

Religious fundamentalism' and democracy' comparison essay

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Over the years, religious fundamentalism has become a notable ideology in the political arena. Despite the swift development of this phenomenon, this subject has received little attention in terms of research in its relationship with democratic issues. This paper will add to the existing comparative literature in a bid to understand the subject by developing various research questions and possible responses.

First, this essay will establish whether religious fundamentalism pursues a relevant role within the existing democratic space. Second, the paper will evaluate the possible comparisons among the political ideologies of various fundamentalist groups. Lastly, this essay will examine the impact that these religious movements have on their political ideologies with regard to the quality of democracy and public expectations. In response to these considerations, this essay will give an analysis of the key concepts designed in comparative studies concerning the relationship between religious fundamentalism and democracy. This essay will show that despite the efforts by religious fundamentalists to effect change in democratic politics, there has been no substantial impact on both social and political structures. This assertion holds partly because the religious fundamentalists have been prevented from undertaking their objectives by the mainstream institutional powers.

The field of political science has developed various definitions of the concept of religious fundamentalism. Its definition is greatly influenced by its application, area of the application, and the role intended to accomplish. In this case, the definition provided is related to the groups' ideology and

objective. First, the definition reacts to the alienation and marginalization of religion. Fundamentalist groups fight to restore the relevance of the church and establish its purpose in society (Fridell 35).

They strive to conserve certain religious content, beliefs, traditions, and norms. Their behavioral requirements take the form of the group rather than an individual in a bid to attain a powerful and conforming following.

However, religious fundamentalism as an ideology entails following strictly the basic regulations and doctrines of a given religion fashioned to protest against the radical restructuring of the historical faith by the modernists.

It is important to note that religious fundamentalist groups take different forms depending on their ideological perspectives. For instance, some purport to represent and promote the will of the people, but their agenda is to subject it in their movement teachings and ideologies. Such fundamentalist doctrines entail manipulating the society to follow principles, which their faith perceives as necessary. They take part in democratic matters not because they trust that process, but because democracy facilitates their objectives via the opportunities of free speech (Kaufmann 54). Nonetheless, some religious influences embrace democracy.

On the other hand, democracy is an ideal way of sustaining justice, freedom, and equality. Democratic regimes, whether secular or aligned with religion, should guide all fundamentalist groups through uniform conditions in a bid to facilitate democracy (Kamrava 101). Everything related to religious fundamentalism allows it to support democracy. However, the relations of

the fundamentalist with the authorities define how religious movements approach the development of democracy. In most cases, the use of violence to achieve groups' objective has been largely controversial. When liberals use violence to achieve democratic ends, they tend to be justified of their actions, but it is always different for fundamentalists when they use the same tactics (Haugen 78). They are labeled as intolerant and selfish in their agenda.

Most comparative studies have shown a significant relationship and the essence of compatibility between religious fundamentalism and democracy. What has been lacking in the comparative literature is demonstrating how these fundamentalist movements approach their roles with respect to their strategies and political expectations (Farmer 65). In the democratic regimes, religious fundamentalists adopt a bottom-top approach due to the opportunities offered to the group by freedom of speech and civil rights. Their initial strategy adopts a non-violent model with the aim of attaining hegemony. The right-wing authorities prevent religious fundamentalists from acting assertively in political issues by claiming that they lack relevant political exposure (Porter 53).

The foundations of many religious movements were often based on reclaiming the values of the religion lost to modernity. Most parts of the world and particularly the United States experienced the resurgence of fundamentalist movements in the late 1960s following the socio-economic challenges. The American Christian Right movement (CR) rejoined the public realm in the late 1960s. Although CR was influenced by the economic and

social crisis of that time, it cannot be termed as a reactive strategy (Driessen 67). This group was devoted to democratic issues such as women's suffrage, abortion, and education for all.

With time, CR evolved to a liberally centered movement, especially when its leadership became exposed to democratic politics. Despite its effort to represent the society in the pursuit of democracy, its outcomes were limited, and up to date, they remain poor. The administrative acts championed by CR, particularly in the area of health, education, and infrastructure, were challenged by radical movements, and some were erased by the court system.

Most right-wing protagonists will not hesitate to show how fundamentalist movements pose threats to democracy. It is evident that fundamentalism aims at triumphing by establishing an international following in a bid to restore the morals lost to secularism. Religious fundamentalists participate in activities that governments fail to do for their people, particularly in marginalized areas. On a humanitarian basis, fundamentalist movements engage in voluntary activities to assist societies that have been neglected by mainstream institutions (McCullough 54). This aspect is a show of patriotism and searches for democracy for all.

Nevertheless, religious movements have been viewed as outsiders and anti-nationals by the state machinery. Partly, this aspect underscores what compels some fundamentalist groups to retaliate via using force and the media when governments show no efforts to facilitate religious expression.

In most cases, religiously related violence is just but mere fabrications propagated by the state authorities through the media in a bid to derail their objectives (Choueiri 54).

Fundamentalist groups often initiate a religious tone when addressing society (Rubinstein, 13). Several important aspects drive their bid to stage into the political process. Their efforts target not at manipulating the mainstream society to assuming ideals arising from religious dogma, but at helping their people to achieve civil rights that are enjoyed by the majority. The political ideals that they pursue do not demean their roles in religion since they are just driven by their fundamentalist commitment. The factors of religious dogma, which distinguish the religious groups from one another, are the cause of conflicts that prevent democracy (Clanton 44).

At this point, it is now possible to respond to the three questions raised at the beginning of this essay. First, it is evident that all religious fundamentalists have played a significant role in the political spheres where they are established. With time, they have acquired an important portion of power within the ruling authorities. They also influence the decision-making process and participate in the political agenda. It should be noted that not all fundamentalist movements have a detrimental influence on democracy (Vincent 67). Most of the issues raised are linked to religious expression in the public spectrum. These issues include freedom for women to put on headscarves in public domains, fighting for the recognition of religious schools by the government, and discouraging immoral practices such as abortion (Ozzano 344)

Therefore, religious movements are largely compatible with democracy. In response to the second consideration, different religious fundamentalist groups differ in terms of organizational structure and cohesion. Although these movements present similar ideological trajectories, some tend to take a peaceful process of mobilization, and others, especially those aligned with an ethnic-nationalist identity, tend to adopt violent mobilization (Marcovitz 87). Although most governments tend to be friendly to these fundamentalist groups, they are always keen to ensure that their outcomes are limited in scope.

Lastly, fundamentalist movements' influence on the quality of democracy tends to have minimal outcomes. This assertion is partly because most fundamentalist groups that seek to address religious issues through the ballot happen to be the minority. In the cases where they manage to ascend to influential positions and manage to initiate a fundamentalist policy, it is easily repealed by the majority institutional powers. In addition, most fundamentalist objectives are long-term, and they aim at altering the institutional and legal frameworks (Ball, Dagger, and O'Neil 35). Such objectives include the revision of school curricula and the government support for religious schools. Thus, the impact of fundamentalist movements on the quality of democracy might be felt in the future and in the short term in regimes that lack defined political structures.

The ambitions and intentions of religious fundamentalists regarding the compatibility of religion and democracy have been misinterpreted. Religious fundamentalism is a legitimate way of expression for those who are

alienated from mainstream society. In most cases, it emerges from below, and it can imply that there is a need for action to put things in order in a particular society. Therefore, dialogue to understand the issues raised by fundamentalists is necessary for a bid to avoid what is termed as intolerant retaliation. Democratic regimes should exercise the core principles of democracy, which entail letting individuals express their beliefs and faiths without the fear of victimization and intimidation and thus allow fundamentalists to air their views freely.

Religious fundamentalists should take note that no form of religious dogma should alter or endanger the essentials of humanism, which form the grounds of democracy. In addition, fundamentalist groups should be aware that it is not their role to determine the world order, but they can contribute to the shaping of democracy via their moral commitment. On the other hand, political parties must not view religion as an elevated platform of democracy. Fundamentalists have the right to express their beliefs, just like everyone else in society. With the suggested approaches, people will live in harmony, as each side will understand its roles in ensuring a cohesive society.

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