

Abstract

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Islamist parties are important actors on the political arena in the Muslim World. As such, they are interesting objects of research. Islamist parties however also pose a wider theoretical challenge: How are we to understand these parties? Can we use traditional theories, originated in the West, to understand the logic of these parties, or do we have to develop other approaches?

This study focuses on the *political linkage* of Islamist parties. Political linkage is a core function in politics; it is the way in which parties relate to the people of a country. The study sets out to explain why Islamist parties organise their linkage the way they do.

In doing so, explanatory models derived from traditional (Western) theories on parties are utilised. On the basis of previous scholarly works in the field, party-centred models, which focus on party-specific factors, as well as institutional models, which focus on institutional arrangements in the context at hand, are construed. May these models explain the linkage of Islamist parties? This is tried in part I of the study.

In Western theory on parties, religious parties as such have not been bestowed with much theorising and no specific explanatory model has been developed to account for the organisation of religious parties. By comparing Islamist parties with Western Christian Democratic parties, part II of this study investigates whether there are reasons to speak about a particular religious party model. Do religious parties organise their linkage in a specific way?

In this study, three Islamist parties are analysed: The Virtue Party in Turkey, the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and the Party of Islam in Pakistan. Data on these parties have been collected primarily by way of interviews. In part II of the study, an embryonic ideal typical model of Christian Democratic party linkage is developed on the basis of previous scholarly works.

The main conclusion of the study is that while the traditional theories on parties do provide a good help in analysing the linkage of Islamist parties, they cannot fully account for the way in which linkage is organised in these. Instead, there are indications that religious parties (Islamist as well as Christian Democratic) largely organise their linkage in a specific religious way, in accordance with what they interpret as the command of God.

Key words: Islamist parties, Islamism, party theory, political linkage, Virtue Party, Turkey, Islamic Action Front, Jordan, Party of Islam, Pakistan, religious parties.