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The Development of Islamist Insurgency: Egypt, 1986-1999

Principal Investigator: J. Craig Jenkins

From 1986 to 1999, Egypt experienced a wave of Islamist violence as 474 attacks killed and injured over 2,000 people. Perhaps most notable was the 1997 attack in Luxor in which 10 German tourists were killed. The Egyptian government responded to the violence with a campaign of repression through arrests, trials, and executions. By 1999 the violence had dissipated, though some insurgents went on to form the core of al-Qaida.

What explains the rise and decline of the Islamist insurgency? Jenkins set out to answer this question by examining the pattern of attacks against four variables:

Poverty and regional inequality. Some observers believe insurgency is a response to limited economic opportunity. Others think it comes from a sense of inequality as perceived through the media. Jenkins will examine poverty measures such as infant mortality, access to safe water and electricity, and income per capita, as well as inequality measures such as income inequality, unemployment, and mass media exposure.

Religious competition. Some scholars believe Islamic insurgency is more likely in areas with a high percentage of Christians. Others think it happens where Islam is dominant. Jenkins will chart the percentage of Coptic Christians in each province of Egypt.

Changing status of women. Restrictions on women's mobility, dress and family practices has been a pillar of the Islamist campaign. Some scholars believe this contributes to insurgency, while others point to significant changes in women's access to education, jobs, and social opportunity. Jenkins will measure female education rates, literacy rates, participation in the workforce, and contraceptive use.

State repression and political opportunity. Some argue that an erratic mixture of political repression and relaxation of control stimulates insurgency by undermining state authority while leaving insurgent groups in tact. Others see an increasing "tit for tat" between government and insurgents. Jenkins will examine three types of



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government action: hard repression, such as imprisonment, torture and executions; soft repression, such as covert monitoring crowd control, and censorship; and political relaxations such as lifting of curfews, easing of blockades, and release of political prisoners.

All of these variables will be crossed with a listing of Islamist attacks each year in each Egyptian province. Jenkins will construct this list, including the lethality of each attack, by using a dataset from Charles Fahner of Georgia State University. Fahner reviewed all news stories about Egypt in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and Lexis-Nexis, identifying the date, actor, target, casualties, and location, including province.

Going into this project, Jenkins expected that modernization, particularly improvement in the status of women, would be correlated with Islamic insurgency. Preliminary results, however, do not support this. Instead, he is finding that insurgency is more common in areas in Egypt where change has not taken place. Thus, cultural traditionalism, not cultural change, may be the most important predictor of insurgent violence.

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