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The reasons for the recent and simultaneous appearance, or rise in influence, in much of the world of “fundamentalist” or doctrinally and socially conservative religiopolitical mass movements have been analyzed for individual groups but rarely in a way that compares all the main religions and the regions in which they are strong.¹ Rarer still have been analyses of why such movements have expanded in most areas only since the 1970s, what causes exist in areas where these movements are strong and why they differ from those regions where they are weak or nonexistent, and what, aside from religion, produces different types of movements. Here we will try to see if there are common factors in time and in space that help explain these movements and will look for causes of their similarities and differences. Explanations presented here will stress differences between religious nationalism (or communalism) directed primarily against other religious communities and conservative religious politics directed primarily against internal enemies. Differences between types and levels of pre-existing religious beliefs will be examined to suggest why some areas have such movements and others do not. World-wide factors that help to account for the recent rise of religious politics will also be explored.

To deal with such large problems in one essay requires the simplification of complex and varied movements and permits only a brief treatment of their his-

torical background and development, much of which has been well covered elsewhere.2 These movements, arising as they do from many countries with very different religious traditions and regional histories which affect their shape and nature, have several variations. This essay explores those factors that make the movements comparable despite major differences in the religions, regions, and circumstances where they appear—factors that arise largely from modern developments, especially of the past three decades. Emphasized are generalizations; detailed treatments of each movement must, because of space, be deferred.

THE TERMINOLOGY OF RELIGIOPOLITICS

Although I accept only some of the objections to the term fundamentalism, I prefer to employ, when possible, a more neutral term, New Religious Politics, shortening it to religiopolitics or NRP. This term does not cover all recent religiopolitical movements but can be applied when movements exhibit certain specific features. These features include, first, an appeal to a reinterpreted, homogenized religious tradition, seen as solving problems exacerbated by various forms of secular, communal, or foreign power. Second, these are populist movements that aim at gaining political power in order to transform governments on the basis of their religiopolitical program. Third, they are not led by liberals or leftists and have predominantly conservative social views. For most groups this includes patriarchal views regarding gender, family relations and social mores, although there are a few exceptions analyzed below.

Using the category of NRP avoids some problems of employing the term fundamentalist, including the connotations of its U.S. Protestant origin, the inclusion of apolitical religious groups, or the implication of extremism.3 My terms involve a specialized use of the broad term "religiopolitics," but no satisfactory short alternative now exists; terms like religious (or Islamic, Christian, or Hindu) revival or resurgence are unsatisfactory in stressing the religious at the

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2 Basic information on most such movements is found in the relevant chapters of the five volumes edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, Fundamentalisms Observed, Fundamentalisms and Society, Fundamentalisms and the State, Fundamentalisms Comprehended, Accounting for Fundamentalisms (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995). Overall, the descriptive articles are very good and are superior to many of the generalizing pieces. My analyses often differ from those found in the four summary chapters at the end of Fundamentalism Comprehended. For a debate about the series see Henry R. Munson, "Not All Crustaceans are Crabs: Reflections on the Comparative Study of Fundamentalism and Politics," Contention, 4:3 (Spring 1995), 151–66; R. Scott Appleby, "But All Crabs are Crabby: Valid and Less Valid Criticisms of the Fundamentalism Project," ibid., 195–202; and Henry Munson, "Response to Appleby," ibid., 207–9.

expense of the political. The proposed terms have the advantage of neutrality and of making clear both the political content of the movements they cover and their contemporary nature. The word fundamentalist will be used rarely, with implied quotation marks. This does not indicate that the use of fundamentalist by others necessarily reflects any particular bias or vitiates their scholarly work; some of the best work in the field has been done by writers who use this term.

No single term would be acceptable to partisans of these movements, who often call themselves “Muslims,” “Christians,” “Hindus” and the like, and do not include politics in their terms for themselves. Participants in these movements do not see themselves as part of a world-wide trend but, rather, as true followers of their own religions. To adopt their terminology would renounce comparison and deny true religion to others, as their favored terms, including “Christian,” and “Muslim,” imply that only they are true believers. (The widely used “Islamist” is disliked by some as it appears to privilege “Islamists” as the true Muslims.) While those who follow universalist beliefs like democracy, socialism, or communism accept identification by a single term worldwide, those who stress the boundaries of their belief want to be called by a particularist name. It may thus be fruitless to seek a term acceptable to various religiopolitical movements. Clearly, a single comparative term cannot fully define any movement, each of which must be understood in terms of its own context, ideas, and actions. Comparability does not mean sameness.

The informative volumes published by the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences found fundamentalist or “fundamentalist-like” religious movements in most of the world, but many of these do not have the features emphasized here, such as the stress on a homogenized common doctrine, which is presented as the true religious tradition (al-

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4 I proposed “New Religious Politics/NRP” at the Middle East Studies Association meetings in 1995, where it was well received; whether it will last is another question. Regarding scholarly use of “fundamentalism” until an alternative is accepted, I would, however, echo what Gyanendra Pandey says of “communalism.” Saying why he continues to use the term, without quotation marks, “in spite of my argument . . . that it is loaded and obfuscating. The answer is that the needs of communication, and of a convenient shorthand, have dictated this. The term has passed into the political and historiographical vocabulary” (The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India, [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990], viii.) This explanation also covers my use of “communalism” below.

5 The term New Religious Politics might also end some confusion among scholars as to the meaning of fundamentalism. Scholars differ on such points as whether fundamentalist movements must be political or involve gender. Some use fundamentalism only for pre-modern movements like the Wahhabis and call later ones neo-fundamentalist; some use fundamentalism for both early and recent movements; and some reserve the term for recent ones. Ervand Abrahamian, in an otherwise excellent book, defines fundamentalism by criteria few scholars accept, and concludes that Khomeini was no fundamentalist but rather a populist (surely only a partial definition of him) (Khomeinism [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], ch. 1).

6 It is clear from my notes for this essay that I have profited greatly from the works of many scholars who use the term fundamentalism.

though it is in fact new in many ways) or, especially, a high level of political activism, ultimately aimed at taking power. (The latter was not important in the first wave of fundamentalism in the United States during the 1920s, which would not meet the definition given above.) Here a more limited group, seen as more similar and significantly comparable, will be discussed; and a different analysis will be made of the reasons for the rise of religiopolitics in certain areas, after first noting relevant factors that exist in much of the world.

**Worldwide Trends Favoring Religiopolitics**

Common factors behind these movements may be found in recent world-wide trends.\(^8\) Some of these trends also exist where these movements are weak or nonexistent, something which can be explained. Such distinctions are needed to distinguish causes that are necessary but not sufficient and require other factors if a phenomenon is to occur.\(^9\) Many of the socioeconomic and political reasons often cited for the rise of these movements are in this necessary but insufficient category, as these reasons are also present in areas without such movements. Factors widely present everywhere help explain the nearly simultaneous rise and *timing* of contemporary fundamentalist movements, influenced by world-wide socioeconomic, political, and cultural changes, although more is needed to explain why these factors have led to movements in some areas but not in others.

Global trends that have favored the recent rise of religiopolitics are often cited when discussing particular movements. There follows a list of trends that have favored religiopolitics in many areas. Some have been felt strongly almost everywhere, while others are mitigated in some areas, such as the first two for East Asia until 1998. These trends include:

- First, recent expansive developments in capitalism (the main element of globalization), which have increased total production but are highly uneven by region, class, race, and gender. Income distribution gaps have grown in most areas, along with job insecurities and forced migration—all factors in discontent or concerns about identity.

- Second, economic slowdowns, stagnation, and insecurity in the developed world, the Middle East, much of South Asia, Africa, and Latin America have encouraged discontent and right-wing populist movements, which tend to nationalism in some areas and to religiopolitics (often combined with nationalism) in others.

- Third, increasing migration, which may improve living standards but produces certain other strains. Urbanizing and international migrants experience prejudice, which can encourage counterideologies. Some religiopolitics first


\(^9\) A work that fruitfully uses this method of comparison is Henry Munson, Jr., *Islam and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
center abroad, as with Sikhs in Canada. “Fundamentalist” ideologies may seem more familiar to uprooted rural-urban migrants than secular nationalism. There are also anti-immigrant religiopolitics.

Fourth, greater choice for women in lifestyle, jobs, marriage, and motherhood, while reducing patriarchal problems, has led to new stresses, such as rising divorce, inadequate child care, and disputed challenges to male prerogatives. This encourages nostalgia in some for the way things used to be. Other recent changes in family structure make young people more independent and eager to find new identities.

Fifth, the continued growth in secular state power, while bringing social gains, favors some groups but creates regulations opposed by many. Governments are blamed for socioeconomic change. With a failure—both by capitalist and socialist systems—to solve some problems, there is a tendency to turn to ideologies both new and familiar, whether right-wing nationalism or religiopolitics.

Sixth, education and urban growth allow many people to express their discontentment more effectively. This favors religiopolitics, which seem familiar, can claim a moral high ground and are independent of discredited states and parties.

Seventh, global cultural homogenization brings reactions based on identity politics, including nationalism and religiopolitics because they are seen as expressing needs better than the current secular order, which favors universalist modern western values. In some areas (such as Sri Lanka and the former Yugoslavia) religious and ethnic or linguistic divisions coincide, increasing divisiveness. Many also perceive a crisis in moral terms, one that requires a religious solution.

Eighth, in the Global South improvements in health have led to increases in population. Population growth has brought new strains and skewed the demographics of the population toward very young age groups, groups that are the main supporters of religiopolitical movements in this region.

No movement arises simply as a reaction to such general factors; all involve active individuals moving in ways that are unpredictable. In order to be comparative, this article must stress general factors at the expense of individual features.¹⁰

WHY HAVE RELIGIOPOLITICS ARisen WHERE THEY HAVE?

If we look for movements expressing New Religious Politics, we find important ones chiefly in the United States, South Asia, the Muslim World, and Israel. Among Muslims the strongest movements are in the Middle East; movements in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central Asia till now are less salient.

Liberation Theology, strongest in Latin America, is different in not being traditionalist in ideology and in being more, not less, liberal or socialist than the official church or doctrine. Neither liberal nor socialist movements fit the NRP’s stress on conservatism and homogeneous religious doctrine, so Christian Democratic parties and others who accept existing liberal or social democratic states are not included, even though the border between them and moderate fundamentalists is not rigid. Although many Roman Catholics do fit part of the above definition, only the small number who belong to movements that aim at taking power in a state in order to enforce their interpretation of doctrine qualify—and the same is true for other religions. There are other religiopolitical movements that also fit the definition in Latin America, Africa, Europe, and non-Muslim East Asia; but their scale and importance is smaller than in the areas stressed here.

Some scholars, based on different definitions of fundamentalism, limit the concept to those who follow monotheist scriptural religions, so they put Hindu and Buddhist revivalists into another category.\(^\text{11}\) Given my emphasis not on monotheist scripturalism but on religious politics, conservatism, and populism, however, I include nationalist Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. The communalism or religious nationalism found in South Asia has many parallels among monotheists in countries with a recent history of communal struggles for power or territory, including Israeli Jews, and Muslims in Southeast Asia, Palestine, and some other areas. Although there is no rule as to what is comparable, it seems useful to include Hindus, South Asian Buddhists, and the partially scriptural Sikhs in New Religious Politics, since their religiopolitical movements meet the NRP definition. Omitting South Asia would sacrifice the understanding of New Religious Politics that can be gained from studying communalism. The first major ideologist of Islamic fundamentalism, Maulana Maududi, emerged from and reflected a communal environment and background\(^\text{12}\) (the earlier Egyptian Muslim Brethren not having produced such an overall systematic ideology). Maududi, who first theorized key concepts such as the Islamic state, greatly influenced the main activist theoretician of Egyptian and Arab religiopolitics, Sayyid Qutb.\(^\text{13}\)

Looking at the United States, South Asia, Israel, and the Muslim world, one

\(^{11}\) Comparisons of only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are found in Antoun and Hegland, Religious Resurgence; Lawrence, Defenders of God; and Gilles Kepel, The Revenge of God, Alan Bradley, trans. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Henry Munson, Jr., “Not All Crustaceans Are Crabs,” also explicitly excludes Hindu movements.


is struck more by major differences among these areas than by similarities. Several religions are represented, as are nations with very different levels of development and histories. The United States is an economically developed superpower that has dominated other regions; Israel is developed and combines a history of persecution with that of dominance; South Asia and most of the Muslim world are much poorer, less developed, and have a history as colonies or semi-colonies. While these differences are reflected in these regions’ religiopolitics, with the third world’s being anti-Western and seeing Judaism and Christianity as the cultural arms of neo-colonialism, there are nonetheless major similarities in their religious politics. Is it just an accident or a trend of the times that New Religious Politics is found in these very different areas, especially since there seems to be little direct influence from one fundamentalist culture to another? Or have we not looked in the right places for comparable features?

The features leading to New Religious Politics include those listed above, such as a search for a secure identity in the face of rapid socioeconomic and cultural changes; growing income gaps; changes in the status of women, the family, and sexual mores; and the growing and often unpopular power of secular central governments and their failure to meet the economic and cultural needs of their subjects. Such factors are justly stressed in discussions of NRP movements, but many exist as much in countries without strong movements as in those that have them. These factors, thus, do not answer the question of why these movements appear where they do. Hence, despite their importance, they will not be reiterated but will be assumed as a background common to many countries with and without the emergence of significant NRP movements.

To state in advance an explanatory hypothesis: Significant NRP movements thus far tend to occur only where in recent decades (whatever the distant past) religions with supernatural and theistic content are believed in, or strongly identified with, by a large proportion of the population. In addition, either or both of the following must also be true in recent times: a high percentage of the population identifies with the basic tenets of its religious tradition regarding its god or gods, its scriptural text, and so forth. The only single word for this phenomenon is a term, normally used differently but recognizable—religiosity. Or else, or in addition, at least two strong religious communities exist; and there is a widespread quasi-nationalist identification with one’s religious community as against other communities. This second variety will be called religious nationalism or “communalism,” which, like “fundamentalism,” is still used even by many who dislike it because it is the only appropriate way to refer to it in one word.

The factors of religiosity or communalism are often the main ones distinguishing communities with or without significant New Religious Politics; religiosity in the above sense distinguishes the United States from Western Europe,
and Muslim countries from Confucian ones, for example. Such factors have rarely been discussed by scholars except in discussions over whether monotheistic scripturalism is necessary to fundamentalism, a question which does not explain the contrast in levels of fundamentalism between the United States, where levels of belief and church membership are high, and Western Europe, where they are low. For all the pitfalls in discussing levels of religious belief and identification, which vary over time and region, such levels are often recognizable enough to support generalizations in the contemporary period when New Religious Politics develop.

Both communal and fundamentalist groups have been mobilized by steps taken by secularizing governments and hegemonic elites. The measures offending many believers of these groups include the U.S. Supreme Court decisions since 1962, affirmative action programs in the United States and India, and reforms in law, education, and gender and family matters in the Muslim world and elsewhere. There has also been widespread disillusionment in many regions with secular governments that have come to power because they have been unable to meet major problems in many regions, whether the governments are socialist or capitalist in orientation.

Both rapid and often unpopular recent socioeconomic and political change and religiosity or communalism seem necessary for fundamentalism to become strong. Religiosity and communalism strongly influence whether a strong movement of New Religious Politics will develop in an area that fits an appropriate socioeconomic and political profile, but socioeconomic and political causes appear to be the most important factor in explaining when they occur. Further, major religiopolitical movements have occurred from the 1970s on only after certain socioeconomic and cultural changes typical of these recent decades have taken place in areas with a recent history of religiosity or communalism.

Latin America (and some other areas) may be a case for the future, since that region has both religiosity and many of the requisite socioeconomic and political problems. There, however, the fundamentalists are mostly Protestants who are not yet oriented toward overthrowing old power centers. To date, Roman Catholics, even in believing areas, have resisted fundamentalism, aside from

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14 Socioeconomic distinctions exist but are insufficient to account for differences in religiopolitics. East Asia has developed more rapidly than the Middle East, but this was far less true when religiopolitics first expanded in the 1970s; and differences in socioeconomic egalitarianism and the social safety net between Western Europe and the United States were also less salient then.

15 Church membership statistics according to a 1981 Gallup poll asking "Are you affiliated with a church or religious organization?" saw 57 percent of Americans answer yes, but only 4 percent of the French, 5 percent of Italians, 13 percent of West Germans, 15 percent of Spaniards, and 22 percent of the British. The gap between Americans and Europeans on religion's importance to them was also great. Reported in Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Crown, 1993), 9. Other polls also show this large gap between the United States and Western Europe.
“integralist” traditionalist movements that are not politically significant. Those Catholics whose traditionalism centers on questions stressed by the Pope can support these policies without joining a Catholic fundamentalist movement, while a full-fledged ideological movement would probably challenge Rome. Roman Catholicism is the only major religion with a single doctrinal leader (there were Shi’i rivals to Khomeini), a dynamic which may inhibit the flexibility needed for local fundamentalisms.16 Inhibiting factors may also exist elsewhere, so that while the factors mentioned earlier seem necessary if strong fundamentalist movements are to emerge, their presence does not guarantee that a strong movement has appeared.

Religiosity or communalism help to explain why NRP is found both in more (United States) or less (third-world) economically developed countries.17 The relative weakness of NRP in East Asia reflects both a lower degree of religiosity, as defined above, and higher levels and more egalitarian nature of that region’s economic development, when compared to areas with strong NRP at least until 1998. Religiosity contributes to the gender-conservative ideologies of most NRP movements, which see patriarchal practices as having religious and scriptural sanction.

Most of the socioeconomic and political factors listed above exist in countries with strong NRP movements. (This list excludes some countries in Africa with weak states and development; it partly excludes some East Asian and European countries with income distribution gaps that have not widened significantly.) Until now, the emergence of strong NRP movements requires both a series of socioeconomic and political developments characteristic of the recent decades of globalization and a strong background of religiosity or communalism.

Many persons who participate in religiopolitics may have either mainly religious or mainly political motives and ideas, but their movements combine both. Not all the movements considered here have continued to grow: Some have been suppressed or weakened due to government action, improved socioeconomic or political conditions, revulsion from extremist acts, or internal political errors.

COMMUNAL RELIGIOPOLITICAL MOVEMENTS

Until this point, communalism was listed together with other trends, but the most striking subdivision among religiopolitical movements is probably between those where communalism (religious nationalism) is primary with the focus directed mainly against other communities and those where the movement


17 One scholar suggested to me in early 1996 that the weakness of social insurance in the United States causes fundamentalism. While it may contribute, the difference from other developed countries in fundamentalist religious background is more directly relevant.
is primarily directed against one’s own government but only secondarily, or not at all, against other communities.

South Asia is the largest and most variegated area with a major modern development of communalism or religious nationalism. The colonial and postcolonial period saw the development of quasi-ethnic identification with constructed nationalist versions of Hinduism and similar constructions, partly in reaction to Hindu nationalism, followed in Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism. These versions had roots in nineteenth-century religious modernisms but developed especially after the two world wars and were alternatives to the secular nationalism of the Indian National Congress and the later Congress Party. Religious nationalism developed in part out of nineteenth-century Hindu reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj and similar movements in other religions.18

In the interwar period the Hindu-centered nationalist ideology was developed especially by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925. Its ideology centered on the concept of Hindutva, put forth in a 1922 book by that name by the RSS leader, Savarkar. The book and the RSS, followed by some later Hindu nationalists, argued that Hindus were all who lived in, and acknowledged cultural ties to, ancient India. This often included Sikhs, Jains, and untouchables, with only Muslims and Christians regarded as enemies. Some RSS publicists suggested that the best analogy to their understanding of nationhood was found in Zionism.19

Although it lost much popularity after it was associated with Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination, the RSS has since been greatly revived and has contributed to two newer Hindu nationalist organizations in the past two decades, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Sangh (BJP) political party. The recent growth of Hindu nationalism is in part due to disillusionment with the acts of secular governments. Most scholars consider the key initial point for the contemporary efflorescence of religiopolitical nationalism in India to be the 1975–77 emergency rule of Indira Gandhi, a time when civil liberties were curbed, opponents jailed, and Congress lost its popularity. As the RSS entered more actively into politics under new leaders in the 1970s, some of its leaders helped form the new religiopolitical groups. The RSS and some other religiopolitical groups in India do not demand particular acts of worship or beliefs so much as an overall belief in Hinduism. The RSS has also been notable for having a separate and militant women’s organization since 1936 which combined traditional and modern ideas.

RSS members and several Hindu religious leaders were among the founders of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP, or World Hindu Council) in 1984. The RSS has been heavily involved in the VHP, which also includes independent religious leaders. One of its aims is to bring tribal people and untouchables into the Hindu fold (which would thus be much enlarged). Like the RSS, the VHP has a broad definition of Hinduism that includes all but Muslims and Christians, seen as foreign and hostile. The VHP uses the Hindu nationalist argument that an ancient just Hindu society was conquered by foreign oppressors, first Muslim and then British. Hindu religious inclusiveness is called tolerance (following some western scholars), while Muslims are seen as fanatical and bigoted and secularists as anti-national agents of the West.

The growing popularity of the VHP is partly due to, and expressed by, its mass religiopolitical rituals. These have included processions of “chariots” (trucks) with images of Mother India and holy Ganges water. The processions’ popularity contributed to a movement to rebuild Hindu temples allegedly demolished to build mosques. The Babri mosque in the pilgrimage center, Ayodhya, already a site for conflict between Hindus and Muslim, became the center of action. VHP pressure brought a 1986 judicial ruling that the disputed site for the mosque should be opened to the public, a decision which resulted in communal violence all over India. The religiopolitical BJP party, which also had direct ties to the RSS, entered heavily into the issue from 1986 on.20 The issue culminated in the destruction of the mosque by a Hindu crowd in December 1992, followed by terrible Hindu-Muslim riots in several cities.

Anti-Muslim agitation, including a focus on such issues as Kashmir separatism and Rajiv Gandhi’s concessions to Muslim pressure in favor of Muslim family law in the 1980s, has been the main feature of recent Hindu nationalism. Hindu identification has also been increased by television series dramatizing the ancient Hindu epics. Another point of Hindu nationalist agitation came after V.P. Singh’s government in 1990 increased the reservations for “backward castes” in education and government (while some nationalists wanted to make these people more Hindu, most did not want to give up job privileges for them). The government was seen as favoring Muslims and borderline Hindus above true Hindus.

Indian scholars have shown how Hindu fundamentalism grew out of anti-Muslim Hindu communalism, which in turn was in large part an evolving and interactive result of British imperialism.21 Hindu nationalism fits better as New Religious Politics than as a fundamentalism, since it has the main NRP char-

acteristics but not always religiously fundamentalist ones. Hindu nationalists have constructed modern though politically conservative doctrines and organizations: They are intolerant of other doctrines, including both those defined as religious Others and secularism; mobilize militants around a creed that claims to be traditional but is mostly novel; and seek state power in the name of this creed. They are also highly concerned to have Hindu control of both territory and culture, while they are hostile to minorities, especially Muslims, who are seen as threatening that control. Pre-colonial Hinduism was neither monotheistic nor scriptural, and some scholars deny that it was even a single religion, but Hindu nationalism, building on Hindu modernism, supports a creed that has become far more like the monotheistic, scriptural religions it fights than that of the decentralized Hinduism of the past. This is partly due to the large presence in India of non-Hindu scripturalist religions, Muslim and Christian, seen as effective enemies by Hindu nationalists, and also due to the need for a unified doctrine to support a unified movement. To organize national movements and combat non-Hindu scriptural religions, Hindu nationalists created a more unified set of doctrinal propositions which privilege a part of their literature.

A parallel development toward a unified scripturalism is seen in modern Sikhism, which formerly had a variety of doctrinal trends, some of which were seen by their followers as compatible with Hinduism. In recent years Sikhs have become far more doctrinally unified, scriptural, and nationalist, with many advocating a separate Sikh nation to be carved out of Sikh-majority territory in the Punjab region. Indira Gandhi’s violent suppression of nationalist Sikhs in their Golden Temple in 1984 did not reduce Sikh nationalism but resulted in her assassination by a Sikh bodyguard. (The assassins of Mahatma Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi also had religiopolitical motives.)

Another partially parallel religious nationalism in pre-partition India is found among Indian Muslims. It is seen in the increasingly separatist program of the Muslim League, which early in the twentieth century demanded only Muslim representation via separate electorates and after World War I carried out joint projects with the Indian National Congress stirring up agitation against the British. Many Muslims belonged to the Congress, but their sentiments changed especially after the experience of Congress-majority provincial governments of the late 1930s. In this period and especially after partition, Maududi’s ideology favoring a revived Islamic politics and state and his Jama’at-i-Islami organization were important in the development of religious nationalism (although neither he nor certain ulama organizations favored the formation of Pakistan


until faced with a fait accompli). The Pakistan movement and the formation of Pakistan in 1947 embodied a latent contradiction. Although the chief founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, did not favor a religious state, the very existence of Pakistan as a Muslim state opened the door to an increased number of Islamic interest groups. The influence of Islamic nationalist groups has grown in recent decades, especially since the movement against Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan in the 1970s focused resentment against high-handed actions by secular governments. The succeeding government of Zia al-Haqq introduced many features of Islamization, including several Islamic punishments, the collection of Islamic taxes through bank accounts, Islamic banking practices, and new judicial rules. Although there were movements that resisted these changes, particularly those of Shi‘i and women’s organizations, and although some rules were altered as a result, most of the legal changes remained. Islamic identity, especially that part opposing Hindu India, is today the only real unifying force in a Pakistan torn by sub-national and Islamic sectarian conflicts.

Ideologically, religious nationalism contains about as many novelties in South Asia’s Islam as in Hinduism, even though Islam is more amenable to a single set of beliefs and practices shaped and focused by legislation. The whole concept of Pakistan was novel: While it favors Muslim rule in conquered territory, Islamic tradition has nothing to say about carving out a state from territories with a Muslim majority. In addition, the idea stressed by Islamists everywhere—that the shari‘a should be the state’s fundamental law code in all spheres—is a novelty, although some steps toward codification were taken by the nineteenth-century Ottoman state. Traditionally the shari‘a was more analogous in its procedures to Western civil law, since shari‘a cases were brought by individuals, and not the state, against other individuals.

In the postwar period, fierce ethnic and social conflicts in Sri Lanka and in the Sikh areas of the Punjab have added to South Asian religious nationalism. Religious nationalism does not always involve a high level of belief (though many of its adherents are very religious) but utilizes or invents increasingly popular religious symbols and successfully identifies religion with the nation.

A communal background with analogies to the South Asian situation is also


27 An original discussion of religious nationalism in South Asia is found in Peter van der Veer, Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). In Mark Juergensmeyer’s The New Cold War, the term “religious nationalism” is used differently than I do, since he includes Islamic and other movements.
found in some other societies with large minority religious communities, including Israel-Palestine, Nigeria, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka (all on the territory of ex-British colonies). Communal defense of one’s religion against rivals became political and was often tied to a defense of invented traditions that favored groups and classes who felt left out by secular modernization. This grouping of those “left out” crossed class lines and included, in different areas, lower- and middle-class people disrupted by modernization and secularization, classes tied to the traditional economy, and some special groups like the Hindu upper castes favored by religiously sanctioned practices and disfavored by affirmative action programs and Israeli Oriental Jews, who feel discrimination.

While communalism is often considered only for South Asia, it can also be identified, whether called communalism or not, in several British ex-colonies, partly as the result of British policies defining people by religious groups and assigning them alternate favors based on these categories.

Three special features of religious nationalism are notable. First, similar movements have arisen from very different religions, suggesting that modern circumstances may be as important as the original religious material. In South Asia, early Buddhist doctrine was not militant or religiously exclusive; yet the Buddhists of Sri Lanka created a militant movement against what they saw as a Hindu Tamil threat. Hindus, who began the nationalist trend in South Asia, had in pre-colonial times very little unity in their doctrine and no unified leadership, but Hindu nationalist groups produced both later, when needed. Stress on the centrality of Hindu-Muslim differences began when colonialists and early Hindu reformers, then other religious groups, took similar positions. The communalists’ creation of more unified doctrines, boundaries, and leadership is striking; along with setting newly rigid boundaries, these movements and their ideologies, by a dialectical process, came to appear more alike.

Second, the religious nationalist or communal wing of NRP has had a longer, more varied, and more gradual evolution than has the non-communal wing. In India, Hindus have had over a century of religion nationalist organizations, and Muslims and Sikhs became increasingly nationalist in the course of this century. Elsewhere, religious nationalism among Zionists was important from the beginning, and developed and subdivided over a century. The turning point toward strengthening New Religious Politics, however, happened during the 1970s for South Asia and Israel just as it had for the non-communal Middle East and United States. Even areas with older communalisms have experienced an upsurge in religiopolitics in recent decades, along with the invention of newly militant ideologies.

Third, some communal religiopolitics differs from non-communal religiopolitics in that less stress is placed on mores, including the enforcement of

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28 Religious nationalist identifications are also important elsewhere, as in Ireland and former Yugoslavia, but neither yet has important movements that meet my initial definition.
29 See especially Swearer, “Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism.”
patriarchal categories that fundamentalists tend to stress as part of religion. The role of gender among South Asian communalists is important but also varied and complex: While two major communal issues of the 1980s, one concerning Islamic divorce law and the state and the other sati, involved defense of gender traditions, the RSS and some other Hindu nationalists have mobilized women in a partially modern manner. For some Hindu nationalists, more equal treatment of women has become an anti-Muslim weapon. The Israeli Gush Emunim put much less stress on patriarchy and social mores than do more orthodox Israeli movements. Those advocating communal religiopolitics, which appeals both to more and less religious persons, often put less stress on religion as such and speak more of cultural heritage or the like, as does the BJP, the chief religiopolitical party in India.

This reduced stress on mores, patriarchy, and even religion arises largely from the communalist movements’ goal of strengthening one community at the expense of other communities. Insistence on conformity in religious belief and practice can interfere with this goal by alienating others in one’s community. For example, Palestinian Hamas started with a straight Muslim Brotherhood program but over time have stressed nationalism more and Islamic rules less. Certain rules, such as Islamic dress for women, are enforced, however, and have even become almost a visible badge for those in these movements, whether communal or non-communal.

Although communal religiopolitics tend to have a longer evolution and put less stress on religious conformity than do non-communal religiopolitics, it is useful to consider them together because the lines between the two are often blurred and because in many areas one spills or changes into the other. Those in Sudan, Palestine, Lebanon, Israel, and elsewhere who fight against other communities combine features of communal and non-communal fundamentalism. As noted, communalism lay behind the first ideological formulation of Islamic fundamentalism, by Maududi, a development that has influenced Muslim fundamentalists elsewhere.

Communal (nationalist) factors exist in Islamic, Christian, and Jewish religiopolitics even though communalism is often unfairly reserved for South Asia.


31 Communication of Walid Atalah, UCLA 1996, who has done research on this movement. On Palestinian movements and their movement toward nationalism and militancy, see Ziad Abu-Amr, Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

The elements of communalism in Islamist theories, in ultra-Zionism, and in some other movements are reflected both in hostility to other communities and in a focus on communal control of territory and of centers of power and influence. The Zionist right has strong communal elements supporting its exclusive identity against another community competing for the same territory.

South Asian communalists were in a sense pioneers when they organized effective right-wing religio-politics, having a history now of a century of organization, action, and ideology. This may be why some scholars of South Asia hesitate to place a movement that to them is both historically familiar and non-scriptural in a class with recent scriptural and non-communal movements. Recent South Asian movements do, however, display NRP novelties—chiefly an unprecedented political organization and strength, including provincial election victories and pluralities for the BJP in the national Indian elections of 1996 and 1998—which make them part of the international resurgence of religious politics. A BJP-led government from March 1998 toned down its anti-Muslim rhetoric, in part to secure allies from other parties.

Communal religio-politics focuses on controlling territory and suppressing other communities. In South Asia, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh nationalists concentrate on such programs of control and suppression; in Israel, religio-politics stresses control over disputed territories and denies Arab claims; and in Palestine religio-politics calls for Muslim Arab control of all former Palestine. The primacy of territorial and power issues sometimes means paying less attention to religion.

In some areas religious and ethnic communalism are intermixed, as in Nigeria and Malaysia, where Muslims comprise about half the population and where most non-Muslims have different ethnicities. Muslims there have had less education and less opportunity to enter modern economic sectors, and Islamist claims have helped strengthen the economic and political clout of Muslims.33

Although it has earlier roots, communalism is tied to colonialism and continues to be so in the post-colonial period. As noted previously, communalism is especially characteristic of British colonies and to the playing of communal politics by British colonizers. It was also a part of the background of the Islamist Moro revolt against U.S. colonialism in the Philippines but apparently was less important in France’s colonies, possibly because of the French preference for universalism in their educational system and in some other policies.

Communalist NRP trends are less religiously cohesive than are movements with a greater background in religiosity. In Hinduism this is often attributed to the lack of a single god, scripture, and ritual; but this is also true of the very varied trends in political Judaism, where there is one scripture and one God. Like Hindu nationalists, the newer Israeli groups like Gush Emunim and Kach fo-

cus on national and territorial goals; while older groups, like the traditionalist Haredim and the religious parties, stress religious strictness. The emphasis on nationalism and territory leads some to exclude Jewish and Hindu politics from fundamentalism. Given the definition here, both belong, however, to the New Religious Politics, even though some communal or religious nationalist movements have fewer religious requirements. These movements are especially distinguished by hostility to other religious or religio-ethnic groups and by a stress on the control of a territory by their own religious group. Hostility to their own government, based largely on that government’s secularism and its supposed complaisance to the main target group, is often a secondary theme.

**NON-COMMUNAL MOVEMENTS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

There are two major non-communal or less-communal religiopolitical groupings: those in the Muslim world and those in the United States. These differ from communal movements because they place a greater stress on religion and reflect conservative positions on gender and family issues, and on replacing evil governments rather than taking or controlling territory. While communal-nationalist religiopolitics have a significantly similar set of causes, non-communal religiopolitics in the Muslim world and the United States have rather different causes for similar results. While Islamism has appealed to many different kinds of Muslims, the U.S. Christian Right has generally appealed only to an evangelical Christian minority. Christian and Muslim religiopolitics may thus be seen as separate subcategories, to be differentiated below.

Although Islam has not, contrary to what is often said, always united religion and politics, the Muslim world has been open to NRP, mainly because of three elements. First, early ties between Islam and politics have continued as a model even after being much reduced in practice since the early rise of non-religious hereditary rulers; and Islamic institutions have also long controlled law, education, and social services, which has made secularization difficult. Second, mass movements of opposition to existing governments in the Muslim world have usually had religious ideologies. Third, hostile contacts with the West, including its backing of Israel and interventions to protect oil and strategic interests, have generated strong feelings of resentment leading to some hostility to western ideas. The strength of Islamic movements is suggested by their victories in Iran and Sudan, and their near victory in Algeria. In Turkey dur-

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ing 1996 the Islamist Welfare Party gained a plurality, and its leader was—until mid-1997—prime minister in a coalition government. Elsewhere, Islamist movements are also powerful, especially in the Middle East.36

Islamist movements are often salient where socioeconomic and political discontents are great, such as in the Middle East and Pakistan, and are growing in Central Asia, but not until 1998 in the more prosperous Southeast Asia or in the weaker states of Africa. (While the relative weakness of Islamism in Malaysia and Indonesia is sometimes attributed to government suppression, that same kind of suppression has been less successful in some Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran and Algeria.) Islamism comprises many different types of groups but can be roughly divided both into Sunni and Shi‘i and into moderate (stressing organization, persuasion, and electoral politics) and radical (legitimating violence).37 Key dates in the development of these movements are the founding of the Egyptian Muslim Brethren (1928), the Israeli defeat of Egypt (1967), and the victory of the Iranian Revolution (1979), all of which gave impetus to the spread of religiopolitics.38 The Iranian Revolution in particular, which showed that organization and activism could topple a powerful ruler and install a government seen as Islamic, encouraged organization and agitation in many Muslim countries. The special features of Iran’s Shi‘ism were rarely considered by oppositionists elsewhere.

Other precipitants to the spread of activist Islamism include Saudi financing of Islamic institutions and teachings abroad, which inadvertently encouraged oppositional Islam, and the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan during the 1980s, supported by the United States via Pakistan. This version of Islamism trained a number of prominent activists, some implicated in terrorist acts in the United States and worldwide.39 These built upon other precipitants of Islamism, such as grievances against the West and the failure of indigenous gov-


38 Among works covering the Egyptian events are Gilles Kepel, Muslim Extremism in Egypt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Richard P. Mitchell, The Society of Muslim Brothers (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); and Abdel Aziz Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfīr Groups,” in Marty and Appleby, eds., Fundamentalisms and the State. On Iran, see note 39, below.

ernments and prior ideologies to meet national needs, which a politicized Islam has promised to do. Among socially conservative Muslims (as well as Chris-
tians), changes in family structure, and particularly those giving new indepen-
dence to women, were especially resented; and governments whose laws sup-
supported such changes were considered evil and targets for radical change or
overthrow.

Although each country’s Islamist movements have special features, some
general points about the strength of Islamists’ opposition to their own govern-
ment’s unpopular policies and excessive ties to the West can be seen by mak-
ing a close examination of any of the major Islamist movements. Here, a brief
examination of Iran will point up similarities with other Middle Eastern coun-
tries despite special features centering on the development of Shi’ism and its
powerful clergy in Iran. The governments of several Middle Eastern countries,
particularly in the 1970s, were seen as too complaisant to the West and to Is-
rael, not meeting the needs of those who did not profit from the Western-tied
economy, being too autocratic, and trying to suppress Islamic law and practice,
especially in the realm of gender and the family. The wealth and power of newly
westernized groups were resented, especially given rapid urbanization and
the increased spread of education to rural, small-town, and popular classes, who
became more politically articulate but could not take full economic advantage
of their urban or educated status.

Iran felt many of these problems and contradictions in especially acute form.
Virtually all the modernization that occurred in Iran took place in a brief half
century, from 1925 to 1978, under the rule of the two Pahlavi shahs. The ra-
pidity of socioeconomic change was, under the late shah, especially fueled by
oil income, a direct or indirect factor in many Middle Eastern countries. Rapid
modernization of the economy, with its accompanying internal migration, pop-
ulation growth and youthfulness, and growing gaps between rich and poor and
between traditional and modern sectors, was not accompanied by political de-
mocratization but, rather, by increasing autocracy. Both shahs took on the typi-
cal secular modernizing role of wrestling control from the clergy over educa-
tion, social services, and law, with a controversial change toward greater gender
equality, especially in the Family Protection Law of 1967/75. The Pahlavis car-
rried a penchant for westernization and confrontation with Islamic leaders fur-
ther than some other Middle Eastern rulers, with Reza Shah being the only such
ruler to outlaw veiling (although this lapsed after his 1941 abdication), and his
son’s arrest and exile of the leader of the oppositional ulama, Khomeini, in
1964, initiating a scurrilous newspaper attack on him in early 1978.

The association of the shah with secularism, pro-westernism (he was seen as
a puppet of the United States), and relations with Israel, meant that effective
opposition was increasingly associated with total rejection of these policies and
that in this opposition Islamist ideologies had great advantages over secular
ones. By the 1970s, Islamists in Iran and elsewhere, dissociated from the peri-
od many decades earlier when Islam had been largely tied to old regimes, could present a new vision of Islam as a socially egalitarian, just, and indigenous answer to western control. In Iran the oppositional clergy, chiefly Khomeini and his students and disciples, could also build on the groundwork for Islamism laid by non-clerical intellectuals and activists like the writer Jalal al-e Ahmad; Ali Shariati, the ideolgical hero of the educated youth; Mehdi Bazargan and his Freedom Movement; and the Islamic leftist “urban guerillas,” the Mojahedine-Khalq.

Sections of the ulama in Iran, owing partly to the way Iranian Shi’ism had developed since the eighteenth century, had a tradition of independence and participation in anti-government movements, notably the constitutional revolution of 1905–11. The structure and modern history of Iranian Shi’ism created a situation in which a clerical leader, Khomeini, and his immediate followers could take the leadership of a mass oppositional movement in a way not duplicated in other, Sunni-Muslim countries. But Sunni movements had many ideological similarities to the Iranian one, and all were hostile to existing governments.

The shah, who had deliberately fragmented his leading support groups, had also lost much of his class-based support with his land reforms of 1962–63 and hesitated to crack down early on the opposition. He was forced, in February 1979, to give in to the largest mass-based revolution in Middle Eastern history. By this time much of the Iranian population had utopian expectations of a newly defined Islam and of Khomeini—expectations that were largely, though not entirely, belied in the revolution’s aftermath.40

In other Islamic, especially Middle Eastern, countries, there was little understanding that a strong independent clerical tradition in Iran made a certain type of Islamic revolution possible there but not elsewhere. On the other hand, the Iranian revolution gave an impetus to the further growth of Islamist movements, which were nearly always headed outside Iran not by ulama but by men with western or westernized educations and which in countries like Algeria, Egypt, and Sudan became very strong.

Nearly all the movements in the Muslim world are directed primarily against their own governments: The strength of the Iranian movement lay largely in its being directed against the shah and his policies; the Egyptian movement, in being against Sadat and Mubarak; and of the Algerian movement, in its hostility to the secular government and its policies. To be sure, communalism also en-

ters into Islamism where religious minorities are strong, such as Christian minorities in Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Nigeria, and ethnic-religious minorities in Malaysia; but Islamism can flourish as much where religious minorities are not numerous, such as in North Africa or Iran. Hence religious nationalism is not key to the rise of Islamism, while opposition to governments seen as secular, westernized, and oppressive often is.

The United States presents a different picture, one in which only a religious minority, Evangelical Christians, have been prone to fundamentalism, though NRP now attracts some Catholic and even Jewish allies. Welcoming such allies is a trend of recent decades and demonstrates a realization that such groups need allies to attain political majorities. Though Evangelicals are growing, they remain a clear minority. Understanding the New Religious Politics in the United States requires a focus on the discontents of the involved minorities more than on those of a larger group, as in many Muslim countries. There are nonetheless some parallels, by contrast, to the communal countries, since both Islamic and Christian movements greatly stress threats to conservative positions on such issues as gender relations, the family, and sexual mores. Both also centrally demonize secular governments and their growing power.

While Muslim movements have often had leaders who were formerly nationalists or Marxists but saw in Islam a more potent instrument of change, the U.S. Christian Right arose out of literalist and conservative Protestant Christianity. This extended its interests to politics at first in order to achieve what were considered religious goals, particularly to reverse court decisions regarding abortion, prayer in the schools, and the teaching of evolution.

Both the United States and the Muslim world have experienced both gradualist-compromising and radical-uncompromising religiopolitics. In recent years most U.S. religiopolitics has concentrated on a policy of gradual change, stressing electoral victories in local races and chipping away at laws and regulations governing school prayer, creationism, and abortion, though the Christian Right’s effort to control the Republican Party shows its continued aim of seeking national power. Gradualist and local tactics were epitomized by Ralph Reed, the first and now former executive director of the Christian Coalition, who retains an influence, but are opposed by some in the Christian Right. Such local and electoral tactics are less possible in several undemocratic states in the Muslim world, where the only hope of control may seem to be through revolutions or acts of violence. When electoral politics are possible, Islamist movements often have a broader base of appeal than does the U.S. Christian Right, as seen in Turkey or pre-1992 Algeria, Muslim Brotherhood alliances with sec-

ular parties in Egypt, Islamist strength in Jordanian elections, or strong—though unsuccessful—attempts to be recognized as an electoral party against government opposition in Tunisia.  

Religiopolitics in the United States and the Muslim world are similar in stressing religion and conservative behavior rather than territorial goals and in wanting to replace secular governments; but they differ in points of origin and in the groups to which they appeal. They both have a central emphasis on policies that affect women and the family, see contemporary mores as contrary to religion and morality, and call for a return to an idealized past with patriarchal family structures and limits on women’s control of their bodies and activity in the public sphere.

The decentralized democratic politics of the United States make it possible for the Christian Right to act through many different organizations and in many diverse ways, including supporting candidates and propaganda at all levels and pushing for a variety of national and local laws to chip away at abortion, favor Christianity in the schools, block many rights for homosexuals, and so forth. The very political nature of today’s Christian Right, including direct entry into various forms of partisan and non-partisan politics, differentiates them from most of those who called themselves fundamentalist early in the twentieth century. The achievement of political goals, including the political enforcement of ideological goals, now takes priority for most of the Christian Right.

**COMMONALITIES AND DIVERGENCES IN NRP MOVEMENTS**

The argument thus far has three main distinctive features. First, it provides a list of socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors in religiopolitics. Second, it gives a definition of New Religious Politics, not based only on scriptural monotheism, which accounts both for primarily communal movements and for those based more on religiosity. Third, it sees religiosity and communalism, as defined, as two key factors demarcating the areas where New Religious Politics are to be found and notes differences in movements with these two bases.

Despite major differences among religiopolitical movements, it is striking

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how many of them developed rapidly beginning in the late 1970s. Relevant events include Indira Gandhi’s Emergency Rule in 1973–75, which gave impetus to Sikh and Hindu politics and to Muslim movements in Kashmir; the Iranian 1979 revolution and its influence; the Soviet 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and the Islamist-led response; Zia al-Haqq’s favoring of Islamist laws and groups in Pakistan; and in the United States, the founding of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, in 1979.44

Among the reasons for this simultaneity is the intensification of socioeconomic discontent and dislocation: Few parts of the world have been exempt from rapid and unequal socioeconomic change, though more equal income distributions or social safety nets in East Asia and Europe and some recent favorable economic changes have helped defuse opposition. In some countries, specific causes have stimulated the emergence of strong NRP movements, such as anti-imperialism in the Global South or relations with Israel in the Middle East. On the other hand, it is more difficult to determine the extent to which other factors—such as challenges to patriarchy by women and their allies—have assisted in the emergence of NRP movements. Since they are found in both NRP and non-NRP countries, it is obvious that these factors cannot alone account for the NRP. One factor that seems stronger in countries with NRP movements than in those without them is the disillusionment with recent secular governmental policies, whether they are called socialist, welfare state, free market, or something else. Discontent with socioeconomic policies, which often accompanies opposition to perceived government hostility toward religion, is felt among many Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Jews.45

Also in recent decades, communist and socialist movements have lost their international backing and much of their appeal. In the Muslim world and elsewhere, not only do fundamentalists often come from the same background (student and professional) that used to produce communists; but a number of ex-leftist intellectuals have become prominent in New Religious Politics.

Religiosity and communalism are historically developing and changing phenomena. They have varied over time but have been on the rise in many parts of the world, though not without setbacks, in recent decades. As with many factors that can be called causes, they are also both the effects of other causes and the consequence of a dialectical interpenetration of many operative factors of cause and effect. Communalism or religiosity are also involved in areas where religiopolitics are only partial, as in the ethnoreligious struggles in ex-Yugoslavia, Central Asia, Ireland, and Muslim Africa, or religiopolitical trends in Latin America.

44 Regarding the United States, Sara Diamond, Roads to Dominion, ch. 7, stresses the late 1970s as the years the Christian Right became organized openly and on a massive scale, with an emphasis on issues concerning gender and the family.

45 The importance of secular centralizing governments in encouraging reactive religiopolitics is noted in Said Amir Arjomand, “Unity and Diversity in Islamic Fundamentalism,” Marty and Appleby, eds., Fundamentalisms Comprehended, 179–98.
In attempting to answer the question why some countries have more religiopolitics than others, we could start with why only the United States, among either countries of advanced industrialization or of Christian majorities, has a major NRP movement, even though many of the others may have constituent elements expressed in movements such as Christian Democracy, Catholic Integralism, Liberation Theology, or non-political fundamentalism.46

The most convincing reply as to why the United States has more fundamentalism than any other Christian-majority country is that such a Christian religiopolitics seems possible only with the multidenominational situation there, and especially its far higher levels (shown in numerous polls) of belief in God, in the literal truth of the Bible, and in such things as special creation, than in any other industrialized country with a Christian majority. To cite only a few of many poll data, 72 percent of Americans have said the Bible is the Word of God, with 39 percent indicating it should be taken literally and 44 percent professing that they believe God created the world “in pretty much its present form” within the past 10,000 years.47 Of the large numbers of people attending church, many belong to evangelical denominations that believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. This latter group has provided, ever since the late-nineteenth-century rise of religious modernism and Darwinism, a large base for fundamentalism that does not exist elsewhere. In Europe, belief in God, the Bible, and basic Christian doctrines is far less widespread.48 There is today no basis in Europe in widespread religious belief for mass opposition to Darwin, abortion, birth control, or any of the other points that U.S. fundamentalists see in the Bible.

We do not have good religious poll data for developing countries, and in many of them one could not poll people about their beliefs; but there is little doubt about the strength of belief in Islam and the importance of scripture in the contemporary Muslim world. In Israel, although the founders were secularists, and secularism continues to be strong, there has been an increasing push, strengthened by the heavy immigration of more religious Oriental Jews, to have Jewish religious identification be a stronger part of Israel’s identity. As in South Asia, strong communal identity centering on a religious tradition can in part play a role similar to that played by belief.

In the Muslim world, although some of the socioeconomic and anti-secular

background for fundamentalism is similar to that elsewhere, many of the groups affected have been different from those in the United States. Islamist movements did not arise so much from defenders of literalist orthodoxy as from professionals, intellectuals, and students who might in earlier decades have turned to nationalism, socialism, or communism. Disillusionment with the failure of Nasser, the symbol of nationalism, to defeat Israel or solve internal problems and with the failures of socialism and capitalism helped turn people toward a search for an idealized Islamic past as the embodiment of a more distinctive identity than that offered by nationalism or Marxism. It became fashionable to think that Islamic solutions could meet modern problems, especially when governments were seen as too secular, too pro-Western, and too compromising in dealing with Israel.49

Despite these differences in background, in most countries with strong NRP movements, we may point to a few key governmental secular measures that helped arouse mass religiopolitics in the past quarter century. In the United States, measures that were greeted with unqualified enthusiasm by liberals were equally despised by biblical literalists. Among these were the proposed Equal Rights Amendment and some key Supreme Court measures, especially the outlawing of prayer in the public schools in 1962 and the granting of abortion rights in 1973. These were part of a growing trend after the 1930s to give the Supreme Court power over the states. Although the notion of the separation of church and state is an ideal going back more than two centuries, the Supreme Court made several key decisions in the 1960s that broadened the meaning of the Bill of Rights and applied it in the states. Fundamentalist Christians believe that the Bible forbids abortion (though the texts they cite seem irrelevant to others) and that outlawing school prayer is an abomination. Most object to the teaching of evolution, and in the postwar period they invented what they called creation science in an attempt to include the biblical account of creation in the official curriculum of the public schools. They have had considerable success, obtaining de facto limits on the teaching of evolution as a part of their continuing efforts in many parts of the country. Especially in many parts of the South, prayer in the school continues even though the Supreme Court has long outlawed it. The Supreme Court is a very visible aspect of the strengthening of the central government, and its non-representative nature makes it an easy target for populist attack.50

49 Olivier Roy, The Failure of Political Islam, Carol Volk, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 4, notes that “from Cairo to Tehran, the crowds that in the 1950s demonstrated under the red or national flag now march beneath the green banner. . . . The continuity is apparent not only in these targets but also in the participants: the same individuals who followed Nasser or Marx in the 1960s are Islamists today.”

In Muslim countries resentment against government has centered on a variety of measures that altered traditional law and mores generally considered Islamic. A common feature in Muslim, and also in many non-Muslim, countries has been the use of increased central government power in ways considered imical to religion and tradition. Islamic institutions and ulama had controlled most education, courts, and social services, all areas crucial to modernizing states; and friction as the state took these over was inevitable. Traditional ways of dealing with gender, the family, and social mores came increasingly to be seen as Islamic. Newer ways are viewed as not being Islamic. These include growing government control of education and law, and especially legal reforms regarding the family and the role of women.\(^51\) India also saw various forms of secularization and actions that favored Muslims and other minorities, plus the reservation of educational and job positions for the lower castes. Significant both in India and the Muslim world was the interference with mores in the name of modernization. In the Muslim World, concern centered on reforms in family law, state encouragement of a presence of women—usually unveiled—in jobs and schools, and both governmental and private flouting of traditional modes of dress and behavior.\(^52\)

The considerable post-colonial failure of governmental solutions to socio-economic and cultural problems has brought a growing alienation between people and their governments. In the Muslim world, governments have often found it difficult to suppress Islamist movements because of their decentralized organization, use of mosques and religious networks, and their increasing popularity resulting from the provision of social services, especially to the poor.

A feature special to the Muslim world is the presence of Israel. To Muslim and many third-world eyes, Israel is a colonial implant. The Israelis entered under the protection of western governments. For a while, it seemed not unreasonable to think the Israelis could be ejected by force, much as the French had been in Algeria, as the last stage in a movement against the western occupation of Muslim lands. Only after several military defeats did many Muslims come to believe they could not reverse the dynamics favoring the continued presence of Israel. Not believing this are the Islamists, whose refusal to accept a state that has taken over land formerly controlled and populated by Muslims has created an impetus for religiopolitics among Muslims.

Another phenomenon characteristic of, though not exclusive to, several Muslim countries and South Asia, is what I have called the phenomenon of “two cultures,” which could also be called cultural dualism. Although culture today

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51. See the articles on Muslim countries in *Contention*, 4:3 (Spring 1995); and the articles by Andrea B. Rugh, Shahla Haeri, and Majid Tehranian in *Fundamentalisms and Society* and by Ann Elizabeth Mayer in *Fundamentalisms and the State*.

is most often tied to ethnic groups, there are other forms of differentiation that are equally significant. In Iran before 1979, the Middle East, and South Asia we find, broadly, two groups. One group of people has had a westernized or modernized, often secular, education, cultural mores and aspirations, and ways of dress and behavior. Another group has followed cultural ways considered traditional. (The word "traditional," however misleading, signals a practice that prominently includes local pre-modern elements.) In the two-culture phenomenon, the size of the gap between the two sides is particularly striking. The modernized culture includes western forms of dress and consumption, heavy dependence on western cultural sources, and command (often everyday use) of a western language as a mode of discourse. Its followers tend to be secular, cosmopolitan, and oriented to Western ideas. Most in this culture often regard those practicing the ways of the traditional culture as backward, superstitious, fanatical, irrational, and so forth. Those in the traditional culture follow forms of gender relations that are closer to those of pre-modern times, such as those typically separating the sexes socially, giving men much control of sisters and wives, insisting on strict limits on sexual relations for women. Though this two-culture division was named first (with apologies to C.P. Snow) to address situations in Islamic countries, much of it exists in South Asia, and a variation exists in the United States. There, fundamentalist Christians are offended by contemporary mores and look on their practitioners as harmful sinners, while secularists see fundamentalists as irrational, benighted, and so forth.

These two-culture divisions preceded, and have provided a fertile ground for, the rise of New Religious Politics. Those who followed traditional ways often resented the modern mode, especially if, as in the Global South, they saw it as being tied to westerners they disliked. The existence of a large bloc of people who had never modernized provided the popular base for more educated and ideological fundamentalists. The latter often came from rural, small-town, or urban traditional backgrounds. They felt torn between Western and traditional ways, so they looked favorably on movements that encouraged both technology and traditionalism and gave them a mass following. Educated men and women who opt for a "traditional," fundamentalist, and populist identity often find a mass base larger and more enthusiastic than they could have found in the modern sector.

Another feature religiopolitics have in common is their hostility toward the growing power of secular centralized states. The relationship between fundamentalism and the state has rarely been given the weight it deserves. In Egypt charges were raised against Nasser's socialism, which centralized the economy and increased controls over the ulama and the highest Muslim university, as

53 H. E. Chehabi, forthcoming book manuscript on cultural and social dualism in twentieth-century Iran.

well as against Sadat's and Mubarak’s open-door capitalism and their foreign policy. In the pre-revolutionary Iran of the Shah, religious objections were raised to many measures, including land reform, votes for women, and cooperation with the United States and Israel. Post-colonial states often interfere with all aspects of life more than did colonizers, who were wary about interfering with personal and family arrangements. The Islamist reaction in the Middle East was largely directed against state actions perceived as tyrannical and anti-Islamic. In India, Israel, and the United States, state interference in social questions also grew in the postwar period and was a source of resentment from conservatives, whether fundamentalist or not.

Scholars of fundamentalism more often stress changes in society and the economy which introduce new strains, income gaps, and dislocations. Some of these changes have undermined the belief in the progressive nature of modern social processes, causing feelings of alienation and a need to search for community. For some, these feelings and needs have been answered by religiopolitics; while others, especially in countries where religiosity and communalism are weak, have turned to nationalism or other types of identity politics.

Another reason for the spread of religiopolitics has been the force of example: Just as revolution spread in the nineteenth century and after 1917, so religiopolitics has gained wider support partly through example. The early Egyptian Muslim Brethren stimulated interest in similar groups elsewhere, and the Iranian Revolution inspired both Shi’i and Sunni religiopolitics. The spread of religiopolitics in the Arab world after Israel’s 1967 defeat of Egypt was in part based on a strength attributed to Israel by its identification with religion. Such imitation of another religious group is also found in the development of religiopolitics in the various communities of South Asia, which was in part a reaction to prior Hindu nationalism. And phenomena like the anti-abortion movement in England draw heavily on the U.S. example.

Hence, commonalities in the causes and policies of New Religious Politics are notable and explicable; and differences can also be explained. This essay has not exhausted all the points on which religiopolitics are comparable, and in stressing these points it has had to deal lightly with the specifics of each movement. Individual movements or specific features such as militancy or different gender attitudes and practices have received much published discussion elsewhere. The great variety in tactics and ideology and changes over time are material for other works, while the stress here has been mainly on comparable features. On the specifics of each movement, a large literature now exists and shows no signs of abating. Here, I have tried rather to stress overall analytic points that may tell us something new about this novel phenomenon.

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