial egalitarian principles of Islam came to be seen as subversive social elements in the restored hierarchical order of consecutive Islamic empires.

As Said Aly and Wenner (1982) showed, Nasser successfully tapped the Islamic egalitarian drive to justify his socialist policies of land reforms, nationalizations, and the like. Indeed, many of these policies were advocated by Hassan Al-Banna, the founding leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, with which the free officer movement of Nasser was closely associated, and Nasser used Islamist rhetoric, when necessary, to argue that “Islam is 100% a socialist religion.” Analysis in the following section shows that the confounding of redistributive egalitarianism with Islamism was strongly present at the revolutionary moment in Egypt, and explains the events that have unfolded since February 2011. This religious-egalitarian coalition has now rejected inegalitarian neoliberalism twice, and, if revived, will likely reject it again.

4 The Egyptian Formula: Opinion Surveys

This section uses Bayesian-Network analysis to detect statistical dependence patterns between variables in public opinion surveys. The relationship between Islamism and egalitarianism was an obvious hypothesis to investigate, and emerged independently from the data analysis. Recent studies such as Davis and Robinson (2006), Pepinsky and Welborne (2011), and Pepinsky et al. (2012) have found, at best, mixed results for this relationship. This is in part due to actual variations between countries, as will be shown in this section, but also in

part because of the nature of opinion survey data, and the inappropriateness of regression analyses in these contexts, as noted later, although this paper is focused squarely on empirical results rather than methodological issues. Bayesian Network analysis is an artificial intelligence technique ideally suited for extracting conditional independence relationships in categorical data. Some, like Pearl (2009) and Morgan and Winship (2007), would sometimes interpret the uncovered relationships in a causal manner.

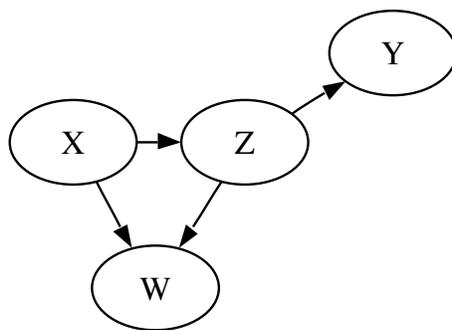


Figure 9: Example of A Simple Bayesian Network

An estimated directed acyclic graph may include relationships such as the one shown in the very simple schematic Bayesian Network in Figure 9. Of all the possible decompositions of the joint distribution of the four variables X , Y , W , and Z , this estimated network $P(X, Y, W, Z) = P(X)P(Z|X)P(W|X, Z)P(Y|Z)$ simplifies the joint distribution greatly because Y is independent of X and W conditional on Z : $P(Y|X, W, Z) = P(Y|Z)$. Many of the relationships on which we focus in this section will take this conditional independence form. Estimation of the best fitting network is very time consuming, and it is impossible to know with certainty that we have obtained the relationship that best explains the data, but the conditional independence relationships posited in the estimated network can be easily tested using standard contingency table methods, as shown below.⁸

⁸It is difficult to avoid the causal interpretation, for which Pearl (2009) makes a compelling argument, although studies such as Eckel et al. (2009) and the current paper can reach fruitful conclusions while maintaining the purely statistical interpretation of Heckerman (2008) and avoiding being mired in philosophical debates about causality. Neapolitan (2003) is a very good textbook reference on widely-used methods for estimating (“learning”) Bayesian Network structure from data. The estimation method in this paper is posterior maximization with Dirichlet priors, using the R routine “bnlearn”, see Nagarajan et al. (2013) for software overview. All

We begin our analysis with investigation of views on democracy and neoliberalism using the Pew Research Global Attitudes Project data collected in Egypt during Spring 2012.⁹ The estimated network using all 1,000 observations for 160 available variables that exhibit any variation across observations is shown in Figure 10. Sub-networks containing the democracy variable, at the top, and neoliberalism variable, in the bottom middle, are highlighted in red.

The democracy variable of interest, highlighted at the top of Figure 10 is *Q21*: ... which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion ...? (show card)

1. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government
2. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable
3. For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have ...

The estimated dependence relationship for this variable is $\boxed{Q71} \longrightarrow \boxed{Q21} \longrightarrow \boxed{Q72}$, where *Q71* asks the respondents if they prefer the democratic form of government or a strong leader, and *Q72* asks if the respondents give priority to a good democracy or a strong economy. Thus, views on the relative importance of economics and politics are the best predictor for preferability of democracy, which in turn is the best predictor of the respondent's views on the relative merits of democracy vs strong leadership.

The joint distribution plotted in Figure 11 shows that respondents are split equally over whether a good democracy or a strong economy is more important, and although those who prefer democracy are also more likely to believe that democracy is the best system of government, a supermajority of more than two-thirds of respondents believe that democracy is the best system of government. Figure 12 shows that the expressed preference for democracy is also a strong predictor for choosing it over having a strong leader.

Thus, the overwhelming support for democracy – whatever that means – is clearly on display in this data. Later analysis of data from the World Values Survey will allow us to unpack exactly what democracy means to different groups. For now, we turn to the high-

estimated networks were obtained with thousands of restarts and hundreds of mutations to increase confidence in obtaining the global posterior mode. The number of possible directed acyclic graphs to consider in estimation grows super-exponentially in the number of variables, making it impossible to examine all possible network structures in this NP-complete problem, see Robinson (1977) and Chickering (1996). Networks are plotted using “Rgraphviz”, see Høsgard et al. (2012). Joint distributions of variables and important arcs identified in the estimated networks are plotted using “mosaic” plots in the R library *vcd*.

⁹Data available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/04/20/spring-2012-survey-data/>. Unfortunately, the same questions were not asked in earlier Pew surveys.

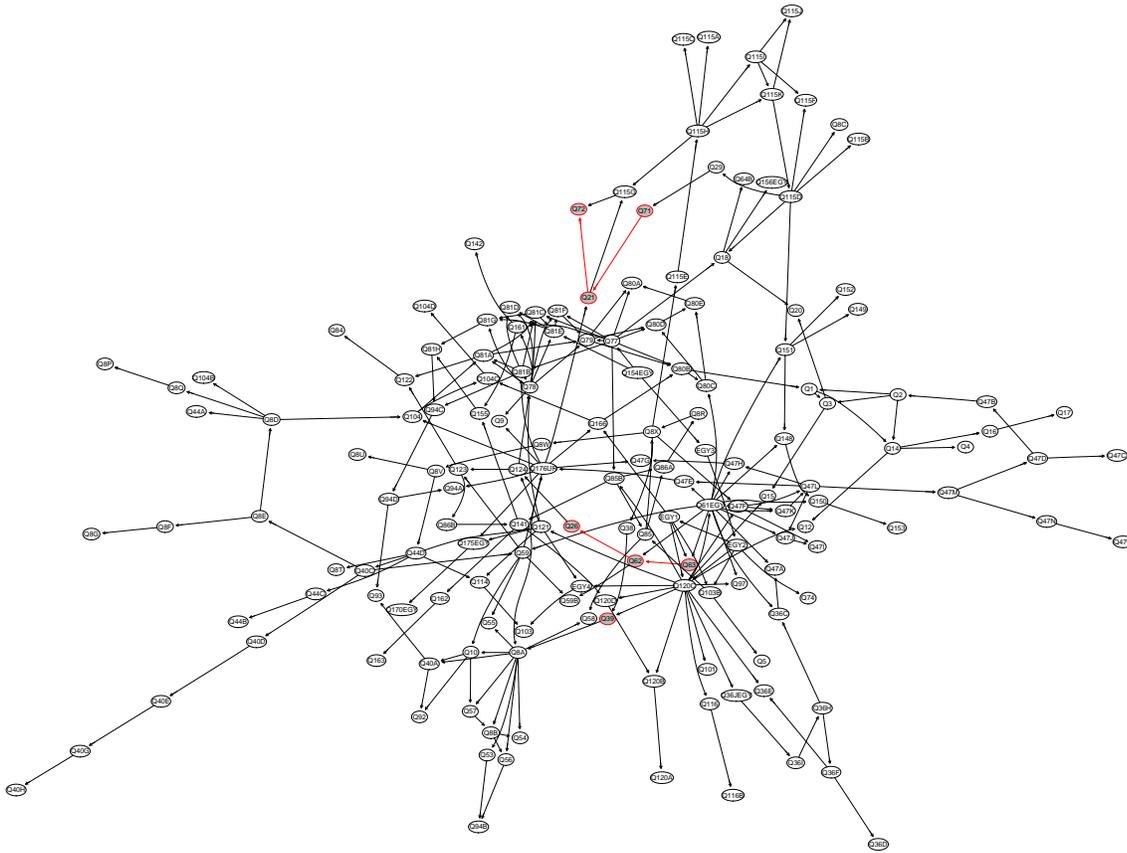


Figure 10: Estimated Bayesian Network for Spring 2012 Pew Survey in Egypt

lighted variables in the middle of the estimated network in Figure 10, which are conditionally independent from the democracy variable. The variable at the terminal node of the highlighted subnetwork elicits views on the neoliberal agenda; *Q26*: Please tell me whether you completely agree, . . . with the following statement - most people are better off in a free market economy, even though some people are rich and some are poor?

- 1 Completely agree
- 2 Mostly agree
- 3 Mostly disagree
- 4 Completely disagree . . .

This variable is estimated to be independent of all other variables conditional on *Q62*,

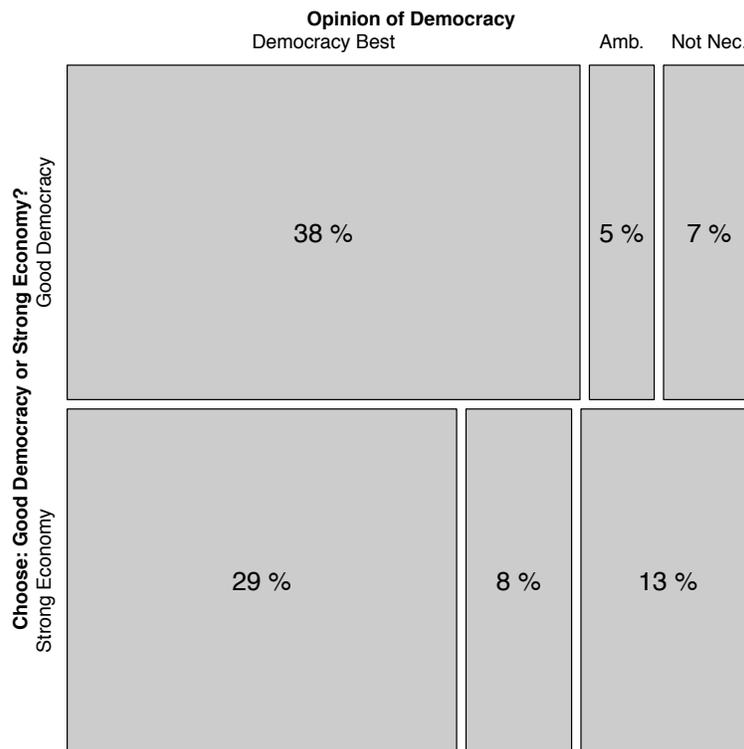


Figure 11: Joint Distribution of Responses on Importance of Democracy and Preference between Democracy and Strong Economy. *Data Source: Pew Spring 2012 Survey.*

which elicits “How much of a role [the respondent thinks] Islam plays in the political life of our country,” thus establishing some relationship between religious attitudes and views about neoliberalism. The joint distribution in Figure 13 shows a weakly-negative relationship between the expressed views on role of Islam and politics and support for neoliberalism.

This relationship should be complemented with the driving variable for views on the role of Islam in Politics, which is the follow-up question *Q63* on whether or not the current role of Islam in politics is good or bad. The joint distribution of *Q63* and *Q62* is plotted in Figure 14, which shows, unequivocally, the strong anti-secular sentiment in Egypt at the eve of the election of a president from the Muslim Brotherhood: Combined, nearly two thirds of the respondents thought either that the role of Islam in politics was large and that that was a good thing, or that the role was small and that was a bad thing! This is further amplified

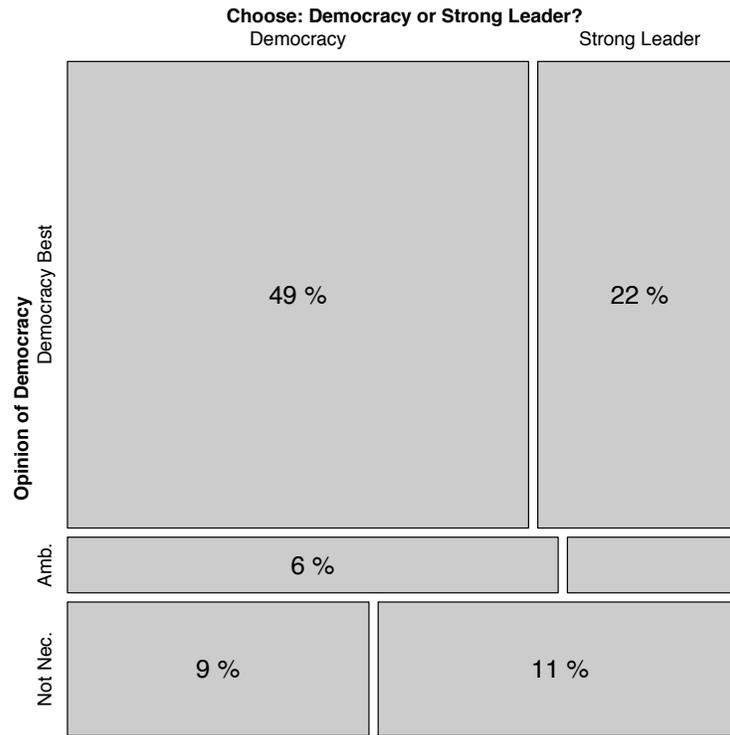


Figure 12: Joint Distribution of Responses on Importance of Democracy and Preference between Democracy and Strong Leadership. *Data Source: Pew Spring 2012 Survey.*

by the evidence shown in Figure 15 which shows the large percentage (nearly 60%) who expressed the view that laws should follow the rules of the Qur'an strictly. It must be noted that strong anti-secularism did not necessarily result in a strong rejection of neoliberalism. However, as we shall see shortly, anti-secularism was strongly associated with expectation of greater redistribution, especially if democratic government is assumed.

The World Values Survey 2008 data was collected between 2005 and 2007,¹⁰ as the frequency and intensity of protests were increasing. Therefore, these data measure Egyptian sentiments at the revolutionary moment. As we have seen in the Pew Survey data, Egyptians had a very strong sentiment that democracy was important. Most remarkably, the World Values Survey contained ten questions aiming to understand exactly what respondents meant by

¹⁰Data available at <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSDData.jsp>.

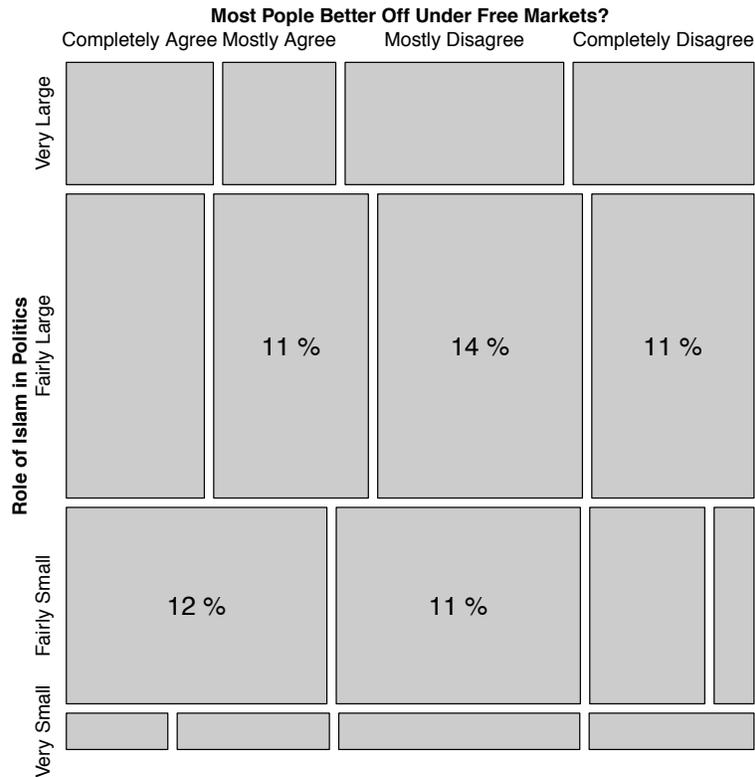


Figure 13: Joint Distribution of Views on Liberalism and the Role of Islam in Politics.
Data Source: Pew Spring 2012 Survey.

democracy. Each of these 10 questions, listed below, elicited a response on how essential the stated proposition was ‘not an essential feature of democracy’ (coded 1), ‘an essential feature of democracy’ (coded 10), or somewhere in between (coded numerically as 2 – 9):

e224 – Democracy: Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor.

e225 – Democracy: Religious authorities interpret the laws.

e226 – Democracy: People choose their leaders in free elections.

e227 – Democracy: People receive state aid for unemployment.

e228 – Democracy: Army takes over when government is incompetent.

e229 – Democracy: Civil rights protect people from oppression.

e230 – Democracy: The economy is prospering.

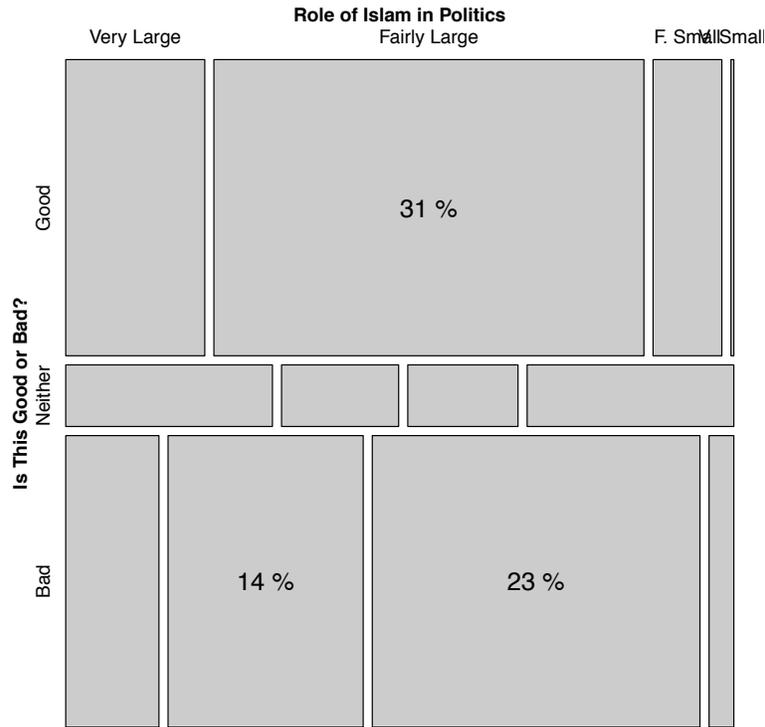


Figure 14: Joint Distribution of Views on the Role of Islam in Politics.
Data Source: Pew Spring 2012 Survey.

e231 – Democracy: Criminals are severely punished.

e232 – Democracy: People can change the laws in referendums.

e233 – Democracy: Women have the same rights as men.

The estimated Bayesian Network for Egypt, using nearly 3000 observations on 200 variables, without imposing any a priori structure on the network, is shown in Figure 16.

4.1 Confounding Redistributive Egalitarianism and Anti-Secularism

We begin by focusing on the estimated subnetwork for questions *e224* and *e225*, respectively, on redistribution and anti-secularism, and how they relate to democracy. We first notice a fundamental difference between the dependence structures for these variables in Egypt and Turkey: Anti-secular attitudes in Egypt are driven by egalitarian attitudes, whereas the op-

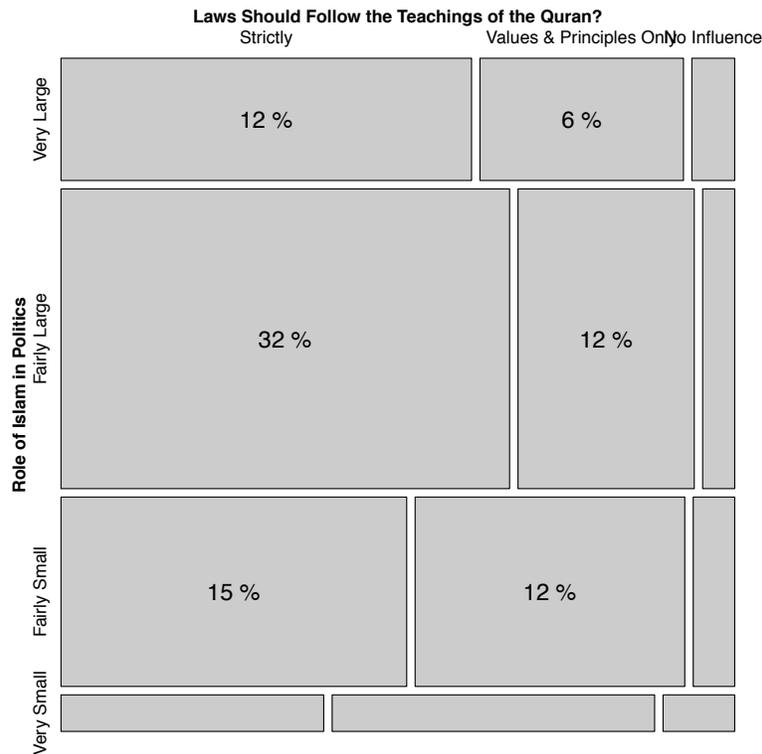


Figure 15: Joint Distribution of Views on the Role of Islam in Politics and Extreme Anti-Secularism. *Data Source: Pew Spring 2012 Survey.*

posite is true in Turkey (where Islamist identity politics are lexically prior to socioeconomic views). Multiple tests to challenge this direction of dependence structure in Egypt produce astronomical posterior odds in favor of the estimated network against alternatives of reversing the $e_{224} \rightarrow e_{225}$ arc, removing it, or blacklisting it and re-estimating the network.

Figure 17 shows that the vast majority of surveyed Egyptians associated democracy simultaneously with anti-secularism (possibly assuming, correctly, that Islamic parties would come to power in any democracy within the Egyptian context of the time) and that it was also an essential feature of democracy to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor. Nearly 40 percent of the surveyed respondents chose the extreme on both scales, indicating that they expected democracy to yield Islamist rule with a flavor that will have a strong redistributive egalitarian policy bias – a monumental anachronism in their understanding of Political Islam.

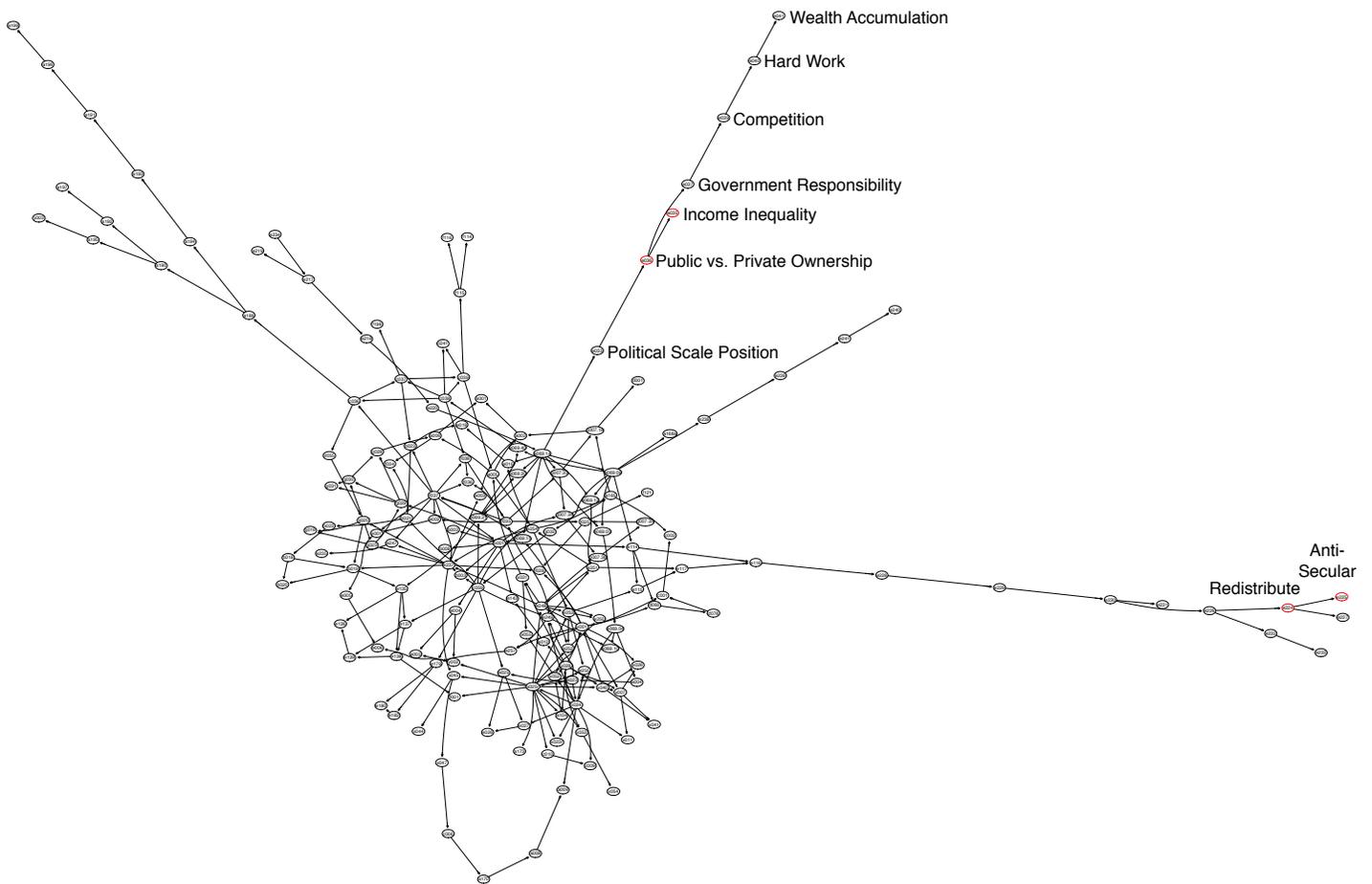


Figure 16: Estimated Bayesian Network for Egypt, WVS 2008 Data

However, one must not confuse this confounding of anti-secularism and redistributive egalitarianism with intolerance of initial income inequality to incentivize industry, or tendency to favor public ownership of enterprises. As shown in Figure 16, the variables on democracy being associated with anti-secularism and redistribution are *conditionally* independent from the variables on income distribution and its incentivizing effect and preference for public versus private enterprise, even though they are unconditionally highly dependent. For example, although we would strongly reject outright independence of e224 (redistributive egalitarianism) and either e035 (income inequality to incentivize industry) or e036 (preference for public vs. private enterprise), we fail to reject the *conditional* independence of e224 from both e035

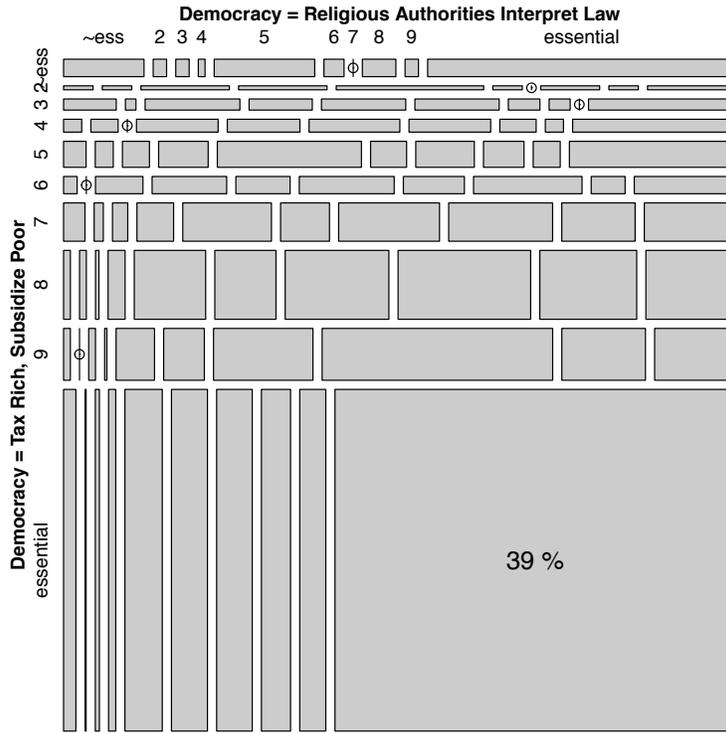


Figure 17: Egyptian Views on Egalitarianism and Anti-Secularism, WVS 2008.

and e036 given e226 (the importance of choosing leaders in free elections).¹¹ Figure 18 shows the joint distribution of responses on allowing greater initial income inequalities to incentivize hard work and industry (e035) and redistribution by taxing the rich and subsidizing the poor as an essential feature of democracy (e224). It is clear that the majority of respondents favored both greater initial inequality and ex post redistribution. Moreover, Figure 19 shows that there is no clear relationship between attitudes toward anti-secularism (measured by the Pew 2012 question about laws following teachings of the Qur'an) and neoliberalism.

As discussed above, left-leaning revolutionaries assumed that elected Islamists would have the egalitarian persuasion of the first part of the twentieth century, which was at the heart of

¹¹Formally, the test of independence of e224 and e035 yields $\chi^2(100) = 439$ (p -value=0), and test of independence of e224 and e036 yields $\chi^2(100) = 688$ (p -value=0). However, the corresponding tests of conditional independence, given e226, yield, respectively, $\chi^2(1100) = 752$ (p -value=1), and $\chi^2(1100) = 1042$ (p -value=0.889).

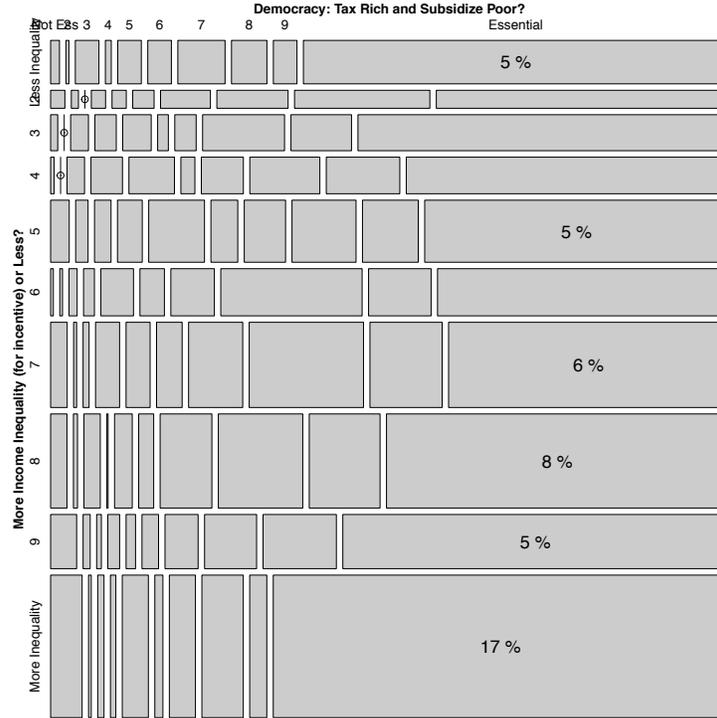


Figure 18: Egyptian Attitudes toward Inequality and Redistribution, WVS 2008 Data

Nasser’s socialist experiment. However, the Muslim Brotherhood of the twenty-first century was very far from the egalitarian Islamism that left-leaning revolutionaries expected. Hence, within one year of the Muslim Brotherhood government pursuing the same Mubarak-era mix of neoliberal economic policies and minimal populist concessions to the poorer classes, the coalition of the egalitarian left and the anti-secularists (who split their votes in the summer of 2012 between the Nasserist Hamdin Sabbahi and the former Muslim Brotherhood leader Abdulmoneim Abul-Fotouh) broke down and led to a second uprising in late June 2013, which allowed the military to remove the Brotherhood government on July 3rd. Interestingly, having learned the lesson, the subsequent government with an economic team steeped in neoliberal economics, including prominent cabinet ministers who had spent most of their careers at international financial institutions, has pursued populist measures such as minimum and (very surprisingly) *maximum* wages, price fixing, and the like, to much greater degrees

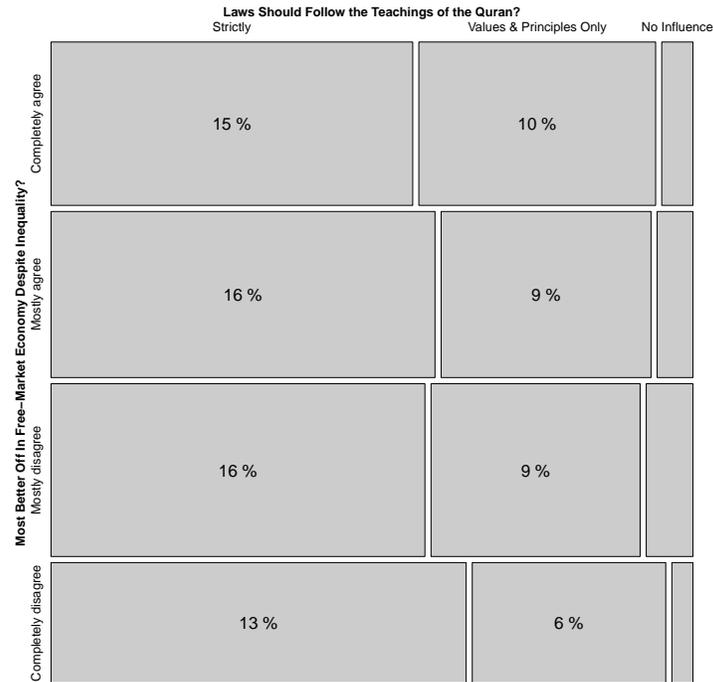


Figure 19: Egyptian Attitudes toward Antiseccularism and Neoliberalism, Pew 2012 Data

than the Muslim Brotherhood government.

Interestingly, the leftist redistributive-egalitarian interpretation of democracy in the Egyptian context at the revolutionary moment was not restricted to the lower classes. Figure 20 shows that, although, of course, lower classes placed a stronger emphasis on redistributive justice, nearly half of those who identified themselves as belonging to the upper class also viewed redistribution as an extremely essential feature of democracy. That was the surprising nature of the revolutionary moment, which was somewhat unique to the Egyptian experience, driven as it were by the Egyptian history of egalitarian Islamism during the early twentieth century.

Examination of the relationship between egalitarian and anti-secular interpretations of democracy in Egypt and other countries explains why neoliberal policies – which dictate making concession only to minimal and necessary measures of pro-poor subsidies – were generally accepted in Turkey and Malaysia, where Islamist governments have successfully pursued these

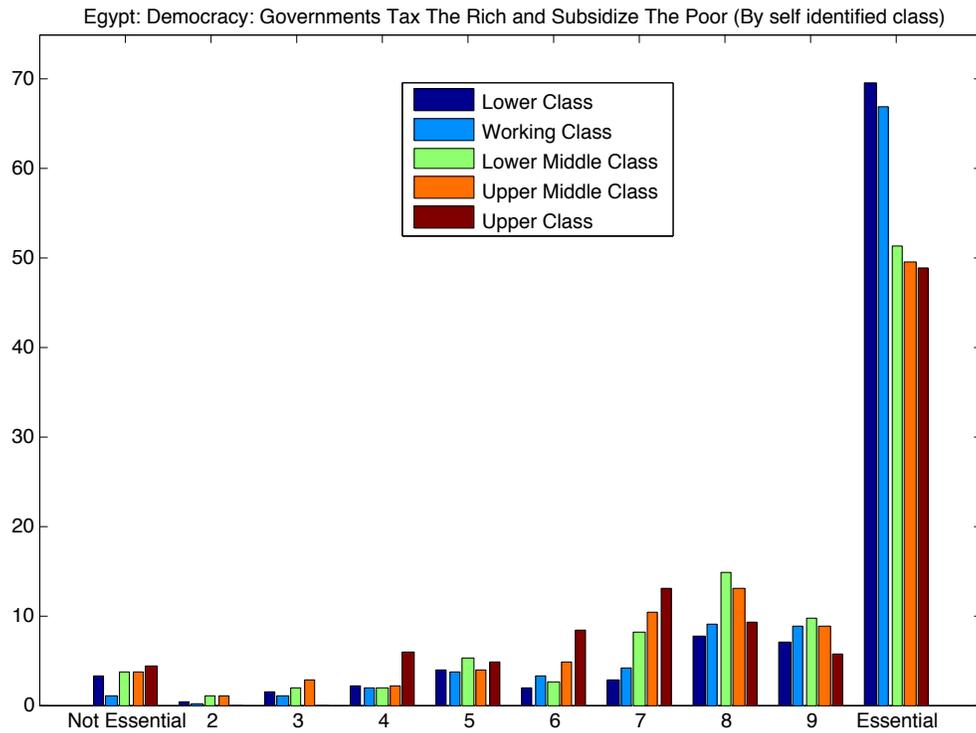


Figure 20: Egyptian Attitudes toward Government Redistribution by Class

policies, but the same policies were rejected in Egypt.

In both Turkey and Malaysia, the estimated direction of influence (or causation) was from religious attitudes to egalitarian attitudes, the exact reverse of the Egyptian structure. Moreover, Figures 21 and 22 show that distributions of attitudes towards egalitarianism and anti-secularism were very different from their Egyptian counterparts. In Turkey, Figure 21 shows that there were three mass concentrations: an anti-secular left in the bottom right hand corner, a secular left in the bottom left hand corner, and a secular right in the top left hand corner. Neoliberalism was thus unchallenged due to secular/anti-secular divisions on the left.

Figure 22 shows that the anti-secular left in Malaysia is much smaller in size than either Egypt or Turkey, and is counter-weighted by a relatively large centrist mass of views on both anti-secularism and redistributive egalitarianism. This is consistent with Malaysia's Islamists belonging mostly to the ethnic Malay who have been upward mobile throughout the past few

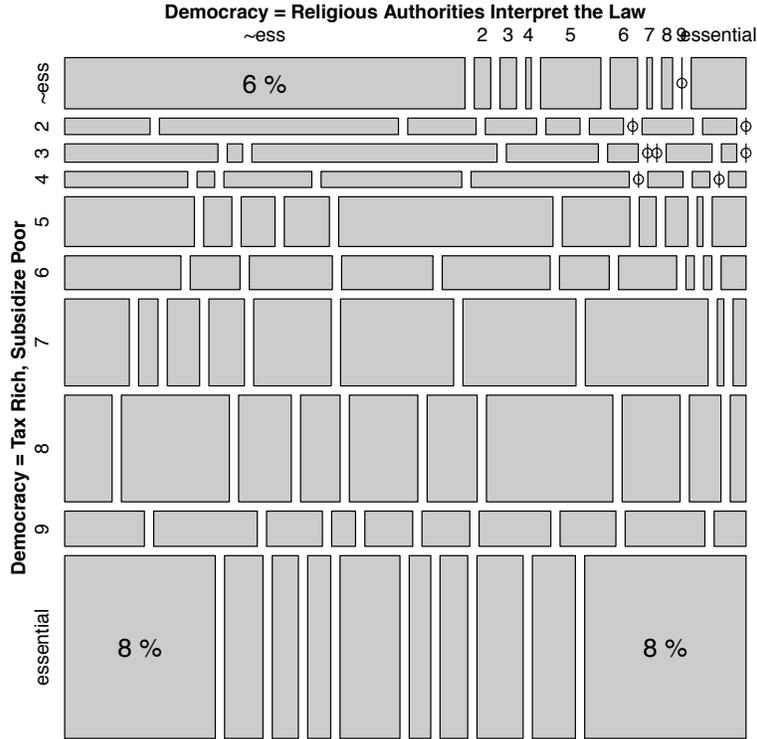


Figure 21: Joint Distribution of Turkish Views on Egalitarianism and Anti-Secularism

decades of Islamist rule, and, therefore, favor neoliberal policies based on their experience.¹²

It may be instructive to compare the confounding of democracy, anti-secularism, and redistributive egalitarianism in revolutionary Egypt, the balance of extremisms in Turkey, and

¹²It is important to make a technical note at this point. Standard regression analysis using the numerical values of responses (1 through 10) would have been most misleading, because regression coefficients are essentially measures of partial correlation. Correlation measures linear covariation around the mean, which is meaningless for the types of categorical variables with which we are dealing in this study. In this regard, if we compare the correlation between the two variables $e224$ and $e225$ for Egypt, Turkey, and Malaysia, using the joint distributions shown, respectively, in Figures 17, 21 and 22, we get a correlation of 0.33 for Egypt, a slightly lower correlation of 0.28 for Turkey, and a much higher correlation of 0.52 for Malaysia. This is a consequence of the linear structure near the mean for Malaysia, but it is meaningless, because linearity requires that the distance between any two consecutive numerical values of the response are the same. The appropriate method for handling this type of categorical data would be analysis of variance with dummy variables for each potential value of each variable, but that reduces to the multinomial structure used in our Bayesian Network analysis, and the latter provides a coherent methodology for searching over all dependence structures, instead of assuming in ad hoc fashion which variables to put on the left and right hand sides of quasi-regression ANOVA equations.

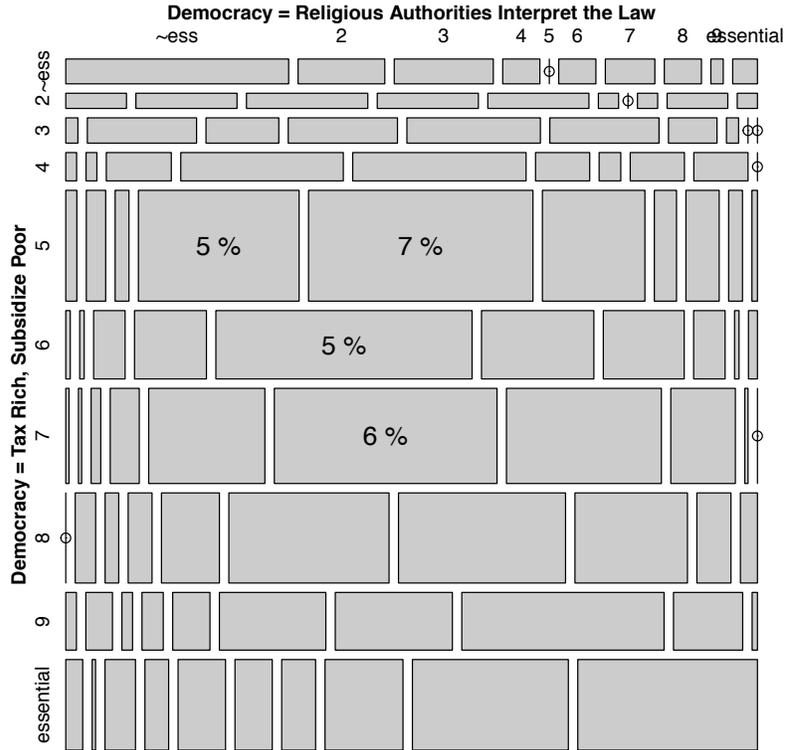


Figure 22: Joint Distribution of Malaysian Views on Egalitarianism and Anti-Secularism

the centrist tendencies in Malaysia, with experiences in other countries. We can see in Figure 23 that Jordan had the same very large mass at the anti-secular left, but also a large (albeit much smaller) secular left. The Jordanian secular right commanded less than 5% of the respondent views. Compared to Egypt (Figure 17), Jordan showed a larger secular left, and shows a secular right similar to the one evident in Turkey (Figure 21). Iraq (Figure 24) is even closer to Turkey. Its anti-secular left is much smaller than Egypt and Jordan, but larger than Turkey's. In the meantime, other mass accumulations at the secular left and secular right are equally evident in Iraq and Turkey. In stark contrast, and as validation of focusing on this redistributive-egalitarian anti-secular nexus, Figures 25 and 26 show more centrality and right leaning secularism in the U.S., and some centrality and left-leaning secularism in the U.K.

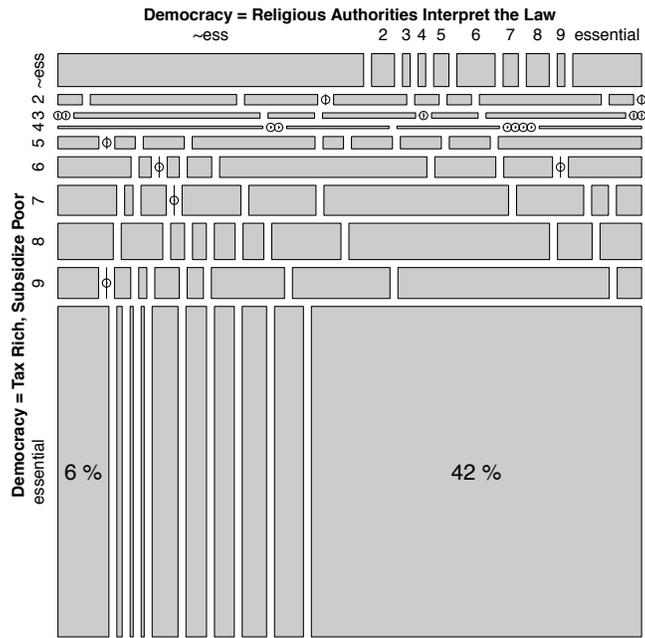


Figure 23: Joint Distribution of Egalitarian and Anti-Secular Attitudes in Jordan

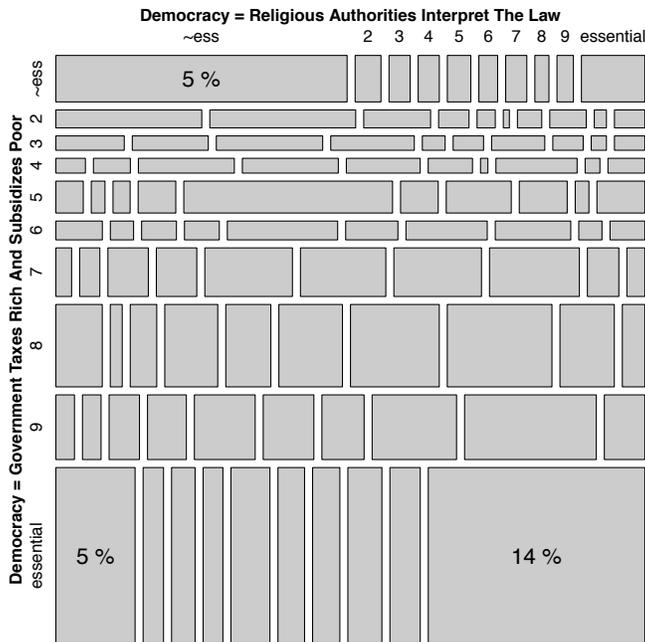


Figure 24: Joint Distribution of Egalitarian and Anti-Secular Attitudes in Iraq

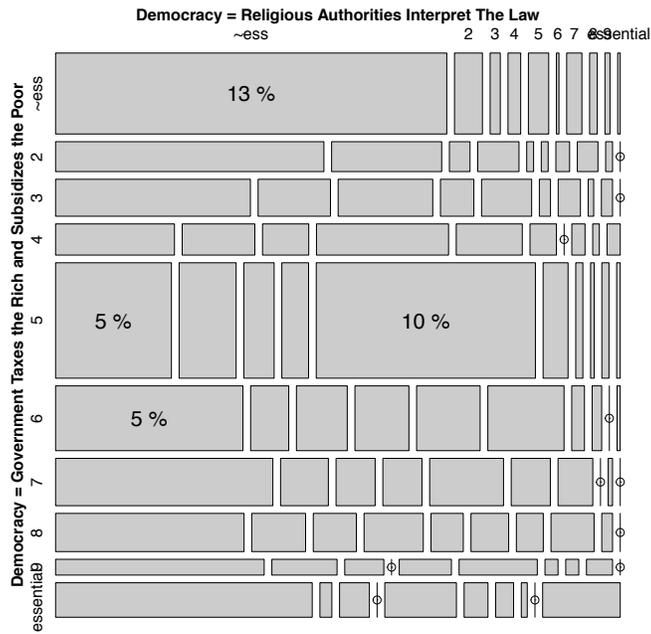


Figure 25: Joint Distribution of Egalitarian and Anti-Secular Attitudes in U.S.

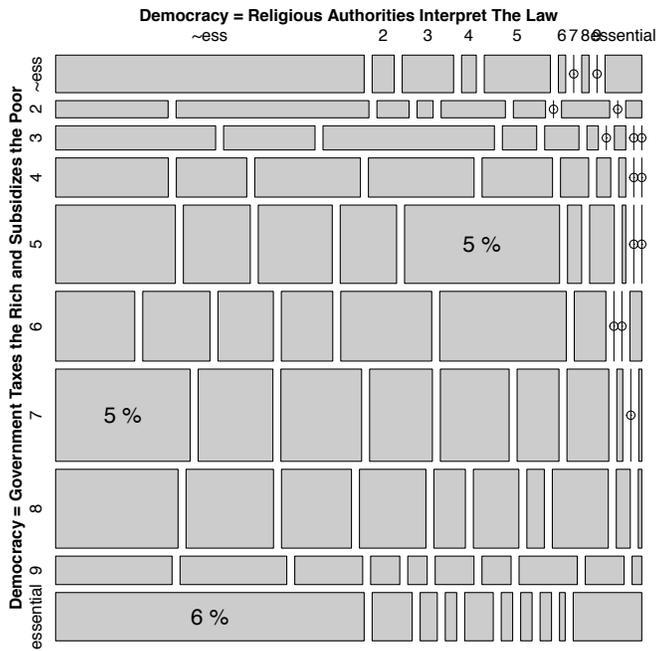


Figure 26: Joint Distribution of Egalitarian and Anti-Secular Attitudes in U.K.

5 Concluding Remarks: Theory of Justice for Economics in the Time of Revolution

Tunisia and Egypt were the IMF poster-children of successful implementation of neoliberal institutional reforms and economic policies, even as resentments were rising to levels that eventually toppled their regimes. Data analysis in Section 4 has suggested that the strong resitributive-egalitarian brand of Islamism that dominated in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century was fully on people's minds during the revolutionary moment. So strong was the public's rejection of inequalities caused by neoliberal policies, which impacted the middle class more than the poorer classes, as we have seen in Section 3, rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, that revolutionaries were willing to accept Islamist rule – assuming, as they apparently did, that Islamists would pursue more egalitarian redistributive policies. In the event, today's Muslim Brotherhood leadership proved to be as inegalitarian as their predecessors, and proceeded to pursue the same neoliberal policies, merely replacing the Mubarak-era business elites with their own loyalists. This dismantled the coalition that brought them to power, and led to the ensuing political vacuum, which was quickly filled by the military; the last remaining solid institution in the country.

Proceeding forward towards any level of economic success requires a new social contract to which a significant majority of the population can subscribe. The history of “Islamic economics,” has shown that the Islamic canon can easily justify anything from socialist measures (e.g. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab insisted to maintain farm land in conquered territories in public ownership, and leased it, in some sense, to its former owners) to extreme neoliberal measures (Prophet Muhammad refused to regulate prices, even when asked to do so). The debate on such matters pre-dates the field of Islamic economics, which was born in the Indian subcontinent under the influence of Mawdudi and developed by his students, eventually to be adopted by M. Baqir Al-Sadr, Sayid Qutb, and others in the Arab world.

During the early part of the mid twentieth century, in the late colonial and early post-colonial people, distinguished jurists such as the Egyptian Mohamed El-Ghazali (2005) and the Syrian Mustafa Al-Sibā'i (1960) wrote treatises that highlighted ostensibly socialist aspects of Islamic law and tradition, justifying nationalization of industries, price controls, and the like, which were adopted by Qutb (1993, 2000) in his critique of capitalism. Al-Badri (1965)

offered an early rebuttal, arguing that these anti-capitalist elements of the Islamic tradition were exceptions, and that the general rule was essentially libertarian, permitting all modes of property acquisition and transfer through transactions with mutual consent, with minimal regulation and provision for post hoc redistribution to prevent poverty. The latter view has been dominant from the 1970s onwards. With so many degrees of freedom, it was easy for authors to justify their politically preferred course by choosing which provisions to make the general rule and which to make the exception.

It is very easy, in the modernist apologetics approach of Muhammad ‘Abduh and his followers, to which this author is quite sympathetic, to construct a “proof” from the Islamic canon that the WC-II variation on neoliberalism is not only compatible with, but in fact an implementation of Islamic ideals as enshrined in Islamic scriptures and traditions. The most cynical application of this approach, rejected by this same author, is behind today’s Islamic finance, which began in the second half of the twentieth century, and which is capable of replicating every financial transaction and institution in “Shari‘a-compatible” ways. Paradoxically, the more social-benefit minded manifestation of the modernist approach was behind the adoption of conventional banks as well as corporate legal structures, and the like. In terms of theories of justice, it is easy to confine the state-ownership of farmland example of ‘Umar in time and space, and to argue that Islam is even less egalitarian than Rawls, because the minimal wealth threshold above which one pays *zakāh*, and below which one receives it, is an absolute poverty level. Hence, one can argue that the Islamic “difference principle” is weaker than Rawls, because inequality is justified by making the poorest better off only if they fell below that poverty line, or the same as Rawls if the poverty line is allowed to rise with GDP.

The problem with the modernist apologetics approach, especially if applied to neoliberal economic policies, is the ease with which traditionalists can discredit it by tapping into the egalitarian tradition and accusing advocates of pro-market reforms of hypocrisy – as the Muslim Brotherhood themselves were discredited in 2013, tasting the same medicine that they had served modernists like the jurist ‘Abdul-Razzāq Al-Sanhūri half a century earlier. At the other extreme, attempts to internalize the confounding of Islamism with egalitarianism at the revolutionary moment, such as Hassan Hanafi’s attempt to generate indigenous social formulas through his “Islamic Left” and “Occidentalism” projects, are at once excessively academic and intellectually incoherent, see Riexinger (2007), in their attempt to resurrect Nasserism.

The Mubarak regime pursued neoliberal policies with some measurable success, and used the police state to repress popular dissent. Data suggests that it is not only too facile, but also incorrect, to assume that discontent was only a product of high-level corruption, and, therefore, it is dangerous to expect successful resumption of the same neoliberal policies with minimal institutional reforms and punishment of criminal activity. The theories of justice enshrined in neoliberal economics, with its emphasis on institutions and minimal safety nets for the poorest, have been soundly rejected. Egyptian economic success requires a new social contract that is compatible with their religious views. Sadly, no Islamic theory of justice is available to anchor such a social contract, and it is unclear if such a theory is either feasible or warranted. Fortunately, historical experience has shown that politically viable social contracts can always be justified post hoc as “Islamic.” Egyptian Islamism has not rejected neoliberal policies insofar as they can result in large income inequalities, but it has demanded a higher degree of redistribution, which may take forms consistent with Sen’s capabilities approach, for example to fund investments in better education, healthcare, etc. The biggest challenge facing any government in the near future will be dealing with fuel subsidies in a manner that does not lead to revolt. Section 3 of this paper suggests that replacing subsidies with cash transfers has to include the middle class, not only the poorest, lest the move be seen as inegalitarian redistribution, and result in further instability.

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