

Islam and Democracy

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Abstract: *The objective of this paper involved an analysis to democracy in Islam. The paper tried to answer the question of how democratic and/or Islamic some countries in the Islamic world are. The paper analysed 59 countries using data from the World Values Survey 2005-2008. It measured several variables such as, Religiosity, Islamic Practices, Political Importance, Family Importance and the GDP. The paper concluded that there was absolutely no evidence to suggest that either Islam is anti-democratic or democratic, it is clearly subjective.*

Keywords: *Democracy, Islam, Religiosity, Family Importance, Political Importance.*

I. Introduction

Is Islam compatible with democracy? This is a fundamental question that has historically been pending among academics and pundits alike. Opinions have been polarized across a variety of spectrums among scholars. Islam and democracy has been assessed through the historical realities of their relationship until the present-day. The main concern is defining what the ‘natural’ or ‘ideal’ composition of both a united political and religious ideology in the Muslim world.

A major concern among scholars is whether certain variations of Islam, regional or otherwise, are predisposed to a democratic point of view. Are there certain non-religious variables that may be prevalent (or lacking) in predominately Muslim countries that possess a higher correlation with a pro or anti-democratic stance? Evaluating the surveys conducted within the last decade reveals that one thing is clear that the people of these countries seek change. Through the current movement of the Arab Awakening it is palpable that change is occurring at a fast rate towards the direction of modernization and liberalization that is generally articulated in democratic values. What forces are shaping the end results of these changes and what role does the Islamic faith play in the unfolding of the current events?

A full-fledged democracy is not merely contingent on political changes; it encompasses a holistic societal metamorphosis with regards to institutional development and modernization. Furthermore, the economic and sociocultural developments are a profound aspect of democratization and are inseparable. The technological component and the legal ramification of a functioning democracy must also be taken into consideration. As evident in the Arab Awakening, the establishment of a democracy does not only impact a country intrinsically, it results in a ripple effect both regionally and internationally. Another key question is what is the implication of these ripple effects? Moreover, if democracy was established in Muslim countries, how will the composition of international political change and will the recent history of relations continue in its trajectory? These and other questions will require an in depth assessment of the relevant variables that gauge the key concerns with regards to the viability of Islam and Democracy to flourish concurrently.

Any comprehensive study on the topic would require a thorough examination of the literature on the subject matter. Therefore, this paper will review nine articles and a book that seek to address this fundamental question through providing a survey of the literature and the questions that have shored-up from previous research. To address this in the paper, we firstly seek to identify the key issues scholars have posed in reference to democracy and Islam through a literature review. Then, we pose the concern of the relationship between Islam and democracy which we utilized data from the World Value Survey from 2005 until 2008 on 57 countries to evaluate it through the ‘Best Subset’ method of multilinear regression. Finally, we concluded that there is no evidence suggesting that Islam is either democratic or anti-democratic, but rather it is subjective to the context of the respective country.

II. Literature Review

In academia, there is an adamant preoccupation of the scholarship focused on writing off Islamic countries as adversaries against democratization. This has led to the lenience towards Islamic “exceptionalism” based on some empirical observation that these countries seems to be immune to the three waves of democratization (Huntington, 1993 [1]). However, in recent years the scholarship has been removed from the orientalist bias in their assessment. For example, Bratton (2003 [2]) carries out of survey working through a

series of survey questions administered to over 10,000 individuals in four sub-Saharan countries (Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda), drew significant conclusions revealing that the population were overwhelmingly supportive in of democratic electoral systems. Interestingly enough, after dividing the religious factions into subgroups, the Islamists showed to be more tolerant of democratic development than others, specifically those who followed the aboriginal religions. By using frequency of attendance as a gauge for religiosity, the study determined the more religious Muslims were likely to support democracy. The final outcome of the study was a regression where the level of explanatory power for the variables in descending order were education, media exposure, urban residence, and religion regarding the level of support for democracy.

Another survey conducted resulted in complimentary results that evaluated five Arab countries that were polled in 2006, revealing that 90% of subjects were amicable towards the establishment of a democratic system of governance (Peter, Palshikar & Yogendra Yadav, Jamal, Tessler, and Marta, 2008 [3]). Among the Arab countries 52% voted in elections and 56% actually followed domestic politics. A good amount of the population thought of democracy in a positive light, but 83% thought democracy should be introduced gradually. However, there was approximately 31% that thought it could be negative to the economy. Among those who favored democracy, half of them wanted religious men included in the decision-making process. Furthermore, a good amount of subjects still thought a strong and broadly powerful leader would be good in spite of their support for democracy.

Clearly, from research the overall populous are cordial towards a democratic establishment; however, an understanding of the internal voting trends and politics is important to grasp the status of democratic development. It has been shown that liberal centrist Islamic parties and gain momentum in votes in countries where Muslims are permitted to vote (Nassr, 2005 [4]). The competition almost always includes a hardline Islamist pro-Sharia party and votes are generally geared towards more liberal parties. Collective interest and stability are pivotal to the formation of these parties and since these are predominantly Muslim countries, it is natural that Islamic interests are usually part of the process, even though they are not the sole consideration. Among a lot of the recent scholarship, it reveals that Muslim ethics and values a lot of times are in harmony with the framework of democratic society.

The Islamist state is a more modern invention, it is neither in the Quran or has historical precedence (Ayoob 2008 [5]). Ayoob argues that jihad is a violent political movement which simply borrows terminology from the Quran to feign legitimacy. Furthermore, he parallels the relationship between religion and politics to that of Christianity. The development and application of law in Islam occurred within civil society and primarily beyond the sphere of the state. Each predominately Muslim state has organically developed its own composition of religion and politics. Saudi Arabia and Iran are self proclaimed Islamic states that have little or no democratic precepts, although Iran is constitutional. On the other hand, Egypt and Pakistan had achieved a hybrid of religion and leftist politics, sometimes operating within a broader vote-friendly framework. Turkey and Indonesia show great economic success and an innovative level of moderation with their development focused Islamic political regimes. Finally, Hamas and Hezbollah, and other transnational Islamist movements, have injected a radical violent element into the situation, distorting the worlds view of how politics are understood within the Muslim religion.

A case study of Indonesia highlights both the high level of moderation within the voting public, as well as the incessant variance within the more extreme Muslim community (Mujani and Liddle 2009 [6]). Historically, the fall of the military dictatorship in 1999 and the emergence of extremist terrorism, highlighted the inconsistency with which the public is voting. Even though they were given the choice to include more fundamentalist parties, invariably and overwhelmingly they voted for a more Islamic centrist party. The idea that the ruling class is secular is stressed due to the fact that there are un-Islamic affiliations (as well as non-religious) parties involved in elections. The right wing Islamic community, with a less than stellar showing in all four major national elections since 1999, has narrowed their focus on regional and local races. The article concludes that fundamentalist facets of the more dominant Islamic political parties were stripped away over time in order to evolve into what the authors refer to as a secular democracy with strong ethical and material Islamic tendencies.

Not only is it important to see how democratic characteristics develop within a particular country, but to assess a benchmark between two successful Islamic democracies can offer further enlightenment (Yilmaz, 2009 [7]). The importance of opposition to Islamist parties has been a linchpin within the recent outlined political histories of both Turkey and Egypt. Military coups in Turkey and the recently deposed Mubarak regime in Egypt have created a pocket of opportunity by repressing the more violent or radical Islamic extremist sects. The evolution of the ruling party in Turkey seems to have gone from a more liberal secular democracy to one with moderate Islamic sensibilities over time. However, in Egypt the violent Muslim Brotherhood gave the authoritarian autocrats in change and the less severe Islamic democratic parties a common enemy (Berlin, 1996 [8]). The result in both cases is the evolution of the democratic process working within the boundaries of primarily Islamic countries in order to represent the will of the mainstream.

Zartman (1992 [9]) makes the case that political Islam, is only one of the more recent manifestations of a dogmatic fundamentalist fringe within the faith that seeks (and has always sought for that matter) to impose itself on the entire populace. The conflict inherent in this is a sociopolitical one where the same principles that led Muslims to push their extremist interpretation of scripture onto their neighbors run completely countercurrent to the principles inherent in the democratic process. The democratic values allow for open debate, free choice, and a weighing of options by the majority within a society. To complicate matters further some Islamic political parties are divided into moderate and radical fundamentalist segments, while those subsectors (as well as other Islamic parties) are divided into visible campaigning leadership factions and more violent (or potentially violent) militant wings. Zartman argues that places without a democratic process, whether it is via dictatorship, military leadership, or more liberal forces, are subject to Islamist extremism and have no built in mechanism with which to maintain or enforce a multiparty electoral system. The tactics of the extremists make the idea of elections themselves paradoxical, as many vow to remove the democratic process once elected. This is the underlying conflict and the resolution will only be found over time.

Midlarsky (1998 [10]) shed light on how various versions of democracy results in different reactions to the Political ideology. He created several illustrations to compare the multiple interpretations of the Jihad passages in the Quran in a across-correlation to income, revealing that income supersedes any religious affiliation when attempting to quantify the causes of support for democracy. In other words, lack of consistency is the only real standard as the variables chosen required three separate regressions to be formed. The conclusion is that democracy and Islam have a positive correlation (with non political factors being the most influential) while Islam and liberal democracy have a negative correlation (although the developmental direction at the time was toward an eventual positive direction). And finally, those other non-religious factors may have more of an impact on the difficult to quantify concept of democracy, whether it be the practice or merely the unspoken psychological state.

Mark Tessler's work exemplifies the historical predecessor to the Arab Democracy Barometer series (2002 [11]). Tessler purports that the political realities of a nation's struggles has little association with the internal perspectives on a political system of the population. Legitimacy is often taken, not earned, which has caused a measure of disconnect between what a nation feels and how that nation is governed by those in charge. The debate is visited between whether scriptures and rhetoric, or the surveys and sentiment of the anonymous populace should be emphasized on the most. This questions whether it is the Muslim people or the governments that are opposed to democratization.

Scholars usually reference Turkey as the model country revealing a democratic Islamic country. Yilmaz (2007 [12]) argues that Turkey is leaning towards a post-Islamic era. The history of politics and religion came about in the early formative time when religious thinking was still being developed. Yilmaz argues that Islamist philosophy was founded on a political platform, where the religion was a social construct and the state was a separate entity. He purports that Christianity developed the dualistic approach early on and this view has vilified political opponents ever since. This is only a relatively recent development with political Islamists and has guided the direction of Islamic democracy. The changes now being undergone are traced to the religious crossroads in which Turkey is experiencing through the party process that has made it the paragon of development for progressive democratic development in the Islamic world. This system filters itself where the moderate Islamic philosophy prevails in a democratic society, while the hard-line extremism is filtered out peacefully.

III. Hypotheses

Among Islamic countries there seem to be two broad questions that the authors of these studies have been trying to answer. 1) How "democratic" is the country and 2) how Islamic is the country? While numerous variables affect the formulation of how Islam and democracy relate to one-another within the boundaries of a specific nation state, these two seem to be the primary descriptors of eminent concern with regards to the countries that have been evaluated. The question to be answered here is, irrespective of exogenous influences, what is the relationship between these two variables and how do they manifest themselves?

The answers lead to questions about how to quantify the level of democratization in a country and how to gauge prevalence of Islam among the population of the country. Once those questions are answered satisfactorily these variables may be used as axes on a graph to visually represent the countries being viewed in this study. All countries will fall within one of the four quadrants and will be both categorizable and ordinally comparable. This will allow for a more empirical (and therefore economically useful) analytical approach to the question of Islamic democracy.

Essentially, the outwardly democratic countries can be measured by such factors as how frequent are elections? What percent of the population participate? Or which parties perform the best democratically, or otherwise? A similar litmus test can be held to the level of Islam a country has by both the obvious "percentage of the population" data, as well as more complex proxies that have been substituted when measuring religiosity.

This index, while an end in itself for our purposes, will be a starting point in its numerous and varied examples of usefulness. To be able to quantify along with compare Islam and democracy within a country or region, could potentially revolutionize the methodologies in which political scientists can evaluate the issue. Social scientists, economists, financiers, marketers, and statisticians of all types will be able to use this information constructively. A benchmarked comparison holds the promise of showing how certain countries are performing with regards democratic development. Politicians will be able to measure unbiased progress in either of the four directions. This can be further developed in the construct of future models, as it is at this point still an abstract and unformatted study within itself.

IV. Research Design

The domain being used in this experiment is the data collected from the World Values Survey 2005-2008. A total 59 countries were analyzed and several relevant variables were quantified through this study. The variables used for our experiment were (1) the level of religiosity in the country measured on a scale of zero to 100 (religion); (2) the percentage of the population that practices the Islamic faith (Islam); (3) the statistic showing whether those individuals polled hold politics as important in their worldview (Political Importance); (4) the level which the society thinks that the family unit is essential (Family Importance), and (5) the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country in question. The 33 largest countries in the dataset were used as observations. This selection was based on a combination of core 'Islamic Democratic' countries (i.e., Turkey, Mali, Egypt, etc.) and a cross set of 'world-player' countries (like China, US, Australia, etc.). The combination was designed to give a good broad cross section of the global paradigm.

The World Values Survey polls were conducted between 2005 and 2008 in 57 countries worldwide. Respondents are sampled through stratified, multi-stage PPS (probability proportional to size) sampling. The units of measure are varied (some percentage, some diffusion scale, etc.) as appropriate for the value being measured. The data is, by design however, meant to be used together; therefore compatibility should not be an issue. Because the time period of 2005-2008 is merely the window of survey chronology, and no individual observations are made over a variety of time periods, the potential for unbalance between samples or pools is nonexistent.

The variable of interest in this study is the level of democracy within each of the sampled countries. The level is portrayed by the World Value Survey compilers as a diffusion scale from -10 to 10, with authoritarianism at the one end of the spectrum, the most liberal democracy at the other, and zero being anarchy or total lack of adherence to either wing of the political spectrum.

The ideology behind democracy just being one of the many factors involved in the World Values project keeps a measure of impartiality behind the composition of the scalar units. The project has been carried over 5 iterations spanning 27 years at the point where the data was taken and the importance of consistency as well as necessary refinements was most thoroughly and professionally implemented.

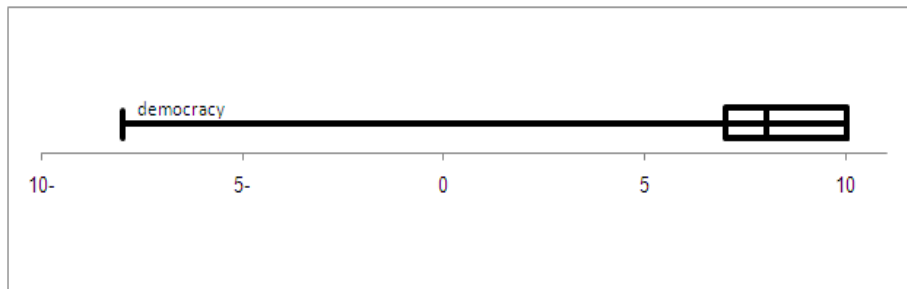
Certain very non-democratic regimes rate very low on the scale. Communist China, for example, rates a negative 8 while the military dictatorship of Ethiopia is a negative 7. The monarchy in Jordan earned a negative 3 because of the lopsided locus of control meted out by the royalty across the political landscape there. Other, more liberalized countries score much higher, including most of Europe and North America, which receive 10 points (as fully democratic societies) and countries like India and Peru, which score almost perfect 10 (perhaps limited by communist or other authoritarian elements within the national geographical boundaries). We can conveniently call this the World Values version of democracy, as it was designed and quantified by their teams.

None of the 33 countries used are missing any variables. The stratification and making probability proportionate to size are two factors that should help eliminate internal bias which otherwise may have actually skewed the results within each category or variable. Again, the World Values team has been refining this process for about 30 years now.

V. Descriptive Statistics

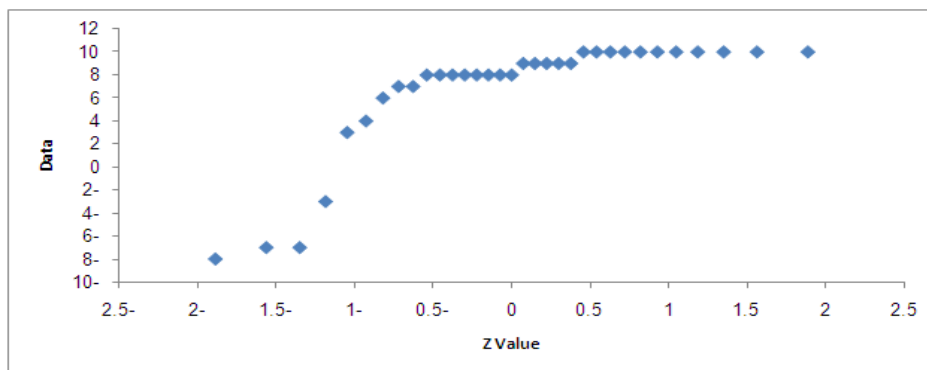
The data does not show a normal distribution. The selection of data shows a heavy positive skew and an extra long left tail. This is consistent with the selection process and should not result in bias because the observations are based on the domain of the 57 World Value Survey countries that participated in the 2005-2008 wave and the range merely exemplifies a sample of the more influential countries in the sub-categories of Islamic Democracies and first world powers. With a concentration of highly democratic nations among those assessed by the World Value scientists and a further layer of democratization among those being chosen on the basis of their influence and visibility, the preponderance of upper range democracies is to be expected. The underlying point to be kept in mind is that a fully global distribution of democracy is not being assessed here so the limited range provides sufficient indication of the correlation and variance analysis inherent in the data.

Religion as an independent variable is defined as a number between 1 and 100 which rates the importance of religion in the lives of the participants of the survey. Answers to questions like “How often do you pray or attend religious services?” and “How important is God in your life, or your decision making process?” were attributed points and tallied to provide the World Values investigators their basis for the scores.



Boxplot 1: Independent variable (Democracy)

Gross Domestic Product, or GDP as it is commonly referred to, is the sum of the production of goods and services produced for final use within a countries borders. An alternative but equivalent measure can be reached by summing the spending of consumers, business investors and the government with net exports (or exports minus imports), but this method is usually only reserved for countries with more advanced national income accounting standards in place.

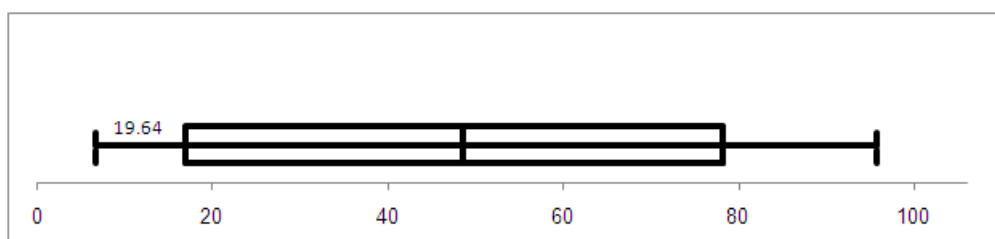


Plot 1: Normal probability of dependent variable (Democracy)

Political Rather Important is the name of a variable given by the surveyors to categorize a series of questions related to views on the importance of politics, and again a scorecard was designed to attempt to comparatively enumerate the answers. The outcomes in our sample range from below 25 from some Eastern European (Bulgaria, Romania) and Latin American (Chile) countries, to over 70 by such highly oppressed locales as Vietnam and Ethiopia.

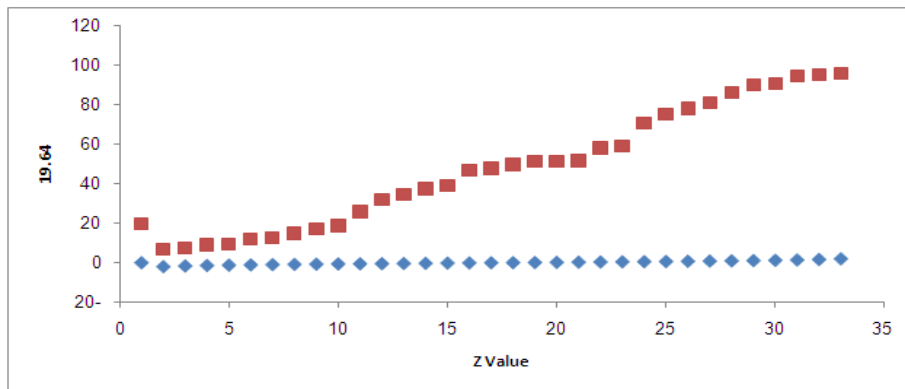
The independent measure called Islam is simply of percentage of participants whose answers reflect that they adhere to the faith of the Prophet Mohammed and ranges from one tenth of a percent in Vietnam to 99% on the country of Morocco.

The last variable used is called Family Important and is a reflection of some survey questions dealing with how important of a role the family plays in the lives of the survey participants. Most countries scored on the rather high end of the scale (in the eighties or nineties) with the lower end of the spectrum being reserved for communist (China) or African tribalist (Rwanda) nations.

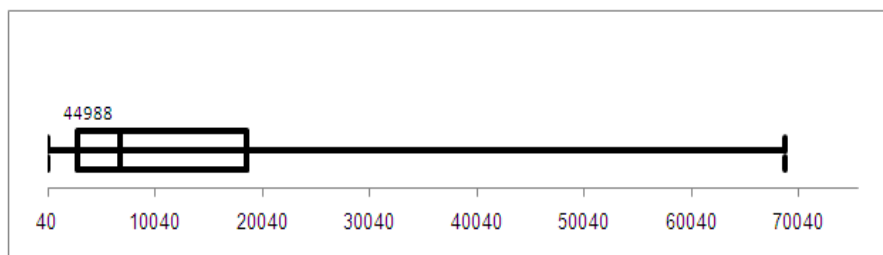


Boxplot 2: Religious

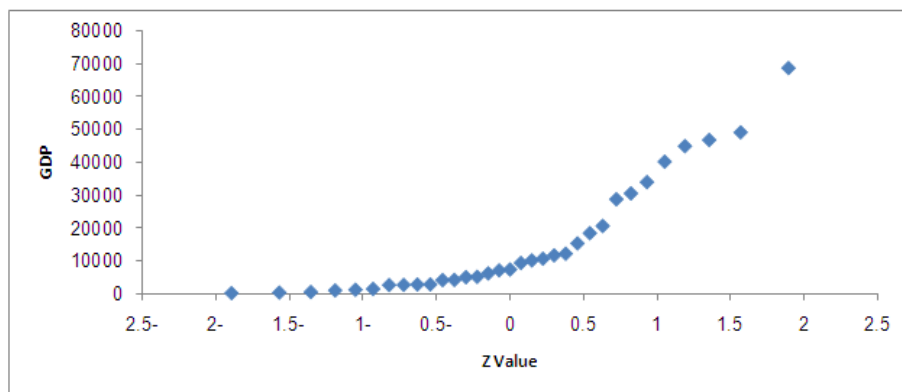
The Religious variable which quantifies the religiosity or depth of religion within a country shows a roughly normal probability distribution as evidenced by the lack of outliers in the boxplot and the linear symmetry of the z values across either side of the mean.



Plot 2: Religious probability

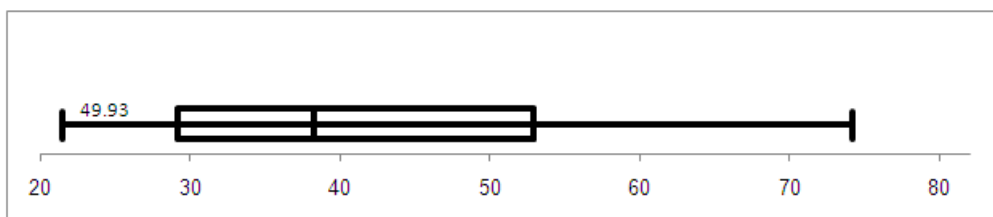


Boxplot 3: GDP

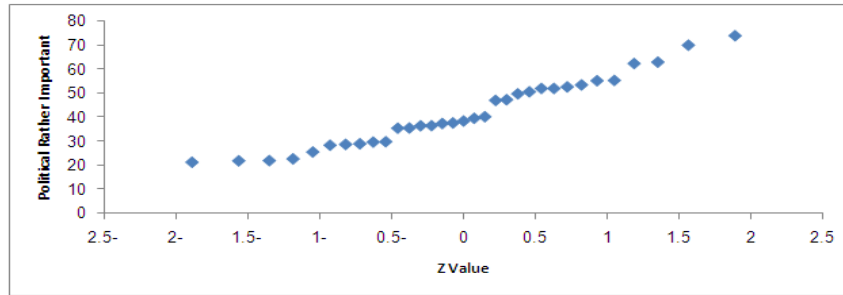


Plot 3: GDP probability

The boxplot of the nations GDP production levels shows outlier values and the normal probability plot indicates that the relationship among data points is not linear. GDP does not seem distributed along a normal curve.

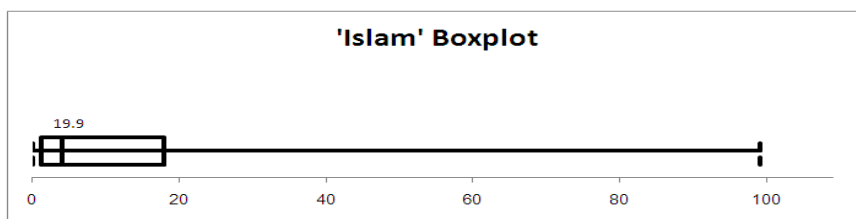


Boxplot 4: Political rather important

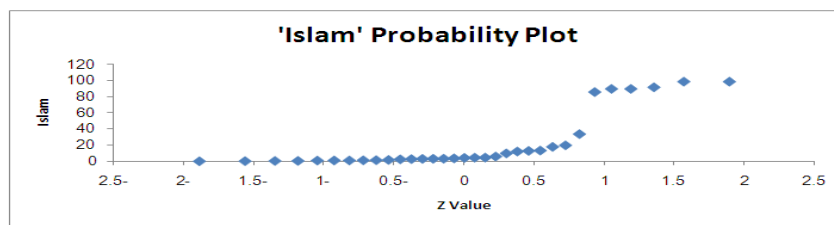


Plot 4: Political probability

The plots of the results of the 'Political Rather Important' section of the questionnaire show a non normal distribution where there are extreme values in the tail on the right hand side and there are higher values on that side of the median.

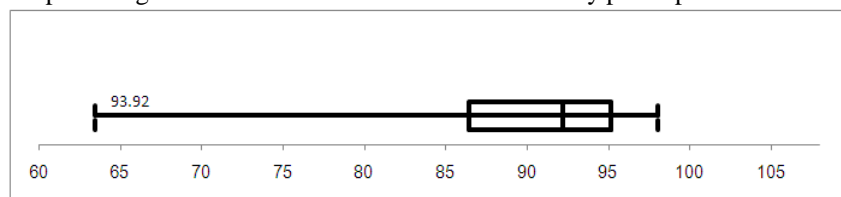


Boxplot 5: Islam

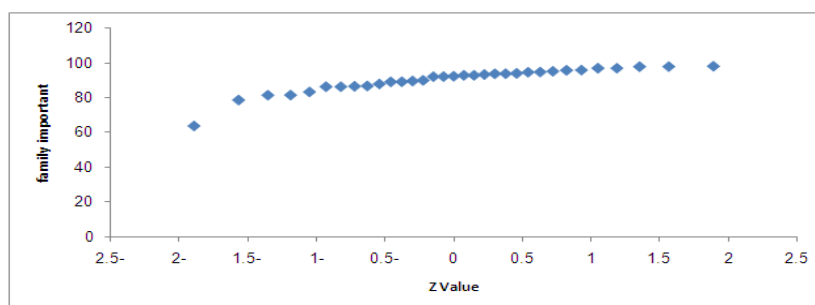


Plot 5: Islam probability

It is evident that the percentage of Islamic constituents within the survey participants is not normally distributed.



Boxplot 6: Family Important



Plot 6: Family probability

The variable that represents the importance of families to those polled does not follow the normal distribution pattern. The boxplot shows extreme low values and the probability plot puts only a handful of the observations within the normal range.

VI. Methods

The dependent variable being tested is democracy. The method used is the ‘Best Subset’ method of multilinear regression as performed by the PHStat add-in for the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program. The way it works is a systematic trial-and-error analysis of each different combination of independent variables, and then a comparison of the efficiency and accuracy of the results from the data. As a standard matter of practice, the first steps are to run the regression with all the explanatory variables in place. The second step is to use single variables and simple regressions, systematically adding variables while maintaining the constraints on the parameters set forth in the research. This process yielded the following results, which will be further discussed in the ‘Conclusion’ Section.

VII. Empirical Analysis

The multiple linear regression of the 5 independent variables with Democracy show that, between the 5, they explain about 79.42% of the change in the dependent variable. Once this figure is adjusted to allow for the cross correlation between variables and the lack of parsimoniousness caused by such correlation, the Resulting explanatory value is more accurately assessed at 56.24%.

Best Subset regression for 'Democracy'								
Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.7942							
R Square	0.6308							
Adjusted R Square	0.5624							
Standard Error	3.4432							
Observations	33							
ANOVA								
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
Regression	5	546.8769	109.3754	9.2259	0.0000			
Residual	27	320.0927	11.8553					
Total	32	866.9697						
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	7.1057	10.2159	0.6956	0.4927	-13.8556	28.0670	-13.8556	28.0670
Religious	0.0276	0.0284	0.9733	0.3391	-0.0306	0.0859	-0.0306	0.0859
GDP	0.0001	0.0000	3.6196	0.0012	0.0001	0.0002	0.0001	0.0002
Political Rather Important	-0.2280	0.0458	-4.9784	0.0000	-0.3220	-0.1340	-0.3220	-0.1340
Islam	-0.0261	0.0265	-0.9828	0.3344	-0.0805	0.0284	-0.0805	0.0284
family important	0.0691	0.1110	0.6224	0.5389	-0.1586	0.2968	-0.1586	0.2968

The individual variable of Religious is shown to be statistically insignificant at the 95% confidence level, as is Islam and Family Importance. When the Best Subset process is used in order to find a statistically significant measure for the variable that measures the percentage of Islamic survey participants against the level of the Democracy variable, the following subset is the one that proves the most robust results.

This regression shows that, when coupled with the importance of the family, the statistically significant variable Islam explain 45.69% of the change in the Democracy variable. This number, however, does get reduced to about 15.6% when the outcome is adjusted for the cross correlation between the factors that encompass the Islamic portion of the questionnaire and those that pertain to the importance of the family among those who were surveyed. The end result is that Islam, as it turns out, and the percentage of Islamic practitioners in a country (or more accurately among those being surveyed in a given country) is only marginally influential on the level of democracy within that country.

Best Subset regression for 'Democracy'								
X4 X5								
Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.4569							
R Square	0.2087							
Adjusted R Square	0.1560							
Standard Error	4.7819							
Observations	33							
ANOVA								
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
Regression	2	180.9734	90.4867	3.9572	0.0298			
Residual	30	685.9963	22.8665					
Total	32	866.9697						

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	-23.1515	11.9899	-1.9309	0.0630	-47.6380	1.3350	-47.6380	1.3350
Islam	-0.0621	0.0276	-2.2457	0.0322	-0.1185	-0.0056	-0.1185	-0.0056
family important	0.3458	0.1356	2.5511	0.0161	0.0690	0.6227	0.0690	0.6227

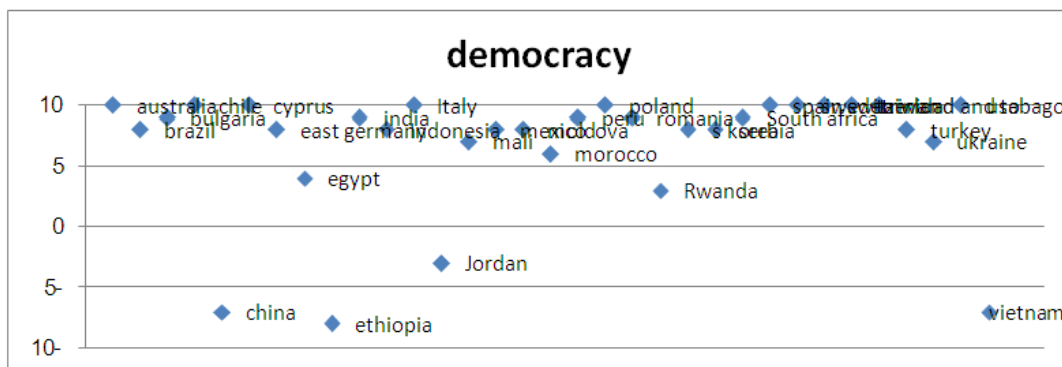
Table 1: Best Subset Regression for Democracy

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, while the levels of differentiation between the percentage of Islamic citizens within a country will fluctuate rather substantially, the correlation between this variable and that of the factor referred to by the World Value Survey as Democracy is actually very small when testing the level of statistical significance. In order to explain why democracy becomes prevalent within the borders of a nation, most of the aforementioned independent variables carry a more substantial predictor value than that of the measure that relates to the number of Islamic people in proportion to the population.

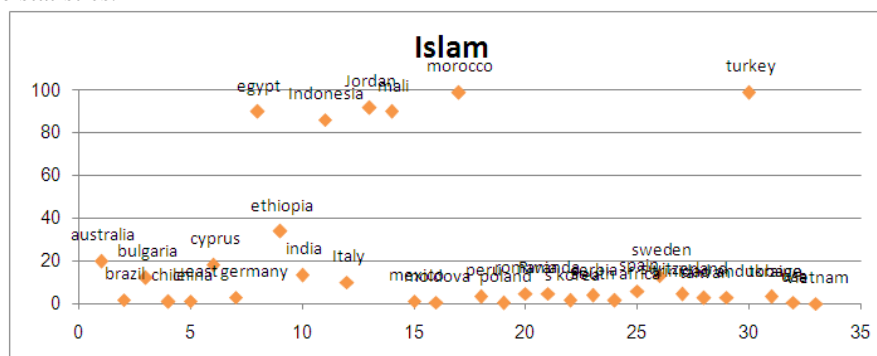
This could raise questions regarding other religions and other form of governmental oversight. Is there any correlation between supernatural belief systems and the method of societal regulation that occurs within the borders of any given state? Is there a measure of predisposition that cannot be explained away by cross correlated variables that actually do influence the degree of democracy present within a society?

The overarching values as measured through the studies that were used as the basis for this analysis can be used as a proxy for the well being of the citizenry within each of the surveyed countries. The freedom of religion seems to be a democratic principal that begets both well being and provides impetus to align the political system with democratic principles. The Arab Spring and more recent developments are proving that the interconnectedness of individuals with common goals can supplant repression with freedom and place the values that lead to well being higher on the list of a society’s priorities.



Plot 7: Democracy

The important takeaway here is that there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that either Islam is anti-democratic or democratic, it is clearly subjective. The countries with extreme values regarding either variable simply do not correspond with extreme values in the other variable. The majority of the data, which fall in the normal range, associated with the domain being used here, show minimal explanatory connection between these specific sample statistics.



Plot 8: Islam

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