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Explaining the Spatial Variation of Sectarian Violence in Egypt

DISSERTATION

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by

Mirette Ayman Morcos

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Jeffrey Kopstein, Chair
Professor Sara Goodman
Professor Kamal Sadiq

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DEDICATION

To

My Mom

Sally Edward Albert

All that I am is because of all that you are.

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VITA

Mirette Ayman Morcos

2017	B.A. in Political Science, California Polytechnic University, Pomona
2018-2024	Teaching Assistant, University of California, Irvine
2022-Present	Instructor, California Polytechnic University, Pomona
2024	Ph.D. in Political Science, University of California, Irvine

FIELDS OF STUDY

Comparative Politics and Political Violence.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Explaining the Spatial Variation of Sectarian Violence in Egypt

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Mirette Ayman Morcos

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Professor Jeffrey Kopstein, Chair

This dissertation analyzes the surge in sectarian violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt from 2011-2018. It addresses a gap in the literature by analyzing the spatial distribution of violence within a non-democratic regime, focusing on the number of Coptic churches, population demographics of the Copts, and the perceived sociopolitical threat posed by the Coptic community. In doing so, I expand Blalock's threat theory to authoritarian regimes in order to offer a nuanced understanding of sectarian violence in Egypt, emphasizing the role of visibility and organization in shaping perceptions of threat. Employing a novel dataset of 596 sectarian attacks, this dissertation utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify and analyze the underlying mechanisms of sectarian violence.

Chapter 1 provides a historical overview of Coptic-Muslim relations since the Arab conquest of Egypt, highlighting a notable shift from state driven violence in the pre-modern era (641 AD-1922), to mob violence in the modern era (1923-present). Chapter 2 presents a large N study of sectarian attacks in Egypt from 2011-2018, highlighting that higher

percentages of Copts and the number of churches per governorate are significant factors in the occurrence of violence, while political Islam and police presence are less influential. Chapter 3 offers a qualitative analysis of church-related tensions, interfaith relationships, and the role of rumors and honor, further highlighting the importance of churches in understanding sectarian relations in Egypt. By examining these dynamics, the dissertation explores how perceived threats and competition under authoritarian regimes manifest outside electoral arenas.

INTRODUCTION

On May 26, 2016, a startling headline spread across the world, "Muslim mob in Egypt strips 70-year-old Christian woman and parades her through the streets." The news sparked outrage, with the Coptic community in Egypt reaping the repercussions; seven Coptic homes were ransacked and torched following the attack (Withnall, 2016). Despite the brutality of the attack, it stands as an example of a broader trend. The past decade has seen more violence against Copts than the previous five decades combined, with a focus on upper Egypt.

This dissertation aims to establish a vital link between the perceived threat of the Coptic Christians of Egypt, posed by the number of churches, and the occurrence of sectarian violence. I center my analysis on the spatial distribution of sectarian attacks in Egypt, examining them through the lens of population demographics and the quantity of churches in each governorate. In doing so, I discuss the logic of competition under authoritarian regimes, as well as the ways that threat and organization can manifest themselves outside of the electoral arena. Additionally, I present a nuanced analysis of the intricate dynamics of Coptic and Muslim populations in Egypt as well as discuss the conditions under which mere tensions can translate to attacks.

Ethnic identity, or ethnicity, is a part of a person's identity that is drawn from one or more "markers" such as race, religion, shared history, region, social symbols, or language. Any collective violence where animosities rooted in ethnic identity differences serve as the primary cause for an attack, is therefore considered ethnic violence (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998). Much of the analysis on ethnicity views religion as a subset of it. According to

Posner, “All of the identities in a person’s repertoire are equally important components of who they understand themselves to be” (2005). In the cases where the ethnic identity also corresponds to a religious identity, these attacks are commonly referred to as "sectarian violence." Therefore, I generalize the theories and mechanisms regarding ethnic relations and assume they also hold when discussing sectarian relations. Moreover, these dynamics are further exacerbated when the sectarian difference aligns with any of the other markers of ethnicity discussed earlier. For this dissertation, I refer to violence in Egypt as sectarian violence, as the stance of the Coptic Church remains that they are not different in ethnicity from their Muslim counterparts. Despite the interchangeability of the two terms academically, as religion is often defined as a component of ethnicity, discussion of ethnic differences often has a connotation of being racially or hereditarily different, which the church tries to undermine as to not exacerbate more divisions.

The Puzzle:

What explains sectarian violence in Egypt post-Tahrir? Despite a tremendous accumulation of research devoted to this question, it remains a complex puzzle. While the study of the causes of ethnic and sectarian conflict has gained prominence in comparative politics, a notable gap persists regarding the factors influencing the spatial variation in amity and conflict among minority and majority groups in the region.

The puzzle at the core of this research project is not unprecedented in the realm of ethnic violence studies. In fact, it echoes the central puzzle explored in Varshney's "Ethnic Violence and Civic Life scholarship (2005). It is noteworthy that despite ethnic diversity,

countries have areas that manage to remain peaceful, while others experience long term histories of violent attacks. The significant contribution of my work lies in addressing this puzzle, with a primary question at the forefront: What explains variation in the spatial distribution of sectarian violence in Egypt post-Tahrir? This arises from the observation that ethnic violence in Egypt does not manifest uniformly across all governorates. The location of violence is an important variable because it indicates that deeper social and political processes are at work.

Despite the Copts enduring sectarian strife across all Egypt, the majority of violent attacks are concentrated in the areas of Upper Egypt. Moreso, a more nuanced examination of the data reveals that even within Upper Egypt, where violence is most prevalent, there are significant variations in the numbers of attacks across different governorates. Notably, the governorate of Menia emerges as a clear hotspot, accounting for 35% of all sectarian attacks between 2011 and 2018, despite being home to only around 5.8% of Egypt's population. The observation that violence is not uniformly distributed even within regions challenges the effectiveness of national-level analyses in accounting for the geographical distribution of violence. Consequently, such analyses may have limited value in explaining why it occurs at all. This prompts a crucial question: At what level should this conflict be examined?

My theoretical contribution addresses the existing gap in the study of ethnic violence by introducing a novel dataset that dissects violence on the subnational level. This dataset serves as a valuable tool for testing my theory on the dynamics of power threat, expanding its application beyond democratic regimes into authoritarian settings. This

extension is particularly significant as it acknowledges the distinctions in the determinants and outcomes of group threat under different regimes while highlighting that mass politics is still at play even in non-democratic contexts.

The Mechanisms:

I approach this topic in three different ways. I begin by presenting a historical account of the Copts in Egypt since the Arab Conquest. While existing historical studies indeed touch upon instances of violence and conflict, I highlight an essential pattern that has not been otherwise done previously. Relying on a diverse range of secondary sources, I categorize the history of ethnic violence into the pre-modern and modern eras. I discuss the shift in dynamics between Copts and Muslims in the modern era, as population size and weight is translated to power and the majority strives to have the upper hand in deciding who gets citizenship rights. By doing so, I highlight that, even in authoritarian regimes, dynamics of competition and threat persist, although they manifest differently. Despite the Copts not being a politically mobilized group, their emergence out of second-class citizenry signaled a socio-political threat to the majority Muslim population and therefore resulted in the escalation of violent attacks. Therefore, in many ways, Egyptian political development influenced patterns of violence as new groups entered early modern politics.

Upon establishing the distinction in citizen behavior dynamics between the pre-modern and modern eras, I then transition to an assessment of the spatial distribution of ethnic attacks in Egypt. As previously noted, attacks are not happening throughout the entire country, but rather concentrated in particular areas. Following this observation, I

explore the question of what factors can account for the variation in the distribution of these attacks. I conduct a large N study that utilizes a novel, meticulously curated dataset on violent attacks, socioeconomic factors, and political variables in Egypt from 2011 to 2018. This quantitative analysis aims to highlight the factors contributing to the variation in the occurrence of violence across different regions.

Following the quantitative study, I move towards exploring the mechanisms through which violence unfolds. To do so, I ask why one governorate, Menia, experienced more than four times the number of attacks than the next runner up from 2011-2018. I utilize process tracing to establish how given similar circumstances, the number of churches in a particular area is a key variable in understanding how perceived threats are triggered. I proceed with an analysis of the legislative landscape surrounding church constructions and the controversies surrounding this topic. The final portion of the dissertation discusses interfaith marriages and conversions, and their effect on Coptic Muslim relations in Egypt.

The Argument:

My central argument builds upon Blalock's (1967) Racial Threat Theory, contending that if a minority is perceived as a threat to the majority, the majority may respond with force to subjugate them. Although macro-level data might initially suggest a correlation between minority group size in a particular area and level of attacks, as Blalock's hypothesis would suggest, a more nuanced analysis reveals variation in the number of attacks even within the governorates with the highest percentage of Copts, indicating that

other variables, such as the number of churches, are important factors in the distribution of sectarian violence.

As Dollard argued over nine decades ago regarding the lynching of blacks in the U.S., "whites do not fight for social superiority just for fun; on the contrary, they are attempting to minimize or eliminate negro competition" (1937, p. 314). Similarly, I offer an extension to threat theory that considers the sociopolitical perceived threat of the minority group through both their visibility as a group and their level of organization. While the mere existence of the Copts may be a necessary factor to trigger attacks, it is not sufficient. I supplement the basic account of threat based on demographic distribution with one that highlights the visibility and organizational capacity of the Coptic minority. This nuanced perspective brings us closer to a comprehensive threat-based explanation of violence perpetrated by the Muslim population against their Coptic neighbors. The question then arises: What aspects make the Copts appear threatening to the majority Muslim population? In my analysis, visibility and organization emerge as key factors influencing the perception of threat of the Copts.

Concerning visibility, I argue that the mere existence and sheer numbers of the Copts are insufficient to evoke a perceived threat; the Copts must also be visible in order to be perceived as threatening. While Copts and Muslims have a lot in common, there are differences between both groups such as names, speech patterns, celebratory practices, and religious symbolism in attire, all of which highlight religious identity differences. While this may provide a vague sense of a certain number of people from each group reside a particular area, these factors are not enough to provide tangible visibility on the large scale.

However, churches are able to provide this tangible visibility. Additionally, while the Copts may be noticeable through these differences, merely categorizing them as the "other" is insufficient to signal a threat. A more robust and concrete form of visibility is necessary for the group to be perceived as threatening.

The second important concept is group organization. While threat theory traditionally considers political participation and organization as key variables influencing perceived threat, I argue that organization looks different in non-democratic regimes. Despite their apparent lack of concrete political organization and mobilization, dismissing the Copts as a non-organized group that is perceived as non-threatening by the Muslim population oversimplifies the dynamics. Understanding the role of the Church in Egyptian society, from the controversy of the construction of its physical buildings to the social services they provide, points us to an important yet commonly overlooked, perceived threat factor: religious organization. In non-democratic contexts, political organization may not be as overt, but the role of religious institutions, in this case, the church, becomes incredibly important. Churches serve as symbols of organization and community, which I argue are viewed as threatening. Additionally, churches increase visibility by making it more tangible; in other words, Copts can be seen *through* the number of churches in a particular area. The greater the number of churches, the more it signals the existence of a substantial Coptic population. This highlights the critical role of churches in studying the perceived threat of the Copts.

While both visibility and organization can be studied alone, I argue that they are naturally intertwined and therefore understanding their interaction is the key element in

explaining sectarian violence and its spatial variation in Egypt. Coptic demographics are indeed an important variable. However, it alone cannot offer a comprehensive explanation for attacks, as there is considerable variation in the frequency of attacks against Copts even within areas with substantial Coptic populations. Copts cannot be visible without the presence of churches. Therefore, the number of churches in a particular area provides a much more powerful account of the conditions that produce violent attacks.

Case selection, Research Materials, and Methods:

The selection of Egypt as the focal point for this dissertation is due to several reasons. First, Egypt represents a multi-ethnic autocratic state with a predominantly Sunni Muslim majority of 90%, and a minority of 10% comprising Coptic Christians- while estimates may vary, the majority-minority distribution remains significant. Additionally, Egypt is a part of the Middle East, and the Coptic Christians of Egypt are the largest minority group in the Middle East, making them a crucial group to study to understand both ethnic and sectarian conflict in the region.

I focus on the sub-national level of aggregation, by analyzing the number of attacks per year per governorate, as national-level variation would be too high to properly dissect the causal mechanisms for attacks, and district-level data was not available given the controversy of demographic distributions in Egypt. Therefore, despite some weaknesses of the dataset, which will be discussed in greater details in later sections, subnational data still allows for an in-depth examination of variations within and across different governorates.

The chosen timeframe of 2011-2018 serves three key purposes. First, the Arab Spring period introduced short-term religious unity, which was anticipated to last and decrease sectarian violence. Second, the post-Arab Spring era witnessed a less constrained media environment, contributing to a more authentic reporting of human rights issues, including sectarian attacks. Lastly, this timeframe streamlines the data collection process, ensuring methodological consistency under a particular era.

The principal data source for the statistical analysis as well as the qualitative study of this research is a novel dataset of 596 attacks at the subnational unit of analysis. This dataset is a combination of a non-published dataset obtained from Open Data Tank Initiative[1], and my independent research, drawing on sources such as news reports and publications by organizations like the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and Human Rights Watch. I meticulously curated the initial dataset, organizing it by year and governorate, and cross-referenced each attack with at least two additional news sources for verification. Unverifiable attacks and those not meeting the defined criteria of sectarian violence were excluded. Each event is recorded with its date, location, number of people injured or killed, type of attack, property damages, the narrative regarding the cause of the attack, details of the event, and the state response to the attack.

Chapter 2 tests Threat Theory through addressing different facets of the relationship between visibility, organization, and the perceived sociopolitical threat leading to sectarian violence. H1: Governorates with the highest percentages of Copts face more attacks, as they are perceived as more threatening. H2: Governorates with the greatest

[1] Open Data Tank Initiative e.V. is a Berlin-based association, aiming to make systematic data on political violence and nonviolent actions in the Middle East publicly available.

number of churches witness more attacks, indicating that Copts are seen as a more organized and thus more threatening group. H3: Governorates with the highest Muslim Brotherhood organization will witness more attacks. And H4: Governorates where state capacity is strong experience fewer attacks as police activity may serve as a deterrence to attacks.

To assess at the relationship between attacks and both churches and the percentage of Christians, I employ a linear mixed effects model with random effects for both year and governorate. Additionally, I control for police stations and percentage of Morsi vote share in each of these models as to isolate the effect attributed to churches as well as the percentage of Christians in a particular area. I find that population percentage and number of churches were both statistically significant, and maintained significance even when Menia, the largest hotspot was removed from the model. On the other hand, the influence of Political Islam, measured through vote share for Morsi, was found to be practically statistically insignificant in all models. Moreover, the prevalence of police stations was also found statistically insignificant except in Model 1b, which highlighted that an increase in 10 police stations would potentially result in nearly one more attack, prompting a necessity of additional analysis of the relationship between local law enforcement and Copts.

How the Dissertation is Organized:

Chapter 1 explores the history of the Copts, spanning from the Arab conquest to the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Throughout, I discuss the legal standing of Copts under significant regimes and their treatment by both state and non-state actors. I argue that

political modernization reshaped the way Copts and Muslims interact with each other. During the era of political modernization, there is a shift from violence stemming from political authority in the pre-modern period to more socio-political violence in the modern period. Interestingly, the phenomenon of mob violence, traditionally associated with pre-modern political contexts, intensified in the modern era. Despite Egypt not being a democracy, the modern era remains somewhat defined by the prevalence of mass politics.

As Egypt transitioned into a modern state, citizenship rights became tied directly to the exercise of power. In many ways, this resulted in a much more dangerous reality for minorities in the modern world, despite human rights advancements and state inclusion. However, the pre-modern era carried different expectations regarding the state's reflection of preferences as the dynamics of power did not involve the citizens, and therefore, socio-political competition was rather absent. This resulted in an entirely different dynamic of behavior between citizens of different faiths.

Chapter 2 presents the large N study that assesses the relationship between multiple variables and the number of attacks through a linear mixed-effects model with random effects. The variables included the Percentage of Christians, Number of Churches, Number of Police Stations, and Vote Share for Morsi in 2012, all at the governorate level.

Before attempting to answer the primary research question, I provide a critical overview of existing scholarship on the determinants of ethnic and sectarian violence, analyzing the literature's contributions and limitations. I then supplement the basic account of perceived threat based on just demography to one that goes beyond population numbers as a measure of threat. I highlight the role of Churches in increasing the visibility

and organization of the Coptic minority as an important measure for population threat. The main argument of Chapter 2 is that a minority is attacked by the majority in areas where they are perceived as threatening to the sociopolitical dominance of the majority. Furthermore, I delve into the logic of competition in authoritarian regimes, highlighting that economic and political competition exists despite the absence of electoral rivalry. I discuss how threat perceptions, power dynamics, and group interactions, exist in non-democracies in ways that deviate from democratic norms.

Chapter 3 presents the qualitative analysis of the research, digging deeper perceived threat by highlighting the multifaceted role of the Coptic churches in Egypt as both a structural condition and a micro-level factor. This qualitative exploration aims to uncover patterns and dynamics that might not be immediately evident in broader quantitative analyses. Additionally, Chapter 3 explores the rationale behind "close calls", that is instances where violence would be anticipated but does not occur. Through a discussion of violence surrounding church construction, interfaith relationships, and conversions, as well as the role of rumors and honor in shaping micro level factors, this chapter highlights the intricacies of Coptic Muslim relations in Egypt, and the conditions under which tensions escalate into attacks.

Chapter 1

History of the Copts Since the Arab Conquest

This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of the historical trajectory of the Coptic community, spanning from the Arab conquest to the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Throughout, I discuss the legal standing of Copts under significant regimes and their treatment by both state and non-state actors. Throughout the analysis, the chapter highlights recurring patterns in state behavior and discusses the circumstances surrounding attacks on the Copts of Egypt. While the history of Coptic persecution predates the Arab conquest, I begin the dissertation with this era to provide an important perspective on the genesis of Coptic-Muslim relations, not necessarily relationships prior.

Upon analyzing the history, it becomes evident that violence against the Copts by their Muslim counterparts took place in the modern era, more so than in prior periods. Accounts of Copts being attacked through mob violence were relatively limited in the premodern era, and despite their second-class citizenry, they seemed to coexist with their neighbors under a certain degree of tolerance. While it is crucial to acknowledge that Copts faced systematic persecution under all regimes of Egypt, the prevalence of mob violence appears to be more pronounced in the modern era compared to earlier periods.

This chapter is divided into two main sections: the premodern era (641 AD-1922)and the modern era (1923-present). I argue that political modernization reshaped the way Copts and Muslims interact with each other. During the era of political modernization, there is a shift from violence stemming from political authority in the pre-modern period to more socio-political violence in the modern period. Interestingly, the

phenomenon of mob violence, traditionally associated with premodern times, intensified in the modern era. Furthermore, this chapter highlights that socio-political competition over citizenship rights, typically associated with democratic regimes, are evident even within non-democratic contexts.

In the modern era, the translation of population size and weight into direct power, as well as increased citizen participation in governance (through voting or other means), resulted in intricate ingroup-outgroup dynamics as the majority strived to have the ultimate power to decide who gets citizenship rights. Citizenship rights were now tied directly to the exercise of power, which is a stark difference from the rather subdued political landscape of the premodern era. My main argument lies in the assertion that despite Egypt not being a democracy, the modern era remained somewhat defined by the prevalence of mass politics.

Despite the Copts not being a politically mobilized group, their emergence out of second-class citizenry signaled a socio-political threat to the majority Muslim population. The expectation that the modern state would reflect the cultural and political preferences of the majority fueled the competition between Muslims and Copts, fostering a perceived threat of the Copts, and therefore escalating sectarian violence. In many ways, this resulted in a much more dangerous reality for minorities in the modern world, despite human rights advancements and state inclusion.

In contrast, the pre-modern era carried different expectations regarding the state's reflection of preferences. The dynamics of power did not involve the citizens, and

therefore, socio-political competition was not prevalent. The upcoming section will discuss the history of the Copts in the pre-modern era, shedding light on this interesting dynamic.

The Pre-Modern Era (641 AD – 1922)

The Arab Conquest of Egypt

In 641 AD, the Arabs conquered Egypt, expelling Byzantine rule. This was a drastically different period for the Copts than previous ones, not necessarily in the severity of attacks, as the Romans and Byzantines were indeed more violent, but in the systematic exclusion of both Copts and Jews, known as "People of the Book," into second-class citizenry. Upon conquering Egypt, the new Arab rulers implemented the Covenant of Omar, an Islamic treaty that laid out the rights and restrictions for non-Muslim Abrahamic religions under Islamic rule (Gornall, 2022).[2] The covenant viewed them as polytheists and referred to them as "Dhimmis," a derogatory term that indicates a status of inferiority. The Dhimmi status also mandated the payment of a poll tax fee called the "Jizya," which was levied on non-Muslims (Tada, 2020).

Under the first caliphs and their successors of the Umayyad (661-750 AD) and Abbasid (750-868 AD) dynasties, Egypt was ruled as a province by ethnic Arab governors appointed by the caliphs in either Damascus or Baghdad. In the year 705 AD, we see one of the first attempts to turn Egypt into an Arab nation: a decree from the governor of Egypt making Arabic the country's official administrative language (Tada, 2020). Despite the

[2] The covenant is attributed to the 2nd Caliph Omar Bin Al Khattab (634-644) and continued to be implemented during the Abbasid (747-1252), Mamluk (1252-1517) and Ottoman (1517-1798) periods (Cswpress,2021).

protections that the Covenant of Omar provided "Dhimmis," the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs still mistreated them. Kurrah, who governed Egypt under the Umayyad Caliph Al Walid I (705-715 AD), mandated the branding of monks' hands with the name of their monastery and the date of their branding, or have their limbs cut off (Gornall, 2022). Similar persecution was generalized to all Copts living in Egypt at varying degrees of severity.

The Arab governors also began controlling the church by regulating the authority of the Coptic Pope and revoking his ability to "freely administer the affairs of his church and people" (Seraphim, 2001).[3] Harsher laws were created to disenfranchise the Copts and push them into second-class citizenry, including heavy taxation, confiscation of treasure, and extension of the Jizya tax to the monks. The Arab Caliphate tax system consisted of a combination of a discriminatory tax levied on non-Muslims and removed upon the taxpayers' conversion to Islam, and a uniform tax that was paid regardless of religion. This heavy imposition prompted a large wave of conversions among Coptic nobles, aiming to escape financial burdens. "It is said that in 744, some 24,000 Copts embraced Islam when the governor promised them relief from the jizya, which was periodically rescinded. For the first time since the conquest, the Copts were now the minority," explained Bishop Seraphim (2001). Those who did not convert fled their homes to avoid the taxes but were brutally treated once caught, returned in chains with their limbs amputated, and their properties confiscated (Seraphim, 2001).

[3] Anba Seraphim, Bishop of the Metropolis of Glastonbury wrote this article as a part of the book *Byzantine Christianity and Islam: Historical and Pastoral Reflections on the Relationship of Islam and Christians of the East, by Jack Figuel. It is a collection of* articles that provides the comments of current Eastern Christian Church leaders on the history of Coptic Muslim relations.

The mass conversion of Copts to Islam resulted in higher taxes on those Copts who refused conversion to offset the decline in tax revenue of the Jizya. Many Copts tried to evade paying these heavy taxes, which led to the Arabs initiating a system of internal passports; those traveling long-distance within Egypt were required to carry a permit certifying they had paid all their taxes (Gornall, 2022).

Between 725 and 832 AD, there were multiple instances of Coptic uprisings that were ultimately suppressed. In 831 AD, a significant uprising erupted in the Nile Delta, where Copts succeeded in conducting some periodic attacks on the Muslim army. However, they were eventually crushed. The survivors were exiled, imprisoned, or enslaved throughout the empire (Gornall, 2022). As the process of Islamization of all government institutions was taking place in full effect, all Coptic leaders were removed from office and replaced with Muslims (Gornall, 2022), (Tada, 2020). Discussing the state of the Copts during this period, the Muslim historian al-Makrizi wrote: "From that time, they were in subjection throughout the Egyptian territory, and their power was crushed. None of them had the power to revolt or even resist the government; the Muslims were in the majority in the villages" (Seraphim, 2001). Both financially and socially weakened, it is said that churches used glass and wooden utensils for sacramental use since their gold and silver vessels were stolen from them (Seraphim, 2001).

From 851 to 858 AD, a periodic rise in oppression went beyond increasing taxation and extended to an assault on religious observances. Crosses and bells were smashed, the sale of wine was prohibited, making it difficult for Copts to partake in communion, churches were destroyed. The Copts were also prohibited from riding horses, and required

dress in black (Seraphim, 2001). Between the 10th and 13th centuries, the Coptic language faded out of everyday speech, and Arabic became Egypt's primary language. Coptic survived only in the liturgical services and religious schools of churches and monasteries. It survives today as a liturgical language, in the same way Latin is still used within the Catholic church (Gornall, 2022).

As highlighted in the previous section, the government played a crucial role in the persecution of the Copts and pushed them into second-class citizenry. Since the dynamics of power in the government did not involve citizens, there was an absence of socio-political competition or citizen-on-citizen violence. Instead, the pattern was the systematic suppression and brutal treatment of Copts at the hands of the government.

The Fatimids (969 AD-1171)

Being a Shi'ite Dynasty in a Sunni-majority country, the Fatimids provided a degree of protection for minorities to garner their support. During this period, Copts and Jews enjoyed administrative jobs and essential positions as clerks, accountants, and scribes. However, during the ruling period of Hakim Bi Amr Allah (996-1021AD), the Copts saw one of the largest attacks on their identity. Hakim forbade the speaking of Coptic in public, at home, and even inside churches and monasteries. Those caught conversing in it had their tongues cut off (Gornall, 2022). By the 10th century, Coptic bishops began to preach in Arabic to preserve the religion. However, beyond the oppressive rule of Al-Hakim, who was notorious for persecuting various groups, not just Christians, the church enjoyed a rare interval of religious tolerance, with the Caliphs even participating in Christian festivals.

One of the most remarkable observances of leniency was the allowing of those who had converted to Islam under compulsion to revert to their original faith. Muslim converts to Christianity were also not always punished. During the reign of the Armenian vizier of the caliph al-Hafiz (1132-1149), the position of Christians was so comfortable that it was feared that some Islamicised Copts might revert (Seraphim, 2001).

The prosperity of the Copts under the Fatimids offers an illustration of the complexities surrounding minority-majority dynamics throughout history. As the Copts received more protections, they found themselves increasingly targeted by segments of the lower-class Muslim population who viewed the Copts as dhimmis who overreached themselves.

This historical vignette serves as a small illustration of the dynamics of perceived threats that become more prevalent in the modern era. Despite the absence of political competition, it becomes evident that whenever competitive dynamics emerge, the sense of threat intensifies. As a minority group begins rising in the ranks, they are often perceived as encroaching upon the socio-political dominance traditionally held by the majority. Consequently, the majority population may resort to coercive measures to assert their supremacy.[4] While instances of elevated Coptic status in the pre-modern era were relatively rare, they were often met with heightened hostility and violence from Muslim citizens who perceived such advancements as challenges to their own position of dominance. The disintegration of the Fatimid rule marked a dangerous time for the Coptic

[4] See Blalock's racial threat theory discussed in Ch 2.

community, with the destruction of churches, and the execution of monks who resisted converting to Islam.

The restoration of order brought about by the triumph of Salah ad-Din and the establishment of the Ayyubid dynasty (1169-1252) came at a cost for the Copts, who lost their dominance in public services, with many losing their jobs. Suspicious that the Copts would act as third columnists in the war against the Frankish crusaders, laws were enacted forbidding them from holding office. Additionally, a series of harsh laws were introduced, and included the taking down of bells and crosses from churches, church walls to be painted black, and the banning of religious processions (Seraphim, 2001). It was only after Salah al-Din defeated the Crusaders at the Battle of Hittin in 1187 that Copts were allowed to return to their normal lives.

The Mamluks (1250-1517)

The Mamluks, a Muslim warrior class made up originally of enslaved people from the Caucasus, overthrew the ruling Ayyubid dynasty and ended Arab rule in 1250. The Mamluks ruled Egypt until 1517 when a new power emerged in Asia Minor. Egypt became an Ottoman province, to be ruled by Turks for the next 300 years (Gornall, 2022). The Mamluk rule was a period of state repression and violence (Tada, 2020). They ruled according to a feudal system, and because they needed skilled workers in administration and finance, they appointed a Copt as a vizier in their early years (Seraphim, 2001). However, this angered Muslims towards Christians. "An incident in 1293 began when a well-dressed Copt was seen mounted on his horse and leading a Muslim debtor behind him

bound with a rope. The crowd erupted and murdered the Copt before setting out on a general massacre of Copts with looting and destruction of their homes," explained Seraphim (2001). Once again, we see the sporadic instances of violence among subject populations in the pre-modern era aligning with the elevation of the status of the Copts, signaling a perceived threat to the majority Muslim population. Although the modes of threat vary, the underlying pattern remains consistent.

Nevertheless, the majority of attacks on the Copts in the pre-modern era stemmed from the state. In 1301, the Sultan ordered all churches to be closed because of the fear that they were accumulating wealth by purchasing land, and in 1321, around 60 churches and many monasteries were destroyed. Through the intervention of the Ethiopian emperor, a period of peace was reached from 1327 to 1339, when churches were allowed to be restored. This was not long-lasting, however, when another Coptic administrator was lynched by a rampaging mob in 1354 (Seraphim, 2001).

By the time Sultan Selim I (1512-1520) brought Egypt under Ottoman rule in 1517, the Copts had already become a marginalized minority. On his trip to Egypt (1672-73), Vansleb, a German theologian and writer on Egypt, made the following observation, "I must confess that there does not exist in Egypt a community that suffers from tyranny such as what the Copts suffer… The Turks consider them the scum of the world and even lower than the Jews. They treat them offensively… close their churches and their homes… to blackmail money from them" (Seraphim, 2001).

The disenfranchisement and persecution of the Copts continued, leading to the erosion of much of their identity and recorded history. As noted by Seraphim, "recorded

Coptic history came to an end by the fourteenth century…. between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, we are dependent largely on occasional references by Muslim authors or observations by Western pilgrims and travelers" (Seraphim, 2001).

The French Occupation of Egypt (1798-1801)

In July 1798, Napoleon fought the Battle of the Pyramids, defeating local Mamluk rulers and wiping out most of the Ottoman army. Napoleon's arrival gave hope to the Copts, who hoped their circumstances would change because of European rule. While the period indeed brought some benefits to the Copts, who were able to retrieve some of their power in the government, it was very subtle and short-lived. Napoleon confirmed many of the impositions placed on Copts and did nothing to support them. Consequently, the Copts did not benefit from the presence of the French. However, once the French had departed and Ottoman rule was restored, the Copts were accused of collaboration with the invaders, and Christian homes and churches were attacked.

These allegations were primarily rooted in the alliance of Coptic General Yaqub Hanna with the French in fighting the Mamluks. Following the departure of the French, General Hanna began advocating for Egypt's independence in 1801 but died before his movement could gather support (Farag,2014). Many Egyptians perceived him as a traitor for aligning with the French, and because he was a Copt, the public sentiment regarding Coptic patriotism was heavily altered. Copts were seen as an internal enemy.

The Reign of Mohammad Ali Pasha and his Family (1805-1952)

The early 19th century was a time of harmony between the Copts and Muslims. In 1805 the Turkish government appointed Mohammad Ali Pasha to rule over Egypt, and in 1811 he wiped out the Mamluks who regained control after Napoleon. The reign of Mohammad Ali Pasha was a breath of hope for the Copts. Ruling Egypt from 1805 to 1849, his bloodline led Egypt under the titles of pasha (1805-1867), khedive (1867-1914), sultan (1914-1922), and finally king (1914-1952). Mohammad Ali was an enlightened reformer, he established military schools, sent students to be educated in Europe, and opened Egypt's doors to anyone who could assist proactively. Because of this, he and his successors were able to achieve much success in Egypt such as establishing a national army, broadening the irrigation system, expanding agricultural lands, connecting Egypt with European civilization, and opening the Suez Canal (Gornall,2022).

His vision of modernizing Egypt led to the establishment of cultural and religious institutions that had western character, such as the University of Giza, as well as new industrialized cities such as Ismailia, Heliopolis, and Maadi. Despite his commitment to education, he neglected the education of the Copts. However, they still benefited under his rule, as he allowed them to own land, and attain government positions. When the Copts failed to win seats on local councils, the government would step in to appoint some, to ensure that they were represented (Cswpress,2021).

Despite political inclusion, the Copts remained under threat of violence of the government, through attacks by local authorities. The story of Sidhom Bishay is one of the most well-known during this time. In 1844, Bishay, a government clerk in the port of

Damietta, faced false accusations of blasphemy against Islam, and was given a choice, to leave Christianity or be killed. Despite denying the accusation, the testimony of a "*Dhimmi"* against a Muslim was inadmissible in court. Refusing to abandon his faith, he was flogged before being killed by having molten tar thrown on him by local law enforcement (Coptic Synaxarium).[5]

Following Mohammad Ali Pasha, Khedive Abbas Hilmi took power from 1849 to 1854. During his reign, he contemplated the idea of transporting the Copts to Sudan and Ethiopia to make Egypt completely Muslim. However, when informed of this, the Islamic authorities issued a *fatwa* rejecting it and reminding the Khedive that the Copts were the original inhabitants of Egypt and therefore their deportation would be both wrong and impractical.

In 1855, the Jizya tax was abolished and under Ismail Pasha, the grandson of Muhammad Ali and the Ottoman Khedive of Egypt from 1863 to 1879, Copts were recruited to the advisory Council of Representatives and other arms of Egypt's bureaucracy (Gornall,2022). However, the Hamayoni Decree was established in 1856, in which Christian congregations were required to submit petitions for any form of building, repair, or renovation of church buildings to the ruler of the country.

[5] The Coptic Synaxarium, often referred to as the Senexar, by Copts, is an ancient book that commemorates the stories of the martyrs of the Coptic Church on their prospective day of martyrdom. While there is debate as to how old the Synaxarion as we know it today is, there is evidence that points to it being used in liturgical services around the time of the 13th and 14th century.

The British Occupied Egypt (1882-1914)

The British occupied Egypt in 1882, but they did not annex it, allowing a nominally independent Egyptian government to continue to operate. During this time, there were many examples illustrating the affinity between the two faiths, particularly during religious celebrations. It was often the case that Copts would help build mosques while Muslims helped restore churches. "They have similar customs for birth, marriage, and death, similar superstitions and folklore, similar relics of that Nile worship which has been called the real religion of the Egyptian peasant. Lord Cromer encapsulated this unity by asserting that 'the only difference between the Copt and the Muslim is that the former is an Egyptian who worships in a Christian church, whilst the latter in an Egyptian who worships in a Mohammedan Mosque" (Hamed,1979). However, as the 20th century progressed, the two groups began to drift apart, an unsurprising shift that coincided with British colonialism and their implementation of divide and conquer tactics, which were not at all unique to Egypt.

During the beginning of the occupation in 1882, the Copts played a pivotal role in the bureaucracy with most of the fiscal tasks being performed by them. In fact, in the beginning of the 20th century, about 97% of all tax collectors were Copts and several were among the village Sheikhs and Umdas (headmen). The most influential category of Copts was those involved in international trade after the introduction of the market economy as well as expansions in agriculture. They invested their capital in agrarian production buying up large estates and becoming landlords. While wealthy Copts were supporting the occupation

to keep their ranks and protect their interests, the majority of the Copts opposed the occupation.

Contrary to expectations, the British were discriminatory towards the Copts, in hopes to appease the Muslim majority, and due to the Copts not supporting the British occupation (Farag, 2014). Lord Cromer (1841-1917) rarely hired Copts or gave them public appointments, but instead depended primarily on Christians from Mesopotamia. Despite the success of some Copts, the majority of them, as of the Muslims, were poor peasants, producing the same crops, suffering the same oppressions, and facing the same economic problems.

During this period, we witness the emergence of early political modernization through the creation of the National Party (Al Hizb al Watani). The National Party was led by Mustafa Kamel, and their goal was to resist British occupation and establish a modern political system in Egypt. Utilizing Islamic rhetoric, the party called for a return to Ottoman rule and promoted the idea of an Islamic University, which alienated the Copts (Farag, 2014). The death of Mustafa Kamel worsened Coptic-Muslim relations as the new leader Muhammad Farid, objected to the appointment of Butrus Ghali, a Copt, as prime minister, resulting in the loss of any bit of support the party had from the Copts. “The decade of 1908–18 was characterized by the retreat of the national movement, the public escalation of religious tension, and the general deterioration of the relations between Christians and Muslims” argued Farag (2014).

The deterioration of Coptic and Muslim relations manifested itself in the Coptic Congress of Assiut and its rival, The Egyptian Congress. In March 1911, Metropolitan

Macarius of Assiut (1897–1944) called for a Coptic Congress and invited some of the leading Coptic figures to discuss their relationship with the state and their Muslim co patriots. The event had 1000 attendees. Some of their demands included Sunday as an official holiday for Copts, employment based only on merit, and equality between Christians and Muslims in high-ranking leadership positions, Christianity to be taught in schools to Coptic students, the establishment of a system that guaranteed Coptic representation in the judicial councils, and government funding of Coptic schools from the land tax, of which the Copts paid 16% (Farag, 2014).

To counter the Coptic Congress, an Islamic congress took place in April of that same year and was named the "Egyptian Congress", one of the first modern attempts at alienating the Copts from what it means to be Egyptian. It was led by Rya-d Pasha, a former prime minister and had 5000 people attending. These meetings were the first time the issue of Coptic rights became a point of debate, and the full citizenship of Copts was asserted. The Egyptian congress concluded that political rights are not to be divided among the nation's religious groups, Friday is the only official holiday and Islam is the religion of the state, employment is based on merit and the government has to make sure that the Copts do not receive more than their proportion in society, and no changes to the voting law to guarantee Coptic representation on judicial councils (Farag, 2014).

The Road to Independence and the Rise of Political Modernization:

From the beginning of the 20th century, the national movement against the British occupation intensified, and the gap between Muslims and Copts grew even more

(Gornall,2022). In 1919, under the leadership of Saad Zaghloul, the revolutionaries adopted the slogan "Unity of Crescent and Cross" in hopes of having a unified independent Egypt without religious strife. The time period from 1919-1952 was considered the golden age of national unity and religious harmony. The 1919 revolution was a critical point for the Copts to engage in national movements as it was believed to be in Egypt's national interest to gain the Copts as allies in the resistance against the British, especially since Britain claimed it was staying in Egypt to preserve and protect Coptic rights (Farag, 2014).

Analysis:

The previous section focused on the pre-modern Era, starting from the Arab conquest of Egypt, and outlining key time periods and regimes. While characterized by discrimination and persecution, this period experienced less sectarian violence. As Egypt headed on the path to modernity, a noticeable surge in violence became evident, accompanied by shifts in how the violence was manifested.

Political modernization in much of the colonized world was fraught with violence and ethnic tensions. However, unlike much of the modern world, modernization in Egypt took place from the top down with the aim of creating a powerful nation capable of protecting its borders and citizens. Therefore, Mohammad Ali prioritized strengthening and educating the military as well as technological advancements. "Modernization was not a long-term plan for the modernization of the state, but a short-term plan with a specific goal. It is no surprise that the main interest was in science and technology. There were no fellowships for linguistics, philosophy, or humanities in Muhammad Ali 's educational programs and

the modernization project was not interested in art, new ideas, or other aspects of a civilized society" argues Farag (2014). As a result, what Egypt learned from France regarding science and technology, it lacked in principles of democracy, equality, or secularization. Additionally, because cultural and social modernization was taking place in the west during the time of western occupation, "resisting modernization was viewed as resisting occupation and western hegemony" (Farag, 2014).

As Egypt transitioned into an era of political modernization, we see a transition from the buildup of sectarian tensions into conflict and violence. Political modernization meant that population weight and size can now be translated into power, and therefore it gave rise to competition regarding whose preferences the states would now reflect. The next section will discuss the intricate relationship between the Copts, the emerging modern state, and the Muslim population.

The Modern Era (1923- Present)

The Modern Era presented a new reality for the Copts that is indeed challenging to definitively label as an improvement or deterioration. On one hand, the Modern era brought more inclusion, state representation, and improvement in the protection of human rights. It also brought along international protections and pressure on the state to maintain a fair, equal treatment of all citizens. On the other hand, political modernity brought around a more complex dynamic of everyday interactions. For the first time, economic and social competition were intertwined with political competition, offering another layer of complexity. The expectation that the state should reflect the cultural and political preferences of the majority group introduced a new form of competition previously absent

in earlier periods, rendering the presence of a sizable or prosperous minority as a potential political threat. Consequently, instances of mob violence that are often associated with premodern politics, paradoxically increase in the modern era.

My main argument is that power-threat theory retains its relevance in modern contexts, even within non-democratic regimes. While population size may not directly translate into votes, its significance endures, perpetuating the influence of modern politics on ethnic group dynamics. Beyond the electoral, group size plays a crucial role in determining whose preferences the government will favor, as well as influencing cultural dominance and the distribution of citizenship rights. This section will discuss these new dynamics of group behavior between the Copts, the state, and the majority Muslim population. As the Copts transitioned out of second-class citizenry, there was a notable surge in mob violence, along with attacks on Coptic places of worship, businesses, and homes.

Egyptian Independence and the Rise of the Wafd Party:

On Feb. 28, 1922, after years of unrest in every corner of Egyptian society, the British government issued the Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian Independence, recognizing Egypt as an independent sovereign state. However, Egyptian independence was conditional, with Britain retaining its influence in Egyptian public life, keeping large numbers of troops in the country and retaining control of the Suez Canal (Gornall,2022). The Wafd party developed the 1923 Constitution that would govern the country after the departure of the British (Farag,2014). Christians were finally declared equal citizens to Muslims.

Despite the Mufti insisting that the constitution must declare that Islam is the religion of the state, the Copts still felt politically well represented. All the Wafd Party nominees for judicial elections were elected without discriminating between Christians and Muslims and no discrimination was observed in the 1925 or 1926 elections. However, the spirit of non-discrimination did not last. Despite the Copts being elected to the parliament as members of the Wafd party, they were forbidden from positions such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of the Interior, and discrimination persisted in the military, the police force, and especially with regards to promotions to high positions. Copts were also never appointed as university presidents or deans (Farag, 2014). Additionally, all Wafd party cabinets kept Hamayuni law, restricting church construction. The Wafd party also did not oppose Al Ezabi's 10 conditions, which listed 10 conditions that had to be met before any application to build a church could be submitted, essentially curtailing all attempts to build a church (Farag,2014).

Despite this, the mere presence of the Copts in politics through the Wafd party resulted in much backlash in the 1930s and 40s. Al-Ahrar al-Dusturiin and the Saadı parties accused the Wafd party of favoring the Copts at the expense of Muslims' interests(Farag, 2014). This resulted in a rise of Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Masr al-Fatah, which resorted to a more violent Islamic rhetoric that attacked Copts. In the 1940s many of the Coptic youth found a place in the communist party, though it was a weak party and did not address any of the Coptic concerns(Farag,2014). As political modernization began to take place, and competition rises, we see a drastic rise in sectarian tensions and non-state led mob violence. A pivotal moment illustrating this phenomenon occurred in March 1949, when one of the earliest recorded instances of modern-day mob

attacks on churches unfolded in Zaqaziq, with the burning of a church as well as calling for the boycotting of all Coptic businesses and services (Farag, 2014).

On July 23, 1952, the Free Officers, with only one Copt in a leading position, staged a coup and ousted the king, putting the country in limbo, and the Copts at the mercy of new leadership of a new Era (Farag, 2014).

The Nasser Regime:

One of the key figures among the Free Officers, Gamal Abdel Nasser, swiftly assumed leadership of the new government and became president in 1956, enjoying widespread popularity among both Copts and Muslims. Nasser was arguably one of the most influential leaders in the modern Middle East, and his policies quickly transformed Egypt and influenced much of the Arab world. Nasser appealed to the Egyptian people as a populist reformer, championing pan-Arabism and spearheading efforts to nationalize public goods. Central to his vision was the concept of Arab-Socialism, advocating for the unity of the Arab world under an economic framework aimed at nationalizing resources and fostering a sense of independent Arab identity (Cswpress, 2021). This ideology led to an expansion of government control over the economy, the dissolution of political parties and the free press, and the introduction of compulsory religious education in school curricula. Additionally, Nasser established Al Azhar University, which to this day exclusively admits Muslim students (Cswpress, 2021). Despite his significant influence, Nasser's domestic politics were contradictory, and oftentimes incredibly messy.

One of the most complicated relationships during his time in office was between him and the Muslim Brotherhood. Initially, the Brotherhood supported Nasser's rise to power, and he tolerated their continued existence. However, he quickly went against the group as they continued to demand to have more influence and power as he was on his route to consolidate power and gain unilateral authority. Their relationship became hostile, with the Brotherhood attempting to assassinate Nasser in 1954, prompting the arrest and torture of many Muslim brotherhood members (Laub,2019). As a result, the group was incredibly weakened and was forced underground.

The Coptic question under the Nasser Era marks the beginning of modern-day Coptic Muslim relations. Nasser's friendly relationship with Pope Cyril VI became the instrument in which the Copts were able to gather some protections under his regime.[6] "The President, Pope Cyril VI stated, " was thinking of a nation with no discrimination between Copt and Muslim. He was thinking of the country, not of the sects and religions" (Gornall, 2022). A pivotal event for the Coptic Church was the regime's support in constructing a new cathedral to house relics of St. Mark, which had been acquired from the Vatican. Nasser's presence at the cathedral's opening ceremony in 1968 suggested potential collaboration between the Coptic community and the state (Tawfik, 2018). Despite some notable moments, Nasser's overarching policies had both a direct and indirect impact on the Coptic community, leading to a decline in their societal status in Egypt. Nasser's Arab nationalist agenda, coupled with efforts to shape Egyptian identity around Arabism, undermined the distinct "Egyptianity" that had provided a sense of belonging for Copts.

[6] Pope Cyril VI is often referred to as Pope Kirollos IV by the Copts.

While Nasser's policies did not explicitly target Copts, they were not fully integrated into his vision, lacking a place in his "three circles" ideology of Arab, Africa, and Islamic identity. "The nature of the Naserist project made the state the major player, while the people played the role of recipients. All political opposition was eliminated for the sake of protecting the Naserist project. Raising issues of minority rights or discrimination was forbidden, since sectarian struggle would lead to the instability of the political system" explained Farag (2014).

Nasser's socialist policies also destroyed much of the collective economic and political power of the Copts. The nationalization of large businesses and the redistribution of land holdings larger than 200 fedans significantly affected wealthy Copts, diminishing their wealth, and their capacity to provide assistance to impoverished Copts. "The policies of the revolution, particularly those of nationalization and socialism, including land reforms, did little to help the Copts," explained Gornall (2022). "There was no suggestion that the laws targeted Christians, but they severely hamstrung the Egyptian bourgeoisie, of which the Copts were appreciable constituents", he continued (Gornall, 2022). Coptic political organization also experienced a sharp decline, with their representation in elections falling to less than 0.5%. Furthermore, Coptic presence in parliament became virtually non-existent. To counteract this, Nasser amended the constitution to allow a presidential appointment of 10 members to the 350-person parliament. However, this was not a long-term political solution to the systematic exclusion of the Copts from the Egyptian political landscape (Farag, 2014).

Many of Nasser's policies were a double-edged sword. One example of such was the nationalization and expansion of the free education system in Egypt. While the education

system provided educational opportunities for all citizens, the regime enforced teaching religion as a mandatory subject in grade school (despite it being optional previously). In practice, this resulted in all public-school students, despite their religious affiliation, to be required to learn Islam as a core subject (Cswpress, 2021). Thus, while aiming to promote national unity and cultural cohesion, Nasser's educational policies inadvertently contributed to the marginalization of the Coptic community within the public education system.

The Arab Israeli conflict exacerbated hostility towards Egyptian Jews, as well as the Copts, who were blamed for supporting Israel. Despite the church authorities voicing no objections to Nasser's socialist alliances and adopting a supporting stance over Egypt's championship of justice for the Palestinians, the Nasser administration systematically excluded Copts from attaining high-ranking positions within the government and military (Cswpress, 2021). Nasser's policies engendered desperation, which resulted in the 1st wave of Coptic middle-class migration out of Egypt (1952-1970) to the west and neighboring Arab countries (Gornall, 2022). Following Nasser's death in 1970, President Anwar Al-Sadat assumed power, marking a new chapter in Egyptian history.

The Sadat Regime:

Under Sadat's leadership, Egypt experienced a departure from nationalist ideals, moving towards an Islamic religious identity as the primary basis for governance (Tadros,2013). Approximately five months after Nasser's death on March 9, 1971, the Coptic church underwent its own internal chance with the death of Pope Cyril VI and the accession of Pope Shenouda III as the patriarch of the church (Gornall, 2022). Sadat came to power at

a very difficult time in Egypt's history, marked by numerous domestic and international complexities. To consolidate his power and solidify his legitimacy, Sadat forged alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood, releasing its members from the prisons and underground operations they were in under Nasser's regime. He aimed to utilize the Brotherhood as a counterforce against both the liberal and intellectual opposition, as well as the religious right wing.

The Muslim Brotherhood capitalized on their resources from Gulf States to establish their own media platforms, non-governmental organizations, aid networks, religious education institutions, and paramilitary militias. This influx of funds facilitated the spread of Wahhabism and Salafism within Egypt (Cswpress, 2021). To garner support from the Muslim Brotherhood, Sadat undertook measures to redefine Egyptian identity as an Islamic one. In 1971, he amended the constitution to declare that "Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language." This constitutional amendment aimed to align the government more closely with Islamic principles and win favor with the Muslim Brotherhood.

The rise of the Muslim brotherhood generated a climate of sectarian tensions and public verbal attacks on the Copts. In 1972, rumors circulated alleging that Pope Shenouda III wanted to convert Muslims into Christianity in order to increase the Coptic population and establish his own Coptic state (Gornall, 2022). Hostile sentiments and preaching against the mosques run by radical Sheikhs, calling for the segregation of Copts and Muslims and for Muslims not to partake in business with Copts. The Coptic community was perceived as a significant threat to the core of Egyptian identity, fueling heightened tensions among the predominantly Muslim population.

Unlike his predecessor, Sadat did not seek to cultivate a friendly relationship with the

new patriarch, which created a complex dynamic between the church and the state. The Sadat era marked the exacerbation of hostile relationships between Copts and the state, and the first instance in modern history for the church to be publicly attacked in a speech by a sitting president.

Unlike previous time periods where violence and discrimination against Copts were predominantly driven by the state, this new era witnessed a shift as individuals took matters into their own hands to express their grievances. The tensions between both groups erupted in 1972, when an arsonist targeted a small church in Al Khanka, Cairo. This incident marked the first official confrontation between the church and Sadat's administration concerning the construction of a church without proper permits (Gornall, 2022). Additionally, it marked the first occurrence in modern history where the police actively participated in the destruction of a church.

In response to the destruction of the church in Al- Khanka, the Pope instructed bishops and priests to hold a mass amidst the ruins. The following Sunday, large masses of Coptic protestors marched to Al- Khanka and held a mass in the ruins. Anti-Copt protests also erupted, and Coptic houses and shops were burnt to the ground. The government attributed the unrest to "foreign agitators" (Gornall, 2022). In an effort to alleviate tensions, President Sadat promised the Pope the construction of 55 churches annually without restrictions. However, this proved false, as the church was granted permits for only 25 churches over the following four years, slightly over 10% of what was initially promised to them.

Confronted with significant economic challenges and domestic unrest, Sadat pursued a policy of disengagement from the conflict with Israel, ultimately leading to the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty in March 1979, known as Camp David. However, this decision came at a considerable cost for Sadat, resulting in the alienation of the Islamists whom he had previously courted for support. Meanwhile, sectarian tensions continued to escalate, reaching their peak from 1977 to 1979 (Gornall, 2022). During this time, Shaykh al Azhar, Abd Al Halim Mahmud, organized a conference in 1977 asserting that any law conflicting with Islamic law should be invalidated, essentially advocating for the supremacy of Islamic law over parliamentary legislation. This stance further exacerbated tensions as Copts began to fear what a future of living under Islamic law would look like for them.

Violence against the Copts continued to escalate. On January 6th, 1980, during Coptic Christmas Eve prayers, sectarian clashes erupted across the country, resulting in the burning of several churches (Gornall, 2022). In 1981, a series of religious riots spanning three days resulted in the deaths of at least seventeen individuals, both Copts and Muslims, with over a hundred others sustaining injuries. In response to the tragic events, the Coptic Holy Synod made the decision to cancel the traditional Easter festivities. Simultaneously, American Copts staged protests during Sadat's visit to the USA in May of the same year, seeking international attention and support.

On May 14th, 1980, Sadat delivered a speech in parliament that deeply alienated the Coptic community, proclaiming, "I am a Muslim president of an Islamic country" (Tadros, 2013). In this address, he also accused Pope Shenouda III of plotting to undermine state security and wanting to erect a separatist Coptic state in Upper Egypt. This move aimed to generate support from the Islamists and divert attention away from his intention to amend

the constitution to allow for more than two presidential terms. In 1980 Sadat amended the constitution, inserting the clause, “Islamic jurisprudence is the principal source of legislation”, further strengthening Political Islam in Egypt. In response, the Pope delivered an angry speech, in which he attacked the idea of adopting Sharia law as the basis for laws imposed on non-Muslims (Gornall, 2022). Consequently, relations between Sadat and Pope Shenouda broke down completely.

In 1981, a wave of sectarian attacks targeting Copts unfolded, culminating in the worst attack of its time in Al Zawya Al Hamra in June of that year. An argument between neighbors regarding land for a proposed church escalated into violence, resulting in the deaths of 17 individuals and injuries to 54 others. This incident garnered significant international attention, and Sadat was not well received by Raegan in his visit to the United States shortly after (Gornall, 2022). Furthermore, Sadat faced protests by American Copts outside the White House. Sadat blamed the church and the Pope for complaining to the West and orchestrating a hostile reception of him, despite the Pope never doing so. In fact, the Pope's public relations expert, Bishop Samuel, had previously traveled to the United States to urge the Coptic community not to protest and provoke Sadat, but they did not listen to him.

Wanting to punish the Pope, Sadat revoked the 1971 presidential decree recognizing Shenouda as the Patriarch of Alexandria the following month. The Pope was forced into internal exile in the Wadi El-Natrun desert, as many of his predecessors had been since antiquity. Ultimately the Pope was under house arrest. This action marked the most direct assault on the church in modern Egypt (Gornall, 2022). Despite these harsh measures, Pope

Shenouda III refused to pursue legal action against the state. He maintained his stance out of love for his country, asserting that he remained the head of the church whether he was in his residence or confined to the monastery.

Towards the end of his regime, Sadat was unable to contain Political Islam. Sensing that Islamists posed a threat to his authority, Sadat responded by arresting thousands of Islamist militants and clerics. Despite his efforts, Sadat's utilization of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political tool unleashed a force that was far too powerful for Sadat to contain, ultimately costing him his life. The Political Islam that Sadat sought to manipulate ultimately turned against him, and he was assassinated by a small group of young jihadists during a military parade commemorating the October 6th war with Israel. His attempts to Islamize Egypt, along with his strained interactions with the church, further alienated the Coptic community. As a result, the possibility of cooperation or even mere co-existence between the state and the Copts remained strained even after his death.

Sadat's regime witnessed a significant increase in violent attacks against the Coptic community, driven by various factors. As discussed previously, the modern era introduced a more complex dynamic in the interactions not only between Copts and the state but also between Copts and Muslims. Beyond the electoral, the size of different groups played a crucial role in determining whose preferences the government would favor, as well as influencing cultural dominance and the distribution of citizenship rights. The expectation that the state should now reflect the cultural and political preferences of the majority group introduced a form of competition that was absent in previous periods.

Despite Egypt not being a democracy under Sadat, the dynamics of citizenship and inclusion persisted. With the rise of Political Islam during Sadat's rule, there was a noticeable

shift towards a more Islamic Egypt, which redefined who was considered part of its citizenry. While not officially designated as second-class citizens, Sadat's rhetoric alienated the Copts, leaving them feeling unrepresented. Furthermore, the rhetoric of both the Muslim Brotherhood and Sadat legitimized the threat that the Copts were attempting to take over Egypt by constructing more churches. This perceived threat heavily affected the relationship between Copts and Muslims in Egypt as the Copts were now viewed as competitors rather than co-citizens.

The Mubarak Regime:

Following Sadat's assassination, Mohammad Hosni Mubarak, his former vice president, assumed the presidency, becoming Egypt's 4th president. Mubarak's 30-year rule witnessed significant changes in political participation, as he initially introduced some degree of liberalization in Egyptian politics (Gornall, 2022). Mubarak was generally viewed as an ally to the Copts. He took measures such as issuing a decree to reinstate the Pope to his office and exchanging holiday greetings with the Coptic community on January 7th, Orthodox Christmas. Unlike previous regimes, Mubarak did not attack the Copts, nor did he blame them for any internal or external unrest. There was a noticeable shift in the official state rhetoric concerning the Copts. However, Mubarak's allyship was not enough to protect the Copts. While relations remained calm initially, there was a lingering fear among the Coptic community that this was the calm before the storm, and that the loose bonds would eventually break.

Despite this apparent shift in the state's position towards the Copts, systemic discrimination against Copts persisted in various spheres, including university admissions,

public spending, and military promotions (Cswpress, 2021). The educational system also reflected biases, with public schools excluding any teaching of the Coptic Era from the history curricula and omitting Christianity from religious education classes (Cswpress, 2021). Restoration of churches and construction of new ones was continuing at a steady pace but some of Coptic community were still frustrated by the long administrative procedures required before even the most trivial repair can be approved. In 2005, however, widespread criticism of the Hamayoni Decree resulted in Mubarak delegating the responsibility of church approvals to provincial governors (Seraphim, 2001). This shift in administrative authority aimed to streamline the process and address the grievances of the Coptic community regarding bureaucratic obstacles that they face.

This time period also saw a drastic increase in anti-Coptic sentiment portrayed in the media. Various publications, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's magazine, El-Daawa, frequently published articles attacking the Copts, advocating for their treatment as dhimmis unless they converted to Islam (Gornall, 2022). These sentiments were fueled by rumors alleging that Copts were attempting to alter Egypt's landscape by constructing large numbers of churches and stock piling weapons (Gornall, 2022). These fear-inducing narratives painted Copts as not only politically but also socially threatening, and they resulted into real-world consequences, with violence against Copts surging in particular areas. In the 1990s, Islamist extremists in upper Egypt began imposing an unofficial *jizya* in some villages to push Copts into second class citizenry. Between September 1994 and November 1997, 85 Copts were murdered for failing to pay this tax (Seraphim, 2001).

During this period, Copts faced not only institutionalized discrimination but also many violent attacks.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a notable escalation in anti-Coptic violence, with one of the most infamous occurrences being the two massacres in El Kosheh. These events not only resulted in the murder of over 20 Copts but set the precedent for lack of accountability for those who commit the crimes, and the negligence of the Egyptian police force when it came to protecting Coptic lives and property. In August 1998, in the predominantly Coptic village of El Kosheh in Upper Egypt, two young Copts were murdered following an altercation. In response, the police detained over 1200 Copts for investigation (Baker, 2001). A year after the initial attack, the second Kosheh massacre occurred on New Year's Eve, 1999. Triggered by a dispute between a Christian merchant and a Muslim customer, the fight escalated into an anti-Christian riot. Relatives of the Muslim customer targeted shops and homes owned by Christians, leading to looting, destruction, and arson (Seraphim, 2001). Initially, local law enforcement managed to put a stop to the violence. However, two days later, on January 2nd, 2000, riots spread to neighboring villages. The aftermath was devastating, with over 20 Christians killed and 33 injured. Additionally, many shops, houses, and kiosks were intentionally burned or damaged (Seraphim, 2001). Reports suggest that local authorities failed to adequately control the situation, and in some instances, police officers even participated in the riots (Baker, 2001).

On December 1, 2000, a criminal court in Sohag Governorate released all 89 defendants charged in the New Year's massacre in Kosheh without bail. Surprisingly, the only individual convicted in the massacre was a Muslim, charged with the accidental killing

of another Muslim, receiving a 13-year prison sentence (Baker, 2000). Six days following the acquittal of the defendants, the homes of four Christian families in Kosheh were set to fire and destroyed. In response, the Pope called for justice, emphasizing that "the problem will not be resolved by covering up, or by painting the victims as criminals," and declared the victims as martyrs (Seraphim, 2001). Three weeks later, the Supreme Court of Egypt intervened to overturn the verdict. While this was a victory for the Copts, this incident heightened tensions between Muslims and Copts and ruined the Copt's confidence in the government's ability to fairly address such crises and their trust in local law enforcement.

Mubarak was president for another 10 years, and the Copts continued to suffer many attacks, particularly on houses of worship. From 2010-2011, a series of deadly attacks unfolded, with the worst of them claiming the lives of 21 Coptic Christians attending a New Year's service in Alexandria, and injuring 97 (Gornall, 2022).

The rise of Political Islam and anti-Coptic rhetoric that took place during the Sadat regime continued to have its own life long after taking his. The Coptic question under the Mubarak regime still lived under the shadows of Sadat and Mubarak struggled to maintain control over the extremist elements of Political Islam that were unleashed during the previous presidency. Additionally, rumors regarding the Copts being threatening to Egypt were already spreading throughout the country. Unable to put a stop to the fire, Mubarak ignored it. Instead of addressing the struggles of the Copts, he spent most of his time attempting to shift the conversation away from the struggles of the Copts and disregarding sectarian attacks as being carried out by outsiders. He wanted the people to believe that it was terrorism, rather than sectarian violence. His failure to address these issues effectively and protect the rights of the Copts resulted in a massive wave of violence against the

church. The Mubarak regime was unable to address the root causes of anti-Coptic sentiments or hold perpetrators accountable, and consequently, attacks against the Coptic community persisted.

The Egyptian Revolution and its Aftermath:

On January 25th, 2011, the Egyptian revolution marked a significant turning point in Egypt's history. Headlines in Egypt and worldwide celebrated the anti-authoritarian national alliance between Egypt's Muslims and Coptic Christians. "The surge of popular unity that toppled Hosni Mubarak last week has eased tension between Egypt's Muslims and the Coptic Christian minority and raised hopes for lasting harmony,"(Saleh, 2011). News media worldwide focused on events of unity between the two groups: Muslims and Christians forming human shields to protect each other from riot police during prayer (Saleh, 2011), images of the cross and the crescent side by side, Priests and Sheikhs holding hands in prayer, and slogans calling for religious unity (Alexander, 2011). "Egypt has been victorious over what they called sectarian strife," proclaimed Muslim preacher Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi. "Here in Tahrir, the Christian and Muslim stood side by side… This cursed strife is no more", he added (Saleh, 2011). Qaradawi's words brought hope that long-standing inter-communal tensions in Egypt would subside.

Less than a month following the revolution in Tahrir square, however, Egypt was once again plagued with sectarian violence, at rates even higher than before. Competition over who the government would represent intensified as Egyptians grappled with their newfound political freedoms. On March 17, 2012, with Egypt's future still in the balance, Pope Shenouda, whose papacy had been so entwined with the Mubarak presidency, died at

the age of 88. His death provoked a wave of grief, with more than a million people attending to pay their respects in St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo.

Egypt's first 'democratic' election resulted in the election of the Muslim Brotherhood President, Mohammad Morsi in June 2012. However, on November 22, 2012, massive demonstrations erupted by both Muslims and Copts after he announced a temporary constitutional decree that granted him extensive powers and appointed a number of hardline Islamists to different positions within the administration, some of whom were previously involved in sectarian violence. Morsi was removed from office and sent to prison following a military-led operation in July 2013.

The Rabaa Al Adaweya Massacre and Riots Against Copts:

On August 13th, 2013, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood gathered near the Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in the Nasser City district of Cairo to protest the removal of Morsi from office. In response, the police carried out a brutal crackdown, killing over 1000 protestors and injuring thousands more, marking it the largest mass killing in modern Egyptian history. Angered at the outcome, seeking retaliation against the Copts for supporting the military coup, and playing an important part in the ousting of Morsi, riots erupted all across Egypt on August 14th. Christians became the target of violence and their churches and homes destroyed and vandalized. Event data indicate that individuals associated with these groups were implicated in 129 attacks after the Rabaa Massacre, many of which targeted Christian churches (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2014). 52 churches were attacked in the first 24 hours, according to Bishop Angelos, a prominent figure in the Coptic church, and by the end of the riots on August 19th, a total of 73 churches

in total were attacked (Mostafa, 2017).

The EIPR report titled “The Weeks of Killing: State Violence, Communal Fighting, and Sectarian Attacks in the Summer of 2013” includes firsthand accounts from individuals who witnessed the attacks (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Right, 2014). One of the priests of Mar Girgis Church in Menia described an assault on a Christian orphanage: “What happened is that on Wednesday, 12 August, the day they cleared the Nahda and Rabaa sit-ins, a huge group of terrorists came and attacked the place here. As you can see, the building here was burned to the ground with everything inside it, after they took whatever, they could carry. It was an organized operation; first looting and theft then burn it down” (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Right, 2014). In addition to churches and other communal sites, the report also discusses the deliberate targeting of Coptic-owned homes and businesses by similar crowds of Morsi supporters.

Moreover, witnesses interviewed confirmed that “the attackers were more interested in burning and in looting computers, wiring, and other valuables from the churches than in attacking people”, and that these attacks did not involve weapons: “While some people might have brought arms to the attacks, these were crowd assaults, not armed assaults” (Barrie et al, 2020). "Now dozens of churches are smoldering ruins, and Christians throughout the country are hiding in their homes, afraid for their very lives," stated Human Rights Watch Report (2020). In 2014, Coup leader General Abdel Fattah El Sisi was elected president of Egypt, and Pope Tawadros was chosen as the Patriarch of the Copts. Despite their commitment to bettering interfaith relationships, violence continued to haunt the Copts. The upcoming chapter will delve deeper into this period as I conduct a

quantitative analysis of the spatial distribution of sectarian violence in Egypt from 2011-2018.

Conclusion:

The primary goal of this chapter is to establish the foundational context for the exploration ahead. As we dive into the complexities of Coptic-Muslim relations and Coptic-State interactions throughout history, various puzzles appear. One distinction highlighted in this chapter revolves around the macro conditions that affected the patterns of violence between these communities in the pre-modern and modern eras. In the pre-modern era, the landscape was characterized by distinct dynamics and state expectations, with violence often stemming from the state. However, political modernization reshaped these interactions, introducing a more complex dynamic characterized by socio-political competition.

In the modern era, we observe multifaceted competitiveness between both groups, economic, social, and political, intertwining everyday interactions with broader power struggles. This multifaceted dynamic reflects a departure from earlier periods, where such complexities were not as pronounced. As previously stated, one significant development is the expectation that the state should reflect the cultural and political preferences of the majority group, creating a new dimension of competition into the societal landscape of Egypt. Despite Egypt not being a democracy, political modernity translated demographic weight into power. As a result, the presence of a sizable or prosperous minority group became potentially threatening to socio-political dominance of the majority.

Interestingly, while socio-political competition over citizenship rights is typically associated with democratic politics, it appears to also manifest in non-democratic contexts. The transition to modernity reshapes the sources of anti-Coptic violence. In contrast to the pre-modern era, where oppression often stemmed from the state, the modern era witnesses a shift towards socio-political competition as a primary driver of tensions. Furthermore, mob violence, which is normally seen in pre-modern societies, intensifies in the modern era. This intensification challenges our understanding of modern mass politics and prompts a reconsideration of the sources of violence within it.

As the Copts are seen as more threatening to the majority's socioeconomic dominance, they are attacked through mob violence at higher rates, in hopes to subjugate them. However, while traditional power threat theory argues that sheer numbers and political organization are perceived as threatening behavior, solely considering political organization and population numbers would cause a tremendous gap in understanding the contexts of not only this case study but also other cases under non-democratic regimes in which such factors are limited in their impact on political change. In this case we see the dynamics of competition differ under non-democratic regimes. Despite the Copts not being competitive in the typical ways we see in democracies, such as forming political parties, and protesting, and advocating for more say in the political realm, we cannot dismiss them as a non-organized group. Understanding the differences in the dynamics of competition and threat in non-democratic regimes is crucial to understand sectarian relations properly and adequately in Egypt and other authoritarian contexts.

Chapter 2

Explaining the Spatial Variation of Sectarian Violence in Egypt

Chapter 2 marks a shift in focus from the historical foundations laid out in Chapter 1 to an exploration of modern-day sectarian violence in Egypt. The primary framing question of this project is: what explains variation in the spatial distribution of sectarian violence in Egypt post-Tahrir? This question arises from the observation that incidents of violence are not uniformly distributed across all governorates but follow a pattern of increased attacks within Upper Egypt.

The selection of Egypt as the primary case study for this research is motivated by several factors. First, Egypt is a multi-ethnic authoritarian state, with Sunni Muslims comprising approximately 90% of the population and Coptic Christians around 10%, making it an ideal case for studying inter-ethnic dynamics. Despite variations in estimates regarding the total population size of the Copts, the majority-minority distribution remains significant. Additionally, Egypt's strategic location in the Middle East makes it a critical focal point for understanding sectarian conflict within the region. Moreover, The Coptic Christians in Egypt are the largest minority group in the Middle East, further highlighting their importance in studies of sectarian violence at large.

The chosen timeframe for this study, spanning from the aftermath of the Arab Spring to 2018, is deliberate and informed by several factors. First, the Arab Spring brought about a period of short-term religious unity, which was anticipated to decrease sectarian violence. Second, the era after the Arab Spring experienced a media less constrained by government censorship, which resulted in the broader discussion of human rights, making

it more authentic in the reporting of attacks than in previous eras. Lastly, by choosing a defined period that looks at post- Arab Spring years, I aim to ensure methodological consistency and streamline the data collection process.

Understanding the 2011-2018 Time Period:

Before delving into the quantitative research section of this chapter, it is crucial to discuss the historical and political context of the project's time frame, spanning from 2011 to 2018. As previously stated, the selected time period for this project is a deliberate choice that yielded many benefits to the research. However, it is important to acknowledge the variations and nuances within this time period. Understanding the broader context is essential to understanding the dynamics of Coptic Muslims relations during this period.

Following the Arab Spring, Egypt held its first democratic presidential election in 2012. The Muslim Brotherhood participated in the election, with Mohamed Badie, the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, pledging that their organization aimed "to participate in, not dominate elections" (Brownlee, 2013). During his campaign, Mohammad Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, vowed to represent all Egyptians, not just supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. His opponent, Ahmed Shafiq, who served as Mubarak's prime minister, lost the election due to his ties to the previous regime, pushing many non-Islamists to also vote for Morsi. However, the Coptic community overwhelmingly favored Shafiq, perceiving him as a safer choice due to his military background. Morsi won the presidency with 51.7% of the total vote and assumed office on June 30, 2012. It soon became evident that his presidency prioritized consolidating power within the Muslim

Brotherhood rather than representing or safeguarding the interests of all Egyptians, including the Copts. Under his presidency, anti-Christian violence and kidnappings continued and increased.

As Morsi began working towards drafting a new constitution and granting himself far-reaching powers, public opposition against him surged. On the first anniversary of his presidency, millions took to the streets to protest. In response, the military warned Morsi that they would intervene if he did not satisfy the public's demands within 48 hours. “On the evening of July 3rd, the army suspended the constitution and announced the formation of a technocratic interim government ahead of new presidential elections” (BBC, 2019). His arrest was ordered by the then armed forces chief, and now president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The ousting of Morsi sparked massive street mobilization from the Muslim Brotherhood. Hundreds of thousands of their followers gathered in front of Rabaa al-Adwiyya mosque in Cairo and swore not to leave until Morsi had been restored to power (Biagini and Ardovini, 2022). The government reacted with a bloody crackdown, killing approximately 1,150 people (Shakir, 2023). In response, local Muslim Brotherhood branches and allied Islamist groups went on the attack. One of their main targets was the Copts, who they blamed backed the coup and were a large percentage of the anti-Morsi protests. The attacks took place nationwide, with a concentration in the governorates with the largest numbers of Copts such as Menia, Assuit, and Beni Suef. In my research, I find that 2013 was a particular outlier with regard to the number of attacks that took place with 159 attacks. It was a bloody year for the Copts.

Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi came to power in 2014, and the period from 2014 to 2018 period was considered relatively “normal.” It's important to clarify that “normal” doesn't imply an absence of attacks, as the Coptic community experienced anywhere from 32 to 99 attacks annually. However, there were no significant spikes except for a surge in Sinai in 2017, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. Pope Tawadros has an ongoing close relationship with Sisi, who has presented himself as an ally to the Copts since his rise to power. However, despite the president’s warm holiday wishes to the Copts, equality appears to be a long way away. The Copts still see very little representation in the government, with only 36 out of 596 members of the parliament being Coptic Christians, out of which 24 were awarded seats through a religion-based quota system. Under Sisi's administration, the Brookings report highlighted ongoing discrimination and sectarian violence against Copts, despite legal protections in Egypt (Yerkes, 2016). Church construction remains a controversial topic, and despite Sisi's passing of a parliamentary bill in 2016 aiming to streamline the process, the issue remains of heated debate both within the government and among citizens. “In some ways, the Copts of Egypt have the worst of both worlds. President Sisi presents himself as their ally and protector, so Islamist foes of the government bitterly resent them. And in the end, the president's protection turns out not to be adequate”, argued Erasmus (2016).

Before diving into the argument and hypotheses of this research project, a deep dive into the literature is warranted to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary Coptic experience and the factors influencing sectarian violence in Egypt.

Ethnic Violence in the Literature:

There is an array of scholars who work on the study of ethnic violence, offering substantial contributions to the field. This rich and impressive body of scholarship has provided us with many answers regarding why people commit violent attacks on those who are ethnically different than them, as well as the mechanisms by which they do so. This section aims to discuss the existing knowledge on ethnic violence at large. To initiate this, I pose a broad question: Why do individuals participate in ethnic violence?

Horowitz (1985) argues that ethnic conflict emerges from the shared significance attributed by groups to others, which is then manifested in rituals of affirmation and contradiction. He argues that while western conceptions of politics are often procedural, as in power is a means to an end, in other ethnically divided societies, it can also be an end within itself, as it can ensure group survival and confirm the group's worth.

In addressing the spatial variation in the distribution of attacks, many researchers have conducted very valuable work on the American reconstruction era that I will often draw on and expand towards non-democratic regimes. Herbert Blalock's well-known racial threat theory argues that attacks on a minority group occur when the majority group perceives a threat to its dominance (1967). Blalock identifies threats in three forms: economic, political, and symbolic, but only focuses his analysis on the first two. His theory explains that as the relative size of a minority group increases, the majority begins to perceive them as a growing threat. In the case of his research, as the number of liberated blacks increased, whites feared becoming outnumbered. This was also supported by other scholars such as Reed (1972), and Corzine et al. (1983), who also found that lynching was

positively correlated with high proportions of the black population. The second cause of perceived threat, according to Blalock (1967), was the increase in the formation of black-run political parties, which was seen as politically threatening. When these threats were prevalent, whites were more likely to seek to subjugate this perceived dominance through disenfranchisement, Jim Crow laws, and lynching.

Beyond lynching, research in ethnic violence and criminology indicates a connection between minority population size and support for racialized social practices (Barkan & Cohn, 2005), (Bridges, Crutchfield, & Simpson, 1987), (Chiricos, Welch & Gertz, 2004), Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz,1997), (Quillian, 1996). Dollar (2014) notes that minorities tend to face more severe punishment for crimes perceived by whites as socially threatening, including sex and drug offenses and certain property crimes. In contemporary research, Kopstein and Wittenberg (2018) extend Blalock's theory beyond U.S. race relations, discussing "intimate violence" against Jews in eastern Poland at the outset of World War II. They argue that pogroms were more likely to occur where Jews constituted a substantial minority, as well as increased political polarization between Jews and non-Jews (Kopstein and Wittenberg, 2018).

In this line of reasoning, some scholars have extended research on minority perceived threats by focusing on economic and material threats. In their study of the postbellum U.S. South, Tolnay and Beck (1995) argue that economic and status concerns were at the heart of violent lynching, not so much sheer numbers of blacks. Economic hypotheses as such are quite commonplace in explaining ethnic violence; viewing violence as occurring when one group threatens the other groups' access to material benefits

and/or insecurity stemming from leaders favoring their own ethnic group when allocating resources, relative or absolute deprivation models, and many more; these types of explanations are quite commonplace in explaining actors' preference formation and, in return, their likelihood for tolerating or even partaking in, ethnic violence, as examined by Gellner & Breuilly (1983), Olzak, S. (1993), Lupsha (1968), Gurr (1968).

Another extension to threat theories is the electoral threat theory, as explored by Wilkinson, who argues that "politicians often plan ethnic riots for a clear electoral purpose" (2006). Wilkinson's theory rules out state capacity explanations and argues that politicians will increase the supply of protection to minorities when minorities are 1) an important part of their party's current support base, or the support base of one of their coalition partners in a coalition government, or 2) when the overall electoral system in a state is so competitive that there is a high probability that the governing party will have to negotiate or form coalitions with minority supported parties in the future, despite its own preferences.

Competition among ethnic groups is not a new phenomenon. Olzak (1993) argues that ethnic/racial conflict arises from an increase of intergroup competition for social resources. Violence is most apt to occur when members of the disadvantaged group experience greater equality of opportunity. In this new environment, members of a formerly segregated group become rivals for social rewards. However, Olzak differs from Blalock regarding the type of group that gets attacked, asserting that an environment containing several disadvantaged groups competing for rewards leads to attacks on groups least able to defend themselves.

Adida, C. L., Brown, J. M., McCord, G. C., & McLachlan, P. (2022), explore the relationship between Church diversity and conflict related deaths in Northern Ireland, and find that even a slight increase in diversity in highly homogeneous areas results in a significant rise in violence. Through a discussion of historical Belfast, they argue that violence between both groups arose due to perceived threat of the minority group with regards to jobs and resources (Adida et al., 2022).

Beyond threat and competition theories, I move towards social dynamic theories. Why are inter-ethnic relations frequently characterized by tension that is relatively absent in intra-ethnic relations? Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D. (1996) argue that in areas where social networks are better developed, and interactions are more frequent, individuals have easier access to information about their co-ethnics than others. This leads to cooperative behaviors that are more difficult to sustain in inter-ethnic interactions. Due to cultural familiarity, people are better able to distinguish opportunities among co-ethnics, facilitating peaceful interactions within and hindering them across ethnic groups (Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D., 1996). The dynamics of cooperation vs amity affect the way violence breaks out and whether peace can be restored.

This is similar to Varshney (2005), who argues that communal peace or violence is largely determined by the civic life of the communities in question. He explains that if civic engagement is inter-ethnic rather than intra-ethnic conflicts may occur, but they are less likely to spiral into widespread violence. Cross-community engagement serves as a more robust defense against riots, especially if it involves associational rather than everyday interactions (Varshney, 2005).

In this line of reasoning, some scholars have started to conduct valuable work on ethnic diversity and social trust. Dinesen, P. T., Schaeffer, M., & Sønderskov, K. M (2020), discovered that as ethnic diversity increases, social trust decreases. In environments where individuals are surrounded by dissimilar people whom they don't trust, the overall trust in the average neighbor diminishes, and vice versa. The question arises: under what conditions can contact alleviate social distrust? Interactions between two groups affect whether they trust each other; for example, meaningful contact with ethnic out-groups may under certain facilitating conditions reduce stereotypes and therefore build positive intergroup relations and higher trust (Rudolph and Popp, 2010). However, overall social trust tends to be lower in more ethnically diverse contexts.

The existing literature on ethnic violence has made significant contributions by identifying some causes for attacks; however, it faces serious difficulties highlighting the mechanisms that underlie those observed patterns, particularly outside democratic regimes. One significant limitation lies in the unit of analysis, as most accounts operate at the national level of aggregation, which doesn't align with the geographical concentration of attacks observed in Egypt. Despite being plagued with sectarian strife for decades, most attacks in Egypt are concentrated in particular areas of upper Egypt; with a clear hotspot in the governorate of Menia, which experienced over 35% of all sectarian attacks from 2011-2018, despite being home to only around 5.8% of Egypt's total population. This observation alone renders national-level analyses weak in accounting for the variance in the geographical distribution of violence and therefore is of limited value in explaining its occurrence.

The overarching limitations of power threat theory and material threat hypotheses highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of ethnic violence, especially in non-democratic regimes. The existing literature tends to struggle when confronted with the unique challenges presented by non-democratic contexts, where power dynamics, threat perceptions, and group interactions may deviate from democratic norms. Recognizing the complex dynamics of different regimes and understanding how factors such as competition and threat differ in non-democratic regimes becomes crucial in understanding intergroup interactions. Moreover, the limitations of national-level analyses in explaining the geographical distribution of violence emphasize the importance of adopting a subnational approach. The concentration of attacks in specific regions, such as the observed hotspot in Menia, underscores the necessity of examining local dynamics in order to unravel the underlying mechanisms driving the violence.

Therefore, this research is conducted at the sub-national level of aggregation, analyzing the number of attacks per year (2011-2018) , in each governorate. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of variation both within and across different governorates. National-level data would present challenges due to high variation, while district-level data appeared to be incredibly difficult to obtain due to security concerns in Egypt. Nonetheless, by focusing on the subnational level, I am able to explore localized patterns of sectarian violence more effectively.

Another weakness in the literature is that material threat hypotheses inherently rely on a Schumpeterian approach that views all actors as rational and calculating individuals endowed with resources but must connect with others to secure more.

However, as argued by Hall (2013 & 2016), such approaches have become limited in their explanations as fields such as anthropology, behavioral economics, psychology, and sociology have shown that humans are not mere rational beings that only care about their goods, but are relational actors deeply connected by social networks, organizational structures, common practices, and shared meaning systems. Their most significant limitation is that they cannot explain why if all groups are rational and ultimately in competition, some can live peacefully together, while others are constantly warring, regardless of the economic distribution of goods. Furthermore, they fail to explain why the same groups can be warring in some areas of a country yet live violence-free in other areas. In light of these considerations, it becomes imperative to explore alternative hypotheses that account for the intricacies of power relationships, social structures, and the unique dynamics of ethnic relations in non-democracies.

To summarize, some of the greatest limitations in the literature on competition and power threat stem from 1) high levels of aggregation ignoring the subnational variation of attacks, 2) a theoretical focus on democratic regimes, and 3) an underlying emphasis on democratic understandings of factors such as threat, competition, coalitions, and networks.

A recent publication by Barrie, Clarke, and Ketchley (2021) introduced a promising typology for dissecting sectarian violence in Egypt by looking at bombings, beatings, or burnings. They base this typology on the target of the attack being either properties or individuals, the type of arms assailants use, as well as characterizing whether unarmed attacks were burning or beatings. They argue that unarmed attacks against property are the product of political mobilization, whereas unarmed attacks against individuals are

related to socioeconomic tensions, and armed attacks are a result of terrorist violence. My project aims to build on their findings by providing a larger dataset, with more attacks to analyze the factors contributing to the spatial variation in which these attacks are taking place. Additionally, I anticipate that the qualitative section of my study will supplement their analysis as it provides insights not just into the types of attacks occurring in specific areas but into the structural and facilitating conditions that contribute to a higher number of attacks in certain governorates compared to others. Throughout this chapter, I will also discuss the logic behind group competition and perceived threat under authoritarian regimes, where such factors manifest differently than in democracies.

The Spatial Variation of Sectarian Violence in Egypt- Framing the Question:

What renders the Copts perceived as threatening to the majority Muslim population? I argue that visibility and organization play pivotal roles in shaping this perception of threat, and that the churches are a marker for both variables. My central argument is as follows: if a minority is perceived as threatening to the majority, the majority will feel threatened and may resort to the use of force to suppress them.

To accurately trace the pattern of attacks in Egypt, I compiled a dataset consisting of 596 attacks against Copts occurring between 2011 and 2018. Upon thorough examination of the data, two prominent observations emerged initially: 1) churches emerged as both the primary target of attacks and the main grievance cited by perpetrators, and 2) attacks were more prevalent in Upper Egypt and rural areas compared to Central and Lower Egypt, as well as urban areas. However, a deeper investigation at the subnational level revealed a

third and arguably pivotal trend: significant variation existed in both the frequency and intensity of attacks throughout Upper Egypt, with a notable hotspot identified in Menia. Despite Menia comprising less than 6% of the Egyptian population, it accounted for 35% of sectarian attacks between 2011 and 2018.

The Logic of Competition in Authoritarian Regimes:

As previously discussed, studying ethnic violence within non-democratic regimes presents unique challenges. Power dynamics, perceptions of threat, and group interactions often deviate from democratic norms, and understanding this is crucial to a thorough understanding of ethnic relations in these contexts. A central puzzle in this research is how competition between groups plays out in non-democratic settings. Under a democratic regime, competition among groups is expected, with population size and group organization playing pivotal roles. Larger groups tend to have greater electoral influence. However, in non-democratic regimes where there is little to no direct electoral influence, the question arises: How do minority groups pose a perceived threat to majority groups?

Competition and perceived threats can manifest in different ways. Blalock (1967) argues that as the relative size of an ethnic minority group increases, members of the majority group perceive them as a growing threat, which can take on at least two different types. The first is economic threat, as the minority population grows, competition for jobs, housing, and other economic resources results in the majority feeling threatened. The second is a political threat, which occurs as the minority consolidates their political power, particularly through their large numbers and group organization. In both scenarios, the

majority will then attack the minority to subjugate them and keep their dominance. While Blalock was discussing inter-ethnic group relations under a democratic regime, threat perceptions posed by minorities occur across all regime types.

As previously discussed, economic hypotheses are common in explaining ethnic violence; viewing violence as occurring when one group threatens the other groups' access to material benefits and/or insecurity stemming from leaders favoring their own ethnic group when allocating resources, relative or absolute deprivation models, and many more (Gellner & Breuilly,1983), (Olzak, S,1993), (Lupsha,1968), (Gurr,1968). Group competition for economic goods, is an all-present factor in all free market economies, regardless of regime type, and can potentially escalate into conflict given the right circumstances. In her article, Horizontal Inequalities, Frances Stewart (2016), argues that the existence of horizontal inequalities, which are inequities among culturally different groups, can be a catalyst for conflict. This argument is based on the notion that cultural differences can cause deep resentment that result in violence when aligned with economic and political differences.

Overall economic performance also matters in authoritarian regimes. Londegran and Poole (1990) find that even authoritarian regimes have powerful incentives to promote economic growth, not necessarily due to concern for their citizens, but out of fear that failure to deliver satisfactory economic performance may lead to their downfall. This highlights not only the economic threat posed by economic disparities but also the fact that even authoritarian leaders must navigate with caution to maintain popular support.

Political competition is not exclusive to democratic regimes, although, it manifests itself differently. Despite the lack of electoral rivalry under democratic regimes, non-democratic societies still exhibit political dynamics that fuel inter-group competition. Vorthems argues that unlike democratic regimes where citizens have access to inclusive membership and individual rights, authoritarian regimes offer particularistic membership and group-based rights (Vorthem, 2023). Authoritarian citizenship, as Vorthems explains, is based on a different dynamic of relations between citizens and the government (Vorthems, 2024). Authoritarian leaders are known to provide socioeconomic benefits in exchange oof political support to maintain legitimacy, and the scarcity of resources, despite the amount of them, results in authoritarian leaders conserving resources for redistribution in order to maintain the privileged status of the elites. By doing so, citizens get varied degrees of access to citizenship (Vorthems, 2024). These varied degrees of access to citizenships, and resources, can indeed fuel competition between groups, despite the absence of electoral competition.

In his book *The Logic of Political Survival*, Bruce Bueno De Mesquita argues that leaders are essentially interested in enhancing their own interests, and because of this, they will seek to produce what their supporters want, whom he terms the "selectorate" (De Mesquita, 2005). The key to political survival lies in maintaining a winning coalition of supporters. Even in non-democracies, leaders still must satisfy some people to sustain their rule. While De Mesquita's thesis may not directly align with my current research, it highlights the fact that even the strongest of autocrats still have people they are attempting to please. However, does this imply that autocrats only care about appeasing a select few?

Numerous studies point to the fact that public opinion and responsiveness to public distress are not exclusive to democratic regimes. Scholars like Richards et al. (1993), Downs and Rocke (1994), and Miller (1995) assert that autocratic leaders face similar pressures to utilize conflict as a distraction from domestic economic problems. This highlights that autocrats care about public opinion and may resort to different tactics in order to appease the people. Tir (2010) further suggests that democratic and non-democratic regimes respond similarly to popular discontent. Some non-democratic leaders reveal their dependence on domestic support through negative acts such as repression (Davenport and Armstrong, 2004).

Authoritarian leaders' responsiveness to public opinion shows that it has an effect and is important. Therefore, citizens in non-democratic regimes can still make their voices heard through avenues beyond elections. Consequently, the demographics supporting the regime and those to whom the regime caters hold significance even in the absence of electoral competition.

Christian minorities in the Middle East have often relied on the patronage or tolerance of authoritarian leaders. Belge and Karakoç (2015) argue that minorities whose status is threatened by majoritarian decision-making are less likely to support democratization. Their survey research and comparing minorities in Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan, reveals that religious minorities tend to be more supportive of authoritarianism. This may be out of fear of what the majority would want, if given the chance to make their voices heard.

In the case of Egypt, the Copts are known to mainly support the military regime. They backed Mubarak, opposed Morsi, and now support Sisi. "It wasn't exactly loyalty" explained Steven Cook, from the Council on Foreign Relations, "It was acquiescence to Mubarak's authoritarianism. The Christians were caught between Mubarak and fears of Islamists. They chose not to oppose Mubarak", he added (Tobia, 2011). Cook elaborated that Mubarak occasionally extended favors to the Pope, such as releasing Coptic prisoners upon his request (Tobia, 2011). Many Copts, however, participated in the 2011 Egyptian revolution that caused Mubarak to step down.

After the removal of Morsi from power in 2012, the Coptic community were blamed for supporting the military coup that ousted him. This was not met with ease from Islamists. In a 15-minute audio recording posted online following Morsi's ousting, al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahri accused the Copts, the military, and the secular-minded elites of conspiring against Morsi because he is an Islamist (Lynch, 2013). "Copts are paying the price of the inflammatory rhetoric against them coming from some Islamist leaders and supporters of the former president, who accuse Coptic spiritual leaders of conspiring to foment army intervention to remove Dr. Morsi," said Ishak Ibrahim, officer for freedom of religion and belief at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (Lynch, 2013). This shows that group competition over who holds power can still exist in ways outside of the electorate.

Furthermore, the majority of Egypt's Copts support President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's current regime. Prominent figures such as Coptic priest Makary Younan, even claimed Al-Sisi had been "sent from heaven". This is, not out of love for Al-Sisi necessarily, but out of

supporting his commitment to curbing Political Islam, which both Al-Sisi and the Copts fear. However, regardless of the sincerity of their support of Al-Sisi, they are still seen as supporters of the military regime who has curbed the rights of many, particularly the Muslim brotherhood.

How does competition manifest, whether politically or economically, in Egypt? Despite the absence of democracy, or electoral competition, it's conceivable that Coptic-Muslim relations may be guided by an anticipation of a future democratization. After all, historical precedents exist not too long ago, and given the contemporary era of mass politics, such a transformation may not seem too far out of reach.

This is similar to the discussion of the dynamics of power, citizenship, and competition in the modern era. In the modern era, the translation of population size and weight into direct power, as well as increased citizen participation in governance (through voting or other means), resulted in citizenship rights becoming tied directly to the exercise of power. Despite Egypt's lack of democracy, the modern era is still marked by the prevalence of mass politics. In essence, the anticipation of future democracy persists, especially considering the Copt's alignment with authoritarian regimes due to fears regarding the political and exclusionary impact of democracy on their communal interests. Therefore, it is plausible that the logic of political competition remains present because the possibility of democracy remains real at some point.

Beyond an anticipation of a democracy in the future, in the era of mass politics, there continues to be consequences of ethnic competition, of which we discussed at the

beginning of this chapter. Therefore, beyond democracy and electoral processes, the question of who the country belongs to remains a valid catalyst for competition and threat.

Regarding Visibility and Group Organization:

This project utilizes perceived visibility and organization, marked by the construction of churches, as important variables in assessing the perceived threat posed by a minority group. To do so, I choose to operationalize minority threats in a manner that extends beyond mere population statistics of Copts in a specific area.

One of the most common types of sectarian violence against Copts are a result of the Copts engaging in religious rites, such as praying, holding worship services in a private home, or building or expanding a church. In fact, many human rights reports and independent research organizations have argued that the issue surrounding churches " is a primary driver of sectarian violence in Egypt," as reported by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2017, p.6). Dating back to as early as Islam's entry to Egypt, the laws surrounding Christian worship practices and churches have been restrictive yet unclear, resulting in conflict between the state, the Copts, and the Muslim population.

Understanding the dynamics of visibility and organization is essential for comprehending their interplay and effects. Concerning visibility, I argue that the mere presence and numerical strength of the Copts are insufficient to elicit a perceived threat. Instead, visibility plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of threat. The Copts must be visible in order to be perceived as threatening. Despite sharing similarities in language, food, and culture, Copts and Muslims maintain distinguishable religious identities through various factors such as names, speech patterns, celebratory practices, and religious

symbols in attire. These differences result in awareness regarding the existence of the other group despite their shared national identity. Everyday interactions further accentuate this awareness, gradually intensifying over time and with increased contact.

However, what makes this hazy feeling of a large number of Copts living in a particular area gain tangible substance is the presence of churches, which makes them more visible. While the religious differences may render Copts visible to some extent, merely categorizing them as "other" falls short of signaling a significant threat. A stronger, more tangible form of visibility is necessary for the group to be perceived as threatening.

The second key concept is religious organization. While threat theory typically considers political participation and organization as primary factors influencing perceived threat, I argue that organization may look different in non-democratic regimes. Despite the absence of explicit political organization and mobilization, dismissing Copts as an unorganized group could lead to underestimating their perceived threat by the Muslim population. Examining the role of the Church in Egyptian society from the controversy of their building to the social services that they provide, points us to a commonly overlooked, yet critical factor in understanding ethnic relations in Egypt: religious organization.

Churches serve as symbols of organization and community, both of which can be perceived as threatening. Moreover, Churches enhance visibility by making it more tangible; in other words, Copts can be seen through the number of churches in a particular area. The greater the number of churches, the more apparent the existence of a sizable Coptic population. This makes studying the role of churches integral to understanding the perceived threat posed by the Copts to the majority. Similarly, while organization plays a

role, the presence of churches amplifies the visibility of Copts. Without churches, Copts would not be as visible. The upcoming section will delve into the research methods to explore where these attacks are happening and provide some insight as to why.

Research Methods:

This research tests 4 hypotheses, each addressing different facets of the relationship between visibility, organization, and the perceived sociopolitical threat leading to sectarian violence.

H1: Governorates with the highest percentages of Copts face more attacks, as they are perceived as more threatening.

H2: Governorates with the greatest number of churches witness more attacks, indicating that Copts are seen as a more organized and thus more threatening group.

H3: Governorates with the highest Muslim Brotherhood organization will witness more attacks.

H4: Governorates where state capacity is strong experience fewer attacks as police activity may serve as a deterrence to attacks.

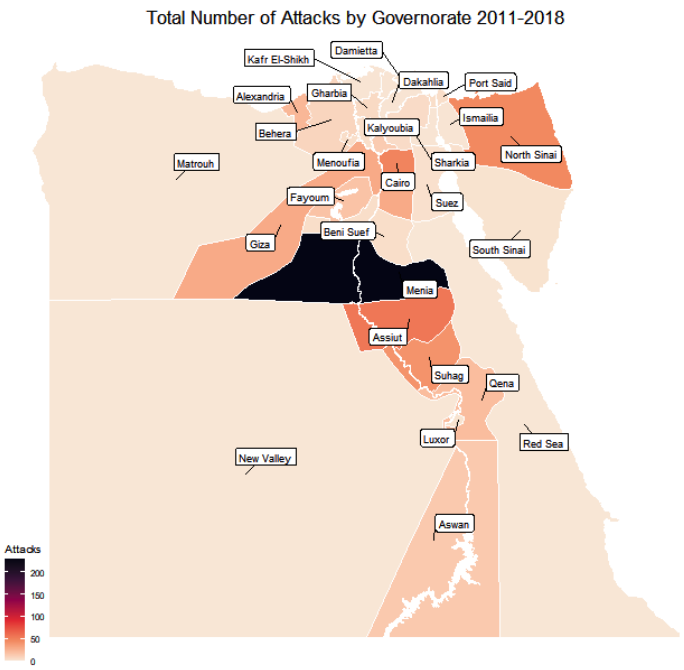
The principal data source for the statistical analysis of this chapter as well as the qualitative study in the following chapter is a novel dataset of 596 attacks at the subnational unit of analysis. It is a combination of a dataset from Open Data Tank Initiative[7], and own research using news reports and independent journalist reports such as the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), and Human Rights Watch. The selection process involved including only attacks aligning with the previously defined criteria of sectarian violence, while excluding those lacking verification. Each recorded event contains details such as date, location, casualties, attack type, property damages, causal narrative, if present, event details, and police and state response to the attack.

To qualify as a sectarian attack and be incorporated into the dataset, the perpetrators had to be non-state actors who are part of the Muslim majority, and the victims must be Coptic. What we are interested in here, is what Kopstein and Wittenberg (2018) refer to as “intimate violence", instances where individuals target those they know or are familiar with, like neighbors or acquaintances. Although government authorities often classify such incidents as terrorism to portray them as external threats, they are distinct from generic terrorist acts and should not be analyzed as such. The goal is to understand the factors contributing to the escalation of tensions and grievances into sectarian violence in some areas than others.

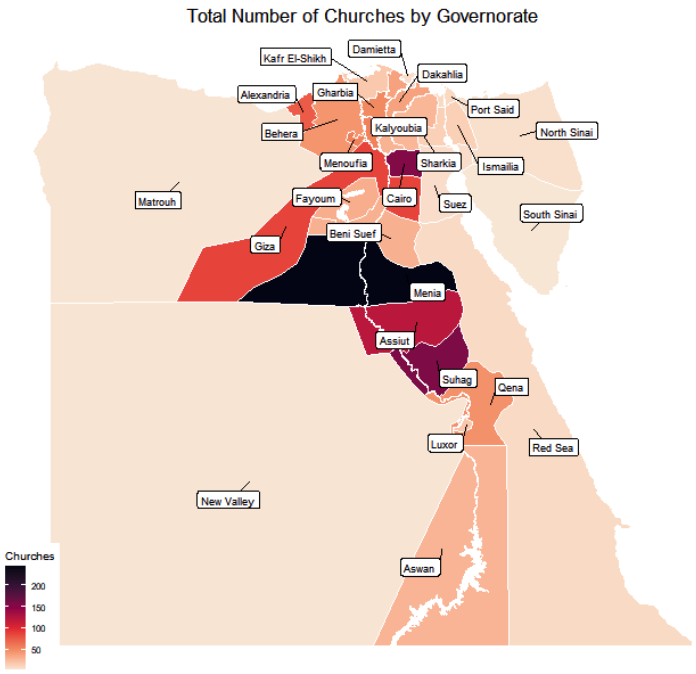
[7] Open Data Tank Initiative e.V. is a Berlin-based association, aiming to make systematic data on political violence and nonviolent actions in the Middle East publicly available.

Descriptive Statistics:

As a preliminary step in assessing the data, I take on a descriptive analysis focusing on recent trends in anti-Christian violence in Egypt. Upon dissecting the data, three larger trends emerge; 1) churches are both the primary place of attack and the primary grievance cited by perpetrators, and 2) attacks are more common in upper Egypt and rural areas than in central and lower Egypt and urban areas. However, despite this observation, further dissection of the subnational level points to the third and arguably most crucial trend, 3) there is great variation within both the numbers and rates of attacks throughout upper Egypt as well, pointing to a particular hotspot in Menia. The two maps below highlight the similar spatial distribution of both number of attacks and number of churches. As Map 1.1, shows, attacks occur most in upper Egypt, with a particular hot spot in Menia. Map 1.2 shows the spatial distribution of churches throughout Egypt, pointing to a hot spot also in Menia, and other surrounding governorates in Upper Egypt such as Assyut and Sohag. The high number of attacks in Northern Sinai is, however, not related to the number of churches in the governorate. Northern Sinai is further discussed in its own section in the end of this chapter.


Total Number of Attacks by Governorate 2011-2018
Kafr El-Shikh
Damietta
Dakahlia
Port Said
Alexandria
Gharbia
Ismailia
Behera
Kalyoubia
North Sinai
Matrouh
Menoufia
Sharkia
Cairo
Fayoum
Suez
Beni Suef
Giza
South Sinai
Menia
Assiut
Suhag
Qena
Luxor
Red Sea
New Valley
Aswan
Attacks
200
150
100
50
0

Map 1.1


Total Number of Churches by Governorate
Kafr El-Shikh
Damietta
Dakahlia
Alexandria
Gharbia
Port Said
Behera
Kalyoubia
North Sinai
Menoufia
Sharkia
Ismailia
Matrouh
Fayoum
Cairo
Suez
South Sinai
Beni Suef
Giza
Menia
Assiut
Suhag
Qena
Luxor
Red Sea
New Valley
Aswan
Churches
200
150
100
50

Map 1.2

The following figure presents cross tabs that compare all 27 governorates of Egypt and discuss the predictors that this research will test through some descriptive analysis.

Governorate	Churches	Attack 2011-2018	Police Stations	Percentage Christian Population	Morsi Vote Share
Menia	**245**	**230**	**1**	**16%**	**64.42%**
Assiut	**121**	**55**	**3**	**15%**	**61.5%**
Cairo	**154**	**48**	**39**	**10%**	**44.27%**
North Sinai	**5**	**46**	**9**	**20%**	**61.51%**
Suhag	**157**	**41**	**5**	**12%**	**58.23%**
Giza	**87**	**30**	**12**	**4%**	**59.71%**
Alexandria	75	23	18	5%	57.5%
Qena	46	20	2	6%	55.61%
Fayoum	31	17	1	3%	77.75%
Aswan	27	14	1	4%	51.92%
kalyoubia	28	13	8	5%	41.71%
Behera	44	8	2	1%	58.6%
Gharbia	50	6	4	2%	37.04%
Sharkia	26	5	7	2%	45.72%
Beni Suef	29	4	4	5%	66.47%
Port Said	9	4	10	3%	45.75%
Suez	6	3	4	3%	62.74$
Menoufia	55	3	3	2%	28.46%
Menoufia	6	2	4	0%	56.01%
South Sinai	2	2	1	x	49.65%
Luxor	18	2	4	x	46.95%
Kafr El-Shikh	17	1	2	1%	69.15%
Ismailia	13	1	4	3%	54.25%
Dakahlia	23	1	4	1%	44.38%
New Valley	3	0	1	2%	63.37%
Matrouh	3	0	3	1%	49.37%
Red Sea	8	0	1	4%	49.37%

Table 1.1

A quick look at Table 1.1 generates interesting trends. First, among the top five governorates (excluding Sinai) with the highest combined attacks over the seven-year period studied, four have the highest numbers of churches and the highest percentage of Copts. Moreover, out of the top five, only Menia ranked in the top five governorates for Muslim Brotherhood vote share at 64.42%. Menia stands out as a particularly compelling case, embodying the worst-case scenario in all the factors outlined in the chart. It possesses the highest number of churches in Egypt, the largest proportion of Christians (excluding Sinai), only one police station, and ranks within the top five for the highest vote share for Mohammad Morsi. Unsurprisingly, Menia is home to the highest number of attacks, almost five times the next runner-up.

Assuit follows with the second-highest number of attacks. It has 121 churches (4th governorate), three police stations, 15% of the Coptic population, and ranks 9th with regards to vote share for Morsi, though still maintaining a majority vote for the Muslim Brotherhood. Cairo and Suhag have similar numbers of churches (154 and 157 respectively), and numbers of attacks (48 and 41, respectively). Their population percentages are similar with Cairo having 10% and Suhag 12% Copts. However, they vary in vote share for the Muslim Brotherhood, with Suhag ranking 12th and Cairo ranking 25th, being one of the 11 governorates where Morsi did not win. Giza, with 87 churches, 12 police stations, only 4% Coptic population, and a 10th position in the Morsi vote share ranking, witnessed 30 attacks. It is also interesting to note that Fayoum, Bani Suef, and Kafr Al Sheikh, all had the highest votes for Morsi, however, that did not coincide with having

the highest number of attacks, possibly negating the importance of the organization or support of the Muslim Brotherhood and attacks. Overall, a relationship emerges between the number of churches and the population with the frequency of attacks.

Churches Per Capita:

I was eager to explore whether churches per Christian capita would impact my research models. However, the analysis revealed that it was statistically insignificant and not correlated with the percentage of Christians in a given area. Figure, 1.1, illustrates the distribution of the number of churches per 10,000 Christians. It highlights that most places have fewer than 15 churches per 10,000 Christians. Only two governorates, Northern Sinai and Damietta, have more than 25 churches per 10,000 Christians. In reality, however, they have small populations with Northern Sinai having 1646 Christians and Dumyat having 2392 Christians. Consequently, they have 5 and 6 churches respectively. This highlights that it is not necessarily the actual organization of threat of the Copts that matters, but rather the perceived threat that the Muslim population feels. The Copts may not be getting attacked in areas that they are actually organized in, but churches spark the perceived threat of the Copts, highlighting both their visibility and organization.

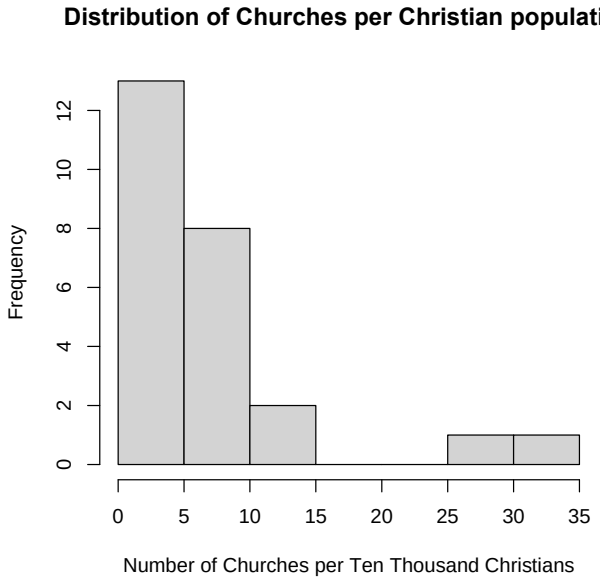


Figure 1.1

Study Variables and The Statistical Model:

The unit of analysis for this study is the number of governorates in Egypt over a 7-year span, with N=217. While many variables are self-explanatory within their names, I will discuss them briefly for clarity. All my variables are aggregated at the governorate level. The dependent variable is coded as the number of attacks per governorate/per year. The main independent variables under investigation are the number of churches, which were derived from St Takla's website, a website run by the Coptic community, and the proportion of the Coptic population.[8]

A notable limitation of conducting the N study is the absence of precise population data on the Copts in Egypt, particularly their distributions on a subnational level. To

[8] St Takla is a website run by the Coptic Community that provides information regarding the heritage of the Coptic Church in Egypt.

account for population, I utilized a proxy variable representing of the percentage of Copts, drawn from sample data from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS , 2006).[9] Despite its imperfections, this variable offers a means to address the absence of population data and is one of the only ways I have found to account for population differences of the Copts across governorates.

Additional independent variables include the strength and organization of Political Islam, ie Muslim Brotherhood, given that it can be correlated with the dependent variable. That is, the more Muslim Brotherhood members (or supporters of political Islam) there are in a particular area, the more attacks there are in that area. To account for this, I included a variable for the percentage of the vote share won by the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012, arguably Egypt's first and only democratic election.

At the time, Mohammad Morsi was running against Ahmed Shafiq. It was seen as a battle between secularizing, or Islamizing Egypt, with a common phrase being used among Egyptians "Shafik will make your mother take off her Hijab." Therefore, I assumed that those who supported Morsi had greater support for the Muslim Brotherhood as well as Political Islam, and those who supported Shafik had more secular aspirations for Egypt, or supported the Mubarak regime, which was considered secular in many ways (at least in comparison to the Brotherhood). The areas that Morsi won, therefore would have higher organization or strength of the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam. Another variable

[9] IPUMS conducted a survey sampling 10% of the Egyptian population per governorate in November 2006 to compile information on housing and household characteristics. I utilized their sample percentages of Christians and Muslims in Egypt in order to generate my population variable. Retrieved from https://international.ipums.org/international-action/sample_details/country/eg#tab_eg2006a

included in the model is police stations per governorate, as I believe it to be a fair measure of state capacity in a particular location. Moreover, police stations can be potentially correlated with the dependent variable, as heightened police presence may deter perpetrators from engaging in attacks.

To assess at the relationship between attacks and both churches and the percentage of Christians I employ a linear mixed effects model with random effects for both year and governorate. The rationale behind utilizing random effects lies in the nature of the data. While my dependent variable varies across time (spanning from 2011 to 2018), my independent variables are constant across this time period. This modeling approach allows me to account for the clustering and grouping effect while modeling the DV using fixed IV that don't change across time. Additionally, I controlled for police stations and percentage of Morsi vote share in each of these models as to isolate the effect attributed to churches as well as the percentage of Christians in a particular area.

I anticipated that the percentage of the Coptic population and Churches would be correlated with each other since it is normal to assume that the areas that have more Copts will have more churches. Initial analysis reveals a notable correlation of around 0.9 between the percentage of the Coptic population and the count of churches, in the output of a model with both variables included, which is anticipated. To assess the multicollinearity between the variables I looked at the variance inflation factors and found that the percentage of Christians variable had a value of 4.33 and churches had a value above 5.54, highlighting collinearity.

Therefore, I checked the variance inflation factor for all factors minus Churches, and then all factors minus the percentage of Christians. Without churches, all the variance inflation factors were just over 1. When churches were included and the percentage of Christians was excluded, the VIF slightly increased to 2.154, but remained within an acceptable range for analysis. In figure 1.1 below, we can also see the strong relationship between Number of Churches and Percentage of Christians. The R^2 value when I regress the number of churches on the percentage of Christians is 0.755, meaning that 76% of the variation within the number of churches can be explained by the percentage of Christians.

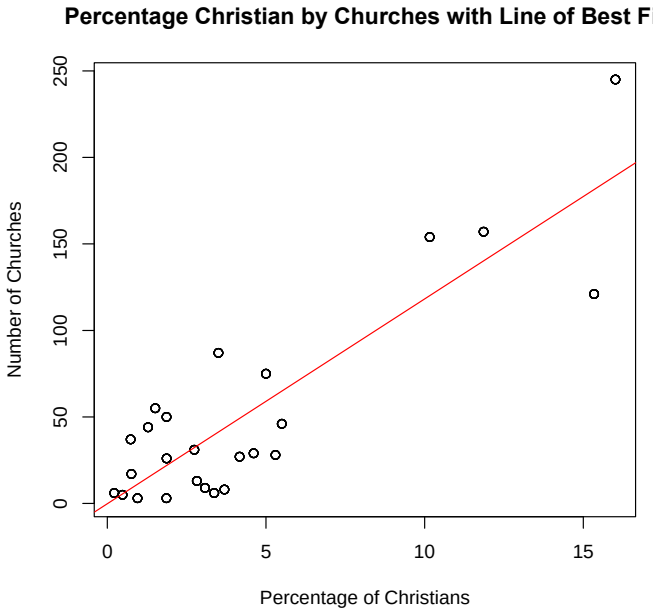


Figure 1.2

As a result, I formulated two separate models, one incorporating churches and another incorporating population percentage of Christians, alongside police stations and the

percentage of the 2012 vote share for Morsi, with random effects accounting for variation across years and governorates.

Model 1: Attacks= β_1 Percentage of Christian Population + β_2 Police + β_3 Morsi Vote Share + α_{Year} + γ_{Gov} + ε

Model 2: Attacks= β_1 Churches + β_2 Police + β_3 Morsi Vote Share + α_{year} + γ_{gov} + ε

I conducted several robustness checks, one of which involved running both models without Menia, the largest outlier in the dataset. This approach aimed to assess whether churches retained a significant impact on the frequency of attacks, even in the absence of Menia 's influence on the data. The following section will discuss the regression results and their implications regarding the overall findings.

Discussion of Regression Results:

Below is an analysis of the results from the statistical models:

Variables	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 1b	Model 2b
Percentage Christians	0.96873**	x	0.34953**	x
Churches	x	0.08443**	x	0.03184**
Police	-0.05002	-0.13845	0.09056*	0.05037

VoteShare Morsi	0.05054	0.06785	0.03819	0.05193*

* p<0.05 **p<0.001

Table 1.2[10]

We can see that different variables are significant when we compare models 1b and 2b, this disparity likely stems from the fact that the proportion of Christians and the number of churches is correlated with different aspects of the variation within the number of attacks. Therefore, the unexplained variation within the number of attacks will be different and so will be explained by different independent variables.

The results of these regressions support hypotheses 1 and 2, regarding population size and number of churches.

H1: Governorates with the highest percentages of Copts face more attacks, as they are perceived as more threatening.

[10] Model 1a and 2 a utilized the dataset including Menia, while Model 1b and 2b, utilized the dataset excluding Menia.

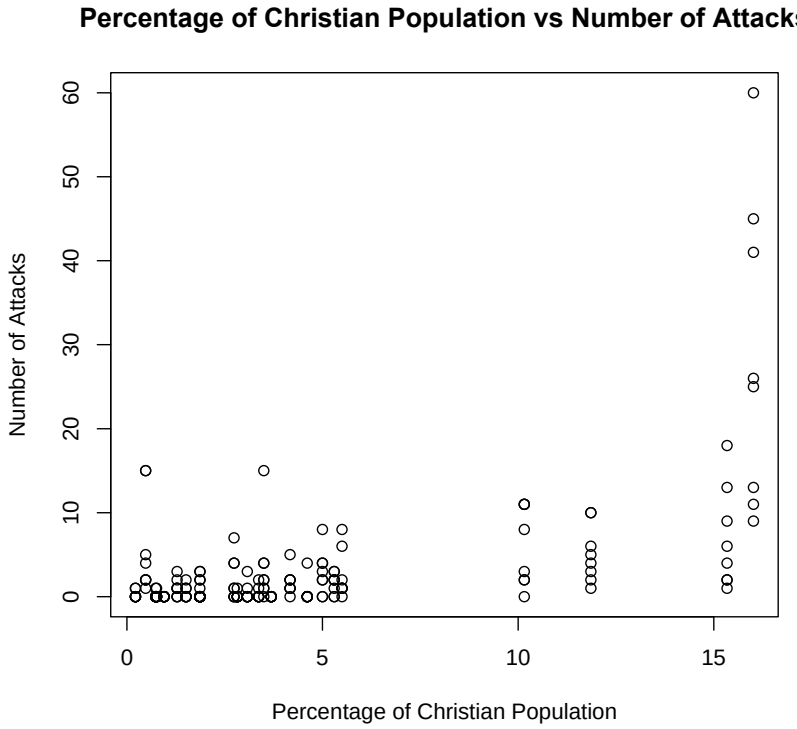


Figure 1.3

The correlation coefficient between percentage of Christian population and number of attacks is R= 0.594, including Menia, and R=0.483 when we exclude Menia. The inclusion of Menia in the models inflates correlation coefficient because of its particularly number of attacks. The Population percentage of Christians was very significant in Model 1 with a p value of 8.206e-05. The estimated effect of population percentage on attacks is substantial at 0.96873. If there was an increase in percentage of Christians of 1 percentage points, keeping all other variables constant, then we would expect approximately 1 more attacks (0.96 more attacks). Even when Menia, the governorate with the highest percentage of Copts, is excluded from the analysis, in Model 1b, the significance of population percentage persists. However, the estimated effect decreases to 0.34953, suggesting that an increase of

3 percentage points in population of Christians is associated with approximately 1 more attack. This is expected given that Menia has the highest numbers of attacks, more than double the next runner-up. Therefore, the model is accounting for these big differences with the bigger effect size when Menia is included.

H2: Governorates with the greatest number of churches witness more attacks, indicating that Copts are seen as a more organized and thus more threatening group.

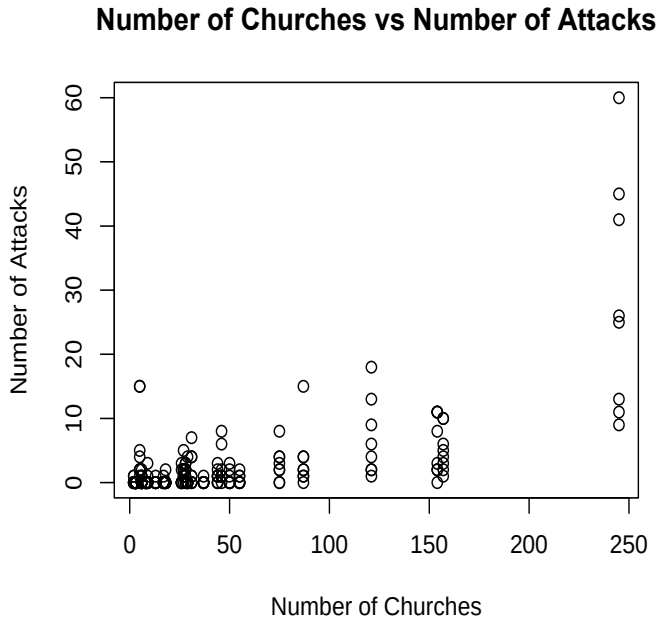


Figure 1.4

The correlation coefficient between the number of churches and number of attacks is R= 0.671, including Menia, and R=0.505. when we exclude Menia. As previously stated, the inclusion of Menia in the models inflates correlation coefficient because of its particularly

number of attacks. In all models, the presence of churches emerges as a significant factor. In Model 2a, Churches had a notable significance with a p-value of 5e-08 with an estimated effect of 0.0843. This suggests that with the addition of 10 churches, you would expect around one more attack (0.84). In Model 2b, churches remain highly significant, with a p-value of 0.000185 and an estimated effect of 0.03184. This indicates that an increase of 10 churches would yield approximately 0.3 more attacks. The reduction in effect size for churches is logical and due to the same factors previously discussed regarding Menia's effect on the model. Nevertheless, the fact that churches are still statistically significant shows the robustness of their effect. Figure 1.3 shows the relationship between number of Churches and number of attacks. As shown, as the number of churches increase, number of attacks also increases.

H3: Governorates with the highest Muslim Brotherhood organization will witness more attacks.

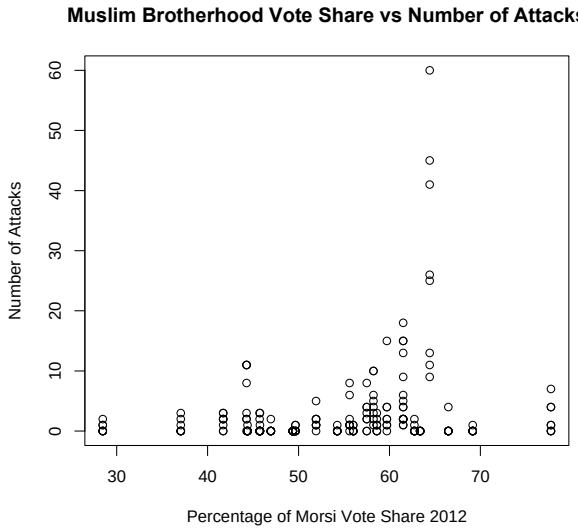


Figure 1.5

The correlation coefficient between the percentage of Morsi Vote Share in 2012 and number of attacks is R= 0.201, including Menia, and R=0.129 when we exclude Menia, for similar reasons I previously stated. Hypothesis 3 remained statistically insignificant in all models, increasing slightly to show statistical significance when Menia was excluded. However, even then, the significance was marginal (0.048508) and the effect size was minimal, at 0.05193, indicating potential practical insignificance. Although I expected these findings, they intrigued me, as it is commonly assumed that regions with greater support for political Islam, a key goal of the Muslim Brotherhood, would experience higher rates of attacks on Copts. Conversely, one might expect areas with higher concentrations of voters supporting Shafik, the more "secular" candidate, to experience fewer attacks on the Copts. However, no such correlations were found in the analysis. Discarding Menia, which has greater than 20 attacks, there isn't really a clear pattern between vote share and number of attacks. There is possibly a negligible upwards trend in the number of attacks as the vote share increases however this figure is not surprising given that we did not find that Morsi was significant in any of the models that we ran.

H4: Governorates where state capacity is strong experience fewer attacks as police activity may serve as a deterrence to attacks.

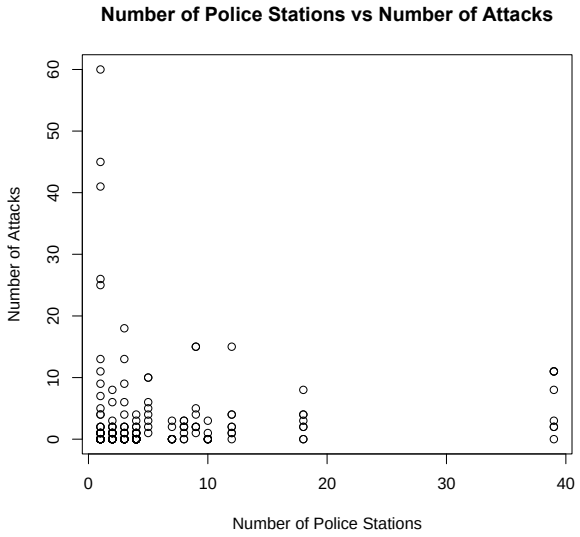


Figure 1.6

The correlation coefficient between the number of police stations and number of attacks is R= 0.061 including Menia, and R=0.342 excluding Menia. Police capacity appeared statistically insignificant in Models 1a and 2a. Once Menia is removed, Model 1b revealed significance with a p-value of 0.02862 and an estimated effect of 0.09056. This implies that an increase of 10 police stations would potentially result in nearly one more attack, assuming all other variables remain constant. The difference in the direction of the effect of police stations between Model 1a/1b vs Model 2a/2b doesn't raise concerns. We can see how the relationship between attacks and police stations will differ when Menia is removed because Menia has a very low number of police stations and a very high number of attacks, which can artificially cause a much weaker correlation between police and attacks.

The Sinai Question?

While Northern Sinai is included in the top five governorates for attacks against Copts, the dynamics surrounding these attacks vary significantly from the rest of Egypt, yielding a specialized analysis. The Sinai Peninsula is located between the Suez Canal on the west and the Gulf of Aqaba on the east. Its greatest dimensions are about 130 miles from east to west and about 240 miles from north to south (Britannica, 2024).

The Sinai Peninsula is home to an array of armed non-state actors, including militant Bedouin and Islamist groups (Watanabe, 2015). The situation intensified following the Egyptian uprising of 2011, which exacerbated the security vacuum in the region. This allowed local Bedouin groups an opening to assert their control over the Sinai (Watanabe, 2015). One of the most operationally advanced groups in Sinai is the "Sinai Province", whom were formally named Ansar Bayt al Maqdis ("Supporters of Jerusalem" or ABM) before they pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2014.

The group's main target was initially Israel. Egyptian authorities have attempted to restore their presence in the Sinai through both political and military measures (Watanabe, 2015). Egypt initiated two military operations, Operation Eagle in mid-2011 and Operation Sinai in mid-2012. The ousting of Morsi in 2013 led to the group declaring war on the Egyptian military and security forces, sparking what is often referred to as the Sinai Insurgency. While initially focused on attacking Egyptian security forces, they later expanded their targets to include civilians (Awad, 2017). On November 24, 2017, an attack on a Sufi mosque in Al-Rawḍah killed around 300 worshippers in the deadliest terrorist attack in Egyptian history.

65% of all attacks on Copts in Sinai took place in 2013 and 2017. The attacks of 2017 resulted in many characterizing the 2017 wave as an attempt to ethnically cleanse Sinai of Copts. The attacks resulted in an exodus of over 250 families leaving Sinai into neighboring governorates out of fear for their lives (RT Arabic, 2017). Muneer Abu Al-Khair, the representative of the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs in North Sinai Governorate mentioned that these families have dispersed across 13 Egyptian governorates, including 114 families in Ismailia Governorate, 44 in Cairo, and around 30 in Port Said. He noted that there were still some clergymen and Christian citizens inside the Coptic Church in Al-Arish at the time and that Egyptian security forces have surrounded the church and blocked access roads to secure protection for those inside. Those who fled reported that they received direct threats of targeting them and their families if they chose to remain, with some finding intimidating messages like "leave" written on their homes (BBC, 2019).

Fahmy Howaidi, Egyptian journalist and political analyst, suggested that the targeting of Coptic communities in Sinai reflects a strategic shift among terrorists. He stated that " the Sinai puzzle is becoming more mysterious, as we see a shift from attacking the army and police to attacking the Copts. Do these terrorists resort to killing the Copts because they failed to avenge themselves against armed forces and found a weak point that can disturb the authority of the state, ie the Copts?" (BBC, 2019).

Analysis of the attacks in Sinai suggests that the majority are claimed by Sinai Province and are aimed at threatening the state. Given that the perpetrators pledged allegiance to a terrorist group, I do not discuss the attacks in the light of sectarian violence,

as I argue terrorist attacks are inherently different due to their organizational levels as well as their arbitrary way of picking victims. Therefore, while this makes Sinai attacks an important area of study, it necessitates a specialized analysis outside the scope of this research. Additionally, while the 2006 survey by IPUMS indicated that Copts comprised close to 20% of the governorate, the current numbers remaining in Sinai after the mass exodus of 2017 are unclear.

Conclusion:

This chapter supplemented the basic account of perceived threat based on just demographics to one that goes beyond population numbers as a measure of threat. I highlight the visibility and organization of the Coptic minority as an additional measure for population threat. Although the churches are not the triggering mechanism for the attacks, they seem to provide the facilitating conditions that render an area ripe for violence. Throughout the chapter, I explore different explanations for the variation in the spatial distribution of sectarian violence in post-Tahrir Egypt. I discuss how threat perceptions, power dynamics, and group interactions, exist in non-democracies in ways that deviate from democratic norms. Understanding ethnic dynamics and power struggles in such contexts is essential for comprehending intergroup interactions and ethnic violence under authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, this chapter delves into competition logic in authoritarian regimes, highlighting that economic and political competition exists across most regimes types but the scope and configuration of this competition differs. In the modern era, where population size equates to power, there's still a sense of anticipation of democracy despite

current authoritarian rule. This anticipation drives political competition, particularly regarding Coptic-Muslim relations, with the Copts aligning with authoritarian regimes due to their fear of democracy's impact. Beyond the anticipation of democracy, ethnic competition and questions of ownership still fuel ongoing competition and threat between both groups.

Building upon Blalock's theory of perceived threat, I argue that if a minority is perceived as threatening, the majority may resort to force to suppress them. Upon conducting my analysis, Coptic population percentage and number of churches both arose as statistically significant. The presence of churches emerged as a significant factor in all models, even those excluding Menia, suggesting its robust influence on number of attacks.

The influence of Political Islam was found to be statistically insignificant in most models. This was particularly interesting as it is often assumed that regions with greater support for political Islam would witness higher rates of attacks on Copts and vice versa. However, no such correlations were found in the analysis. This suggests that churches and population density play a greater role in violence than Political Islam. Moreover, the prevalence of police stations was not statistically significant except in Model 1b. Model 1b highlights that an increase in 10 police stations would potentially result in nearly one more attack, assuming all other variables remain constant. This finding points to the need to further assess the relationship between local law enforcement and sectarian violence in particular areas, as well as the importance of a nuanced approach towards measuring state capacity, given that selective enforcement is a significant phenomenon even in strong capacity states.

The structural factors highlighted in this chapter are crucial to understanding sectarian violence in Egypt before moving to the short-term and more immediate mechanisms, as those could be too many to even name. This, I argue, brings us much closer to a satisfactory threat-based account of violence committed by the Muslim population against their Coptic Christian neighbors. Since perception is reality, understanding the potential perceived threat of churches is an essential factor in studying sectarian violence in Egypt. Failure to do so would leave a tremendous gap in the study of sectarian conflict in Egypt unengaged.

Chapter 3

Understanding the Intricacies of Coptic Muslim Relations and Perceived Threat

In Chapter 2, I conducted a large N study that assessed the relationship between multiple variables and the number of attacks through a linear mixed-effects model with random effects. The variables included the percentage of Christians, number of Churches, number of police stations, and vote share for Morsi in 2012 per each of the 27 governorates. My findings suggested that population percentages of Christians and number of Churches were the most significant factors, with the highest estimated effects.

While population percentages were indeed significant on their own, I argue that the number of churches needs to be included in the analysis for multiple reasons. First, churches appeared to be highly correlated with the percentage of Christians in an area, which makes logical sense; more Christians will build more churches. Moreover, churches emerged as both the primary target and the primary grievance cited by perpetrators. Therefore, a closer look at the data from a qualitative perspective will provide us with a clearer analysis of the independent effect of churches and a unique explanation to the spatial variation of sectarian attacks in Egypt. This is because churches are a novel marker for revealing both minority visibility and religious organization.

Additionally, upon examining governorates with the highest percentages of Copts, significant discrepancies in the number of attacks become apparent. For example, Menia and Assuit, the two governorates with the highest percentages of Copts with 16% and 15% respectively, saw vastly different numbers of attacks, with 230 attacks in Menia compared

to 55 in Assuit. Therefore, I argue that population percentages alone cannot account for the variation in attacks even in areas with large Coptic populations. As Varshney argued, a constant cannot explain a variation" (Varshney, 2005). These variations allow us to dive deeper into an analysis of the structural conditions identified in the large N study, and how they work to transition sectarian tensions into attacks.

Given the importance of the political and social controversy of churches in Egypt and the controversy surrounding their construction, this chapter focuses on highlighting how churches serve as both a structural condition as well as a micro level condition in Egypt, and discussing how the variables assessed in the large N study actually work together or separately to either cause violence or not. To do so, I ask why one governorate, Menia, experienced more than four times the number of attacks than the next runner up from 2011-2018. I utilize process tracing to establish how given similar circumstances, the number of churches in a particular area can indeed trigger a perceived threat. I proceed with an analysis of the legislative landscape surrounding church constructions and the controversies surrounding this topic. Additionally, I discuss the logic of a "close call", that is why, in some areas, an attack may seem likely, yet doesn't occur. Through this approach, I aim to provide insight into the intricate dynamics that cause the escalation of tensions into sectarian attacks in Egypt.

The Theory:

Despite common belief, it appears that specific accusations towards the Copts as a group or large-scale fear tactics are not the primary reason for the day-to-day assaults

targeting the Copts. Rather, it is the accumulation of minor grievances that, coupled with a growing sense of perceived threat, can escalate into violence in one area, all while remaining potentially insignificant or inconsequential elsewhere. The range of motives behind these attacks vary widely, and can be influenced by many factors, such as interfaith marriages, rumors, religious conversions, and small quarrels, to name a few.

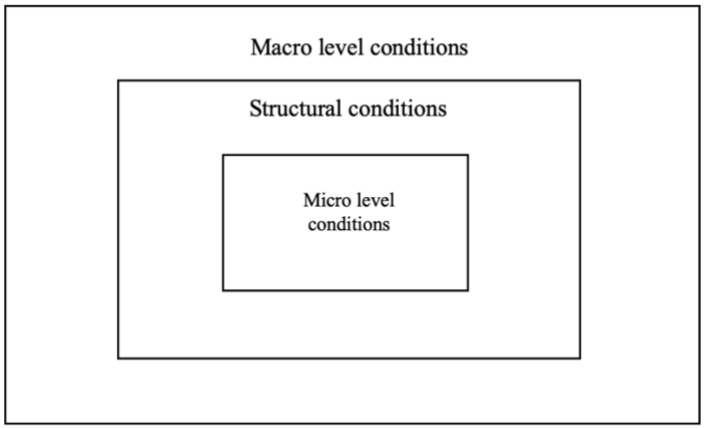


Figure 1.7 Conditions for Attacks

The figure above highlights the different conditions that exist and affect Coptic Muslim relations. The largest in scale are Macro level conditions. These are the widespread accusations towards the Copts, seeing the Copts as the enemy, blaming them for certain political outcomes, and using Islam to justify treating the Copts as second-class citizens. Because Macro level conditions are prevalent throughout the entire country, they cannot be used to explain the spatial variation of attacks. If macro level conditions were indeed the sole determinants of attacks on the Copts, one would expect attacks to occur uniformly across all regions of Egypt. However, this is not the case. Despite sectarian tensions existing throughout much of Egypt, attacks are not evenly distributed across governorates. This

suggests that additional factors beyond macro level conditions must be considered to fully comprehend the spatial distribution of attacks on the Coptic community.

Micro level conditions are the smallest in scale. These are agent-based motivations where individuals or groups choose to carry out attacks in response to specific triggering situations. These triggers can include rumors, inter faith marriages, religious conversions, individual grievances, alongside many others including the new construction or renovation of churches. However, while these agent-based motivations could potentially exist everywhere, they do not trigger attacks in all contexts. In other words, micro level conditions cannot explain alone why an interfaith marriage between a Coptic man and a Muslim woman can trigger a riot in some areas, as has happened in Menia in many cases, while failing to do so in others. This disparity highlights the inadequacy of micro-level conditions alone in explaining why such incidents result in violence in some contexts but not in others, therefore pointing us to structural conditions.

Structural conditions exist in the background or the structure of the society, that set the stage for tensions to translate into attacks. These include population distributions, number of churches in a particular area, etc. These types of conditions are not the immediate triggering conditions, but they offer the contexts where individuals are more likely to resort to violence in response to grievances. In essence, structural conditions provide the ground upon which micro-level triggers interact, ultimately shaping the likelihood and intensity of intercommunal violence. Understanding the interplay of these factors is essential for properly understanding the underlying dynamics of sectarian violence in Egypt.

As evident by the discussion above, churches play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of sectarian violence in Egypt. The significance of churches, theoretically, is multifaceted. On one hand, Church construction appears to be a triggering event. As will be evident through the qualitative analysis in the upcoming sections, the construction of churches in Egypt is a controversial, and in many cases, violent, matter. This is not particularly unique to Egypt. In fact, houses of worship are frequently causes of intercommunal tensions, if not violence elsewhere. From the construction of Hillel house at UCSD on a prominent piece of property in La Jolla (Mackin-Solomon, 2023), to the controversy surrounding the building of a mosque near ground zero in New York (Rohrer, 2010), to the standing tension surrounding mosque construction in Switzerland (Abdeleli, 2024), there have been many political and social tensions surrounding manners of religious expression, and particularly religious buildings in democratic countries.

However, the difference between construction of houses of worship in democratic settings, and church construction under authoritarian regimes, such as Egypt, is that in the democratic cases, the controversy gets channeled into the democratic politics and therefore, it is somewhat resolved in this way through the system. In an authoritarian setting, however, the dynamics are different in the absence of an electoral space for people to express their frustrations. This absence of an electoral space in authoritarian settings exacerbates intercommunal power struggles, transforming disputes over church construction into catalysts for sectarian violence.

More so, the legal framework surrounding the rules regarding church construction are vague and restrictive. This lack of clarity often leads to community rejection when

churches are suspected to be built both with and without permits. Without a mechanism for channeling this resistance into the political sphere and no avenue for the majority to express electoral disapproval, tensions frequently escalate into violence as a way for the majority to put the minority back in their place, so to speak. In these incidents, the churches serve as micro-level triggers for conflict. These are, in many ways, relatively straight forward easy to distinguish. In other words, there is a smoking gun. Perpetrators in most of these cases readily admit to targeting churches due to their opposition to their construction or expansion, as will be evident in the narratives surrounding some of the attacks we will discuss.

On the other hand, churches also impact intercommunal tensions in much more profound ways beyond their construction. Once established, churches become structural institutions that heavily shape the inter-ethnic dynamics of the surrounding community. Therefore, even if an attack is not related to a direct grievance against church construction, the presence of churches provides the structural conditions that set the stage for potential violence. Put simply, all of the micro level sources of intercommunal conflict that were presented in the previous section, are more likely to lead to violent attacks in areas where there is a perceived threat from the Copts.

These types of explanations are more challenging to study, lacking the clear-cut smoking gun that is found in the previous scenarios. Individuals do not confess to targeting the Copts due to the perceived threat of churches as a reflection of Coptic organization. In fact, they might not even be consciously aware of it enough to state it. However, these factors can indeed increase the likelihood of Copts in certain areas becoming a target for

attacks. The following section will highlight that despite being lumped together often, there is indeed variations within Upper Egypt's governorates with regards to violence against Copts.

Variations Within Upper Egypt:

Menia and Assiut

More than 60% of Coptic Christians live in upper Egypt., and "over half of these in the provinces of Assiut and Menia, the Copts' traditional strongholds" (Pennington, 1982). The majority of the Copts in Upper Egypt [although not of the Coptic population as a whole] are peasants, living a simple life often indistinguishable from that of their Muslim counterparts (Torres, 2017). The majority of attacks against the Copts also occur in Upper Egypt. Consequently, violence against the Copts has long been linked to the sheer numbers of Copts. That is, Copts are attacked in upper Egypt because they exist in the largest numbers and concentrations there. However, this argument overlooks the variation of number of attacks even in areas with the greatest percentages of Copts. As discussed in Chapter 2, Menia emerges as the epicenter of attacks against the Copts in Egypt. Despite comprising only about 5.8% of Egypt's total population, Menia accounted for 230 attacks (35%) of all attacks against the Copts between 2011 and 2018, making it commonly referred to as the "capital of sectarian violence in Egypt" (Torres, 2017). Assuit, on the other hand, despite having very similar percentages of Copts Assuit to Menia (15% versus 16%), experienced 55 attacks in the same time period. This disproportion highlights a complex reality beyond mere demographic figures.

Upon examining the cases of Assuit and Menia, it becomes evident that the sheer number of Copts present cannot be a sole explanation as to why they are attacked. Menia and Assuit are the top two governorates with the largest percentages of Copts. At first glance, they appear very similar; neighboring governorates situated less than 100 miles apart, with similar population numbers, education levels, and even a similar distribution of rural vs. urban population, with the majority living in rural areas.[11] Menia, however, is considerably smaller in geographic size to Assuit, with Menia spanning 15.0 km^2 and Assuit 26.6 km^2.

The similarity in demographical characteristics is a crucial control for the two cases as population distribution is often cited as one of the main reasons for attacks against Copts. However, the stark contrast in number of attacks between two governorates with similar demographic profiles raises pertinent questions. How then can two governorates with similar demographic distributions lead to very different rates of attacks? One of the major differences between Menia and Assuit is the number of churches in each governorate. Despite Copts constituting only a marginally higher percentage of the population in Menia compared to Assuit, Menia hosts a much higher number of churches, with 245 churches in total, surpassing Assuit by 124.

This disparity in church numbers as well as attacks suggests that attacks against Copts are not only correlated with their population density alone, but rather also with the presence of visible symbols of their community, such as churches. Given that churches are

[11] Demographic information was gathered from the Egypt Census Bureau (2006). Egypt 2006 census. Retrieved from https://egypt.opendataforafrica.org/EGSNS2006/egypt-census-2006

one of the main measures of perceived threat, the Copts are then attacked in the areas where more churches exist, not necessarily where more Copts exist. The high numbers of Copts coupled with high numbers of Churches in certain governorates results in the Copts being perceived as threatening to the sociopolitical dominance of Muslims, as the Copts are not seen as weak or fragmented, but rather appear more visible and organized through the churches.

While Copts and Muslims have a lot in common, such as language, food, and culture, they are not exactly indistinguishable. There are many telling factors that can point to religious identity differences, such as their names, the way they speak, their celebratory practices, and the religious symbolism in their daily attire. Because of this, Muslims and Christians are aware of each other's religious differences, despite being from the same country. There is always this feeling that the “other” group exists through everyday interactions, and this feeling tends to increase over time, and particularly with increased contact.

What makes this hazy feeling of a large number of Copts living in a particular area more of a reality is the presence of churches, as it amplifies the visibility of Coptic communities, rendering their demographic presence much more visible and tangible. While the Copts may seem visible through these differences, categorizing them as the other, is not enough to signal threat. A stronger, more concrete form of visibility is necessary for the group to be perceived as threatening.

To illustrate, consider two cities, each with 1000 Copts. If one city has only one church while the other has 10, the latter may appear as having a denser Coptic population due to

the greater visibility as a result of the higher number of churches. Churches are a marker of visibility Therefore, churches are not only significant as places of worship, but also as a symbol that shapes perceptions of community presence, strength, organization and in turn, threat. The difference in size between Menia and Assuit also highlights both population numbers as well as churches even more.

Despite similar percentages of Copts, Menia's smaller geographic area contributes to a higher concentration of churches per square kilometer, therefore creating the impression of a denser Coptic presence. Moreso, the churches signal that a large, organized group resides in a particular area. The more churches there are, the more this perception increases. It is important to note that this does not actually have to be true, as the measure for Churches per Coptic Capita yielded insignificant results in the large N study. However, what truly matters is the perception created by the presence of numerous churches. Since perception is reality, the proliferation of churches serves as a visible indicator of the Coptic community's strength and organization, therefore increasing perceived threat.

Menia stands out as a hotspot for attacks, primarily due to two interconnected reasons, both revolving around churches. For one, there are already so many churches there, creating a perceived threat of the Copts. This abundance of churches acts as a structural condition, heightening the susceptibility of the region to violent outbreaks triggered by conditions that might not lead to violence elsewhere. Additionally, church construction remains a contentious issue in Menia. Not only does Menia have the highest numbers of churches, but, due to the large number of churches and growing Coptic population, there is also a continuous trend of constructing new churches or renovating existing ones in

response to community needs. These instances of church construction serve as triggering conditions, particularly within the context of the already large number of churches in the governorate.

An example of this took place on October 22, 2017, when dozens of Muslims in Ezbat al-Qusheiri attempted to storm a building known as the Church of Father Mousa the Black. Their objections stemmed from rumors circulating that the worship services held there were an attempt to convert the service building into a church. According to an eyewitness, following the dusk prayer, several young Muslims gathered in front of the Qusheiri mosque, neighboring the building. They organized a march through the village streets, chanting, "Up and down and all around, we'll bring the church tumbling down. "During the march, protestors assaulted some Copts and threw stones at Copts' homes. They set the building's iron gate on fire and broke the surveillance cameras (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017). This incident reflects a broader pattern documented by the EIPR, illustrating the recurring cycle of community rejection regarding the construction of churches.

According to the EIPR report, "Closed on Security Grounds", an attack is likely to take place "at the earliest sign of the construction or renovation of a church .... In some cases, churches are attacked and may even be burned and demolished; the property of Christians in the area is also frequently subject to arbitrary attack" (2017). In some instances, the attacks on churches are random and unprovoked, while in other instances, they stem from disputes between Copts and Muslims, escalating into assaults on local churches. However, The EIPR report further notes that "Nearly no case of sectarian violence passes without a church being pelted with stones or an attempt to burn it down,

accompanied by hostile religious slogans," (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017, p.10).

We see these dynamics at play on October 27, 2017, when dozens of Muslims from Ezbat Zakariya, Menia, tried to storm the Mar Girgis Church and Kindergarten building after it was expanded. Although security forces intervened to prevent the attack, the situation escalated as the protestors took to the village streets, throwing stones at the homes of Copts and injuring a Coptic woman. The following day, three Coptic owned sheds on agricultural land were torched. A similar scenario took place on August 31st, 2018, where dozens of local Muslims in Dimshaw Hashem in Menia, chanted hostile slogans and declared their rejection of a church in town. They forcibly entered the homes of some Copts, looting gold jewelry and money, vandalizing electrical appliances and furniture, and setting the homes on fire, resulting in injuries to two Copts. Bishop Macarius of Menia noted in a statement that a similar incident had occurred in Ezbat Sultan, a neighboring town, just a few weeks earlier as a result of community rejection.

Controversy Surrounding Church Construction:

As previously discussed, the laws surrounding the construction of churches are restrictive, and the administrative procedures are vague. This is not new by any means, but dates back to Islam's Entry of Egypt in 641AD. Muslim leaders had no clear procedures regarding how Copts should go about receiving approvals for the construction or renovation of churches, often just following their own inconsistent policies that changed over time (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017). The Hamayouni decree, one of the

first decrees surrounding the topic issued by Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid I, distinguished two types of scenarios regarding religious practice and discussed regulations accordingly. The first are houses of worship in religiously homogenous areas, the second was houses of worships located in religiously diverse regions. In the latter spaces, the renovation of churches was to require certain approvals and depended on a permit from the Ottoman Porte. Most places are now religiously diverse, and therefore, all of Egypt falls under the 2nd scenario. Since then, it has become customary for the head of state to grant authorization for the building of any church.

The first attempt at modern administrative regulation for church construction, which provided detailed requirements, was issued by Deputy Interior Minister al Ezabi Pasha in 1934, and is known as El Ezabi decree. This decree, as outlined in the EIPR report "Closed on Security Grounds" (2017), is broken down as follows. The first section focused on inquiries regarding the Coptic community itself, asking questions such as how many Copts are interested in constructing a church, whether another church existed in the same locality, and if so, what is the proximity of that church. The second section addressed the Muslim population in the area, asking about the proximity of mosque or Islamic mausoleums to the proposed church site, whether the land is in Muslim or Christian neighborhoods, and whether there were any objections from the Muslim community regarding the construction (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017).

Section three focused on the land designated for the church, asking whether it is unused or agricultural land, and if it is near any bridges or irrigation canals. It also required consultation of competent authorities on the matter. The last section delved into

procedural matters, stating that the head of the church and an engineer must submit an application that includes architectural plans for the proposed church, as well as file an official report for investigation (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017).

The Ezabi decree has remained robust despite Egypt moving from a monarchy to a republic. Over the years, several presidential decrees have been issued. Presidential decree #13 in 1998, authorized governors to license the support and repair of churches. Presidential decree #453 in 1999 gave the administrative body in each governorate the right to issue permits to repair or renovate houses of worship. In 2005, Presidential decree #291 authorized governors to issue licenses for construction or expansion in existing churches.

Many churches, however, do not have permits. Some churches are historical churches that never obtained a license from the Ottoman Porte, or through presidential decree. Others were built based on oral approvals and have been hosting worship services for decades, without official documents. Others were built without permits due to the difficulty of obtaining one. "Some of these look-like traditional churches, while others are halls or homes in which worship services are regularly held" explained the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2017).

Issues arise when these churches want to follow procedures of renovations but are rejected because they don't have initial presidential permits. Churches that look like homes have become increasingly popular given the legal hurdles to building churches, as well as community objections. In response to these issues, President Sisi introduced Law 08/2016, aimed at streamlining the licensing process for churches. It established the committee for

the regularization of churches' status and had a goal to grant existing churches all necessary permits in order to legalize them. However, resistance from local communities against churches persists in numerous governorates. Additionally, the process to get a church licensed is still a lengthy process often subject to refusal.

Since permits for service buildings are easier to obtain than those for churches, requiring only the approval of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, Coptic communities are increasingly utilizing these structures, or part of them, for worship services. Often, Coptic citizens purchase a residence and renovate it by removing all the interior walls in order to make it suitable for worship services. Sometimes they build what appears to be a small factory and begin holding worship services regularly. Once the security establishment learns that the location has been converted into a church, often along with local officials and neighbors, the building is often shut down by a direct governmental order, or as a result of pressure from objecting Muslim residents (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017). "In many cases, however, security or local residents reject the construction of these buildings, even after all legal procedures are adhered to, and in a number of cases, the construction of service and social annexes has been prevented even when there is a church in the village" explains the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights report (2017).

These types of attacks also continue beyond the timeframe covered by the quantitative analysis. On April 23rd, 2024, in Al-Fawakher village, Saft Al-Khammar Al-Gharbiya, Menia, local Muslims set fire to several homes and shops owned by Copts, attempting to prevent them from leaving the buildings. Though no lives were lost, the attack destroyed a notable amount of Coptic property. This attack yet again stemmed from

rumors regarding the Copts obtaining a permit to build a church in the area. Abna Makarios, Archbishop of Menia stated that he had received threats after the building permit was issued, and alerted authorities.

Nonetheless, the attacks continued for hours before security forces arrived (International Christian Concern,2024). A video of the attacks began circulating social media with a song praising the attack playing in the background. " The events in Al-Fawakhir village, Menia, bear a striking resemblance to previous incidents in the same governorate, including those in Al-Khaiyary (September 2023), Manzafat Zaafarana (January 2024) in Abu Qurqas, and Al-Azib (December 2023) in Samalut. In each instance, the attackers have imposed their will, leading to the closure of the construction site, and preventing the completion of the church, even if it was licensed" explained an article on Coptic Solidarity, a reporting organization on violence against the Copts in Egypt (Adel, 2024).

The Churches as the Primary Factor of Perceived Threat:

How does the majority Muslim population perceive the churches? To start, churches are not seen as just places of worship; they serve as symbols of the presence and organization of the Coptic community. At the bare minimum, churches serve as a sign of visibility. They highlight and signal the fact that a Coptic community exists in a particular area. The greater the number of churches in a locality, the stronger the indication of a sizable Coptic presence. Furthermore, churches serve as centers of organization for the Coptic community. They are not only spiritual institutions but also hubs for communal activities and social gatherings. Churches, in nature, are organizational institutions. They

organize a particular group, whether figuratively as in the Copts are part of the "church" at large, or in the literal sense, in which they go to a particular church with a physical address.

In response to rejection and societal tensions, churches have emerged as vital community spaces. Through various programs such as sports leagues, summer activities, competitions, and social clubs, churches provide opportunities for Copts of all ages to come together, engage in recreational activities, and foster a sense of community cohesion. Additionally, churches often organize field trips, community events, and other social activities, further highlighting the visibility and organization of the Copts in a particular area. Therefore, the more churches there are, the more likely it is to signal perception of a larger, more organized Coptic community.

Churches also play a significant role as social service organizations. The Coptic Church provides an array of community services to those in the surrounding area, whether it be through monetary means, food, health, or shelter. The presence of churches offering such comprehensive support can be perceived as a threat by the majority population. It signals not only the strength and resilience of the minority Coptic community but also its level of organization and ability to provide for its members. Thus, the prevalence of churches in an area serves as a visible indicator of the perceived strength and organization of the minority group, resulting in increased perceptions of threat, and therefore attacks.

Beyond statistical data indicating a higher frequency of attacks in areas with more churches, it is evident that many attacks stem directly from the refusal of church construction or from individual grievances that escalate into assaults on churches. The correlation between the presence of churches and the perceived threat to the majority

population is not merely a statistical observation but a reality that shapes the ways both Copts and Muslims interact. Beyond statistical data indicating a higher frequency of attacks in areas with more churches, it is evident that many attacks stem directly from the refusal of church construction or from individual grievances that escalate into assaults on churches.

The following section will discuss micro level conditions, particularly interfaith relationships and religious conversions, and how churches provide the structural conditions for perceived threat, therefore increasing the likelihood of attacks in areas where they exist in large numbers.

Interfaith Relationships and Religious Conversions:

One of the most controversial issues that affects Coptic Muslim tensions in Menia (and arguably Egypt at large) is conversions. More so, conversions are even more controversial when they are tangled with rumors regarding an interfaith relationship (Torres, 2017). One of the most infamous incidents took place in the village of Karama in Menia, where rumors that a Christian man had an affair with a Muslim woman resulted in a brutal attack on his mother, a 70-year-old Coptic Woman. The elderly woman was stripped naked and paraded through the streets followed by the ransacking and torching of seven Coptic homes. “They burned the house and went in and dragged me out, threw me in front of the house and ripped my clothes, 'I was just as my mother gave birth to me, screaming and crying” the woman stated (Daily Mail, 2020). Bishop Makarios of Menia stated that the police arrived two hours later, giving the attackers “ample time” to commit their crimes (Guardian News and Media, 2016).

The topic of interfaith marriage is of high controversy, particularly because it has implications regarding conversions. According to a decree issued by Dar al ifta, it is permissible for a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman in certain circumstances. However, marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman is prohibited (Library of Congress, 2016). While conversions from Islam are not technically a crime under the law, pressures both legally and culturally complicate the process making it near impossible (Torres, 2017). Conversions to Islam, however, are a much simpler process. "Egyptians who wish to convert to Islam can file a paper to reflect the change of religion in their legal and personal documents, such as the compulsory ID card. There is no such process available for Muslims who wish to convert to another faith" (El-Tahawy, 2015). Consequently, religious leaders often see inter-faith marriage a tool to recruit members from the other religion, which intensifies discourse around the topic.

If interfaith relationships are considered taboo across the entire country, why then, do they not trigger large scale attacks stemming from such contexts across all governorates? Violence surrounding interfaith marriages and religious conversions represent a micro-level condition discussed in earlier sections. These are agent-based motivators that are often linked to an attack motivated by an individual grievance. Such situations are frequently observed in Egypt, where topics like premarital sex and interfaith relationships are controversial in the country's conservative culture. While tensions surrounding interfaith marriages are widespread across the country, the level in which this tension turns into bloody attacks like the one described above highly depends on the structural conditions in the area. Attacks surrounding interfaith relationships are often acted on in bloody riots in rural areas where churches are high in numbers.

It is by now clear that churches indeed heighten the perceived threat of the Copts. The Copts are then attacked in areas where they threaten the sociopolitical dominance of the majority Muslim population. What type of threat is being highlighted, then? Interfaith marriages bring up two types of threats, the threat of conversations, which results in losing members of the congregation while the other group gains them, as well as threatening the honor of the society at large, and the men, their women.

Demographic distributions, as found in Ch 2 are important, and can have an impact on violence. Copts are indeed attacked in areas where they exist in large numbers. Because of this, conversions intensify the dynamics at hand, and can, depending on the rates of conversion, affect the balance between both groups. Conversions are linked with interfaith marriages because, while Christian women do not have to convert when marrying a Muslim man (although they often do), the children by law take after the religion of their father. Therefore, the children of a Christian woman married to a Muslim man are Muslim. Likewise, the children of a Muslim woman married to a Christian man, are Christian. This highlights a different threat, that of ownership. As demographic patterns change through conversions, it prompts the question of ownership and citizenship; whose country does it belong to? The threat is that by moving people into the category of a particular group, and as demographic distributions shift, it raises the question of whose country, is it? These dynamics are not only significant in democratic societies but also within authoritarian regimes where internal ethnic politics persist.

Beyond conversions, interfaith relationships are also heavily interlinked with the concept of honor, which is very prevalent in the middle east for centuries. In Arabic, the word Honor has multiple words, including “Sharaf” which means dignity, glory, or high

rank, or ''Ird" which is good repute, and dignity. "Sharaf suggests rank and social prestige, can be augmented or diminished, and should be defended by men, ''Ird, can only be lost or redeemed and is mostly connected with a woman's body" explains Baron (2006). According to Arab customary law, immodest actions that caused dishonor to the family can only be remedied by loss of life (Baron,2006). Honor based violence is another contentious topic that when becomes entangled with religion, becomes even more exacerbated. According to the US Department of State 2021 country reports on Human Rights Practices in Egypt, "The law allows leniency towards men who kill their wives upon discovering them in an act of adultery" (2022). While honor is not exclusive to interfaith relationships, the situation is even more so intensified if it occurs across religious lines.

This concept is not exclusive to honor based societies. As Dollar (2014) notes, many scholars that study the American reconstruction period have found evidence that points to the fact that minorities were punished more severely for crimes that whites perceive to be socially threatening, such as sex crimes. Similarly, Copts are punished severely for crimes that Muslims perceive to be socially threatening, especially when it involves their women. However, Muslims are not doing so in all areas, simply because they do not view the Copts as threatening in all areas, but rather in the areas where they are already existing in large numbers and appear as organized through the number of churches in the area. The Copts visibility and organization are therefore incredibly important in the effect they have on the perceived threat to the majority.

As previously discussed, rumors play a crucial role in intensifying violence against Copts. This, too, is not unique to only the Copts. In the book, The Deadly Ethnic Riot, Horowitz points to rumors as an essential precipitant of violence. "Rumors are highly patterned, and

they move people to violence by acting on individual cognition and motivation as well as on group dynamics," he argues. Horowitz explains that a rumor is a "short-lived, unverified report, usually anonymous in its origin," by which the perpetrators justify the violence that is about to occur and mobilize ordinary people to do what they would otherwise not do. Rumors about interfaith relations in Egypt are no different, and in rural areas where the majority of people get their information from word of mouth, become highly dangerous.

This was evident by an attack that took place in February 2011, where rumors circulated in the village of Sol in Menia suggesting that a Christian man and a Muslim woman were involved in an interfaith relationship. When the woman's cousins learned of the situation, they insisted on killing her as she dishonored the family. Her father refused to hand her over to them, which resulted in the cousins opening fire and fatally injuring him. On March 4th, the villagers raged on the Copts, attacking the local Church, and demolishing it, as a form of collective retribution. Local residents refused to allow the church to be rebuilt until military forces and religious leaders intervened.

Attacks as such highlight the fact that attacks on churches frequently occur alongside individual grievances. This highlights the symbolic significance of churches; churches represent not only places of worship but also symbols of identity and community organization of the Copts. Churches provide the structural conditions that render an area ripe for violence. Heightening the perceived threat of the Copts, they are then more likely to get attacked as a result of an individual grievance escalating in areas where there are large numbers of churches. Areas that have large numbers of churches give off the perception that the Copts are more organized, and therefore, this fuels the sense of threat from them, resulting in issues that would otherwise not result in violence elsewhere, result in violence.

This is also evident by the fact that in many cases, even if the violence is not directly related to the church, the church still becomes a focal point in the attacks.

The Logic of a "Close Call":

While attacks can happen because of an individual grievance, fueled by factors such as interfaith marriages, such micro level conditions cannot explain why despite happening nationwide, they do not trigger attacks in all contexts. Why, for instance, do rumors of interfaith marriages or church construction sometimes escalate into riots in certain areas while remaining peaceful in others? Similarly, macro-level factors such as blaming the Copts for Mohammad Morsi's ousting or perceiving them as second-class citizens due to religious beliefs don't evenly provoke attacks nationwide. The distribution of attacks in Egypt, as revealed by the quantitative analysis in Chapter 2, is not random and follow certain patterns. Attacks occur in areas where there are certain structural conditions in place, such as high percentages of Copts, and large numbers of Churches. This chapter, therefore, focuses on these structural conditions as crucial to understanding sectarian violence before moving to the short-term and more immediate mechanisms as there could be too many to even name. This section will discuss the logic of a "close call", where an attack seems likely but doesn't occur.

In June 2012, in the governorate of Assuit, The Salafi Al Nour Party, circulated inflammatory pamphlets all around the governorate of Assuit targeting some public figures, and specifically the Coptic Church. Some of the claims they made included that George Isaac, a Coptic politician stated that, "June 30th is the end of Islam," and that Bishop

Moussa, the Bishop of Youth, had said, "Get out of the capsule of the caliphate dream." The pamphlets had a call for action, calling all Muslims to participate in demonstrations held in Al-Magdoub Square in Assuit, where Asim Abdel-Majid, a member of the Islamic Group's Shura Council, and the Brotherhood leader Safwat Hegazy, were attending. Both are known for hostility towards the Copts. However, despite the inflammatory rhetoric used, the rumors circulating, and the call for protests, we did not witness any large-scale attacks taking place against the Copts in Assuit as a result of this mass calling.

Why is this the case? I argue that while macro level conditions can play a role in enticing conflict, without certain structural conditions in place, they alone do not necessarily depict Copts as a tangible threat. In other words, areas that have high percentages of Copts, but fewer churches, may not exhibit the same visibility in terms of Coptic organization, as churches serve as a tangible symbol of perceived threat. Consequently, areas with fewer churches may not elicit the same level of perception of threat. Attacks on churches often occur in conjunction with individual grievances because churches hold immense symbolic significance in the collective psyche. Consequently, despite Assuit having the second-highest percentage of Copts, it experiences fewer attacks.

This is not to suggest that Coptic-Muslim relations in Assuit are devoid of tension. However, the notable difference in the number of attacks, given similar demographic characteristics in both governorates but with a significant variation in the number of churches, is striking. Areas with a greater number of churches appear to be tension hot spots for attacks, as these institutions provide the structural conditions necessary to escalate violence, as evident by Menia. Although the churches themselves may not always

directly trigger attacks, they provide the structural conditions that render an area ripe for violence. Therefore, studying these structural factors is essential to understanding the complex patterns that fuel sectarian violence in Egypt and the variables provide the grounds for violent outbursts to occur.

Conclusion:

This chapter expands on the quantitative analysis conducted in Chapter 2. I argue that structural conditions, including population percentages of the Copts, and number of churches in a governorate are crucial factors that influence the levels of perceived threat of the Copts, and in turn, numbers of attacks. While population percentages were significant on their own, I argue that it is important to examine churches due to them being both primary targets of attacks and the main grievance cited by perpetrators. By doing so, I offer an in-depth understanding of the independent effect of churches on the perceived threat of the Copts.

To do so, I ask why one governorate, Menia, experienced more than four times the number of attacks than the next runner up from 2011-2018. I discuss the most common micro level triggers, interfaith relationships, and conversions, as well as the role of role of rumors and honor in shaping these factors. Through a comparative examination of Menia and Assuit, the two governorates with the highest percentages of Copts, I show that the abundance of churches in Menia heightens the perceived threat of the Copts. Because of this, they serve as both a structural condition and at times, a micro-level trigger for attacks. I also discuss the logic of a "close call", that is why violence may be anticipated in certain

areas but does not happen. This analysis has significant implications for understanding sectarian violence in Egypt, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach that considers explanations beyond micro-level factors, such as structural explanations. In doing so, I aim to shed light on the intricate dynamics that cause either escalation or mitigation of sectarian attacks in Egypt.

Conclusion

This research began with asking a question; What explains sectarian violence in Egypt post-Tahrir? Despite a tremendous accumulation of research devoted to this question, it remains a rather complex puzzle. What was rather puzzling is that while research on the causes of ethnic and sectarian conflict has indeed gained prominence in comparative politics, research focusing on ethnic violence in non-democratic regimes was scarce, and when available, relies often on the same explanatory mechanisms evident in democratic regimes. Such a narrow lens of view results in a notable gap in the literature regarding both violence under authoritarian regimes, as well as the factors influencing the spatial variation in amity and conflict among minority and majority groups in the middle east.

Chapter 1 offered an in-depth exploration of the historical trajectory of the Coptic community, spanning from the Arab conquest to the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Throughout, I examined the legal standing of Copts under significant regimes and their treatment by both state and non-state actors. A notable shift observed during the era of political modernization was the transition from violence stemming primarily from political authority in the pre-modern period to a prevalence of socio-political violence in the modern era. Interestingly, the phenomenon of mob violence, traditionally associated with the pre-modern era, intensified in the modern era. Furthermore, chapter 1 highlighted that the phenomenon of socio-political competition over citizenship rights, often perceived as characteristic of democratic regimes, is evident even within non-democratic contexts.

Turning to the spatial distribution of violence in Egypt, it appears that violence is not equally distributed throughout all of Egypt, yet the majority of research discussing sectarian violence in Egypt operates on a national level of analysis, often overlooking the spatial variation in the distribution of attacks. When such variations are acknowledged, they are often dismissed by simplistic explanations such as the sizable Coptic Christian population in a particular are, high organization and mobilization of the Muslim brotherhood, lack of education, inadequate proper state capacity, or the influence of conservative cultural norms. While at first glance, such factors may appear true, a more nuanced examination of the data reveals a different conclusion; there exists substantial variation in both the frequency and intensity of attacks even within Upper Egypt, with a notable hotspot in the governorate of Menia, despite many similarities shared with neighboring governorates such as Assuit

This finding pushed me to pursue an analysis of the spatial variation of violence in Egypt. In doing so, I drew upon Blalock's threat theory, expanding his theoretical contributions onto authoritarian regimes. Following Blalock's argument that minority groups are targeted where they are seen as posing a threat to the socio-political dominance of the majority, I centered my investigation on the spatial distribution of sectarian violence in Egypt. Specifically, I examined these patterns through the lenses of population demographics and the presence of churches. In doing so, I discuss the logic of competition within authoritarian regimes, and explored how perceptions of threat and levels of organization can manifest beyond electoral processes. Additionally, I provided into a nuanced analysis of the intricate dynamics of Coptic and Muslim populations in Egypt, shedding light the conditions under which mere tensions can translate to attacks.

The statistical analysis conducted in Chapter 2 highlighted the significance of both the population percentage variable as well as the number of churches variable in their effects on attacks. Across all models, the presence of churches and population percentages emerged as a significant factor, even when Menia, the governorate with the highest percentage of Copts, and the highest number of churches was excluded from the analysis. This is important because it highlights that Copts are targeted in areas where they exist in high percentages, and have a greater number of churches, all indicating that they are more organized as a group. Intriguingly, the percentage of vote share for Morsi in the 2012 election, the measure for political Islam in my data, appeared to be practically statistically insignificant in all models. Despite popular belief, the analysis suggests that regions with larger concentrations of Muslim Brotherhood members or supporters do not experience more sectarian violence, further emphasizing that majority of sectarian violence is not motivated by conservative religious beliefs.

Police capacity appeared statistically insignificant in Models 1a and 2a, with a negative correlation. Upon exclusion of Menia, there doesn't appear to be a correlation between the 2 variables. An interesting finding is that in Model 1b, a positive relationship is observed, that is, an increase of 10 police stations could potentially result in nearly one more attack, assuming all other variables remain constant. This finding was interesting, but not necessarily shocking, as selective enforcement is a phenomenon even in strong capacity states. As evident by some of the narratives I presented in Chapter 3, there have been indeed many reports pointing to the fact that local law enforcement allowed or even participated in some attacks. This finding, however, suggests the necessity of further research into the relationship between police presence and the occurrence of sectarian

attacks. Additionally, it highlights the importance of conducting analysis that goes beyond the relationship between the state at large, and the Copts, and looking into the nuanced dynamics between law enforcement and the Copts.

Chapter 3 provided the qualitative analysis and offered a deeper discussion of the factors discussed in Chapter 2, and others. By examining attacks related to church construction, interfaith relationships, conversions, and the role of rumors and honor, this chapter highlighted key factors affecting the complex dynamics of Coptic-Muslim relations in Egypt. Given the importance of the political and social controversy of churches in Egypt, as well as the tensions and attacks linked to their construction, I argued that churches are the best measure of the perceived threat of the Copts in a given area. Additionally, I provided an analysis of the legislative landscape surrounding church constructions and the controversies surrounding this topic. Moreover, I explored the multifaceted role of the Coptic churches in Egypt, examining their role as both a structural condition and a micro-level factor. The last section of Chapter 3 discussed the logic of a "close call", that is why, in some areas in which violence would be expected to take place, doesn't. By doing so, I shed light on the importance of studying churches as a primary factor in affecting Coptic Muslim relations in Egypt, as well as violence against the Copts.

Project limitations:

Although much work has been dedicated to this project, I encountered various limitations stemming from both data constraints, and research methods. As previously stated, the population data posed a significant challenge to my research, as there are no

reports since 2006 that reported religious divisions and demographic distributions. Existing governmental figures, in addition to being outdated, have been disputed by independent journalists and even the church. To account for population, I utilized a proxy variable representing the percentage of Copts, drawn from an IPUMS survey conducted in 2006, where they sample 10% of Egypt's population. Despite its imperfections, this method offers a solution to account for the percentages of Copts across governorates.

Another issue was the lack of consistency regarding the aggregation levels between the dependent and independent variables. The unit of analysis was significant above where the attacks occur. To remedy this, I reported everything at the level of the governorate, as much of the data at the district level was unavailable. Additionally, this research would have benefitted from more detailed information about the churches, such as all their construction dates, congregation numbers, and other patristic and demographic information. However, this data was, as expected, not readily available online and would require conducting fieldwork in Egypt in order to obtain.

This brings us to the final limitation, the absence of field work in Egypt, which would have provided invaluable insights into the dynamics at play. Growing up in Egypt, much of these dynamics are not foreign to me, however, conducting field work that focuses on the particular research questions of this project would have offered a deeper understanding that goes beyond my lived experiences, and would remain otherwise unattainable.

Despite these constraints, the dataset I put together and used in this project is the largest and most streamlined resource of its kind on sectarian violence in Egypt. Despite being dissuaded by many to conduct this research due to the scarcity of readily available

data, I wholeheartedly believed in the importance of investigating this topic. I aspire for this research to be built upon by myself and others in the future, as more data and more methodological approaches become available.

Moving Forward:

Although this dissertation project is over, my research on this topic is merely just beginning. This dissertation has highlighted many avenues that still require much research. First and foremost, I intend to conduct fieldwork in Egypt, in order to gather a deeper more nuanced understanding of the inter-ethnic dynamics at play. Currently, there are three extensions to this project that I aim to work on, two of them will offer more in-depth extensions to this topic, and one will offer a broader expansion beyond Egypt.

The first extension is an article that provides an analysis that goes beyond the relationship between the state at large, and the Copts, and investigates the relationship between local law enforcement and inter-ethnic dynamics. This article would analyze the relationship between police presence and the occurrence of sectarian attacks, discussing many factors such as demographic composition of police officers across governorates, their political affiliations, and the legitimacy of local law enforcement in different areas.

The second extension is an article focusing primarily on conversions and interfaith relations, and how they impact inter-faith relations. While this project briefly discussed these factors, a more in-depth understanding of these contentious topics will offer a deeper understanding on the dynamics and controversy surrounding kidnapping of Coptic women, a topic I did not get to discuss in the dissertation.

Finally, the third extension will provide an analysis on the dynamics of authoritarian safeguards to minority communities. Moving beyond Egypt, this article would provide a comparative examination of Egypt and Lebanon, analyzing the inter-ethnic dynamics as well as the factors that shape ruler's decisions regarding extending protections to minority groups. Lebanon provides a good comparative case for this analysis as I analyze the factors under which leaders in non-democracies may still extend protections to minority groups when it aligns with their strategic interests, especially in politically competitive or divided landscapes where minority support becomes crucial.

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