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Social Relationships and the Prevention of Anti-Christian Violence in Egypt

Jason Brownlee

Institutionalist accounts of sectarian and ethnic conflict tend to emphasize national divisions. For the "master cleavages" of identity politics to shape behavior, however, they must be reproduced at the local level. Otherwise, citizens will not experience private disagreements in terms of officially promoted differences. This finding comes from extensive fieldwork on collective assaults upon Christians in Qena, Egypt. The Egyptian state favors Muslim citizens over Christian citizens, but in Qena local practices eclipsed this national hierarchy. The likelihood of attacks on Christians depended not on how the state categorized Egyptian governors (Muslim or Christian), but whether the governors reproduced Muslim primacy in their social relationships.

In January 2013, Egyptians were engulfed in a political whirlwind. The elected president, Mohamed Morsi, a member of the conservative Muslim Brotherhood, had circumvented Egypt's judiciary, pushed through a divisive new constitution, and appeared to be instituting a new brand of Islamist authoritarianism. His opponents, having failed to stop the new constitution, were beginning a national campaign to delegitimize his presidency. As many Egyptians hunkered into pro-Islamist and anti-Islamist camps, the country's Christians (also known as Copts) were pinched between social discontent and official prejudice.

During this fraught period, Muslim-Christian relations in the southern village of Marashda in Qena Governorate took an astonishing turn for the better. Local Muslims had accused a Christian man of sexually assaulting a Muslim girl. Incensed, they threatened to escalate the rumor, soon proven baseless, into a riot.[1] Social upheaval loomed. Just three years prior, in 2010, Qena governor Magdi Ayyub had refused to protect Christians in the nearby town of Farshut from a gossip-fueled rampage.[2] Since that time, attacks on Christians had increased all over Egypt, particularly after the country's longest-ruling president, Husni Mubarak, was deposed in early 2011. But the course of events in Marashda in early 2013 defied these trends. The new Qena gover-

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1. "Ten Arrested over Sectarian Strife in Qena, Upper Egypt," *Ahram Online* (Egypt), January 19, 2013, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/62839/Egypt/0/Ten-arrested-over-sectarian-strife-in-Qena,-Upper-.aspx.

2. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), "نجع حمادي: شهود على الفتنة — تقرير بعثة تحقيق ميداني" ["Nag Hammadi: Witnesses to the Strife — Fact-Finding Mission Report"] (Jan. 2010), https://eipr.org/sites/default/files/reports/pdf/Naga_Hammadi_Report2010.pdf.

HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.3751/72.1.14

nor, ʻAdil Labib, unlike his indifferent predecessor, responded to distress calls from the local bishop and ordered police to disperse the angry crowd. Labib's brisk intervention quelled initial aggression that was likely to spread. Marashda's turn from suspicion to stability seemed all the more surprising because Governor Labib, who stopped the incipient Muslim mob, was himself a Muslim, while his predecessor, Ayyub, who had left Christians vulnerable in Farshut, was a Christian. Further, the governor in 2013 intervened during a moment of unprecedented national polarization and when the country's chief executive was a prominent Islamist.

The seeming idiosyncrasy of the Marashda incident actually reveals a pattern in identity politics and intergroup relations in Qena. Even during the most "sectarianized" moments of national politics, the frequency and severity of violence against Christians in Qena has fluctuated based on local social relationships, particularly whether or not the governor has reproduced official Muslim primacy through his interactions with locals. This finding is based on a range of previously untapped sources, including Arabic and English reports on anti-Christian violence in Egypt, four field trips to Egypt (including three to the governorate of Qena) between November 2012 and March 2014, and over four dozen interviews, the majority with residents of Qena.

Political science scholarship in and on Egypt tends to focus upon Cairo. I opted to work in Qena (as well as conducting research in Cairo). The governorate's profile and recent history complement prior Cairo-centric studies.[3] Additionally, Qena itself provides analytically useful and politically consequential variations in conflict across time. Home to nearly three million Egyptians, Qena hugs a semicircular eastern curve in the Nile River 350 miles south of Cairo and 140 miles north of Aswan. It has ranked as the most impoverished governorate of Upper Egypt; an estimated 78% of the people are considered "poor" or "near poor."[4] Officially measured at 7%, Qena has one of the larger concentrations of Egyptian Christians, also known as Copts, in the country. Some areas in Qena have a particularly high portion of Christians; the northern city of Nagʻ Hammadi, famous for a trove of early Christian texts discovered there in 1945 and as the site of an infamous drive-by shooting in January 2010, is estimated to be 40% Christian.[5]

Inside Qena I developed a paired comparison of the incidents that took place in Farshut and Marashda. Although still susceptible to criticism, controlled comparisons remain one of the most powerful inferential tools for small sets of cases.[6]

3. Mamoun Fandy, "Political Science without Clothes: The Politics of Dress or Contesting the Spatiality of the State in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 87–104; see also Richard Snyder, "Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Mar. 2001), pp. 93–110.

4. Egypt Network for Integrated Development, "A Profile of Poverty across Egypt and Recommendations," Policy Brief No. 015 (2014), p. 4.

5. These numbers derive from the 1986 Egyptian census, the most recent official calculation, cited in Mark Purcell, "A Place for the Copts: Imagined Territory and Spatial Conflict in Egypt," *Ecumene*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Oct. 1998), p. 435.

6. David Waldner, *State Building and Late Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 15–17, 230–33; James Mahoney, "Nominal, Ordinal, and Narrative Appraisal in Macrocausal Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.104, No. 4 (Jan. 1999), pp. 1,154–96; James Mahoney, "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis," *Sociological Methods and Research*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (May 2000), pp. 387–424; Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Boston: MIT Press, 2005).

Despite the common charge that paired comparisons are no more valid than small sample correlations, carefully structured pairings do more than line up independent and dependent variables: they provide the evidentiary basis for specifying causal linkages among those variables.[7] The ability of such cases to address potentially confounding variables is particularly strong when the pairing comes from within a single country, rather than across two countries that may vary in many respects.[8] Farshut and Marashda were chosen because they share a number of similarities — the two communities are near Nag' Hammadi and in the same Coptic diocese — but evinced dramatically different responses to anti-Coptic sentiment, specifically the escalation of sexually charged interfaith gossip in late 2009 in Farshut and the containment of analogous tensions in Marashda in early 2013. These contrasts enable a detailed comparison through process tracing and provide theoretical implications that extend far beyond Qena.

The research design underpins a larger theoretical contribution on identity politics. Social scientists have come a long way toward integrating institutionalism and constructivism. This scholarship has argued that identities are not preexisting or fixed, but actively produced by political and social processes. In this area, they have pushed debates in the social sciences beyond "greed versus grievance" or primordialism.[9] At the same time, multi-country studies still tend to operationalize ethnicity based on official categories or identity boundaries that manifest during conflict. Such methods abrogate the authors' ostensible recognition of constructivist processes. Rather than revealing new phenomena, these methods occlude the ways social practices shape identities and they may overstate the explanatory power of formal rules.

7. Dan Slater and Daniel Ziblatt, "The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 10 (Oct. 2013), pp. 1,311–1,313.

8. For example, iconic paired comparisons include India and Pakistan and even France, Russia, and China, groupings that are prone to invite more objections and rival hypotheses than the present study of two towns in the same governorate.

9. Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). On greed and grievances, see Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," World Bank, Policy Research Paper No. 2355 (May 2000); Nicholas Sambanis, "A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War," *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2002), pp. 215–43; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Dec. 1996), pp. 715–35; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Feb. 2003), pp. 75–90. For works that see grievances as political constructs, see Stathis Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence': Action and Identity in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Sept. 2003), pp. 475–94; Daniel N. Posner, "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (Aug. 2004), pp. 529–54; Lars-Erik Cederman and Luc Girardin, "Beyond Fractionalization: Mapping Ethnicity onto Nationalist Insurgencies," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Feb. 2007), pp. 173–85; Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis," *World Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Jan. 2010), pp. 87–119; Kanchan Chandra, "Introduction," in *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, ed. Kanchan Chandra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1–50; Evan S. Lieberman and Prerna Singh, "The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Oct. 2012), pp. 1–24; Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Whereas recent political science work has read "master cleavages" off of official state institutions,[10] the fieldwork evidence from Qena and Cairo shows such cleavages depend on local social life. For example, the modern Egyptian state engrained a conception of Egypt as a Muslim country, where Christians are a "protected" (i.e. subordinate) minority. Successive rulers reinforced this cleavage.[11] Over time, the institutionalization of Muslim-Christian difference over a shared belonging as Egyptians led to the state's prejudice in the provision of public goods, including security, to Christians. This posture in turn incentivized Muslim criminal and political entrepreneurs to promote violent collective action against Egyptian Christians. Despite the official promotion of Muslim-Christian difference, though, collective aggression toward Christians remains uncommon. Relations in Qena help explain why.

In northern Qena, the difference between whether the governor emboldened or deterred anti-Christian assaults grew out of his everyday interactions with area Christians. These interactions either reproduced the national Muslim-Christian cleavage or countered it. Notably, the governors' social practices mattered more than the governors' "attributes" in terms of the national Muslim-Christian hierarchy. Ayyub, a Christian assigned to Qena, reinforced the national prejudice against Christians, while Labib, a Muslim administering the same area, countered the prevailing categorization by mingling with the people of the governorate. In short, treating national categories as "causes" of major identity conflicts (and civil wars) is as unsubstantiated as assuming the Egyptian state determined levels of violence across Qena. Master cleavages gleaned from national institutions prove only as potent as the local interactions that validate them.

DATASETS, SOCCER JERSEYS, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Researchers of "ethnic" conflict have found that identities can be plural and shifting, a point that holds for other forms of intergroup conflict. Kanchan Chandra described how "individuals have multiple ethnic identities that can change endogenously to political and economic processes."[12] At the same time, individuals do not simply "choose" their identity categories. For example, the sources of ethnicity — a set of categories, not attributes — tend to be both inherited and sticky. Political actors affect, but do not independently determine, which ethnic identities remain "nominal categories," because "an individual's descent-based attributes make her eligible for membership," and which identities will be "activated," by "professing membership" or being "assigned membership by others."[13]

The concept of activation means supposedly immutable identities are actually highly contingent: any prevailing category exists only insofar as it has emerged *over* alternative understandings.[14] At any moment, however, the processes that bring out certain identities may be invisible, leading scholars to assign the activated identities permanence. In civil wars, for example, the most overt identity boundaries may loom and

10. Kalyvas, "Ontology of 'Political Violence'," p. 476.

11. Paul Sedra, "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: Coptic-Christian Communities in Modern Egyptian Politics." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Apr. 1999), pp. 219–35.

12. Chandra, "Introduction," p. 6.

13. Chandra, "Introduction," p. 10.

14. Chandra, "Introduction," p. 20.

seem as if they are "always already there."[15] Researchers now understand such "master cleavages" to be a politically built organizing frame that "simplifies, streamlines, and incorporates a bewildering variety of local conflicts."[16] It follows, as Stathis Kalyvas explained, that one must take care when assigning micro-violence a group moniker: "If targets of violence are selected along lines that go beyond group attributes, then the violence cannot be described as simply ethnic, class-based, et cetera."[17]

Demystifying "ethnic" or "political" violence requires reverse engineering the social processes that produced seemingly coherent group boundaries.[18] Lisa Wedeen suggested one approach, looking at how persons instantiate boundaries and categories through everyday processes of meaning-making.[19] She noted that anthropological research on refugees in western Tanzania found they experienced levels of "Hutuness" and "cosmopolitanism" based on the conditions in which they lived.[20] In order to scrutinize other cleavages that may seem "always already there," she recommended quantitative researchers "list the range of identifications that might take on political salience . . . while explaining why others are unlikely to do so."[21]

While Wedeen, Kalyvas, and Chandra considered how to treat identity categories as political and social *effects*, more recent works evince a gap between these conceptual advances on one hand and measurement practices on the other. Both the Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min's Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset, and Evan Lieberman and Prerna Singh's study of cleavages in southern Africa illumine the relationship between institutions and conflict.[22] At the same time, they tend to treat institutions as establishing and preserving a limited set of master cleavages. As a result, these works overstate the determining power of institutions while underestimating how dominant identity categories exist contingently and in competition with alternative conceptions.

The EPR dataset seeks to revive the idea of ethnicity as an independent variable. It reports that the exclusion of "politically relevant" ethnic groups from power has encouraged "many [of the] internal conflicts in the post–World War II era."[23] For the authors, "politically relevant" means that "at least one significant political actor claims to represent the interests of that group in the national political arena, or if members

15. Lisa Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (Dec. 2002), p. 719.

16. Kalyvas, "Ontology of 'Political Violence'," p. 486.

17. Kalyvas, "Ontology of 'Political Violence'," p. 481.

18. Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture." See also Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Aug. 2002), pp. 163–89.

19. Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture," p. 717.

20. Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture," pp. 724–25.

21. Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture," p. 725.

22. For example, by examining all size demographic groups (minorities, pluralities, and majorities) in and out of power. In "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel?" Cederman et al. significantly built on Ted Robert Gurr, *People Versus States: Minorities at Risk Project* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000). They also advanced authoritarianism studies that have largely not considered ethnicity, see Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Leonardo R. Arriola, "Protesting and Policing in a Multiethnic Authoritarian State: Evidence from Ethiopia," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 45, No 2 (Jan. 2013), pp. 147–68.

23. Cederman et al., "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel?" p. 88.

of an ethnic category are systematically and intentionally discriminated against in the domain of public politics."[24] The number of "politically relevant" groups in a country is fixed based on the judgments of expert coders over a given time period, while the extent to which the holders of state power reach across those cleavages varies. Some comparativists have already questioned the EPR results based on codings of ethnic dominance in Syria and Iraq, which differ from the other cases due to the wars there.[25] The data, however, also exhibit a meta-problem that extends beyond one or two cases on the extreme ends of political violence.

The question the data raise is not whether more "ethnically fragmented" countries are more likely to experience war, but how one determines what counts as ethnic fragmentation in the first place. Under what conditions do large numbers of people become "politically relevant"? When are people coded as members of ethnic categories making claims on the state, groupings that are then treated as included or excluded? A consideration of two other cases in the dataset — one with multiple civil wars, the other with none — suggests that national conflict itself makes a group "relevant" for data coders. It then becomes unsurprising, and indeed expected, that the EPR finds strong correlations between ethnic group exclusion and conflict onset: the two variables are co-constituted.

Data on Egypt and Sudan (before the independence of South Sudan) demonstrate how the EPR dataset may reinforce the "always-already-there–ness" of identity categories and master cleavages. Egypt and Sudan are neighboring Muslim-majority countries with significant Christian populations. After Egypt's Ottoman viceroys colonized the Sudan in the 19th century, the two countries shared a government until 1956.[26] In the EPR dataset, Egypt under the rule of Husni Mubarak (1981–2011) is coded as having *two* ethnically relevant groups (Muslims and Christians), wherein one group (Muslims) that amounts to 90% is deemed "included." Meanwhile, Sudan under 'Umar Hasan al-Bashir (1989–) is accorded *thirteen* relevant ethnic groups, only one of which ("the Shaygiyya, Ja'aliyyin and Dangala . . . Arab groups"[27]) is labeled as "included," while the others, amounting to 85% of the population, are deemed as "excluded." In effect, Sudan registers as being under minority rule as much as 'Alawi-dominated Syria or Iraq under Saddam Husayn, while Egypt appears ethnically inclusive.

24. Andreas Wimmer, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Brian Min, "Online Appendix for 'Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict'," Wimmer's page at Columbia University (last updated July 27, 2015), www.columbia.edu/~aw2951/AppendixEthnicPolitics.pdf, p. 2.

25. Compare, for example, James D. Fearon, Kimuli Kasara, and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic Minority Rule and Civil War Onset," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Feb. 2007), pp. 187–93; Lars-Erik Cederman, and Luc Girardin, "Beyond Fractionalization: Mapping Ethnicity onto Nationalist Insurgencies," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Feb. 2007), pp. 173–85. Fearon et al. disputed findings from the EPR on ethnic power-sharing by showing that the latter's results appeared highly contingent on whether a single country (Syria) represented ethnic dominance or power-sharing (p. 187). In a subsequent article, Cederman and colleagues responded by retesting Fearon et al.'s ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF) and ethnic executive variable employed. They reported no significant effects. See Cederman et al. "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel?"

26. Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003).

27. "Sudan," *EPR Atlas*, p. 1,375, available on the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich's Geographical Research on War, Unified Platform (GROW^{up}), https://growup.ethz.ch/atlas/Sudan.

The stark coding difference between Egypt and Sudan suggests the EPR data are concealing important processes of identity construction and ultimately producing a causal story that is backward. Excluded ethnic categories attract the notice of coders because of their salience in violent disputes. Meanwhile, identity categories that do not correspond to a master cleavage remain unmeasured. Consequently, the main explanatory variables, group quantity and degree of political exclusion, are not predictors of conflict but artifacts of it. In sum, the EPR does not apply constructivist premises. Rather, the dataset instantiates a worldview — of preexisting groups that leaders include or alienate — that regression tests then validate circularly.[28]

Following the thoughts of Wedeen, one remedy to this problem would be to put ethnic identities and master cleavages in dialogue with alternative categories that carry everyday meaning. Such an approach would attend to ethnic categories and officially promoted cleavages without prejudging that they trump other affiliations. For example, Egyptians from the north of the country tend to be overrepresented in government. The country, however, has not been violently split across its middle. Were regional identities added to the dataset, students could assess under what conditions certain identities (for example, Muslim/Christian) became "relevant" while other categories (northerner/southerner) remained latent. Asking why a commonly understood regional cleavage in Egypt did *not* become a master cleavage, as in Sudan, promises greater analytic gains than asking why a country riven by supposedly preexisting divisions witnessed more conflict than its allegedly more cohesive neighbor.[29]

The challenge of applying constructivist advances also emerges in Evan Lieberman and Prerna Singh's work on the occurrence of civil wars in southern Africa. Considering 11 countries, the authors found a strong correlation between ethnic divisions institutionalized in language restrictions, race-based laws, and other discriminatory practices on one side and the outbreak of armed conflict on the other. Where "trait differences" are present, political entrepreneurs can tie notions of political authority to these characteristics.[30] When these notions become formalized in government rules, institutionalization "provides a convenient set of labels and relevant sets of facts for information brokers to report on 'unfair' distributions of resources and/or biased policies and practices."[31] By looking at the ways institutions have contributed to the salience of certain identity categories, Lieberman and Singh sought to "endogenize the formation of ethnic groups."[32] More precisely, they traced the creation of (i.e., they "endogenized") formal institutions and then ascribed identity- and behavior-shaping properties to these rules.

28. Lisa Wedeen, "Concepts and Commitments in the Study of Democracy," in *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, eds. Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 274–306.

29. The current insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula implies a long-latent, recently activated identity cleavage between Bedouin and non-Bedouin Egyptians. For background, see International Crisis Group, "Egypt's Sinai Question," Middle East/North Africa Report No. 61 (January 30, 2007). On the coding of the conflict, see Lotta Themnér and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946–2013," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2014), p. 554.

30. Evan S. Lieberman and Prerna Singh, "The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Oct. 2012), p. 3.

31. Lieberman and Singh, "Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," p. 5.

32. Lieberman and Singh, "Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," p. 2.

To illustrate how identities form within human interactions Lieberman and Singh recounted psychologist Sabine Otten's hypothetical tiff among rival soccer fans.[33] Imagine that two strangers are sitting in close proximity at a game, enjoying the match and some refreshments. If Person A spills their drink on Person B, the latter's response is likely to be shaped by each person's team preference. B can be expected to react more negatively if A is wearing a jersey of the opposing team. In this respect the effects of the action — spilling a drink — cannot be predicted by the incident itself. Rather, the reaction is produced by the interaction of the two persons. This scenario fits Lieberman and Singh's view of ethnic conflict, where "grievances" emerge when differently categorized people interact.[34] To their credit, they acknowledge that they do not consider alternative, nonethnic identities or look at the interaction between private disputes and master cleavages.[35] By specifying the limits of their approach, they aid future knowledge accumulation. As it stands, though, their treatment does not fully exploit the value of constructivist ontology.

It is not necessarily the case that a jersey of the opposing club will produce tension. Other consequential identity categories may instead be activated.[36] Rather than quarreling because of their clubs' rivalry, the two people may laugh and commiserate over being stuck in the nosebleed section because they could not afford better seats. If they both have children with them at the match, their shared identity as parents may become more salient than their team affiliations. By giving jerseys *a priori* predominance over other symbols, the scenario presupposes a separateness and division — an "always-already-there–ness" — that may not exist before or even after the incident. In a similar manner, Lieberman and Singh's notion of state institutionalization of ethnic categories reifies formal distinctions that may be overridden or produced in the social and private lives of citizens.

In sum, there remains a gap between calls for incorporating constructivist findings and methods that still reify identity categories and take them for granted. The remainder of this paper seeks a more deliberate synthesis of constructivism and institutionalism through empirical work. A full accounting of thousands of counterfactual identities is infeasible. Chandra recommended scholars explicitly theorize the constraints that tend to privilege certain categories over others in what is a vast repertoire of potential identities. The manifestation of ethnicity in human interactions then becomes an object of explanation, as opposed to regional divisions, gender, athletic fan bases, etc.[37] Following this guidance, I focus on the categories of "Muslim" and "Christian" in Egypt. These distinctions have not predated politics; they have been promoted through formal institutions and political decisions. Social relations between local administrators and communities have determined the salience of these identities for intergroup violence and security.

33. Sabine Otten, "Social Categorization, Intergroup Emotions, and Aggressive Interactions," in *Intergroup Relations: The Role of Motivation and Emotion*, eds. Sabine Otten, Kai Sassenberg, and Thomas Kessler (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), pp. 162–81.

34. Lieberman and Singh, "Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," p. 5.

35. Lieberman and Singh, "Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," pp. 4, 6.

36. These reflections are inspired by Kanchan Chandra's illustration of how different ethnic categories become salient depending on social context, from "What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9 (June 15, 2006), pp. 401–2.

37. Chandra, "Introduction," pp. 20–21.

HOW THE MODERN EGYPTIAN STATE PROMOTED A MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CLEAVAGE

Muslim primacy in Egypt has not been "always already there." Rather, a Muslim-Christian hierarchy has been politically erected and periodically contested. Across the interwar period, the 1970s, the mid-1990s, and 2000–2013, the category of "Muslim" bestowed professional and political advantages; official practices incentivized the violent victimization of Egyptian Christians; and collective assaults on Copts rose. At other times, Muslim-Christian relations were comparably tranquil.[38] Hence, attacks on Egyptian Christians have varied in frequency over time, depending on how much the state promoted a Muslim-Christian cleavage over a more inclusive alternative: "Egyptian-ness." In addition to physical violence, Copts have faced persistent de facto discrimination. For example, they have been excluded from judgeships, university deanships, sensitive ministerial portfolios (defense, foreign affairs, and interior), and, with two exceptions, governorships. This pattern upholds conservative Islamic notions that non-Muslims should not exercise authority over Muslims and instead should be subordinates, effectively wards (dhimmis) of the Muslim-led polity.[39]

Seemingly religious language conceals prosaic material incentives for perpetuating hierarchy instead of allowing intergroup equality.[40] Adult citizens seek to provide for themselves and their families in conditions marked by limited resources. When the state discriminates, it deprives members of the "out-group" (Christians) of public goods (including educational and job opportunities) while freeing up more resources for the favored "in-group" (Muslims). As the state converts public goods into "club goods" based on religion or some other category, members of the advantaged group see the benefits of policing group boundaries. Through such behavior, club members ensure that their oversized share of state resources is not "redistributed" equally among all citizens through a repeal of discriminatory institutions. Meanwhile, citizens from the out-group must pay a premium (in extra effort, added risk, bribes, etc.) to reach the same services or opportunities afforded their peers from the in-group. This disadvantage creates an opportunity for local racketeers, who can permit "entry" to non–club members who can afford the inflated cost of entry. Even such side payments raise new problems for members of the out-group. The political gatekeepers can spike the price of entry by stoking public insecurity. In this manner, the state-promoted master cleavage reduces the costs and increases the expected gains for members of the in-group to aggress upon members of the disadvantaged community. Historical evidence shows how this pattern unfolded during the past century.

38. Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2013); B. L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics, 1918–1952* (London: Croon Helm, 1986); Paul Sedra, "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict."

39. Interview by the author with left-wing politician Rif'at Sa'id, November 5, 2012, Cairo. In the Ottoman Empire, dhimmitude entailed a kind of ethnic entente between the empire's Muslim majority and non-Muslim minorities in which the latter would pay additional taxes (jizya) while being exempt (i.e., barred from) military service. Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 56.

40. Lieberman and Singh, "Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence," p. 2.

Before turning to that history, it is valuable to note that the present discussion of Muslim-Christian relations does not imply that either set of communities are monolithic. Indeed, experts on Copts and Egyptian politics from B. L. Carter to Paul Sedra have emphasized that Copts comprise a set of *communities* (plural) and not an undifferentiated bloc. Distinctions of class, political leaning, and affinity for (or dissent from) the church hierarchy have formed salient cleavages among Copts throughout the modern era.[41] The present approach is compatible with the goal of understanding *intra*-Coptic relations, even as this particular research endeavor deals with interactions between Copts and Muslims.

Egyptians alive between the 1919 revolution and President Gamal ʻAbd al-Nasser's death in 1970 experienced the peaks and valleys of intergroup politics as the country rose up for independence, sank into economic and religious strife, then reached intercommunal détente under military authoritarianism. As Egyptians strove to oust the British after World War I, their politicians declared, "Religion is for God alone and the homeland is for all." They endorsed a shared civilizational identity, based on a common connection to the homeland (*watan*), thus superseding the idea of an Islamic national identity.[42] Solidarity with the homeland was symbolized by a flag showing a cross inside a crescent.[43] In the 1930s, economic recession drove cracks through the national community. Christians were buffeted by social prejudice and state discrimination. A new Islamist organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, injected religion into electoral politics and stirred animosity: "Churches were stoned, priests abused, Copts beaten up and occasionally anti-Coptic demonstrations sparked."[44] An already tense situation between the two communities was made worse in 1934 when Deputy Minister of the Interior Muhammad al-ʻIzabi Pasha decreed that Christians seeking to construct churches would need approval from both the central government *and* local Muslims. After Nasser seized power in 1952, he provided Copts with a measure of security.[45] His presidency is recalled by Egyptian Christians as a golden era compared to the difficulties of the interwar period and the decade that followed his death. Reversing some of the discrimination of the interwar period, Nasser repressed the Muslim Brotherhood and authorized new churches to be built.[46]

Nasser's direct successors employed Muslim primacy unsuccessfully as they tried to secure their own power by fomenting social division. First, Anwar Sadat, who held office from 1970 to 1981, made religion a political fault line.[47] He released Islamists from prison and amended the Egyptian constitution to establish shariʻa as "a chief source of legislation."[48] This language removed any plausible ambiguity about the

41. See, among others, Carter, *Copts in Egyptian Politics*; Sedra, "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict."

42. A third category, which this paper does not explore due to space considerations, identifies Egyptians as members of an Arab nation.

43. Carter, *Copts in Egyptian Politics*, p. 290.

44. Carter, *Copts in Egyptian Politics*, p. 272.

45. Carter, *Copts in Egyptian Politics*, pp. 18–19.

46. Sedra, "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict," p. 225.

47. Mohamed Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat* (New York: Random House, 1983).

48. "An amendment in 1980 elevated the role of sharia to "the" chief source of legislation. Clark B. Lombardi, "Constitutional Provisions Making Sharia 'a' or 'the' Chief Source of Legislation: Where Did They Come From? What Do They Mean? Do They Matter?" *The American University International Law Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sept. 2013), pp. 754-57; Nathan J. Brown, *Constitutions in a Nonconstitutional World: Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

state's support for the Muslim-Christian hierarchy. Soon after, in scenes reminiscent of the 1930s, Muslims began attacking Christians. On November 6, 1972, in the town of Khanka in Qalyubiyya Governorate, arsonists torched a building used by Copts for prayer that the government had not authorized to be a church. A parliamentary investigation urged reform of the laws on church building, but Sadat took no action. In June 1981, a fresh controversy over church construction shook the Cairo neighborhood of al-Zawiya al-Hamra. When a group of Muslims began erecting a mosque on private property slated for a church, gunshots were fired. Fighting lasted three days. Over 100 people were injured and 17 killed, including 9 Christians, before the Ministry of Interior intervened.[49] Militant Islamists assassinated Sadat on October 6 of that same year, and Vice President Hosni Mubarak became Egypt's chief executive.

For the better part of two decades, Mubarak worked to suppress armed Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood, which had joined electoral politics. But his policies did not submerge Muslim primacy. In fact, the longer Mubarak stayed in office, the more he enabled anti-Christian attacks. By 1998, Egyptian security forces had brought the insurgent al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya ("the Islamic group") to heel.[50] No sooner had Mubarak's forces ostensibly vanquished the Islamists, however, than they reemerged to prey on the majority-Christian town of Kosheh in Sohag Governorate. In August 1998, while ostensibly investigating the murder of two Copts from the area, security officials tortured hundreds more. It quickly became apparent that, in situations of conflict, the state was as willing to discount non-Muslim lives as the Islamic Group had been. On December 31, two merchants from Kosheh, one of whom was Christian, had an altercation. Over the next two days, Muslims from surrounding areas ransacked the town. Area police stood aside while the assailants killed 20 Copts.[51]

EGYPTIAN IDENTITIES IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

In the first years of the new century, Egyptians began debating their country's political future with historic intensity. As Muslims and Christians grew weary of Mubarak, possibilities opened for replacing Muslim primacy with a more inclusive conception of Egyptians as equal members of a shared homeland.

Like nothing else since the struggle against British rule, Mubarak's fifth six-year term as president (2005–11) united Egyptians of all faiths in opposition to the regime. The pivotal year was 2010. In January, a drive-by shooting in the southern town of Nag' Hammadi in Qena Governorate killed six Copts and a Muslim off-duty security officer.[52] In November that same year, a policeman shot and killed a Christian man in the 'Umraniyya neighborhood of Giza, just west of Cairo. A thousand Copts in the area then

49. Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, pp. 217–19; Nadia Ramsis Farah, *Religious Strife in Egypt: Crisis and Ideological Conflict in the Seventies* (London: Routledge, 1986); Kirk J. Beattie, *Egypt during the Sadat Years* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 270–71.

50. Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 63.

51. Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, "The Road of Thorns from al-Khanka 1972 to al-Kosheh 2000," *al-Watani*, February 13, 2000, available through the Arab West Report, www.arabwestreport.info/en/year-2000/week-7/21-road-thorns-al-khanka-1972-al-kosheh-2000.

52. EIPR, "نجع حمادي" ["Nag Hammadi"].

confronted area police and dozens were injured.[53] 'Umraniyya became Mubarak's al-Zawiya al-Hamra, the moment Christians saw the state espousing national unity while promoting Muslim superiority. These losses colored Egyptians' views at the start of 2011. Just hours into the New Year, a bomb tore through the Two Saints' Cathedral in Alexandria, killing 23 parishioners attending a midnight Mass. Copts and Muslims suspected the state had been involved, either actively or tacitly, to try to bolster Mubarak. If that were the case, the move backfired, pushing Christians to join the January 25 Revolution. Participants in the 18-day uprising resurrected the national solidarity of 1919. In Cairo's Tahrir Square, protesters rallied across boundaries of ethnicity, class, and ideology.[54]

After Mubarak's resignation was announced on February 11, 2011, the inclusive Egyptian identity that had coalesced over a matter of days vanished just as quickly.[55] Mubarak's departure from office left a political void that Islamists rushed to fill. On March 19, 2011, 77% of voters approved a limited set of constitutional amendments, rather than pursuing an overhaul of the 1971 constitution that included Sadat's divisive articles. The referendum affirmed Islam was the religion of the state. Copts and liberals despaired while Islamists celebrated. One ultra-traditionalist Salafi preacher gloated to worshippers they had "conquered the ballot box" and suggested Egyptians with different views should emigrate.[56] When the interim prime minister proposed naming 'Imad Mikha'il as governor of Qena, which would have given the governorate its second Christian executive in a row (after Ayyub), local Salafis blockaded the national rail line running through the area. The transitional government soon capitulated and installed 'Adil Labib, a popular Muslim administrator, instead.[57] Much like Mubarak, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) deemed collective dissent more problematic than communal violence. On October 9, 2011, soldiers in armored vehicles shot and ran over Christian and Muslim demonstrators near the headquarters of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (known as the Maspero building after a nearby street, itself named after 19th century Egyptologist Gaston Maspero). The assault killed 27 civilians, the overwhelming majority of them Copts.[58]

If Christians were disturbed by the SCAF, they dreaded what the Muslim Brotherhood would do after it rose to power. In legislative elections between December 2011 and February 2012, blocs led by the Brotherhood and the major Salafi faction, the Nour Party (properly *Hizb al-Nur*, "the party of the light"), won a parliamentary supermajor-

53. EIPR, "EIPR Condemns Security Violence against Coptic Demonstrators: The Public Prosecutor Must Prosecute the Security Personnel Responsible for the Death of One Christian and the Injury of Dozens More in Omraniya" (November 24, 2010), https://eipr.org/en/press/2010/11/eipr-condemns-security-violence-against-coptic-demonstrators-public-prosecutor-must.

54. For more information, see Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, pp. 119–38.

55. Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, pp. 139–59.

56. "teka_anas — الشيخ محمد حسين يعقوب: غزو الصناديق" ["Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Ya'qub: Conquest of the (ballot) boxes"], YouTube video, uploaded by Omar Sawi, March 25, 2011, available on the Internet Archive at https://web.archive.org/web/20140223195805/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxkUmwMF994.

57. "Hundreds Call on Sharaf to Reappoint Labib as Qena Governor," *Ahram Online*, May 3, 2011, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/11303/Egypt/Politics-/Hundreds-call-on-Sharaf-to-reappoint-Labib-as-Qena.aspx.

58. Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, pp. 183–99.

ity. Meanwhile, less than a fifth of voters chose either of the two leading non-Islamist parties, the New Wafd Party (named after the secular nationalist Wafd Party that led the 1919 revolution, referring to the delegation — in Arabic, *wafd* — Egyptians sought to have at post–World War I peace negotiations) and the center-left Egyptian Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Misriyya*). In spring 2012, the Brotherhood's standard-bearer, Dr. Mohamed Morsi, placed first in the initial presidential election with 25% of the vote, and won the subsequent runoff with 51.7%.[59] After taking office, he stacked the Constituent Assembly with Islamists who then drafted an overtly religious constitution that prompted the Coptic Church to withdraw its delegates in protest.[60] In December, after decreeing his actions beyond judicial review, Morsi ignored liberal and legal objections and put the constitutional draft up for a popular vote. Although voters approved the document, the president's victory proved pyrrhic. Copts and liberals moved to partner with the Egyptian army.[61] On June 30, 2013, more protesters took to the streets than in early 2011. Three days later, Morsi's own defense minister, General 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, deposed the president and ushered in a new era of military authoritarianism.[62]

From Mubarak's final year of rule through Sisi's first year in power, the way the state promoted a Muslim-Christian cleavage mattered enormously for the security of Christians. When secular figures, like Mubarak, and Islamist movements, such as the Brotherhood, sought to reap political gain from ideas of Muslim primacy, they lowered the costs of anti-Christian aggression and invited social conflict. At the national level, this pattern would seem to reinforce extant theories that political freedom and political violence rise and fall in an inverted U.

According to a range of studies, autocracies and democracies are less prone to conflict than the transitional regimes between them.[63] Such findings imply that Copts, ceteris paribus, would be safer under uncontested dictatorship (Mubarak in his heyday) than under competitive authoritarianism (Mubarak under challenge or Morsi after

59. Tarek E. Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 184–86.

60. Imad Khalil, Yasser Chmais, and Hamdi Kassem, "Egypt's Coptic Pope Warns of Extremist Trend," *Al-Monitor* (Lebanon), November 13, 2012, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/11/egypt-coptic-pope-would-keep-constitution-article-on-religion.html; "Egyptian Churches Withdraw from Constituent Assembly," *Egypt Independent*, November 17, 2012, www.egyptindependent.com/egyptian-churches-withdraw-constituent-assembly/.

61. Peter Beaumont, "Mohamed Morsi Signs Egypt's New Constitution into Law," *The Guardian* (UK), December 26, 2012, www.gu.com/world/2012/dec/26/mohamed-morsi-egypt-constitution-law.

62. On anti-Christian attacks in 2013, see "Egypt: Pope Tawadros Rebukes Morsi over Cathedral Clash," *BBC News*, April 9, 2013, https://bbc.in/2yhhbmz; Raymond Ibrahim, "The Siege of Egypt's St. Mark Cathedral: An Insider's Account," Middle East Forum (April 22, 2013), www.meforum.org/3491/egypt-st-mark-cathedral; Mahmoud Salem, "Morsy's Christian Problem," *Daily News Egypt*, April 8, 2013, https://dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/08/morsys-christian-problem/.

63. Juha Auvinen, "Political Conflict in Less Developed Countries, 1981–89," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (May 1997), pp. 177–95; Demet Yalcin Mousseau, "Democratizing with Ethnic Divisions: A Source of Conflicts?" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (Sept. 2001), pp. 547–67. Compare Stephen M. Saideman et al., "Democratization, Political Institutions, and Ethnic Conflict: A Pooled Time-Series Analysis, 1985–1988," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Feb. 2002), pp. 103–29; Jack A. Goldstone et al., "A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan. 2010) pp. 190–208.

his constitutional decree).[64] The mechanism behind this shift is that institutional openings, including elections, enable disgruntled constituencies to mobilize faster than the government can improve its performance.[65] When one looks below the national level, however, it becomes clear that anti-Christian attacks have not tracked smoothly with macro-level institutional shifts.

The effects of the Muslim-Christian hierarchy during the 2010–13 period were unevenly distributed and must be delineated at the local level. Mariz Tadros counted 110 total "incidents" of aggression between Egyptian Christians and Muslims during 2008–10 and 70 such incidents in 2011, meaning there were 50% more altercations in the first transitional year than in any of the three prior years.[66] However, intergroup violence tended to be localized.[67] Four governorates of Upper Egypt (Minya, Asyut, Sohag, and Qena) and the metropoles (Alexandria, Cairo, and Giza) together make up less than half of Egypt's populace, but encompassed two-thirds of the incidents.[68]

The volatility of transition did not imperil Copts uniformly. Rather, the opening of elections and the political ascent of Islamists tended to encourage anti-Christian aggression only in certain areas. What explains this variation? Country experts have few systematic answers, although they have observed recurring patterns. Specifically, violence often erupts at the intersection of material deprivation and cultural controversy. Copts tend to be attacked in economically poor areas, according to leading Egyptian social scientists.[69] Social aggression also generally follows a perceived affront against local Muslims, from rumored sexual contact between a Christian man and a Muslim woman to a commercial dispute between a Muslim vendor and a Christian customer.[70]

I situate these suppositions in a broader theory that local social relationships reinforce or contest the master cleavage and thereby help determine whether or not intergroup violence spreads as a "Muslim-Christian" confrontation. As developed below, this approach recognizes the power of national frames but incorporates the agency of subnational leaders, who can raise alternative identities and blunt aggression toward out-groups.

A CONTROLLED COMPARISON OF LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERGROUP VIOLENCE

The preceding discussion described a combination of structural contributors to anti-Christian violence and significant variations at the local level. National institutions in Egypt have provided broad incentives for Muslims to exploit Copts. But the

64. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Apr. 2002), pp. 51–65.

65. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968); Jack L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

66. Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, p. 49.

67. Ashutosh Varshney, "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond," *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Apr. 2001) pp. 371–72. See also Steven L. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

68. Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, p. 49. The governorate of Luxor, separated from Qena in 2009, is not included in the data. Hence, the sample includes 26 governorates.

69. Interviews by the author with Nabil Abdel-Fattah and Sameh Fawzi, November 4, 2012, Cairo.

70. Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, p. 46.

Muslim-Christian cleavage has not affected the lives of Egyptians uniformly. Some communities are largely free of religiously tinged animosity. Others experience relatively frequent social collisions across lines of faith. Determining where and why Muslim primacy is produced requires closer study. The remainder of this article examines relationships between governors and local society in one corner of Egypt. Thus, a word on the role of governors is warranted.

In the highly centralized Egyptian state, the governors of the country's 27 governorates are effectively presidentially appointed proconsuls.[71] This arrangement contrasts starkly with federal systems. For example, in India, voters (indirectly) elect the "chief ministers" of India's 29 states.[72] In Egypt, though, elections play a marginal role in the construction of subnational administration, and governors serve at the president's pleasure. Accordingly, a 2006 World Bank report noted that Egypt has had "one of the world's most centralized systems of government."[73]

While Egyptian presidents and Islamist movements have cleaved the Egyptian nation into Muslims and Christians, Egyptian governors can further assert Muslim primacy — or contest that bias with a shared sense of Egyptian-ness. To understand why Christians in northern Qena were exposed to mobs in Farshut but saved in Marashda requires looking at whether governors enacted Muslim-Christian hierarchy or intergroup equality in their relations with the people of Qena.

MUSLIM PRIMACY UNDER GOVERNOR AYYUB

In 2005, Mubarak assigned to Qena the first Coptic governor in a quarter century. The man he tapped for the job was a little-known security official named Magdi Ayyub.[74] In terms of diversity, Ayyub's appointment struck a long-awaited blow against the exclusion of Christians from influential positions. By choosing Ayyub, Mubarak was devolving a measure of subnational authority he previously reserved for Muslims. If power-sharing across ethnic boundaries tended to reduce conflict, then Christians in Qena could be expected to be safer under Ayyub than under a Muslim appointee. Contrary to that expectation, however, Copts soon felt less safe with Ayyub as the governor, as he shunned the local community and reproduced the Muslim favoritism of the central government.

From Ayyub's first days as governor, Qena's Christians perceived that their new administrator would take no more interest in their affairs, and perhaps less interest, than a Muslim governor. In his relations with laypeople and clergy, Ayyub was aloof. One Coptic human rights activist recalled that Ayyub isolated himself in the governorate's

71. World Bank, "Intergovernmental Relations and Fiscal Decentralization," Egypt Public Expenditure Review, Policy Note No. 8 (Jan. 2006), p. 1.

72. In India, legislators elect chief ministers, who in turn head state governments. Robert L. Hardgrave Jr. and Stanley A. Kochanek, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation*, seventh edition (New York: Thomson, 2008), p. 126.

73. World Bank 2006, Intergovernmental Relations and Fiscal Decentralization," p. 1.

74. In 1980, Sadat appointed the first Christian governor in the Egyptian republic, decorated army officer Fu'ad 'Aziz Ghali, for South Sinai Governorate. Galal Nassar, "A Hero Bid Farewell: Fouad Aziz Ghali (1927–2000), *Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 13–19, 2000, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2000/464/eg7.htm.

capital while criminals ran amok in the hill country of the governorate's north.[75] Another advocate for Christians said Ayyub did absolutely nothing as governor.[76] Bishop Kyrillos of the Nag' Hammadi area shared these assessments. Ayyub hardly interacted with him, Kyrillos recalled. Most importantly, he actually opposed the bishop's requests for repairing old churches. Although Mubarak had recently given governors the power to authorize church renovations, Ayyub approved none of the applications to update Qena's aging places of worship.[77]

Ayyub's relations with area Christians signify how a Copt may support the master cleavage that sets himself and his coreligionists apart as second-tier citizens. This posture soon carried significant material effects. Through his stance, Ayyub signaled a disinterest in providing the public good of security to all Egyptians under his administration. Rather than being shielded by Ayyub, Copts were left exposed in a subnational context that encouraged local Muslims to escalate private disputes into anti-Christian attacks.

For processes of intergroup violence, the initial, "quiet" stage of tension matters as much as the later eruption of rage; Ayyub was demonstrably inactive when trouble simmered in Qena.[78]

In November 2009, a Coptic man named Girgis Barumi Girgis was accused of raping a female minor, who was Muslim. The alleged incident originated in Farshut, 5.5 miles west of the city of Nag' Hammadi and inside Kyrillos's diocese. In rural Egypt, gender-related assaults ("crimes of honor") are known to be socially volatile, particularly when they occur across religious communities.[79] The charge against Girgis lit a fuse. But in the 48 hours after the rumor emerged, Governor Ayyub and local police did not try to deter Muslims from enacting mob justice. On Wednesday, November 18, the family of the Muslim victim reported Girgis to the police, who took him into custody for questioning. The next day, "a group of young men carrying canes, knives and firearms" attacked two clergymen, one of whom, a Coptic deacon, was hospitalized for head injuries. Bishop Kyrillos requested additional security from the local security director, but was ignored.[80] That Friday, instead of defending the Christians, security forces instructed Copts in Farshut to leave the area if they wanted to remain safe.[81]

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), one of the country's premier human rights organizations, chronicled the escalating series of events. Early in the morning on November 21, three Coptic-owned stores were set alight. A mob gathered outside the police station holding Girgis. Unchallenged by the police, the crowd then went off in different directions carrying "canes, gas canisters, knives, and metal implements." They ransacked Christian shops late into the evening:

75. Interview by the author with Informant A, May 13, 2013, Nag' Hammadi. For safety reasons, the names of interviewees are withheld if they are not public figures.

76. Interview by the author with Informant B, March 17, 2013, Luxor.

77. Interview by the author with Bishop Kyrillos, March 8, 2014, Nag' Hammadi.

78. See Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 3–31.

79. So-called honor-related infractions are the third most common trigger for communal violence in Egypt, after quotidian disputes and issues of church building or renovation. See Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads*, p. 46.

80. EIPR, "Freedom of Religion Belief in Egypt: Quarterly Report, October–December 2009" (Jan. 2010), p. 17.

81. EIPR, "Freedom of Religion Belief in Egypt," p. 18.

> Several victims and eyewitnesses stated that security arrived about 90 minutes after the assaults began, but did not engage with any of the assailants for several hours. The EIPR also received photos and video footage from the Nag' Hammadi bishopric and some Coptic websites showing the assaults underway despite the presence of security forces nearby.[82]

Dozens of the attackers were eventually apprehended but not charged with a crime. Violence resumed on November 23 near Farshut when additional Coptic stores and homes were torched.

Attacks surrounding the incident stretched over six days and touched three towns and villages. Forty-two stores, one pharmacy, and a bookshop were damaged, to an estimated cost of at least $800,000. According to Kyrillos, Ayyub rejected requests to compensate the victims.[83] The governor himself downplayed the crisis and claimed the destructive course of events was unpredictable and unpreventable: "What happened in the business district was a complete surprise by all measures. Who could have imagined that the crowd would go from the city station to the stores and do what they did?" He also denied that the attacks had any religious overtones, depicting them as merely an excessive reaction to an outrageous criminal act.[84]

The implications of Ayyub's controversial relations with the people of Qena were deeper than he fathomed or acknowledged. By promoting Muslim primacy over shared Egyptian-ness, Ayyub reproduced locally the national framework in which political entrepreneurs reaped advantage by attacking Copts. This opportunity lingered. A week after the governor claimed the crisis in Farshut "had no religious overtones," a young Muslim man named Hamam al-Kimuni committed the drive-by shooting in Nag' Hammadi. Interviewees attest that the attack would have been avoided had Magdi Ayyub not been governor, for the massacre was partly motivated by a heated disagreement between Muslim and Christian notables. A more proactive governor, they maintain, would have interceded between the disputing parties and the private disagreement would never have degenerated into intergroup violence.[85] Events in neighboring Marashda in 2013 provide an opportunity for considering that counterfactual.

SHARED EGYPTIAN-NESS UNDER GOVERNOR LABIB

Before Magdi Ayyub arrived in Qena, another former official from the Ministry of Interior, 'Adil Labib, had administered the governorate. *After* Ayyub left in 2011, transitional politics brought Labib back to Qena for an unprecedented second term. Labib's eight total years, in two different eras, increased confidence that local social relations heavily influenced levels of intergroup violence. Unlike Ayyub, Labib, a Muslim, counteracted the politics of Muslim primacy, worked closely with local Copts, and enacted

82. EIPR, "Freedom of Religion Belief in Egypt," pp. 18–19.

83. EIPR, "Freedom of Religion Belief in Egypt," p. 20.

84. Interview by Nabil 'Umar with Magdi Ayyub, "محافظ قنا: أنا محافظ مصري قبل أن أكون قبطياً" ["Governor of Qena: I am an Egyptian governor before I am a Copt"], *al-Ahram*, December 31, 2009, www.ahram.org.eg/archive/Investigations/News/1660.aspx.

85. Interview by the author with Informant C, March 15, 2013, Qena; interview by the author with Informant D, March 16, 2013, South Valley University, Qena.

an identity of Egyptian-ness that substantially deterred attacks on Copts or quickly stamped out such aggression. Although Copts in Qena still experienced a general sense of vulnerability — especially by criminal gangs — they were noticeably safe from the kind of public mob assault that occurred during Ayyub's tenure.

Before first arriving in Qena in 1999, Labib had risen to the rank of general in the Ministry of Interior, served in the State Security Investigations Service (SSI), and directed security for Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city. As a governor, he rehabilitated Qena's infrastructure and developed a reputation as a "just despot" who used "tough autocratic means to get . . . public order."[86] The upshot of this order was that Labib countered the state's institutionalized Muslim-Christian cleavage, engaging with all of Qena's communities without distinction.

Muslim leaders in Qena reported that the governor dealt as closely with Coptic leaders as he did with Muslim elites.[87] No church updating had been allowed in Father Kyrillos's diocese since 1985. From 1999 to 2005, Labib secured authorization for 10 churches to be renovated and a new one to be built. The governor's empathy for Copts in Qena extended from problem-solving to social celebration. On the occasion of Coptic holidays, Labib would attend the festivals and stay late into the evening. Labib's embrace of Copts exuded solidarity. Kyrillos said he thought of Labib as a close friend, while Labib regarded the bishop as a brother.[88]

Interviewees consistently recalled the governorships of 'Adil Labib as eras of social harmony. A priest in the governorate's capital, the city of Qena, remarked, "Before [Labib] came many governors, but none of them accomplished what he did . . . He understands the tribes and he understands the psychology of the people . . . In all respects, 'Adil Labib's . . . terms as governor are distinguished by stability."[89] One local opposition party leader said he had never gotten along well with Labib, but acknowledged the governor could contain a crisis "before it happened . . . He knows how to include Muslims and Christians."[90] By treating Copts as fellow Egyptians, not religious inferiors, Labib reduced the expected benefits of aggression upon Christians in Qena. The effects of this shift were manifest during both of his terms. The governor claimed that no incidents of violence against Copts occurred on his watch from 1999 to 2005.[91]

As remarkable as Labib's first term in Qena was, historic national and local conditions made his management of the governorate from 2011 to 2013 even more noteworthy. After Salafis stopped the post-Mubarak government from appointing another Christian governor to Qena, Labib (whom Salafis did not oppose) took the reins in Qena once more. Rather than deferring to the insurgent Islamists, however, Labib reestablished his strong relationship with Coptic clergy and non-Islamist Muslim leaders.

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86. Samer Soliman, *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

87. Interview by the author with Khalid Khalafallah, head of the Hawarra tribe, May 13, 2013, Qena; interview by the author with Hawarra tribe member Hisham al-Shu'ayni, May 14, 2013, Qena.

88. Interview by the author with Bishop Kyrillos, March 8, 2014, Nag' Hammadi.

89. Interview by the author with Father Ammonius, March 16, 2013, Qena.

90. Interview by the author with Informant E, May 14, 2013, Nag' Hammadi.

91. Interview by the author with Governor 'Adil Labib, March 13, 2013, Qena; EIPR, "نجع حمادي" ["Nag Hammadi"].

As elections delivered a Brotherhood-led parliament and then carried Morsi into the presidency, Labib steered the governorate through profound political uncertainty and Christian anxiety.

Labib's second gubernatorial term in Qena was not free of incidents. As the Egyptian republic became more Islamic than ever, local movements promoted violence along the master cleavage and a crisis much like Farshut's in 2009 loomed.

It was another "honor crime" in northern Qena that threatened to stir mass violence. On January 17, 2013, a 64-year-old Coptic merchant named Nadir 'Atiya was accused of sexually assaulting a six-year-old Muslim girl in the village of Marashda, 18 miles east of Nag' Hammadi. As in the Farshut case, police apprehended the suspect, but vandals still attacked 'Atiya's shop and three other stores in Marashda. Hundreds of area Muslims then gathered outside of the closest major church, Abu Fam.[92] One witness who lived next to the church faulted an ultraconservative Islamist group for inciting locals: the Group for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice is "terrorizing us. They try to find a reason to attack us . . . In no time, this village turned to a ball of fire."[93]

Marashda displayed all the ingredients for a social conflagration: ill-founded rumors that a Coptic male had victimized a Muslim female, a political climate of suspicion and uncertainty, local religious movements with a recent history of anti-Coptic mobilization. Moreover, the event occurred during a national transition in which Muslim Brotherhood control over the government generally reduced the risks of aggressing upon Copts. In this context, it was remarkable that events swung from hysteria toward reason.

Expecting that angry crowds would descend on the main local church after Friday prayers, Bishop Kyrillos had contacted multiple branches of security ahead of time: "We notified the general security services, the [local] director of security, and Homeland Security [formerly the SSI]." Labib, Kyrillos recollected, ordered these forces to respond promptly: [the police] "stood in front of the church and prevented the [Muslim] youths from reaching the church. Some of the youths carried Molotov cocktails, but security used tear gas and dispersed them. The situation calmed."[94] Rather than telling locals to flee (as they had in 2009), police shielded the church, repelled the incipient siege, and restored order throughout the village.[95] Labib followed this decisive intervention by enjoining the heads of Qena's Islamist parties against any further violence.[96]

92. "Update: Police Fire Tear Gas to Quell Sectarian Clashes in Qena," *Egypt Independent*, January 18, 2013, www.egyptindependent.com/update-police-fire-tear-gas-quell-sectarian-clashes-qena/.

93. The Associated Press, "Sectarian Unrest Flares Anew in Southern Egypt," *USA Today*, January 18, 2013, https://usat.ly/2iFaSTc.

94. "تصريحات الأنبا كيرلس بشأن أحداث المراشدة" ["Bishop Kyrillos's remarks regarding the Marashda events"], في النور [In the light], CTV (Egypt), January 19, 2013, YouTube video, 7:40, uploaded by Follow Me News, January 21, 2013, https://youtu.be/MErB5uHPQbQ.

95. "كيرلس: الأمن أنقذنا من مذبحة طائفية بعد شائعة اغتصاب طفلة المراشدة" ["Kyrillos: Security saved us from a communal massacre after rumors of a girl being molested in Marashda"], *Sada Elbalad* (Egypt), January 18, 2013, www.elbalad.news/371390.

96. Interview, Bishop Kyrillos, March 2014, Nag' Hammadi; Amira Hisham, "الأنبا كيرلس: الأوضاع هدأت في المراشدة وأمين الجهاد الإسلامي لاحظ عدم اتزان المتهم بتحرش الفتاة" ["Bishop Kyrillos: Conditions have calmed down in Marashda and the secretary of Islamic Jihad observes a lack of balance in suffering in the harassment of the young girl"], *al-Ahram*, January 19, 2013.

The close comparison of Farshut and Marashda provides a rare and instructive pairing of actual incidents of intergroup conflict. As the next section develops, the evidence strongly supports the idea that, when it came to public safety, the religious affiliations of the governors mattered less than their social practices: Did they categorize Copts as outsiders, whose safety depended on appeasing national and local political entrepreneurs, or as integral members of the community? Labib managed to suppress ideas of Muslim primacy by engaging with Coptic clergy and laity, just as he did with Muslims. Through these practices, he and his interlocutors embodied a shared sense of Egyptianness that raised the costs and reduced the anticipated gains of victimizing non-Muslims.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The above narrative, with granular attention to relationships in Qena, indicates that the production of intergroup violence has less to do with how individuals are themselves categorized by the state than how they address and interact with others. Officials in the Egyptian republic have driven a cleavage between Egyptian Muslims and Christians that encourages violent prejudice against Christians. However, the perks of "Muslim-ness" do not produce intergroup aggression uniformly. Rather, private individuals may or may not pursue "identity-based" violence as they act in a local context. The confluence of national, local, and interpersonal politics helps make variations in communal attacks more intelligible. Governorates with larger Coptic populations have only been more conflict-prone during periods of national volatility, such as 2011. But in tumultuous times, leaders like Governor 'Adil Labib can meet with both Muslim and Christian communities and religious leaders to promote "Egyptian-ness" over Muslim primacy. This pattern merits further study in additional cases. For example, at the local level researchers can assess when disputes conform to or contravene national institutions.

Even before additional research is conducted, some provisional implications are clear. Most significantly, the evidence already gathered in Qena raises confidence that the observed link between social relationships and intergroup security is not spurious or epiphenomenal.

One might question whether the account has reversed cause and effect. Perhaps antecedent conflicts determine what identity will be salient. On this point, the tracing of politics over time provides leverage that simple correlations would miss. If the salience of the master cleavage were produced by prior clashes, we would observe the damage of older disagreements lingering across governorships and the calm of Labib's first gubernatorial term (1999–2005) would have generated close elite relationships during Magdi Ayyub's tenure. Conversely, the conflicts of 2009–10 would cast a shadow over 2011–13. That pattern did not manifest. Rather, the safety of Christians fell and rose based on whether the governor, during his term, built leaderships with key leaders across the master cleavage.

Another possible concern is whether "good leadership," rather than social processes, explains the variance in violence. One could then say that the study has replaced formal institutionalism with individual agency. Here, again, comparative evidence raises confidence in the proposed theory. If intergroup security came down to just picking the right leaders, we would observe Labib delivering communal harmony wherever he went. This was not the case. Outside of Qena, Labib was neither effective at tamping

down anti-Coptic violence nor universally admired by Christians. Specifically, when Labib served as governor of Alexandria from 2007 to 2011, Egyptians there considered him dangerously ineffectual. His relations with Christians were especially strained when in 2009/10, he publicly clashed with Pope Shenouda III after authorizing the use of land previously allocated to a growing church in the neighborhood of Ma'mura. For weeks, the Coptic pontiff explicitly refused to visit the governorate.[97] Most seriously, Labib neither prevented the New Year's 2011 bombing nor promptly quelled the street fights that followed.[98] Although this contrast with Qena can be developed further, the initial record of Labib's time in Alexandria suggests he was not consistently "good for Christians" wherever he went. Compared to his tenure in southern Egypt, it supports the theory that social peace emerges from within relationships between leaders and area citizens — not because of the benevolence of individual officials.[99]

These rebuttals do not mean the thesis is uncontestable. Subsequent students of identity politics may challenge and disprove the present theory through a range of historical, econometric, and anthropological evidence. The most direct test would come from cases in which institutional cleavages override local politics and determine violence independent of social relations on the ground. Such cases would depart from the present description of interactive identity formation. They would validate more formalistic institutional explanations. Other hypothetical counterexamples would be if there were cases in which the master cleavage permanently erased rival conceptions of identity, removing them from the imaginations of citizens such that official categories no longer needed local actors to reproduce their boundaries.

Notwithstanding the prospect of future falsification, the proposed theory invites a discussion of the broader lessons this study yields. What does the link between social relationships and violence imply for other vulnerable populations, for the production of global datasets, and for the attempt to ameliorate conflict through formal institutions?

First, the above findings can inform theorists and practitioners concerned with other forms of intergroup discrimination and hierarchy, such as patriarchy. Women in Egypt have faced de jure and de facto discrimination just as severe as the biases against

97. In effect, Labib overruled Pope Shenouda's preferences on church renovation in Alexandria much as Ayyub had dismissed Bishop Kyrillos's concerns about aging church proprerties in Qena. Amr Bayoumi, Iskandariyya Nabil Abushal, and Rajab Ramadan, "البابا شنودة «يقاطع» الإسكندرية احتجاجاً على «تعنت لبيب» ضد الكنيسة" ["Pope Shenouda 'boycotts' Alexandria in protest of 'Labib's stubbornness' against the Church"], *Al-Masry Al-Youm* (Egypt), May 25, 2009, http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=212414; Essam Fadl, "Rights Center Takes Church Land Dispute to President," *Daily News Egypt*, February 18, 2010, https://dailynewsegypt.com/2010/02/18/rights-center-takes-church-land-dispute-to-president/; Amr Bayoumi, "Pope Shenouda in Alexandria after Long Absence," *Egypt Independent*, January 24, 2010, www.egyptindependent.com/pope-shenouda-alexandria-after-long-absence/.

98. Tamir Salah al-Din, "'عادل لبيب محافظ الاسكندرية" ["'Adil Labib, governor of Alexandria"], *Masreat* (Egypt), March 15, 2010, www.masreat.com/عادل-لبيب-و-البابا-شنودة/; "Clashes Follow Church Bombing," *Al Jazeera*, January 1, 2011, www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201111145531097 42.html.

99. "Rejected by Alexandria, New Governor Welcomed by Majority in Qena," *Daily News Egypt*, August 5, 2011, www.dailynewsegypt.com/2011/08/05/rejected-by-alexandria-new-governor-welcomed-by-majority-in-qena/. Labib's record in other parts of Egypt also addressed concerns that there was something in the qualifications of him and Ayyub that made the difference in Qena. Both men hailed from the SSI, though, and although Labib enjoyed a higher rank than Ayyub, this prominence did not guarantee safety for Christians in Alexandria.

Copts. In the modern Egyptian state, not a single woman has led a governorate or commanded a security-related ministry. Further, incidents of street harassment and sexual assault have risen dramatically in recent years.[100]

Work on misogyny and patriarchy can adopt the template used above and ask questions such as: Under what conditions, and to what effect, have women and men produced a culture of gender equity that challenged the official and informal barriers obstructing Egyptian women from safety and citizenship? This question, like its analogue in Muslim-Christian relations, will probably lead away from mechanistic answers. Specifically, practitioners are unlikely to find solutions through token-based "power-sharing," i.e., appointing members of an excluded category (as in the EPR codings or Ayyub's assignment to Qena). If one were looking to prevent church burnings or sexual assault in a particular locality, the remedy would not be simply to assign someone who shares nominal identity traits with the vulnerable community, i.e. a Copt or a woman. Far more consequential would be whether the appointee could build relationships in the community that would bridge the master cleavage with a more inclusive alternative.

Second, Qena underscores Wedeen's point that social scientists building global datasets need to acknowledge a multiplicity of identities. Rather than continuing in the vein of the EPR dataset — where the number of "relevant ethnic groups" and the amount of violent conflicts are co-constituted — scholars will benefit from considering the forces that make certain boundaries "always already there" while making other potential intergroup borders inconceivable. Such research will necessarily involve a combination of national institutions and subnational behaviors. To attribute conflict-provoking attributes to national institutions alone, without considering how citizens erode or reproduce them in everyday life, reifies those institutions and misconstrues a highly social causal process. Explanations of identity boundaries will be more complete if they consider how the impact of official categories depends upon local politics that sustain or contest categories promulgated by the center. Only when researchers consider categories *other* than the boundaries that have been pushed to the fore through open conflicts or formal rules will they be able to explain under what conditions certain identities become salient over others.

Third and last, this article offers two lessons for understanding the security of disadvantaged groups in authoritarian settings where formal institutions may be deeply entrenched. First, patterns of violence on the ground signal that even a seeming monolith like Husni Mubarak's Egypt comprises numerous subnational networks of coercion, mini-regimes in which local political entrepreneurs target citizens based upon an incentive structure that is coproduced by national and local officials. Combatting "religious" violence begins with making such aggression more costly than the alternative. Second, even though the leadership at the country's center may vigorously guard extant identity boundaries, subnational officials and local leaders have the power to produce

100. Noha Radwan, "How Egyptian Women Took Back the Street between Two 'Black Wednesdays': A First Person Account," *Jadaliyya* (US), February 20, 2011, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/694/how-egyptian-women-took-back-the-street-between-tw; Engy Abdelkader, "99.3% of Egyptian Women, Girls Have Been Sexually Harrassed," *Huffpost* (US), June 4, 2013, www.huffingtonpost.com/engy-abdelkader/99-percent-of-egyptian-women-girls-have-been-sexually-harassed_b_3373366.html.

other modes of interpersonal relations. Such cultural production occurs not through individual decisions but through social behaviors that embody broader categories and, in turn, promote equal access to public goods.

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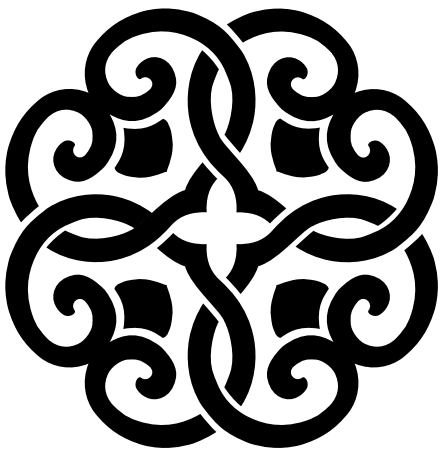
A wide range of scholars of intergroup conflict have endorsed constructivist approaches, but a much narrower range of empirical research actually treats identities as products of human interactions. It is more common for studies to assess master cleavages and identity categories as independent influences on social relations and violence. Such approaches do not establish the power of national institutions; they assert them, often through measurement decisions that become "baked into" the data and are difficult to distinguish in reported results. The above study of attacks on Egyptian Christians in Qena shows academics will achieve more complete and more accurate causal claims if they apprehend the dynamic interaction of national institutions and local relationships. Since the local level is where private conflict becomes "political" or "ethnic," the social relations that reproduce or subvert official divisions are integral to the production of violence or peace. Even when the central state has suppressed more egalitarian and more inclusive categories, they remain available for local leaders and citizens.