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How exceptional are Islamists? Comparing support for Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces

IMAD SALAMEY and GARY COPELAND

Islamic Exceptionalism?

Islamist movements have advanced in various contemporary forms for several decades, but there is little scholarly consensus in explaining the phenomenal rise of these movements. At least four principal competing scholarly schools of thought provide theoretical interpretations: post-nationalism (globalism and weakened nation-states), comparative institutionalism, neo-Marxism (or class-based explanations) and Islamic exceptionalism in multiple forms.[1] Post-nationalist views assert that spreading globalization and the weakening of the nation-state in recent decades have undermined nationalism.[2] The combination of these factors provides the impetus for communal groups, such as Islamists, to fall back on primordial political identifications (ethnic, religious, sectarian, racial, tribal, etc.) and, at the same time, to transcend a country's borders.[3] The comparative institutionalist argument grounds the growth of Islamist movements in contemporary conditions (often tied to globalization) that place unaccommodating political institutions in the path of ethnic and religious aspirations.[4] In contrast, class analysis uses social and economic concepts to explain Islamic populism in terms of class mobilization and social conflict.[5]

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[1] Masoud Kazemzadeh, 'Teaching the politics of Islamic fundamentalism', *Political Science and Politics*, 31, 1998, pp. 52–59. Kazemzadeh provides the justification for the choice of these four theories which we adapt for this analysis.

[2] Barbara R. Barber, 'Jihad vs. McWorld', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 269, 1992, pp. 53–65.

[3] Ronald Axtmann, 'The state of the state: the model of the modern state and its contemporary transformation', *International Political Science Review*, 25(3), 2004, pp. 259–279. Mustapha K. Pasha, 'Predatory globalization and democracy in the Islamic world', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 581, 2002, pp. 121–132.

[4] Martin Marty and Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalism and Society, Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education (The Fundamentalism Project)*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993. See Martin Marty and Scott Appleby's 'Fundamentalism Project' an edited series from the University of Chicago Press, Vols 2–4, 1993–2004. Michele Angrist and P. Marsha, *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2005.

[5] Farhad Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran: The Migrant Poor, Urban Marginality and Politics*, New York University Press, New York, 1980. Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1989. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essay on the Islamic Republic*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People, and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1993. Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1996. Adam Webb, 'The calm before the storm? Revolutionary pressures and global governance', *International Political Science Review*, 27(1), 2006, pp. 73–92. Imad Salamey and Frederic Pearson, 'Hezbollah: a proletarian party with an Islamic manifesto—a sociopolitical analysis of Islamist populism in Lebanon and the Middle East', *Small War and Insurgencies*, 18, 2007, pp. 416–438.

Post-nationalism makes an identity argument; comparative institutionalism is grounded in the failures of (state) institutions; and neo-Marxism is, of course, grounded in economic and class-based discourse.

These three theories make claims that are not unique to Islamists; Islamic exceptionalism, however, attributes to Islamist populism a unique and inherited faith or cultural system. Islamic 'revivalism' must therefore be examined as a phenomenon on its own.[6] The faith, itself carries values that are inimical to Western thought and democracies and must be understood as an exceptional system.[7] Kazemzadeh argues there are three distinct schools within this paradigm. The first school, cultural relativism, claims that Islam is different from the rest of the world but that current movements simply reflect a normal period of historical cycles resulting in the contemporary politicization of Islam. The second view borrows from the main tenants of the Islamic exceptionalism argument. It sees repression as inherent in the worldview of the Islamic faith and claims that radical Islamists have simply politicized those cultural views. The final school of thought, Occidentalism, positions itself as a rejection against Western political and cultural impositions and finds in Islam a superior tradition to Western and other forms of thoughts and governance.[8] The common denominator, of course, is that all three schools see Islam as a worldview and a way of life that is exceptional from the West and the rest of the world. The common conclusion drawn by exceptionalists, therefore, is that Islamic populism and revival are founded on a strong political rejection of non-Islamic values and ways of life.

This paper evaluates these contending views through a survey-based research design that compares popular support of Islamist to non-Islamist militant groups in the Middle East. Characteristics of the supporters of the militant Islamist Hezbollah in Lebanon are compared with that of the supporters of the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militant organization developed to 'defend [Christians] against impending internal and external threats'.[9]

Lebanese Forces have positioned themselves politically on an antithetical course to that of Hezbollah and closer to that of Western political traditions. The left–right divide may not clearly differentiate the groups, as each provides an opportunistic and conditional support for privatization or the expansion of public programmes while their social orientation has often intertwined with religious conservatism. Yet, rhetorically, both groups appear to mobilize supporters on differential versions of nationalism. As a means to preserve and protect the Christian presence in Lebanon, the Lebanese Forces bases its platform on supporting a strong independent nation-state as well as the positioning of

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[6] While it is a term better applied to Christian revivalism, there are many definitions of 'Islamic revivalism'. For the purposes of this paper, however, we aim to examine the radical Islamic political mobilizations that seek, in different forms and strategies, the eradication of the current traditional or 'moderate' Middle Eastern governments and the expulsion of Western influences. It is from this angle that we look at Islamist movements without ruling out other social, cultural or religious traits.

[7] Samual Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996. Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002. Sanford Lakoff, 'The reality of Muslim exceptionalism', *Journal of Democracy*, 15, 2004, pp. 133–139.

[8] Kazemzadeh, op. cit., pp. 52–59.

[9] See 'The Lebanese Forces Official Website', <http://www.lebanese-forces.org/lfintroduction/index.shtml> (accessed May 2009).

Lebanon within the global context of democratic internationalism. Hezbollah, on the other hand, conditions its own brand of nationalism to the extent with which it stands in harmony with the Iranian brand of pan-Shi'ism, which rejects Western-ordered secular nationalism in favour of a theocratic–sectarian order within the nation-state, also known as Wilayat al-Fakih.[10]

The survey in this study focuses on aspects of sectarian political support, national identification and other contested propositions in order to reveal whether such variables are consistent with the theories outlined above and whether they are exceptional to Islamists. Accordingly, the survey identified supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces and then asked a range of opinion questions related to the various theoretical explanations. Further analysis serves to address the extent to which post-national, comparative institutional or class analysis can explain political support for militant sectarian groups. To the extent that the findings, for both the supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces, are consistent with the theories, more confidence is gained in those explanations; to the extent that the views of supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces are different from one another, then the possibility of Islamic exceptionalism can be entertained.

This paper provides some background regarding Hezbollah and the Islamist movement in Lebanon before elaborating on the various theories that might account for the general appeal of militant groups and Hezbollah in particular. While alternative theories for sectarian militant movements are considered, the key concern is whether there is evidence supporting Islamic exceptionalism. Following that discussion, results from the public opinion survey of respondents who identify themselves as either supporters of Hezbollah or of the Lebanese Forces are analysed. The comparison of the two groups provides evidence as to whether there are unique, or exceptional, characteristics of Hezbollah supporters. The findings suggest that the exceptionalism hypothesis does not help us distinguish between supporters of the two groups.

Lebanese Islamism

Similar to many developing countries in the MENA region and much of the Islamic world, it has been difficult to refer to Lebanon as one state and one people, as conflicting post-colonial 'national paradigms' have emerged, calling into question the viability of a concrete national identity.[11] Beyond its historical diversity, a series of global and regional challenges has fuelled contradictory notions of nationhood in Lebanon.[12] After all, the country has been impacted

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[10] Salamey and Pearson, op. cit.

[11] Imad Salamey and Paul Tabar, 'Consociational democracy and urban sustainability: bridging the confessional divides in Beirut', *Journal of Ethnopolitics*, 7, 2008, pp. 239–263.

[12] Imad Salamey, 'Failing consociationalism in Lebanon & integrative options', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 14, 2009, pp. 83–105. Early post-state national identity crises emerged in 1958 after Sunnis took up pan-Arab Nasserist sentiments against Christians who supported a non-Arab Lebanese national identity. The impasse led to violent street confrontations between both sides. In 1975, charged by pan-Arab national appeals, both Sunnis and Shi'ites mobilized around the Palestinian cause against primarily the Maronites, the latter which opposed the growing Palestinian military and political role in the country, thus leading to a 30-year-long civil war. The 1975 civil war ended only after the Ta'ef Accord which amended the constitution and asserted Lebanon's Arab affiliations.

by tumultuous ideological and regional turmoil, beginning with the decline of pan-Arabism, the rise of radical political Islam in both Iran and Afghanistan during the late 1970s and 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the weakening of secular and national ideologies in much of the surrounding region.

The Ta'ef Accord of 1989, which was brokered by various Lebanese political factions to end the Lebanese civil war, attempted to establish a unifying position over national identity. And with Syria's tutelage over the country and suppression of dissenting voices (1990–2005), the debate over national identity had declined.[13]

Following the Syrian troop withdrawal, however, the debate sharply resurged. The pullout of foreign troops from Lebanon—Israeli in 2000 and Syrian in 2005—offered the Lebanese the opportunity to independently re-examine and reformulate a coherent national vision. Global and regional tensions, however, undermined the efforts to bring some unity regarding the direction of Lebanon. In fact, the post-Syrian, post-Israeli 'independence period' was torpedoed by strong national polarizations leading to renewed sectarian and political strife (2005–2009).

In general, post-9/11 global policies and the Bush Administration's War on Terror had established an environment conducive to ideological and sectarian polarizations, thus further complicating the formation of a coherent Lebanese nationalism.[14] This polarization has been manifested in Islamists' growing opposition of states' 'anti-terror' policies and is reflected in mounting suspicion toward the very foundation of the nation-state and its geopolitical and international commitments.[15] For instance, militant Shi'ite Hezbollah has come to consider the 2004 US-sponsored UN Resolution 1559, deemed by the party as unfavourable to the cause of Islamic resistance against Israel, as non-nationalistic.[16] In geopolitical terms, the party considers the Islamic Republic of Iran's military and financial contributions to the party's anti-Israeli campaigns as being an accommodating nationalist position regardless of international laws or their stipulations.[17] This ethos has driven a wedge between the party and other proponents of state sovereignty and supporters of UN Resolution 1559.

The turbulent events of May 2007 in Northern Lebanon (at the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp) and in May 2008 in Beirut (after the government tried to limit Hezbollah's communications infrastructure) perpetuated the already existing fear that militant Islamists, such as the Sunni Fatah al Islam and the Shi'ite Hezbollah, not only espouse a vision of a state that is antithetical to a

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[13] Imad Salamey and Rhys Payne, 'Parliamentary consociationalism in Lebanon: equal citizenry vs. quoted confessionalism', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14, pp. 451–473.

[14] The early manifestation of Lebanese nationalism emerged following independence from France and the declaration of a Lebanese National Covenant in 1943. Lebanon became a member of the United Nations and the Arab League.

[15] This applies to both Sunni and Shi'ite militant Islamist groups who have opposed the state's crackdown on perceived Islamist 'terrorist' organizations in Northern Lebanon in 2004 and in 2007.

[16] UN Security Council Resolution 1559, passed in 2004, calls for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon, implicating Palestinian groups as well as Hezbollah.

[17] Iran, through Syria, provides a variety of military training and assistance to Hezbollah, a matter considered to be in violation of UN Resolution 1701, which forbids the armament of non-state actors.

nation-state paradigm, but that they would resort to violence to secure their vision.[18]

Despite efforts to undermine existing differences between the various Lebanese sectarian factions over the country's national destiny and the role of the state through the Doha Agreement—which was brokered in May 2008 with the aim to end sectarian unrest and bring the various national groups together—divisions have only deepened with sectarian groups acting above the law or national consensus.[19]

In May 2008, Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah publically declared his loyalty to *Wilayat al-Fakih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists or Supreme Jurist), underlining the perception that Hezbollah's nationalism is secondary to that of its commitment to an Iranian brand of Shi'ism.[20] The party's priorities can therefore be viewed as regional and transnational, with declared aims as to liberate Palestine, defeat colonial forces in the region, and strengthen geopolitical, financial and military ties to Iran, Syria and Gaza.[21] The party's defiant militant declarations challenging international political impositions have only served to increase the party's popularity.

Yet, this presumably militant and often religious (rather than nationalist) characteristic of the party, and that of its supporters, may not be exceptionally Islamist. When driven to a disadvantageous power position vis-à-vis the state, other religious sectarian groups at various historic periods have cast doubt onto their national patriotism and commitment to Lebanese nationalism. For example, the Druze Social Progressive Party, the various Sunni pan-Arab nationalist parties and several Christian groups have each periodically taken militant, local and often religious positions rather than nationalist stands, all while strengthening their respective ties to foreign sponsorship.[22]

In fact, this sectarian proximity to state relationship was positively demonstrated after Hezbollah began its integration into the Lebanese governance

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[18] Fatah al Islam, a Sunni group linked to al-Qaida, attempted in May 2007 to violently overrun the Lebanese Army in the Nahr al-Barad Palestinian refugee camp and in the city of Tripoli in Northern Lebanon and establish an Islamic Emirate. The group was crushed by the Lebanese Army after a long combat that only ended in December 2007. In Southern Lebanon, parts of the Bekaa Valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut, Hezbollah maintains semi-autonomous control with an independent military security apparatus. After a long and escalating national dispute over its arsenal of weapons, Hezbollah waged a decisive military insurgency in West Beirut to suppress opposing groups and force a reverse of the Lebanese cabinet's decision to ban the party's private telecom network. Hezbollah insists on the duality of power between the Lebanese State and its own functions as a resistance against the state of Israel. This compares well with the role played out by Palestinian Hamas throughout the 1990s in the Palestinian Territories and well into 2007 when the group finally waged an armed insurgency against the Palestinian National Authority.

[19] See details of the Doha Agreement: <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID = 44023/> (accessed December 2008).

[20] Various theological Shi'ite interpretations exist as to the degree of commitment, through emulation, an individual must maintain to *Wilayat al-Fakih*. Strict conservatives, such as Hezbollah supporters, would elevate this commitment above any national considerations. See Hassan Nasrallah's victory speech commemorating eight years since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon on 26 May 2010: <http://www.sh22y.com/vb/t12769.html> (accessed April 2010).

[21] See 'An open letter: the Hizballah Program', *al-Safir*, 16 February 1985. Also, Imad Salamey, 'Eyes on Nasrallah', *New Statesman*, 19 November 2007.

[22] Sunni pan-Arab Nasserist groups such as Al-Mourabetoun and the Popular Nasserist Arab Union; Christian groups such as the Cedar Defenders and the South Lebanon Army.

process, which necessitated cross-confessional alliances. By 2009, the party's militant rhetoric was significantly moderated in favour of a multi-confessional rather than an Islamist state. In his 2009 televised address, Nasrallah openly supported Lebanese confessional consociationalism. Of course, Hezbollah's conception of multi-confessionalism necessitated its sectarian and regional dominance over Shi'ite areas within Lebanon.

Such dynamics demonstrate that the course of Lebanese politics is driven by strong sectarian and transnational momentums that have a direct impact on the conception and fate of Lebanese nationalism.[23] This ambiguous relationship between Islamists, sectarian groups and the state is casting doubt on the sustainable viability of the Lebanese State and the national paradigm—a challenge that can be found in many MENA countries (e.g. Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Algeria, Palestine, Pakistan and Afghanistan). Thus, the examination of the Lebanese case can be revealing in various comparative, social and post-independence national experiences, particularly in countries confronting the phenomenal rise of Islamist populism.

Competing Explanations of Islamic Revivalism in Lebanon

The belief systems of militant groups in Lebanon and, specifically, whether supporters of Islamist Hezbollah are significantly different from those of the Christian Lebanese Forces are examined in this paper within the framework of competing theories of the rise of Islamic populism. Our primary interest is to examine the Islamic exceptionalism argument. The question we ask is whether support for Hezbollah takes a unique form or whether it appears to follow the same pattern of support for other populist groups (as represented by the Lebanese Forces in this paper). If the patterns are similar, then there would appear to be nothing unique about Islamists' support. But if the supporters of Hezbollah do not respond in the same way to routine social, economic and political forces as do the supporters of the Lebanese Forces, then we can at least entertain the possibility of Islamic exceptionalism.

To elaborate, we will briefly review the Islamic exceptionalism thesis and then follow it with a review of competing propositions that we will use to compare adherents of the two groups.

First, the cultural exceptionalism hypothesis attributes political behaviours to a socially determinant set of values accumulated by a particular society over a range of historical experiences—or, in this case, inherent in its faith. Samuel Huntington expressed one aspect of the cultural thesis in his acclaimed 'clash of civilization' theory, wherein he associates Islamic societies' unique and exceptional characteristics with the nature of their (religious) belief system and the corollary civilization resulting in these unique sets of political behaviours.[24] Such a hypothesis asserts values in conflict (especially Christian vs. Islamic) and the inherent clash among civilizations. The hypothetical implication of Huntington's view in the Lebanese case would suggest exceptional political values that set supporters of Islamist groups apart from the Christians, among

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[23] Salamey and Pearson, op. cit., pp. 416–438. Salamey and Tabar, op. cit., pp. 239–263. Salamey and Payne, op. cit., pp. 451–473.

[24] Huntington, op. cit.

others, and place them on an ultimate national collision course. This paper examines the exceptional cultural hypothesis by comparing political support between the militant Islamist Hezbollah and the militant Christian Lebanese Forces—the dichotomy where the clash should be most evident. Differences in national identification in terms of national allegiances, respective attitudes toward other co-national sects and perceived national priorities are among other operational variables that would provide strong indications confirming the religion-driven exceptional views in relation to nation-state building.[25]

The post-nationalism perspective, specifically, argues that globalization and the weakening of the nation-state system naturally produce a different set of allegiances and expectations of that state in lieu of other actors.[26] The state should therefore be an auxiliary focus of attention and expectations; identity should be less tied to the nation (as embodied by the state). Instead, it is expected that individuals find transnational allegiances across state boundaries. This is particularly the case when ethnic and religious groups reach out for 'kin' support beyond national borders when confronted by common cultural and political challenges, which their respective nation-states fail to effectively address. Amid the formation of a fragmented and weak state in post-Saddam Iraq, for instance, Iraq's Shi'ites have forged strong political and strategic ties with their Iranian Shi'ite compatriots in a bid to confront perceived Sunni threats. Localized affiliations—such as sectarian, tribal, clan-based or familial—would also be expected in reaction to the state's failures to accommodate local cultural and political aspirations within the national context.

Further buttressing the post-nationalism perspective, Islamic exceptionalism would argue that the Islamic faith, in particular, inclines adherents towards transnational and localized directions. If this survey indeed finds that only Hezbollah supporters conform to that pattern, it would support the theory of Islamic exceptionalism. But if supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces both exhibit that same pattern, the post-nationalism paradigm should be held as a more general explanation of populism and it would undermine the exceptionalist argument. If neither group sees strong affiliations within or beyond the nation-state, then the entire theoretical proposition is subject to question and would also undermine the exceptionalist perspective.

The comparative institutionalist hypothesis attributes to militant Islamic populism the presence of inadequate national institutions that have either undermined or marginalized Islamist aspirations. As a consequence, groups' grievances have been translated into militant political action demanding a greater voice, to use Hirschman's rational choice model terminology.[27] Confirming such a

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[25] Divergent and often conflicting political aspirations drive leaders to seek the support of foreign countries to balance against their national rivals. On the same day of 14 October 2008, the Christian leader of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Gag'a, was meeting with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt for support while at the same time his Christian opponent, Michael Aoun, was meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad seeking Iranian backing. Meanwhile, President Michel Sleiman was meeting with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to strengthen bilateral relations between the two governments, while the Shi'ite Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh was meeting with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to establish formal diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria.

[26] Axtmann, op. cit., pp. 259–279.

[27] Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1994.

hypothesis in the Lebanese context would suggest that political support to Islamists is driven by the perception of deficient national political institutions. Comparing the views of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces toward the state's institutions would indicate varying attitudes toward the political regime and how it performs. A comparative perception of political deprivation and unequal rights showing greater grievances by Islamists would provide solid support for the exceptionalist framework using this thesis. If both groups are high in their sense of deprivation, then it would suggest that this is a general theory; if neither group is high, then comparative institutionalism would fail as an explanation—at least in these cases.

Finally, economic and class-driven views have claimed in various degrees that Islamist populism is a reaction to liberal and global hegemonization. Such views hold that policies of state liberalization—particularly privatization and the deterioration of state-sponsored social programmes—and economic deprivation are substantially responsible for the rise of competing Islamic social networks and, consequently, the growing capacity of Islamists to mobilize the strata of economically deprived and marginalized social groups.[28] Lebanese political Islamization, from this perspective, implies that Islamist support is derived predominantly from the economic underclass. A comparative analysis between the supporters of Hezbollah and those of the Lebanese Forces should underscore respective constituents' social class differences. Again, if both groups are high in this regard, then the theory appears to hold as a general explanation for populist support; if neither group is high, the theory is undermined.

Survey at Lebanese American University

In order to examine these various propositions, a comparative group research design was established in order to compare supporters of the Islamist Hezbollah with those of the militant pro-Western Christian group, the Lebanese Forces. This research design allows the examination of the peculiar characteristics, if any, of Islamist support. For that purpose, a Lebanese American University (LAU) survey was conducted with supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces ($n = 180$) in 2008.

The survey's systematic random sample was drawn from the 2008 official Lebanese landline household phone directory. The phone directory contained over 1 million phone numbers (landlines). One advantage associated with surveying by telephone is the potential to collect a large amount of data within a short period of time, thus limiting the effects of time-laden spurious variables. It also provides greater confidentiality and privacy for respondents. More so than in most Western societies, where response rates to telephone surveys average well below 10 per cent, telephone surveys in Lebanon have proven much more effective, with response rates to medium-length surveys averaging as high as 60–70 per cent. The sample was stratified in order to closely reflect the regional demographic distribution as established by statistics from the National Survey of Household Living Conditions, which was undertaken by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs in 2004.

The survey was carried out by students from the Political Science and International Affairs Program at LAU who received comprehensive training in phone interviewing. Training techniques instructed interviewers on ways and

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[28] Salamey and Pearson, op. cit., pp. 416–438.

means to take into consideration sectarian, religious and political sensitivities of the participants.[29] All interviews were conducted in Arabic via telephone. The survey took about 18–20 minutes to complete and asked a variety of questions designed to test the competing explanations. A screening question was used to determine support for either Hezbollah or the Lebanese Forces. The sample size of the phone survey is 180 and responses to questions vary within the 170s. Statistical significance tests were used in all analyses which, of course, take into account the sample size. Proportion estimates for a sample size of 175 at 95 per cent confidence are ± 0.07. The results reported are not intended to be representative of the Lebanese population, but rather representative of supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces.

For the post-nationalist, comparative institutionalist and class-based analysis, there are three possible outcomes when comparing supporters of Hezbollah with those of the Lebanese Forces. First, both Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces supporters could provide responses consistent with each theory. If that pattern is found, then that theory is generally (rather than exceptionally) supported. But if neither group provides responses consistent with a particular theory, then the theory is generally undermined. Or, it could be the case that only supporters of Hezbollah provide responses consistent with the various explanations, which would suggest that there is some merit to the exceptionalism argument and that the theory may be an explanation for how that exceptionalism plays out in practice.[30] A number of questions designed to tap the exceptionalism argument directly are also asked.

The post-nationalism theory is explored using questions that indicate the respondent's views of the state and bases of identity. Specifically, to gain an understanding of how the respondent views the role of the state, the survey asks what the priorities of the state should be. For identity, the survey asks how the respondents express themselves in terms of identity and what they would be willing to defend the most.

To assess the comparative institutionalism explanation, the survey asks questions that are evaluative of the performance of the state. It also asks questions about the quality of representation respondents feel they receive from their elected officials and whether they feel they receive equal treatment from the state.

To suggest class-based differences, the survey looks at demographics, particularly within the vectors of income and education; the survey also poses some general questions assessing respondents' views of the economic conditions within Lebanon.

Finally, to assess directly the exceptionalism argument, the survey asks respondents about the importance of religion, their views of their neighbour-hoods and questions regarding modernity.[31]

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[29] The survey instrument was designed by various specialists. The survey was reviewed and approved by LAU's Committee on Human Subjects in Research.

[30] There is, of course, a fourth possibility, and that is that the theories are found consistent with the views of only supporters of the Lebanese Forces, but that would go beyond the theoretical interest of this paper and was not found in our data analysis.

[31] Several questions were asked to gauge for attitude toward modernity such as: 'Was life better before computer, internet, and imported life styles?' 'With the new life styles, do you fear for the future generation?'

One theme developed throughout the data analysis and findings is that the views of supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces are generally similar, and where they do diverge it is generally over questions of tactics and political strategy.

Data Analysis

Post-nationalism

The analysis of the post-nationalism explanation for Islamist support began with the fundamental question of identity by asking the respondents how they identify themselves. Needless to say, and as expected, differences between the Shi'ite Hezbollah respondents and the Christian Lebanese Forcers respondents are evident throughout. Still, Table 1 shows that both groups are significantly more likely to self-identify simply as 'Lebanese' more than anything else. And in both cases, they were also more likely to say Lebanese-Muslim or Lebanese-Christian than just Muslim or Christian. Only 13 per cent of Hezbollah supporters did label themselves as Arabic-Muslim, but the strongest conclusion from this table is that both groups exhibit substantially strong national identification. This finding is inconsistent with both the post-nationalism and Islamic exceptionalism arguments, with the possible exception of a fraction of Hezbollah supporters.

Taking identity a step further, the survey asked what the respondents would be most willing to defend. Overwhelmingly, both groups responded by placing the family/clan first, followed by the nation (Table 2). Generally, responses do not seem consistent with the post-nationalism explanation either. About 21 per cent of Hezbollah supporters place their sect or religion as the first to defend, but that was still just less than half the number of those who placed the nation first, compared to about two and half times the number of Lebanese Forces supporters who provided that response.

The post-nationalism argument suggests that the traditional role of the nation-state should be less important than other priorities. Consistent with post-nationalism would be elevating priorities such as preserving community values or improving human rights. Matters of security, national unity and economic growth—traditional state functions—might rank as less important. However, consistent with the findings of Hutson's survey of south Lebanese communities, this survey finds no prevalence of communalism over state loyalty as the post-nationalism argument suggests.[32] Both Hezbollah and Lebanese Forces supporters showed strong adherence to Lebanese nationalism and the state, prioritizing domestic security, national unity and fostering economic growth.[33] The responses for both groups are strikingly consistent, with the only notable difference being a

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[32] Strong support to state-sponsored security institutions were found among Hezbollah supporters by a survey-based study in Southern Lebanon. See Royce Hutson, Athena Kolbe, Ted Haines, Bernadette Stringer, Harry Shannon and Imad Salamey, 'Testing received wisdom: perceptions of security in Southern Lebanon', in Small Arms Survey (eds), *Small Arms Survey 2009: Shadows of War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009.

[33] For spatial constraints, this table and a number of subsequent tables are not shown, but are available from the authors upon request.

Table 1. Which of the following best represents your identity?

		Supporters of:		
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
Which of the following best represents your identity?	Muslim—Shi'ite, Sunni, Druz	14.1	2.6	9.1
	Christian—Maronite, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant	3.0	5.2	4.0
	Lebanese-Muslim	16.2	5.2	11.4
	Lebanese-Christian	3.0	31.2	15.3
	Arab-Muslim	13.1	1.3	8.0
	Lebanese	41.4	51.9	46.0
	Arab	9.1	2.6	6.3
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 176$, $p < 0.001$.

slightly lesser emphasis on domestic security and greater emphasis on national unity by Hezbollah supporters. Again, these findings provide little support for either the post-nationalist explanation or Islamic exceptionalism.

The survey also asked whether sectarian diversity is a source of strength or a weakness for Lebanon. The exceptionalism hypothesis, especially in the form that suggests a clash of civilizations, would predict the Hezbollah supporters as dissatisfied with living in such a diverse environment. Further, the post-nationalism hypothesis would suggest that a diverse state might lead to dissatisfaction that would breed extremist groups of all types. Both hypotheses are dramatically wrong (Table 3). Approximately two-thirds of each sectarian group find diversity in Lebanon to be a source of strength.

Due to the protracted crisis in nation building throughout post-independence, the debate over state and nation building are often intertwined. The post-nationalism analysis provides little evidence of its value as an explanation for the

Table 2. Which of the following are you most willing to defend?

		Supporters of:		
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
Which of the following are you most willing to defend?	Family/clan	42.6	52.1	46.6
	Sect	4.0	1.4	2.9
	Social class	1.0		0.6
	Nation	31.7	39.7	35.1
	Pan-Arab nationalism	4.0	1.4	2.9
	Religion	16.8	5.5	12.1
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 174$, not significant.

Table 3. Do you think that sectarian diversity in Lebanon is …?

		Supporters of:		
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
Do you think that sectarian diversity in Lebanon is:	A source of strength?	68.0	65.8	67.1
	A source of weakness?	32.0	34.2	32.9
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 170$, not significant.

militancy of Hezbollah or the Lebanese Forces. There is no evidence of the rejection of the state or of the desirability to engage in nation building. Diversity is valued. Respondents generally identify themselves as Lebanese in some form and there is a reasonable willingness to defend the nation. Nor is there support, to this point, of the exceptionalism argument. Except for the obvious differences that occur naturally in political debates and electoral campaigns to mobilize adherents, there is little that differentiates the principal views of Hezbollah supporters from those of the Lebanese Forces.

Comparative Institutionalism

The comparative institutionalism argument claims that groups who feel that state institutions work to their disadvantage, by undermining or marginalizing their power position, are likely to become more militant.[34] Accordingly, it is expected that Islamist supporters would express negative evaluations of the state apparatus and to feel disadvantaged. Table 4 supports that exception, presenting clear evidence that both groups evaluate the performance of the state poorly. Over three-fourths of each group say the provision of public services is not sufficient. And when asked about the overall performance of the political system, about half say it is not working (although most believe it is salvageable). The responses, however, indicate that there is generally more optimism than pessimism about the future, but there are many who expect conditions to worsen. While not statistically significant, there is more pessimism among Lebanese Forces supporters than among the Hezbollah.

So, do these negative evaluations also lead the respondents to think that the system works to their disadvantage? Few affirm that their rights and liberties as citizens are well preserved. In fact, about half to two-thirds think they are hardly preserved or not preserved at all, but the differences between Hezbollah supporters and Lebanese Forces supporters are not statistically significant. Moreover, when asked whether they do worse than other citizens in Lebanon, large numbers of both groups say they are treated at least somewhat unequally. Even more challenging is that about two-thirds of each group thinks they are excluded from rights and services provided to members of other sects (Table 5).

The survey also asked about the quality of representation respondents feel they receive from their Members of Parliament and from their municipal councillors. Neither set of elected officials consistently receive high marks. In fact,

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[34] Gurr and Harff, op. cit.

Table 4. How do you feel about public services in Lebanon today?

		Supporters of:		
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
How do you feel about public services in Lebanon today? By public services, I mean the provision of things like water, electricity, transportation, health and education. How do you feel about them?	Excellent	2.6		1.3
	Acceptable	20.5	21.1	20.8
	Not sufficient	76.9	78.9	77.9
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 77$, not significant.

about half respond that their MPs hardly or don't represent them at all. Local officials fare a little better and supporters of the Lebanese Forces are more positive about them, but there is clearly substantial dissatisfaction among both groups of partisans for both sets of elected officials.

Overall, the comparative institutionalist hypotheses fare quite well. There is a strong sentiment among supporters of both militant groups that the state is failing its citizens and that there are biases in the political process. The circumstances surrounding Lebanese state building and the resultant challenges facing the state should make these findings not surprising. But whether expected or not, this theoretical framework suggests these are exactly the circumstances that can lead to extremist forms of political action.

At the same time, these findings do nothing to suggest that supporters of Hezbollah see Lebanese institutions in a worse light than do those of the Lebanese Forces. There is no evidence that suggests that there is something uniquely Islamic about the way Lebanese institutions are evaluated and the resultant political extremism.

Class Analysis

Class analysis suggests that militancy can be attributed to economic conditions as an economic underclass seeks a more advantageous outcome. Table 6 provides an

Table 5. Are you excluded from rights and services provided to other sects?

		Supporters of:		
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
Are you excluded from rights and services provided to other sects?	Yes	65.7	68.8	67.0
	No	34.3	31.2	33.0
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 176$, not significant.

Table 6. Monthly income in US$

| | | Supporters of: | | |
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
Monthly income in US$:	Below $500	41.9	22.2	32.8
	$500–$1000	43.2	36.5	40.1
	$1000–$1500	9.5	15.9	12.4
	$1500–$2000	2.7	7.9	5.1
	$2000–$2500	1.4	7.9	4.4
	$3000–$3500		3.2	1.5
	$3500–$4000	1.4	3.2	2.2
	Above $4000		3.2	1.5
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 137$, $p = 0.03$.

estimate for whether there are grounds for an economic explanation. Almost three-fourths of the respondents report a monthly income of less than $1000.[35] Additionally, the income of Hezbollah partisans is substantially lower. About 85 per cent of Hezbollah supporters have incomes of less than $1000 a month compared to about 59 per cent of the supporters of the Lebanese Forces. In fact, Hezbollah supporters are almost twice as likely to have incomes of less than $500 per month.

Perhaps making the income finding all the more telling is that the education levels between the two groups is not significantly different (Table 7). Hezbollah supporters are twice as likely to have an elementary education or less, but the numbers are small—about 6 per cent. The combined income and education picture presents a context that would lend some credence to class-based explanations. It is also worth mentioning that the measure of income is personal income and the findings point to distinct gender differences in the two groups. Sixty per cent of the surveyed respondents of Hezbollah supporters are female, as opposed to only 40 per cent for the supporters of the Lebanese Forces.

Additional analysis does not present a picture that draws a sharp distinction between the two groups. When asked about job opportunities in the country, no one says they are excellent, but Hezbollah supporters are slightly less likely to see them as fair and slightly more likely to see them as poor. These differences, however, are not statistically significant. In addition, Hezbollah supporters were less likely (but not significantly) to indicate that they or a family member has migrated for job purposes.

Because of the low income levels of the supporters of both groups, there is some evidence to suggest that the economic situation plays a role in attracting adherents to militant groups. The survey does not have enough evidence to conclude how far class-based analyses would go in terms of explanatory power, but it would be a mistake to dismiss them without more substantial analysis.

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[35] The CIA *World Factbook* estimates Lebanon's per capita GDP at $13,100 (2009 est.). See the Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*, Office of Public Affairs, Washington, DC, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html/> (accessed April 2010).

Table 7. Highest education level completed

		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
			Supporters of:	
Highest education level completed:	None	2.0		1.1
	Elementary	4.0	2.6	3.4
	Middle school	11.9	11.8	11.9
	High school	22.8	25.0	23.7
	Pre-college or technical degrees	7.9	11.8	9.6
	College—BA, BS	41.6	34.2	38.4
	Master—MA, MBA, MS	7.9	10.5	9.0
	Professional—MD, JD, PhD	2.0	3.9	2.8
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 177$, not significant.

Exceptionalism

This section directly examines the question of whether Islamic exceptionalism carries substantial explanatory power when comparing supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces. The exceptionalism theory suggests that Islam is more than a religion—that it is a way of life.[36] If that is the case, it would be expected to find Hezbollah supporters to be very religious, or at least presumably more so than the supporters of the Lebanese Forces. Table 8 shows that neither presumption is the case. Only 3.9 per cent of Hezbollah supporters claim to be very religious compared to 10.4 per cent of supporters of the Lebanese Forces. Hezbollah supporters are also less likely to call themselves religious (17.5 per cent compared to 19.5 per cent). In fact, about two-thirds of Hezbollah supporters say they are moderately religious and about 10 per cent say 'not very' or 'not at all' religious. The degree of religiosity between the two groups is not statistically significant.

The exceptionalism hypothesis also suggests that Islamists should be less comfortable interacting with other sectarian groups. If they feel a 'clash of civilizations', they are likely to want to be isolated from other sectarian groups. However, Hezbollah supporters are more comfortable in mixed neighbourhoods than are those who support the Lebanese Forces. Only about a quarter of Hezbollah supporters (vs. 37 per cent for Lebanese Forces) feel safer in a neighbourhood populated dominantly by their own sect.

Additionally, the survey asked a series of three questions designed to tap respondents' views regarding modernity. For both groups, it was generally found that there is concern about modernity, what it brings and how it will affect future generations. In this regard, the survey found no significant differences between the two groups. The closest significant difference found that Hezbollah supporters tend towards both extremes when it comes to fearing for the future generation.

[36] Lakoff, op. cit., pp. 133–139.

Table 8. How religious are you?

		Supporters of:		
		Hezbollah (%)	Lebanese Forces (%)	Total (%)
How religious are you?	Very religious	3.9	10.4	6.7
	Religious	17.5	19.5	18.3
	Moderately religious	68.0	51.9	61.1
	Not very religious	4.9	13.0	8.3
	Not at all religious	5.8	5.2	5.6
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

$N = 180$, $p < 0.10$.

The results of this part of the analysis reinforce the previous findings throughout the analysis: that there is little to suggest that there is anything exceptional about the supporters of Hezbollah when compared to the supporters of the Lebanese Forces.

Strategic and political considerations

Having reached the conclusion that the exceptionalism hypothesis is not well supported by the survey analysis, it should not be concluded that there are no differences between the supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces. The survey found differences on a wide range of political and strategic decisions. This section summarizes some of them.

When asked what type of political system would be best for Lebanon, for example, markedly different results were found. Nearly all Lebanese Forces supporters indicate that they either want a system like the USA or a social democratic system. Hezbollah supporters also frequently favour social democracy, but few want to model Lebanon after the USA and more want a confessional system. It is worth noting that very few supporters of either group want a system governed by religious guidance. The lack of Hezbollah support of such a system is further evidence contrary to the exceptionalist argument.

Differences between the two groups arise when asked about specific reforms. Hezbollah partisans most desire a proportional system, while supporters of the Lebanese Forces favour small majoritarian districts. Regarding economic reforms, supporters of Hezbollah are more likely to want to strengthen the public sector and control economic liberalization while Lebanese Forces seek both foreign and domestic investment. When asked about an overall political strategy, supporters of the Lebanese Forces are more likely to want neutrality while Hezbollah partisans are more likely to provide nationalistic responses and responses that identify their enemies. Strong pluralities of both groups, though, support a national dialogue. A similar pattern is found when asked about defence strategies with a plurality of Hezbollah supporters responding that they support resistance movements.

Finally, respondents greatly differ in terms of their preferences for foreign sponsorship. When asked what country can best help Lebanon achieve its

national priorities, Hezbollah supporters overwhelmingly responded in favour of Qatar and Iran. Supporters of the Lebanese Forces, meanwhile, indicated their support for Saudi Arabia, France, the Vatican and the USA. When asked who they feel closer to politically, Hezbollah supporters frequently responded in favour of Syria and Iran, while supporters of the Lebanese Forces responded in favour of the USA, France and Saudi Arabia. Needless to say, the differences between the two camps are also great when participants were asked with whom they feel closest to religiously. Over one-third of Hezbollah supporters say Iran and frequently mention Palestine and Saudi Arabia. Two-thirds of Lebanese Forces partisans say the Vatican but supporters also frequently mention France and Saudi Arabia.

The overarching point is that both supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces naturally have divergent political views. They view Lebanon's place in the world and in the region quite differently. They also subscribe to different means and goals by which to achieve their objectives. The differences, politically, are very significant. But these differences are in sharp contrast to the many similarities regarding possible explanations for their militancy.

Conclusion

This paper explored the four mainstream explanations for political militant support against the backdrop of the opinions of supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces. It examined post-nationalism, comparative institutionalism and class-based paradigms. Throughout much of the survey analysis, however, particular attention was paid to the theory of Islamic exceptionalism.

Despite relative class-based analysis of support for militant groups showing economic deprivation at play, the findings do not show decisive evidence of a difference between the two sets of respondents. However, the survey did find that a majority of Hezbollah supporters are of lower socio-economic status than their Christian counterparts. Still neo-Marxian explanations based on economic deprivation seem not to be a sufficient explanation for differential militant mobilizations; both Hezbollah and Lebanese Forces supporters are charged with a sense of injustice, inequality and marginalization.

Overall, supporters of both groups express great dissatisfaction with the general economic and political conditions in the country. They recognize state political institutions as failing to provide for effective and fair representation. Explanations built upon economic circumstances coupled with state institutions that fail the citizenry seem to hold the most promise for future research on militants' support.

The Islamic exceptionalist theory, however, receives no support in the survey analysis. Except for the obvious political differences, there is little to distinguish supporters of Hezbollah from the Lebanese Forces. Hezbollah supporters were not found to be on an inevitable collision course with Western values. They held positive attitudes toward inter-sectarian mixing and, contrary to Huntington's thesis, identified more with their nationalism as opposed to religious affiliation. On the other hand, supporters of the Lebanese Forces were found to be more religiously oriented. Such discourse is underscored by Hezbollah's anti-colonial and anti-Zionist rhetoric, providing the party with cross-confessional support

from Sunnis as well as Christians. Pan-Arabists as well as an amalgam of leftists have also turned their support to the party in promise of national resistance and liberation.[37] Thus, there is no basis to suggest that the clash of civilizations is the driving vehicle for political support and mobilization of Islamists; nor is there sufficient evidence to indicate that religious perceptions have undermined national appeals. Theories grounded in the failures of the state and its fruitless economic conditions, rather than theories grounded in Islamic exceptionalism, hold much more explanatory promise for the appeal of militant Islamic groups in Lebanon and, perhaps, the region as a whole.

Alternative to the exceptionalism thesis, Islamist mobilization in the Middle East can perhaps be explained from the perspective of populism. The theory stresses that the emergence of such movements, Islamist or otherwise, often arise from the mobilization of under-represented lower classes triggered by the repression of authoritarian governments or following political breakdowns.[38] The 'people' going against the existing power structure is central to populists.[39] The struggle against a perceived 'elite' responsible for political exclusion represents the major outcry of the movement.[40] A charismatic populist leader is central to the unity and demagogical support of followers. Sectarian communal mobilization, Christian and Islamic, serves populist appeal in closing rank among followers and rendering internal dissent or opposition treacherous and, other times, as defying God (*Takfeer*).

The survey results of this study concur with the various populist themes that characterize support to both the Islamic Hezbollah and the Christian Lebanese Forces. And if indeed Islamists in the Middle East are true populists rather than exceptionally fundamentalists, then the challenge of Middle Eastern democracy and transformation can be revealed in political rather than religious or cultural reforms. Such prospects may need to be critically centred on the ability of state national institutions to be accommodating. Devising inclusionary political strategies for various social strata of society remains the essence of state building and for the containment of populist tendencies.

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[37] See public opinion survey by the Lebanese English daily the *Daily Star* on 26 July 2006 that found cross-sectarian support for Hezbollah's anti-Israeli activities, <http://www.beirutcenter.info/default.asp?contentid = 692&MenuID = 46 > (accessed 13 May 2011).

[38] Francisco Panizza, 'Introduction: populism and the mirror of democracy', in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London, 2005, pp. 1–31. Kenneth Roberts, *Populism and Democracy in Latin America*, 2000, <http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/nondatabase/Roberts.pdf > (accessed 31 March 2010).

[39] John Lukacs, *Democracy and Populism: Fear & Hatred*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2005. Benjamin Arditi, 'Populism as an internal periphery of democratic politics', in F. Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London, 2005, pp. 72–98. Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy', *Political Studies*, XLVII, 1999, pp. 2–16.

[40] Arditi, op. cit.

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