

# Religious Fundamentalism among Christian and Islam Students of University

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University of Mysore, Karnataka, India***Abstract**

*This study is aimed to revisit the previous one, which measures the level of religious fundamentalism (RF) among Christian and Islam. The socio-cultural background, such as national integration in Western Europe or the economic gap between Muslim in Europe and the U.S. is likely to give a different output of research. The difference of RF among Christian and Islam with the Indonesian background where religiosity of both religions is high, and they are not attached to the particular racial group become a novelty. A significant difference between Christian and Islam is revealed in this study. Islam students are higher at their RF level than Christian ones.*

**Keywords: Religious fundamentalism, Christian, Islam, socio-cultural background.****Introduction**

The measurement of Religious Fundamentalism (RF) among mainstream religions such as Christian, Islam, Jewish, Buddhism, and Hinduism has been conducted for a few times. In 2007, Pew Research Centre issued the scriptural literalism report for Islam, Christian and Catholic, which showed that 50% of Muslims believes that their holy book is the word of God and right. It was then followed with Christian, Catholic, and secular of which percentage are respectively 48%, 25%, 9%<sup>1</sup>. Altemeyer revealed that Islam is the highest and then Christian, Catholic and, Jews consecutively in their RF score<sup>2</sup> (Paloutzian, 2005).

Based on the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Muslims are the most dogmatic about religion, and this attitude is followed by Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist. While in the conception of God, Protestant reaches the highest percentage, which is consecutively followed by Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish. Protestant and Muslim have almost similar proportion (84% and 85% respectively) of the belief in heaven, and the hell<sup>3</sup>.

- 1 Pew Research Centre, "Muslim Americans, May 2007, Pew Research Centre, March 2007.
- 2 Altemeyer measured the difference of RF to some religions after completing their revised scale but didn't mention their comparison.
- 3 this survey was mainly conducted to find out the level of RF, but it is methodologically different from Altemeyer's study. "Belief in heaven and hell" is one of the survey questions similar to one of RF measurement items.

The consistency of both results cannot be yet generalised in a different locale. Gillum (2013) concluded that no difference is found in RF between American Muslims and Christians. She, furthermore, explains that the less gap between American Islam and Christians is due to the socio-economic condition between Islam in the U.S. and Islam in Europe. The level of economy and education of Islam America is better than the average American. Low-skilled labour immigration mostly migrates to Western Europe.

They have economic issue and problem to integrate with the indigenous European. Islam-American National Opinion Survey (MANOS) state that religious fundamentalism level among Muslims and Christians in the U.S. are almost equal (Gillum, 2013). On the contrary, Koopmans (2013) found that religious fundamentalism among Islam immigrants in Western Europe is strikingly higher than that among Christian Europeans. He argues that fundamentalism is associated with the feeling of threat (his group is threatened by outsiders).

Politic, Socio economic, Cultural aspects are considered as the main factors influencing the collective attitude such as religious fundamentalism. Indonesia, which shares hardly similarities in terms of anything with U.S. and European countries becomes a captivating background to find out if both Christians and Muslims share the same level of RF. As one of the religious countries in the world, religion for Indonesian takes the most of their lifestyle and social life. Their formal ones are, in fact, not originally from their ancestor but imported. Two religions highlighted in this study, Islam and Christian, are spread through trading and war. Being well-known as pious and religiously devoted people, most Indonesians introduce religion and socialise it in the family from early childhood. It is different from the case in the U.S, and Western Europe where Muslims and Christians belong to two separate groups (indigenous and migrant), There is no particular group who belong to a specific religion. Based on this assumption, either Muslims or Christians have the nearly same level of religious fundamentalism, because innately they are religious regardless of what they believe.

Religious fundamentalism is perceived differently by different groups. Some people find

it has negative connotation while others seem to be otherwise because it is considered as to how consistent and robust someone holds their belief. The former may assume such a way because of some psychological effects of RF. Altemeyer etc. (1995) conclude that RF significantly correlated with right-wing authoritarianism, religious emphasis as a child, religious ethnocentrism, dogmatism, racial/ethnic prejudice, hostility toward homosexual. The unfavourable attitude toward RF cannot be separated from public association with terrorism, radicalism, and religious violence. While in the other groups, RF is emphasised and becomes the indicator of one's full-fledged religiosity. It is highly valued for some people, especially religious group, when someone cast no doubt at all to spiritual teachings. However, religious fundamentalism as an ethical attitude is supposed to be considered as a neutral construct because cognitive dissonance might still happen, which lead to the discrepancy between belief and behavioural expression.

Any religions are not innately fundamentalism. Psychologically, RF is merely an attitude of which the magnitude can change. Therefore, data of the RF level will be likely to vary when conducted in a different context with the same category of subjects. RF become the centre of attraction from two different sides: 1) the impact of RF, 2) The causal factor forming RF. When it turns to be such an issue as prejudice, the rigidity of thinking, hostility, etc., the latter finally set to be central topics.

The aim of this research is, in general, to revisit the previous study on the difference of RF level between Christians and Muslims in the different context of place, culture, and time. In particular, it is intended to be the preliminary study for the next researcher to find the institutional effect, i.e. government intervention to religious teaching dissemination, the content of preach, religious traditions.

### **Religious Fundamentalism: Must Christians and Muslims Essentially Different?**

To commence the theoretical discussion on religious fundamentalism, it is necessarily anticipated by notifying that this study stands as a starting point in which is seen as one's attitude to his/her belief which is fundamental, intrinsic, essential, necessary,

and contains absolute truth on humanity and divine. It is taken and summarised from the widely used definition derived from Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992).

“The belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity”

RF is a psychological construction owned by every individual regardless of what they believe. Being present in any human being, we can even, then, measure its magnitude from atheists. It is, however, not about the content of religion but the way someone treats their belief using their cognitions, conations, and affections. Laythe distinguished fundamentalism from orthodoxy, which refers to what one believes rather than how they hold their faith. From this point of view, it can be concluded that religion doesn't serve as a control variable in measuring religious fundamentalism(Koopmans, 2013).

Within the realm of attitude, the behavioural manifestation of RF is still being intended (donation), which means that political issue and violence are not included. Many scholars associate RF with revivalism, Islamism, religiously inflicted violence, and radicalism. Koopmans (2013) argues that RF is possible to but must not be referred to the legitimization of violence religiously aimed.

Elucidating the manifestation of RF will be in line with narrating the formation of attitude. The parent is the primary agent who becomes the earliest figure forming children attitude. Values are cultivated in them, which contribute significantly to their position. Peer and mass media turn to be the agents building theirs. Ajzen (2001) elaborates the process of attitudinal formation into four kinds:

1. Classical conditioning: children are introduced with particular object/situation accompanied with favourable and unfavourable labelling.
2. Operant conditioning: learning process takes place by giving reward or punishment for certain behavior and attitudes.

3. Cognitive appraisal: application of reasoning and logical argument to convince someone to a particular object/situation

4. Observational learning: exposure of media or imitating specific behaviour which they find fashionable or attractive.

If we transform the explanation hereabove to the process of RF formation, it will be exactly like watching two different movies which have the same story. Altemeyer al. (2005) explain that parents are the first agents who instil values, which eventually affect one's attitude. The imposition on religion set of teachings to children from religious parents is unavoidable. One of their researches shows that atheist parents give freedom to their children to be religious or not. They, however, still have favorability to religions. It is followed, then, with peer and religion institutions that take part in the process. The acceptance and fulfilling need of affiliation turn people to be more attached to religion group. The frequency of attending mass, service, or any religious gathering strengthen one's spiritual attitude.

Proselytising and dogmatism are two means present in any religion which bring about RF. Rather than what their beliefs are, interpretation of holy books accompanied by the frequency of proselytising, and convincing religious argument are two essential factors heighten one's RF magnitude. People who attend regularly and frequently church or Islamic religious gathering doesn't always turn to be more fundamental if they receive only moderate spiritual messages. Otherwise, if someone is commonly exposed to the original religious message, they will be likely to be less tolerant in their religious attitude. The second one is the presentation of a preacher, which can elicit one's emotion and the cognitive rigidity, which perceives religion as logic flow. Religious teachings which are supposed to be multi interpretative are sometimes treated like single explanatory science. Consequently, when dealing with incompatibility between religion and science, fundamentalist picks the former over the latter.

Fundamentalism is omnipresent. Not only religions but whatever concept or philosophical thought are also likely to be labelled with it as long as the adherents hold them with strictness,

rigidity, fundamental, unchangeableness, and single interpretation. Religion is a neutral concept which can turn to be various expressions depending on the readings. Thus, the implementation of RF by people from diverse religions will eventually manifest identical reactions to the external world. As stated by Altemeyer (Paloutzian, 2005):

“Furthermore, one hears of “Islam fundamentalists” and “Hindu fundamentalists” as well as Christian ones these days. And one can speak of theological fundamentalists, cultural fundamentalists, and maybe even vegetarian fundamentalists. So, the term has many meanings, and arises in many contexts.”

**Method**

**Participants, Procedure, and Measurement Scales**

Subjects for data collection in this study are students of Medan Area University, North Sumatra, Indonesia, as many as five hundred twenty-three from August to September 2018. Demographically, the range of their age is 18-24, and it consists of four hundred women and a hundred twenty-three men. They belong to the different department such as Psychology, Law, Political Science, Agriculture, and Architecture. The classes in each department are randomly selected based on the proportion of class. Since the psychology department has the most students, the greatest number of subjects come from there as much as 271 while the other departments have

the rest: 34 agriculture, 90 law, 76political science, 52 architecture. The process of data collection was conducted after permission was granted from the university and took place during the class session. The distribution of religions of population is 67.1% Islam 23% Christians, 9% Catholic, 0,7% Buddhism, and 0,2% Hindu

The score for Religious Fundamentalism is obtained from Revised Religious Fundamentalism scale built by Altemeyer and Hunsberger with the validity of the revised RF Scale is 0.47 and reliability (R-values) is 0.91. The measure consists of 12 items which assesses how firmly individuals hold their belief that there is one set off religious teachings containing the basic and essential truth about humanity and God (Altemeyer et al., 2004).

**Result and Discussion**

This study was participated by 387 Muslim and 137 Christians. For further information, Islam in this study belongs to Sunni while Catholic is included in Christians since the number is not representative. The other religions are absence at the time data being collected. Both groups, Islam and Christian, belong to high RF (the lowest score is 12, and the highest one is 96). Means of RF difference is 2.68251in, which Islam subjects are more senior than Christian. Furthermore, the difference of RF between Christian and Islam is significant (p= .004) in which Muslims are higher in RF than Christians.

**Group Statistics and Independent Sample Test**

	Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	p
Religious Fundamentalism	Islam	387	75.9380	8.89584	.45220	2.932	.004
	Christian	137	73.2555	10.01985	.85605		

The result of the study has supported the previous research such as Pew Research Centre which reported in 2007 that Muslims are a little bit more fundamental than Christians (50%: 48%). However, this study is not the conclusion that Muslim is more crucial than Christian because the results of the similar research shows variety, e.g. level of RF is at least identical among Muslims and Christians in the

U.S. (Gillum, 2013)<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, RF is not innate in any religions and merely attitudinal construction,

4 Results from General Social Surveys and MANOS reveal that the general American population holds nearly similar levels of fundamentalist beliefs as Muslims, if not slightly more. Just over 57 per cent of the general American population believes that “right and wrong in U.S. law should be based on God’s laws,” compared to 49.3 per cent of U.S.-born Muslims and 45.6 of foreign-born Muslims.

which might not permanently linger in one's personality.

The religiosity of subjects from both groups is not measured, but from the high level of RF, it is confirmed that they hold their belief firmly. It is according to the earlier assumption that religious exposure they encounter from family, schools, mass media have moulded their religious attitude. Based on their personal information obtained during the data collection, 100% of the Christian subjects reported that they attend church regularly, and 100% of Islam subjects have regular gathering meeting beside their obligatory rituals.

The shortcoming of the current study is that the result cannot be compared with the previous one due to measurement and research method are different. The last RF measurement conducted by Pew Research Centre is the list of survey question which consists of a few similar items with the one built by Altemeyer et.al. The aspect of attitude there is just limited to conation such as believe in God or another higher power, heaven and hell, and scriptural literalism while the latter covers more completely (affection, conation, and cognition). In terms of the result, Pew Research Centre presents it descriptively (in percentage) while the current study is inferential. This methodological issue might still pose a similar question on whether Muslims and Christians are different in their RF level when the same survey is revisited with the other background.

Based on the result of the study, Muslim and Christian subjects are equally categorised as high-level RF. Their attitude to their religions is not moderate, which can be perceived as either serious concern or common phenomena. The former indicates the possibility of effect, which emerges from this religious attitude such as prejudice, religious ethnocentrism, hostility to LGBT and outgroup, and dogmatism. Moderation of religious view should be attempted by government or educational institution. When it comes to the latter, people might find it neutral or see it positively since holding belief actively is highly valued in some religious countries.

The most likely parts of this study to probe further are the cultural background and the content of religious preaching which create the differences to both religions. The religious exposure and

proselytising for any religions in Indonesia are socially encouraged and equally facilitated by government, parents, and education institute. It is different from the case in Western Europe and the USA, where the issues pertained migrant and local people, social integrations, racial prejudice, and outgroup-ingroup conflict. Indonesia, which culturally and politically different from them, is expected to be of no difference, in terms of RF, between Christians and Muslims.

For preliminary research, the next researcher can take a benefit from this result to find the causal factors of the RF difference among Muslim and Christian students within the Indonesian context. The discourses analysis on the proselytising process either in family or religion institutions can be based on this result.

Muslim students significantly different from Christian ones indicate the differences in the process of proselytising and emphasised religious messages. The authors cannot make any assumption to how they have been happening to the subjects. Discourses or content analysis are necessary to investigate the religion messages passed in the family context, worshipping place, and peer interaction.

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