Fundamentalist Extremism and Politics

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I will be addressing the following questions:

- What is fundamentalism and what are its causes?

- What is the nature of fundamentalist politics?

- What is their agenda?

- When and why does fundamentalist extremism become violent?

- What can governments do to mitigate or prevent fundamentalist violence?

- The definition and causes of fundamentalism are interrelated:

- My definition: Fundamentalism, is a set of religious beliefs and practices that evolved or was designed to defend religion against secularism and modernity by rejecting both secularism and modernity.

- Almond et. al. (2003) definition: a discernable pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors.

Characteristics of fundamentalism

- Anti-modern
- Boundaries
- Elect membership
- Inerrancy of and focus on religious texts
- Selective emphasis on some parts of religious texts
- Theological innovation
- Black and white view of the world

- Millennialism
- Persecution
- Authoritarianism
- No public-private sphere distinction
- Hierarchical and patriarchic relations between the genders
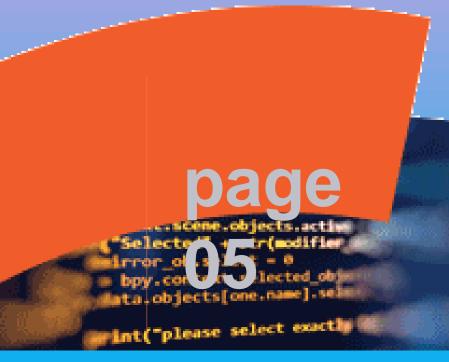- Myth of the golden age

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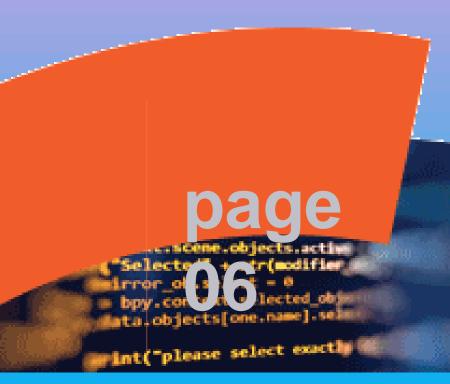- Black and white view of the world

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- Fundamentalism is a reaction against rationalism, modernity, and secularism.

- Consequently fundamentalist movements often feel threatened by many aspects of modernity and actively oppose them.

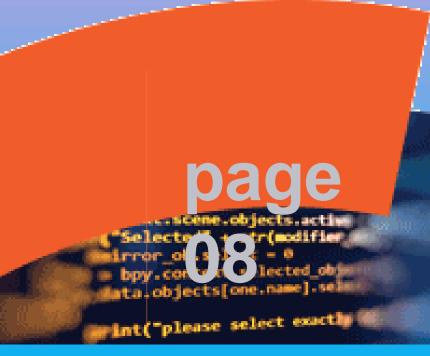- This determines much of their political agenda and behavior.

- Fundamentalist political agendas vary but they all have the following in common:

  - Designed to preserve the religion against the threats of modernity and secularism.

  - The world has left its proper course the following are to be blamed:

    - Secularists.
    - Members of other religions.
    - Members of their own religion who do not accept the fundamentalist ideology.

  - Their agendas matter deeply to them, so they are unlikely to concede or compromise.

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- Fundamentalist have the following type of political agenda when they belong to a country's majority religion:

    - To bring society and politics in their country in line with their fundamentalists ideologies.

    - In many cases, the long term agenda is to transform the country into a religious state.

    - Often more modest goals are set in the short term because forming a religious state can under some circumstances be unrealistic as a short term goal.

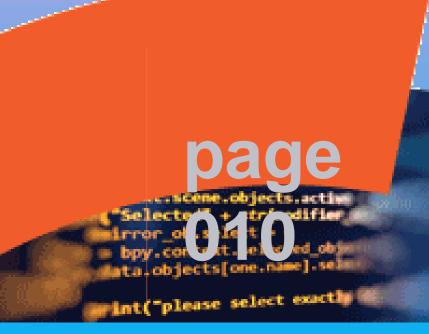Bar-Ilan University
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- Fundamentalist have the following type of political agenda when they belong to a country's minority religion:

  - Set up closed homogeneous community for members only.

  - Seek equal treatment and government benefits.

  - Seek special privileges.

- ## Strategies

  - Strategies largely influenced by the political opportunity structure.

  - To proactively set the terms of political debate.

  - Seek to control or influence religious authority and institutions.

  - In democracies, if they have enough support, form political parties which pursue their agenda.

  - When they are shut our from the political process, violence is more likely (more on this later).

- Strategies

  - Engage in community charity work by providing services such as education and welfare, especially in locales where the government provides inadequate services.

  - International coordination and assistance.

- Violence is largely determined by structural factors
    - "World renouncers" rarely get violent when left alone.
    - Most violence is from those who have a political agenda to change the nature of a country's politics and society.
    - Fundamentalists prefer peaceful and legal political tactics.
        - As long as these tactics are allowed.
        - As long as these tactics are seen as potentially successful in the long term.

- "War is the continuation of politics through other means" –Carl von Clausewitz

  - When three factors are present violence becomes likely:

    - The political agenda cannot be achieved peacefully.

    - The political group is unwilling or unable to compromise, give up, or put off its agenda.

    - The group has the means to engage in violence.

  - This structure makes fundamentalist violence more likely

    - Fundamentalists seek change which is often too radical to gain support from a majority.

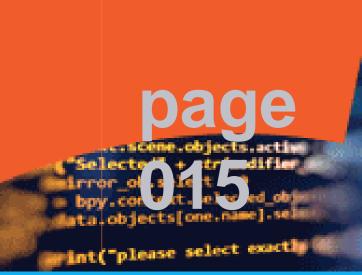   - Fundamentalists are unwilling to compromise or give up their agenda.

- Promote religious freedom for fundamentalists in return for fundamentalists guaranteeing that they will not infringe upon the freedoms of non-fundamentalists.

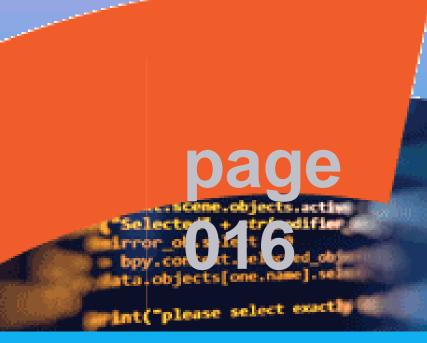 - Simple in theory, difficult in practice.

- Religious freedom for fundamentalists mitigates their perception of threat.

  - This freedom includes.

    - Allowing them their modes of behavior and dress as well as their institutions.

    - Fundamentalist control the education of their children.

    - A promise that secular agendas will not encroach upon their religion.

    - Government willingness to make religious exceptions to generally applicable laws which encroach upon their religious beliefs whenever possible.

    - Essentially, limited internal autonomy.

- The government must be seen as having a clear and consistent policy of accommodating fundamentalists to whatever extent is possible within this framework.

  - This is important because there will be instances where a religious accommodation is not possible.
    - it is critical that the fundamentalists perceive these instances as a minor exception within an agreement which in which they have a stake and from which they greatly benefit.

  - This agreement requires active and explicit support from both the government and the religious leaders of the fundamentalist movement.

A political agenda to address fundamentalism

- This arrangement is similar to what exists with a number of "world renouncing" sects in a number of countries.

- It provides a framework and a tradition of cooperation to manage inevitable tensions.

- One of the best strategies to counter fundamentalists is to force them to defend their ideas in a free marketplace of ideas.

- In brief this creates a strategy with the following components

  - Remove as much as possible the perceived threat of secular encroachment.

  - Place fundamentalists in a situation where they must compete with religious moderates in a free marketplace of ideas.

  - Create a structural situation where fundamentalists see it as being in their benefit to cooperate.
    - Equal rights to other religious groups.
    - Equal benefits to other religious groups.