بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# How Pragmatism Is One of the Biggest Obstacles for Successful Change

This article addresses one of the obstacles that hinder the delivery of a successful vision for change capable of solving the various problems faced by the Muslim Ummah and humanity today. In order to do so, it examines the philosophical foundations that guide political action in the modern West and contrasts them with the political philosophy of Islam. By identifying the limitations inherent in the dominant Western approach, this article clarifies why this approach fails to provide real solutions to systemic problems. It then presents the Islamic political vision as the only correct alternative, outlining the qualities required of the Muslim individual, the Muslim Ummah, a political party, and a state in order to realize genuine change and overcome existing obstacles.

## The Philosophical Foundation of Western Political Practice

Western political practice is largely rooted in pragmatism. Pragmatism emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to rationalism and empiricism, which had previously dominated Western philosophy.

Rationalism holds that knowledge is derived from deductive reasoning based on innate ideas or intuitive truths, without requiring direct observation of reality. Key representatives of this school include Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. Empiricism, by contrast, argues that knowledge originates from sensory experience and observation, and that understanding is formed inductively. Prominent empiricists include Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.

Pragmatism, represented by thinkers such as Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, combines elements of both approaches. Knowledge acquisition begins with observation of reality, followed by rational theorization, and is then tested in practice. A theory is considered valid only as long as it corresponds with observed reality. As reality changes, theories may be revised or discarded. Knowledge is therefore seen as provisional and inherently subject to change.

A commonly cited example is the discovery of black swans, which invalidated the previously held belief, based on limited observation, that all swans were white. In pragmatism, reality is not merely the subject of thought but its source, and truth remains conditional.

In ethical terms, pragmatism rejects both absolutism and relativism. Absolutism asserts the existence of fixed and universal standards of good and evil, while relativism holds that moral standards depend on cultural, historical, or personal contexts. Pragmatism denies the existence of a permanent moral standard and instead maintains that moral judgments must be continually reassessed according to circumstances and perceived outcomes. As a result, concepts of right and wrong shift over time, reflecting changing social norms.

## Pragmatism as an Obstacle in Western Political Practice

Pragmatism strongly influences policymaking in modern Western politics. Political decisions are made based on current realities, with the assumption that these decisions must be constantly reassessed as circumstances change. Policies adopted today may be replaced tomorrow if they are judged to be less effective than newly proposed alternatives.

This approach becomes particularly problematic when the root of a crisis lies not in policy implementation but in the system itself. If a problem stems from flawed execution,

pragmatic adjustments may offer temporary relief. This logic underpins capitalist governance, where continuous legal reforms aim to refine the system.

However, when problems are inherent to the system, such as recurring financial and debt crises within capitalism, adjustments in implementation fail to provide lasting solutions. The repeated occurrence of such crises indicates that they are embedded within the system itself. Measures such as state intervention or nationalization, which contradict core capitalist principles, further demonstrate that the system lacks the capacity to resolve its own contradictions.

When a problem originates from the system, only a systemic transformation can address it. Such change is necessarily revolutionary. Yet pragmatism dismisses revolutionary solutions as unrealistic, labelling their proponents as idealists. As a result, pragmatic politicians are structurally incapable of resolving systemic crises. Instead, they obstruct genuine change by confining debate to adjustments within the existing framework, reinforcing the illusion that the system itself is sound.

This constitutes a major obstacle to delivering a successful vision for change.

### The Islamic Political Vision as the Only Correct Alternative

The political philosophy of Islam is founded on the belief that all matters concerning the universe, humanity, life, truth, falsehood, good, and evil originate from Allah (swt). Allah (swt) is the Creator of the universe and humanity and the sole possessor of sovereignty and authority.

Islam distinguishes between two spheres: one in which human beings have no control and are subject to divinely ordained laws of nature, and another in which humans are granted the ability to choose and act. In both spheres, Allah (swt) retains the exclusive right to legislate and determine how affairs should be ordered. In the sphere of choice, human beings may obey or disobey, but divine authority remains absolute.

Islamic governance is therefore based on the conviction that Allah's (swt) rule is just and perfect, and that no human authority can legitimately replace it. The Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophets are the sources of knowledge regarding divine law, which is regarded as the highest law. Governing according to these laws is considered the only correct form of governance.

In this framework, a Khalifah (caliph) safeguards the sovereignty of Allah (swt), and political authority is understood as the implementation of divine law rather than autonomous human rule.

Consequently, in Islam, reality is the subject of thought, not its source. Divine Revelation serves as the criterion through which reality is understood and addressed. What is good remains good, and what is evil remains evil, regardless of changing circumstances.

Problems are therefore not resolved by altering the system or borrowing elements from other systems. Instead, solutions are sought by returning to the Islamic system itself and examining whether it is being correctly implemented. Deficiencies are attributed to human failure in execution, not to the system. Accountability is enforced according to Islamic law, both in this world and the hereafter.

### Pragmatism and Islam

When comparing pragmatism and Islam, the difference lies not only in their treatment of reality but also in their epistemological foundations. Pragmatism is confined to the limited capacities of human reason and perception, while Islam is grounded in trust in the knowledge and wisdom of Allah (swt).

What pragmatism deems impossible or unrealistic may be entirely feasible within the framework of divine law. What is dismissed as idealism may, in fact, represent realism when judged according to Islamic principles.

This distinction highlights a central obstacle in delivering meaningful change: reliance on human-centred reasoning that rejects transcendent guidance.

## Historical and Contemporary Illustrations

An illustration from the early Islamic state can be found in the Battle of Mu'tah. After the killing of a Muslim envoy by a Byzantine ally, the Prophet (saw) mobilized an army of three thousand men. Upon learning that they faced a vastly larger force, some hesitated. Abdullah ibn Rawahah reminded them that success did not depend on numbers or material strength, but on faith and obedience to Allah (swt).

From a pragmatic perspective, engaging such a force appeared futile. Yet the decision was made on the basis of divine obligation rather than material calculations. Despite overwhelming odds, the engagement preserved the standing of the Islamic state and demonstrated its resolve.

A contemporary example is the attack of 7 October. From a pragmatic viewpoint, it appeared unrealistic for a small force to confront one of the most powerful military entities of the modern era. Nevertheless, the operation was carried out and sustained resistance followed, illustrating once again the contrast between pragmatic calculations and action driven by a different vision of success.

## Conclusion: Overcoming the Obstacles to Change

The willingness of Muslims to prioritize the hereafter fundamentally alters their approach to political and every other action. Decisions that appear excessively risky from a purely rational or pragmatic perspective become conceivable when guided by faith and adherence to divine law.

The central obstacle to delivering a successful vision for change lies in the dominance of pragmatism, which confines solutions to what appears immediately feasible within an existing system. Islam offers a different vision: one that demands unwavering commitment to divine guidance, moral certainty, and systemic integrity.

Overcoming these obstacles requires individuals, the Ummah, political movements, and an Islamic state to embody conviction, discipline, and trust in Allah (swt), recognizing that true success lies in obedience to Him (swt).

Hudhayfah reported: The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «لَا تَكُونُوا إِمَّعَةً تَقُولُونَ إِنْ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسُ أَحْسَنَّا وَإِنْ ظَلَمُوا ظَلَمْنَا وَلَكِنْ وَطِّنُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنْ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسُ أَنْ تُحْسِنُوا وَإِنْ أَسَاءُوا فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا» *Do not be blind followers, saying that if our people are good we will be good, and if they are unjust we will be unjust. Rather, decide for yourselves. If the people are good, be good. If they are evil, do not be unjust"* (al-Tirmidhī).

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