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# Rethinking Islamic Studies

## *From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*

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# Who Are the Islamists?

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Bruce Lawrence famously noted that fundamentalism grows out of the encounter with modernity. It is not the atavistic movement that unsympathetic observers often take it to be, but rather a product of modern processes such as colonialism and postcolonial state formation, industrialization and economic inequality, and contemporary shifts in popular identity. The social bases of fundamentalist movements in Muslim societies, he argues, are consistent with this modern context: "The groups that have mobilized as fundamentalists are not the most wretched but those who have had some contact with the West, who understand the horizons of possibility denied them by the inequities of the world system."[1]

Lawrence bases this observation in part on sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim's widely cited 1980 article in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, which examined the social background of several dozen imprisoned Egyptian Islamists.[2] Ibrahim's study has served as a sort of license for endless generalizations about the social bases of Islamist activism worldwide, many of them far less well-informed than Lawrence's observations, which grow out of his long and far-flung experiences with Muslim communities around the planet. But for all the interest that scholars have shown in Islamist movements, there is relatively little empirical analysis of its social origins. Several important ethnographic field studies have noted that Salafi leaders in Jordan are from poorer neighborhoods,[3] and that Egyptian Islamists are primarily from lower-middle-class communities.[4] Systematic data on this subject is less well known and has never been subjected to a meta-analysis of the sort that we present in this paper, which reviews biographical encyclopedia entries, quantitative case studies, and survey data to review the state of our knowledge about the social bases of Islamist leaders, activists, and supporters.

For present purposes we use a simple definition of *Islamist* that is parallel to Lawrence's more general approach to the concept of *fundamentalist:* a person or movement expressing "the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced."[5] In

the case of Muslims, these demands seek to implement particular provisions of the Shari'a as the basis for the nation-state. Notice that this definition makes no distinction between those who seek to do so through violent means and those who repudiate violence, despite the competition and hostility between Islamist movements with varying strategies. It makes no distinction between different sects and schools within Islam. However, this definition of Islamist does distinguish between those who seek to establish the Shari'a through the state and those who seek to establish it outside of the state—through a renovation of personal piety, for example. It distinguishes between those who favor a scripturalist interpretation of Shari'a and those who defend the incorporation of local customs into Islamic practice. It distinguishes between those who believe that the Shari'a contains within it all the basic principles needed for governance and those who believe that the Shari'a is silent on important topics of governance and leaves these to human ingenuity.[6]

With this definition in mind, let us turn to three categories of Islamists: leaders, activists, and supporters. We find that Islamist leaders are split into two categories, one group trained in secular schools and one in religious seminaries, many of them from provincial backgrounds. Activists, on the other hand, largely received secular schooling, with increasingly diverse levels of education and varied social backgrounds. Supporters, in elections and surveys, tend to be less educated, poorer, and more rural in some—but not all—countries. The best correlate for Islamist attitudes is country of residence rather than socioeconomic characteristics within any given country.

### *Islamist Leaders*

There appear to be two typical careers of Islamist leaders. One is epitomized by Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Banna came from a clerical family—his father taught at the local mosque—but received his advanced education at a secular school, the Teacher's College in Cairo. In college he was exposed to Western scientific training and also to European accounts of the rise and fall of Western civilization. As a result of this contact with Western education, he become more overtly activist, helping to found a Young Men's Muslim Association in 1927 and the following year, after his graduation, creating the organization that would become the Muslim Brotherhood. After several years of cultural activism in defense of Islam, he turned in the early 1930s to political activism, seeking to implement the Shari'a through state intervention in addition to changes in personal mores.

The second career is epitomized by Imam Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989) of Iran. He was born into a devout family in a provincial town, where social practices were regulated in large part by religious principles. He was trained first in traditional religious schools, not in state-run elementary schools, and then in a recently rejuvenated institution of advanced religious training, the seminaries of Qom. Khomeini turned to antimonarchic activism at Qom against the wishes of the leaders of the institution, who placed him under virtual house arrest for several years in the late 1950s. Even during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, in which Khomeini was the undisputed leader, many of his fellow Shi'a Muslim theologians were less than eager to participate in antimonarchic activism, a position for which Khomeini frequently chided them.



These two career paths overlap in the provincial roots of the Islamist leaders, their advanced educations, and their defense of Islam against encroachments by Western culture. However, Banna, following the first career path, turned to Islamism as a response to contact with Western culture, primarily through secular higher education. Khomeini, on the second career path, turned to Islamism as a response to traditional Islamic scholarship, which he saw as ill suited to modern challenges.

Of the forty-two contemporary Islamist leaders profiled in the *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* and the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*—we define contemporary as 1970 and later—about half conform to each type (see table 1).[7] It is striking that almost all of these leaders have advanced educations, a relatively rare accomplishment in Muslim-majority societies, as everywhere. Only two have little or no advanced education: Zaynab al-Ghazali of Egypt and Juma Namangani of Uzbekistan. Al-Ghazali attended public high school and received certificates in several Islamic subjects, while Namangani appears to have moved quickly from Soviet military service to Islamist revolutionary movements in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. As opposed to the internationally renowned figures in our sample, however, Islamist leaders at the local level may be more likely to lack advanced educations.[8] Approximately twenty-one of forty-two Islamist leaders in our sample attended secular universities with degrees in engineering, management, law, philosophy, and other fields. For these scholars, as for Banna, Islamist activism represents a response to the westernized approach to knowledge that is dominant at secular universities. 'Abbasi Madani of Algeria, for example, who earned a doctorate in England, wrote a book titled *The Crisis of Modern Thought and the Justifications of the Islamic Solution* (1987), in which he identified Islamist activism explicitly as a response to Western ideologies: "By their action, they have put us in a situation of reaction."[9] Similarly Abdessalam Yassine, who was trained in French colonial schools in Morocco (as well as having an Islamic education), began his book *Islamicizing Modernity* (1998) with a discussion of the work of French sociologist Alain Touraine, in which he attempts to sift through the positive and negative aspects of Western notions of modernity.[10]

This finding corresponds closely with case studies of Islamist leaders in several settings. Secularly educated professionals constituted two-thirds of leaders

TABLE 1. Advanced Education of Selected Islamist Leaders

| *Secular Education* | *Seminary Education* | *Both/Neither* |
|---|---|---|
| Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud, Iran, 1956, engineering | ʿAbdel Rahman, Omar, Egypt, 1938 | ʿAzzam, ʿAbdullah, Palestine, 1941 |
| Bin Laden, Osama, Saudi Arabia, 1957, management | Belhadj, ʿAli, Algeria, 1957 | Erdoğan, Recep, Turkey, 1954 |
| Erbakan, Necmettin, Turkey, 1926, engineering | Bin Baz, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, Saudi Arabia, 1909 | Ghazali, Zaynab al-, Egypt, 1917 |
| Faraj, ʿAbd al-Salam, Egypt, 1954, engineering | Buti, Saʿid Ramadan al-, Syria, 1929 | Gumi, Abu Bakr, Nigeria, 1922 |
| Ghannushi, Rashid al-, Tunisia, 1941, philosophy | Fadlallah, Muhammad, Iraq & Lebanon, 1935 | Kadivar, Muhsin, Iran, 1959 |
| Gül, Abdullah, Turkey, 1950, economics | Hakim, Muhammad Baqir al-, Iraq, 1939 | Namangani, Juma, Uzbekistan, 1969 |
| Hekmatyar, Gulbuddin, Afghanistan, 1947, engineering | Hashemi-Rafsanjani, ʿAli-Akbar, Iran, 1934 | Yasin, Abdessalam, Morocco, 1928 |
| Izetbegović, Alija, Yugoslavia-Bosnia, 1925, law | Khamenei, ʿAli, Iran, 1939 | |
| Kısakürek, Necip Fazıl, Turkey, 1904, philosophy | Khomeini, Ruhollah, Iran, 1902 | |
| Madani, ʿAbbasi, Algeria, 1931, philosophy/psychology | Kishk, ʿAbd al-Hamid, Egypt, 1933 | |
| Maryam Jameelah, U.S. & Pakistan, 1934, religious studies | Marwa, Muhammad, Cameroon & Nigeria, 1920s | |
| Masri, Abu Hamza al-, Egypt & U.K., 1958, engineering | Mawdudi, Abu al-Aʿla, India & Pakistan, 1903 | |
| Mustafa, Shukri, Egypt, 1942, agronomy | Mutahhari, Murtaza, Iran, 1920 | |
| Turabi, Hasan al-, Sudan, 1932, law | Nasrallah, Hasan, Lebanon, 1960 | |
| Zarqawi, Abu Musʿab al-, Jordan, 1966, biotechnology | Omar, Muhammad, Afghanistan, 1959 | |
| Zawahiri, Ayman al-, Egypt, 1951, medicine | Qaradawi, Yusuf al-, Egypt & Qatar, 1926 | |
| | Sadr, Muhammad Baqir al-, Iraq, 1935 | |
| | Sadr, Muqtada al-, Iraq, 1970s | |
| | Yasin, Ahmad, Palestine, 1937 | |



of the Jamaat-i Islami of Bangladesh in the early 1980s and half of the founders of the Islamic Action Front in Jordan in the 1990s.[11] Over the decades the leaders of the Jamaat-i Islami of India and later Pakistan increasingly were professionals,[12] as was the membership of the Guidance Council of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950s.[13]

About twenty-four of the forty-two Islamist leaders in our sample attended religious universities such as al-Azhar in Cairo and the more informally structured seminaries of Najaf, Iraq; Qom, Iran; and Delhi, India. For these scholars Islamist activism frequently represents a response to the scholasticism of traditional religious learning. Abu al-Aʿla Mawdudi, for example, never publicized his religious education and "criticized the institution of the ulama openly and at times sharply," since "he did not believe in the effectiveness of traditional Islam . . . in addressing the predicaments that had brought him to the study of religion in the first place"—the challenges facing Muslims in the modern world.[14] Shaykh ʿAbd al-Hamid Kishk was blunt about his alma mater, al-Azhar, the ancient Islamic university in Cairo, which he felt was too passive in confronting the problems of the day: "al-Azhar slumbers the deepest sleep, in unparalleled dishonour!"[15]

Several Islamist leaders combined both secular and religious training, such as ʿAbdullah ʿAzzam (who studied agronomy before attending the University of Damascus's seminary college), Recep Erdoğan (Imam Hatip religious high school and Marmara University's Department of Economics and Management), Abu Bakr Gumi (British colonial schools and Islamic seminaries), Muhsin Kadivar (one year at the University of Shiraz's Department of Electronic Engineering, then the seminaries of Shiraz and Qom), and Abdessalam Yassine (French colonial schools and Islamic seminaries).

Like Banna and Khomeini (who is included on this list because his activities continued past 1970), these figures are largely provincials who migrated to the capital—of the thirty-nine leaders for whom place of birth can be identified,

only eight were born in the capital of their home country, evenly split between the secularly and religiously educated; all but six of the forty-two later came to the capital at some point in their career. Of the twenty-eight figures whose family background is available, twelve are the children of religious scholars (eight of these following in the same profession themselves). Seven come from middle-class backgrounds with secular educations (six of them pursuing secular educations themselves), five from poor rural families (evenly split between secular and religious educational tracks), and three from poor urban families (two of them seminary trained). Only one was born rich: Osama bin Laden, whose father was a major industrialist.[16] In sum this sampling of Islamist leaders shows a relatively even split between two career paths, seminary scholars and secular college graduates, both of them originating primarily in well-educated families in the provinces.

### *Islamist Activists*

Turning from leaders to activists more generally, we find relatively little systematic evidence available. Indeed the classic work in this tradition, Saad Eddin Ibrahim's "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups," was intended only as a preliminary study. Its sample size is only thirty-four, and its method of sampling—interviewing suspected militants under arrest—allows the government to select respondents and biases the sample in the direction of whatever political concerns the government may be suffering. For example the high proportion of university students and graduates in this sample (85 percent) may be exaggerated by governments' heightened sensitivity to university-based unrest. It may also reflect government agents' ability to infiltrate university settings more easily than other settings. In any case the study offers a striking image of Islamist activists: among the students a majority have earned spots in elite majors, and almost all are in scientific and technical fields. All of the activists lived in large cities, but 62 percent had migrated from smaller cities or rural areas. However, this does not mean that the activists come from uneducated or peasant backgrounds; a majority of the activists' fathers had a secondary or higher education, and most worked in civil service or professional occupations. Upward mobility is evident among the activists, if not dramatic peasant-to-university mobility.[17]

A second study by Ibrahim, published fifteen years later, suggests that the social basis for Islamist activism in Egypt had shifted from universities to shantytowns. He mentions a group of thirty Islamists "arrested, tried, and convicted for attacks on tourists," seven of whom received death sentences in December 1993, but the reported statistics appear to come from a larger sample of arrestees whose size is not reported. The usual caveats regarding arrest sampling apply. Ibrahim argues that the composition of Islamist activism has changed considerably, with arrestees now younger and less educated (only 20 percent were college students or graduates). He notes that 54 percent of militants arrested and charged for acts of violence in the 1990s reside in shantytowns and rural areas as compared to 8 percent in the 1970s, and speculates that the alienation and discontent that fueled university Islamists in the 1970s has spread throughout Egyptian society. He does not state whether educated Egyptians are now less likely to be Islamist activists or whether they are participating at the same rate as before but are now outnumbered by less-educated Islamists.[18]



To what extent are Ibrahim's foundational studies confirmed by other research on the social bases of Islamist activism? We have located twenty-five studies that offer quantitative data on the social background of Islamist activists (see table 2 and figure 1). These studies do not use the same definition of *Islamist* that we propose in this paper, namely, state implementation of Shari'a. Some focus on "terrorists"—several on suicide terrorists specifically—one on guerrilla fighters, and three on more peaceful forms of activism: Hermassi on the Islamic Tendency Movement in Tunisia, Dekmejian on open-letter signatories in Saudi Arabia, and Schbley on marchers in a Hizbullah demonstration (whom Schbley calls "terrorists"). The Amra'i study, which examines fatalities in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution, included activists whose goals were more liberal or leftist than Islamist, as well as bystanders who were not activists at all.[19] In general it appears that the social bases of nonmilitant forms of Islamist activism, such as providing social welfare, are studied more rarely than overtly confrontational activists, but we believe that these definitions overlap enough with our definition of Islamists to make useful comparisons. In addition the sampling methods differ in these works: nine studies derive their samples from government arrestees, ten from militants who died during movement activities, one from signatories of open letters (Dekmejian), one from a survey of members of an Islamist organization (Hermassi), and one from a survey at a refreshment stand at a Hizbullah demonstration (Schbley). We do not have enough studies to tell whether particular methods bias the findings in the direction of one social basis or another.

These studies confirm Ibrahim's initial analysis that Islamist activists are more likely to have some higher education than the population of Muslims at large. In only three of the twenty-two studies was the percentage of highly educated Islamists lower than the percentage of highly educated adults in the population at large: the small sample of Islamist revolutionaries arrested in Singapore, only one of thirty-one of whom had some higher education, as compared with 7 percent of all Singaporeans (the percentage for Muslim Singaporeans is not available); and two studies of Hizbullah in Lebanon, which estimated the percentage of highly educated activists as lower than 20 percent, as compared with 21 percent of all Lebanese (not broken down by confessional group).[20] Even if we compare Islamist activists specifically with young adult Muslims—since most activists tend to be young adults—only the Singapore and Lebanese samples

TABLE 2. Quantitative Studies of the Social Background of Islamist Activists

| *Year(s) Covered* | *Source* | *Sampling Method* | *Sample Size* | *% with University Education* | *Social Background* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AL QAEDA CENTRAL STAFF | | | | | |
| 1990s–2000s | Sageman (2004) | Public reports about terrorists | 32 | 92 | 86% upper and middle class |
| EGYPT | | | | | |
| 1970s–90s | Fandy (1994) | Members of the Islamic Group in southern Egypt | N.R. | Most | Largely peasant |
| 1977–79 | Ibrahim (1980) | Arrested Islamist militants | 34 | 85 | 62% sons of government employees; 61% provincial |
| 1981 | Ansari (1984) | Arrested Islamist militants | 280 | 56 | 74% provincial |
| 1986 | Ismail (2000) | Arrested members of Islamist groups | 101 | 35 | Poor neighborhoods of Cairo |
| 1990s | Ibrahim (2002) | Arrested, wounded, killed Islamists | N.R. | ? | Largely provincial |
| 1991–93 | Ismail (2000)[1] | Arrested Islamist militants | N.R. | 51 | Poor neighborhoods of Cairo |
| IRAN | | | | | |
| 1971–77 | Abrahamian (1982) | Dead members of Islamic Mojahedin and other Islamic guerrillas | 91 | 69[2] | Provincial middle-class families |
| 1978–79 | Amra'i (1982) | "Martyrs" of the Iranian Revolution in Tehran whose families later registered with the Martyr Foundation | 742 | 7 | 19% high school students; 41% work-ing class; 48% born outside Tehran |
| IRAQ | | | | | |
| 1979–80 | Wiley (1992) | Executed Islamists | 29 | 51 | N.R. |
| LEBANON | | | | | |
| 1982–94 | Krueger/ Maleckova (2003)[3] | Articles on deceased Hizbullah fighters | 129 | 14 | 28% poverty rate; 42% from Beirut |
| 2001 | Schbley (2003) | Questionnaire at Hizbullah parade | 341 | ~15 | Family income < $20,000; provincial |
| LEBANON AND PALESTINE | | | | | |
| 1980–2003 | Pape (2005) | Public reports about suicide bombers | 38 | 62 | N.R. |

TABLE 2. (*continued*)

| *Year(s) Covered* | *Source* | *Sampling Method* | *Sample Size* | *% with University Education* | *Social Background* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MAGHRIB NETWORK | | | | | |
| 1990s–2000s | Sageman (2004) | Public reports about terrorists | 53 | 43 | 52% upper and middle class |
| MASHRIQ NETWORK | | | | | |
| 1990s–2000s | Sageman (2004) | Public reports about terrorists | 66 | 57 | 80% upper and middle class |
| MOROCCO | | | | | |
| 1984 | Munson (1986) | Arrested members of Association of Islamic Youth | 71 | Most | Not poor |
| 1984 | Munson (1986) | Arrested associates of 'Abd al-Salam Yasin | 5 | 80 | Not poor |
| PAKISTAN | | | | | |
| 1990–2004 | Fair (2008) | Interviews with family of deceased militants | 141 | 19 | 26% unemployed |
| PALESTINE | | | | | |
| 1993–2005 | Kimhi/Even (2006) | Interviews with surviving suicide bombers, families, friends | 60 | N.R. | N.R. |
| 1993–2004 | Merari (2005) | Interviews with family of suicide bombers, surviving attackers, and captured recruiters | N.R. | N.R. | Economic status similar to society as a whole. |
| 1993–2000 | Pedahzur (2005) | Reports about suicide bombers | 33 | 50 | 30% unemployed |
| 2000–2004 | Pedahzur (2005) | Reports about suicide bombers | 150 | 32 | 42% unemployed |
| Late 1980s–2003 | Berrebi (2007) | Biographies of martyrs and leaders from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad Web sites | 335 | 57 | 84% not poor; 90% employed full-time |
| 1996–1999 | Hassan (2001) | Interviews with failed suicide bombers and families/trainers of successful suicide bombers | ~250 | N.R. | Not poor or uneducated |
| SAUDI ARABIA | | | | | |
| 1991 | Dekmejian (1995) | Signatories of open letter | 52 | 40 | 64% from Najd region |
| 1992 | Dekmejian (1995) | Signatories of open letter | 107 | 60 | 72% from Najd region |
| 1990–2004 | Lacroix/ Hegghammer (2004) | Militants mentioned in Saudi police statements or jihadist publications | 50 | Minority | N.R. |

TABLE 2. (*continued*)

| *Year(s) Covered* | *Source* | *Sampling Method* | *Sample Size* | *% with University Education* | *Social Background* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SINGAPORE | | | | | |
| 2001–2 | Singapore government (2003) | Arrested members of Jemaah Islamiyah and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front | 31 | 3 | N.R. |
| SOUTHEAST ASIAN NETWORK | | | | | |
| N.R. | Sageman (2004) | Public reports about terrorists | 21 | 88 | 83% upper and middle class |
| SYRIA | | | | | |
| 1976–81 | Batatu (1982) | Arrested Islamists | 1,384 | 49 | N.R. |
| TUNISIA | | | | | |
| 1987 | Burgat/Dowell (1993) | Convicted Islamists | 78 | 48 | N.R. |
| 1970s–80s | Hermassi (1984) | Survey of Islamic Tendency Movement members | ~50 | 80 | 69% from Tunis region; 75% of fathers primary educated or less; 46% of fathers working class |

N.R. = Not reported.

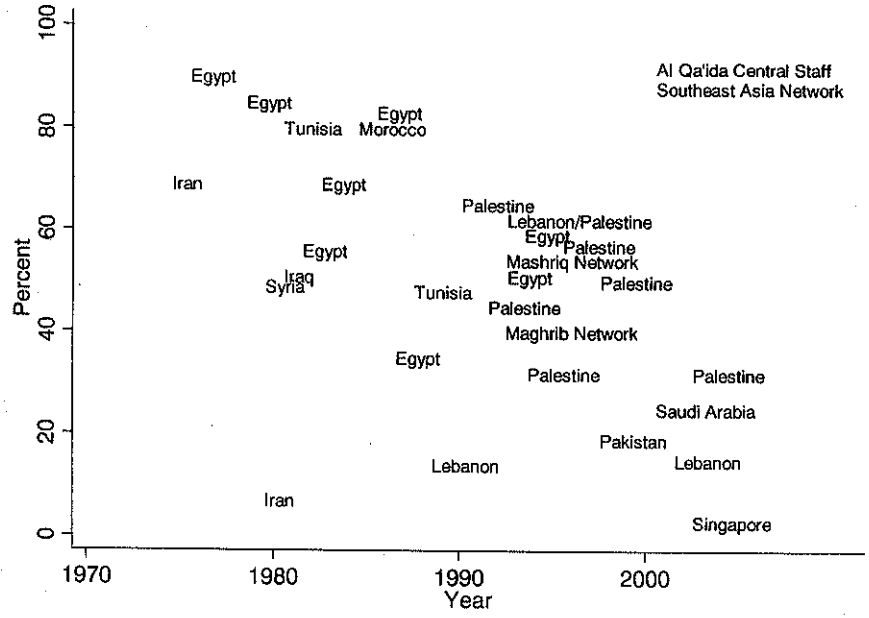
1. Reporting findings from Hisham Mubarak, *Al-Irhabiyun Qadimun! Dirasah Muqaranah bayna Mawqif al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin wa-Jama'at al-Jihad min Qadiyat al-'Unf, 1928–1994* (Cairo: Markaz al-Mahrusah li'l-Nashr wa al-Khidmat al-Suhufiya, 1995).

2. The percentage rises to 82 percent if office workers are included.

3. Analyzing data from Eli Hurvits, *Ha-Dereg ha-Tsevai shel Hizballah* (Tel Aviv: Merkaz Mosheh Dayan le-Limude ha-Mizrah ha-Tikhon ve-Afrikah, Universitat Tel-Aviv, 1999).

*Sources:* Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Sohbatollah Amra'i, "Barresi-ye Moqe'iyat-e Ejtema'i-ye Shohada-ye Enqelab-e Eslami az Shahrivar 1357 ta Akharin-e Bahman 1357" (master's thesis, University of Tehran, 1982); Hamied Ansari, "The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984): 123–44; Hanna Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren," *MERIP Reports* 12, no. 9 (1982): 12–20, 34, 36; Claude Berrebi, "Evidence about the Link between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): art. 2; François Burgat and William Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 1993); R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995); C. Christine Fair, "Who Are Pakistan's Militants and Their Families?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 1 (2008): 49–65; Mamoun Fandy, "Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?" *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (1994): 607–25; Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, 36–41; Mohammed Elbaki Hermassi, "La société tunisienne au miroir islamiste," *Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 108 (January–March 1984): 1–54; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 4 (1980): 423–53; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "The Changing Face of Islamic Activism" [1995], in *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Twelve Critical Essays* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 69–79; Salwa Ismail, "The Popular Movement Dimensions of Contemporary Militant Islamism: Socio-Spatial Determinants in the Cairo Urban Setting," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 363–93; Shaul Kimhi and Shemuel Even, "The Palestinian Human Bombers," in *Tangled Roots: Social and Psychological Factors in the Genesis of Terrorism*, ed. Jeff Victoroff (Amsterdam: IOS, 2006), 308–23; Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 119–44; Stéphane Lacroix and Thomas Hegghammer, *Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who Are the Islamists?* Middle East Report no. 31 (Riyadh & Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004); Ariel Merari, "Social, Organizational and Psychological Factors in Suicide Terrorism," in *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality, and Ways Forward*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (London: Routledge, 2005), 70–86; Henry Munson Jr., "Social Base of Islamic Militancy in Morocco," *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 2 (1986): 267–84; Robert Pape, *Dying to Win* (New York: Random House, 2005); Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Ayla Schbley, "Defining Religious Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 2 (2003): 105–34; Government of Singapore, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2003); Joyce N. Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder, Colo.: Rienner, 1992).

FIGURE 1.



have rates of higher education lower than the tertiary school enrollment ratios reported in the World Bank's World Development Indicators database. All of the other studies show considerably higher rates of tertiary education among Islamist activists than among young adults in the populations from which they are drawn.

At the same time, it is worth noting the inconsistencies in these studies' estimates of educational attainment among Islamist activists. For example there is a large discrepancy between educational levels of the Jemaah Islamiyah samples in Singapore and in Sageman's Southeast Asia network (only two of whose members were Singaporean), and between the various samples of Palestinian attackers. Similarly three studies of Egyptian Islamists report levels of higher education at 85 percent in the late 1970s (Ibrahim), 66 percent in the early 1980s (Ansari and several other studies using the same published list of government detainees),[21] and 80 percent in the mid-1980s (Fandy), using different samples. All are far higher than the percentage of Egyptian adults with higher education (around 5 percent in the 1980s) and the percentage of young adults enrolled in higher education (under 16 percent in the 1980s)[22]—but the Ansari study complicates Ibrahim's conclusions about the downward trend in higher education among Islamists over time. Notwithstanding the uncertainty in these samples, however, it appears that this trend is generally confirmed. Four of the six least-educated samples are from the past decade, while five of the eight highest-educated samples are from earlier periods. Of course we cannot rule out the possibility that this trend is an artifact of the locations that happened to be selected for study at different periods. Another observation that emerges from figure 1 is the increasing variation in levels of higher education over time. Samples from the past decade now range from under 10 percent to over 90 percent with higher education, as compared with somewhat smaller ranges in earlier periods. Again this trend may be due to the selection of sites for study, but it may suggest that Islamist movements are now much more diverse in terms of social bases than they were in the 1970s and 1980s.

One of Ibrahim's main points is that Egyptian Islamist activists came increasingly to be drawn from far poorer social circles than they were in the 1970s. Few of the studies that we have located give systematic data that would confirm or disconfirm this hypothesis, so we cannot produce a chart analogous to figure 1 for the social background of Islamist activists. However, several studies give hints that there has always been substantial variation in this background. Abrahamian's study of Islamic guerrillas in 1970s Iran notes that activists came predominantly from middle-class households, as does Munson's study of 1980s Morocco.[23] More recently data collected by Eli Hurvits on Lebanon and Claude Berrebi on Palestine found that Islamist activists are not drawn from the poorest communities—they tend to have incomes above the poverty line, according to Hurvits, and hold steady jobs, according to Berrebi.[24] A widely cited paper by Krueger and Maleckova, which uses data from both of these studies, offers the more general conclusion that poverty does not breed Islamist terrorism.[25] At the same time, other samples find poorer backgrounds for Islamist activists. Hermassi's study of Tunisia reports that 46 percent of Islamist movement members in the 1970s and early 1980s came from families of urban or agricultural workers. A series of studies of university students has found that supporters of Islamist ideals and movements tend to be from poorer backgrounds than other students.[26] Sageman finds that the Maghrib Islamist terrorist network is evenly divided between middle-class and lower-class family backgrounds, as distinct from the predominantly middle-class backgrounds of the networks that lie farther east.



Another aspect of social context is the location of recruitment into Islamist organizations. Sageman reports that 70 percent of the members of what he calls the global Salafi jihad were recruited outside of their country of origin: al Qaeda central staff bonded through common experiences during the Afghan war against the Soviets,[27] while the Maghrib and Mashriq networks (Sageman calls the latter the "Core Arab Network") are dominated by Arabs who were either first- or second-generation immigrants in Western Europe and felt excluded from full participation in European society. (This process is identified also in Wiktorowicz's study of second-generation Muslim immigrants who were recruited into Al Mohajiroun in the United Kingdom, where the experience of racism formed a cognitive opening for later membership.)[28] By contrast Sageman writes that the Southeast Asian network was recruited largely domestically, especially through two Islamist boarding schools in Indonesia and Malaysia.[29] Similar boarding schools are associated with the Taliban, particularly the Dar-ul-Ulum Haqqania, near the Afghan border, where activists were recruited and trained from among the Afghan refugee population.[30] There is no evidence on what proportion of madrassas contribute to the recruitment of Islamist militants, but enrollment numbers for Pakistani madrassas in general are limited to 0.02–1 percent of enrolled children in most of the country and slightly over 4 percent in a belt bordering Afghanistan.[31] While Pakistani madrassa enrollment is marginally related to household income and the education level of the head of household, the biggest impact on school choice is access to private and public schools. Only in settlements with no public or private schools are the poor substantially more likely (4 percent versus 2.5 percent of enrolled children) to enroll their children in madrassas—though total enrollment plummets under such conditions. While few studies have found systematic evidence about the social bases of either madrassa students or Taliban activists,[32] this pathway to activism seems to differ considerably from the European-based experience of certain other Islamist movements.

These differing social bases of Islamist mobilization are symbolized by the contrast between al Qaeda and the Taliban. Western news reports frequently

confuse the two, on the basis of the alliance that they forged during the 1990s, but the two draw on quite distinct pools of recruits. Would-be militants who showed up in Afghanistan to join the jihad "had to take a complex entrance exam," a former member of al Qaeda told U.S. officials. "It involved what sounded like an IQ test. Those who scored high, like Max [the code name for the informant], were sent to bin Laden's intelligence training program. Those who scored lowest were sent to fight against the Northern Alliance on the front lines."[33] Al Qaeda leaders denigrated the Afghans as "a simple people with a simple culture," according to an Egyptian Islamist. "They didn't believe the Taliban had an ability to grasp contemporary reality, politics and management."[34] Taliban leaders, for their part, were irate at al Qaeda for its global campaign of violent attacks and media publicity, according to a Pakistani journalist who interviewed them regularly. The Taliban worried—correctly, as it turned out—that al Qaeda's activities would provoke the United States and threaten Taliban rule in Afghanistan.[35] The sociopolitical distinctions between the two groups extended also to religious matters, notwithstanding their overlapping interest in establishing an Islamic state. Mullah Muhammad 'Umar, leader of the Taliban, literally wrapped himself in the cloak of the Prophet one day in 1996—the cloak is a cherished relic in Qandahar—and consistently refuses to be photographed. Bin Laden and other globalists, by contrast, denounce the worship of relics and are comfortable in front of a camera, even distributing videotapes of themselves to the media.[36] Of course the two movements were able to cooperate. Similarly globalists and localists conspired together to kidnap and murder American reporter Daniel Pearl in Pakistan, including "members of at least three different Pakistani groups, none of which had ever shown much previous interest in international jihad."[37]

Certain other nationality- and communal-based Islamist movements, however, do not fall so clearly into this dichotomy. Palestinian Islamists, for example, are territorially limited in their activities, like the Taliban, but mobilize broader segments of the local population than the Taliban appeared to do. Studies of Palestinian militants, listed in table 2, show that they are fairly representative of the education levels of Palestinians at large. Similarly a 1998 survey of educated young adults in Gaza found that economic well-being—self-reports of a five-point scale ranging from "We are a lot poorer than most" to "We are a lot richer than most"—was not significantly correlated with willingness to engage in future protest.[38] One possible explanation for this representativeness could be the role of retribution for the loss of family members as a motivation for Palestinian militancy, since several studies have identified revenge as an element in the motivations of some Palestinian suicide attackers.[39] Revenge-based activism resulting from experiences of sustained violence may be more randomly and broadly distributed in the population than more ideological forms of motivation for activism.



### *Supporters*

Finally let us turn from activists to more passive supporters of Islamist movements. One indicator of support is voting for candidates whose platform includes state implementation of Shari'a. In more than sixty national parliamentary elections since 1970 in which such candidates have participated, they have never received a majority of votes.[40] However, Islamist candidates have been well represented in parliament on several occasions, including Algeria in 1991 (47 percent of votes and 81 percent of seats in the first round, which was soon canceled by the military), Bahrain in 2002 (48 percent of seats), Jordan in 1989 (41 percent of seats), Kuwait in 1999 and 2003 (40 and 42 percent of seats), Palestine in 2006 (44 percent of votes, 58 percent of seats), and Turkey in 1995, 2002, and 2007 (21, 34, and 47 percent of votes; 29, 66, and 62 percent of seats). More commonly Islamists receive 10 percent or less of the vote, though they might have received more if the state had not handicapped them in various ways. These vote levels do not appear to be correlated significantly with any social characteristics at the national level—both high and low vote levels appear in both more industrialized and less industrialized countries, more educated and less educated, and so on. Within countries there is fragmentary evidence that poorer districts vote slightly more frequently for Islamist candidates. In Turkey, for example, the Islamist party has done best since the 1970s in areas with lower socioeconomic development,[41] and recent ethnographic studies from Istanbul suggest that Islamist parties have targeted their mobilizing efforts at poor neighborhoods with large numbers of migrants from the provinces.[42] In Jordan, too, Islamists appear to have received more votes in poorer districts, where they focused their campaigning, though factors such as tribal or local identity may have been more important than wealth in accounting for the Islamists' performance.[43] In Pakistan and Malaysia, the provinces where Islamists have been most successful and actually formed provincial governments are among the most peripheral regions of these countries: Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan and Kelantan and Terengganu in Malaysia.

Cross-national survey findings partly confirm the electoral results. In 2000–2002 the World Values Survey asked Muslims in seven countries with significant Muslim populations and active Islamist movements (as well as sixty-eight other countries)—Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Nigeria, and Pakistan—whether they thought that "good government . . . should implement only the laws of the *shari'a*."[44] The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing ranged from 44 percent in Bangladesh and 50 percent in Indonesia to 62 percent in Pakistan, 72 percent in Algeria, 79 percent in Jordan, and 80 percent in Egypt.[45] Within each country the least educated were the most likely to support state implementation of Shari'a, and this relationship held up in almost every

country even when controlling for other socioeconomic variables. The poorest third of respondents were most likely to agree in three countries (Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Pakistan), but in the countries with the highest rates of support (Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan) the middle third was most likely to agree. Only in Indonesia was the wealthiest third the most likely to agree. In every country in the sample, residents of towns and small cities were more likely than residents of big cities (over half a million in population) to agree. The oldest respondents were among the most pro-Shari'a, though the youngest generation (ages fifteen to thirty-four) were slightly more pro-Shari'a than middle-aged respondents in five of the seven countries. In sum the image of Shari'a supporters that this survey presents is that they are less educated and somewhat poorer, less metropolitan, and older. However, the variation within countries is less prominent than the variation across countries: the nations with lower levels of overall support for Shari'a tend to have lower levels of support across all categories of education, income, city size, and age, and the range of national averages is considerably more dispersed than the range across subnational categories within any given country.[46]

But what does it mean to say that one favors Shari'a? The question may mean different things to different people. For example, 71 percent of Indonesians agreed that "the government must make obligatory the implementation of *shari'a*," according to a survey in 2002. Sixty-seven percent agreed that "government based on the Qur'an and Sunnah under the leadership of Islamic authorities such as *kiai* or *ulama*, is best for a country like ours." But only 46 percent agreed that "in elections we must choose the candidate who fights for the implementation of *shari'a*." Only 21 percent agreed that "in elections there should only be Islamic parties."[47] In parliamentary elections in 2004, only 18 percent actually voted for Islamist parties (PPP, PKS, PBB). In Turkey, by contrast, survey questions about Shari'a have predicted electoral results more closely: in the 1990s a series of surveys found support for a Shari'a-based state at 20 to 27 percent, matching the 21 percent of votes received by the Islamist party (Fazilet Partisi) in national elections in late 1995.[48] However, fewer than one third of the supporters of the party agreed that Turkish civil law on divorce or inheritance should be changed in accordance with "Islamic law."[49] In Palestine 60 percent of a 1999 survey said they found no incompatibility between democracy and a political system based on Shari'a.[50]

Similarly in the World Values Survey, most people who supported Shari'a also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government."[51] Interestingly the percentage is lowest in Indonesia and Nigeria (69 percent), which are among the countries with the lowest levels of support for Shari'a, and highest in Egypt (98 percent), Bangladesh (97 percent), and Jordan (91 percent), two of which (Egypt and Jordan) are among the countries with the highest level of support for Shari'a. If we examine respondents who are both pro-Shari'a and antidemocracy, there are no consistent findings with regard to socioeconomic characteristics. Higher income is negatively related with these attitudes in Pakistan, as is metropolitan residence in Algeria—but most countries display no significant pattern. Again the bigger difference is between countries, not within countries, ranging from 1–2 percent of respondents in Bangladesh and Egypt to 15 percent of respondents in Indonesia and 17 percent in Nigeria. Support for democracy is so widespread—79 percent of all Muslims in the World Values Survey[52]—that it outweighs the correlations between particular social categories and support for Shari'a.



These findings are visible also in a second cross-national survey, conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2002, which asked respondents in ten countries with significant Muslim populations (along with thirty-four other countries)—Bangladesh, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Turkey, and Uzbekistan—"How much of a role do you think Islam *should* play in the political life of our country—a very large role, a fairly large role, a fairly small role, or a very small role?"[53] If we take the response "a very large role" as most closely approximating our definition of Islamists, we once again find tremendous cross-national variation, from 18 percent of Muslim respondents in Uzbekistan and 24 percent in Turkey to 59 percent in Mali and 82 percent in Pakistan. Within-country variation was fairly consistent but less dramatic: the poorest segment of most countries' samples was more likely than others to select this response, and in only one case (Indonesia) marginally less likely; college-educated respondents were less likely than others in half the samples (only in Indonesia were the college-educated marginally more likely); and metropolitan respondents were less likely in a few countries.[54] Parallel to the overlap between support for Shari'a and democracy in the World Values Survey, the Pew survey found that most people who said that they wanted Islam to play "a very large role" in political life also said that "democracy is not just for the West and can work well here" (only in Turkey was this portion just below 50 percent).

Similar variation emerges from single-country surveys (see table 3). The rates of support for Islamism are relatively consistent within each country, despite the use of different indicators, but vary greatly between countries. The demographic characteristics of these supporters also differ by country: they are less urban than other survey respondents in Bangladesh, more urban in Turkey, and less or equally urban in Indonesia, according to different studies. Islamist supporters are inconsistently differentiated by age, education, and wealth as well, not just between countries but also within each country. Different surveys of Palestinians, for example, found Islamist supporters to be older, similar in age, or younger than other respondents. Different surveys of Indonesia found Islamist

TABLE 3. Social Background of Islamist Supporters, as Compared with Other Survey Respondents

| Year | Source | Type of support | Percent Islamist | Compared with Other Survey Respondents | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Urban* | *Age* | *Education* | *Wealth* |
| BANGLADESH | | | | | | | |
| 1983 | Banu (1992) | Select religious figures as political representatives | 27 | less | N.R. | less | N.R. |
| EGYPT | | | | | | | |
| 1988 | Tessler (1997) | Four questions about the role of religion in politics | 20 | N.R. | younger | more | N.R. |
| 1988 | Tessler/Jesse (1996) | Support current organized Islamic movements | 40 | N.R. | similar/ younger | similar | N.R. |
| 2005 | Moaddel/ Karabenick (2008) | Twelve questions about Islamicattitudes | N.R. | N.R. | N.R. | similar | less |
| INDONESIA | | | | | | | |
| 1999 | Liddle/Mujani (2007) | Support United Development Party (PPP) | 11 | similar | N.R. | similar | N.R. |
| 2002 | Mujani/Liddle (2004) | Fourteen questions about Islamic attitudes | 14 | less | N.R. | less | less |
| 2004 | Liddle/Mujani (2007) | Support United Development Party (PPP) | 8 | similar | N.R. | similar | N.R. |
| 2004 | Webber (2006) | Support United Development Party (PPP) | N.R. | less | N.R. | less | less |
| KUWAIT | | | | | | | |
| 1988 | Tessler (1997) | Four questions about the role of religion in politics | 47 | N.R. | similar | more | N.R. |
| 1988 | Tessler/Jesse (1996) | Support current organized Islamic movements | 49 | N.R. | similar | similar/ more | N.R. |
| PALESTINE | | | | | | | |
| 1986 | Shadid/Seltzer (1988) | Favor state based on Shari'a | 26 | N.R. | older | less | N.R. |
| 1994 | Tessler/Jesse (1996) | Support Hamas or Islamic Jihad | 16 | N.R. | similar | similar | N.R. |
| 1994–1998 | Tessler/ Nachtwey (1999) | Support Hamas or Islamic Jihad | 13–20 | N.R. | similar/ younger | similar | N.R. |
| SAUDI ARABIA | | | | | | | |
| 2005 | Moaddel/ Karabenick (2008) | Twelve questions about Islamic attitudes | N.R. | N.R. | N.R. | similar | more |
| TURKEY | | | | | | | |
| 1998 | Akgün (2002) | Support Virtue Party | 14 | more | younger | less | less |
| 2002 | Başlevent et al.(2005) | Support Justice and Development Party | 19 | more | younger | similar | N.R. |



TABLE 3. (*continued*)

*Sources:* Birol Akgün, "Twins or Enemies: Comparing Nationalist and Islamist Traditions in Turkish Politics," *MERIA Journal* 6, no. 1 (2002): 17–35; U. A. B. Razia Akter Banu, *Islam in Bangladesh* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Cem Başlevent, Hasan Kirmanoğlu, and Burhan Şenatalar, "Empirical Investigation of Party Preferences and Economic Voting in Turkey," *European Journal of Political Research* 44, no 4 (2005): 547–62; R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Leadership, Party, and Religion: Explaining Voting Behavior in Indonesia," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 7 (2007): 832–57; Mansoor Moaddel and Stuart A. Karabenick, "Religious Fundamentalism among Young Muslims in Egypt and Saudi Arabia," *Social Forces* 86, no. 4 (2008): 1675–710; Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, "Politics, Islam, and Public Opinion," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 1 (2004): 109–23; Mohammed Shadid and Rick Seltzer, "Political Attitudes of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," *Middle East Journal* 42, no. 1 (1988): 16–32; Mark Tessler, "The Origins of Popular Support for Islamist Movements: A Political Economy Analysis," in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa*, ed. John Entelis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 93–126; Mark Tessler and Jolene Jesse, "Gender and Support for Islamist Movements: Evidence from Egypt, Kuwait and Palestine," *Muslim World* 86, no. 2 (1996): 200–228; Mark Tessler and Jodi Nachtwey, "Palestinian Political Attitudes: An Analysis of Survey Data from the West Bank and Gaza," *Israel Studies* 4, no. 1 (1999): 22–43; Douglas Webber, "A Consolidated Patrimonial Democracy? Democratization in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2006): 396–420.

supporters to have less education or similar levels of education, as compared with other respondents. No universal profile of Islamist supporters emerges from these studies.

## *Conclusion*

The primary finding from this review of the social bases of Islamism is variation. Some Islamist leaders are trained in seminaries, while others are products of secular state school systems (and a few have both or neither background). Most migrated from the provinces to the capital of their home countries, but not all. Islamist movements of the 1970s drew largely on middle-class university students and graduates, with the exception of the Iranian Revolution, but in more recent years the educational and social background of activists is increasingly mixed. Surveys from the past decade suggest that Islamist attitudes are most widespread among the least educated and poorest residents of rural areas, but these are only marginal distinctions—plenty of well-educated, wealthy metropolitans voiced the same opinions as well. The short answer to the question in our paper's title, "Who are the Islamists?," is anybody. We find no strong demographic predictors of Islamist leadership, activism, or sympathy.

The bigger explanatory feature is country of residence. Some countries—Egypt, for example—generate considerably higher rates of Islamist activism and support than other countries.[55] Regardless of social background, education, or urban/rural distinctions, Egyptian Muslims seem to be more supportive of

Islamist attitudes than their neighbors, and this difference appears to be related to religiosity in general. According to recent surveys, 99 percent of Egyptians consider themselves "a religious person," compared with 85 percent in Jordan and 62 percent in Saudi Arabia.[56] Cross-national differences extend from the rate of support for Islamism to the social bases of support. In Egypt the middle third of the income distribution was most likely to tell survey researchers that they support state implementation of Shari'a, while in Pakistan it was the lowest third and in Indonesia the highest third. Islamist movements seem to differ by country. The most consistent feature of support for Islamism across countries is the view that democracy and a state based on the Shari'a are compatible, and this view is also broadly held across all segments of the national populations. The social bases of Islamism seem to be less important than the national bases.

This nonfinding is important as a counterweight to grand theories about the social bases of Islamism. The evidence reviewed in this paper suggests that we should be careful about generalizing from the study of any one movement, even Saad Eddin Ibrahim's studies of militant Islamism in Egypt. Ibrahim's research—confirmed by several other studies on Egypt—concludes that Islamist activists of the 1970s came from well-educated, middle-class provincial families, and that this profile changed in subsequent decades to include less-educated, poorer shanty dwellers. This trajectory is not easily corroborated in other countries, because there are few similar studies. But the evidence we do have suggests that Islamist militants in other countries are more varied than Ibrahim's classic 1980 paper would imply. International jihadi groups, for example, continue to draw disproportionately from well-educated middle classes, while other movements appeal to less-educated and poorer populations as well as the educated middle class.

This is not to say that Islamist movements have ceased to be "modern" in the sense that Bruce Lawrence and others have used the term. Even as Islamist activism and opinion has spread beyond the educated middle class, so too has the "contact with the West" and understanding of "the horizons of possibility denied them by the inequities of the world system," to return to Lawrence's phrases. Yet there is little evidence that the spread of Islamism matches the spread of globalization and relative deprivation: we would need far more detailed evidence than this paper has located to understand, for example, why rural folk in some Muslim societies are so much more likely than rural folk in certain other Muslim societies to express support for Islamist attitudes. The cross-national variation in the scale and social bases of Islamism suggests that global factors are not so important as local ones.

Perhaps another argument of Lawrence's is more appropriate here. Lawrence begins his comparative study of fundamentalism, *Defenders of God*, with a sharp attack on social-scientific approaches that fetishize "hard data, evidence capable



of observation and measurement in models or graphs." This "need for hard data, that is, recurrent behavioral evidence in the public sphere, . . . minimizes the significance of soft data, such as scriptural references, creedal assertions, and biographical analyses, all of which are messy, admit of a thousand exceptions, and, of course, preponderate in the private sphere." Hard data, in Lawrence's argument, is part of the modernist effort at "domesticating" fundamentalism by objectifying it and reducing it to social—nonreligious—causes. "Most social scientists, especially sociologists, mirror the Enlightenment categories [of religion and academic scholarship] in a manner that precludes, even while seeming to permit, self-criticism."[57]

Yet social scientific methods are self-critical in at least one way that humanist analyses are usually not: for more than half a century, social scientists have struggled to come to terms with the fallibility of their own observations of the world around them, and they have institutionalized this struggle through constant concern for representativeness. Humanists who mock the pretenses and limitations of "nationally representative samples" may be missing the underlying anxiety that these samples are intended to address: the concern that human observations may be biased and self-serving. The search for random and representative samples is an admission of this personal failing, and an attempt to transcend it. Perhaps transcendence is folly, but so is the humanists' lack of reflexivity—or lack of published accounts of reflexivity—about how they discovered and selected the evidence that they present.

In addition a number of social scientists have in recent years attempted to challenge the objectivist approach to the study of Islam—and other themes—arguing that understanding the worldviews of one's subjects may trump the attempt to explain their attitudes or actions.[58] In this view the empiricist collection of "hard" data may be harnessed for the same analytical purposes that Lawrence's humanistic approach intends. The evidence reviewed in this paper, for example, does not point to a single set of socioeconomic determinants of Islamism but rather to a varied set of social conditions that have been activated in a variety of contexts. The result is a social-scientific call for further humanistic research into the self-understandings of Islamists—so long as the findings of this research are subjected to the checks and balances of all available evidence, including "hard" data.

## Notes

1. Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age*, with a new preface by the author (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 237.

2. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (December 1980): 423–53.

3. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 127.

4. Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 158; Salwa Ismail, "The Popular Movement Dimensions of Contemporary Militant Islamism: Socio-Spatial Determinants in the Cairo Urban Setting," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (April 2000): 372–73, 379–93.

5. Lawrence, *Defenders of God*, 27.

6. On these distinctions, see Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

7. Richard C. Martin, ed., *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale, 2004); John L. Esposito, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

8. Ismail, "Popular Movement Dimensions of Contemporary Militant Islamism," 384.

9. Mustafa Al-Ahnaf, Bernard Botiveau, and Franck Frégosi, *L'Algérie par ses islamistes* (Paris: Karthala, 1991), 79. The original publication was 'Abbasi Madani, *'Azmat al-fikr al-hadith wa mubarrirat al-hall al-islami* (Mecca: Maktabat al-Manara, 1987).

10. Abdessalam Yassine, *Islamiser la modernité* (Rabat, Morocco: al-Ofok Impressions, 1998); translated by Martin Jenni as *Winning the Modern World for Islam* (Iowa City: Justice and Spirituality, 2000).

11. U. A. B. Razia Akter Banu, "Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh: Challenges and Prospects," in *Islam, Muslims, and the Modern State*, ed. Hussin Mutalib and Taj ul-Islam Hashmi (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 86–87; Hani Hourani et al., *Islamic Movements in Jordan* (Amman: Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Center, 1997), 103.

12. Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 83–84. A list of the founding members and their educational background is available online at Jamat-i Islami, "The Profile of the Founding 75 Members," http://jamaat.org/overview/profile.html (accessed July 10, 2007).

13. Eric Davis, "Ideology, Social Class, and Islamic Radicalism in Modern Egypt," in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 142.

14. Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12–19, 29.

15. Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, trans. Jon Rothschild (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 183.

16. A similar pattern emerges in a study of Syrian Islamist leaders: seven professionals, most from middle-class backgrounds, and five religious scholars, three from clerical families. See R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 114–15.

17. Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups."

18. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "The Changing Face of Islamic Activism" (1995), in *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Twelve Critical Essays* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 69–79.



19. Of the seventy "martyrs" whose families offered an assessment of their political ideology, twenty were not focused on establishing an Islamic state. Sohbatollah Amra'i, "Barresi-ye Moqe'iyat-e Ejtema'i-ye Shohada-ye Enqelab-e Eslami az Shahrivar 1357 ta Akharin-e Bahman 1357" (master's thesis, University of Tehran, 1982), 218. For a discussion of the Amra'i study, which has been banned in Iran, see Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 176–77.

20. National comparison data are drawn from the Task Force on Higher Education in Society, *Higher Education in Developing Countries* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank and UNESCO, 2002).

21. Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991), 164; Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, 101; Nemat Guenena, "The 'JIHAD': An 'Islamic Alternative' in Egypt," *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 9 (Summer 1986): 100.

22. Robert J. Barro and Jong-Wha Lee, *International Data on Educational Attainment: Updates and Implications*, Harvard Center for International Development, Working Paper no. 42 (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2000).

23. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 481; Henry Munson Jr. "Social Base of Islamic Militancy in Morocco," *Middle East Journal* 40 (Spring 1986): 267–84.

24. Eli Hurvits, *Ha-Dereg ha-Tsevai shel Hizballah: Deyokan Hevrati* (Tel Aviv: Merkaz Mosheh Dayan le-Limude ha-Mizrah ha-Tikhon ve-Afrikah, Universitat Tel-Aviv, 1999); Claude Berrebi, "Evidence about the Link between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): art. 2; available online at http://www.bepress.com/peps/vol13/iss1/2 (accessed July 8, 2009).

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# Sufism, Exemplary Lives, and Social Science in Pakistan

David Gilmartin

They are and they aren't; they do and they don't.
Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*

As Marcia Hermansen and Bruce Lawrence have noted, *tazkiras* of Sufi saints trace "memory through the lives of heroes."[1] They are heroes because their lives embody many of the most basic ideals of Islamic civilization. Both through the tracing of exemplary genealogy and through stories of exemplary behavior and exemplary power, the lives of Sufi saints embody, in the eyes of many, how God's purposes for mankind have been brought to earth. And yet, for this very reason, critical also to the stories of Sufi saints is their particularity. The stories of Sufis have power precisely because they have dramatized how civilizational ideals—imagined as being shared by vast portions of humanity—have been brought to bear in the most particularistic places and amid the most mundane of experiences. That is why these stories can be used to trace simultaneously the operation of civilizational identities and of the most local—and sometimes competitive—particularistic identities. The historical association of Sufis with particular cities, places, or communities (or even dynasties) provides ample evidence of this.

A consequence is that stories of Sufis also embody, as dramatically as any sources we have, the tensions between civilizational ideals and the operation of local power structures—whether those of states, tribes, kinship networks, or urban patronage—in shaping Muslim lives. Peter Brown noticed long ago these tensions in the lives of saints more generally in commenting on the holy men of early Christianity. Saints were often portrayed as the ideal embodiments of the structures of leadership and authority around which everyday life was structured. They were, as Brown wrote, frequently portrayed in hagiographical writing as patrons par excellence—in a society in which patronage was central to social order.[2] Yet, at the same time, they embodied (or at least allowed their