



JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC STUDIES

https://ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/jiis/

Unraveling Islamic Fundamentalism and Radicalism: A Literature Review Perspective

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Articles Information

History:
Received
Approved.....
Publish....

Keywords: Islamic Fundamentalism, Islamic Radicalism

Abstract

This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism to enhance our understanding of these phenomena and their implications. By examining various sources, including academic articles, policy reports, and historical records, this research seeks to uncover the multiple dimensions of fundamentalism and radicalism. The study will explore the socio-political, economic, and cultural factors contributing to the emergence and spread of these ideologies. Additionally, the research will analyze the effectiveness of various counter-radicalization strategies implemented by governments and international organizations. The study employs a literature review methodology to systematically analyze existing research on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. This approach was chosen for its ability to consolidate and synthesize various scholarly sources, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on the topic. By reviewing and comparing different studies, this approach aims to reveal patterns, identify key themes, and highlight areas where further research is needed. The selected sources include peerreviewed journal articles, books, and scholarly essays that are relevant to the topic, methodologically rigorous, and authored by credible scholars. The research findings indicate that historical perspectives on Islamic fundamentalism reveal that this phenomenon is rooted in various historical and ideological developments, particularly in response to colonialism, political instability, and socio-economic changes. Contemporary manifestations of Islamic radicalism are highly diverse, reflecting the different contexts in which they arise, including geopolitical conflicts and domestic discontent. Comparative analysis with other fundamentalisms, such as Christian and Hindu fundamentalism, shows similar patterns in resistance to modern and secular influences. The socio-political impact of Islamic fundamentalism includes changes in domestic policies, diplomatic challenges, and social cohesion. The study also highlights scholarly debates on the interpretation of religious texts, external influences, and sociopolitical factors driving radicalization.

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Introduction

Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism have emerged as prominent and contentious issues in contemporary global discourse. These phenomena are often associated with extremist ideologies and violent actions, which have significantly impacted both international relations and domestic policies in various countries (Faiq, 2021). The rise of groups that espouse these ideologies has led to conflicts, terrorism, and a global security dilemma, prompting nations to reevaluate their strategies in combating these threats (Brahimi, 2019). Furthermore, the media portrayal and public perception of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism have contributed to widespread fear and misunderstanding, influencing policy decisions and international cooperation (Luqiu & Yang, 2020; Nickerson, 2019; Rezaei et al., 2019; Tsimouris, 2020).

Understanding these complex issues requires a nuanced examination of their historical roots. The origins of Islamic fundamentalism can be traced back to the early 20th century when various reformist movements sought to return to what they considered the pure and unadulterated teachings of Islam. These movements emerged in response to colonialism, perceived moral decline, and the influence of Western ideologies (Kiçmari, 2023; Shboul, 2020). Over time, some factions within these movements adopted more radical stances, advocating for the establishment of Islamic states through revolutionary means. The ideological foundations of Islamic fundamentalism are deeply rooted in a literal interpretation of religious texts, which often reject modernist and liberal interpretations of Islami (Kicmari, 2023; Piwko, 2021).

Contemporary manifestations of Islamic radicalism are diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the varying contexts in which they arise. In the Middle East, the rise of groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda has highlighted the violent potential of radical ideologies. These organizations have exploited political instability, social grievances, and sectarian divides to gain support and establish control over territories (Akhmetova & Jaafar, 2020; Elemanya, 2023). Meanwhile, in regions like Southeast Asia and Africa, local insurgencies and radical groups have similarly drawn on fundamentalist rhetoric to further their agendas. The global nature of radicalism has also seen the rise of lone-wolf attacks and homegrown terrorism in Western countries, complicating efforts to combat these threats (Al-Bulushi, 2022; Tetteh Hormeku-Ajei & Olukoshi, 2022).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism to enhance our understanding of these phenomena and their implications. By examining a wide range of sources, including academic articles, policy reports, and historical accounts, this research seeks to uncover the various dimensions of fundamentalism and radicalism. The study will explore the socio-political, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to the rise and spread of these ideologies. Additionally, it will analyze the effectiveness of different counter-radicalization strategies employed by governments and international organizations.

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to contribute to a more informed and balanced discourse on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. By shedding light on the complexities and nuances of these issues, it hopes to foster greater understanding and cooperation among nations in addressing the root causes and consequences of radical ideologies. This research underscores the importance of adopting a holistic and multidisciplinary approach

in studying these phenomena, recognizing that simplistic or monolithic narratives often fail to capture the intricate realities at play.

Method

This study employs a literature review methodology to systematically analyze existing research on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. A literature review is chosen for its ability to consolidate and synthesize a broad range of scholarly sources, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on the topic (Lame, 2019). By reviewing and comparing various studies, this approach aims to uncover patterns, identify key themes, and highlight areas where further research is needed.

The literature review draws from a variety of academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and scholarly essays. The selection criteria for sources include relevance to the topic, methodological rigor, and the credibility of the authors. Sources are chosen based on their contribution to the understanding of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, as well as their ability to provide historical, ideological, and socio-political insights. Databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and academic library catalogs are used to identify and access relevant literature.

The analysis of the selected literature involves a thematic approach, where key themes and trends are identified and categorized. This process includes summarizing the findings of each source, comparing and contrasting different perspectives, and synthesizing the information to provide a coherent overview of the research landscape. Special attention is given to recurring arguments, methodological approaches, and the evolution of theoretical frameworks. The review also includes an examination of gaps and inconsistencies in the literature to suggest areas for further investigation.

Results and Discussion Historical Perspectives on Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism, often understood as a strict adherence to traditional Islamic principles and laws, has roots that can be traced back to various historical and ideological developments. The concept of returning to a pure form of Islam has long been present within the Muslim world, but it gained significant traction in the 20th century amidst the backdrop of colonialism, political instability, and socio-economic changes (Kiçmari, 2023). These upheavals created a fertile ground for fundamentalist ideologies to take hold, as they offered a sense of identity and purpose in a rapidly changing world (Orekhovskaya et al., 2019; Ridho & Sabil, 2023). Early works in this field explore the emergence of these movements, highlighting how they sought to address the perceived moral and spiritual decline brought about by foreign domination and modernization (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Rahman, 2021).

Key historical figures and movements have played crucial roles in shaping Islamic fundamentalism. The Wahhabi movement, which emerged in the 18th century in what is now Saudi Arabia, is one of the earliest examples of fundamentalist ideology. Founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, this movement called for a return to the strict monotheistic worship and the rejection of practices considered innovations or deviations from early Islam (Qeyamuddin Ahmad, 2020). The Wahhabi movement gained political power through its alliance with the House of Saud, establishing a state governed by its principles (Peter

Mandaville, 2022). Similarly, the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, sought to reform society by promoting Islamic values and resisting Western influence. The Brotherhood's emphasis on social justice, education, and political activism made it a significant force in the Middle East (El Zalaf, 2022; Solomon & Tausch, 2020).

These early fundamentalist movements laid the groundwork for contemporary Islamic radicalism. The ideological foundations they established have been adapted and expanded upon by various groups in different contexts (Haramain et al., 2019; Raffie, 2022). In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS took these principles to new extremes, advocating for violent jihad and the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate. Their actions have had profound implications for international security and have drawn widespread condemnation (Lee et al., 2021; McKenna, 2021). The tactics and rhetoric employed by these radical groups have evolved, reflecting the changing dynamics of global politics and technology (Blumenthal, 2020; Kancherla, 2021). For instance, the use of social media for propaganda and recruitment has become a hallmark of modern radicalism, amplifying their reach and influence (Syahputra & Hamid, 2024).

Understanding the historical and ideological underpinnings of Islamic fundamentalism is crucial for addressing its contemporary manifestations. By examining the roots of these movements, we can gain insights into the factors that drive individuals and groups towards radical ideologies (Tibi, 2023). Socio-political and economic grievances, identity crises, and the search for meaning in a complex world are some of the common threads that run through the narratives of those drawn to fundamentalism (Mohiuddin, 2023; Westermeyer, 2021). This understanding can inform more effective counter-radicalization strategies, which must address not only the symptoms but also the root causes of extremism.

Contemporary responses to Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism vary widely, reflecting different national contexts and policy priorities. Some countries have adopted a hardline approach, focusing on military interventions and strict security measures (Clive Jones, 2020). Others have emphasized the importance of community engagement, education, and socio-economic development as means of preventing radicalization (Sas et al., 2020). International cooperation is also a key component, as the transnational nature of radical networks requires a coordinated global response (Develtere et al., 2021). The effectiveness of these strategies is a subject of ongoing debate, with successes and failures offering valuable lessons for future efforts.

Modern Manifestations of Islamic Radicalism

In contemporary contexts, Islamic radicalism has manifested in various forms, from political activism to violent extremism. This phenomenon is not monolithic, as it encompasses a wide range of activities and motivations, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and grievances of those involved (Sas et al., 2020; Tibi, 2023). Islamic radicalism has been influenced by historical, political, and socio-economic factors that shape the ideologies and actions of its adherents (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Irawan & Arifin, 2021; Mohiuddin, 2023; Peels & Kindermann, 2022). This complexity necessitates a multifaceted approach to understanding and addressing the root causes and manifestations of radicalism.

One significant factor in the development of radical ideologies has been geopolitical conflicts. The Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989) is often cited as a turning point, where the influx of foreign fighters and the involvement of various states created a breeding ground for extremist ideologies. The war not only galvanized a generation of fighters but also provided them with the experience, networks, and resources to continue their activities beyond Afghanistan (Afridi et al., 2022; Hauner, 2019). Similarly, the Iraq War (2003-2011) contributed to the destabilization of the region, creating power vacuums and fostering sectarian violence, which extremist groups exploited to further their agendas (DeFronzo, 2018; Fawcett, 2023).

Domestically, issues such as authoritarianism and economic disenfranchisement have also played a crucial role in the rise of radical ideologies. In many countries, repressive regimes have stifled political dissent and marginalized certain groups, leading to frustration and anger among the populace (Shboul, 2020; Solomon & Tausch, 2020). Economic hardship, lack of opportunities, and social inequalities further exacerbate these feelings, making radical ideologies appealing as a means of seeking justice and change (Irawan & Arifin, 2021; Luqiu & Yang, 2020). The promise of empowerment and purpose offered by extremist groups can attract individuals who feel alienated and disenfranchised.

Studies on extremist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, provide valuable insights into their recruitment strategies and ideological frameworks. Al-Qaeda, for instance, has utilized a decentralized structure, allowing local affiliates to operate independently while adhering to a common ideological vision. This flexibility has enabled Al-Qaeda to adapt to changing circumstances and sustain its operations across different regions (Kancherla, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; McKenna, 2021). ISIS, on the other hand, has been noted for its sophisticated use of propaganda and social media to recruit members and spread its message. By leveraging modern communication technologies, ISIS has been able to reach a global audience and inspire attacks far beyond its immediate geographical base (Elemanya, 2023; Kancherla, 2021; McKenna, 2021).

The impact of globalized communication technologies on extremist activities cannot be understated. The internet and social media platforms have revolutionized the way extremist groups operate, offering unprecedented opportunities for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination. These technologies allow for the rapid dissemination of radical ideologies, reaching potential recruits across the globe. Online forums, encrypted messaging apps, and social media networks provide a sense of community and support for individuals who might be isolated in their offline lives, reinforcing their radical beliefs and encouraging them to take action (Nickerson, 2019; Rezaei et al., 2019; Syahputra & Hamid, 2024).

Addressing the challenge of Islamic radicalism requires a comprehensive understanding of its multifaceted nature. It is essential to recognize the interplay of global and local factors, the historical and contemporary contexts, and the diverse motivations and grievances that drive individuals towards radical ideologies. By examining the literature on this topic, policymakers, scholars, and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to counter radicalization, address its root causes, and promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

Comparative Analysis with Other Forms of Fundamentalism

To provide a broader perspective, this research includes comparative analyses of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism with other forms of religious and ideological fundamentalism. By exploring these comparisons, we can gain a deeper understanding of the unique attributes and commonalities shared among diverse fundamentalist movements. This comparative approach not only enriches our comprehension of Islamic fundamentalism but also situates it within the larger context of global fundamentalist phenomena.

One key aspect of this comparison is the examination of Christian fundamentalism. Like Islamic fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism is characterized by a strict adherence to perceived traditional religious beliefs and practices. Both movements often resist modern secular influences and advocate for a return to what they consider the true principles of their faiths. However, the historical and cultural contexts in which these movements arise create significant differences in their expressions and impacts on society (Marsden, 2022; Perry et al., 2022).

Similarly, Hindu fundamentalism offers another point of comparison. Hindu fundamentalists, much like their Islamic and Christian counterparts, strive to preserve and enforce a particular interpretation of their religious traditions. This movement often emerges in response to perceived threats to cultural and religious identity (Ahmed & Bashirov, 2019; Muhammad Umer Hayat, 2022; Wilfred, 2021). By comparing these forms of fundamentalism, we can identify patterns in how religious identity and cultural preservation play crucial roles in the development and sustainment of fundamentalist ideologies.

In addition to religious fundamentalism, the research also considers ideological fundamentalism, such as political radicalism. Ideological fundamentalists, whether motivated by nationalism, communism, or other political ideologies, share with religious fundamentalists a dogmatic commitment to their beliefs (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Ridho & Sabil, 2023; Shboul, 2020). This comparison allows for an exploration of how fundamentalist attitudes and behaviors can transcend religious boundaries and manifest in purely ideological contexts. Understanding these parallels broadens the scope of our analysis and highlights the pervasive nature of fundamentalist thought.

Impacts on Society and Politics

The literature also explores the socio-political impacts of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, shedding light on the far-reaching consequences of these movements. Scholars have delved into how fundamentalist ideologies influence domestic policies, shaping the legislative and administrative landscape of nations. These movements often push for the implementation of Sharia law or other religiously inspired policies, which can lead to significant changes in governance structures and legal frameworks. This influence extends beyond mere policy changes, impacting the broader socio-political fabric of societies where these movements gain traction (Peels & Kindermann, 2022; Ridho & Sabil, 2023; Shboul, 2020).

Additionally, the literature examines the effects of Islamic fundamentalism on international relations. Countries grappling with radicalism often find themselves navigating complex diplomatic challenges, as they must address concerns from the global community

regarding human rights and security. The presence of fundamentalist groups can strain international alliances and necessitate a recalibration of foreign policy strategies. For instance, states might face pressure to align their policies with international norms or risk isolation and sanctions, highlighting the intricate interplay between domestic radicalism and global diplomacy (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Peels & Kindermann, 2022; Rezaei et al., 2019; Shboul, 2020).

Social cohesion is another critical area impacted by Islamic fundamentalism, as highlighted in various studies. The rise of radical ideologies can deepen societal divisions, fostering an environment of mistrust and conflict between different religious and ethnic groups. This polarization can undermine efforts to build inclusive, harmonious communities, leading to increased incidents of discrimination, violence, and social unrest. Researchers emphasize the need to understand these dynamics to develop effective strategies for promoting social cohesion and resilience in the face of radical influences (Akhmetova & Jaafar, 2020; Faiq, 2021; Piwko, 2021).

The research also considers the effects of fundamentalist ideologies on governance. These movements often challenge existing political systems, advocating for an alternative model based on their interpretation of Islamic principles. This can result in clashes with secular authorities and democratic institutions, leading to political instability and power struggles. The push for a theocratic governance model can erode democratic norms, limit freedoms, and restrict the rights of minority groups, posing significant challenges to maintaining a pluralistic and democratic society (Peels & Kindermann, 2022; Shboul, 2020).

Human rights are profoundly affected by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, as documented in numerous studies. Fundamentalist movements frequently promote restrictive interpretations of religious texts that curtail individual freedoms, particularly those of women and minority groups. This can manifest in discriminatory laws and practices, such as gender segregation, limitations on freedom of expression, and persecution of religious minorities (Orekhovskaya et al., 2019; Ridho & Sabil, 2023; Shboul, 2020). Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing policies and interventions that protect human rights and promote equality in affected regions.

Finally, the role of Islamic fundamentalism in shaping public opinion and policy responses is a key focus of the literature. The spread of radical ideologies can influence public perceptions and attitudes, often through sophisticated propaganda and communication strategies. This can lead to heightened fear and suspicion of Muslim communities, as well as increased support for hardline policies and security measures (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; McKenna, 2021; Rezaei et al., 2019). Policymakers must navigate these complex dynamics, balancing the need for security with the imperative to protect civil liberties and foster social integration (Sas et al., 2020). By examining these multifaceted impacts, the literature provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for addressing the socio-political consequences of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism.

Debates and Controversies

The research identifies and discusses major scholarly debates and controversies related to Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. These debates encompass a wide range

of issues, starting with differing interpretations of religious texts. Scholars argue about the extent to which certain interpretations of the Quran and Hadith can be linked to radical ideologies (Akhmetova & Jaafar, 2020; Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Ridho & Sabil, 2023; Shboul, 2020). Some researchers emphasize a literalist approach to these texts, while others argue for a more contextual understanding that takes into account historical and cultural nuances (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Shboul, 2020). This divergence in interpretation forms the basis for many academic discussions on the roots of radicalism within Islamic thought.

Another significant area of debate is the role of external influences, such as foreign interventions and global political dynamics, in fostering Islamic radicalism. Some scholars argue that Western military interventions in Muslim-majority countries, economic sanctions, and political meddling have exacerbated feelings of injustice and humiliation, leading to a rise in radical sentiments (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Piwko, 2021; Rezaei et al., 2019). Others contend that internal socio-political factors, such as corruption, authoritarianism, and economic disparity within Muslim-majority countries, play a more critical role in driving radicalization (Al-Bulushi, 2022; Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Peels & Kindermann, 2022). This debate highlights the complexity of identifying the primary catalysts for radical ideologies.

The socio-political factors driving radicalization form another core aspect of scholarly discussions. Researchers explore how socio-economic conditions, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education, contribute to the appeal of radical movements (Muhammad Umer Hayat, 2022; Orekhovskaya et al., 2019; Sas et al., 2020). Additionally, political repression and the lack of democratic freedoms are seen as significant factors that push individuals towards radical groups as a form of resistance (Shboul, 2020). This perspective emphasizes the need for comprehensive socio-political reforms to address the root causes of radicalization.

Divergent viewpoints within the academic community further complicate the discourse on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. Some scholars advocate for a securitized approach, emphasizing the need for robust counter-terrorism measures and military interventions to combat radical groups (Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Peels & Kindermann, 2022). In contrast, others argue for a more holistic strategy that includes dialogue, community engagement, and addressing underlying grievances (Syahputra & Hamid, 2024). This division reflects broader debates about the most effective methods for tackling radicalism and ensuring long-term stability.

The research also provides an overview of ongoing debates about the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to Islamic radicalism. It highlights the interplay between ideological, socio-economic, and political factors in shaping radical movements. By examining the multi-faceted nature of these issues, the research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding and addressing radicalization. Scholars from fields such as political science, sociology, religious studies, and international relations contribute to a richer and more nuanced understanding of these complex phenomena (Ahmed & Bashirov, 2019; Bayani & Serajzadeh, 2023; Piwko, 2021).

The research sheds light on the major scholarly debates and controversies surrounding Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism. It reveals the diverse perspectives and arguments that characterize academic discussions on this topic. By identifying and

analyzing these debates, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of radicalization and the challenges involved in addressing it. It underscores the need for continued scholarly inquiry and dialogue to develop effective and sustainable solutions to the issues at hand

Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive review of the literature on Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, shedding light on the historical, ideological, socio-political, and economic factors that have contributed to the development and spread of these movements. Islamic fundamentalism, rooted in history, gained traction in the 20th century due to colonialism, political instability, and socio-economic changes. Movements like Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood shaped modern radicalism, offering identity and purpose, leading to groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Islamic radicalism today ranges from political activism to violent extremism. Geopolitical conflicts like the Afghan-Soviet and Iraq Wars, alongside domestic authoritarianism and economic disenfranchisement, have fueled radical ideologies, amplified by modern communication technologies like social media.

Comparing Islamic fundamentalism with Christian and Hindu fundamentalism reveals common patterns of resisting modern secular influences and seeking a return to traditional values, highlighting the universal nature of fundamentalist thought. Islamic fundamentalism impacts domestic policies, international relations, social cohesion, governance, and human rights, often leading to changes in governance, challenges to democratic institutions, and increased social polarization. Key debates focus on interpreting religious texts, external influences, and socio-political drivers of radicalization. Divergent views on counterradicalization strategies range from securitized to holistic, community-based methods, reflecting ongoing discourse on effective solutions.

Understanding the historical and ideological underpinnings of Islamic fundamentalism is crucial for developing effective counter-radicalization strategies. Addressing the root causes, such as socio-economic grievances and identity crises, is essential for long-term solutions. The study underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches and continued scholarly inquiry to develop sustainable strategies to combat radicalization and promote peaceful, inclusive societies. Future research should focus on the evolving tactics and rhetoric of radical groups, the impact of global communication technologies, and the effectiveness of various counter-radicalization strategies. Comparative studies with other forms of fundamentalism can provide further insights into common patterns and unique attributes of radical movements. Understanding these dynamics is vital for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners working to address the challenges posed by fundamentalism and radicalism in the modern world.

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