

## The Muslim Continuum: An Analytical Model of Religiosity and Socio-Political Diversity in Muslim Minority Environments

Kasim Randeree

To cite this article: Kasim Randeree (2016): The Muslim Continuum: An Analytical Model of Religiosity and Socio-Political Diversity in Muslim Minority Environments, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, DOI: [10.1080/13602004.2016.1180890](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2016.1180890)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2016.1180890>



Published online: 10 May 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# The Muslim Continuum: An Analytical Model of Religiosity and Socio-Political Diversity in Muslim Minority Environments

---

**KASIM RANDEREE**

## ***Abstract***

*This paper examines the challenges facing Muslim societies in the early part of the twenty-first century. The paper examines tensions between “liberal” interpretations of Islam and extreme views within a globalisation paradigm and how these are changing. Specifically, the work investigates how the spotlight on Islam and its adherents in a post-9/11 world has manifest among Muslim individuals, groups and societies and how these may change to accommodate or react to the shifting global frame of mind towards Islam and the Muslims. Analysis is provided within the context of Muslim minority dwellers, with focus on Muslims living in Britain. The paper further proposes a fundamentalism continuum based on Dekmejian’s<sup>1</sup> model and analyses its impact on the Muslim Diaspora.*

## **Introduction**

The resurgence of religion in the latter quarter of the twentieth century was largely unexpected, since the global trend was clearly towards contemporary secularism. Hefner<sup>2</sup> notes,

A key feature of world politics in recent years has been the resurgence of religious issues and organisations into public affairs. Whether with the Christian Coalition in the U.S., Hindu nationalism in India, militant Buddhism in Sri Lanka, or Islamist movements in the Muslim world, the end of the twentieth century demonstrated convincingly that high modernist reports of religion’s demise were, to say the least, premature.

Focusing on Islam, it is clear in a post-9/11 world that the Muslim world (perhaps together with China and, to a lesser extent, Russia) carries substantive political focus in the West. Domestic and international concerns about Muslim societies, Islamic radicalism and the threat of extremist violence are at the head of home and foreign affairs issues in many countries in the West. Among Muslims living in the West, consequential policies, political governance and media scrutiny have given rise to a dynamic tension on an individual, as well as collective basis. For example, the term “Islamic fundamentalism” carries significant meaning in contemporary society with a strongly negative and political connotation in mainstream media and society.

The paper explores the term fundamentalism, its general religious and specifically Islamic contexts, before exploring the political implications of Islamic fundamentalism in which the term is being used. The work further investigates twenty-first-century Islamic fundamentalism and examines the liberalist/extremist dichotomy through a continuum model of Muslim thought and expression through which Islamic political and

sociocultural environments can be understood. An examination of whether or not non-fundamentalist Muslims exist is given as well as a recent chronology of Islamic fundamentalism. Finally, the paper draws lessons from the model and, using British Muslims as a case example of a Muslim minority environment, the interconnectedness of reformation and Islamic fundamentalism is examined.

### **Islamic Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism, in general, is often articulated as a meeting of faith and politics with an emphasis on literal interpretation and strict adherence to some religious scripture in a present-day setting. Historically, the term fundamentalism was first used to describe a backlash among Protestant sects to growing modernity within Christianity consequential to the acceptance of Darwinist theory, in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> It has therefore been defined as “contemporary religio-political movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundations of the community, excavating and reinterpreting these foundations for application to the contemporary social and political world”.<sup>4</sup>

However, this generic notion of fundamentalism has taken on a far more distinct understanding in a post-9/11 context, as it singles out Islam in its characterisation. Thus, Soanes and Stevenson<sup>5</sup> define fundamentalism as the “strict maintenance of the doctrines of any religion, notably *Islam*, according to a strict, literal interpretation of scripture”. Thus, fundamentalism as a global phenomenon is now almost exclusively reserved for use in relation to Islam, as seen in these definitions, though the relationship with all Abrahamic faiths remains,<sup>6</sup> albeit at more localised levels. Examples of this would be the use of the term in relation to al-Qaeda and its global operations and networks, as opposed to Irish republicanism, which is geo-centric to the nations of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, “Islamic fundamentalism appeared in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a reaction to the disintegration of Islamic political and economic power, asserting that Islam is central to both state and society and advocating strict adherence to the Koran (*Qur’an*) and to Islamic law (*Shari’ah*), supported if need be by *fi’ah*”.<sup>7</sup> Fundamentalism thus carries inward and outward characteristics. Inwardly, it is an individual’s stringent observance of orthodox tenets of a particular faith. Outwardly, it is a public opposition to liberalism and materialism.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the term Islamic fundamentalism is very much in use today to describe Muslim revivalism and neo-traditionalism,<sup>9</sup> with the media utilising the term with a negative connotation in order to “devilise”<sup>10</sup> its adherents.

Although many use the term Islamic fundamentalism interchangeably with Islamism, they are distinct, as Islamism denotes Islamic fundamentalism with a political agenda.<sup>11</sup> Thus, an Islamist is an Islamic fundamentalist, but not necessarily vice versa. However, others, such as Butko,<sup>12</sup> use the term Islamic fundamentalism deliberately to mean political Islam, particularly in the context of movements expressing views opposing authoritarian one-party states, in particular in the Middle East. Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world is thus narrated as the tool which counteracts cultural, social and intellectual stagnation.<sup>13</sup> Euben<sup>14</sup> interprets her definition, given earlier, as being composed of two essential elements: firstly, an emphasis on politics and fundamentalism being intertwined, thereby excluding mystic forms of Islamic devotion such as Sufism; and secondly, being part of a scriptural tradition, meaning, in the case of Islam, the *Qur’an*.

It is also true that the use of the term Islamic fundamentalism within popular news media can evoke notions of militancy, extremism, violence and even terrorism. Thus, the impression left in the minds of many is that all Muslims are an intolerant, backward

and ignorant people. Images such as book burning British Muslims on the streets of Bradford in 1989 at the height of the Rushdie affair<sup>15</sup> or celebratory Palestinians distributing festive sweets in the immediate aftermath of 9/11<sup>16</sup> and a plethora of other similar images engraved in the minds of television viewers the world over, only serve to reinforce this notion.

Though this merely alludes to perceptions among those who have little knowledge of the diversity of views among Muslims as well as the rich historical contribution Islam and Muslims have made to broader civilisation, among Muslims themselves, there exists an historical “tension between Islamic fundamentalists and liberal Muslim intellectuals”.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Albertini<sup>18</sup> argues that both Islamists and fundamentalist Muslims are “anti-intellectuals” by Islam’s own standards of religious scholarship through a rejection of both *Ijtihād* and freethinking, both of which are traditional scholarly values among classical Islamic thinkers and gives credence to this view by citing Islam’s current scholarly vacuum.

### *A Recent Chronology of Islamic Fundamentalism*

The resurgence of Islam was manifested in two political forms, nationalist and fundamentalist and, much to the surprise of Orientalist scholars of recent decades such as Riesebrød,<sup>19</sup> led to piety among the poor, as opposed to revolution, and acceptance of the patriarchal society in women. These shifting sands of political thought which included the middle-elite in the Muslim world, was summed up by Gaffney,<sup>20</sup> who says, “In the 1970s, the Islamicist agenda began to find a newly receptive public, especially among that same educated class that had imbibed the imported tonics of liberating socialism or liberal capitalism, only to find them toxic”. The message was clear. They had experienced or understood all potential models for existence, but chosen Islam as their “way of life”. But for what reasons?

Over the past 25 years, Muslims in particular have been defined by a considerable shift in terms of the impact and relevance of Islamism on and within nations across the world. From the standpoint of the Arab world, the first period, from circa 1989 to 2001, witnessed governments across this region being forced to take defensive positions against Islamist expansion. The Islamist regime in Sudan, which took hold of power through a military coup d’état in 1989, the near grasp of power by FIS, who won democratic elections in Algeria in 1991, followed by Tunisia denying Islamist participation in elections through fear of Islamist gains similar to their neighbours, Islamist parliamentary gains were also observed in liberal Arab states such as Kuwait, Jordan and Egypt, Hezbollah gains in Lebanon in 1992, Salafist pressure being brought to bear on the House of Saud, PLO on the defensive against Hamas in the Palestinian territories are all examples of this phenomenon. The only exceptions in the Arab world were the Ba’thists in Syria and Iraq, with Islamist resurgence appearing in those nations beyond this period.<sup>21</sup>

In the West, this period was signified by a simplicity of understanding about the Muslim world, seen as a region of tragedy, civil war, killing, bombing and extremism, which was summed up as “Islamic fundamentalism”.<sup>22</sup> Huntington’s prophecy, that not all societies, and especially Muslim societies, were likely to develop democracies, as democratic values conflict with core values, or fundamentals, of the culture to which they are being aligned, was coming true.<sup>23</sup>

The second period, from 2001 until the present day, has been defined and shaped by the events of 11 September 2001 and the actions that followed. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have refashioned the political landscape of the Middle East with respect to

Islamism, which have impacted on the psyche of Muslims across the world, with an emphasis on liberalisation of the masses and extremism becoming progressively more marginalised. Thus, the terrorist atrocities of 2001 have acted in some way as a catalyst for making distinctions among Muslims, as The Prince of Wales stated in 1994, saying, “we need to be careful of that emotive label, ‘fundamentalism’, and distinguish, as Muslims do, between revivalists, who choose to take the practice of their religion most devoutly, and fanatics or extremists, who use this devotion for political ends”.<sup>24</sup> It is apparent, therefore, that even thinkers in the Western world were beginning to develop an understanding of the fundamentalism continuum, even before 2001.

### *Indicators on Fundamentalism*

Appleby and Marty<sup>25</sup> examined the misconceptions that surround the term fundamentalism in its general sense. Their findings are explicit and argue that all fundamentalisms are religious, rejecting the presence of scientific or secular fundamentalism since these do not have an ultimate concern which affects their actions in the way religious fundamentalists, spurred on by the promise of an eternal reward, are. Contrary to this view, in considering actions of groups and individuals driven by specific issues, such as animal rights or environmental activists, it can be seen that their responses are based on a form of fundamentalism, the fundamental rights of creatures or the planet in these cases. Their actions, like religious fundamentalism, are manifest across a range of activities and behaviour, for example, intellectual, protest, disruption, anarchy and violence.

They further argue that fundamentalism is not restricted to monotheist traditions, but manifests elsewhere, in Hindu and Sikh religions, for example.<sup>26</sup> In terms of fanatic fundamentalist religious groups and sects turning to terrorism, unlike Islamic and Christian extremists, others do operate, but for the most part in the confines of associated geographical limitations; Hindu and Sikh extremists in India and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan are good examples. It is further observed that fundamentalists are not literalists, rather the interpretation of scripture, law and tradition emphasises a reliance on hermeneutics. In Islamic fundamentalism, it is precisely the interpretation of scripture that extreme forms of fundamentalist use to justify their methods and goals. Moreover, fundamentalism does not attract only the uneducated poor, but also the educated, skilled and gainfully employed.

This is the case from both the narrow perspective of the media-driven view of fundamentalism as tantamount to violent extremism, where many active members have been shown to be well-educated and affluent affiliates, and the broader view that fundamentalists include devotional people with a strong scriptural belief. This is also true across religions. It is also appreciated that fundamentalism does not lead to a violent outcome or disposition, but rather sociocultural factors are strongly deterministic. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the idea that “Muslim equals terrorist” surfaced albeit briefly in the United States. Mamdani writes that the absence of distinction between terrorist and civilian, in favour of a distinction on the grounds that a Muslim was either a “good Muslim” or a “bad Muslim” (and all good Muslims are non-fundamentalists, all bad Muslims are fundamentalists) in US popular discourse at the time, is extremely grave and potentially enduring.<sup>27</sup> In the intervening years, this has languished into a loss of trust between Muslim and Western communities, as the unspoken feeling is that many people continue to believe or feel the phenomenon, though it is no longer articulated publicly. This point further develops Appleby and Marty’s view, that all fundamentalists are not the same, rather that they exist across a range of people of social, cultural and economic

backgrounds with differing political persuasions, which requires greater depth of investigation to understand than merely that purported by the mass media.

Appleby and Marty further proffer that fundamentalists do not oppose change but rather seek change, albeit to counter godlessness in society. Sociocultural norms that surround communities are thus influential on the identity of individuals and social groups within them, which in turn drives change.<sup>28</sup> Finally, personality cults do not drive fundamentalism. Personalities may be instrumental in setting or affecting agendas, or be motivational in their own right, but their *raison d'être* is to argue a case, perhaps violently, to traditional values. Thus, fundamentalist icons and cult leaders are not the same.

These outcomes are supported, in part, by Euben, who states that fundamentalists all too often dismissed as irrational dogmatists, with reinforcement through mass media, must actually be regarded as rationalists, who carry a “compelling yet dangerous ethico-political vision”.<sup>29</sup> In understanding the misconceptions, however, it becomes clear that, rather than assuming a monochromatic view of fundamentalism in Islam, it is necessary to examine and analyse a range, or indeed continuum of views which collectively define fundamentalists.

*The Islamic Fundamentalism Continuum*

Figure 1, which Dekmejian discussed within the context of Islamism within twentieth-century Egyptian society,<sup>30</sup> can be used as a model by which the examination of the context of Muslim consciousness in a post-9/11 world can be articulated more broadly. The model is adapted here as a continuum, as adjacent aspects are to some extent not discernible and also interrelate, whereas extremities are very distinct. Furthermore, and more insightful, is the prospect that individuals can move along the continuum in either direction as a consequence of internal and external political, intellectual, economic and social forces.

To define the continuum modelled, Secular Muslims (or “Ordinary Muslims” as Dekmejian described them), practise Islam to varying degrees of regularity. Populist Muslims are those who believe in revivalism and are regular in their observance of the acts which demonstrate their faith in a conspicuous manner (prayer, fasting, Hajj, etc.) though are not activists or affiliated to any coordinating organisation. Social/Spiritual Revivalists introduce organised forms onto the continuum, movements which organise study groups, collective acts of spiritual development and simplistic forms of outreach and propagation of their faith and beliefs, mainly towards Secular Muslims further to the left, and they are commonly devoid of political discourse. Political Gradualists represent a section of the population who are often Social/Spiritual Revivalists with an added

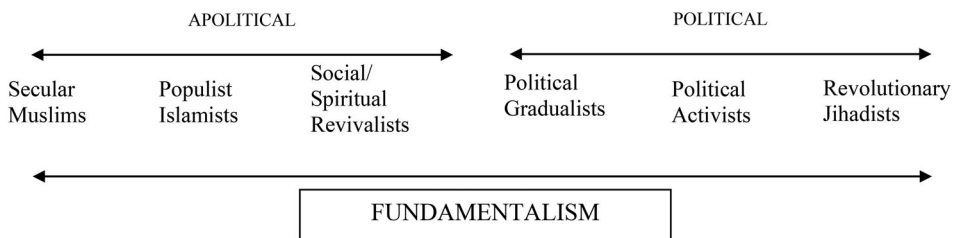


Figure 1. The Islamic continuum of fundamentalism (adapted from Dekmejian, 1995:175 (endnote 1)).

political dimension, though non-confrontational and unchallenging of the national administration, who express themselves through organised conferences, with identifiable scholars, and often hark back to early Islamic history to illustrate deficiencies in contemporary thinking. Political Activists are Political Gradualists, who are confrontational with the administration in power, mostly through challenging current policy, political public demonstration and published works which challenge the status quo. Finally, Revolutionary Jihadists are those who take up arms against the ruling elite, calling for uprising and insurgency with the view to bring about change through insurrection and follow belief structures founded on a return to an Islamic caliphate through hostility and conflict.

Table 1 highlights broad distinguishing features across the fundamentalism continuum, with examples. One additional entry is that of Internet utilisation. An interesting note of commonality across the continuum is that, for a variety of reasons, the use of information technology, in particular the Internet, is well utilised among Muslims globally. With limited exceptions, the Internet is viewed pragmatically, where, in contrast to say television, which is regarded as demonic by some on the continuum, the value of the Internet as a means of “getting the message across” seemingly trumps any criticism it may receive across the entire continuum. Such technology is regarded as beneficial in terms of global coordination within a group and global communication to those outside of groups.<sup>31</sup>

A point of interest across the continuum is that the commonly held belief in the West, that of Islamic “exceptionalism”, which is that fundamentalists reject the three defining political characteristics of modernity, namely democracy, secularism and nationalism,<sup>32</sup> does not hold across the continuum. This again reinforces the distinction between political Islamism, where this rejection exists and apolitical fundamentalists, who subscribe to one or more of these characteristics.

Of course, the issue of fundamentalist versus non-fundamentalist is a source of debate and cannot be represented, by definition, on a fundamentalism continuum. Furthermore, scholars appear to vary in opinion as to whether all Muslims belong somewhere on the continuum, or that the continuum is limited, and other Muslims exist, who are not fundamentalist. Certainly, in terms of extremism, nothing further could possibly exist to the right of Revolutionary Jihadists, though it may be argued that Revolutionary Jihadists can be sub-categorised by the extremities of violence they are liable to undertake. The debate is therefore whether or not liberality among Muslims can exist to the left of Secular Muslims on the continuum and, if indeed, “Secular” and “Fundamentalist” are indeed comparable.

In answering this issue, Monroe and Kreidie’s empirical evaluation of fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist thought and practice is helpful.<sup>33</sup> Through the examination of certain characteristics tested through interview, they delineated between fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist Muslims. The characteristics explored level of religiosity; comprehensiveness of religious world-view; reason and revelation; conversion; identity versus choice; and cost/benefit calculus. For example, in terms of their level of religiosity, fundamentalists were seen to organise their lives around the teachings of the *Qur’an*, prophetic traditions and *Shari’ah*, indicating Populist Islamist classification as the furthest left on the continuum. In contrast, non-fundamentalists by their measure, identified with being Muslim and the first pillar of Islam (testimony of faith) in terms of their religious identity, but fell short of any form of ritualistic practice, such as prayer or fasting.

Other interviewees, however, saw religion as an insurance policy for the afterlife or preferred not to be labelled “Muslim” at all, emphasising self-improvement, thus not practising Islam to any degree outside perceived moral or ethical norms of civilised society.

Table 1. Analysing the distinguishing features across the fundamentalism continuum.

Position on continuum	Secular Muslims	Populist Islamists	Social/Spiritual Revivalists	Political Gradualists	Political Activists	Revolutionary Jihadists
Expression of political views	Secular Muslims, often nationalists and often espouse counter-terrorism, anti-radicalisation missions, Western democratic values or political affiliations, for example, Inspire and Quilliam Foundation (UK)	Individual revivalists	Collective revivalists with largely apolitical structures. Participation in politics is absent, as it is perceived as allying with non-Muslims or submission to a non-Islamic, secular system <sup>a</sup>	Expression of Islamic politics through knowledge-based revivalism	Expression of Islamic politics through demonstration, protest and “city centre <i>Da’wah</i> ”	Religious fanaticism, rejectionist philosophy, violent
Individual level of religious observance	Limited or non-practising (inward)—for example, men do not frequent local mosques, exception may be Friday and/or Eid prayers, women unlikely to wear <i>Hijab</i> and oppose <i>Niqab</i>	Building personal character and morality through individual practice (inward)	Religious observance and practice based on scholarly interpretation of foundational texts and historic scholarly tradition Most common methodology is developing personal practice and propagating this practice among Muslims to the left of the continuum (inward/outward)	Practising Organised study groups/”circles” (inward/outward)	Practising Propagation of desire for Islamic caliphate Methods seen as offensive and hostile (outward)	Practising Methods seen as aggressive and irrational Propagation of political philosophy is clandestine (outward)

(Continued)



Table 1. Continued.

Position on continuum	Secular Muslims	Populist Islamists	Social/Spiritual Revivalists	Political Gradualists	Political Activists	Revolutionary Jihadists
Broader affiliations	Identify with broader social or cultural groups Develop own sense of Islamic understanding, which may be evidentially baseless or opinionated	Absence of affiliations Develop own sense of Islamic understanding based on reading and reason	Organised Muslim groups Focus on collective worship and propagation Strong South Asian, North African influences	Organised conferences Identifiable contemporary scholars Strong Saudi Arabian/Yemeni/Egyptian influence	Rallies, demos and public gatherings Media target Strong Middle Eastern influence	Methods involve covert tactics and long term terrorism strategy
Goals	Integration with surrounding socio-political environment Advocate separation of “church” and state	Mutual co-existence and engagement with surrounding sociocultural environment	Reformation of Muslims based on spiritual revivalism, covert and separatist existence within surrounding socio-cultural environment	Reformation of Muslims based on intellectual revivalism	Caliphate on the basis of nation state	Caliphate on the basis of <i>Ummah</i> (global Islamic state)
Example associations	Individual ethos outside an Islamic framework Will not draw from other Islamic groups and organisations	Individual ethos within an Islamic framework May draw from many other Islamic groups and organisations Males frequent local mosques, females don the <i>Hijab</i> (not <i>Niqab</i> ), Islamic conference attendance, domestic libraries, faith-based or home schooling are all popular	Focus on promotion of own “brand” of Islamic thought, often through cultural or sectarian partiality with strong ties to a branch of Sunni <i>Madhhab</i> . <sup>b</sup> Organisations well represented in this field include Tabligh Al-Jama’at (India), Barelwi (Pakistan) or similar	<i>Ijtih d</i> -based thinkers such as Salafi-movements, for example, Jamaa’t Ihya Minhaaj al-Sunna (JIMAS, UK), Ikhwaan Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood), or similar, in contrast to <i>Taqīd</i> emphasis of Social/Spiritual Revivalists <sup>c</sup>	Organisations working for the establishment of a caliphate in Western countries, especially the UK, for example, Hizb ul-Tahrir, Khilafah, UK4Islam	“al-Qaeda”, Islamic State (IS/ISIS/ISIL/Da’ish), Boko Haram

Internet usage for religious purposes	No use for religious purposes, perhaps very occasional use of <i>fatwa</i> banks, organising a Hajj trip or finding a mosque for Eid prayer	Tool for acquiring knowledge about Islam Use of <i>fatwa</i> banks Simplistic forms of networking Information about organised events	Simple forms of dissemination of ideas, not explicitly funded Television is taboo for many, but Internet forums, blogs and networking sites are in common use and creation of simple online <i>fatwa</i> banks based on selected, approved scholars	Permanently resourced and well-funded <i>fatwa</i> banks, websites, blogs etc. Online universities and other educational resources, such as Arabic language learning, Imam training programmes	Organisation of events, rallies Dissemination of ideas, literature and other media, often to counteract popular media and rebut criticism Recruitment through chat rooms and social media	Indoctrination and recruitment Broadcasting of terrorism information Communication of extreme media, including weapons manufacturing literature, training videos. Online grooming of Muslim girls as <i>jihadi</i> brides increasing
---------------------------------------	---	---	--	---	---	--

<sup>a</sup>Tauseef Ahmad Parray, “The Legal Methodology of ‘*Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*’ and Its Critics: An Analytical Study”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2012, pp. 88–107.

<sup>b</sup>Kasim Randeree, “The Four Eponyms of Sunni Islamic Jurisprudence: An Examination of the Historical Development of the Dominant *Madhāhib* and the Polemic of *Ijtihād* versus *Taqīd*”, *The International Journal of Civic, Political and Community Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2013, pp. 19–27.  
<sup>c</sup>*Ibid.*

This latter group, according to Monroe and Kreidie's evaluation, and supported by others, constitutes non-fundamentalist Muslims as they appear nowhere on the fundamentalist continuum, being further to the left of Secular Muslims. The issue is one of perspective. Fundamentalists themselves argue that Islam, unlike Judaism, is not a racial identity and so non-fundamentalists could be considered to have apostate or left the "fold of Islam", which, ironically, supports the argument that all Muslims fall on the continuum as, according to them, all others were "apostates". However, if the individual considers him/herself a Muslim, this could either merely expand the definition of what constitutes Secular Muslim, or allows for the possibility of the existence of non-fundamentalist Muslims being to the left of the continuum.

What the fundamentalism continuum further illustrates is that Muslims not only exist on this continuum, but that their understanding, interpretation and implementation of Islamic teaching and values can result in movement along the continuum. However, in order for this to occur, there must be forces, or drivers, in existence which either explicitly or implicitly encourages such movement to occur. This may be through the effects of mass media, through campaigns and advocacy projects, through policy, globalisation, or through agenda propagated by state apparatus or as a result of other factors.

It can also be hypothesised that underlying social conditions may affect movement on the continuum. For example, disproportionate poverty and unemployment may encourage movement to the right of the continuum as migrant communities of Muslims feel disenfranchised by the state, which develops a strong sense of inequitable treatment leading to more extreme views. This formed part of the discourse on inward migration into France from North Africa, following the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris in 2015. Similarly, British Muslims responsible for the London bombings of 2005 were from earlier migrant communities settled in socially deprived areas in the north of England and are often cited in support of this view. The reverse archetype may also be true among Muslim minorities in the Western hemisphere, that belonging to the middle class, with good educational and career opportunities, results in the liberalisation of values towards secular and capitalist thought and consequent movement to the left of the continuum.

Within this discourse is the role of the media, which includes print media, television and evermore prominently, the worldwide web. The Internet, specifically, is utilised across the fundamentalism continuum with extremist groups vying to radicalise young men in particular, with more moderate organisations and individuals concentrating on education, pluralism and morality found in Islamic teaching being pronounced.

### **The Fundamentalism Continuum and British Muslims**

Though the understanding of Muslims within and among British Muslim society has been well researched, the broader context requires further analysis in order to appreciate the fundamentalism continuum from a more far-reaching viewpoint. In this regard, two key issues stand out in the new millennium, those of "Islamophobia" and the "Prevent" programme.

#### *Islamophobia*

Islamophobia is "an outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination."<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, Islam is viewed as unresponsive to change, with adherents to the faith, in

Britain in particular, but elsewhere in the Western hemisphere also, being perceived as lacking the will to integrate and existing separately in ghettos. Consequently, Islam is seen as having alien values from the standpoint of the dominant culture of the West and little in common with other cultures and there is a sense of Muslims as being inferior, irrational, primitive and oppressive to women. However, people opposed to Islam have historically held these views and there is nothing new in these expressions. What is new is the growing perception among some, that followers of Islam are all terrorists or are strongly supportive of terrorism. These views are then used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society, with such antagonism seen as accepted and normal.<sup>35</sup>

### *“Prevent”*

Within this environment and in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington and 7/7 London bombings, the British government began an anti-terrorism programme called “Prevent”, with the objective of stopping people, particularly young British Muslim men, being radicalised and becoming terrorists or violent extremists. On the surface, it can be analysed that, with consideration of the fundamentalism continuum, the objective was to prevent Muslims from moving to the right of the continuum and, perhaps, encourage those on the centre-right, to move further to the left. Contrary to this aspiration, the programme became beset with criticism, as it singled out one religious minority in a discriminatory fashion. The active encouragement of intelligence gathering has consequently become tantamount to discrimination and spying with prejudice on Muslim citizens. Funding of schemes through the Prevent programme was criticised and growing numbers of Muslim organisations expressed disdain and declined to become recipients of funding. Though 53 million GBP was spent between 2007 and 2010 on over one thousand Prevent projects, the programme not only alienated many among those it was designed to engage with, but may have been counterproductive, by encouraging disaffected Muslims to move further to the right on the continuum.

### *Religion as Basis for Identity*

A key factor influencing British Muslims and their relationship to the continuum is identity. Peek<sup>36</sup> outlines four reasons why religion has become an important basis for identity, within the context of American Muslims, which are equally pertinent to the discourse on British Muslims. Firstly, religious identity gains prominence as a reaction to alienation, particularly in circumstances where the Muslim individual has moved from a Muslim majority country, being part of the dominant religion of a nation, to being a representative of a minority religion. An example is a Pakistani Muslim immigrant to Britain, with Muslims forming 96.4% of the population of Pakistan but only 4.6% of Britain’s population.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, for tangible, material benefits, where a stronger religious identity can facilitate community networking and economic opportunities. Thirdly, shared worship acts as a vehicle for unity among diverse groups. Finally, religious identity is seen as a means for the preservation of group cohesion.

The identity of Muslims living in Britain is being challenged and analysed rigorously, in large part due to public discourse concerning the threat Muslims may pose in the wake of global terrorist attacks and Middle East politics. As a backdrop to this, Muslims were already undergoing significant change over recent decades as they struggled to find an

identity and a voice as a minority religion among minority ethnic communities living in the West, with beliefs and practices that often put them at odds with the receiving culture. This has given rise to the “deprivationist” perspective as Lewis<sup>38</sup> describes it, whereby Muslim communities of Asian origin feel discriminated against to the point of racial exclusion, eventually leading to alienation and, occasionally, revolt, such as with the Burnley, Oldham and Bradford riots of summer 2001.

Others have argued that the deprivationist viewpoint does not hold true, but rather that race, religion and culture are mere excuses used by migrant communities to disguise a failure by themselves to integrate and assimilate with the dominant culture and societal norms. Often cited as proof of this are figures pertaining to educational standards. For example, in the late 1980s, youths of Bangladeshi origin were one-sixth as likely to have taken and passed an A-level qualification when compared to the national average. Such figures give rise to the view that it is a fundamental failure of immigrant communities to recognise that their settlement in Britain is permanent and their integration is vital.

Though Muslims themselves often speak of a desire for unity across their communities with a view to following a cohesive way forward for establishing an identity which “fits” their existence in Britain, the reality is that British Muslims have three distinctive choices along three distinctive paths. Geaves<sup>39</sup> expounds the three choices, *isolation*, *assimilation* and *integration*, in his thesis which is based upon “three choices being presented to them (young Muslims) by the receiving culture”. In addition to these three choices, earlier research addressed their interplay with a level of loyalty to three available paths, *ethnic culture*, *British culture* and *religious identity*, where ethnic culture addresses internal conflict issues (within families and communities), British culture addresses external conflict issues (with the dominant culture) and religious identity, which addresses religious conflict issues (alignment with religious values), hence the three paths.<sup>40</sup>

The interplay among these three choices and three paths are visible not only at national and community levels, but are highly discernible within individual family units, with different siblings being noticeable as archetypes for the available choices and paths and hence singular households representing different positions on the continuum. For example, a Muslim who dates or drinks alcohol will be considered as integrated into British culture, and welcomed by the receiving culture, will most likely be isolated from his ethnic cultural group. Similarly, a British Muslim who dresses in Arab/South Asian clothing may well be isolated from the receiving culture but be either assimilated or integrated into both ethnic culture and religious identity. In such a way, these intersections can allow any Muslim to categorise themselves in relation to the three choices. The reality is, of course, far from black and white as the examples suggest. However, these boundaries can be considered as archetypal in an effort to understand the dialectic of the discourse and subsequently serve to nuance the understanding of the fundamentalism continuum.

Therefore, in terms of British Muslims, this paper concludes that Geaves’ view that “Islam is becoming the dominant mark of identity for the Muslim population (in Britain) ... influenced by the worldwide resurgence of Islam”<sup>41</sup> is supported to a great extent. However, it can also be said that Bilgrami’s hypothesis also holds true, that

... there is no reason to doubt that Muslims, even devout Muslims, will and do take their commitment to Islam not only as one among other values, but also as something which is itself differentiated internally into a number of, in principle, negotiable detailed commitments.<sup>42</sup>

This view is further supported by Akbarzadeh and Roose's "silent majority",<sup>43</sup> designated as cultural Muslims, being those Muslims for whom "religion is not the primary source of identity" and hence fall squarely on the left of the continuum, also termed "Secular Muslims" by Akbarzadeh and Roose's categorisation. Thus, the evolution of a British-Islamic identity continues, albeit with its devotees approaching the challenges and choices in a non-uniform, fragmented fashion, with little sense of a cohesive approach for which many are proponents. This lack of cohesiveness is supported throughout the cited literature. As Ansari states, "... British Muslims at the start of the twenty-first century are neither ethnically nor ideologically homogenous",<sup>44</sup> in other words, occupying scattered positions across the fundamentalism continuum.

### Islamic Reformation and the Growth of Islamic Fundamentalism

If we now understand that Islamic fundamentalism is much broader than its paradigm as portrayed through mass media, encompassing all or nearly all Muslims on a continuum of thought, practice and activism, consequently, that it is inclusive and not all unconstructive, we need to understand how it fits with the wider picture of Islamic reformation in recent decades. Is it a repetitive cycle where fundamentalism and reformation are intertwined, with one driving the other, and, as a by-product, resulting in continuous growth?

In order to answer this question, it is worthwhile to examine a single issue pertinent to both reform and fundamentalist thinking on this continuum. One such example is Islamic banking, though many others could be given.

The world of banking has witnessed an exponential growth in Islamic banking in recent years. The seeds of contemporary Islamic banking itself were sown as long ago as 1952, by the government of Saudi Arabia, with the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, which had regulatory oversight over the banking sector and carried currency issuance capability without the use of interest. This was followed by the "real" emergence of Islamic banking in Egypt in 1963.<sup>45</sup> The sector has continued to grow since, with growth in just the past decade, exceeding the half-century prior to it. Even conventional banks in parts of the Muslim world have converted to Islamic banking because of demand—examples include Emirates Bank, now Emirates Islamic Bank; Sharjah Bank, now Sharjah Islamic Bank. Even in the United Kingdom, where Islamic banking products were already available through Islamic-arms within conventional banks, such as HSBC and Lloyds TSB, the latest addition is a *Shari'ah*-compliant bank in its entirety, called The Islamic Bank of Britain, renamed as Al Rayan Bank in 2015.

In terms of free market economics, this emergence must be fuelled by demand. The demand for Islamic banking as opposed to conventional banking which was already widely available indicates that fundamentalist thought, in the paradigm of the wider view articulated, is at the root of the demand. Ergo, fundamentalism must, by definition, be on the rise to generate this demand. In turn, the emergence of Islamic banking into the mainstream has caused moderates, or Secular Muslims and Populist Muslims on the continuum, to reconsider their banking options, once an Islamic alternative became available. Consequently, the act of moving money from conventional to Islamic banking plays a small, but significant part in moving the individual further to the right on the fundamentalist continuum. Add to this a range of other issues, for example, other financial products, such as Islamic insurance, regulation and wider distribution of *Halāl* food products, state-funded Islamic schools and so on, the picture becomes clearer. Ever-increasing availability of Islamic products and services results in greater utilisation of them by Muslims, which in turn results in more demand, and so the cycle continues.

Thus, it is clear that reform and the fundamentalist continuum are interrelated. What is not proven or normatively expected is that the greater practice of Islam on the left and centre of the continuum can, or ever will, result in rejectionism, fanaticism or violent extremism, as opposed to Muslims settling for a more desirable middle course.

## Conclusion

In examining and defining Islamic fundamentalism, it can be argued that Islamic fundamentalism exists; that it is negatively stereotyped but is only a negative force when examined through a misinformed lens; that it is inclusive of a broad spectrum of Muslims and their diverse range of views; that it is interrelated with reform and revivalism in the Muslim world; and that the contemporary paradigm of Islamic fundamentalism needs to be re-examined.

This paper has therefore argued that Islamic fundamentalism is a relevant, though deviated term, which is inclusive of perhaps all Muslims across a continuum of ideas and practice. The outcome, however, is not that the term exists or its relevance, but rather to extend the discourse as to whether or not there is compatibility and potential for harmony between the Islamic fundamentalism continuum and the broader global community, in particular the West, and if so, can issues, such as “rationalism, humanism, secularisation, democracy and globalisation”<sup>46</sup> be reconciled, above all between the West and political Islamic fundamentalists. This reconciliation requires deep insight as essentially the divisions are based on two opposing paradigms; those of understanding the world through divine sovereignty or a world defined by human supremacy and understanding.<sup>47</sup> With such an extreme dichotomy of paradigms, peace, harmony and mutual co-existence, which are admirable aspirations but evidently hard to achieve, should remain at the forefront, in spite of the fact that the reality seems to be moving away from these noble goals.

It is clear from the study that the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, followed by the events of 7 July 2005 in London to a lesser degree, have acted as catalysts in terms of the continuum of Islamic fundamentalism. The consequential shake-up of Muslim perception, both from an internal perspective among Muslims themselves and an external perspective from observers of Muslim attitudes, behaviours and beliefs, has led to a dynamic tension between, on the one hand, a movement for democratising and liberalising Muslim society in line with Western values, and on the other, a fanatic antagonism to Western values, with a third, middle way, a vision of reviving a unified Islamic perspective based on traditional values inclusive of all Muslims and existing in harmony with and within the West.

The resultant effect has thus been efforts on these various pressures to promote their agendas through the means available to them. These means range from the use of force and violence at one end of the continuum, to secular interpretations of Islam at the other, with a view to entering the hearts and minds of Muslims in an effort to move them along the continuum in the desired direction, from the viewpoint of the instigator for change.

This work has thus explored the phenomena, through developing a model for the fundamentalism continuum and evaluating it from various perspectives. Muslims throughout the world, whether in majority Muslim countries, or minorities, are facing pressures to act and respond with ever greater fluidity on the continuum on individual, social and national levels, compared to earlier times.



NOTES

1. Richard Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (2nd edn), New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 175.
2. Robert William Hefner, "Public Islam and the Problem of Democratization", *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 4, 2001, pp. 491–514.
3. Fred Halliday, "The Politics of 'Islam'—A Second Look", *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1995, pp. 399–417; Martin Riesebrodt, "Fundamentalism and the Resurgence of Religion", *Numen*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2000, pp. 266–287.
4. Roxanne Euben, "When Worldviews Collide: Conflicting Assumptions about Human Behavior Held by Rational Actor Theory and Islamic Fundamentalism", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1995, pp. 157–178.
5. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd edn), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 701.
6. David Lehmann, "Fundamentalism and Globalism", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1998, pp. 607–634.
7. Soanes and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, *op. cit.*, p. 701.
8. Arun Ghosh, "Fundamentalism, Its Roots, Rationale and Remedy", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 19, 1996, pp. 1115–1116.
9. Bruce B. Lawrence, "Woman as Subject/Woman as Symbol: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Status of Women", *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1994, pp. 163–185.
10. Anissa Hélié, "Women and Muslim Fundamentalism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 45, 1993, pp. 2454–2456.
11. Tamara Albertini, "The Seductiveness of Certainty: The Destruction of Islam's Intellectual Legacy by the Fundamentalists", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 2003, pp. 455–470.
12. Thomas Butko, "Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2004, pp. 41–62.
13. Hilal Khashan, "The New World Order and the Tempo of Militant Islam", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1997, pp. 5–24.
14. Euben, "When Worldviews Collide", *op. cit.*, p. 162.
15. Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm, "The Importance of Being Earnest about Salman Rushdie", *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1991, pp. 1–49; James Piscatori, "The Rushdie Affair and the Politics of Ambiguity", *International Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 4, 1990, pp. 767–789.
16. Sarah Hall, Suzanne Goldenberg and John Hooper, "Palestinian Joy-Global Condemnation", *The Guardian*, 12 September 2001. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/12/september11.usa16>
17. Fauzi Najjar, "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Nasr Hämüd Abü Zayd", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2000, pp. 177–200.
18. Albertini, "The Seductiveness of Certainty", *op. cit.*, pp. 455–456.
19. Riesebrodt, "Fundamentalism and the Resurgence of Religion", *op. cit.*, pp. 266–267.
20. Patrick Gaffney, "Popular Islam", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 524, 1992, pp. 38–51.
21. Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2007.
22. The Prince of Wales, "Islam and the West", *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1994, pp. 135–143.
23. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 2/3, 1993, pp. 14–33.
24. The Prince of Wales, "Islam and the West", *op. cit.*, p. 139.
25. R. Scott Appleby and Martin Marty, "Fundamentalism", *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 128, 2002, pp. 16–22.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, 2002, pp. 766–775.
28. Appleby and Marty, "Fundamentalism", *op. cit.*
29. Roxanne Euben, "Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism", *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 1997, pp. 28–55.
30. Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, *op. cit.*
31. Stefano Bonino, "Policing Strategies against Islamic Terrorism in the UK after 9/11: The Socio-Political Realities for British Muslims", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2012, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 5–31.
32. Masoud Kazemzadeh, "Teaching the Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism", *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1998, pp. 52–59.
33. Kristen Renwick Monroe and Lina Haddad Kreidie, "The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1997, pp. 19–43.



34. The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity", *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 2005, pp. 215–242.
37. Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010–2030*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2011.
38. Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2002.
39. Ron Geaves, "Britain", in *Islam Outside the Arab World*, eds David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999, pp. 357–378.
40. Kasim Randeree, "Britain and her Islamic Diaspora: An Historical Précis and Neoteric Ethnography of British Muslims", *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2013, pp. 9–21.
41. Geaves, "Britain", *op. cit.*, p. 376.
42. Akeel Bilgrami, "What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 20/21, 1992, pp. 1071–1078.
43. Shahram Akbarzadeh and Joshua M. Roose, "Muslims, Multiculturalism and the Question of the Silent Majority", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2011, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 309–325.
44. Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within: The History of Muslims in Britain, 1800 to the Present*, London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2004, pp. 2, 6.
45. Barbara Allen Roberson, *Shaping the Current Islamic Reformation*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003, p. 16.
46. Michel Hoebink, "Thinking About Renewal in Islam: Towards a History of Islamic Ideas on Modernization and Secularization", *Arabica*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 1999, pp. 29–62.
47. Euben, "When Worldviews Collide", *op. cit.*, p. 157.