Tolerance in Challenging Political Environments in Uganda, Kenya, India and Pakistan

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This is a study of political tolerance in India, Pakistan, Kenya, and Uganda. The project will focus on tolerance of the kind we associate with civil liberties and rights – liberties and rights that from a democratic perspective should belong to all citizens irrespective of race or ethnicity, gender, class, or, most important, opinion. We will consider the value which citizens place upon these liberties and what explains the variation in citizens' levels of political tolerance. By means of surveys and in-depth interviews in all four countries, which vary in type of regime on a scale ranging from "democratic" to "very weak democratic", the project will test a set of hypotheses relating mainly to civil society, gender, type of regime, quality of governance, ethnic pluralism, and socioeconomic conditions. In particular, the project aims at investigating the possible influence of institutional factors and cultural values and traditions. The aim is to test the idea that state institutions that provide services (e.g. health services, education, judicial support) according to universalistic principles always contribute to political tolerance (measured as the support for the freedom of expression) no matter how plagued the cultural and political context may be with regard to

lack of trust, ethnic divides, and socioeconomic inequalities.

Background and purpose of the project

Freedom of expression is a part of the foundation of democracy and it is intertwined, quite inseparably, with the idea that citizens, various actors of society, and the state, must be prepared to tolerate differences of opinion – at least as long as opinions do not severely infringe other peoples rights or cause great harm. Most commonly in bills of rights it is stated that individuals have the right to hold "opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without inference by public authority"[2]. However, this also implies that the state has a duty to protect citizens expressing their opinions and ideas against other, intolerant, citizens. Consequently, in order to provide people with the opportunity to "realise their human potential" (Project, 2009) it is necessary to accept basic principles of political tolerance, from the individual level up to the state level. In a democratic state various actors do not have to always agree on ideas that are expressed, but they need to agree on the right to express them. This is one of the reasons why for example UNESCO pursues projects aimed at not only "media independence" but also "pluralism" (UNESCO, 2009). The basic idea, traceable to the thoughts of Voltaire, is expressed in the dictum "I [may] disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to

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2 From the European Convention on Human Rights, article 10.

the death your right to say it".[1] Establishing a culture of tolerance in a state is, however, a fundamental challenge. In far too many conflicts in the world, historically and today, the aim of at least one party has been to infringe or eliminate the freedom of expression for another and this can create even international conflicts (Hutchison & Gibler, 2007). Conflicts undoubtedly breed on intolerance and vice versa. Therefore Amartya Sen and others identified tolerance as one of the prerequisites for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2004: 10). It is from these observations this project takes its queue.

This is a study of political tolerance in India, Pakistan, Kenya, and Uganda. The project will focus on tolerance of the kind we associate with civil liberties and rights – liberties and rights that from a democratic perspective should belong to all citizens irrespective of race or ethnicity, gender, class, or, most important, *opinion*. We will consider the value which citizens place upon these liberties and what explains the variation in citizens' levels of tolerance. By means of surveys and in-depth interviews in all four countries, which vary in type of regime on a scale ranging from "democratic" to "very weak democratic", the project will test a set of hypotheses relating mainly to civil society, gender, type of regime, quality of governance, ethnic pluralism, and socioeconomic conditions. *In particular, the project specifically aims at investigating the possible mediating influence of institutional factors and cultural values and traditions. Therefore a study is proposed*

which aims at identifying what determines levels of tolerance among citizens who live in areas where economic resources are very limited, with varying degrees of ethnic pluralism, and which vary in the spectrum between "democratic" and "very weak democratic"

The theoretical framework and its relation to previous research

Most freedom of expression studies[2] focus on the state and how constitutions and state institutions can provide direct measures for protection to uphold freedom of speech and provide for tolerance (Newman, 2002; Sullivan, 2000; Wimmer, 2005). However, we want to employ a slightly different approach which places the citizens at the centre of attention – admittedly in relation to the state, but also in relation to other factors that may strongly influence the capacity to uphold freedom of expression and tolerance. Ronald Inglehart points out the direction we want to follow:

> Since the collapse of Communism, democracy has attained a positive image in virtually every country in the world. But these favorable opinions are often superficial, and unless they are accompanied by more deeply rooted tolerance, trust, and participation, the chances are poor that effective democracy will be present at the societal level.(Inglehart & Welzel, 2003: 62).

In further support of this, recent studies have shown that there is a significant discrepancy between the importance people ascribe generally to political and civil liberties on the one hand, and the liberties they are willing to bestow on specific 'adverse'

1 The quotation is often incorrectly attributed to Voltaire. However the aphorism was actually stated by Evelyn Beatrice Hall under the pseudonym Stephen G. Tallentyre in Hall (1906).

2 A good overview of this field of research is provided by Walker (2007).

Figure 1. Explaining acceptance of freedom of expression and tolerance.

groups on the other. For example, a study from Mexico reveals that even though a majority of Mexicans prefer democracy to other forms of government on a general level, a majority also object to the public expression of views that diverge from their own (Schedler & Sarsfield, 2004). Obviously this field of research is full of paradoxes that need to be understood if we want to reveal how basic values are shaped that are necessary at the society level of a democracy.

At the ground level, toleration of differences of opinion among individuals can be a fundamental bulwark against atrocities, attacks, hate-crimes etc. (UNDP, 2004). And vice versa, a state may be efficient in providing resources for the direct protection of the right to expression. However, among intolerant citizens such goals will be ever so hard to fulfil. Therefore, this project mainly aims at explaining variation in political tolerance at the individual level. The independent variables will however relate to individual *and* contextual factors. In short the model to be tested is shown in figure 1.

Standard assumptions about tolerance on *the individual level* will be tested, such as those relating to the influence of gender, literacy, class, membership of civic organisations, levels of social capital, indicators such as trust, and religious and political affiliation. We will also test for the influence *of contextual variables* such as the character of state institutions, their level of demo-

cratic performance, and varying degrees of cultural or ethnic pluralism. With the proposed design of the study we will be able to test hypotheses saying that the character of the state has an impact on tolerance among individuals not only by explicitly guarding certain rights, but also indirectly. The latter depends on how effectively reliable and stable institutions in general can be provided. We will go beyond the assumption that good governance automatically breeds tolerance among citizens. In our view it is important to see if a system which is democratic from a more formal and technical perspective (i.e. by regularly providing general and fairly free elections), always breeds tolerance. An electoral democracy combined with poorly functioning institutions, such as those that for example relate to the educational and health systems, could very well just breed intolerance. Atul Kohli's "Democracy and Discontent" (1990) is a good case in point . It shows how conflicts, riots and intolerance spread in India side by side with the spread of democracy. The key to understanding the situation was that the spread of democratic thinking created systemic demands that were unmatched by the performance of government institutions. The discrepancy spelled out conflicts. Therefore, this research project will keep in mind the paradox that democracy can turn into its own enemy under certain conditions. Nonetheless, the study will be

firmly anchored in the theoretical foundations and relate to empirical findings established in previous research contributions on tolerance and freedom of expression.

Studies of political tolerance were pioneered by researchers in the US in the 1950s and 1960s mainly for two reasons. They emerged from the Cold War as the threats of Communism, both real and imagined, and the fears promoted in connection with them, threatened civil liberties. Also, they were born out of the Civil Rights movement. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 led to policies that challenged the levels of tolerance of the white majority. In this context Stouffer's seminal study 1955 and his continued work in 1973 laid the ground for how most studies since have formulated surveys on political tolerance. They most commonly involve a question where the interviewee is asked to name the most disliked group in society. Then the interviewee is asked to respond to questions about which rights should be extended to the least liked group. At the centre Stouffer placed questions relating to the freedom of expression. This has generated a large number of studies of how, for example, levels of education, religious preferences, ideological preferences, gender, ethnic origin, the political culture etc are associated with political tolerance (Cigler & Joslyn, 2002; Duch & Gibson, 1992; J. L. Gibson, 2005a; Gibson, 1995, 2002; J. L. Gibson, 2005b; Gibson, 2006; Gibson & Duch, 1993; Gibson & Gouws, 2000; Golebiowska, 1999; Inglehart & Welzel, 2003; Mutz, 2002; Persell, Green, & Gurevich, 2001; Reimer & Park, 2001; Finkel, 1999) From studies in America and elsewhere, we know that on the individual level literacy is a major factor in determining the level of tolerance

(Finkel, 1999). In more recent contributions, however, other factors have been emphasised. From the realm of civil society and social capital debates, Cigler and Joslyn (2002) claim that there is support for the idea that group membership is strongly linked to political tolerance. Mutz (2002) and others researchers (Gibson & Gouws, 2000) to some extent holds this view but adds that it seems to be important for individuals to be exposed to several different types of groups. Her experiments show the benefit to citizens of being exposed to "conflicting political viewpoints" and that "cross-cutting exposure" fosters political tolerance. Turning to aggregated levels, Reimer and Park (2001) have a different perspective and decide to re-examine the old findings, saying that conservative Protestants in the US tend to be "less willing than most Americans to grant civil liberties to unpopular groups". The arguments put forward have points of contact with the wider debate on the extent to which religious group affiliation, as well as political affiliation, may decide the level of tolerance. It may be mentioned here that one of the topics granted the most attention in recent civil society conferences has been Putnam's findings that more homogeneous parts of the U.S. turn out to have higher levels of intergroup trust than heterogeneous ones.[1] Financial security has also been shown to have a positive effect on social tolerance by Persell, et al. (2001). From a gender perspective, Golebiowska (1999) summarises recent research on this topic and claims that "[g]enerally speaking, research shows that women are more reluctant than men to allow unpopular groups to

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1 These results have been presented by Robert Putnam, for example in lectures in Sweden 2005 and 2006.

exercise their constitutional rights".[1] We will also focus on other values of society that may be coupled to political tolerance but which have hitherto been ignored in traditional studies of tolerance.

To sum up, the earlier research has pinpointed a number of factors affecting levels of political tolerance among individuals: literacy, membership of civic organisations, political culture, ethnicity, economic factors, religious or political affiliations and gender. As we see it the earlier research on tolerance suffers from three major shortcomings. First of all, there are a number of theoretical and methodological concerns, as well as empirical contradictions, regarding the individual-level explanations of tolerance hitherto proposed. For example, data from the project "Decentralisation in India" shows that commonly assumed links between religious affiliation and intolerance are not clear-cut when controlled for socio-economic factors (Widmalm, 2005). Moreover, and from a gender perspective, the same project supports the conclusion that women hold more tolerant views than men – a finding that contradicts the 'conventional wisdom' from previous studies on gender differences in tolerance. A potentially important explanation for some apparently contradictory findings about gender differences, to which Golebiowska also draws attention, is related to the fact that women and men tend to point to very *different* groups as intolerable. We will pay special attention to this problematique by testing Lise Togeby's hypothesis claiming that a merger of male and female culture can be more profoundly determined by joint political mobilisation than for example a more equal level of education.[2] This is a line of inquiry that we in-

tend to pursue as it points to important theoretical and methodological issues connected to the study of tolerance: the distinction between measuring tolerance expressed generally and measuring the tolerance of specific groups.

Finally, it is reasonable to assume that an individual who trusts people beyond his or her group also will be inclined to be more tolerant. In the previously quoted study from India, however, we found no evidence of a strong connection between tolerance and inter-group trust (Widmalm, 2005). Similarly, only some positive but weak correlations could be established between tolerance and intra-group trust. This is puzzling. It is intuitively compelling to assume that concepts such as trust and tolerance belong together, and this has often been a feature of previous research contributions (Badescu, Sum, & Uslaner, 2004; Brewer, 2003; Cigler & Joslyn, 2002; Hardin, 2004; Offe, 2001; Persell et al., 2001; J. L. Sullivan & Transue, 1999) But it seems they do not have strong empirical connections. This observation has important implications for understanding both trust and tolerance. Tolerance is a factor, it seems, that "stands for itself." I may trust you to fulfil certain obligations – however, I may not necessarily think you should have the same rights in society as I do. And, conversely, I may distrust you but at the same time I may think you are equal to me as a citizen. The implication of this, and provided that we agree with the Human Development Report that tolerance is a prerequisite for achieving the millennium

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1 Also see Togeby (1994).

2 See Togeby (1994). For gender related discussions about tolerance along similar lines but less precise than Togeby, also see Benbow (2005); Brace, Sims-Butler, Arceneaux, & Johnson (1999); Norton (1986); Saharso (2003); Tuori (2007).

goals, and that we want to understand or explain better how tolerance evolves, is that we need a stricter approach to both methodological and theoretical concerns. Tolerance and trust cannot be assumed to be related.

A second shortcoming in the earlier research is the lack of studies on how embedding contexts influence individuals' tolerance.[1] For example, there is good reason to believe that the system of governance and the quality of democratic institutions may themselves shape levels of tolerance among individuals (Rothstein, 2003). On the other hand, according to recent research on social trust, we should expect cultural and ethnic diversity to influence levels of tolerance (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002). It thus seems vital for tolerance to be interpreted in the context in which it is embedded. We therefore aim at testing the idea that state institutions that provides any services (e.g. health services, education, judicial support) according to universalistic principles always contribute to political tolerance (measured as the support for the freedom of expression) no matter how plagued the cultural and political context may be with regard to the lack of trust, ethnic divides, and socioeconomic inequalities.

The third shortcoming concerns the geographical limits of our knowledge. A large majority of the earlier research on tolerance among individuals is based on empirical studies in a small number of long since established and wealthy democracies, above all the United States. However, to enhance our knowledge on the central role of tolerance as a precondition for democracy we need to focus on less economically fortunate countries at different levels of democratic development. This project is designed to address all these three issues. The grant will be used to conduct a three-year research project investigating the impact of these variables on political tolerance in India, Pakistan, Kenya and Uganda.

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1 For two recent exceptions see Peffley & Rohrschneider (2003) and Weldon (2006).

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