

Government and Politics of the Middle East
Gov 332
Political Islam and Islamic Fundamentalism

Starting Point: Why do we need the qualifier “political” if as some say Islam is naturally political? (distinction between Islam and Political Islam)

What are some of the ways in which the politicization of Islam has been portrayed (Lewis, etc.)?

Back to Basics

[first, let us recognize that the term Islamic Fundamentalism is problematic, but will be used here as a starting point for our discussion]

Islamic Fundamentalism (IF) can be viewed as a response to the transformations and crises occurring in the Arab world in the mid- to late-20th century

1. **Definition:** Islamic fundamentalism (especially in the Middle East) has two related dimensions, a sociocultural dimension and a political dimension:
 - a. Socioculturally, IF is a quest to affirm a community’s roots, origin, and authenticity
 - b. Politically, IF is a quest for establishing an Islamic state and upholding the Shari`a as the law of the land

Read p. 378 (Gerner & Shwedler)

2. **Historical Trajectory**

- Colonial Era (early 20th century to WWII): Socio-Cultural Islam
- Radical Arab Nationalism (post-WWII to mid 1960s): the marginalization of Islam and Islamic movements
- The statist era (late 1960s to early 1990s): The Cold War and The rise of political Islam and Islamic movements as the principal/only vehicle for opposition
- Post-Soviet Union to Current Day: The emergence of non-state actors and extremist movements

3. **Manifestation:** Parties, Mass Movements, Military Organizations, Sociocultural Organizations

4. **Geography:** North Africa, Levant, Arab Gulf/Peninsula, South East Asia

5. **Date:** Although rooted in Ottoman and Colonial times, IF became a determined force as a result of State-Opposition dynamics in the 1960s. (as a result of exclusionary practices and failed secular state projects of development)

6. **Caveats:**

- a) IF is not monolithic: it includes diverse strands/groups with internal conflicts and with no unifying organization or political goal (there is no a World IF Organization)
- b) Theological/Ideological Diversity: different schools of thought and ideologies
- c) Islam and Secularism: a matter of interpretation
- d) Political/strategic Diversity: Moderates Verses Radicals
(These strategies and methods are tempered by the context that the state creates)

	“Moderate”	“Radical”
Posture	Reformist	Revolutionary
Strategy	Bottom-Up	Top-Down
Method	Socialization	Coercion

7. Historical Approach to the Causes of the rise of IF.

IF is a reaction to the crisis of the modern secular state: modernization without assimilation.

-cold war

-authoritarianism

-political economy of oil (boom and bust)

- a) exhaustion of the state (refer to the political economy of development lecture)
- b) Response to classes/groups that captured the state: and their failed political economic policies and exclusionary practices (crisis of participation)
- c) Authoritarian rule in the name of secular nationalism (with socialist tendencies)
- d) Post-1967 legitimacy vacuum/deficit after the crushing defeat of Arab armies (Egypt and Syria) by Israel
- e) The Cold War and the role it played in supporting the Islamists to stem the tide of the left in the region. This also relates to the political economy of the oil boom and bust which was also affected by Cold War politics (e.g., Afghanistan, US, and the Soviet Union)
- f) In the absence of other legal avenues, Islam became a vehicle for political/economic demands rather than the impulse behind demands.
(what made this instrumental approach effective was that Islam was *also* a source of meaning, culturally and religiously—it was not something that was imposed on indigenous people, so there was no “natural” resistance to it)

8. Modern Secular/Bourgeois Arab Nationalism vs Radical Arab Nationalism Dynamic

- The former was not intimidating to Islamists and Muslim groups
- The latter was intimidating, exclusionary, and hostile to such groups

9. Social Bases:

- a) Rank and File: urbanized masses, workers in traditional, non-public sector quarters (Refer to chart from the “Post-Colonial Development” lecture)
- b) Leadership: urban middle-class professionals, disaffected bureaucrats, students, small business owners whose interests were gored by liberalization

10. Discourse: change in discourse when IF movements failed to capture any Arab state. By the early 1990s, the discourse of IF became:

- These are characteristics that describe Islamic movements generally after the 1990s. It does not refer to ALL such movements (e.g., not to al-Qa`idah or Al-Jihad Al-Islami)
 - More accepting of other, less rejectionist of all others
 - More humanist, less theocentric
 - More rationalist, less scriptural
 - More socialist, less capitalist
 - More official, less underground/clandestine

11. Islamic Movements in Context

- Hamas
- Hizballah
- Muslim Brotherhood