Fatalism in Post-Revolution Egypt

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Abstract

Fatalism is the belief that forces outside of our control largely decide our future. It has traditionally been thought of as a single overarching idea. One recent study using the World Values Survey for the 2005-2010 wave found that social and religious fatalism are strongly correlated in most countries but not in others, including Egypt. This paper examines these two fatalisms in Egypt during the political opening created by the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Interviews were conducted with 136 adults in the months immediately following the June 17, 2012 Presidential election. In line with the WVS results, we found two unrelated dimension of fatalism: social and theological. The social correlates of these different dimensions are quite distinct, and each fatalism has different implications for political action. Social fatalism is associated with being older and female and is critical for willingness to engage in protest. Religious fatalism is negatively related to education and has no impact on protest potential. We conclude that fatalism has multiple dimensions that need to be separated to understand their origins and their implications for political action.

Introduction and Significance

Fatalism is the belief that life events are outside of our individual control. Those who are fatalistic believe that some outside force (nature, God, luck, etc.) controls and/or plays a significant role in determining their future; those who are not fatalistic believe that they control and set their own future.

Fatalism has been linked to a range of behaviors. Those who are fatalistic are less likely to set money aside for their future (Shapiro and Wu, 2010). They are more likely to turn down potentially life-saving surgery (Hamdy 2009). Fatalistic ideology may represent a significant obstacle to entrepreneurship and investing in the future (Ruiu 2012). These are but a handful of behaviors amongst many more. For a concept that is so integral to the way many live their lives fatalism is understudied. The research that has been done has been largely compared different nations and to help understand its origins and consequences.

This research focuses on Egypt. In this culture, it is common to use the term 'God-willing' as an alternative response to answering in the affirmative. This is most common in situations were the individual is showing intent to perform an action in the future that is not necessarily guaranteed. The specific term has a basis in Islamic teachings; however, it is common for Christians in Egypt to use the term or a similar counterpart that conveys the same meaning. Egypt is comprised predominantly of Sunni Muslims (~90%), with a significant minority (~10%) of Coptic Orthodox Christians.

The theological belief shared by the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) is that there is a sense of divine-determination. God is believed to be Omniscient, or knowledgeable of our future before it occurs. Different religions and different subsets

within each religion have debated the extent of how Omniscience co-exists with free choice for centuries.

The belief for the two relevant faiths is that God knows of our future before it occurs (Omniscient), but that humans have free choice and are therefore able to choose their respective paths. Hence there is a balance between self-determination and divine-determination with the two operating simultaneously. Research has shown that on average, the adherents of different faiths do not exhibit different fatalistic tendencies, i.e., Muslims are no more fatalistic than Christians or vice versa. However it has been suggested that the level of religiosity is positively predictive of fatalism.

Background and Past Research

There are historically two main differing causal theories on fatalism. The Durkheimian view is that income inequality and high level of regulation within a nation are the primary predictors, producing "structural" fatalism (Durkheim 1897, Acevedo 2005). The Weberian view is that fatalism is rooted within cultural factors, more specifically, socialization and public communication, which cause "cosmological" fatalism (Acevedo 2005). A more recent interpretation has suggested that there is an interaction between the two (Ruiu 2012).

The level of regulation as well as income inequality in Egypt is high, so under the Durkheimian theory of fatalism, Egypt should be highly fatalistic. Also, Egypt is a religious nation and based on the Weberian definition it should lean fatalistic (Acevedo 2005). The World Values Survey (WVS) 2005-2010 wave provides evidence both for and against fatalism in Egypt. One question asks about general self-control:

"Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale (1 means —none at all and 10 means —a great deal) to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out."

Egypt's mean score was a 6.0, suggesting low fatalism. But another question asks about "predetermined fate", signaling a religious rationale for fate:

"Some people believe that individuals can decide their own destiny, while others think that it is impossible to escape a predetermined fate. Please tell me which comes closest to your view on this scale on which 1 means – everything in life is determined by fate and 10 means that —people shape their fate themselves. "

Egypt's mean score on this scale was a 2.7, suggesting high fatalism.

Ruiu (2012) performed a cross-national analysis of 21 countries and showed that the two indicators were generally strongly correlated but there were three outliers: Egypt, Male, and Morocco. In Egypt, 54% of respondents indicated the most extreme fatalism tendency: "Everything in life is determined by fate" on the latter statement.

There are several possible explanations. One is that the first statement is a structural fatalism indicator and that the latter is a cosmological fatalism indicator (Ruiu 2012). While they may overlap in most contexts, in a cultural context like Egypt they may be interpreted by respondents as mutually exclusive statements. A second possibility is that the "God willing" culture pervades Egyptian life, leading respondents to endorse religious fatalism while simultaneously endorsing self-determination. At least for Egypt, it

may be better to treat fatalism as multi-dimensional and to examine the origins and implications of social and religious fatalism separately.

Methodology

The interviews for this study were conducted during the Summer of 2012, between June 24th and August 10th. Data collection began following the presidential election, but no interviews were done during the immediate week due to possible complications. The survey was designed during that Spring of 2012, and was originally written in English. It consisted of 3 pages total, the first two pages were predominantly statements with which the respondent would answer in a standard 5 point Likert scale. The final page was comprised of social background questions.

In Egypt, collaboration was made with a professor of social psychology at Ain Shams University, Dr. Mohammed Khalil. Dr. Khalil aided in translating the survey while ensuring the indicator's meanings have not been altered to maintain legitimacy. Also, Dr. Khalil provided an avenue for testing the actual survey. The survey was administered to roughly 15 masters and pre-doctoral students as well as 3 PhDs, including Dr. Khalil. Only Dr. Khalil was familiar with the survey beforehand. It was altered afterwards based on feedback and interpretations and put in its finalized form. Internal Review Board for Human Subjects approved the survey questionnaire (IRB protocol # 2012B0274).

We followed a convenience sample with efforts to ensure social diversity in the sample to make it as representative of the adult population as feasible. A total of 136 individuals were surveyed. To insure social diversity in the sample, I selected 15 different, unique locations with college students, older adults, protestors and counterprotestors in public settings, and workplaces (both privately owned and governmental). Each site

surveyed provided between 5-20 surveys. In order to gain access to these locations permission was sought from the Bureau for Statistics and Mobilization, a similar institution to the IRB within Egypt. Professors in both the American University and Ain Shams University in Cairo, Egypt agreed to distribute paper copies to college students. Access to students at Alexandria University was also granted. Personal contacts were used to secure access to employees in a governmental agency and in a private company to create access to middle and working class respondents. Finally, interviews were also conducted in public areas such as Tahrir Square to get the opinion of the significant activist population, both pro and anti President Morsi. Within all settings a diverse group of political affiliations was surveyed including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis (a more conservative Sunni group), Coptics (Christian minority), and seculars/liberals. All respondents had the right to refuse cooperation at any point. Table 1 shows how the convenience sampling lined up with population estimates.

There were fewer females in the sample due to cultural constraints. By Egyptian norms, women are not as numerous in public settings and are discouraged from talking to males without the presence of a male family member. This meant that female respondents were underrepresented and came from either one of the universities or a private workplace. All women who were interviewed were either in a group of peers, or with a male counterpart. The potential implications of this are discussed below.

The other potential indicator that may not be representative of the population is educational level. Our sample had roughly 70% either with a college degree or currently enrolled, which over represents the college population of Egypt. Roughly 75% of Egypt's population is under the age of 25, of which 30% attend university but only half (15%)

graduate. Hence, one would expect between 15 and 30% of the sample to be enrolled or a degree holder.

In all public settings the interviewees were approached and asked if they could participate in a survey study. If they showed that they could comprehend the questions being asked and that they were at least 18 years of age, they were considered eligible. For safety purposes the IRB required only oral approval and no handwritten consent forms were used. Within private companies and universities a short recruitment script was provided to supplement the oral consent script. This helped ensure that the employees and students did not feel coerced into participating.

In the context of this specific paper, there are two main dependent variables of interest: social and religious fatalism. These two indicators of fatalism were tested with two respective statements: "*I decide my future*", and "*God has decided my future and it is a matter outside of my control.*" Both questions used 5-point Likert scales with "5" being "strongly agree." The second indicator used in the WVS differed in the language used, most notably the word 'destiny' and 'fate'. Therefore to make the indicators clearer within this cultural context a more straightforward statement was designed that featured God. These statements were intentionally designed to contradict each other by adding to the latter part of the God statement, "...and it is a matter outside of my control." They were placed right after each other on the survey so the individuals were aware of which responses they put for both. Finally, both statements were made in the affirmative so that any potential effects of a traditional positive response bias would not differentially affect either statement.

The major social background factors explored were age, gender, and educational level. Age was based on a numerical value and, in the cross-tabulation, was divided into two

categories: 18-25 and 26+ to separate young adults. Education was based on highest degree attained or current enrollment. Reflecting the hierarchy of educational opportunities in Egypt, we used the following rank ordering: 1 = no formal schooling; 2 = primary education (up to 8th grade); 3 = high school educated; 4 = vocational education; 5 = pre-university education; 6 = college educated; and 7 = professional education. In the cross tabulation, we split college educated vs. lower. Gender was treated as a dummy variable (male = 1; female = 0).

We were also interested in the likelihood of protesting in the future, which we predicted should be negatively related to fatalism. The exact statement was, "I plan on being more involved in future protests," to which the respondents indicated their opinion using a Likert scale (scored 1-5 with 5 meaning "strongly agree").

We use a combination of cross-tabulations, correlations, and ordinal logistic regressions to evaluate the associations among these various factors.

Results

The two fatalism indicators are uncorrelated (r=.014), suggesting that they represent distinct dimensions of fatalism. The mean for "I decide my future" is 4.05, suggesting low fatalism and a high sense of self-determination. But the mean for "God has decided my future and it is a matter outside of my control" was 3.32, indicating a moderately high level of religious fatalism. It is also valuable to note that the mode for the religious fatalism measure was a 1, the strongest affirmation that God decides our future. Table 2 provides the summary statistics for the two fatalism indicators. The percentage responding with each level is provided in Figure 1 (social fatalism/self-determination) and 2 (religious fatalism). This contradictory result resembles the conflicting responses found

by Ruiu (2012) using the 2005-10 World Values Survey suggesting that, at least in Egypt, strong religious fatalism is compatible with affirming self-control for many respondents. Since the survey language was designed to maximize the likelihood of a difference between the two forms of fatalism, these seem to be valid responses. Table 3 shows a cross-tabulation of the two fatalisms, showing a majority of respondents endorsing a "4" or a "5" for both questions, i.e. supporting both religious fatalism and self-determination.

D'Orlando et al. (2010) found that three significant social correlates of fatalism are age, gender, and education. Younger respondents, men, and the more educated are less likely to display fatalism. We used multiple regression to estimate the effects of these three variables on the two types of fatalism. Social fatalism (i.e. a low score on the fatalism/self-determination index) is positively related to being older and being female (Table 4). Education is not statistically significant. By contrast, for religious fatalism (i.e. "God determined my future"), educational level and gender are statistically significant predictors but age is not significant. Religious fatalism is positively related to lower education and being male (Table 5). Finally we used cross-tabulations to confirm the relationships among these variables.

For these cross-tabulations, we collapsed age, gender, and education into two categories as outlined in the methodology section. The cross-tabulation between social fatalism and gender showed that only 3.8% of all men were socially fatalistic as compared to nearly 10% of females (Table 6). Age had a similar result with 3.6% of all 18-25 year olds being socially fatalistic compared to 8.1% of those who were 26 and over (Table 7). For religious fatalism, 65.6% of respondents who had less than a college education were

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highly fatalistic as compared to 36.5% of those who had at least a college education (Table 8).

Both statements had unique predictors which reinforces the notion that they are separate dimensions of fatalism. What about their implications for political action? To address this, we used our two types of fatalism to predict willingness to engage in future protest. This regression analysis showed that self-determination is strongly positively related to willingness to protest but that religious fatalism is not a significant predictor (Table 9). In sum, those who claim self-control over fate are more likely to engage in proactive protest action while religious fatalism does not affect this. We also tested the effect of age and gender on protest potential net of social fatalism, but only social fatalism was statistically significant.

Discussion

These results implicate two main findings. The first finding is that Egypt does appear to respond to two different fatalisms, which we termed social and religious fatalism, in support of the idea that there are multiple dimensions of fatalism. The second finding is that these two dimensions of fatalism are predicted by different social factors and have different implications for political action.

The social correlates of social fatalism were as expected based on past research. For gender, a potential cultural explanation is that since Egypt is a patriarchal society, women do not have control over major aspects of their daily lives. Decisions to marry, take a job, and attend college as well as domestic roles are socially prescribed in ways that are quite different for men and leave men with more choice. Men have a lot more freedom to move

about and interact publically, while women tend to be more reserved publically. Culturally there is a male companion rule where women are not often seen interacting publically alone or without a male family member present. This sense of dependence has far reaching consequences both socially and politically. In this way it is not unusual for fewer women to agree with "I decide my future" because there are elements within the culture of this specific society that are outside of their direct control.

The age relationship for social fatalism also fits the expectation: younger individuals tend to be less fatalistic. There are two relevant explanations, one of which is generational (i.e. reflecting unique experiences of a young cohort) and the other more rooted in life-course change. For this generational explanation, the idea is that different cohorts have experienced different political rule and respond in terms of this. The older generations are more fatalistic because they have seen nothing but military and one-party authoritarian rule for the entirety of their lives. They see this as normal and respond fatalistically. The younger cohort has, by contrast, seen protests topple a longstanding President and take this as normal. This suggests that the young respondents see more possibility for change. The second explanation is that this may be a life-cycle process in which individuals become psychologically less optimistic with aging. Fatalism then becomes a more appropriate response.

The religious fatalism indicator showed more complexity. There was a very strong relationship with the educational component (P<0.001) and a significant gender component (P<0.05).

Explaining education's role has a much more deep theological basis, which we will only briefly discuss. Theologically speaking there is technically a 'correct' response to the

statement of " God has *decided* my future and it is a matter *outside* of my control." The belief shared by the two religions represented is that God *knows* their future. Due to the belief of free-will God knows how we as humans will act and therefore knows our future; however, it is not God who actively *decides* our lives. For this purpose we intentionally added the second phrase because it was determined that it was possible that some people would not differentiate "God decides" versus "God knows" and therefore adding "and it is a matter outside of my control" should have removed any theological reason to agree with the statement. Still, it is possible that those who are less educated tended to not distinguish the technical language between the two. Interestingly, religious affiliation does not affect fatalism. Within our data, religious affiliation (Sunni Muslim or Coptic Christian) did not have a statistically significant relationship with religious fatalism, which supports this notion. We can therefore attribute this to be driven by a 'cultural norm' response. This goes back to what was discussed in the introduction with Egypt being a "God willing" society where routine activities and life outcomes are always attributed to God giving us the ability to act or not act. Therefore, it is likely that those with a lower education level on average are more likely to follow the cultural script.

Conclusion

The lack of any statistical relationship between social and religious fatalism as well as the data that suggests the most agreed upon predictors of fatalism are actually mutually exclusive strongly supports a modified theory of multi-dimensional fatalism.

If there are indeed different types of fatalism and the term is not holistically exclusive, then it is possible to be religiously fatalistic without being socially fatalistic, and

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vice versa. This in essence redefines fatalism. It may then be possible that a few of the trends that have been shown to be correlated with fatalism are actually better predicted by specific dimensions of fatalism, as was suggested by the exclusive relationship between social fatalism and protest willingness. It is therefore reasonable to predict that certain behaviors that have been historically attributed (generally) to fatalism are better predicted by religious fatalism. We would predict that religious fatalism will have paramount importance within the public health realm. For example, a study in Egypt showed those with a 'God-willing' attitude were less likely to undergo potentially lifesaving surgery, supporting this potential theory (Hamdy 2009). From our results, those endorsing self-determination are more willing to engage in protest but religious fatalism has no significance.

The different causal theories (Durkheim's structural and Weber's cosmological) have largely failed to recognize the potential that the 'fatalism' they bring about is in reality not the same object at all. This proposes a potential future study that follows the premise of Ruie (2012) that cosmological fatalism and structural fatalism are both at play with our implication that they are likely at play predicting entirely different items.

The final important note is that of the possible extent of multidimensional fatalism. This study specifically explored two indicators of fatalism. There may be more than these two dimensions. The recent studies that strongly support a multi-dimensional theory of fatalism point to a few related dimensions (Esparza and Wiebe, 2008). It may be possible that, for example, social fatalism has various subsets that could be better tapped with varying indicators, i.e., luck or self-control, that people may respond differently to but that

will likely still be related. It is worthy to mention once more that our data strongly suggests that *religious fatalism* should be it's own entirely independent category.

This study explores a specific case study (Egypt) to understand whether or not their response to the WVS statement was survey error. The data does have implications that help shed light on our understanding of fatalism and how it has evolved over the years; however, a more generalized study that focuses on designing a universal fatalism scale needs to be a priority within this field.

Table 1. Demographics of Egypt as compared to the sample

Demographic	Egypt Population	Sample
Male	51.5%	66.7%
Female	48.5%	33.3%
Muslim	90.0%	90.0%
Christian	10.0%	10.0%
Median Age (years)	25	27.5
Voted Morsi	50.5%	48.9%
Voted Shafik	49.5%	51.1%

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Types of Fatalism

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-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
     n = 120      |  Mean     Mode    Std. Err.     [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
   I Decide       |  4.041667    4     .0779606    3.887297   4.196036
   God Decides    |  3.316667    5     .1323052    3.054689   3.578644
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of Social and Religious Fatalism Responses

Self vs. Divine Determination						
	God decides					
I decide	1	2	3	4	5	Grand Total
1					1	1
2	1	2		1	2	6
3	3	3	5	1	5	17
4	8	6	19	10	16	59
5	6	8	5	3	15	37
Grand Total	18	19	29	15	39	120

Table 4. Ordinal Logistic Analysis of Self-Determination (lack of social fatalism)

I Decide Future	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Education	.9723685	.1197544	-0.23	0.820	.7638342	1.237835
Gender	**2.978298**	**1.184696**	**2.74**	**0.006**	**1.36578**	**6.49465**
Age	**.9605955**	**.0133371**	**-2.90**	**0.004**	**.9348078**	**.9870946**

LR Chi^2 = 13.67
Prob > Chi^2 = 0.0034   AIC = 283 | BIC = 303
Pseudo R^2 = 0.0484

Table 5. Ordinal Logistic Analysis of Religious Fatalism

God Decides Future	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Education	**.658179**	**.089782**	**-3.07**	**0.002**	**.5037696**	**.8599162**
Gender	1.980775	.7190601	1.88	0.060	.9723715	4.034948
Age	.9947575	.0130307	-0.40	0.688	.9695429	1.020628

LR Chi^2 = 16.27
Prob > Chi^2 = 0.0010   AIC = 368 | BIC = 388
Pseudo R^2 = 0.0439

Table 6. Cross-tabulation of Social Fatalism and Gender
"I decide my future"
1- Strongly Disagree, 5 – Strongly Agree | Low score indicates fatalism

Fatalism Score	Male	Female
1	**1.25%**	**0.00%**
2	**2.50%**	**10.00%**
3	12.50%	17.50%
4	47.50%	52.50%
5	36.25%	20.00%

Table 7. Cross-tabulation of Social Fatalism and Age
"I decide my future"
1- Strongly Disagree, 5 – Strongly Agree | Low score indicates fatalism

Fatalism Score	18-25	26+
1	**0.00%**	**1.56%**
2	**3.57%**	**6.25%**
3	5.36%	21.88%
4	57.14%	42.19%
5	33.93%	28.13%

Table 8. Cross-tabulation of Religious Fatalism and Educational level
"God decided my future and it is a matter outside of my control"
1- Strongly Disagree, 5 – Strongly Agree | High score indicates fatalism

Fatalism Score	College or greater	Less than college
1	18.18%	6.25%
2	18.18%	9.38%
3	26.14%	18.75%
4	**11.36%**	**15.63%**
5	**26.14%**	**50.00%**

Table 9. Ordinal Logistic Analysis of Protest Potential

```
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
     n = 125       |  Odds Ratio   Std. Err.    z     P>|z|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Self Determination |  .5947245    .1951639    3.05   0.002    .2122102   .9772388
Religious Fatalism |  .0799296    .1139464    0.70   0.483   -.1434011   .3032604
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

LR Chi^2 = 9.93
Prob > Chi^2 = 0.0070   AIC = 399 | BIC = 416
Pseudo R^2 = 0.0250

Figure 1. Self-Determination
1 and 2 indicate fatalism, 4 and 5 indicate self-determination
Data is in percentages

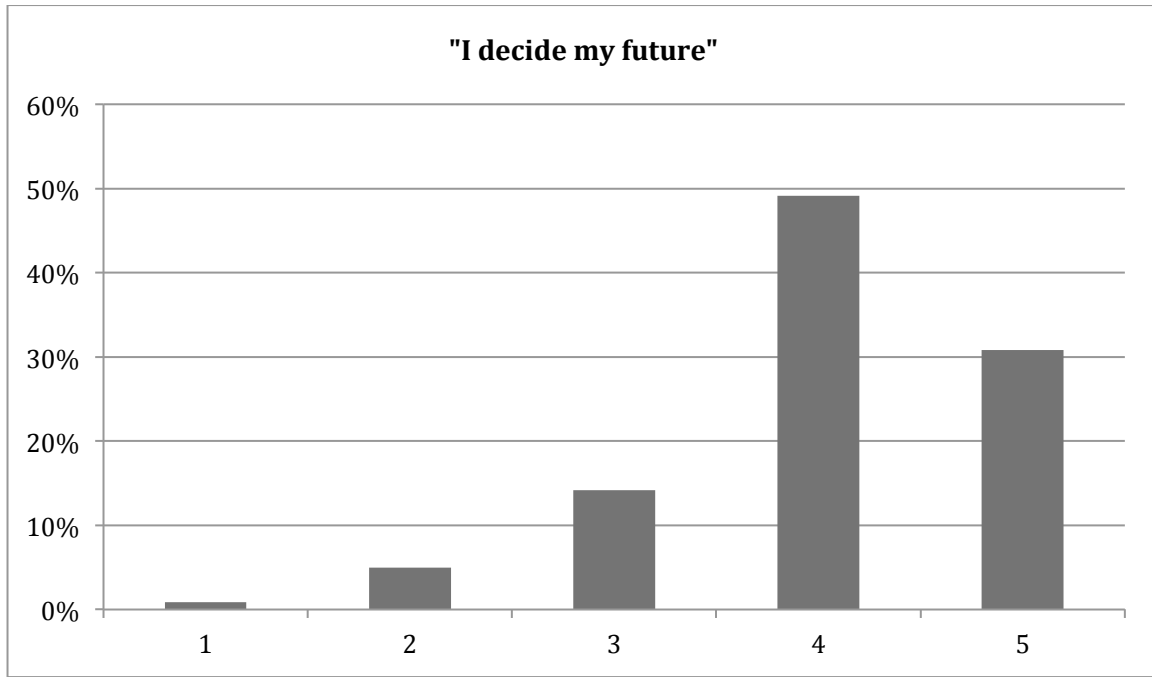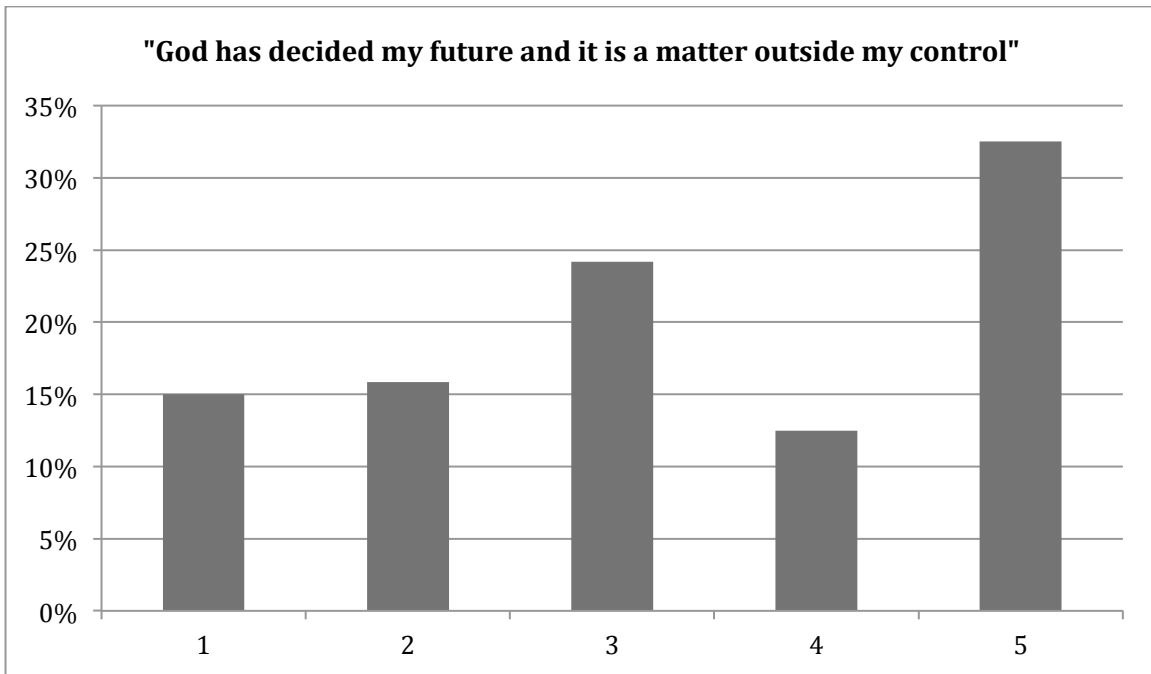**"I decide my future"**

Figure 2. Religious Fatalism
1 and 2 indicate low fatalism, 4 and 5 indicate high fatalism
Data is in percentages

"God has decided my future and it is a matter outside my control"

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