



# Islam

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# Islam

## Opposing Viewpoints®

David Bender & Bruno Leone, *Series Editors*

Paul A. Winters, *Book Editor*



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The basic foundation of our democracy is the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of expression. The Opposing Viewpoints Series is dedicated to the concept of this basic freedom and the idea that it is more important to practice it than to enshrine it.

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# Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?

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*"The only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this."*

John Stuart Mill

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In our media-intensive culture it is not difficult to find differing opinions. Thousands of newspapers and magazines and dozens of radio and television talk shows resound with differing points of view. The difficulty lies in deciding which opinion to agree with and which "experts" seem the most credible. The more inundated we become with differing opinions and claims, the more essential it is to hone critical reading and thinking skills to evaluate these ideas. Opposing Viewpoints books address this problem directly by presenting stimulating debates that can be used to enhance and teach these skills. The varied opinions contained in each book examine many different aspects of a single issue. While examining these conveniently edited opposing views, readers can develop critical thinking skills such as the ability to compare and contrast authors' credibility, facts, argumentation styles, use of persuasive techniques, and other stylistic tools. In short, the Opposing Viewpoints Series is an ideal way to attain the higher-level thinking and reading skills so essential in a culture of diverse and contradictory opinions.

In addition to providing a tool for critical thinking, *Opposing Viewpoints* books challenge readers to question their own strongly held opinions and assumptions. Most people form their opinions on the basis of upbringing, peer pressure, and personal, cultural, or professional bias. By reading carefully balanced opposing views, readers must directly confront new ideas as well as the opinions of those with whom they disagree. This is not to simplistically argue that everyone who reads opposing views will—or should—change his or her opinion. Instead, the series enhances readers' depth of understanding of their own views by encouraging confrontation with opposing ideas. Careful examination of others' views can lead to the readers' understanding of the logical inconsistencies in their own opinions, perspective on why they hold an opinion, and the consideration of the possibility that their opinion requires further evaluation.

### **Evaluating Other Opinions**

To ensure that this type of examination occurs, *Opposing Viewpoints* books present all types of opinions. Prominent spokespeople on different sides of each issue as well as well-known professionals from many disciplines challenge the reader. An additional goal of the series is to provide a forum for other, less known, or even unpopular viewpoints. The opinion of an ordinary person who has had to make the decision to cut off life support from a terminally ill relative, for example, may be just as valuable and provide just as much insight as a medical ethicist's professional opinion. The editors have two additional purposes in including these less known views. One, the editors encourage readers to respect others' opinions—even when not enhanced by professional credibility. It is only by reading or listening to and objectively evaluating others' ideas that one can determine whether they are worthy of consideration. Two, the inclusion of such viewpoints encourages the important critical thinking skill of objectively evaluating an author's credentials and bias. This evaluation will illuminate an author's reasons for taking a particular stance on an issue and will aid in readers' evaluation of the author's ideas.

As series editors of the *Opposing Viewpoints* Series, it is our hope that these books will give readers a deeper understanding of the issues debated and an appreciation of the complexity of even seemingly simple issues when good and honest people disagree. This awareness is particularly important in a democratic society such as ours in which people enter into public debate to determine the common good. Those with whom one disagrees should not be regarded as enemies but rather as people whose views deserve careful examination and may shed light on one's own.

Thomas Jefferson once said that "difference of opinion leads to inquiry, and inquiry to truth." Jefferson, a broadly educated man, argued that "if a nation expects to be ignorant and free . . . it expects what never was and never will be." As individuals and as a nation, it is imperative that we consider the opinions of others and examine them with skill and discernment. The Opposing Viewpoints Series is intended to help readers achieve this goal.

David L. Bender & Bruno Leone,  
Series Editors

# Introduction

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*"On both sides the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations."*

Samuel P. Huntington

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Islam is the second largest and the fastest growing of the three major monotheistic religions. One-fifth of the world's population are Muslims, and Muslims constitute the majority in states in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The phenomenon called political Islam, or Islamic fundamentalism, emerged in the late 1970s as a revival of religion in political and social life and has grown to challenge long-standing governments in the region into the 1990s. In Iran, an Islamic government has ruled since 1979. In Afghanistan, Muslim *mujahedeen* defeated the Soviet army in 1989 and later toppled the secular government. In Algeria in 1991-92, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win democratic elections and form a new government when a military coup ended the election process and outlawed the FIS. Since then, armed factions of the fragmented FIS have carried out acts of terrorism against the military government and foreign targets. In Egypt, Islamic groups have waged a campaign of terrorism against Egyptian citizens and foreign tourists in an attempt to destabilize the government of Hosni Mubarak. The Egyptian government has ruled under a state of emergency since 1992 and has conducted summary military trials against the Islamic groups. Samuel P. Huntington, director of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, has argued that, collectively, these events represent a political movement that will ultimately produce a cultural (and possibly a military) clash between Islam and the West.

Mark Juergensmeyer, author of *The New Cold War?* agrees that "taken together, [these events] are not just a congeries of particular cases but a worldwide phenomenon." Enhancing the perception of a growing and spreading phenomenon, many writers and reporters apply the label "Islamic fundamentalism" to the various movements. Though the movements invariably espouse strict adherence to Islamic law, or *sharia* (making the term "fundamentalist" somewhat fitting), many Muslims and Western scholars reject the label because the movements do not share a single, "fundamental" set of beliefs. Iran's Islamic government, for instance, is based on Shia beliefs and practices, but only 10 percent of Muslims are Shias. Further, many Muslims reject the "fundamentalist" label because it has a negative connotation, associated with fanaticism and violence. They contend that portraying militant groups as fundamen-

talist has created the false impression that Islam is a violent religion. In fact, they argue, Islam stresses justice and peace. Many Muslims do not identify with the movements and do not approve of their goals and tactics. Others point out that the factions that are the most violent, and therefore the most visible, represent only a small minority of the Muslim population. "Political Islam" is the term preferred by many to describe these movements, denoting their religiously based effort to transform the political life of Muslim societies. It is seen by some as a movement to increase the role of religion in Muslim societies and by others as a militant revolutionary movement aimed at overthrowing governments and uniting the Muslim world under religious law.

"Islam is a religious belief that covers all aspects of life and denies the validity of any philosophical separation between 'church' and state," note Charles E. Butterworth and I. William Zartman, professors at the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University, respectively. This fusion of religion and politics stands in direct contrast to the separation of church and state valued in Western governments. And it is this diametric opposition of values, combined with the inequality in military and economic power between the West and the rest of the world, that is the basis of Huntington's hypothesized clash of civilizations. The West, "now at an extraordinary peak of power in relation to other civilizations" following its cold war victory, according to Huntington, faces an Islamic culture it sees as economically underdeveloped, politically unstable, and historically a military enemy. On the other hand, "Western efforts to propagate such ideas [as liberalism, democracy, free markets, and separation of church and state] produce a reaction against" the West, Huntington argues, a reaction embodied in the political Islamic movements. According to Juergensmeyer, the rejection of Western secularism by the Islamic movements is "fundamental—often hostile and violent." With their basic opposition to the West, he warns, the Islamic movements "hold the potential of making common cause against the secular West, in what might evolve into a new Cold War."

In exploring the causes of political Islam's predicted conflict with the West, Bernard Lewis, author of *Islam and the West*, writes, "Ultimately, the struggle of the fundamentalists is against two enemies, secularism and modernity." Islamic fundamentalist groups give form to the popular resentment toward the transformation of Muslim societies by Western technological and communications advancements, explains Lewis, and struggle to limit the influence of Western culture. Western television, for instance, broadcast worldwide by satellite, "infects Islam with 'cheap alien culture' and spreads 'the family-devastating disease of the West,'" according to Iran's Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Araki, quoted by *Wall Street Journal* reporter Peter Waldman. Such fundamental opposition to Western influence, in Lewis's opinion, signifies a movement that is capable of uniting the Islamic world against the West. "This is no less than a clash of civilizations," he concludes.

Others in the West and in the Islamic world do not think a clash is inevitable. Leon T. Hadar, author of *Quagmire: America in the Middle East*, contends that the predicted clash of civilizations is a Western-made "conspiracy theory" that ties together unrelated events and portrays them as a monolithic threat. "This specter is symbolized by the . . . Muslim fundamentalist, a Khomeini-like creature armed with a radical ideology . . . intent on launching a jihad against Western civilization," he says. Daniel Pipes, editor of *Middle East Quarterly*, argues that the various Islamic movements are too disparate in their beliefs and goals to become a unified political force in opposition to the West. In fact, according to Pipes, the majority of Muslim governments find their interests coinciding with those of the West. In determining the future relations between Muslim countries and the West, he contends, "the key issue is whether Muslims will modernize." If they oppose the adoption of democracy, free markets, and technological advancements, he believes, the poverty and autocracy of the Muslim countries will deepen, and their relations with the West will consequentially worsen, possibly to the point of military tensions. "But if Muslims do modernize, things will turn out differently," says Pipes.

According to Michael M.J. Fischer, author of *Debating Muslims*, Muslim societies are already modernizing, in their own way, and "the Muslim world is now more than ever part of the West." Demonizing Islamic civilization as antimodern or anti-Western is pointless, in his opinion, because "the modern world is reworking even so-called fundamentalist movements in the Islamic world." In fact, according to Fischer, Islamic groups are adopting Western technology and modernism in their attempts to remodel Muslim societies on religious principles. These movements have successfully opposed the West's secular cultural influence and are challenging the belief that the West should propagate liberal, secular values in non-Western societies, in Fischer's analysis. Mohammed Sid-Ahmed, an Egyptian newspaper columnist, author, and politician, also rejects the West's equating of modernity with secularism. Islam can adopt modernity "without necessarily having to adopt the Western 'secular' model," according to Sid-Ahmed.

Predictions about the future relations between Islam and the West, ranging from a new cold war or clash of civilizations to increasing integration into a modernized world, center on the compatibility of values between the two cultures. *Islam: Opposing Viewpoints* presents debates on the nature of political Islam and its significance for the West in the following chapters: What Is the Goal of Political Islam? What Is the Status of Women Under Islam? Can Democracy Coexist with Islam? Does Political Islam Promote Terrorism? Is the Islamic World a Threat to the West? Is Islam Uniting the Islamic World? This anthology offers diverse opinions, from Western and Muslim sources, on the values of political Islam and their influence in both the Muslim world and the West.

# 1 CHAPTER

## What Is the Goal of Political Islam?

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# Islam

# Chapter Preface

In 1989, in the face of civil unrest protesting economic stagnation and a single-party monopoly on power, Algerians enacted a new, democratic constitution and scheduled their first-ever multiparty elections. As the democratic process got under way, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) quickly emerged as a leading party, drawing support from a network of neighborhood mosques and charitable religious organizations. With the FIS poised to win a majority in the January 1992 national elections, Algeria's military disrupted the democratic process, outlawed the FIS, and took over the government. Since that time, Algeria has been mired in violence between the military regime and armed Islamic groups—violence that has also targeted civilians, foreigners, and journalists. Jailed FIS leaders declared a *jihād* (religiously sanctioned struggle) against the regime in November 1994, threatening a full-scale civil war.

Shortly after the 1992 military coup, John P. Entelis, a professor at Fordham University, and Lisa J. Arone, a student at the University of Toronto, characterized the FIS as "a populist party . . . and not the fundamentalist threat that the regime has tried to portray it as." They were among those who believed the FIS was committed to democracy in Algeria and who believed the FIS should be given the chance to govern.

The Islamic Front's transformation from leading political party to armed insurgency calling for *jihād* caused others to question the nature and goals of the Islamic movement in Algeria. After witnessing three years of escalating violence committed by factions of the Islamic movement, a growing number of observers now doubt the FIS's democratic intentions. Among the doubters, Karima Bennoune, a lawyer and Arab-American activist, expressed her reservations: "If Algerian fundamentalists have carried out this level of violence, . . . one can but imagine the possible level of brutality to be enacted if these forces were to come to power."

The choice Algerians face, according to reporter Caryle Murphy, is between the "present police state" and a possible "religious dictatorship." Others insist Islamic rule would not preclude the formation of a democratic society. The viewpoints in the following chapter present alternative portrayals of the goals of political Islamic movements.