Groups and ideologies

The Muslim world is a casserole of political systems, ethnicities, cultures and races, and defining the political groups and ideologies is an extremely daunting task.

American scholars, commentators and pundits have presented various classifications based on their own cultural background and criteria.

Here are some of the ideologies and buzzwords used today, and what they mean to different groups of people.

■ **Fundamentalists:** Mainstream discourse equates fundamentalists with terrorist organizations, but scholarship generally understands them simply as religious conservatives who reject secular influences and demand a return to a pure interpretation of the Quran. Their political manifestation, often termed Islamism, is generally used to describe an ideology that would like to see a country ruled by Islam as a religious, political and legal system. Some Islamist groups do resort to violent resistance and even terrorism.

■ **Moderates:** The spectrum of moderates ranges from religious conservatives living in the Western world to secularists in the Middle East who advocate a separation of church and state. Many call for a continuous interpretation of the Quran to fit the modern world. This interpretation would be done using the Quranic principle of ijtihad, systematic original thinking. Moderates are the predominant category in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

■ **Autocrats:** The Muslim world has a history of corrupt autocratic regimes from military dictatorships, such as Pakistan, to kingships, such as Saudi Arabia. Despite claims that their countries are ruled using Islam, religion tends to mesh with tribal customs, which are restrictive and often harsh toward dissenters.

Sources: Interviews; John Esposito, "Unholy War"; Gilles Kepel, "Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam"; wikipedia.org

JASON JOHNS/Missourian

The Columbia mosque, at Fifth and Locust streets, opened in 1983.

What is Islam?

Islam belongs to the same Abrahamic family of religions as Christianity and Judaism. Islam means "submission to God."

The religion spread rapidly after the prophet Muhammad started preaching it to the Arab tribes in the early seventh century. Today, Islam is the second-largest and the fastest-growing of the world's religions.

Muslims do not worship a different God than Christians and Jews — Allah is the Arabic translation for God. Muslims regard Jews and Christians as "people of the book" and their scriptures as messages from God.

The Muslim holy book is the Quran, a collection of revelations, which Muhammad preached to followers. The second book of Islam is the Sunnah, which chronicles the deeds of Muhammad. The two books are the primary sources of religious, social and political guidance as well as law. Islam is viewed by Muslims as a complete way of life.

Muslims believe in six articles of faith:

- Allah (God)
- Angels
- Scriptures
- Prophets
- Day of judgment
- Divine laws

Islam has five pillars that represent obligations for every Muslim:

- Shahadah, the declaration of faith every Muslim has to make: There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.
- Observing prayer.
- Paying zakat, or charity.
- Performing hajj, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, at least once in life.
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan, which celebrates the first revelations made to Muhammad.

Divisions in Islam

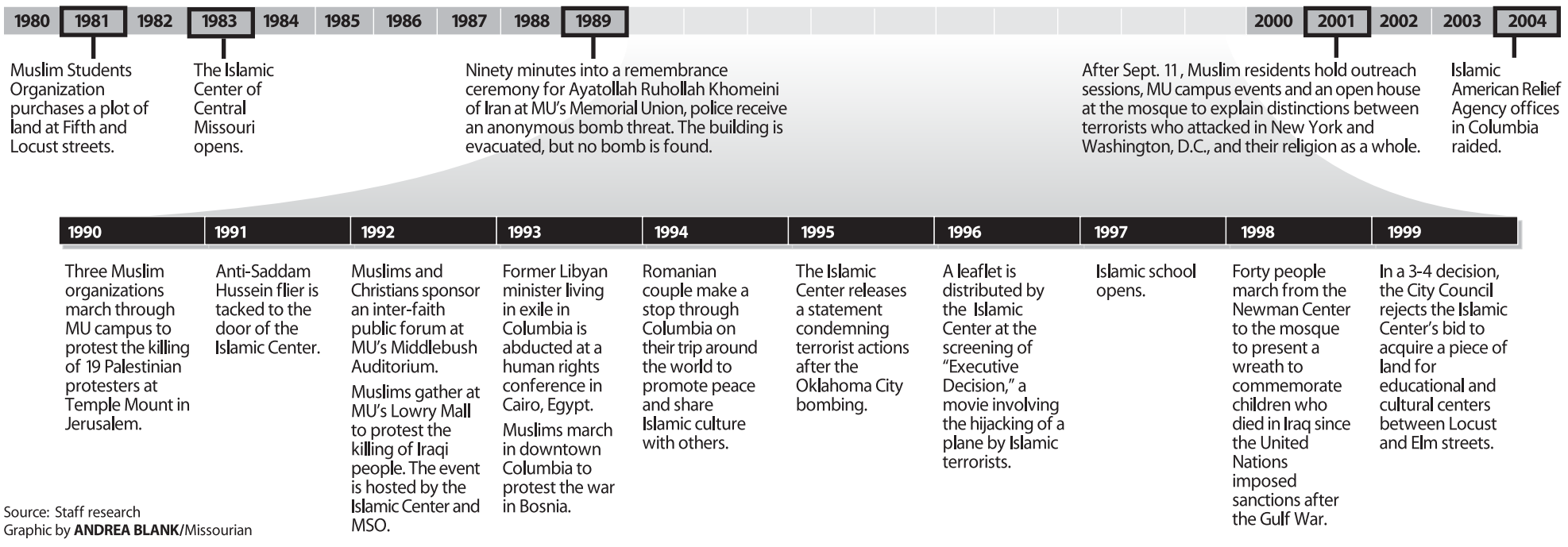
Islam is divided into two major branches: Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam. Sunnis are the majority sect, comprising more than 85 percent of the world's Muslims. The main difference between the two sects has to do with the succession of Muhammad. Sunnis believe the prophet did not appoint a successor, and wanted the best among Muslims to be selected. Shi'as believe succession should be hereditary, passed on to the family of the prophet.

The two sects are divided into many sub-sects depending on the how they practice the religion. One of these sub-sects is Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, which comprises both Sunnis and Shi'as.

Sources: islam.com; "The No-Nonsense Guide to Islam"; wikipedia.org; John Esposito, "What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam"

HISTORY OF ISLAM IN COLUMBIA

Columbia's Muslim community has grown from five families in the early 1980s to more than 1,000 people.



Source: Staff research
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