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## Fundamentalist Theology and Social Religious Dynamics: A Study of The FPI Movement in Padang City

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the relationship between fundamentalist theology and socio-religious dynamics through a study of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) movement in Padang City. Based on the understanding that theology is not only normative but also practical, this study explores how fundamentalist constructions are manifested in the public sphere. The method used is a qualitative approach with sociological-philosophical analysis.*

*examining the relationship between religious texts, ideological interpretations, and local contexts. The research findings demonstrate that fundamentalism within the FPI movement is not merely an attempt to purify teachings, but also a response to social change, identity tensions, and the need for moral authority. In this context, theology functions as both symbolic legitimacy and an instrument of social mobilization, shaping the relationship between religion and the public sphere. Philosophically, fundamentalism is understood as a dynamic construct born from the dialectic between theological ideals and historical reality. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of a reflective and contextual approach in understanding the phenomenon of religious movements in society.*

**Keywords:** *Social and Religious Dynamics, FPI, Religious Movements, Public Space, Fundamentalist Theology*

### INTRODUCTION

Religion in social life never exists as a completely private entity or separate from historical reality. Religion continuously interacts with the social, political, and cultural dynamics that surround it. In this context, theology functions not only as a normative belief system that regulates human relations with the transcendent, but also as a practical force that shapes the orientation of social action (Geertz, 1973). Because of this,

understanding religious phenomena requires an approach that is not only textual, but also contextual and reflective.

One interesting phenomenon to study in the contemporary religious landscape is the emergence and development of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is often understood as an attempt to return to the purity of religious teachings through a literal reading of sacred texts (Armstrong, 2000). However, in practice, fundamentalism cannot be

separated from the social context that gave birth to it. It emerged as a response to various social changes, modernity, and the identity crisis felt by certain groups in society (Berger, 1967). Thus, fundamentalism is not merely a theological phenomenon, but also a complex social phenomenon. In the Indonesian context, this dynamic can be observed through various religious movements, one of which is the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). The FPI's presence in the public sphere often sparks debate on the relationship between morality, power, and religion. On the one hand, the movement claims to represent an effort to uphold religious values; on the other, its practices are frequently described as a kind of essential expression related to social and political concerns (Jamhari, 2004). Thus, fundamentalism is not merely a theological phenomenon, but also a complex social phenomenon.

In the Indonesian context, this dynamic can be observed through various religious movements, one of which is the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). The FPI's presence in the public sphere often sparks debate regarding the relationship between religion, morality, and power. In one sense, this action is similar to an effort to promote religion.

values; on the other, its practices are often viewed as expressions of fundamentalism that overlap with social

and political interests. Several journal studies show that this type of religious movement often utilizes religious symbols and narratives to build social legitimacy and expand its influence in the public sphere (Hasan, 2006). Padang City, as a social space with strong religious and cultural characteristics, is a relevant context for examining this phenomenon in more depth.

Based on this background, this research seeks to examine how fundamentalist theology is constructed and manifested in socio-religious dynamics through a study of the FPI movement in Padang City. The study focuses on the dialectic between religious texts, ideological interpretations, and local contexts that shape religious practices in the public sphere.

Philosophically, this research is based on the assumption that fundamentalism is not static, but rather a dynamic construct born from the struggle between theological ideals and historical reality. Therefore, understanding this phenomenon requires a reading that goes beyond the normative and deviant dichotomy, toward a more in-depth analysis of the conditions that enable the emergence of certain religious expressions. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to enriching the discourse on the relationship between theology,

fundamentalism, and socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach to understand fundamental phenomena in the context of social-religious dynamics. This method was chosen because it can capture social constructs, perspectives, and meaning that cannot be explained using quantitative methods. The primary focus of this study is to examine how religious texts are applied ideologically and supported in social practice by religious actors.

The analytical framework used is sociological-philosophical. The sociological approach is used to interpret the phenomenon of fundamentalism as a social phenomenon related to societal structures, power relations, and the dynamics of religious identity in the public sphere. Meanwhile, the philosophical approach is used to examine the conceptual and normative dimensions of fundamentalist theology, particularly in understanding the dialectic between the ideals of religious teachings and their practical reality. This research is a case study, focusing on the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) movement in Padang City. The case study was chosen to provide a contextual and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, particularly

in relation to the social and cultural characteristics of the local community.

Data collection techniques were carried out using several methods, namely: (1) literature study, by reviewing relevant literature such as books, scientific journals, and documents related to fundamentalism and religious movements; (2) documentation, in the form of analysis of statements, activities, and narratives produced by the FPI movement; and (3) limited observation of social phenomena related to religious activities in public spaces.

Data analysis was conducted interpretively using thematic analysis techniques. The data obtained were categorized based on key themes, such as theological constructions, forms of fundamentalist practices, and the relationship between religion and the public sphere. The data was then analyzed through a process of reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions to identify patterns and meanings.

Thus, this method allows researchers to comprehensively read the relationship between religious texts, ideological interpretations, and local contexts as a dialectical process that shapes the dynamics of fundamentalism in socio-religious life.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Construction of Fundamentalist Theology in the FPI Movement**

The research results show that the fundamentalist theology within the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) movement in Padang City is built on a normative understanding of religious texts that tends to be literal and scriptural. Religious texts are positioned as sources of absolute truth that not only regulate the spiritual dimension but also serve as a foundation for regulating social life. In this context, theology does not stop as a reflection of faith, but rather moves into an ideology that guides collective action (Geertz, 1973).

This construction demonstrates the process of selecting and affirming specific meanings from religious texts, which are then institutionalized in the form of social movements. These interpretations are not neutral, but are influenced by ideological interests and the surrounding social context. Thus, fundamentalism can be understood as the result of an interpretive process that asserts the sole authority over religious truth. (Armstrong, 2000).

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Furthermore, this theological construction is also closely related to local and national political dynamics, where religious symbols and narratives are used to strengthen group identity and gain social legitimacy. In this regard, fundamentalism This can be seen as a reaction to modernity, secularization, and social uncertainty, which encourages a return to the "purity" of religious instruction. (Bruinessen, 2002).

### **Fundamentalism as a Social Response and Identity Crisis**

In the socio-religious dynamics of Padang City, the fundamentalism expressed through the FPI movement cannot be separated from the context of ongoing social change. Modernization, globalization, and shifting social values have created identity tensions within society. In this situation, fundamentalism emerges as a response to what is perceived as a moral crisis and value disorientation (Berger, 1967). This phenomenon indicates that religion serves not only as a system of trust but also as a protective mechanism against social changes that are perceived as

undermining collective identity. (Casanova, 2001).

In this context, the FPI movement serves as a medium for articulating religious identities that are pure and authentic. The social activities that are carried out, such as moral activism and mass mobilization, are not only intended to challenge religious norms but also to support symbolic efforts to restore social norms that are ideal according to the current interpretation of Islam. (Wilson, 2011). This shows that fundamentalism works as a cultural project that seeks to restore the dominance of religious values in the public sphere, while simultaneously asserting the boundaries between “the right” and “the deviant” in society. (Hasan, 2009: 229-250).

The FPI movement, in this case, serves as a medium to reaffirm a religious identity that is considered authentic. The social actions carried out are not solely oriented towards upholding religious norms, but also reflect efforts to rebuild a social order that is considered ideal. This shows that fundamentalism has an existential dimension, namely as an effort to find meaning and certainty amidst social uncertainty. In this context, involvement in movements like the FPI is not only ideological, but also a complex form of individual and collective identity negotiation (Bruinessen, 2011).

### **Theology as Symbolic Legitimacy and an Instrument of Social Mobilization**

The research findings also show that fundamentalist theology functions as symbolic legitimacy in justifying the social actions of the FPI movement. Theological values are used to provide a moral basis for various activities in the public sphere, so that these actions gain religious justification. In this framework, Religion includes both a source of values and a source of authority (Weber, 1993). From a sociological perspective, this illustrates how religion functions as a normative source of authority that can strengthen social ties and create a structure of legitimacy within the community (Turner, 2007). Thus, the practices carried out by the FPI are not merely seen as ordinary social actions, but as manifestations of religious obligations that are legitimized theologically (Jamhari, 2004).

Furthermore, the use of theology as symbolic legitimation also shows the process of sacralization of certain social actions. Activities such as moral regulation or collective action in public spaces are understood as part of the implementation of religious teachings, so that criticism of these actions is often positioned as a form of rejection of the values of religion itself (Durkheim, 1995). In this context, religious symbols and narratives continue to play a crucial role in developing moral

authority while maintaining internal group order (Geertz, 1973).

In addition, theology also functions as an instrument of social mobilization. The religious narratives constructed are able to mobilize collective participation and strengthen group solidarity. This shows that fundamentalism does not only operate at the level of ideas, but also at Concrete social practice. As a result, the relationship between religion and public space becomes increasingly complex due to the influence of symbolic and political dimensions (Roy, 2004). Studies on Islamic movements in Indonesia show that the use of religious symbols, the rhetoric of moral jihad, and the concept of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar are important factors in mobilizing the masses and Building a strong collective identity (Hasan, 2008). This emphasizes that fundamentalism does not only operate at the ideological level, but is also manifested in concrete and organized social practices (Wiktorowicz, 2004).

Thus, the relationship between religion and the public sphere has become increasingly complex, involving both symbolic and political dimensions. Religion is no longer solely confined to the private sphere, but is present as an active force in shaping social and political dynamics. In this context, fundamentalism can be understood as a type of religious

articulation that aims to claim public space through structured social mobilization and the legitimization of ideologies (Hefner, 2001).

### **Dialectic between Theological Ideals and Historical Reality**

Philosophically, the results of this study reveal that fundamentalism is a dynamic construct born from the dialectic between theological ideals and historical reality. On the one hand, there is an effort to maintain the purity of religious teachings as absolute truth; on the other hand, there is a social reality that is constantly changing and demands adaptation. The tension between the two gives rise to distinctive forms of religious expression, as seen in the FPI movement (Ricoeur, 1981). This indicates that fundamentalism is not just a "return" to the text but also the type of interpretation that is produced in the current social context (Martin, 1982); (Eickelman, 1996).

Furthermore, fundamentalism can be understood as a response to the crisis of interpretive authority in the modern era. When traditional authority experiences fragmentation, a tendency arises to claim a single interpretation that is considered the most authentic and legitimate (Eickelman, 1996). In this context, fundamentalism attempts to close the gap for ambiguity of meaning by asserting normative certainty

derived from sacred texts. However, this attempt actually demonstrates a selective and contextual process of meaning construction, not simply a literal reproduction of religious teachings (Esposito, 2000).

In this perspective, fundamentalism cannot be understood simplistically as mere deviation or purity, but rather as a phenomenon that exists in the space between text and context. It is the result of negotiations between normative values and empirical conditions faced by society. Therefore, a reflective and contextual approach is important to understand the complexity of this phenomenon more comprehensively (Asad, 2003). Thus, fundamentalism can be seen as part of the process of articulation of religious identity that is continuously negotiated in a dynamic social space (Salvatore, 2008).

Therefore, a reflective and contextual approach is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of this phenomenon. Such an approach not only seeks to read texts normatively but also considers the social, political, and cultural conditions that shape religious practices. Thus, the analysis of fundamentalism does not stop at normative assessments, but rather moves toward a deeper understanding of how religion is lived, interpreted, and mobilized in social life (Hefner, 2001).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that fundamentalist theology within the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) movement in Padang City cannot be understood simply as an expression of purified religious teachings, but rather as a complex phenomenon formed through the interaction of religious texts, ideological interpretations, and social context. In this case, theology functions not only as a normative belief system but also as a practical force that shapes and directs social action in the public sphere. This finding aligns with studies in the sociology of religion, which position religion as an active system of meaning that shapes social reality, not merely a passive reflection of individual beliefs.

The fundamentalism expressed through the FPI movement reflects a response to social dynamics, including changing values, identity tensions, and the need for moral legitimacy. In practice, theology serves as both symbolic legitimacy and an instrument of social mobilization, strengthening group solidarity and shaping the relationship between religion and the public sphere. This demonstrates that the fundamentalist movement operates not only within the doctrinal realm but also as a social movement with specific strategies, structures, and collective goals.

Philosophically, fundamentalism is understood as a dynamic construct born from the dialectic between theological ideals and historical reality. Therefore, this phenomenon cannot be reduced to merely normative categories but must be understood reflectively and contextually. This approach emphasizes that religious practices are always in a process of negotiation between texts, interpretations, and the surrounding social conditions.

Furthermore, this research shows that the emergence and strengthening of fundamentalism is also closely related to the transformation of public space in the modern era, where the boundaries between the private and public spheres have become increasingly fluid. In this context, religion serves not only as a source of personal ethics but also as a basis for articulation of collective identity and moral claims in the public sphere. Thus, movements like the FPI can be understood as part of the process of religious reactualization in facing the challenges of modernity and globalization.

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