Faith in the Balance
Regulating Religious Affairs in Africa

Editor
Haim Malka

CSIS  CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London
## Contents

Acknowledgments vii  
Preface ix  
*Ellen Laipson*

**Introduction**  
*Haim Malka*  
Morocco: Islam as the Foundation of Power 11  
*Haim Malka*

Tunisia: Searching for a Postrevolutionary Religious Equilibrium 34  
*Haim Malka*

Nigeria: Between Formal and Informal Religious Regulation 62  
*Alex Thurston*

Kenya: Cooperation, Co-optation, and Confrontation 85  
*Richard Downie*

Burkina Faso: State and Religious Authority in Turbulent Times 111  
*Sebastian Elischer*

Conclusion 137  
*Haim Malka*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people played a role in this project, which could not have been completed without their valuable efforts. Jon Alterman, senior vice president and director of the CSIS Middle East Program, provided strategic guidance on the project and feedback on the entire manuscript. His input was invaluable. Judd Devermont, director of the CSIS Africa Program, always made time to review chapters and provide a reality check on the sub-Saharan Africa components. Ellen Laipson, director of the International Security program at George Mason University, shared her wisdom and wrote the study’s preface.

A number of people also provided feedback and comments on specific chapters. Ziad Munson, associate professor of sociology at Lehigh University, provided valuable comments on the introduction. Nathan Brown, professor of political science at George Washington University, and Intissar Fakir, fellow and editor in chief of Sada in Carnegie’s Middle East Program, reviewed the Morocco chapter; Sarah Yerkes, fellow in Carnegie’s Middle East Program, commented on the Tunisia chapter; Alexis Arieff, specialist in African affairs at the Congressional Research Service, reviewed the Burkina Faso chapter; and Stephen Ruken, analyst for Maghreb Affairs at the U.S. State Department, commented on the Kenya chapter. I owe them much gratitude for their willingness to share their expertise.

The study also benefited from numerous interviews and meetings with individuals and organizations in Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, Kenya, Burkina Faso, and the United States. Some are cited, but others wished to remain anonymous. We would like to thank all of those who took the time to meet with the authors, both formally
and informally, to provide their valuable feedback and recommendations.

Special recognition is due to two colleagues who worked tirelessly to help complete this project. Amber Atteridge, associate director of the CSIS Middle East Program, ensured that the project components stayed on track, guided all aspects of publication, and provided valuable feedback on the manuscript. Hannah Porter, research associate in the CSIS Middle East Program, was often on the front lines of editing initial chapter drafts and provided valuable research throughout that filled in many gaps. She also edited and provided feedback on the manuscript. Both were a critical sounding board throughout the project phases, and I am very grateful for their support and partnership on the project. Jennifer Cooke, the former director of the Africa Program at CSIS, helped conceptualize the project in its early stages, and I am grateful for her intellectual partnership.

CSIS’s Rebecka Shirazi guided all aspects of the book’s publication and Will Todman reviewed the final manuscript. This project also received valuable assistance from CSIS Middle East Program interns: Iakovos Balassi, Frances Fitzgerald, Sacha Gilles, Claire Harrison, Farah Oraby, Lauren Remaley, Asha Sawhney, Daniel Sharp, and Jonathan Thrall.

We are grateful to the Henry Luce Foundation for its generous support of this study.

While this study benefited greatly from the guidance of numerous people, the content is the sole responsibility of the authors and should not be construed to represent the opinions of anyone associated with the project. Any errors contained herein are the sole responsibility of the chapter’s authors.
PREFACE

It is indisputable that religion has become a more prominent factor in politics in the twenty-first century. Cases from every continent and nearly every religion demonstrate the rising salience of religion in defining identity and in organizing societies, at the same time that confidence in and competence of governments are on the decline. What was once a clearly understood boundary in modernizing societies between the secular function of the state and the personal, communal bonds of religion or ethnicity has become newly contested terrain. Formal institutions of government in both developed and developing countries are on the defensive, as newly empowered citizens and civil society challenge the dominance of formal public institutions to deliver services and define national and individual identity.

At the turn of the millennium, many political analysts celebrated the unifying and homogenizing effects of globalization. With greater mobility and improved access to information and technology, people around the world would become more alike, as millions of young global citizens, mostly in developed countries, were eager to shed the constraints of traditional cultural norms, including religion and the political affiliations of their parents.

But that was not really the experience of most people, and a backlash against what was seen as the new inequalities of globalization led to the realities of identity politics in many countries. Religion is often, though not always, the driver of identity politics and has become a powerful determinant of state-society relations in dozens of countries. In 2004, the National Intelligence Council's quadrennial Global Trends report noted that “over the next fifteen years, religious
identity is likely to become an increasingly important factor in how people define themselves."

Al Qaeda’s attacks against the United States in East Africa in 1998 and in New York and Washington in 2001 transformed the discourse about religion in politics to a focus on extremism—and on Islam in particular. But extremism and hardline interpretations of religion were rising in other faith communities as well, from different sects of Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, sometimes as an expression of political opposition and sometimes within political parties that won elections and took power.

In her 2007 book, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright traces the evolution of thinking in at least one Western capital, where diplomats have been trained to treat religion as a private, personal matter, not a topic for official policy exchanges. But that bright red line between state and church has become increasingly blurry and anachronistic, and she came to recognize the importance of learning about religious traditions, organizations, and belief systems as a normal part of understanding foreign cultures and the political-cultural realities that shape leaders’ capacity to act.

This important and timely study, *Faith in the Balance: Regulating Religious Affairs in Africa*, provides unique insights into how five governments on the African continent do just that: manage the politics of religion and the role of religion in politics. The study looks at each case—Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Burkina Faso—from the perspective of the state, complementing work that has explained religious organizations and belief systems as they relate to the state, seeking to address grievances, or to access resources and security. One important insight from the various cases is the centrality of politics and power relationships, more than doctrinal theological debates, in shaping the state-religion interactions.

In this study, the key questions relate to the changing strategies of states towards religious communities and institutions: What are

---

states’ goals in regulating religious space? What are the consequences of intervening or not intervening in religious life? Does a more robust government role in religious affairs lead to more domestic peace and consensus, or does it prove to be counterproductive and lead to more religious opposition to the state? Can ministries of religious affairs or education change the direction of religious beliefs and behavior over time, or are those phenomena beyond the control or influence of the state?

The five country chapters represent a fascinating mix of cases. First is the diverse demographic realities they provide: two Muslim-majority (over 98 percent) states,\(^2\) of mixed Arab and Amazigh ethnicity, where religion is a unifying factor (Morocco and Tunisia), one nearly evenly divided Christian/Muslim state (Nigeria), one strong Christian majority state (Kenya, 85 percent Christian, 11 percent Muslim),\(^3\) and one Muslim-majority state with a sizeable Christian minority (Burkina Faso, 61 percent Muslim, 23 percent Christian).\(^4\)

These demographics are constantly shifting, with nontraditional religious movements leading to increased fragmentation of religious affiliation.

There is similar diversity in state approaches to religion: a monarchy that traces its lineage to the earliest days of Islam, states that have clear constitutional mandates to protect religious freedoms, and two states struggling to redefine the state’s responsibilities towards religious activity in the face of a dramatic political transition or the violent extremist spillover from a neighboring state. But none of the state approaches have proven sufficient to deter or prevent extremism or to provide a sustainable political culture of religious tolerance.

---

The cases do not dwell on the roles of external security providers or aid donors, but there are useful observations about how states respond to Western—and particularly U.S.—framing of the concerns about extremism and its post-9/11 significance as the animating theme of security cooperation. States in the Maghreb, Sahel, and even sub-Saharan Africa have learned to use the jargon of countering or preventing violent extremism (CVE and PVE) to improve prospects for bringing in resources to support government programs. Such cooperation may create the misleading impression in donor capitals that there is a shared understanding of the problem set; in fact, for many African states, CVE is a controversial and even counterproductive strategy that can delegitimize government efforts, exacerbate intercommunal differences, and possibly facilitate recruitment to extremist organizations.

Governments will continue to search for the right balance between regulating religious activity for the common good while permitting freedom of worship and accepting the independence of faith communities. Too much government control weakens the legitimacy of religious leaders, but too little can undermine the capacity of the state to provide security for all its citizens. Project director Haim Malka and contributing authors Alex Thurston, Richard Downie, and Sebastian Elischer have provided deeply illuminating studies that show how hard it is to find that balance.

Ellen Laipson
Washington, DC, June 19, 2019
INTRODUCTION

Haim Malka

Religion and politics have been inexorably tied in Africa for centuries. Both Muslim and Christian movements have a history of pressuring governments on a range of social and political demands, including human rights and good governance. In countries where politics are characterized by corruption, repression, and discrimination, religious movements distinguish themselves by claiming moral authority. At the same time, governments are increasingly wading into religious affairs as they seek to silence dissent and amplify voices of religious authorities who legitimize their policies.

This study argues that state intervention and management of religious affairs are fundamentally aimed at expanding state powers and undermining political opposition rather than promoting a specific religious dogma or set of beliefs. Given the appeal and importance of religion as a political tool, governments cannot afford to ignore it. Finding the right balance is an urgent task, because how states manage and intervene in religious affairs has far-reaching consequences for politics, security, and social stability in Africa.

Africa’s religious and ethnic diversity is staggering in its size and complexity, and it continues evolving. Muslim communities are not monolithic within Africa. Islamic opposition movements have used religion as a tool for political opposition just as governments have to justify their policies. Ultraconservative salafi groups have drawn adherents wherever Muslim communities exist. Many salafis, who were traditionally apolitical, have increasingly rejected quietism in favor of political action. A small but vocal minority of jihadi-salafists
use violence to promote their agenda.\footnote{Salafism is a movement within Sunni Islam whose adherents aim to emulate the practices of the early generations of Muslims. The three main branches of salafism include quietists, who do not participate in formal politics and instead focus on spiritual outreach; political salafists, who seek to compete in formal politics and elections; and jihadi-salafists, who employ violence to achieve their aims. For more on this movement, see Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in \textit{Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement}, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009), 33–57.} Previously outlawed political parties that espouse Islamic ideals, especially in the North African Maghreb, have also leveraged their popularity since 2011 to win parliamentary elections. In some cases, these Islamic-inspired parties have formed coalition governments where they share power with other entrenched elites. In Tunisia, for example, the Islamic-inspired Ennahda Party won the largest share of votes for the constituent assembly in 2011, forming a coalition government. In every such case, political Islamists’ electoral successes had a populist tinge and were based in part on perceptions that these religious actors were credible, authentic, and untainted by ruling elites who had abused their powers for decades.

Christian political opposition movements have also used religious messaging and activism to challenge state control and socio-political norms. Historically, Christian groups have been at the forefront of social change movements on the continent, including the push for independence and decolonization. Christian leaders led calls for democratic change in Kenya, for example, at the end of Daniel arap Moi’s repressive reign, and they provided powerful moral voices in the fight against apartheid South Africa. More recently, there are signs that expanding Evangelical and Pentecostal groups are beginning to mobilize their followers for political objectives. Not only do these newer Christian movements threaten the influence of mainline Protestant and Catholic churches that have dominated Africa’s Christian space for more than a century, they pose a potential challenge to governments due to their growing numbers, influence, and ambivalent attitude toward engaging with authorities.

While most religious tension in Africa takes place within and not between Muslim and Christian communities, the two religions do
compete with each other in sub-Saharan Africa. In northern Africa, only Egypt has a sizeable Christian population. But in much of the continent, Muslim and Christian populations live alongside each other. When intercommunal violence does occur, it is often driven by secondary factors such as resource competition or ethnic divides that transcend religious rivalries. Governments are often called upon to arbitrate or intervene in these conflicts, though they are rarely neutral in how they do so.

States also have a long history of trying to co-opt religious symbols, authorities, and institutions. In precolonial times, religious leaders and political leaders were often intertwined. During the colonial period, traditional sources of power often existed alongside colonial institutions, and in some cases colonial powers sought to strengthen religious movements to counter pro-independence forces. Sufi brotherhoods, which wielded considerable influence in many Muslim societies, were often seen as useful allies by colonial powers. After independence, some regimes used salafists to undermine communist or leftist opposition forces. King Hassan II of Morocco, for example, used apolitical salafists and Islamists as a counterweight to socialist opposition forces in the 1970s and 1980s. There are numerous examples throughout Africa of regimes aligning with religious movements. What they all have in common is the desire to mobilize the credibility of religious movements to further state political objectives.

But the recent political successes of religiously inspired opposition groups have forced regimes to approach religious affairs in new ways. In some cases, governments have been active in religious affairs for decades and have developed multifaceted strategies for influencing mosques, churches, schools, charities, and religious bureaucracies. In others, governments are intervening cautiously and slowly, with less

---

developed policies. Much of this recent intervention is shaped by the fight against terrorist groups who claim religious authority. Across the continent, a battle between states and opposition groups over control of religious spaces is intensifying. Mosques and churches have been one arena of contestation, but education systems, civil society, and social media are increasingly important in this conflict.

While some degree of state intervention in religious affairs is unavoidable—and even necessary—it also carries risks. Too little intervention in religious affairs creates a vacuum that can be easily exploited by religious opposition groups, including those with violent tendencies. Mali’s lack of regulation, for example, while not the only driver of extremism, gave salafi preachers widespread influence in the country and created an opening for jihadi-salafists to hijack an armed separatist uprising in 2012. Too much state management and regulation, however, risks undermining the credibility of religious actors if they are viewed as messengers of an unjust state or regime. In 2012, Ethiopia’s government triggered widespread Muslim protests when it attempted to impose a little-known Islamic doctrine that emphasized obedience to the state. Overly aggressive intervention can also restrict religious freedom and trigger conflict with powerful religious movements.

Many states are justifying their religious intervention as a means of combating religious groups that use violence, particularly in Muslim communities. Africa has been particularly vulnerable to groups, such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State group (ISG), that claim religious legitimacy to advance their goals. In Tunisia, for example, thousands of young people left the country after 2011 to join al Qaeda and the ISG, and from 2013 to 2016 the country faced a protracted terrorism campaign that threatened to derail its political transition. The terrorist group al-Shabaab has spread outward from its origins in Somalia, training fighters and developing affiliate organizations that have launched attacks in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and, most recently, Mozambique. In Nigeria, a deeply divided country, Boko

---

Haram has seized territory, imposed a narrow interpretation of Islamic law, and terrorized populations in the northeast.

As governments develop policies to address these challenges, many have adopted U.S.-defined countering violent extremism or preventing violent extremism discourse to justify their security-based actions. This approach favors noncoercive, long-term efforts to undermine violent ideologies and address the underlying causes of violent extremism.

One subset of the CVE/PVE field argues that “moderate” or “tolerant” state-supported religious discourse is critical to undermining violent religious narratives and movements. Promoting state-sanctioned religious discourse includes monitoring and regulating religious spaces including mosques, churches, and schools for extremist discourse; retraining religious leaders and preachers; reforming religious curricula; engaging in social and broadcast media to promote state-approved religious discourse; and developing alternative religious narratives that can compete with violent religious discourse. There is some merit and rationale to this approach. If governments do not seek to regulate religious space and create some legal standards and boundaries to undermine hate speech, then violent extremists could fill the vacuum. Yet, the temptation of regimes to broadly apply this approach to marginalize minority populations or manipulate it for their own political objectives is strong. This has been the case in Kenya, where the government has justified abusive security operations against Muslim communities in the name of fighting terrorism.

The emphasis on CVE/PVE is targeted primarily at Muslim populations, despite the fact that Christian movements have also used violence and spread intolerant ideas about other faiths. Some Christian denominations, such as the diffuse Pentecostal movement, contain churches whose preachers have been accused of spreading violence and intolerant ideas.

---

4. “CVE measures also include initiatives for counter-messaging and the use of social media and other communications channels to counter terrorist narratives and promote alternative visions based on respect for human rights and human dignity.” “Countering Violent Extremism,” UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/countering-violent-extremism/.
hate speech and driving a wedge between faith communities. This has contributed to a climate of intolerance, anti-Muslim violence, and intercommunal conflict in religiously plural countries such as Nigeria and Kenya. While some governments may view these churches and preachers as problematic, few see them as a security threat requiring greater intervention.

What emerges is a nexus between counterterrorism and religious regulation that is inherently unhelpful. When states look at religious regulation through a countering violent extremism lens, it limits their tools for interacting with religious actors. Although security operations against violent extremists are necessary, in some cases state intervention in religious affairs is used as cover to persecute minority populations, preserve their status as second-class citizens, or sideline legitimate political opposition. That is, governments justify a wide range of abuses in the name of combating terrorism. Marginalized communities that are excluded from elite economic and political opportunities, and thus pose a challenge to regimes, are the most vulnerable. In many cases, state repression further radicalizes marginalized individuals and communities, creating a cycle of ongoing radicalization, anti-state violence, and regime repression.

While states speak of undermining violent religious narratives—a legitimate objective—violent extremists do not generally threaten the foundations of state control. Religious regulation may exclude violent discourse in some quarters, but attempting to silence legitimate opposition under the cover of religious regulation will further marginalize and alienate populations that are susceptible to recruitment by violent extremists.

Though governments have adopted CVE/PVE language and frequently frame their policies either in terms of counterterrorism or countering extremism, this study is not intended to analyze CVE/PVE programs. Nor is it intended to explain the drivers and conditions that foster extremism and political violence in Africa, which have been well explained elsewhere. Instead, it asks questions about

states’ motives, constraints, and the consequences of their intervention in religious affairs and explores the impact of those policies on the nature of the state, opposition groups, and society and politics more broadly.

In examining state intervention in religious affairs, this study seeks to answer a number of questions that shape the intersection of religion and public life: What are the different objectives states are pursuing in the religious sector? What are the internal and external constraints or influences on each government as it engages in religious spaces and what tools is it using? How do these policies shape governments’ interaction with religious movements, political parties, NGOs, and opposition groups? How do these policies affect state-society relations and relations between different faith communities? What is the impact of government policies on religious institutions and religious identity? Untangling these threads and identifying the impacts of state efforts to intervene in religious affairs are critical to understanding the trajectory of politics and security in contemporary Africa.

What makes this challenge more daunting is that Africa is undergoing rapid transformational change. The continent’s population is expected to double in the next generation to more than two billion people; internal migration and urbanization are moving populations faster than ever; and young people are demanding more from their governments. Unemployment, youth marginalization, urbanization, and failing services coalesce to create tumultuous sociopolitical environments and disenfranchised youth. Regimes are struggling to meet the demands of populations as debates over political participation and representative government intensify. Religion, either as a source of identity or a political tool wielded by both governments and opposition, is at the center of many of those debates.

As they navigate the religious sphere, governments face several paradoxes. First, by attempting to prevent opposition groups from using religion for political objectives, governments are reinforcing

the importance of religion as a political factor and arena for competition. Many states are attempting to keep religion out of politics while simultaneously politicizing religion. Second, governments seek the legitimacy of traditional religious institutions, but government overreach can delegitimize religious actors who could potentially play an important role in public debates.

The case studies in this volume represent a wide spectrum of regime types and highlight diverse models for state engagement in religious affairs across five countries. They are very different, but all struggle with problems of groups manipulating local grievances to recruit young followers or using religion to justify violence, and the establishment of political opposition groups that are religiously based.

Two North African Maghreb countries in the study, Morocco and Tunisia, share an Arab- Amazigh heritage and are more than 98 percent Muslim. In the Maghreb, where Arab and Amazigh cultural-ethnic identities have historically divided people, Islam has been both a unifying force and increasingly divisive. This is important because Maghreb societies are diverse and are often divided by socioeconomic class, language, education, and geographic location.

A second group of case studies includes two countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have historically shied away from regulating religious affairs—Kenya with a Christian majority and Burkina Faso with a Muslim majority overshadowed by a Christian elite that dominates the state. A fifth case study, Nigeria, has large, evenly matched Christian and Muslim populations with competing demands that the federal state has struggled to balance.

Unlike Morocco and Tunisia, which are religiously homogeneous, the governments of Nigeria, Kenya, and Burkina Faso operate in a fundamentally different context of societies that are divided between Muslims and Christians. This means the state has the additional responsibility of arbitrating and mediating between religious commu-

---

6. Both Morocco and Tunisia have small Jewish communities that are remnants of once-thriving populations that dwindled following the creation of Israel in 1948 and independence from French colonial rule in 1956. Jewish communities in both countries are protected minorities and are allowed to practice Judaism freely. "Morocco Population 2019," 2019; "Tunisia Population 2019," June 14, 2019.
nities. What all these case studies have in common is increasing state intervention in religious affairs, partly justified by the growing challenge of salafi opposition and violent jihadi-salafi groups.

Each country is unique and has different tools to pursue their policies. At the same time, a number of overlapping themes emerge to guide the study.

- Religion is a fundamental part of personal, social, and national identity in Africa, which is diverse and continuously evolving. In the Maghreb, it both unifies and divides states and societies like no other source of identity while in sub-Saharan Africa it is interconnected with ethnicity, which is often a primary source of identity. In all cases, religion is more than a set of beliefs and practices; religious debates are at the heart of the identity of states and citizens alike.

- Many of Africa’s current debates over religion are unresolved questions from earlier periods. In some cases, where populations are divided between faiths, these divisions reflect historic imbalances where one religious community has been favored over another. Fundamental debates today over religious identity, the role of the state in religious affairs, the status of religious education, and the role of religious scholars and preachers are long-standing debates that continue evolving.

- Both states and opposition groups politicize religion for their own benefit. For governments, using religious symbols, tools, and institutions can potentially provide legitimacy or at least religious cover for their policies. For opposition groups, religion—and the moral authority of religion—is a powerful tool to challenge incumbent powers who are often corrupt and abuse their authority. What is different now is the diversity and breadth of religious movements that operate across religious landscapes that are highly fragmented between different denominations, movements, civil society organizations, and institutions.

- There is an important role for states in managing religious affairs. Yet, there are also consequences and risks of
government intervention. If governments do not operate in religious affairs, opposition groups, including those with violent agendas, will fill the vacuum. Even as some states attempt to control religious discourse and co-opt religious institutions, they risk undermining the legitimacy of those same sacred institutions if they are aligned too closely with a state that is seen as unjust or unresponsive to the needs of its citizens. Finding the right balance of state intervention is critical.

- Partner states are adept at leveraging U.S. assistance and training to further their political objectives of regime survival. U.S. assistance and training can be important to improve state capacity, but it can also be used against legitimate political opposition in the name of fighting terrorism or CVE/PVE. Understanding state motives then is critical to understanding the impact of U.S. support and aid.

- Violence and religiously motivated extremism are real threats. But they are not the primary threats to societies in Africa. The conditions that create violent extremism, including marginalization, unemployment, indignity, and hopelessness, are a far greater threat to states and societies in Africa. As long as those conditions exist, they will motivate people to use violence for political objectives and create recruits for violent movements that claim religious authority.

For U.S. policymakers, analysis of Africa tends to underappreciate the way religious dynamics affect social and political trends. When policymakers do take into account the impact of religion on politics, it is often through a narrow counterterrorism lens that interprets Islam as an outlier for its lack of distinction between the political and religious realms. These assumptions are not only unhelpful, they skew our assessment of social, political, and security dynamics. Ultimately, this study aims to understand the motives behind state intervention in religious affairs in an effort to more accurately assess political contestation and social stability in African states and societies.
MOROCCO: ISLAM AS THE FOUNDATION OF POWER

Haim Malka

Toward the end of the 1980s, the late King Hassan II of Morocco famously declared that he was an Islamic “fundamentalist.” It was a strange statement from an Arab leader who was so closely linked with the Western alliance. Hassan II was responding to the growing popularity of religiously inspired political opposition forces that threatened his monopoly on power. His declaration reflected a strategy to enlist religion as a tool to outflank his rivals—both secular and religious. If Islamists were popular, Hassan II would establish himself as even more Islamist than his political foes. Armed with his title, amir al-mu’minin (commander of the faithful), he fiercely defended his claim to religious authority.

It was a tumultuous period in the Arab-Muslim world. Extremists in Saudi Arabia overran Mecca’s Grand Mosque (1979); Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution was inspiring Islamic political movements; Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had been assassinated by violent Islamists (1981); and the seeds of al Qaeda were germinating in Afghanistan. Over the next decade, Morocco strengthened its ties with

2. King Hassan II also allowed Islamists greater freedom as a way to undermine the appeal of leftist forces that posed the primary challenge to his rule in the 1970s and 1980s.
Saudi Arabia, allowing salafi and Wahhabi preachers greater influence in Moroccan society, education, and religious life. This Gulf-inspired practice largely came at the expense of Sufism, which was popular across Morocco. Satellite television from the Gulf brought charismatic Wahhabi preachers into the homes of Moroccans, further strengthening salafism’s hold in the country.

Two decades later, King Mohammed VI faced a more complex series of threats. Marginalized youth attracted to jihadi-salafism launched a series of deadly bombings across Casablanca in 2003, killing 45 people. The attacks occurred during another turbulent and violent period facing the Arab-Muslim world which was grappling with al Qaeda’s rise, the 9/11 attacks, and the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Shifts in mass communications, access to information, demographic trends, and human mobility intersected to create new sources of political opposition and protest that challenged the core of Morocco’s power structure.

Mohammed VI responded to these evolving threats by launching a comprehensive strategy to reorganize Morocco’s religious landscape. He spoke about creating “pious citizens” and worked to promote a distinctly Moroccan Islamic identity to address the new confluence of threats facing the country’s political-religious sphere.

3. Saudi religious influence grew in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa during the 1980s as a response to the 1979 Iranian revolution and heightened Islamic political activism.


5. The nationalist Istiqlal Party, which led Morocco’s independence movement, incorporated salafi Islamic thought into its nationalist project.

6. The total death toll includes 12 suicide bombers.

7. The king used the phrase *muwatin salih*, which can also be translated as “virtuous citizen.” In the speech the phrase is used in between points about citizens needing to adhere to religious rites and the importance of “faith,” but it also discusses how to be a good citizen in general, including caring for family and community and being aware of national identity.

The strategy had several core objectives, from developing a Moroccan alternative narrative to counter violent jihadi-salafi discourse to reinforcing the king's religious legitimacy and authority in order to undermine political threats to his rule. Unlike Hassan II’s religious policy which leaned toward Gulf-inspired salafism, Mohammed VI’s Islamic identity rejected salafism in favor of a uniquely Moroccan form of Islam.

The guiding logic was that salafism breeds a narrow and exclusionary Islamic narrative that can be easily manipulated to justify violence. More than 1,600 young Moroccans joined the Islamic State group (ISG) after 2011, proving that violent salafism still attracts young Moroccans. Only by educating Moroccans about their faith from a Moroccan perspective would the state be able to stop what it saw as violent religious interpretations that preyed on ignorance. Moroccan officials began speaking of spreading a “tolerant” and “moderate” Islamic interpretation that was compatible with universal values of human rights. In this way, Morocco’s efforts sought to replace narrow Wahhabi and salafi inspired interpretations with a Moroccan religious identity and practice based on the Maliki school of jurisprudence popular in the Maghreb, Ashari theology, Sufism,

9. More than 1,600 Moroccan citizens reportedly joined the ISG. Still, terrorism has been rare in Morocco, largely as a result of extensive law enforcement activity. See Mohammed Guenfoudi, “Where do the Moroccan Jihadists Come from and Who do they Affili ate With?” Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, June 29, 2018, https://mipa.institute/5748.

10. Moroccan Islamic identity promoted by the state is based on the Maliki madhab (school of law) and Ashari doctrine, which Morocco’s religious bureaucracy has fully mobilized in promoting its activities. The Maliki school is based on the teachings of Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 795). Malikism prioritizes the hadiths of the Medinan period and the “companions of the Prophet” over other parts of the Sunnah. More importantly, it accepts that the context of time and place must be part of the process of ijtihad (interpretation) for issues not directly addressed in the Qur’an and Hadith. For a detailed description see N. Cottart, “Mālikīyya,” in Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd, ed. P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Brill Online, 2014), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/malikiyya-COM_0652.

11. Moroccan Islamic identity includes a strong Sufi tradition. Senior officials in the religious establishment, including the minister of religious affairs, are members of the Boudchichia Sufi order, which asserts indirect influence over shaping state religious doctrine. The Sufi structure, with its hierarchical leadership,
and most importantly, respect for the king’s unique role as commander of the faithful.

Morocco has built an impressive and strategic network to regulate religious affairs and paid close attention to how Islam is taught, preached, and organized. But to be effective over the long-term, it will need to ensure that Islam not only serves the needs of the state and monarchy, but that its doctrine resonates with and serves the needs of the country’s youth, whose priorities lay primarily beyond the religious realm.

**THE POWER STRUCTURE: GOD, THE NATION, AND THE KING**

Morocco’s king claims the title commander of the faithful, a role that is enshrined in the constitution and bestows the highest religious authority in the country. This title is reinforced by the king’s claim as a *sharif*, or descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. The king’s religious legitimacy is critical because it is the foundation of the monarchy’s political authority. These pillars reinforce each other. The king and the institutions he controls work constantly to shape the boundaries of Moroccan Islamic identity as a way of protecting the monarchy’s unique role within the power structure and undermining potential sources of opposition. Moroccan politics for the last half century and earlier have been defined by this

12. By adopting this title, Morocco’s monarchy evokes the sacred Islamic institution of the caliphate. The interchangeable titles of caliph (successor) and amir al-mu’minin were created after the death of Muhammad in 632 AD as a means of maintaining the prophet’s leadership role, with the goal of protecting Islam and exercising political power. The ruler’s responsibilities include governing the community’s spiritual and worldly affairs and ensuring the observance of religious principles outlined in the sharia. In return, the ruler is entitled to the community’s loyalty and obedience. This is a tenuous pact, however, and debates over caliphal legitimacy and succession have continued for as long as the office has existed.

13. The king’s family is part of the Alouaite dynasty, which has ruled Morocco since the sixteenth century. It is currently one of the longest serving dynasties still ruling.
duality and the struggle between the monarchy and opposition forces.

In precolonial times, tribes in the hinterland constantly challenged the king’s temporal authority. While the tribes challenged the king’s efforts to assert his authority by raising taxes and recruiting conscripts into the royal army, they largely recognized him as sultan and sharif, with all the religious significance the titles bestowed. Thus, the conflict was not about whether a king should exist but the extent of his powers.

Since independence in 1956, this struggle evolved into a modern political contest between the monarchy and political opposition forces to define the king’s executive privileges and the balance of power between elected and unelected officials. The religious establishment was critical to this struggle. Hassan II used his religious status and a combination of incentives and coercion to rein in the ulema (religious scholars). During one highly choreographed Ramadan exchange, Hassan II famously lectured Islamic scholars on his religious interpretation of a particular exegesis while the ulema sat listening. The episode illustrates how Hassan II was able to co-opt and neutralize the ulema as a threat to his monopoly on power, while reinforcing himself as the highest religious authority in the land. Simultaneously, he established new scholarly institutions, such as the Dar Hassaniya, which served several objectives: they ensured that a new group of scholars answered directly to the king, guaranteed that the new institution would depend on royal sponsorship and funds, and moved the center of scholarship to Rabat and away from its traditional stronghold in Fez. Reinforcing his religious credentials strengthened the king’s claim to political authority.

As the state asserted its control over the ulema and created new religious institutions, it further marginalized the traditional

ulema associated with the al-Qarawiyyin University in Fez.\textsuperscript{15} Al-Qarawiyyin was initially brought under the nominal administration of the Ministry of Education following independence, but the state chose to let it languish rather than attempt to assert outright control.\textsuperscript{16}

Over time, the challenges to the monarchy’s powers multiplied and evolved. Political opposition forces that participate within parliamentary politics seek to gradually erode the monarchy’s executive powers in favor of elected officials; grassroots movements seek to distribute resources more equitably; others reject the idea of a monarchy altogether; and a host of Islamic-inspired movements call for a new political and social order based on idiosyncratic interpretations of Islam. A minority of opposition groups advocate violence to undermine the Moroccan power structure and impose their vision of an Islamic state and society. Morocco’s past, including its modern history, is replete with challenges to the power structure. But access to information, mass communication, mobility, and varied nature of opposition create unprecedented challenges.

In response to these multilayered challenges, the monarchy works through the state to deploy vast resources and mobilize numerous institutions to maintain this delicate balance and ensure the monarchy’s primacy. At the core of its strategy to maintain power is a drive to shape a uniquely Moroccan Islamic identity. This includes monitoring and regulating mosques, religious institutions, and preachers; promoting intellectual and legal interpretations of Islam compatible with state religious doctrine; reshaping religious education in the school systems; and developing uniquely Moroccan religious media and broadcasting content. To various degrees, efforts to control the religious sphere have been going on since independence through a series of initiatives, reforms, and bureaucratic organizations.

\textsuperscript{15} Al-Qarawiyyin was established in the middle of the ninth century and is recognized by UNESCO as the world’s oldest university. See “Medina of Fez,” UNESCO World Heritage List, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/170.

\textsuperscript{16} Sarah Feuer, \textit{Regulating Islam: Religion and the State in Contemporary Morocco and Tunisia} (University of Cambridge Press, 2018), 82.
KEY COMPONENTS OF STRATEGY

Morocco has a vast network of mosques, scholarly organizations, and educational institutions that make up its religious ecosystem. The monarchy seeks to oversee and shape this ecosystem to advance its various policy objectives. These activities largely fall into three main categories: preaching and mosque activity, religious scholarship and fatwas (legal rulings), and religious education.

Each of the institutions in these three areas has different mandates, functions, objectives, and target audiences. While there is overlap, there is also a bureaucratic division of labor, as well as competition and rivalry. Any one of these institutions in isolation would be impressive for its scope and mandate; taken as a whole, they make up a staggering network of the state’s religious bureaucracy.

Part of the strategy has been to fragment the religious landscape and institutions in order to control them. By creating numerous and sometimes overlapping bodies, asserting control of mosques, and dominating public religious space, the monarchy is leaving little space for outside religious activity not sanctioned by the state. In the process, it is constraining the ulema’s margin of independent action while offering incentives to join the state bureaucracy through salaries and other privileges. As scholar Malika Zeghal has pointed out, the monarchy had to weaken the ulema by dividing them, but at the same time it had to draw them closer around the monarch to control them.17

The monarchy’s strategy has several core objectives. First, it seeks to develop a Moroccan narrative to counter violent jihadi-salafi discourse that targets young people. Second, it aims to dominate the religious landscape in order to marginalize salafism and other nonviolent Islamic narratives that had gained inroads across the country. Third, it intends to reinforce the king’s religious legitimacy and authority in order to undermine political threats to his rule. Finally, religious regulation and imam training have become a

soft power tool to spread Morocco’s Islamic narrative to sub-Saharan Africa and countries with large Moroccan diaspora populations. Equipped with these tools, state religious institutions set about defining the boundaries of being a good Moroccan Muslim: someone who knows and practices his or her faith based on the Maliki school of law, respects the authority of state religious institutions, and recognizes the monarch’s unique religious role as commander of the faithful. As one senior leader within Morocco’s religious bureaucracy explained when discussing the efforts of the state religious apparatus, “We don’t want our citizens to be theologians,” meaning that people should not try to interpret religious law, doctrine, and theology for themselves. Rather it should be left to properly trained and educated scholars and preachers sanctioned by the state.

Preaching and Mosque Activity

Morocco has an estimated 50,000 mosques that are overseen and licensed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments (Habous), which is arguably one of the most powerful ministries. It answers directly to the king and, unlike most other ministries, its budget is not subject to government oversight. The ministry is tasked with ensuring that Morocco’s preachers, who are government employees, follow the state’s Maliki-Ashari legal and theological doctrine and preach respect for the monarchy as the highest religious authority. As part of this mandate, the ministry distributes the Friday sermon, which is read in the king’s name, and issues

18. Much of Morocco’s soft power strategy in Africa, including economic, security, and diplomatic initiatives, has focused on building support for its position on Western Sahara. In January 2017, Morocco returned to the African Union (AU) after leaving the AU’s predecessor the Organization for African Unity (OAU) in 1984 after the body recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.
21. For a list of institutions managed by the ministry and an illustration of its structure, see Ann Marie Wainscott, Bureaucratizing Islam: Morocco and the War on Terror (Cambridge University Press: 2017), 102–104.
training manuals for imams, which include guidelines prohibiting political activity or membership in political parties. The ministry also serves in an advisory capacity on a wide range of state initiatives including public education, public broadcasting, and religious programming, meaning that it works closely with other ministries. This has largely been a bureaucratic effort of organization, oversight, and implementation.

Much of the ministry’s approach to retraining imams stems from an assessment that the role of imams has to change in order for the religious class to remain relevant. As one senior official at the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated, “Today people are asking questions about non-religious issues and imams have to be able to deal with a wide range of social issues and questions.”22 Moreover, internal surveys by Moroccan religious officials found that the quality and depth of religious training was insufficient to meet new challenges and demands.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has supervised the highly publicized Mohammed VI Institute for Training of Imams, Morchidines, and Morchidates (female spiritual guides)23 since 2013. The training institute’s primary goal is to equip imams with the knowledge required to respond to a wide range of spiritual and practical questions. At the same time, the institute promotes Morocco’s state religious doctrine of Malikism and the centrality of the king as commander of the faithful. So far, the institute has trained nearly 4,000 imams, including more than 1,100 foreign imams24 from

---

22. Interview with director of Mohammed VI Institute for Training of Imams, Morchidines, and Morchidates, Rabat, September 25, 2018.
23. The position of morchida, created in 2006, allows women to train as spiritual guides. Their role is similar to that of their male counterparts, but they are not authorized to lead prayer. As Wainscott explains, the development of the position “serves a dual purpose for the state: underscoring its public relations campaign of Morocco as a ‘moderate country’ and regulating women’s religious beliefs.” See Wainscott, Bureaucratizing Islam, 212.
sub-Saharan Africa, Tunisia, France, and elsewhere. The Moroccan imams enrolled in the school are required to have completed a BA and memorized the Qur’an. Those that complete the training course are placed in mosques across the country and, according to officials at the institute, participate in annual follow-up workshops. After foreign graduates return to their home countries, Morocco keeps in contact with them through the Mohammed VI Foundation of Scholars in Africa, which is based in Fez and has branches across Africa. It is a potentially valuable tool for spreading Morocco’s soft power and influence abroad.

Morocco is also active in spreading its doctrine across the country’s media landscape. In 2005, it launched Assadissa (Channel 6), which broadcasts Moroccan religious programming, and a radio station that airs Qur’anic recitation and Sufi chants. Assadissa’s programs range from Moroccan Islamic scholars discussing tafsir (exegesis) to Qur’anic recitation shows. Other programs specifically target women audiences.

25. Religious ties between Morocco and West Africa are strong due to the role of the Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhood, which is centered in Fez and has tens of millions of followers across West Africa. For a more detailed analysis of Morocco’s relations with sub-Saharan Africa, see Haim Malka, “Morocco’s Rediscovery of Africa,” CSIS, July 2013, http://csis.org/files/publication/130731_Malka_MoroccoAfrica_Web_1.pdf.


27. Interview with director of Mohammed VI Institute for Training of Imams, Mochichines, and Mochidates, Rabat, September 25, 2018.

28. While foreign imams are chosen by their respective governments, Morocco covers the costs of lodging, food, basic medical care, travel home, and a 2,000 Moroccan dirham monthly stipend per student.


30. Other programs focus on the preservation of Morocco’s culture and environment, and some cover issues like family and education. One program, Ma’ al-Utra (With the Family), has an episode that teaches families how to instill the habit of praying in their children and another episode on how to create positive relationships between teachers and students. See “Positive Relations between the Professor
Religious Scholarship and Legal Rulings

In addition to regulating mosques and preachers, the Moroccan state mobilizes religious scholars to promote state religious doctrine and grant intellectual legitimacy to policy reforms and initiatives. These scholars are an important partner to the monarchy as it tries to find a balance between a national identity that is both modern and traditional. Since the king claims religious legitimacy and authority, the stamp of approval from respected scholars is important for promoting state-led initiatives and reforms, such as the mudawana (family code) of 2004, which was undertaken with religious approval.31

At the forefront of this intellectual effort is the Rabita Mohammedia des Ulemas (Mohammedia League of Scholars), a group of interdisciplinary scholars charged with finding the intellectual balance between Islamic orthodoxy and the modern ideals and values espoused through the state’s religious policy. The Rabita answers directly to the king. The league’s experts are trained in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and other disciplines, as well as religious studies. It is a widely respected institution that is comprised of 25 academic units researching a wide range of topics, including deconstructing radical discourse.32 One of its priorities is reaching young audiences through books, graphic novels, media, and different forms of online entertainment. Rather than explicitly projecting religious concepts and principles, the Rabita’s work attempts to address ideological or behavioral tendencies such as...

31. Debates on other sensitive issues, especially in the personal status realm like abortion, equal inheritance, and women’s rights, would also require religious sanction. These issues are not currently targeted for reform but could be at some point in the future.
32. Many Moroccan intellectuals, including those who are critical of the monarchy’s extensive executive powers and may have reservations about the state’s religious policy, view the Rabita as an important and professional organization that is engaged in important intellectual work. For more on the Rabita, see Wainscott, Bureaucratizing Islam, 119–124.
addiction and petty crime that could lead to radicalization among youth.33

The Rabita’s approach and objective is to clarify orthodox Sunni Islam for the masses in a way that resonates and undermines non-Moroccan interpretations, most importantly salafism. According to the league’s secretary general, Dr. Ahmed Abbadi, it is the responsibility of religious scholars “to give people clarity, not ask them to be scholars.”34 In other words, boil down the essence for people without the burden or the opportunity to analyze texts for themselves, which could lead to misinterpreting religious teachings in dangerous ways. Part of the approach is to convey how vast and complex Islamic texts are, and that only trained scholars should be allowed to interpret them.

The Rabita also works with al-Majlis al-`Ilmi al-`A’la (the Supreme Scientific Council), which is responsible for issuing fatwas. The establishment of this council was intended to centralize the issuance of fatwas and prevent multiple and contradictory religious rulings, giving the state the sole right to interpret Islamic law. The council also provides guidance on all matters to imams. In this way, the state has attempted to control and regulate religious legal opinions and ensure that they comply with the state’s religious doctrine. Unlike the Rabita, which does not work directly in mosques, the council conveys its rulings and guidelines through the network of state imams who then preach those ideas throughout the system of state-sanctioned mosques.

Religious Education

The third main pillar of the state’s religious strategy is reforming Islamic education in the school system. While the state religious bureaucracy has largely consolidated control over mosques and

33. The Rabita leadership also works directly with the country’s head of the penitentiary and reintegration administration on a dialogue program with incarcerated violent salafists.

34. Author discussion with Dr. Ahmed Abbadi, secretary general of the Rabita Mohammedia des Oulemas, Rabat, July 13, 2017.
monitors the content of Friday sermons, the public education sphere is a far greater challenge and arguably the most important. Morocco’s public education system is in crisis. Many students lack access to education in rural areas, classrooms are overcrowded, and students are not taught skills for the job market. Religious education, which is mandatory, is one area of particular concern for state authorities.35

According to one scholar, Morocco’s “religious curriculum puts forward two pedagogical objectives: the systematic elaboration of Islamic principles in harmony with a Moroccan dynastic heritage and the thesis that Islam features centrally in all facets of modern life.”36 In the past, religious courses in the school system were allowed to comment on and provide Islamic interpretations on nonreligious subjects, such as science and economics. This was particularly problematic and seen by state officials as unnecessary religious interference in nonreligious areas of education.37 Moreover, religious educational discourse tends to be rigid, by emphasizing what is permitted or forbidden, dividing people between Muslims and non-Muslims, and between right and wrong. Though Islamic scholarship in North Africa has a strong tradition of legal reasoning, education over the last several decades has focused on rigid and exclusionary narratives.

In 2015, Morocco launched an overhaul of religious education taught in primary and secondary schools to address many of these shortcomings. The effort was spearheaded by the Ministry of Education working with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and aimed at redefining religious education as a subject with clear pedagogical objectives.38 Religious education reforms also applied to semiprivate and private schools, which are required to teach Islam.

According to Ministry of Education officials, the goal of the new religious education curriculum is to incorporate human rights and

35. Most middle-class and upper middle-class families send their children to semiprivate schools if they can afford it.
37. Author interview with senior Ministry of Education official, Rabat, September 26, 2018.
38. Ibid.
tolerance with Islamic values.\textsuperscript{39} King Mohammed VI addressed this in a speech marking the Pope’s visit in March 2019, where he highlighted that the solution to radicalism is education. During his address, the king stated, “My plea for education is an indictment of ignorance. It is binary conceptions and the fact of not knowing one another well enough that are threatening our civilizations; it is certainly not religion. That is why, as commander of the faithful, I am advocating today that we give back to religion its rightful place in education.”\textsuperscript{40}

The religious education students receive is intended to help them understand the requirements of their religion while preparing them to operate in the modern world, where they will have to interact with people of other faiths or live in non-Muslim majority societies.\textsuperscript{41} In other words, being open minded enough to interact with other religions and societies while knowing and practicing one’s faith in a way that is compatible with the state doctrine. According to Ministry of Education officials, the curriculum is guided by five broad themes: freedom, integrity and ethics, \textit{ihsan} (solidarity),\textsuperscript{42} love, and monotheism.\textsuperscript{43} These themes are repeated throughout different courses in the religious curriculum.

An often overlooked but critical piece in the education debate is the role of the Arabic language. As the holy language of the Qur’an and Islam, Arabic links Morocco to its traditional sources of Arab-Muslim identity.\textsuperscript{44} Since independence, the state has attempted to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{39} For examples of how the Ministry of Education incorporated these lessons into its curricula, see Wainscott, \textit{Bureaucratizing Islam}, 173–177. \\
\textsuperscript{40} Full text of speech of HM the king on the occasion of Pope Francis visit to Morocco, March 30, 2019, http://www.maroc.ma/en/royal-speeches/full-text-speech-hm-king-occasion-pope-francis-visit-morocco. \\
\textsuperscript{41} Author interview with senior Ministry of Education official, Rabat, September 26, 2018. \\
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ihsan} is a concept related to faith. It has been described as “spiritual excellence” or showing solidarity with other Muslims through charity, for example. \\
\textsuperscript{43} Author interview with senior Ministry of Education official, Rabat, September 26, 2018. \\
\textsuperscript{44} One of the central goals of the postindependence state has been to impose Arabic on the indigenous Amazigh population. Political Islamists and nationalists
\end{flushleft}
impose the Arabic language on all schools, which implicitly reinforces Moroccan nationalism and Islamic identity. Students are taught fusha (Modern Standard Arabic) in first grade, while French is introduced in secondary school and is used for instruction in the sciences. French—and increasingly English—has become the language of modernity, science, technology, and, ultimately, job opportunities. Arabic, in contrast, remains the language of tradition and the social sciences, where fewer jobs exist. As one scholar has noted, this dichotomy between Arabic and French has created socioeconomic gaps with political ramifications.

NONSTATE RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY

Because of Islam's status as a potent and credible political vehicle, the monarchy has worked hard to constrain efforts by political actors to merge religion and politics, while maintaining that unique privilege for itself. Two key tenets shape the formal political system. First, political parties that compete in elections must recognize the king's religious authority as commander of the faithful. Second, no political party can be formed solely on religion, ethnicity, or identity. In this way, the monarchy seeks to exclude any political party from challenging its religious authority or claiming religious legitimacy.

often advocate for Arabic language instruction given its important link to Islam and Arab identity.

45. A recent controversy erupted over the draft law 51.17, which calls for foreign languages to be used in instruction “for scientific and technical specializations.” Some members of parliament see this as a threat to Morocco's Arab and Islamic identity. For more on the debate over this law, see “The Moroccan 'Istiqlal' Calls for the Removal of the Government over 'French-izing Education,'” Arabi 21, April 4, 2019, https://bit.ly/2UlfTkX.

46. According to Charis Boutieri, “the threats to orthodoxy that [the state] faces today emerged out of its own foregrounding of Arabic literacy as necessary to moral cultivation. Nonetheless possession of these very skills in moral deliberation condemns these students in market, social, and political terms. In short, these students face a situation where the linguistic and moral values of their state education do not coincide with other types of empowerment and fulfillment.” Boutieri, Learning in Morocco, 136.
Despite these stipulations, by the late 1990s the monarchy allowed the socially conservative Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party (PJD) to participate in elections. By allowing Islamists to participate in politics under certain conditions, the monarchy created an outlet for Islamist political activity that could be constrained by formal politics.

The PJD evolved from an Islamic political movement, but it denies that it is an Islamic political party and claims that Islam is its “reference.” Since 2011, the PJD has consistently won the largest number of parliamentary seats and has headed successive coalition governments. The PJD is in an awkward position of both heading a government with constrained powers and effectively operating as a loyal opposition to the monarchy. Despite this duality, the party has consistently, and at times vociferously, defended the king’s religious legitimacy despite its broader strategy to slowly strengthen the powers of elected officials and political parties at the expense of the monarchy.

According to one scholar, the PJD tries “to mitigate the authoritarian effects of the state on society while pressing for accountability based on Islamic moral teachings for justice and social solidarity.” Judging by its electoral successes, this approach appeals to many Moroccan voters. Indeed, the PJD’s religious orientation has been a source of credibility that has distinguished it from other political parties.

Civil Society

Given restrictions on mixing religion and politics, Islamic organizations have found opportunities for activism in civil society. They

47. The PJD’s detractors accuse the party of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, though party officials deny this claim. Instead, PJD officials compare their party to Germany’s Christian Democratic Union Party.

operate across a vast field of religious charities, NGOs, and civil society organizations, providing welfare, charity, and social services. Moroccan law generally places few legal restrictions on forming associations, which have been an important space for social and political activism given the historic weakness of political parties.49

Despite a prohibition on political parties engaging in religious activities, the PJD has been able to influence religious space at the grassroots level by nominally splitting off from its affiliated movement, the Unification and Reform Movement (MUR), which has a strong presence in civil society and on college campuses.50 In 2014, one leader of the MUR described the movement’s relationship to the PJD as “strategic” and “complementary.”51 The MUR’s activities emphasize proselytizing and religious education, including public awareness campaigns on a range of social and moral issues.52 The movement convenes conferences on topics such as the role of the Arabic language in education and the Palestinian issue. It also sponsors numerous activities including blood drives, iftars, reading contests, and film competitions. The MUR has an affiliated student group that is active on university campuses and organizes training events to develop communications and other skills for social-political activity.

The civil society sphere also allows Islamic movements that don’t participate in formal politics to engage the public. Foremost among them is al-Adl wal-Ihsan, or the Justice and Charity Movement.

50. Harakat al-Tawhid wal-Islah.
What sets the Justice and Charity Movement apart from other social-political movements is its rejection of the king’s title of commander of the faithful. It has been one of the most organized social-political forces calling for revolutionary change in Morocco and opposing the monarchy. Over the last several years, it has debated whether to form a political party and compete in elections, but so far it has rejected the political cost of entering formal politics.

The movement operates at a grassroots level, focusing its activities on spiritual outreach and proselytizing. Like many Islamist social movements, it understands the limits of existing power dynamics and its own weakness vis-à-vis the monarchy. Rather than confronting the regime directly, it seeks to Islamize from below in order to prepare people to accept its vision of a Muslim society. Much of the movement’s direct activity on religious issues occurs outside of the public sphere, in private homes and study circles of its members.

The Justice and Charity Movement is also active on college campuses, where it has ties with teachers’ unions and student associations and participates in student elections. More broadly, its public activities include organizing protests on nonreligious issues such as Palestinian rights, U.S. foreign policy, economics, corruption, and unemployment. The movement participated with leftists and other groups in the early part of the February 20 protest movement in 2011, but ideological differences prevented cooperation and the

54. The movement also has affiliated women’s associations and social organizations providing a range of services, including distributing food during Ramadan and holidays, providing counseling and health campaigns, legal rights campaigns, and other services. According to one Moroccan scholar, part of the movement’s appeal stems from the social welfare services it provides to Moroccans in urban and rural areas. For more on the movement’s grassroots efforts, see Daadaoui, “Islamism and the State in Morocco,” 106.
Morocco movement quickly ended its formal participation in the loose protest coalition.

In 2017, several Moroccan government ministries launched a nationwide campaign to oust Justice and Charity Movement members from public positions. The members dismissed from their positions included dozens of teachers, government inspectors, public guards, and advisers. More recently, leading figures within the movement claim that they have had their homes broken into and sealed by security services without legal orders. The leaders were accused of turning "places of residence into mosques not subject to the oversight of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and which changed their design [structure] without a permit."58

Morocco also has a small salafi movement, which is primarily apolitical and focused on spiritual outreach and proselytizing. Moroccan salafis did gain some political leverage after 2011, when many participated in the February 20 movement. As Moroccan scholar Mohammed Masbah has noted, the politicization of some salafi factions has led to the weakening of the group as a whole.61

60. Fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2014 by MIPA shows that "Salafi attitudes differ from the traditional perception of their departure from the political sphere and their indifference to the electoral process. According to the results of the research, about half of the surveyed Salafis are registered in electoral lists. However, only 57% had participated in the legislative elections of November 2011, while nearly two-thirds did not participate at all." Mohammed Masbah, "How Do Moroccan ‘Quietist’ Salafis Think?" MIPA, May 10, 2019, https://mipa.institute/6750.

A number of these “Qur’anic houses” were shut down in 2013 by the Ministry of Religious Affairs for operating outside of the state’s official curricula. Like other regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, the state has occasionally engaged in dialogue with salafis, including jihadi-salafists who were jailed after the 2003 Casablanca bombings. Some of this dialogue has been quiet, while some has been high profile and publicized through the media. One highly publicized case was the king’s meeting at Friday prayers with Mohammed Fizazi, a preacher who had been sentenced to 30 years in prison after the Casablanca bombings. The meeting came after dialogue between state officials and Fizazi and the preacher’s declaration of support for the king as commander of the faithful.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

Morocco represents a state that is actively trying to reshape religious discourse to pursue multiple objectives. Its distinct power structure and role of the king make it a unique case, but its successes or failures will have far-reaching ramifications for other Arab-Muslim countries grappling with similar challenges.

The monarchy has asserted its control over formal religious institutions and bureaucracies in a comprehensive and systematic way. In


the process, it is fragmenting Islamic movements that pose a potential political challenge; constraining space for independent religious rulings, preaching, and activity; co-opting the state’s ulema; and introducing a new religious education curriculum into the school system.

While these steps have been successful in regulating the religious bureaucracy and asserting state presence in these areas, effectively undermining the threat of violent Islamic interpretations and political challenges to the monarchy’s rule requires ongoing efforts that can adapt to changing threats. More importantly, while violent extremists and Islamists attract media attention, it is non-violent political forces and grassroots protests that pose the bigger challenge to the monarchy’s monopoly on power and Morocco’s power structure.

The deeper problem is that Morocco’s sociopolitical trajectory and youth dynamics—and that of North Africa more generally—increasingly emphasize challenging the status quo, which preserves injustice, perceived or real. These grievances not only drive recruitment by jihadi-salafi groups but fuel illegal immigration, criminality, and political protest by some youth who make up nearly 60 percent of the country’s population. Thus, religious policy is sending a message of tolerance and respect for authority, while many Moroccans feel they face ongoing injustice by an unjust power structure. Promoting religious-based policies to address radicalization and protest without systematically addressing the socioeconomic and political grievances of Morocco’s citizens fundamentally undermines and limits the strategy’s impact.

Despite these challenges, and in comparison to many of its neighbors, Morocco has the advantage of leadership willing to devote significant resources to its religious initiatives. This advantage may not be enough, however. Looking forward, the strategy faces several important limitations.

Religious education in the school system is one of the most important areas the state is trying to influence. Educational reform is centered on trying to demonstrate that Islamic texts are compatible with modernity and universal values of human rights. The focus is on
changing the image and perceptions of Islam, not changing or re-
forming Islamic law or doctrine. This effort is important, but it would
be more effective in parallel to a significant improvement of overall
education. As long as Morocco’s education system fails to prepare
students for the job market, young people will look for alternatives to
the state narrative of respect for authority and tolerance.

Morocco’s state religious apparatus is preaching tolerance, moder-
ation, and respect for authority, while many Moroccans are protesting
for greater political freedoms, accountability, and socioeconomic
opportunity. Morocco’s protest movements that emerged since early
2011 are calling for change. Moreover, many public demands center on
the notion of justice, a central theme in Islam. Yet, corruption, on-
going human rights abuses, limits on freedom of speech, and growing
economic gaps fuel a perception of an unjust system. Thus, an envi-
ronment of socioeconomic injustice and inequality undermines the
state’s claim of moral and religious authority—two concepts that are
 inexorably linked. As long as young people feel they live in an unjust
society, it will be difficult for the state’s message of tolerance and re-
spect for authority to resonate.

Morocco’s comprehensive religious policy raises the question of
whether too much state intervention can undermine the objectives
of religious regulation in the first place. In the religious sphere, the
credibility of imams has declined not only because they are seen as
state functionaries but because they avoid speaking about sensitive
subjects like corruption, unemployment, and illegal migration that
resonate with young people. It is too soon to determine whether a
new generation of better-trained imams will successfully connect
with youth; but without addressing the issues that people care
about, it will be difficult to rebuild the credibility of imams and the
state more broadly.

While Morocco’s efforts have been strategic and far reaching
across the religious field, outcomes will depend on implementation
and the cooperation of the religious bureaucrats, imams, and
teachers who are charged with implementing the policy. The first
internal assessment of outcomes is scheduled to take place in 2022,
which could provide additional lessons to analyze.
Finally, the state’s biggest challenge is creating an alternative Islamic identity that resonates with youth, undermines extremist discourse, and reinforces respect for authority, including the principle of the commander of the faithful. Whether the state’s alternative will resonate with young people, who have high aspirations, is unclear.

Given Islam’s importance to Moroccan identity and the power structure, the monarchy has little choice but to regulate the religious landscape. It does so not only to project a Moroccan Islamic identity that promotes the king’s religious credentials but as a way to contain Islamic narratives that challenge monarchical rule through violent or nonviolent means. If the state doesn’t establish its presence across the religious landscape, other Islamic narratives and interpretations will fill the void.

The inseparable link between the monarchy and Islam ensures that the religious field will continue to be contested and the monarchy will continue devoting resources and energy to defining the contours of Moroccan Islamic identity. The choices Moroccan leaders made in the past have shaped the country’s current political and religious environment. Striking the right balance today between the extent and type of religious engagement is critical. Too much intervention risks undermining the very objectives the monarchy has prioritized. Too little engagement threatens to leave a vacuum that will be filled with competing narratives. Finding a pragmatic balance will require the courage of ongoing self-reflection, assessment, and adaptation.
TUNISIA: SEARCHING FOR A POSTREVOLUTIONARY RELIGIOUS EQUILIBRIUM

Haim Malka

Zaytouna Mosque sits in the heart of Tunis’s old walled city. For centuries, Zaytouna was more than a place of worship, it was one of the most important universities in the Mediterranean world. It produced famed scholars, trained generations of government bureaucrats, and oversaw educational branches across the country. Zaytouna represented a distinctly Tunisian religious-cultural heritage that many Tunisians have described as “traditional Tunisian Islam,” or simply “Zaytouni.” It was open to the cultural influences of its milieu at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe while promoting orthodox Sunni jurisprudence.

Throughout Tunisia’s history, Zaytouna was at the forefront of the country’s intellectual debates. As Tunisia’s nationalist movement evolved in the 1930s, Zaytouna was “active in redefining the position of Islam in public life in a changing Tunisia.” Zaytouna’s centrality changed dramatically after independence in 1956. Within a decade, Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia’s first president, who envisioned

---

2. Zaytouna also played an important role in transferring advanced scientific knowledge to Europe during the medieval period.
a secular republic, dismantled Zaytouna’s educational units, nationalized Islamic endowments and property used to support the ulema, co-opted the ulema, and took numerous steps to secure state control over religious institutions and discourse.

Bourguiba wanted to ensure that the state, not independent institutions, controlled religious affairs and defined the balance between Islam and public space in the newly independent state. In the ensuing years, the state security apparatus closely monitored and controlled religious activities and worship. The result was that Zaytouna, which had historically represented Tunisia’s identity as both religious and modern, became completely marginalized. The former equilibrium between religion and state was replaced with state repression of religion and an effort to impose a secular identity on Tunisians.

A half-century later, in the aftermath of Tunisia’s 2011 revolution, Zaytouna has emerged as a battleground between Tunisians who believe Islam should influence public affairs in some way and Tunisians who want to maintain a sharper boundary between religion and public space. The struggle is consequential; whoever controls Zaytouna has the potential to influence religious discourse across the country. Debates over Zaytouna’s role, responsibilities, and mandate are a bellwether for broader debates over religion in Tunisia. Rather than a binary political struggle between Islamists and secularists, the debate over religion in postauthoritarian Tunisia reflects the challenges and complexities of shifting political alliances, bureaucratic turnover, and a mix of political compromise and deadlock that have prevented the country from reaching consensus on critical policy issues. So far, those who favor a constrained role for Zaytouna and strict state oversight of religious affairs have an edge. But the struggle to define a uniquely Tunisian balance between Islam and public affairs will endure for the foreseeable future.

The political struggle to find a new equilibrium is critical because state policies of forcefully and thoroughly excluding religion from public space have had far-reaching negative consequences for post-revolutionary Tunisia. First, it delegitimized state-affiliated preachers

4. Ibid., 141.
and scholars who are seen as tools of the state. Second, by weakening the religious establishment it created a vacuum that was filled, in part, by violent salafi groups linked to al Qaeda and later the Islamic State group (ISG). Third, it exposed a deep national identity crisis over Islam that had been largely dormant but that rose to the surface as a divisive political issue.

Regulating religious space is important. Yet, Tunisia’s modern history shows that efforts to regulate religious affairs in the name of imposing a rigid sense of national identity has not only failed but has had serious repercussions. In the process, marginalizing Zaytouna—an institution that has represented a balance between Tunisia’s traditional and modern identities—has left postauthoritarian Tunisia unprepared to address a range of social, political, and security challenges facing the country, including violent extremism. Without reaching a new balance on the role of religion in public affairs through dialogue, Islam will continue to be a source of conflict and be manipulated for political objectives. Finding this balance will require compromise on all sides and a partnership between the government, political parties, and civil society. The challenge for Tunisians is to reach this balance in a way that overcomes deep political polarization and respects Tunisia’s newly achieved freedom of expression.

**POSTINDEPENDENCE IDENTITY CRISIS**

Despite state efforts to impose secularism since independence, Tunisia remains a socially conservative country. Islam is a strong cultural force and it is the only common denominator among multiple, historical sources of identity that binds all Tunisians together. The country’s 1959 constitution explicitly recognizes Islam as the country’s religion.

---

5. Tunisia’s Jewish population has lived in the country since Roman times. During the French colonial period (1881–1956), Tunisia’s Jewish population peaked at more than 100,000 people. The number has dwindled to approximately 1,500 who live primarily in Tunis, the Island of Djerba, and the southeastern coastal town of Zarzis.

6. Article One of Tunisia’s 1959 constitution states, “Tunisia is a free, independent, and sovereign state, Islam is its religion, Arabic is its language, and the republic is
Despite Islam’s cultural depth in the country, Tunisia’s postindependence rulers viewed religion as a threat not only to modernization but to their monopoly on power. For Habib Bourguiba, Islam contradicted his definition of modernity and development. He once infamously drank orange juice on television during the fasting month of Ramadan, arguing that fasting for an entire month undermined worker productivity. Moreover, he feared that religious and other nonstate institutions would undermine the state’s authority. Part of his modernization effort included improving women’s rights and access to education through a new personal status code that stunned the Arab-Muslim world at the time for challenging the region’s cultural consensus.7

As scholars have noted, Bourguiba attempted to secularize Tunisia “via an aggressive state-imposed political project associated with the marginalization of Tunisia’s history and Islamic traditions.”8 His administration neutralized the scholars of Zaytouna by nationalizing and confiscating the endowments (habous) and property that Zaytouna controlled across the country.9 By depriving Zaytouna of its independent income sources, Bourguiba ensured that the religious class would be dependent on the state for salaries and thus refrain from political activity. Over time, this co-optation became so extensive that religious discourse and physical space became tightly controlled by the state, undermining the credibility of the ulema. Mosques were only open during prayer times, libraries were emptied of most religious texts, and Islamic education was reduced to emphasize ritual. Bourguiba essentially divided the

7. The personal status code was decreed in 1956 and entered law in January 1957. It gave women the right to vote and initiate divorce, in addition to other rights. Legislation aimed at promoting equality between women and men and legal protections for women remain more advanced in Tunisia than any other Arab country in the Middle East and North Africa.
9. Religious endowments are referred to as awkaf in other parts of the Middle East. They are typically parcels of land, apartments, shops, or other property that generate revenue that is used to benefit a mosque, charity, or other social services.
Zaytouna mosque-university through a series of reforms. The historic mosque in Tunis would serve only as a place of worship. Its school was incorporated into academic departments at the University of Tunis, including the Higher Institute of Theology, the Higher Institute of Islamic Civilization, and the Center for Islamic Studies.10

Meanwhile, religious institutions were carefully monitored by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Interior. This heavy regulation served several objectives. First, it sought to control mosque discourse and imam sermons in a way that prevented imams from addressing controversial or political subjects. Second, it sought to prevent religious authorities from consolidating power and influence outside of the state bureaucracy. Third, it sought to ensure that the moral authority and legitimacy of religious institutions were enlisted to serve the state and sanction government policies. Fourth, it prevented religious actors from using their position for political activity or allowing religiously inspired political opposition groups to challenge the state’s monopoly on decision-making. The result of these efforts was a religious establishment that was so closely affiliated with the state that it had little moral authority or legitimacy.

Islamism was becoming a powerful opposition force in the Middle East and North Africa when President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali replaced Bourguiba in 1987. Al Qaeda was emerging in Afghanistan; the tumult of the first Gulf War (1990–1991) sparked protests across the region; and a civil war between the military and Islamists raged in neighboring Algeria (1992–1999). Ben Ali saw threats everywhere, and his police state stifled all political opposition and pursued aggressive counterterrorism policies that prosecuted both violent and nonviolent Islamists alike.

Most political Islamic activists were either jailed or exiled. Despite these restrictions, Islam continued to inspire people and Islamic identity evolved under the surface. Because mosque discourse was so tightly controlled and preachers had to avoid controversial

Tunisia’s political-religious environment changed dramatically after the protests in December 2010 sparked revolution. Far from the one-party system that had existed before, Tunisia’s revolution created unprecedented opportunities for political parties, associations, and organizations of all types to emerge and operate. These groups comprised a diverse range of religious movements and
disciplines, many people, most importantly young people, stopped listening. But the demand for information on religious topics and religious commentary on political and social issues persisted within society. Gulf preachers spreading Wahhabi teachings influenced people through satellite television and Gulf money was supporting quietist salafi organizations active in da’wa (spiritual outreach) and proselytizing. Ben Ali’s ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries that shared overlapping security and counterterrorism interests facilitated growing Gulf influence in religious space. State authorities either did not realize the extent of the vacuum they were creating or did not sufficiently assess the threat of salafi and jihadi-salafi ideology that was brewing in the country.11

Widespread grievances that fuel radicalization—including socio-economic and political marginalization, harassment by the security forces, and perceptions of injustice—intensified. The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq further radicalized hundreds of young Tunisians who migrated to join the ranks of the al Qaeda insurgency in Iraq, oftentimes with the acquiescence of Tunisian authorities who were eager to get rid of these radicalized individuals. The Ben Ali regime attempted to contain all these disparate elements through aggressive security operations and legal restrictions. Rather than quell extremism, however, Ben Ali’s tactics—both in suppressing legitimate political expression and nonstate-sanctioned religious movements—created a religious vacuum and fueled radicalization among Tunisian youth.

Postrevolutionary Tunisia

Tunisia's political-religious environment changed dramatically after the protests in December 2010 sparked revolution. Far from the one-party system that had existed before, Tunisia's revolution created unprecedented opportunities for political parties, associations, and organizations of all types to emerge and operate. These groups comprised a diverse range of religious movements and

organizations, including nonviolent political parties like Ennahda, quietest salafi organizations like Hizb al-Tahrir, numerous associations and NGOs like the salafi Group for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, and violent jihadi-salafi organizations like Ansar al-Sharia. All these groups were allowed to operate relatively openly during the two years following the revolution, and the ensuing changes reshaped the religious landscape.

First, Islamist political parties were legalized, allowed to organize, recruit, and participate in the country’s elections for the National Constituent Assembly following the revolution.12 Previously exiled religious and political leaders returned to the country, and those imprisoned were released. After being repressed for more than a half century, these groups not only became visible and operated openly but became part of the debate on public affairs.

Second, in an environment of newly achieved freedom of speech, Tunisia’s first postrevolutionary governments were unsure how to address growing vigilante violence perpetrated by salafists, which contributed to a chaotic postrevolutionary social-political environment. At the same time, a government amnesty released hundreds of prisoners, including up to 250 jihadi-salafists. These activists were able to revive militant recruiting and operational networks in Tunisia and abroad, while amassing followers and recruiting several thousand young Tunisians to join the ranks of the ISG in Syria and Libya.13 Eventually, jihadi-salafists launched a terrorism campaign against civilians and the state.

Third, autonomous preachers, some of whom advocated violence, took over up to 20 percent of Tunisia’s 5,000 mosques, creating a situation where extremist discourse was unchecked.14

---

12. Tunisia’s National Constituent Assembly was dissolved in October 2014 and was replaced by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People.
14. Interview with Mounir Tlili, Tunis, September 3, 2015. Some officials claimed it was much higher. In an interview with the author, Tlili claimed that almost one-third of mosques had been taken over by salafists.
Fourth, the revolution reignited a debate over Tunisian identity and the role of Islam in public life, which became one source of political contestation.

The reemergence of Islamic-inspired political parties and organizations created deep concern among members of Tunisia’s political, economic, and social elite. Coastal elites that benefited from previous authoritarian regimes clung to the idea of a European-oriented secular Tunisia; many felt that after the revolution they woke up to a country that they didn't recognize and that had become more socially conservative and religious. This gap was partially a result of socioeconomic class divisions and regional differences, as well as tension between old and new elites. New elites included former dissidents who went from political exile or prison to senior positions in the government.

Political tension deepened as Ennahda, the most effectively organized political party, won the largest share of votes in the country’s first free elections for the constituent assembly in 2011 and formed a coalition government known as the Troika (December 2011–January 2014). New debates and political conflicts emerged over legislation and senior appointments in the religious sphere. Ennahda lost many of these legislative battles, including efforts to legalize religious endowments, restore Zaytouna’s education system, and prevent constitutional language asserting the equality of men and women.

15. Ennahda won 89 of 217 seats. The Troika government from December 2011 to January 2014 was a coalition led by Ennahda that included the Congress for the Republic Party (CPR) and the Ettakatol party.
16. The fear of those Tunisians who want to maintain Zaytouna solely as a mosque is that creating an educational function for mosques would establish a parallel educational system that could be politicized by religious activists.
17. Ennahda insisted that men and women are “complementary,” not “equal.” They compromised on the final language in the constitution, which states in Article 21, “All citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without any discrimination.” For an English translation of Tunisia’s constitution, see https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf.
ENNAHDA’S VISION

Ennahda has emerged as the most organized and articulate political force in postauthoritarian Tunisia. It is also the only political party that articulates a strategy for regulating religious space and strengthening the role of Islam in society. At the center of Ennahda’s strategy is the idea of reviving what some of its senior leaders refer to as “traditional Tunisian Islam.”

In the words of Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi, the movement set out to “correct the historic mistake” of Bourguiba’s state-imposed secularization. Ennahda argues that restoring the credibility of religious leaders and teaching Tunisians about their faith would revive a more tolerant version of Islam that would help defeat radicalism. Ennahda leaders and imams affiliated with the movement speak of reviving Zaytouna, promoting the Maliki madhhab, and teaching “moderate and correct Islamic values.” This definition of “moderate” includes “accepting the other” and “rules of dialogue, accepting different viewpoints, and respect.” Some critics of Ennahda charge that their emphasis on “moderate Islam” is a public relations effort targeted at Western governments. Others argue that Ennahda instructs preachers to talk about Malikism and wear tra-

18. Harakat Ennahda (the “Renaissance Movement”) grew out of opposition to former president Habib Bourguiba’s secularizing reforms. Rached Ghannouchi, an intellectual, founded the Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) in 1981 as an independent social and political movement inspired by Muslim Brotherhood groups in other Arab countries. Bourguiba repressed the movement, which changed its name to Ennahda and sought to participate in formal politics during the brief liberalization that occurred after Ben Ali came to power in 1987. The opening swiftly closed as Ben Ali banned the movement, pursued an aggressive counterterrorism strategy, and consolidated power. Ghannouchi lived in exile from 1988 to 2011. After Ben Ali fled the country, Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia and Ennahda formed a political party.
19. Interview with Rached Ghannouchi, Washington, DC, February 26, 2014. Ghannouchi dismissed this notion of a “Tunisian Islam,” stating in an interview with the author that “Islam is one, the Qur’an and the Sunnah are one,” and referred instead to “Tunisian Islamic culture.”
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
Tunisia

ditional Tunisian dress only in order to appeal to the local population, while indirectly spreading salafi doctrine.\textsuperscript{22}

Ennahda, however, has never been an ideologically monolithic movement. Some leaders and adherents practice Sufism, while others adhere more closely to salafism.\textsuperscript{23} There is significant internal debate within the movement between these different factions. Rached Ghannouchi has worked to bridge these different currents in order to maintain a unified movement. Many Ennahda supporters who favored using the party’s newfound political power to impose conservative legislation were deeply disappointed by the cautious approach favored by Ghannouchi.

For example, during debates over drafting the new constitution, Ennahda members on the preamble committee advocated explicit language about Islam’s centrality, which led to deep arguments with more secular committee members. Ennahda, at the behest of Ghannouchi, eventually agreed to compromise, resulting in constitutional language concerning Islam that mirrored the previous constitution, which stated in Article 1, “Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; Islam is its religion, Arabic is its language, and the republic is its system [of government].”\textsuperscript{24}

Ennahda’s efforts to reshape the religious landscape have been limited by several factors. It has been in awkward positions of serving in coalition governments while simultaneously acting as an opposition to the old guard political elite that still wields power, especially in the bureaucracy. This has limited its ability to shape policy and reorganize ministries.

In early 2014, Ennahda resigned from the government and turned over control to a technocratic government in response to a spiraling political conflict. Then in mid-2016, it reached a compromise

\textsuperscript{22} Interview with Sufi imam, Tunis, November 22, 2013. The imam had been removed from his mosque after criticizing the Ennahda party and had 24-hour police protection during the time of the interview, after receiving multiple death threats.

\textsuperscript{23} Habib Ellouz, for example, was elected to parliament in 2011 with the Ennahda Party.

agreement with Nidaa Tounes to share power, though it maintained a junior role in the cabinet. Ennahda’s greatest fear is a return to authoritarianism that would resume repressive tactics against the movement. Most of Ennahda’s leaders were either in prison or exiled following the Ben Ali regime’s outlawing of the party in 1988, and their families were subject to harassment by the security services.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, Ennahda’s political strategy has focused on supporting government accountability and transparency to protect rights of association and speech.

In addition to compromising on the constitution and legislation, many of Ennahda’s more conservative figures who were elected to parliament in 2011 were pushed out of the political party and given posts in Islamic NGOs affiliated with Ennahda. Other public figures who were not officially part of Ennahda but had served in the government bureaucracy after 2011 were also encouraged to find other nonofficial positions in religious NGOs. One controversial figure, Habib Ellouz, a salafi-leaning member of Ennahda’s consultative body who served one term in parliament, became the president of the Association of Preaching and Reform, an organization that he has used to promote a conservative-religious agenda.\textsuperscript{26}

In May 2016, Ennahda announced that it was separating its political activities and social/spiritual outreach activities, a move that it had been preparing for several years.\textsuperscript{27} This decision essentially created an important role for NGOs and civil society groups affiliated with Ennahda or that shared the movement’s broad objec-

\textsuperscript{25} Tunisia’s first two prime ministers after November 2011 elections were Ennahda members who had previously been imprisoned by the Ben Ali regime. Hamadi Jebali, who served as prime minister from December 2011 to March 2013, spent 15 years in prison, including reportedly 10 years in solitary confinement. Ali Larayedh, who served as interior minister in Jebali’s cabinet and then as prime minister from March 2013 to January 2014, had previously been sentenced to 15 years in prison and was reportedly tortured repeatedly during his incarceration.

\textsuperscript{26} Habib Ellouz reportedly urged young Tunisians to join the fight against the Assad regime early in the Syrian conflict.

In discussing the move, party leader Ghannouchi claimed that “Ennahda has changed from an ideological movement engaged in the struggle for identity, to a protest movement against the authoritarian regime, and now to a national democratic party,” and that “we must keep religion far from political struggles.”

This reorganization attempted to create a distinction between the political party and a network of NGOs that were loosely connected under the Ennahda movement. The party would focus on elections, legislation, and policy; and the movement would focus on a wide range of religious and social issues, including spiritual outreach and Islamic education.

Ennahda’s announcement to separate political activity from Islamic activism was a powerful move. Though in practice politics

28. Tunisia has created one of the most permissive environments for civil society in the Middle East and North Africa following the revolution. Before the revolution, establishing an association required approval of the Ministry of Interior. A revised law in 2011 created broad protections for freedom of association. “Decree Number 88 for the Year 2011,” http://www.icnl.org/icnl_online_library_seo/Tunisia/icnl_oll_Law_88_on_Associations.html.


30. One organization at the forefront of efforts to foster dialogue about the role of Islam in public affairs is the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), a nonprofit organization that has an office in Washington, DC, and branches throughout Tunisia. CSID has a board of directors made up of Tunisian and other scholars and an executive committee that includes prominent American academics. The organization describes its mission as “dedicated to studying Islamic and democratic political thought and merging them into a modern Islamic democratic discourse.” While some Tunisian critics claim that CSID is merely a front for Ennahda, there is no clear evidence of that. While CSID may not be directly linked to the movement, their leaderships share common visions for Tunisia. The organization is engaged in hosting numerous seminars and conferences on the role of imams in preventing extremism, imam training programs, and town-hall style meetings to discuss critical social and political issues. CSID’s Hand in Hand project, for example, compiled a handbook for training imams, which includes guidelines for Friday sermons. Approximately 400 imams have participated in the program, which has received funding from the Government of Canada. See CSID, Report: Mechanisms for Addressing Radicalism (Tunis, Tunisia: CSID, 2016), https://www.csidonline.org/post/report-mechanisms-addressing-radicalism. See also, “Hand in hand for combatting extremism and terrorism” (al-yed fil yed li-mukafahat at-tatarruf wal-irhab), accessed June 18, 2019, http://www.yed-fel-yed.org/.

31. For more on the split between Ennahda’s political and religious activities, see Fabio Merone, “Politicians or Preachers: What Ennahda’s Transformation Means
and social activities remain interlinked, the shift to greater separation could allow the two broad categories to strengthen their core functions and objectives. The political party could focus on legislation and governing. When necessary it would compromise and accommodate other powerful political parties and interests in order to protect its broader social and religious efforts. The social movement could work simultaneously to advocate at the grassroots level many of the revolutionary and religious goals called for by Ennahda supporters. So far, the party and movement have shown remarkable focus and unity. Its ongoing challenge will be to maintain both unity of purpose and cohesion of its political apparatus in a Tunisian political landscape that is highly fragmented.

**Equal Inheritance and Ennahda**

One issue that has emerged as a source of conflict dividing Tunisians is the debate over equal inheritance rights for men and women. Late President Beji Caid Essebsi recommended revising the inheritance law in 2017 to allow women and men to receive equal shares. In June 2018, a commission appointed by the president (Presidential Committee on Individual Freedom and Equity, or COLIBE according to its French acronym) issued a series of recommendations in a 300-page report, including reforming the inheritance law to allow equal portions of inheritance for men and women.\(^{32}\) The report set off a political storm between the legislation’s supporters and opponents.

Ennahda, which opposes changing the law, faced a lose-lose proposition in addressing the draft law. It could not support the law because it directly contradicted Qur’anic provisions for inheritance and would thus alienate its conservative base. On the other hand, opposing the law opened Ennahda up to charges that its discourse

---

32. Despite the existing law which grants different inheritance to men and women, the legal system found a way to circumvent this through a system of property transfers.
on individual rights and equality is merely a cover to attract a broader voting base and hide its true agenda to Islamize society.33

While partisan political officials and ideologues took a public lead for or against the law, opposition or support did not necessarily follow strict political divisions. A widely cited poll conducted by the U.S.-based International Republican Institute (IRI) illustrates the diverse composition of opposition to inheritance reform. Only 24 percent of the 1,226 respondents supported equal inheritance, including less than one-third of women polled (28 percent of women and 19 percent of men responded in support of reforming inheritance).34 In contrast, 95 percent of respondents supported initiatives to fight corruption and public sector reform.35 The poll highlights how fluid identity in Tunisia is despite efforts to categorize or define people as secular or religious.

Contradictory responses by state religious authorities further illustrate Tunisia's split identity. In August 2017, following the president's announcement that he would submit a bill on inheritance reform, Othman Battikh, then mufti of the republic, initially seemed to endorse the move. He claimed that it served to “reinforce women's position and guarantee the principle of equality between men and women in rights and obligations that is called for in our Islamic religion.”36 Several months later, Battikh shifted his position, arguing that gender equality in inheritance is not permissible in Islam, warning that changing the law could encourage extremists to target Tunisia.37

33. President Essebsi's attempt to submit the draft law to parliament without sufficient public debate sparked criticism that it was a politically motivated move to undermine Ennahda.
35. Ibid.
The debate over the inheritance law and other constitutional issues highlights a fundamental identity crisis within Tunisian society, where religious and progressive values, as well as the preservation of cultural norms, all factor into decisions about the country’s future.

STATE EFFORTS TO REGULATE RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

In the revolution’s aftermath, Tunisia’s successive governments have attempted to reassert their control over religious institutions. That effort, however, has been inconsistent and stalled by political divisions. The frequent turnover in the leadership of the Ministry of Religious Affairs means that no sustained strategy has been put forward to reform the religious sector, and most ministers have lacked vision to rethink the role of the religious establishment beyond bureaucratic and operational activities.

The lack of budget support is also frequently raised by Ministry of Religious Affairs officials as an obstacle. This is not accidental. Authorities have consistently underfunded religious institutions in the state budget in order to keep them weak. But this has an impact on the ministry’s ability to address increasingly complex challenges in the religious sphere.

38. During a private tour of Zaytouna in 2015, an official of the Ministry of Religious Affairs was adamant in pointing out the extensive air-conditioning requirements of the complex and complained that the ministry is responsible for paying the electricity bills for all of the country’s mosques (September 1, 2015).

Ministry of Religious Affairs

The one area where the Ministry of Religious Affairs has made progress is reasserting the licensing and registration of mosques and imams. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for administering and monitoring roughly 5,000 mosques in Tunisia. This includes paying the salaries of approximately 19,000 mosque workers. The government set out to restore its control of the mosques and evict preachers engaging in extremist or violent discourse. The ministry, however, does not have control over unlicensed mosques or study circles that take place in people’s homes or shops. It is unclear how many unlicensed prayer and study venues exist across the country.

However, leadership turnover and inconsistent attention have affected their ability to execute this strategy. Since 2011, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has had five different ministers. Each minister has had a different agenda and approach to the issue of regulation, reorganization, and reform of the religious sector.

Between December 2011 and January 2014, the controversial Nourredine al-Khademi led the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Khademi was accused by some Sufi preachers and followers of using his position to undermine Sufism, which has deep roots in Tunisia, and expel preachers who disagreed with his political agenda. At the same time, he reportedly appointed salafi and conservative preachers. Khademi advocated for increasing the availability of

40. Interview with the minister of religious affairs, Othman Battikh, Tunis, September 1, 2015. According to Battikh there were 19,000 mosque employees on the public payroll including daily imams, Friday imams, and maintenance staff.
41. Interview with the author, Tunis, August 30, 2015. According to a former senior religious affairs official who served under Ben Ali, Khademi appointed nearly 1,000 imams who either embraced salafism or were sympathetic to salafism. It is unclear how accurate this figure is.
42. Ennahda’s effort was also aimed at appointing imams who shared its broad political and religious approach. This reportedly included salafi and conservative preachers that were loyal to Ennahda. See International Crisis Group, Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge (Tunis/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2013),
Islamic education and restoring the historic role of Tunisia’s religious institutions, including Zaytouna. His tenure ended when the Troika government resigned, though he remained active in Islamic NGOs after leaving office. He became president of the National Coordination Coalition to Defend the Qur’an, an organization that has been at the forefront of opposition to reforming the inheritance law. Khademi was not part of Ennahda, but he served as minister in the Ennahda-led government.

Dr. Mounir Tlili, who served as minister of religious affairs during the technocratic government of Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa (January 2014 to February 2015), took the most strategic approach to reforming the religious sector during his short tenure. Tlili, a Zaytouna-trained scholar close to Ennahda officials, launched a far-reaching internal survey of the religious bureaucracy upon taking office. One of his findings was the low educational level and quality of imams and religious teachers in the country. According to his survey, only 10 percent of imams preaching and teaching in Tunisia had religious training from Zaytouna, and only 40 percent had earned a higher education degree in any subject above secondary school. His conclusion, which was confirmed by other imams, was that religious educators and leaders didn’t have the tools and knowledge to debate religious or sociopolitical issues that their students and mosque attendees cared about. For example, people armed with jihadi-salafi narratives would regularly challenge religious authorities and teachers, who were unable to refute those interpretations or provide alternatives in a credible way that resonated with people.

The problem of insufficiently trained and uneducated imams remains widespread and is caused by several factors. First, the role is undesirable to many people because the pay is low, and most imams have to rely on second jobs. Second, the requirements for serving


43. Some imams reportedly have not completed high school.
44. Interview with Ministry of Religious Affairs supervisor, Tunis, September 28, 2018. An imam khamsih, who oversees daily prayers, reportedly earns 70 Tunisian
as an imam are low; these include finishing high school and passing a basic test on Islamic principles.\textsuperscript{45} Third, the budget for imam training is very low. According to an official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the annual budget for imam training is just 84,000 Tunisian dinars, or approximately $28,000. Fourth, there are few opportunities for imam training or education programs to develop higher levels of religious study, beyond universities, which may be out of reach for many Tunisians.

Tlili sought to increase the training of imams and cooperate more closely with other Arab-Muslim countries that shared a similar attachment to the Maliki school of jurisprudence. In this sense, he was looking to share best practices and benefit from the strategy implemented in Morocco. While Tunisia has a very different form of government than Morocco, the centrality of the Maliki school and Sufism creates potentially useful links between the religious establishments. During Tlili’s short tenure as minister, 50 Tunisian imams trained in Morocco’s imam training institute.\textsuperscript{46}

The ministry’s imam training program essentially paused under Tlili’s successor, Othman Battikh (February 2015 to January 2016), who was also trained at Zaytouna and served as mufti of the republic under Ben Ali.\textsuperscript{47} Battikh opposed sending Tunisian imams to train abroad, citing a lack of budget support for imam training.\textsuperscript{48}

dinars per month, compared to 90 Tunisian dinars per month for an imam khatib, who delivers the Friday sermon.\textsuperscript{45} Interview with official from Ministry of Religious Affairs, Tunis, October 1, 2018. See also Feuer, \textit{Regulating Islam}, 168–169. Since 2003, “individuals without a background in religious scholarship would be training and supervising mosque-based educators.”\textsuperscript{46} Interview with Mustafa Tlili, Tunis, October 1, 2018.\textsuperscript{47} Battikh was removed from his position as minister of religious affairs over accusations of financial irregularities within the ministry. He was then reappointed as mufti of the republic by President Bejji Caid Essebsi. See “Tunisia’s Grand Mufti ‘to Appear before the Judiciary on Corruption Charges,’” \textit{Al Arabiya}, August 20, 2017, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2017/08/20/Tunisia-s-Grand-Mufti-to-appear-before-the-judiciary-on-corruption-charges-.html.\textsuperscript{48} Moroccan Ministry of Religious Affairs officials claim that they were willing to cover the costs of Tunisian imams studying in Morocco, except for airfare that they requested the Tunisian government cover. This account was confirmed by a Tunisian government official.
His tenure coincided with the return of a more security-oriented approach to monitoring mosques and regulating religious space. He was eventually ousted from the ministry but reappointed mufti of the republic by President Essebsi.

Ahmed Adhoum, who was appointed minister in March 2017, is affiliated with the secular Nidaa Tounes Party. He previously served as a civil judge and in the Ministry of Finance. Adhoum’s focus has been on preventing imams from engaging in political activity or discourse and removing imams deemed too political. Prior to the May 2018 municipal elections, the ministry dismissed 15 imams and banned them from delivering Friday sermons until after the election because they allegedly were trying to influence voters through their preaching.49

The ministry has been stricter about ensuring that imams avoid political sermons. They are required to sign a rules of conduct document, which includes avoiding preaching about controversial topics. Supervisors working through the Ministry of Religious Affairs also are mandated to provide guidance to imams and evaluate them on their Friday sermons. Reportedly the supervisors also provide feedback on style and substance to imams on the sermons.50

But these monitoring and supervisory efforts have faced opposition from imams who don’t want additional training, especially if the training is accompanied by discussions of democracy and citizenship, which is one area that some imams have protested.51 Imams have also tried to organize themselves since 2011 into several syndicates.52

51. Interview with senior official from Ministry of Religious Affairs, Tunis, October 1, 2018.
52. Their demands typically focus on economic issues and compensation. But some have also attempted to steer an independent path on political issues that at times are at odds with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. For example, in 2018 the secretary general of the Union of Tunisian Imams publicly discouraged Tunisians
Religious Education in the School System

Unlike other Arab-Muslim countries where narrow and exclusionary Muslim narratives are widespread throughout the education system, Tunisia overhauled its textbooks and curriculum in the early 1990s. The reform launched under former president Ben Ali removed extremist language from textbooks and promoted Islamic references that encourage tolerance toward other religions and universal values.55

In Tunisia, religious education in primary and secondary schools is mandated by the Ministry of Education. Since the 1990s, the amount of weekly time devoted to Islamic studies is 1 ½ hours for students from first grade to tenth grade.54 The vast majority of the curriculum focuses on ritual and Islamic practice (ibadat).55 Despite some reforms, the level of religious education is basic and low quality. Critics who support a greater role for religion in public charge that the curriculum has been too watered down to prepare students to understand their religion and the importance of Islam. According to teachers close to Ennahda, the current curriculum does not resonate with students and is insufficient. As a result, students search outside of school for other religious interpretations and can easily be manipulated by extremist discourse.

The Security Component

As Tunisia became a more open society and religious space opened up after the revolution, Tunisian authorities, including Ennahda, struggled to address growing violence and terrorism associated

---

54. Feuer, Regulating Islam, 146.
55. In secondary school, the course is called Islamic Thinking and attempts to foster discussion without contradicting basic Islamic principles. See Faour, Religious Education, 9.
with jihadi-salafi movements. These movements, such as Ansar al-Sharia and later the ISG, used religious arguments and ideology to take advantage of widespread grievances and expectations to recruit followers. Within two years, Tunisia faced a homegrown terrorism threat that was shaped in part by the growth of the ISG in Libya and Syria.

Since the height of Tunisia’s struggle against terrorism in 2015–2016, more senior Tunisian officials, including within the security sphere, recognize that religious institutions and leaders have a role in addressing the radicalization problem. But ultimately, political conflict and polarization have prevented Tunisia’s successive governments from agreeing on a coherent vision or plan that finds an appropriate balance for Islam in public affairs. Tunisia’s confrontation with jihadi-salafists has further politicized the debate over religion in society. Many secularists accuse Ennahda of harboring salafi ideas and operating a secretive military apparatus. Many conservatives in turn see the state’s secular approach as fueling radicalization.

After a series of terrorist attacks from 2013 to 2015, Tunisia’s government launched a crackdown on both violent and nonviolent salafi organizations. The crackdown primarily took the form of law enforcement and counterterrorism operations to arrest or kill terrorism suspects and ban organizations like Ansar al-Sharia. Over several years, Tunisian authorities developed a more comprehensive strategy to address the problem of radicalization and passed an expansive antiterrorism law in July 2015 that was widely criticized by human rights groups for its expanded powers to detain suspects based on vague charges.56

In late 2016, Tunisia launched its “National Strategy for Combating Violent Extremism” after repeated delays. The strategy listed 59 objectives that were based on four main pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution, and response.57 While three out of the four

pillars focus primarily on law enforcement and security methods, a fourth pillar, prevention, touches briefly on the role of religion in combatting extremism. Objective six in the document calls for “Promoting comprehensive education and spreading a culture of tolerance, diversity, and accepting the other” as well as “Developing a moderate and tolerant religious discourse.” Objective 13 calls for “Preventing radicalization in prisons and places of worship, while respecting human rights.”

A series of action plans were intended to clarify strategies for each pillar. Like many national strategy documents, Tunisia’s plan was more of a wish list than an actual strategy, and with 59 objectives it didn’t clearly make choices about its priorities. While jihadi-salafi violence has declined dramatically since 2016, implementation of the prevention component of the strategy has been limited.

**STRUGGLE FOR ZAYTOUNA**

Zaytouna today still sits at the crux of Tunisian identity, of modernity and Islam. The balance Zaytouna has provided in the past will be essential in assisting Tunisia overcome deep political divides. It has been held as a model of Tunisian identity and a tool to help counter extremist ideologies. However, conflicts over control of the mosque and its role in the country themselves comprise a political battle highlighting the internal fault lines in religion, governance, and identity in Tunisia.

Zaytouna and the idea of reviving Tunisian Islam became a signature issue for Ennahda, which argued that it could be a bridge between Islam and democracy in Tunisia. Other conservative Islamists also saw restoring Zaytouna’s preindependence role as a strategy.
for reasserting Islam’s centrality in public life. In 2011, a group of Islamic activists established the Friends of Zaytouna Mosque organization, which advocated reviving Zaytouna’s educational activities and reaffirming its role as a mosque-university. Ennahda was not formally part of the effort, but it supported the broader goal of reviving Zaytouna, and many of its leaders and activists argued that a strong Zaytouna was critical for spreading a tolerant or traditional Tunisian Islamic narrative that would help undermine extremism.

In May 2012, Friends of Zaytouna reached an agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to resume educational activities at the mosque by creating an educational council of Zaytouna. The agreement stated that Zaytouna Mosque “is an independent Islamic educational scientific institution that is not affiliated with the state and enjoys legal personality [status].” This move marked a major yet short-lived victory in the effort to shake off decades of state control and reassert Zaytouna as an independent religious and educational institution. However, the agreement soon became the source of conflict and legal struggles. A few months after it was signed, the ministries involved in signing the document declared that Zaytouna’s educational council is “legally subordinate to the head of the government,” and that the mosque’s administration, including appointment of imams, muezzins, and all other activities, are the responsibility of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

What is notable about the struggle for control of Zaytouna during this period is that it was not a binary battle between secularists and Islamists. Instead, it was a battle between different Islamists who

60. Interview with Said Ferjani, member of Ennahda political bureau, Tunis, November 18, 2013.
62. Ibid.
supported the restoration of Islam in public life. Ennahda was at the forefront of this debate. While it was the most influential voice because of its government position, size, and network, it could not impose its positions even within the religious sphere. It faced competition from within government ministries that were nominally under the control of the government that it headed and from other Islamist individuals who sought to pressure the party to take more aggressive steps on religious issues.

For example, then minister of religious affairs, Nourredine al-Khademi, often took hardline positions on issues that were counter to Ennahda’s efforts to prevent political conflict and support compromise when necessary. Figures like Khademi were a liability not only because they challenged Ennahda’s political agenda, but they reportedly preached takfiri ideas while serving as an imam in Tunis and urged young Tunisians to join the jihad against the Assad regime in Syria.63 Houcine Laabidi, a former electrician with no formal religious training, took control of Zaytouna Mosque in early 2012 and declared himself imam.64 Laabidi had been quoted as calling for violence against Tunisian artists who created what he referred to as “blasphemous” art.65

Laabidi also repeatedly challenged the Ennahda-led government on the issue of Islamic endowments, or habous. According to Laabidi and other activists, nearly half of the country’s farmland had been owned by Zaytouna through endowments before they were nationalized by Bourguiba. He vocally advocated for the return of all nationalized property.66 During that same period, Ennahda was

66. See “Placing a Hand on Zaytouna’s Religious Endowments: A New Battle against Ennahda for the Great Mosque,” Middle East Online, November 14, 2013,
advocating a new draft habous law that would reestablish the legality of Islamic endowments. Ennahda’s draft law, which was hotly contested and eventually abandoned, however, only sought to create new endowments, not restore property that had been nationalized as Laabidi advocated.67

Ennahda had long sought to loosen government restrictions on independent religious activity, but its position evolved to advocate for greater state control of religious institutions. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, nominally under its control, was actively attempting to reassert control over the mosques that had been overtaken by nongovernment-sanctioned preachers. It was also forced to move against and outlaw salafi groups including Ansar al-Sharia following a mob attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tunis in September 2012,68 a move that was opposed by some Ennahda officials such as Habib Ellouz.69 This put the movement’s leadership in a difficult position with its more conservative supporters who wanted immediate changes, as well as other salafists and conservative Islamic organizations who advocated for greater religious independence. At the same time, Ennahda was locked in political conflict with its secular rivals who constantly accused Ennahda of harboring a secretive agenda to Islamize society. In most cases, Ennahda chose political compromise toward the center in order to avoid conflict with powerful vested interests of the previous regime. Such struggles between secular and Islamist forces continue to play out in Tunisia’s political and social spheres.


69. Interview with Habib Ellouz, Tunis, November 21, 2013.
LOOKING FORWARD

Tunisia’s most important gain since the revolution is freedom of expression. In a freer environment, Tunisia has the potential for a more robust and probing debate on its national identity and how to balance Islam and modernity. Zaytouna is at the center of that debate. How Tunisia reconciles its national identity crisis and balances Islam and public life remains an important test facing the political class that will shape the country’s future development. The challenge will be finding an equilibrium between strengthening Islamic institutions that can potentially play a positive role in undermining exclusionary or violent interpretations of Islam without Islam being politicized in a way that encroaches on Tunisia’s newfound freedoms.

It will not be easy for postauthoritarian political elites to find that balance. Political polarization has intensified, while many politicians are driven by personal ambition and agendas rather than a sense of national interest. Moreover, many Tunisians are scarred by their past in different ways. Those who want a greater role for Zaytouna and Islam see many of today’s security problems stemming from the state’s legacy of repressing religion. They fear secularists will use legal methods to constrain their freedoms once again and return to authoritarian methods. Those who want to maintain a separation between religion and politics fear that the power of Islam and success of Islamist parties at the ballot box could be used to impose religious norms and curtail basic freedoms, including women’s rights.

Tunisia’s ambivalence toward regulating Islam beyond monitoring and a security-dominated policy will ensure that Islam remains a source of division among Tunisians. Looking forward, it is important for Tunisians and outside observers to understand several important factors that will shape Tunisia’s religious landscape.

Tunisia’s historical experience illustrates that state-led efforts to impose identity and norms are either temporary or incomplete. Tunisia’s identity is complex and comprised of multiple layers of culture and experiences. It cannot be easily summed up or defined in such broad terms as religious or secular. The debate and opposition
to reforming inheritance laws demonstrate the complexity of Tunisia’s identity, which is more conservative than most Western observers have acknowledged. Instead, Tunisia’s culture demonstrates the importance of Islamic practice coexisting with respect for the sanctity of basic universal values of freedom of expression and association. Identity is fluid, and as Tunisia develops, its national identity will continue evolving.

Without devoting more resources to imam training, improving education opportunities, and improving the quality of religious education, Tunisia’s religious sphere will continue to be weak and a source of political division. As a transitioning country, Tunisia has been dependent on international loans for budgetary support. Yet, the importance of devoting resources to priority areas is the state’s responsibility and should not depend on international assistance.

Tunisia’s history demonstrates that oversecuritizing or repressing legitimate Islamic expression creates more insecurity. By eliminating traditional sources of religious authority and legitimacy, Tunisia has been unable to compete with salafi and narrow Islamic interpretations, including those minority narratives espousing violence. While Tunisia faces legitimate security threats from radicalized individuals, its most strategic threat is a disillusioned and marginalized youth population that is gripped by a sense of injustice and indignity. As long as Tunisia fails to address its shortcomings towards its younger population, it will face insecurity.

Political conflict and polarization undermine efforts to find a practical balance and role for Islam in society. The politicization of religious issues like inheritance reform and attempts to impose legislation that affects religious principles without sufficient debate will further polarize the population. Tunisia’s political polarization continues to prevent religious leaders and government officials from developing a coherent policy toward religion.

Given the importance of religion as a social and political force in the country, the state cannot afford to ignore the need for some level of religious regulation. As long as the state and political elites view Islam primarily as a threat, however, it will be difficult to develop Islamic institutions that are more capable of addressing challenges
and playing a positive role in Tunisia’s development. Political elites should continue to debate the right balance of religion in public affairs and seek to move beyond narrow ideological or partisan positions. As long as Tunisia’s government does not lead in articulating a clear policy toward regulating religious affairs, nonstate actors, including salafi groups, will continue dominating religious discourse.

Civil society has an important role in developing plans and guidelines for imam training and religious education reform. But civil society cannot replace the state’s role in regulating Islamic institutions, legislating practical policies, and implementing those plans. Without cooperation between government and civil society and public-private partnerships, it is unlikely that a consensus that is pragmatic will be reached toward effectively governing religious space.

Although Tunisia’s newfound freedom of expression is its greatest asset, this very achievement makes reaching a consensus on identity more elusive. Given the fraught history of Islam in the country, it is unlikely that the role of religion in society will be resolved in a conclusive way. Instead, Islam and democratic norms will be forced to coexist in Tunisia in ways that may not deliver the decisive outcomes that partisans on all sides of the debate want but that most Tunisians can accept as their cultural and historical legacy.
In Nigeria, religion plays a powerful role in public life. Religious piety is highly visible in political campaigns, the media, the education sector, and in everyday life. Although much of this public piety appears genuine, the Nigerian Marxist scholar Yusufu Bala Usman’s warnings in the 1980s about the “manipulation of religion” in Nigeria remain relevant today. For both politicians seeking mass support and religious leaders seeking political influence, religion is a powerful tool. Because of the political opportunities it presents, whether in terms of winning elections, constraining rivals, or playing to populist agendas, religious regulation in Nigeria is deeply uneven and partly dependent on individual politicians’ and policymakers’ interests.

This chapter argues that religious regulation in Nigeria largely relies upon the relatively informal relationships between politicians and elite religious leaders. The chapter further contends that this model allows significant gaps in regulation and creates substantial vulnerabilities. Three major vulnerabilities include the following: (1) dynamics where state support for hereditary religious leaders can inadvertently undercut those leaders’ credibility; (2) patterns where new kinds of religious elites, particularly Pentecostal Christian megapastors, accrue power that impedes the state’s ability to regulate religion; and (3) difficulties that authori-

ties encounter in regulating religious currents at the grassroots level, which can mean that authorities respond slowly to dangers and do so in a highly coercive and often counterproductive manner. In other words, the unevenness of regulation has consequences for religious institutions, intercommunal relations, and security conditions.

Not all religious regulation in Nigeria is informal, however. For example, pilgrimages (to Mecca for Muslims and Jerusalem for Christians) and education are regulated to a considerable extent by government commissions and ministries. Below the national level, state governments have considerable powers to pass legislation affecting religion; such powers were on dramatic display between 2000 and 2003, when 12 northern states implemented wide-ranging “sharia codes.” On the whole, however, most efforts at religious regulation in Nigeria are ad hoc, reactive, and driven by politics. In the course of day-to-day life, the central government’s limited reach means that much of the religious sector is unregulated. Authorities have relatively little impact on financial and tax questions affecting religious institutions, on the regulation of charitable and health services, or on shaping the internal affairs of different religious organizations.

Pressures to regulate religion are growing amid a proliferation of security crises, especially Boko Haram, farmer–herder conflicts, and with small, fringe militant groups in various states. Although it is simplistic to discuss Nigeria in terms of a “Muslim north” and a “Christian south,” one can say that religious regulation has become much more securitized in the north than in the south. The Boko Haram crisis, concentrated in Nigeria’s far northeast, has generated intense discussions about how and whether authorities can regulate preaching and prevent radicalization. As with the Muslim world as a whole, local, national, and foreign actors increasingly treat broad swathes of Muslims as potential security threats, a perception that can be unfair and harmful. Countering violent extremism (CVE) is

---

2. These sharia codes are still in effect, but their enforcement has receded in some states.
a growing driver of efforts to regulate religion in Nigeria, with both positive and negative effects.

Yet, CVE is not the only theme in calls for increased regulation. Apart from insecurity, other public concerns about religious regulation have to do with some authorities’ and citizens’ perceptions that mass religious movements, Christian and Muslim, are cutting corners and amassing undue influence. In terms of Christianity, the Pentecostal movement has been called “a powerful and unregulated force.” In recent years, following the global drop in oil prices and the expansion of Pentecostal activities, some prominent Nigerians have called for the government to end tax exemptions for churches’ for-profit activities in the education sectors and other areas. Other efforts at regulation have arisen after scandals. In September 2014, 116 people died in the collapse of a guesthouse in Lagos, at a site managed by the Pentecostal preacher T. B. Joshua’s Synagogue, Church Of All Nations; the incident led to years of legal proceedings, diplomatic tensions between Nigeria and South Africa (over 80 of whose citizens were among the dead), and increased scrutiny of both Joshua and the Pentecostal movement as a whole. Another scandal concerned allegations that Ayo Oritsejafor of Word of Life Bible Church owned a private jet that was seized in South Africa and was found to contain $10 million in cash.

Questions surrounding religious regulation have major implications for Nigeria's future. Although the fears are sometimes exaggerated, observers (Nigerian and foreign alike) regularly warn that various movements, ranging from the Shi’ite Islamic Movement of Nigeria to Fulani herders to small and shadowy outfits operating in the far northwest, are “the next Boko Haram.” Observers’ motivations for making such claims vary—some are keen to demonize, marginalize, and control these movements, while other actors actually have the opposite goal of discouraging collective punishment and demonization of militants who might yet be placated through dialogue. Meanwhile, the competition for ordinary Nigerians’ religious affiliations—a competition that is more intense within Islam and Christianity than it is between the two religions—is accelerating, especially with the rise of salafism in the Muslim community and the rise of Pentecostalism in the Christian community. That competition leads to both macro- and microlevel struggles for influence. Struggles for power affect the country’s leading religious umbrella blocs and the most prominent hereditary positions, but they also unfold at the level of neighborhood mosques and churches. Amid rapid population growth, religious leaders’ rising political influence, and the limits of state power, enforcing widespread control over religion may not be possible for the Nigerian state.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria is one of the most devout societies in the world. In a 2010 report, Pew found that 92 percent of Nigerians surveyed said that they prayed daily. These figures made Nigerians the most religiously observant people out of the 19 sub-Saharan African countries Pew surveyed. See Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2010), http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2010/04/sub-saharan


Muslim majority or it is the most populous country in the world with a roughly even split between Christians and Muslims. In either case, Nigeria is home to the fifth largest Muslim community in the world (approximately 100 million people), outstripping any Arab country, including Egypt. Nigeria also has the fifth largest Christian community in the world (again, approximately 100 million people), probably exceeding the Christian populations of every European country, including Russia. Revealingly, however, no national census in Nigeria has asked citizens about their religious affiliations since 1963, indicating how controversial the question of Nigeria’s national religious identity (or identities) has become. In particular, many Christians would object to the idea that Nigeria is a Muslim or Muslim-majority country, especially given many Christians’ already existing fears about alleged “Islamization” agendas.

The Nigerian Constitution of 1999, like its antecedents, establishes two broad principles regarding religious regulation: state neutrality and individual freedom. The constitution forbids the establishment of a state religion, prohibits discrimination along religious lines, and requires that political parties be open to all Nigerians regardless of religious affiliation. One principle underlying these limitations on state authority, and underlying the constitution as a whole, is that of “federal character.” Nigerian political thinkers have historically placed tremendous emphasis on federalism as a tool for uniting Nigerians while acknowledging and

---

10. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Article 15. See also Article 42.
balancing their diverse identities. With religion as with geographical origin, the state is meant to be neutral but not blind.

Above all, the political system is meant to encourage inclusion. Nigerian politics emphasize the principle of “zoning,” or rotating and balancing key offices according to geographic origins (among the states, among the country’s six “geopolitical zones,” and even within individual states). Zoning on a geographic basis can be combined with zoning on a religious basis; thus, one finds that Nigerian presidents typically have a vice president who is not just from a different region but also a different religion. In both constitutional thought and political culture, “federal character” often implies not just ethnic diversity but religious diversity as well. Nevertheless, there are limits to inclusivity: one major historical controversy in Nigerian constitutional history centered on proposals in the late 1970s to create a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal. Whereas backers of the proposal argued that it would give Muslims appropriate representation within the federal courts system, opponents—who succeeded in keeping the measure out of the 1979 constitution—argued that a federal sharia court would inappropriately compromise the state’s secularism and would Islamize Nigeria. Balancing acts around religion can be highly sensitive.

At the level of the individual, the constitution stipulates, “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.” The same article goes on to stress the idea of religious freedom in educational matters. The constitution both bans compulsory attendance at religious instruction or ceremonies and upholds the right of religious communities to provide religious instruction in any schools that the communities themselves manage.

To understand the mechanics and politics of religious regulation in Nigeria, some brief background on the country’s political system is helpful. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has a three-tiered system of federalism, partly modeled on that of the United States: in addition to the federal government, there are 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory, and 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs). All these levels of government, particularly the federal and state governments, have substantial powers to regulate religion in theory and/or practice. Federal and state governments have ministries and commissions directly involved in religious regulation. Some state governments have commissions explicitly related to religious affairs. At the local level, authorities have significant powers to distribute resources and to construct power-sharing agreements that can either heighten or defuse religious tensions.\footnote{On these local dynamics, see Laura Thaut Vinson, *Religion, Violence, and Local Power-Sharing in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).}

At the same time, state authorities face limits to how much they can impose their will on society. Ambitious state policy agendas have often fallen short of effecting transformation, including in the religious sector. Nigeria is not a “weak” or “fragile” state. Yet numerous endemic problems—foremost among them “a culture of corruption”\footnote{Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).} and “prebendalism,”\footnote{Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).} meaning a tendency to view high office as a source of personal enrichment and a platform for political patronage—have limited the reach of the state. When controversies arise over “unregulated” religiosity, other issues related to state power are often at stake as well, ranging from building codes to the rule of law. Mistrust of state authorities can also exacerbate the difficulties those authorities face in regulating religion: some communities see their local, state, or federal authorities as inherently biased, a perception that evokes responses ranging from passive noncompliance to violent resistance. Again, the most extreme example of this dynamic is Boko Haram, whose membership ini-
ially swelled due to its leaders’ preaching against the secular government, and whose wider trajectory has been profoundly shaped by its members’ deep distrust of and hostility toward the state.

At a societal level, there is also an atmosphere of mistrust and recrimination that can take on religious overtones. It has become commonplace for Nigerians, even up to and including presidents, to assert that shadowy actors are pulling the strings in Nigerian politics and society. Whether it is Muslim hardliners denouncing polio vaccination campaigns as anti-Muslim plots, or Christian hardliners accusing Muslim politicians of plotting to Islamize Nigeria by “force and trickery,” religiosity is frequently an object of controversy in the Nigerian public sphere.

Since the 1980s, Nigeria has witnessed recurring episodes of Muslim-Christian violence, especially in Kaduna and Plateau states. These states are located in the Middle Belt, Nigeria’s most religiously diverse zone and home to dozens of ethnolinguistic groups. Such violence has multidimensional roots that extend well beyond religion, but the violence is also often perceived and memorialized by communities as specifically religious trauma. The accumulation of interreligious tensions affects not just conflict hotspots but also how Nigerians across the country perceive the authorities and see fellow citizens.

In sum, Nigeria is a highly religious society where multiple elements of the political system interact to promote substantial

---

freedom of religion. Even as calls for greater regulation are heard, there are widespread assumptions that religion is and should remain a central part of public life. This religio-political culture can substantially inhibit government efforts to regulate religion, especially because authorities are typically keen to avoid either evoking allegations of religious bias or of coming into direct confrontation with powerful religious constituencies.

GOVERNMENT TOOLS AND OBJECTIVES IN RELIGIOUS REGULATION

The Nigerian state has five primary tools for regulating religion: formal regulation through federal institutions, partnerships with religious umbrella bodies, co-optation of hereditary authorities, state-level laws, and coercion. In terms of objectives, state policy has been more reactive than proactive (with the possible exception of the education sector). Regulat ory choices are largely dictated by political concerns, especially the desire to appear evenhanded in balancing representation for different communities and the need to react to security crises as they arise.

Formal Regulation

Unlike some other West African countries, Nigeria does not have a federal ministry of religious affairs. Among existing ministries, one key interface between the federal government and religious communities is the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education regulates schools at all levels.22 A ministry-run parastatal, the National Universities Commission, regulates the creation of new universities, the academic programs offered at Nigerian universities, and the external support given to institutions.23 From the primary

to the tertiary levels, Nigeria has a growing number of explicitly confessional, private educational institutions, both Christian and Muslim, all of which are theoretically subject to federal regulation. For example, such institutions are expected to use standardized curricula and prepare students to take examinations through the National Examinations Council and the West African Examinations Council. At the tertiary level, some public universities have units that are more or less explicitly confessional in orientation, including Islamic studies departments at some universities and a growing number of centers (for example, the Centre for Qur’anic Studies at Bayero University Kano).

Other federal ministries and agencies also interact with the religious sector, including the security-related agencies that have increasingly dealt with religious issues, especially amid the Boko Haram crisis. Both the military (through programs such as Operation Safe Corridor, created in 2016) and the Office of the National Security Adviser have established deradicalization programs. Religious issues also surface in the economic sector. For example, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) made the controversial decision in 2011 to register Jaiz Bank, a “non-interest” (read: Islamic) bank.

The decision opened authorities to charges of religious bias (especially as the CBN governor at the time, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, was not merely Muslim by background but a prominent public Islamic intellectual) and also opened new regulatory complexities in the banking sector.


Another federal role in religious regulation has to do with pilgrimages to Mecca (for Muslims) and Jerusalem (for Christians). Nigeria has both a National Hajj Commission, established in 2006,\(^{26}\) and a Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Commission, created in 2007.\(^{27}\) Each commission includes representatives of federal ministries (such as aviation, health, and foreign affairs), the Central Bank, and the relevant religious umbrella group (respectively, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Christian Association of Nigeria). State governments have long played a role in organizing pilgrimages as well, and in terms of political culture it has long been common to see Muslim and Christian politicians use pilgrimages as vehicles for building political influence and honoring key supporters. Under the independence-era northern Nigerian leader Ahmadu Bello (1910–1966), for example, “the pilgrimage [began] to take on the characteristics of a high-level diplomatic delegation.”\(^ {28}\) Pilgrimages are highly regulated, but even amid that regulation they constitute a space for patronage, informal political negotiation, and religious balancing.

At the same time, contentious domestic political disputes can arise concerning Nigeria’s interactions with foreign religious organizations. Most prominently, military dictator Ibrahim Babangida’s 1986 decision to have Nigeria join the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) elicited wide outcry—not enough to force Babangida to reverse course, but enough that “Nigeria has kept a low profile on OIC matters.”\(^ {29}\) Again, the issue of religious balancing is paramount, and Nigerian authorities are typically keen to avoid any perception of favoritism.


Partnerships with Umbrella Bodies

Another avenue the Nigerian government has for regulating religion and relating to religious constituencies is through religious umbrella groups. The two most prominent such groups have already been mentioned: the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). These umbrella groups reflect hierarchical and largely top-down models of authority: CAN comprises five blocs, each of which has a more or less denominational character. All of CAN’s presidents have been major pastors or bishops. The NSCIA distributes its top offices in a way that reflects the assumed hierarchy among hereditary Muslim leaders in Nigeria: the president-general is the sultan of Sokoto, the preeminent hereditary leader in northwestern Nigeria; the deputy president is the shehu of Borno, the preeminent hereditary leader in northeastern Nigeria; and the secretary-general is typically a prominent Muslim figure from southwestern Nigeria. The umbrella groups partly grew out of dialogue between the state and religious leaders. For example, CAN was founded in 1976 amid a period of political reflection under a military government, where questions of national identity were being revisited; the immediate impetus for CAN’s creation was a meeting between government officials and Christian leaders to discuss a new national anthem and national flag.

The umbrella groups can sometimes tamp down tensions and fill gaps in the state’s authority over religious constituencies, but they can sometimes also elevate tensions through incendiary rhetoric. In particular, election season can politicize religious groups’ and leaders’ roles. Northern Muslim leaders have largely been supportive

---

of Nigeria’s current president, Muhammadu Buhari, and CAN leaders have also taken sides; for example, the organization’s past president, Ayo Oritsejafor (in office 2010–2016) was seen as particularly close to President Goodluck Jonathan (in office 2010–2015). The state’s reliance on the umbrella groups exposes the state to the vagaries of those groups’ own internal politics and to the political calculations of particular religious leaders.

Co-optation of Hereditary Authorities

Meanwhile, the state can also seek to co-opt hereditary religious authorities. Systems of hereditary authority, inherited from precolonial structures but transformed by colonial and postcolonial interventions, exist alongside and are interwoven with the state. Many hereditary authorities assert legitimacy not just on a genealogical but also on a religious basis. For example, the sultan of Sokoto is considered the preeminent hereditary Muslim ruler in the country, not just due to his descent from the precolonial Muslim empire-builder Uthman dan Fodio (1754–1817) but also because of the sultan’s customary role as religious voice and prominent positions within religious organizations. Some hereditary rulers’ positions also reflect continued elements of what might be called African traditional religions; for example, the preeminent Yoruba hereditary ruler, the ooni of Ife, is both a political and a spiritual leader. In many parts of Nigeria, formal politics (office-holding, elections, and government policymaking) routinely interact and sometimes contend with the parallel systems of authority represented by hereditary rulers and religious leaders. Politicians and hereditary rulers frequently appear together in public and also sometimes conduct very public disputes, as has occurred with current Kano governor, Abdullahi Ganduje, and Kano’s emir, Muhammadu Sanusi II (Sanusi Lamido Sanusi). As discussed above, some of these hereditary authorities also have prominent roles in religious umbrella bodies that serve as key intermediaries between the state and various religious constituencies.

There are tensions inherent in the relationships between politicians and hereditary authorities. In some ways, for example, the
The sultan of Sokoto's authority has been undercut by open state interference in the sultanate, as when military ruler Sani Abacha (in power 1993–1998) sacked Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki in 1996. More broadly, hereditary authorities' prestige has declined in the past few decades. As one northern Nigerian essayist wrote in 2012, “All over the North, the inbred respect for ward and district heads, as well as emirs, is fast diminishing and, consequently, the authority and the myths behind the traditional institutions they head.” Various factors have undercut the ability of hereditary rulers to maintain sway over their constituencies; these factors include population growth, urbanization, and rising cynicism about the hereditary rulers’ integrity and credibility.

Figures like the sultan are in tricky positions: when politicians rely on them to help domesticate the religious sphere, that very reliance can eat away at the basis of their authority. This dynamic can explain why some hereditary Muslim rulers were noticeably reticent to speak out against Boko Haram, especially during the phase of Boko Haram’s most dramatic escalation in 2011–2015. The rulers seem to have feared that if they became too explicit in denouncing Boko Haram, they might either attract Boko Haram’s violence upon themselves (as happened with Boko Haram’s efforts to assassinate two successive emirs of Kano in 2013–2014) or reveal the limits of their own influence over youth in their communities.

State Laws and Regulations

Turning from the federal to the state level, some state governments have bodies explicitly charged with regulating religion. In the north, 12 state governments implemented versions of “full sharia” after the 1999 transition to multiparty democracy. Many of the politicians


who pursued sharia implementation were attempting to channel populist demands for justice and moral renewal, while a few governors found themselves reluctantly dragged along in a bid to stave off popular anger. Populist politics, in other words, gave ostensibly secular authorities a strong incentive to involve themselves in regulating religion. In the early 2000s, various governmental and quasi-governmental institutions grew up as part of the sharia project. Such institutions include sharia commissions and hisba boards, the latter being bodies charged with the enforcement of so-called Islamic public morality. A certain amount of co-optation occurred in this sphere as well; some hisba groups, for example, were initially community vigilante organizations that were soon domesticated by state governments.

Sharia bureaucracies are much stronger and more institutionalized in some states than in others; ironically, Zamfara, the first northern state to pursue “full sharia” after the transition, currently has one of the least developed bureaucracies for managing sharia. In contrast, heavily populated Kano has a range of sharia-related commissions and institutions, including a hisba board that intervenes in multiple domains of society, from traffic regulation to arranging periodic mass weddings for widows and divorcees. Beyond sharia bureaucracies in the north, one finds various other channels—official, quasi-official, and informal—through which state governments

---


relate to religious leaders. For example, various state governments have ministries for what is called “chieftancy affairs.” On the whole, religious regulation at the state level appears stronger in the north than elsewhere in the country, and Muslims are arguably subject to greater religious regulation (partly by choice, given the widespread demands among Muslims for sharia implementation) than Christians are.

**Coercion**

State governments also have the power, at least theoretically, to regulate preaching and even to ban specific movements. These efforts, particularly in the north, have sought to control religious space and prevent the rise of violent, dissident religious movements. Yet, unenforced regulations and limited state capacity have often left governments to crack down on movements after violence occurs, rather than preventing violence through regulation. Ironically, laws regulating preaching have been on the books in some of Nigeria’s conflict hotspots for decades. Initial regulations were implemented by the northern regional government in the 1960s and then followed with state regulations starting in 1970, especially under military governments.37 These regulations sometimes focused on Islam specifically and at other times, especially in Middle Belt states with heavily mixed religious demographics, dealt with preaching generally.38 Such laws have periodically been revised and updated, especially amid or following incidents of interreligious tension or violence with religious overtones: the “Maitatsine” riots of the early 1980s, Muslim-Christian clashes, and incidents such as the “Ibadan Cross

---


Some states have updated or attempted to update their laws in recent years, responding to the Boko Haram crisis and—particularly in Kaduna—to conflicts involving the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN).

As noted above, such laws and regulations have not prevented radical movements from emerging or growing. Moreover, state proposals for new regulations can spark controversies, as occurred with Kaduna’s 2016 Religious Preaching Bill. In Kaduna, the bill sought to license all indigenous preachers, require permits for visiting preachers, and end the use of church and mosque loudspeakers at night. Here state authorities seemed to see an opportunity not just to control preaching and in this way lessen the potential for violence but also to impose greater control on what some politicians and ordinary citizens saw as a disruptive, disorderly religious arena permeated with ostentatious displays of religiosity. Yet Muslim and Christian critics charged that the bill would compromise freedom of religion, and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria ultimately took Kaduna governor Nasir El-Rufai to court, asking judges to declare the bill void and unconstitutional. As of July 2019, the Kaduna State House of Assembly passed the bill and it was awaiting El-Rufai’s signature amid continued objections from CAN and others.

State governments have also claimed the power to blacklist movements. In the wake of the 2009 uprising by Boko Haram, Borno and other states banned the sect, and in 2013, the federal government banned Boko Haram and declared it an illegal terrorist group. More controversially, in recent years, several state governments have proscribed or restricted the IMN. The IMN, followers of Ibrahim al-

---

Nigeria

Zakzaky, took its initial inspiration from the 1979 Iranian Revolution and became avowedly Shi’ite by the 1990s. Through the 1980s and 1990s, the movement was involved in major riots and disturbances, and Zakzaky spent much of that period in detention. More recently, a December 2015 clash between the IMN and the Nigerian Army in Zaria, Kaduna State, triggered an ongoing crisis and significant state repression of the IMN. Federal authorities imprisoned Zakzaky and ignored a December 2016 order from the Federal High Court in Abuja to release him.\footnote{“Breaking: Court Orders Immediate Release of El-Zakzaky,” Vanguard, December 2, 2016, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/12/breaking-court-orders-immediate-release-el-zakzaky/.}

In October 2016, the governments of Kaduna, Plateau, Katsina, Kebbi, and Kano all imposed total or partial bans on IMN activities in their states.\footnote{“‘Why We Banned Shiites in Plateau,’” Punch, October 25, 2016, https://punchng.com/banned-shiites-plateau/.}


The decision in Kaduna evoked pleas from civil society for the government to reconsider, with commentator Jibrin Ibrahim arguing that proscribing the IMN could obscure larger issues at play—especially the long-running inability of the police to maintain order—while simultaneously deepening the sense of alienation felt by IMN members.\footnote{Jibrin Ibrahim, “Proscribing the Islamic Movement in Nigeria: A Plea for Second Thoughts,” October 10, 2016, http://jibrinibrahim.com/proscribing-the-islamc-movement-in-nigeria-a-plea-for-second-thoughts/.}
have also objected to federal and state crackdowns on the IMN. There is considerable danger, moreover, that banning movements will fuel the very grievances that led to earlier tensions and violence; for movements that already mistrust and vilify the state, blacklisting could drive them further into dissent.

CONSTRAINTS, CONSEQUENCES, AND CHALLENGES IN RELIGIOUS REGULATION

The foremost challenge facing religious regulation in Nigeria is a lack of capacity and/or will to enforce existing regulations. As noted in the previous section, laws regulating preaching have been on the books in numerous states since at least the 1980s. Yet, in the decades that followed the passage of these regulations, there were recurring signs that authorities were struggling to control religious space and discourse. For example, in a long-running intra-Muslim dispute over control of the Sabuwar Gandu Friday Mosque in Kano in the mid-2000s, both elected officials and hereditary Muslim rulers were only partly able to contain tensions. In the most dramatic example of authorities’ inability or unwillingness to regulate preaching, Boko Haram’s founder Muhammad Yusuf (1970–2009) garnered a mass following in Maiduguri in the 2000s through not just the forbearance but possibly also the active assistance of state politicians. These politicians allegedly patronized Boko Haram in an effort to harness its followers’ sympathies for electoral gain, especially in the fiercely fought 2003 gubernatorial election in Borno State. Soon, however, Boko Haram’s agendas and those of its alleged political sponsors proved incompatible, as the movement refused to be domesticated. By the time state and federal authorities began cracking down on Yusuf’s movement in the late 2000s, the scene was set for tragic confrontation and the ensuing underground insurgency.

Another pattern in attempted regulation has been dubious assumptions about what kind of religious regulation is needed. Colonial authorities marked various Muslim scholars and movements for scrutiny, even though there was limited evidence that those figures were genuinely interested in subverting colonial authority or security.\textsuperscript{50} Again, there are echoes of such policies in twenty-first-century choices, with Nigerian federal and state authorities sometimes targeting Muslim scholars in dubious ways—for example, targeting figures who opposed Boko Haram, but accusing them of secretly colluding with Boko Haram.\textsuperscript{51} Meanwhile, substantial suspicion has focused on Qur’an schools as alleged recruitment or indoctrination hubs for Boko Haram, but available evidence suggests that Boko Haram recruits’ demographic and educational backgrounds are relatively diverse and that religious education can even be slightly correlated with a lower propensity for radicalization.\textsuperscript{52} Imposing greater regulations on Qur’an schools, then, would not necessarily lower recruitment to Boko Haram or prevent the emergence of future Boko Haram-like sects.

Beyond questions of whether the Nigerian state has the capacity to address and prevent violence, there are other obstacles to regulation, including the ability of religious constituencies and leaders to act as organized and effective pressure blocs. In 2017, Christian leaders forced the government to back away from applying new corporate governance codes to churches. Major Christian leaders from different denominations expressed strident and public opposition.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{minipage}{\textwidth}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} For such leaders’ perspectives, see Chris Irekamba and Isaac Taiwo, “Should the Church Be Regulated by Government?” \textit{Guardian}, January 15, 2017, https://guardian.ng/sunday-magazine/ibru-ecumenical-centre/should-the-church-be-regulated-by-government/.
\end{itemize}
\end{minipage}
of God (RCCG), one of the country’s most prominent Pentecostal networks, forced the government’s hand by resigning as general overseer of the church.\textsuperscript{54} Religious leaders, particularly within the Pentecostal movement, have enough clout to resist government efforts at regulation and taxation.

A subtler challenge involved in religious regulation is the interconnections between the religious and political classes, along with open displays of religious adherence on the part of senior politicians. For example, after he assumed the country’s vice presidency in 2015, Yemi Osinbajo described himself as being “on loan” to the federal government of Nigeria from the RCCG, where he is a pastor.\textsuperscript{55} State governors routinely face charges of religious partisanship. In this context, efforts to regulate religion can be interpreted and/or intended not as the actions of a neutral bureaucracy but as the religio-political manipulations of biased actors. Again it is worth emphasizing that accusations of bias concern not just Muslim-Christian but also intra-Muslim and intra-Christian tensions. These challenges are further discussed in the following section.

A final challenge in religious regulation involves the role of foreign influences in the religious field. Numerous foreign influences have contributed to the evolution of different religions in Nigeria. Leaving aside the obvious precolonial and colonial issues of Christianization and Islamization, more recent influences have affected both Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Nigerian Christians are in dialogue with other Christians around the world. Nigerian Christians have played prominent roles in global intra-Christian schisms over social-moral issues such as acceptance of homosexuality and the ordination of women. Nigerian Christian leaders are often on the conservative side of these schisms. For example, Nigerian An-


\textsuperscript{55} “Vice President Says He Is Still Committed to God’s Work,” Pulse, June 12, 2015, https://www.pulse.ng/communities/religion/yemi-osinbajo-vice-president-says-he-is-still-committed-to-gods-work/g4qc19n.
glicans have been leading figures at the series of Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) meetings since 2008. Nigerian Catholic bishops also strongly defended their country’s 2014 Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, which aroused condemnation from Catholics elsewhere, who viewed the legislation as an echo of American Christians’ efforts to promote anti-LGBT laws in Uganda and elsewhere.

Nigerian Muslims, meanwhile, have been influenced by global salafi proselytization efforts emanating from Saudi Arabia (including through Nigerian Muslims who have graduated from Saudi Arabian universities, or from the Islamic University of Say, Niger, which was founded by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation). Saudi influences are not the only external Islamic influence in Nigeria, of course: many leading Nigerian Sufis have strong ties to Morocco, Senegal, Egypt, and even Iraq. Two less-discussed trends involve Nigerian Muslims studying at universities in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, and the spread of Turkish schools in Nigeria. All of these foreign influences raise regulatory challenges, particularly when it comes to regulating preaching (of both Muslims and Christians), preventing undue foreign influence over social policy and legislation, and regulating schools with foreign financing or foreign teachers.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, there are rising calls for both the federal and the state governments to regulate religion—most of all, when it comes to radical movements that use religious rhetoric, such as Boko Haram.

---

58. See Thurston, Salafism in Nigeria.
and the IMN, but also when it comes to other issues, including scandals and untaxed income among Christian megapastors. Nigerian authorities have multiple tools for regulating religion, ranging from sector-specific powers given to ministries to laws intended to control preaching to bodies that can theoretically claim more power to regulate religious bodies’ financial and organizational affairs to the dramatic option of proscribing specific movements. Yet, in using these tools, Nigerian authorities may face accusations of religious bias, backlash and resistance, as well as simple noncompliance. Finally, there are dangers that Nigeria—and its foreign partners, including the United States—will use faulty assumptions to inform religious regulatory possibilities, assumptions that can exacerbate the very problems that those policies are attempting to manage.

There are legitimate reasons for Nigerian authorities to seek more control over the religious field, but any religious regulatory policy should begin from the premise of doing no harm. In Nigeria, religious communities often function partly as social safety nets and otherwise form part of the fabric of ordinary people’s lives. In Nigeria, moreover, different religious communities are sometimes the targets of exaggerated or unfair accusations by other communities. Whatever additional regulation Nigerian authorities pursue in the future should be premised on fairness as well as sensitivity to the rights of minorities, including minorities within the Muslim and Christian communities.
KENYA: COOPERATION, CO-OPTATION, AND CONFRONTATION

Richard Downie

Most Kenyans consider religious faith to be a core part of their identity. Survey data suggests that religion is an important part of life for almost 90 percent of Kenyans,1 and places of worship are focal points of Kenyan communities large and small. Recognizing this reality, Kenya’s leaders consider it prudent to engage with the institutions and representatives of the main faith communities. Politicians are generally respectful of religious leaders and take care to cultivate support from religious organizations. Not only do they conduct business in their official capacity as public servants; they also attend the church or mosque as private citizens, where they informally influence—and are influenced by—spiritual leaders.

Under Kenya’s constitution, the state has a modest mandate in managing religious relations and religious discourse. Its main responsibilities cover four key areas. First, the state has a constitutional obligation to protect freedom of religion and freedom of worship. Second, it is responsible for registering and regulating religious organizations. Third, the state oversees an education sector that includes many schools that were founded by—and in some cases are still run by—religious organizations. Fourth, the state

supports and participates in institutions for organized, regular discourse with religious communities.

Yet in practice, Kenyan governments and politicians, while generally respectful of religious communities and their leaders, frequently overstep the responsibilities mandated by the state. Ultimately, the state’s more robust approach to religious management stems from a desire to maintain political control. However, its increasingly coercive approach fuels interreligious tensions, particularly in the Muslim community, and has accelerated religious diffusion throughout Kenya. The current government of Uhuru Kenyatta has found that controlling religious groups is a harder task than ever before because of Kenya’s increasingly diverse, fragmented religious landscape. The government has followed the practice of its predecessors, adopting a strategy of divide and rule, rather than trying to promote cohesion among its religious communities. It favors the Christian majority over the Muslim minority, a stance that has become more pronounced in response to a terrorist threat that has attracted support from a small number of Muslims. Arguably, religious polarization helps the government consolidate control in the short term but carries long-term risks for social peace and Kenya’s stability.

**KENYA’S RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE**

Kenya’s religious and ethnic landscape is diverse and becoming more so. Kenya is a country of 49 million people with more than 70 ethnic groups and 30 languages and dialects. This ethnic complexity is one identity factor that impacts the religious landscape, which includes Christian and Muslim communities as well as smaller populations of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Baha’is, Traditionalists, and others. Christianity is the dominant faith, practiced by around

3. Ibid.
85 percent of its people. Within Christianity, 48 percent of Kenyans belong to Protestant denominations, with 23 percent part of the Roman Catholic community. Due to the strategies adopted by Western missionaries to Kenya in the colonial and precolonial eras, different denominations took responsibility for evangelizing in different parts of the territory. This caused a degree of overlap between ethnicity and religious affiliation, although it is weaker today than it was in the past. The Anglican and Catholic churches have the longest histories in Kenya and are considered part of the establishment. Their prominent position is partly explained by the outsized role they have played, before and after independence, in the education system. Church-run schools produced the leaders of the independence movement and continue to wield enormous influence.

Muslims have been in present-day Kenya since at least the twelfth century but are fewer in number than Christians, comprising roughly 11 percent of the population. Many Muslims contend that their numbers are far higher than the official figures suggest. While Muslims can be found all over Kenya, they are clustered along the coast and in the northeast, parts of the country that have been marginalized from political and economic life and—as a result—tend to vote for opposition parties.

4. Kenya has many ethnic groups that shape cultural, social, and political identity, in addition to religious factors. For example, the violence following the 2007 election was primarily between ethnic Kikuyus, Luos, and Kalenjins. Additionally, other societal factors impact intrareligious relations. For example, Swahili-speaking Arabs generally receive greater funding from Gulf states than non-Swahili–speaking Arabs. See Zipporah Nyambura, "In Kenya, Politics Split on Ethnic Divide," Deutsche Welle, October 26, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/in-kenya-politics-split-on-ethnic-divide/a-37442394; and Angel Rabasa, “The Ethno-Religious Landscape of East Africa,” Radical Islam in East Africa (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2009), 36.


7. Other faith communities with significant numbers in Kenya include Hindus, Jews, and followers of traditional African religions. This study focuses on state
The treatment of Kenya's two main faith communities by successive governments reflects their relative size, political weight, and social standing. Kenyan governments have been deferential toward Christians, and they largely tolerate the interventions of Christian religious leaders in public policy matters. By contrast, they have been suspicious of Kenya's Muslim population, particularly since the emergence of salafi-jihadi terrorism in the late 1990s, which draws support from a minority of disaffected young Muslims. The state seeks to control pliant Muslim institutions and harass those perceived to be more antagonistic.

In the last several decades, Kenya's religious communities have changed dramatically. Within the two main faiths, new ideologies are gaining influence and followers. The Pentecostal movement is challenging the established position of the Anglican and Catholic Churches, while within Islam, salafi Muslims have rapidly grown in number since the early 1990s. Followers of these creeds view their relationship with the state in different ways to their more established counterparts, which were closer to state power structures. In many instances, they do not have formal mechanisms to engage with the state or each other. Many members of Pentecostal congregations and the Prosperity Gospel churches see their faith primarily in individual rather than collective terms, favoring a more quiescent or detached stance toward the state. One former member of a Pentecostal congregation described the latter as “solidly conservative—they offered a privatization of solutions in the face of public dilapidation that seemed beyond hope.”

The salafi movement is a diverse branch of socially conservative Sunni Islam that includes adherents who are disengaged from, politically en-
gaged with, and—in a small number of cases—violently antagonistic toward the state.

Throughout history, foreign influences have changed the way that Christianity and Islam are practiced in Kenya, a process that continues to the present day. Since the 1990s, the face of Kenyan Islam has evolved due to expanding support from Saudi Arabia and other nations for the propagation of salafi ideologies through madrassa and mosque construction, and the provision of training and scholarships to Muslim scholars from Kenya. The head of a human rights organization based in Nairobi observed that “the influx of Saudi money and salafi teaching has been a big factor in religious change. Some of my friends went to study in Saudi, they came back different people. Now, it’s common to see women covered here but this was never in our culture.” These developments have prompted concern, but little action, from the Kenyan state.

Within Christianity, the growth of the Pentecostal movement in Kenya has mirrored—and been fueled by—global trends. Western Evangelical groups regularly preach and support churches in Kenya and even intervened in Kenyan politics by funding opposition to the 2010 constitution, angered by what they saw—erroneously—as its support for abortion and same-sex marriage. They also accused the state of favoring Islam, citing a provision allowing Muslim courts to continue adjudicating civil claims using sharia law when

---


12. One exception was a proposal in the Religious Societies Rules that would have required foreign preachers to have a work permit and a letter of recommendation from their government. The rules were dropped in 2016 following opposition from Muslim and Christian organizations.

13. Not only is same-sex marriage illegal in Kenya, so too is gay sex. In May 2019, Kenya’s high court rejected a petition to decriminalize gay sex. Petitioners had argued that the ban contravened the constitutional commitment to equality. John Ndiso, “Kenya’s High Court Unanimously Upholds Ban on Gay Sex,” Reuters, May 24, 2019, https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCN1SUTM7-OZATP.
both parties are Muslim.\textsuperscript{14} However, there is no evidence that this outside lobbying of Kenya’s religious communities on issues of national importance concerned the government enough to influence its foreign policy decisions.

The combination of these internal and external trends is reshaping Kenya’s religious landscape, which is becoming more fragmented, unruly, and difficult to manage. Kenyan governments have struggled to find effective ways of engaging with the ascendant religious groups in both of the main faith communities. At the same time, they have benefited from the religious divisions that these groups have exposed, which complicate efforts by religious leaders to speak with one voice on public policy issues.

**MANAGING RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN PRINCIPLE AND IN PRACTICE**

Since the passage of a new constitution in 2010, the state has introduced a devolved system of government. This has affected many areas of life, including engagement with religious groups, which now happens at multiple levels. Devolution has altered power dynamics in Kenya, and the 47 counties now have greater control in the budgeting process. As a result, citizens are increasingly holding their local representatives accountable and learning that the poor governance long associated with central government is not exclusive to Nairobi. County-level political leaders are discovering something their counterparts in central government have known for some time: religious relations require careful, ongoing management.

In both their formal and informal interactions with religious communities, Kenya’s politicians test and transgress the boundaries defined by the 2010 constitution. Their motivation for managing religious institutions and discourse should be understood as part of a broader strategy to secure, consolidate, and extend political

\textsuperscript{14} Catherine Kenga, “The Role of Religion in Politics and Governance in Kenya,” University of Nairobi, 46, http://repository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/100199/Kenga-The%20Role%20Of%20Religion%20In%20Politics%20And%20Governance%20In%20Kenya.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
control. Generally, Kenyan governments use ethnic groups as the raw material for building and maintaining coalitions of support. But religious communities are also important constituencies that must be nurtured and managed.

Successive governments have deployed a range of techniques to manage relations with Kenya’s religious communities. They have sought to cooperate with the mainstream religious groups, mainly through formal interface bodies; co-opt leaders of the Christian and Muslim establishment; and confront Muslims who make political demands, particularly from regions associated with the opposition. Their approach derives from a calculation that in a country where the religious demography strongly favors Christians, it makes political sense to favor them over other religious communities, regardless of what the constitution says about equal treatment. There has been a consistent pattern of discrimination against Muslims, whose marginalization predates independence but has become more pronounced in the years since 1998, when the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi was bombed by al Qaeda terrorists. Governments have sought to control and limit the activities of Muslims in political life, stretching the constitution to suit its objectives. One notable example was the politically expedient decision of the Daniel arap Moi regime to refuse registration to Sheikh Khalid Balala’s Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), an attempt to form a Muslim political party, in 1992 on the grounds that it was a sectarian group that discriminated against non-Muslims.15

By taking such actions that seem targeted at the Muslim community, Kenyan governments have fueled resentment among Muslims and increased inter- and intrareligious tension. While this approach has arguably served the purposes of extending political control in the near term, it has come at the cost of exposing societal division and exacerbating conflict, with long-term implications for peace and stability.

MANDATE OF STATE ENGAGEMENT WITH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

In its interactions with religious communities, the Kenyan state has constitutional, regulatory, educational, and institutional responsibilities. Successive Kenyan governments have interpreted these roles in ways that have had largely favorable or neutral impacts on the Christian majority and largely neutral or negative impacts on the Muslim minority.

Constitutional and Legal Responsibilities

The 2010 constitution guarantees freedom of religion, prohibits discrimination on religious grounds, and asserts the secular nature of the state. In practice, followers of the two main faiths have accused the state of failing to uphold its constitutional responsibilities. Muslims—particularly those living at the Coast, Kenyans of Somali origin, and Somali refugees—regularly complain of harassment and abuses by the security forces and other agents of the state because of their faith. In addition, successive governments have failed to protect Christians from the terrorist group al-Shabaab, which has attacked churches and used other tactics to target Christians in a bid to foment sectarian conflict.

Kenyan governments have used the previous and current constitutions as tools for political management, interpreting their pro-

17. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 259,000 Somali refugees were registered in Kenya as of February 2019, with the majority living in Dadaab camp, close to the border between Kenya and Somalia. Kenya also has a large population of illegal immigrants from Somalia, although their exact number is unknown. UNHCR Operational Portal, “Horn of Africa Somalia Situation,” https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn/location/178.
18. These claims are difficult to assess because although many Muslims face discrimination in Kenya, it is less clear whether those responsible are motivated by ethnic, political, or religious animosity or a combination of all three.
Hibition on discrimination to justify bans on parties being formed along overtly sectarian and ethnic lines. During the transition to the multiparty era, the Moi government prevented the IPK from registering for the 1992 elections. Moi’s Kenya African National Union (KANU) took additional steps to prevent Muslims from uniting politically. It exploited ethnic cleavages within the Muslim community by helping form the United Muslims of Africa (UMA) to draw African Muslims away from the IPK, which was dominated by Arabs from the Coast.

Regulation

The bureaucracy for state management of religious institutions imposes few regulatory hurdles, a situation that reflects the tradition of cooperation between Kenya’s political and spiritual leaders. Religious organizations in Kenya must be registered with the government in theory, but in practice the authorities have taken a relaxed approach. Attitudes hardened—temporarily—in 2014, when the Kenyatta government announced plans to tighten the registration of religious groups and preachers of all faiths. While there had been mounting concerns about extremist preaching in some mosques, it appears that the immediate catalyst for the proposals was a series of high-profile scams perpetrated by Pentecostal preachers of the Prosperity Gospel. In one instance, a televangelist was caught on camera soliciting money from members of his congregation in return for performing fake miracles to cure their real or imagined illnesses.20

The Religious Societies Rules would have required all religious institutions to register with the authorities, submit their articles of faith, and have their preachers present credentials from a reputable seminary. Foreign preachers would have been compelled to prove that they had permission to live and work in Kenya. The plans provoked a backlash, particularly from Pentecostals, who saw them as an attempt to limit the rapid growth of the Evangelical movement

and—some suspected—a clumsy effort to protect the status of the established mainline Protestant churches. The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) and Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) also expressed reservations, accusing the authorities of infringing on religious liberties.  

Critics of the government’s plans argued that religious organizations should be allowed to regulate themselves unless the state had good reasons to intervene, such as when criminal conduct was suspected. As one senior leader from an Anglican-affiliated denomination put it, “We agreed with government that there were some abuses, some conmen leading churches, but we say we can deal with errant members within our own structures.” Their protests prompted a rethink from President Kenyatta, who withdrew the proposals in 2016 and asked religious organizations to draw up their own set of regulations. The issue slipped down the agenda as the 2017 elections approached and has yet to regain high-level attention. The episode demonstrated that Kenya’s religious communities retain the power to successfully undermine government policies when they believe their core interests are under threat.

Education

The Kenyan state, and the colonial state that preceded it, played a critical role in fostering an education system that institutionally favors Christians over Muslims. Current debates over education reform and the role of religious instruction within the curriculum are best understood as part of an effort to deal with these ongoing, systemic inequities. Christian missions played a central role in the

---

22. Interview, former representative on Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), Nairobi, May 9, 2018.
formation of Kenya’s education system and remain influential to this day.24 During the colonial period, denominations including the Catholic Church, African Inland Church (AIC), and the Salvation Army ran most of Kenya’s schools and educated the generation of leaders that led Kenya’s independence struggle.

At independence, the decision was made to bequeath many of these privately run schools to the new state, which lacked the resources to establish a nationwide education system. These schools formed the backbone of Kenya’s public system. Under the Education Act of 1968, the government assumed most responsibilities, including paying teachers’ salaries, but the churches continued to sponsor the schools they founded. Sponsorship enabled church members to sit on school boards, influence staff appointments, and advise on the spiritual development of pupils and teachers. According to the most recent available figures from 2014, almost half of primary and secondary schools in Kenya were either sponsored or directly operated by religious organizations.25

The state initiated a major, ongoing reform of the education system following the passage of the 2010 constitution. The Basic Education Act, passed in 2013, outlines the functions of religious organizations in public schools, sets the objectives of religious and moral education, and explains how the public school system should interact with the parallel system of Muslim religious schools such as madrassas.

The 2013 act states that the goals of basic education should include the “promotion of peace, integration, cohesion, tolerance, . . . the elimination of hate speech,”26 and the nurturing of “independent

-coexistence-feels-pressure-of-stronger-Muslim-identity.
26. In February 2018, it emerged that the government’s National Counter Terrorism Centre was developing a school syllabus for Countering Violent Extremism, in coordination with the Ministry of Education. See Mohamed Ahmed,
and critical thinking among pupils. The act initiated a reform of the national curriculum that tries to define how religious education should be taught, with the overall objective of promoting “national values” and producing a “self-disciplined and ethical citizen with sound moral and religious values.” The curriculum stresses the need to foster tolerance between faith groups, yet it maintains the practice of offering religious instruction in only one faith at each school. The selection is based on the religious affiliation of the majority of pupils in attendance and/or the wishes of the school’s religious sponsor.

Aspects of the education reform process have caused disquiet among some religious communities, who feel that the state is trying to reduce their influence at the schools they sponsor. The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), an umbrella body representing nine faith groups, questioned the state’s authority to define “national values” in its curriculum reform and successfully resisted an early proposal to abandon religious instruction for the youngest pupils. The small minority of people who hold no religious beliefs in Kenya have questioned why the state should impose religious instruction on all students, and others have accused faith groups of resisting efforts to provide comprehensive sex education in a country with high rates of adolescent pregnancies and HIV.

29. The IRCK is made up of five Christian organizations, two Muslim organizations, and one Hindu organization.
Religious organizations have also called on the Ministry of Education to ensure that chaplains are hired in all public schools to assist with students’ moral development and improve discipline. Tussles have emerged over who should manage these staff. The government has said it will recruit and pay for chaplains at all schools, but some church-sponsored schools have complained that a number of experienced chaplains already working on their premises face dismissal because they do not have the teaching qualifications demanded by the Ministry of Education.33

At times, the state has had to adjudicate between the two main faiths on education matters. The Muslim community has chafed against the influence of Christian-affiliated schools over Kenya’s education system, holding it responsible for lower levels of attainment among Muslim students.34 Muslims have complained about inbuilt bias against their students and urged the government to take steps to help their communities. Many Muslims feel that their duty to learn the Qur’an is not accommodated in public schools, leading many young Muslims to adopt an academic schedule of study at public schools during the day and madrassas at night. Another complaint has centered on overbearing rules at church-run schools, particularly dress codes that violate religious beliefs. In 2019, the Supreme Court overturned a high court ruling in favor of Muslim students who claimed that attempts by the Methodist Church to stop them wearing the hijab at its public schools violated the constitution.35

33. Interview with spokesperson for leading Christian denomination, Nairobi, May 9, 2018.
34. Data from 2010 gathered by the Pew Research Center suggest that 59 percent of Kenyan Muslims aged 25 years or older had received no formal education, compared with 11 percent of Christians. Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life: Muslim Educational Attainment, December 5, 2016, https://www.pewforum.org/2016/12/13/muslim-educational-attainment/religioneducation_sitemap/.
In recent years, Kenya’s government—and private benefactors from the Muslim community—have tried to address concerns about lower levels of attainment among Muslim students by setting up Islamic integrated schools that incorporate Islamic study alongside the secular curriculum. Some of these schools have been a success, but they have drawn the ire of Christian groups who claim that the government is favoring Muslims. Their complaints feed into a broader sense of unease among the majority Christian community about the growing assertiveness of Muslims in Kenya and the increased appeal of salafi Islam in particular.

While integrated schools have had some success in drawing Muslims into the public school system, many Muslim parents continue to favor an Islamic education for their children.

Madrassa schools are privately operated and are not regulated by the state. The government has made tentative efforts to work with Muslim interface bodies like SUPKEM to take an inventory of madrassas and gain information about what is taught in them. A small number of madrassas accused of teaching extremist ideology have been shut down. However, the government is wary of the political backlash that would result from any perceived interference in Islamic education. For example, Muslims in Mombasa protested in December 2017 when a holiday camp for Muslim students to memorize the Qur’an was raided by police. More than 90 children were detained in what the authorities claimed was an investigation into

36. Islamic communities, foundations, and donors have also heavily invested in private integrated schools, acknowledging that Muslims must emulate the Christian emphasis on Western education if they want to catch up.
child trafficking; a claim that was angrily disputed by the local community.

Institutional Role

Kenya has several institutions in which formal, regular engagement takes place between the state and its religious communities. In practice, these interface organizations have become less relevant over time because they no longer reflect Kenya’s growing religious divergence, and many have been co-opted by the government. For these reasons, many Kenyans consider them to be out of step with their religious beliefs and priorities.

Kenyan governments have sought to cooperate with their religious communities and have been generally willing to allow religious leaders—particularly Christian ones—the opportunity to contribute to national dialogue with few topics considered off-limits. Politicians prefer the dialogue to be predictable, controlled, and orderly; hence their participation in dialogue with religious communities through interface bodies like SUPKEM and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK).

At the same time, Kenyan governments have sought opportunities to assert themselves as the dominant partner in dialogue with religious organizations. They have done this by controlling political access and providing patronage. Friendly religious institutions are rewarded with access to the political inner circle, while those considered unfriendly or unhelpful are marginalized. Political leaders maintain that their religious counterparts are welcome to contribute to the public dialogue on issues of national importance, but when the conversation moves onto sensitive topics such as human rights and corruption, they are quick to warn against interference in politics.

Kenya’s religious institutions face a dilemma: if they form too cozy a relationship with political leaders, they risk alienating their congregations, but if they confront the government too aggressively, they face being marginalized, losing influence and—potentially—resources. The leader of one such organization was candid about the
challenges: the “government likes to work with us more than other groups, like NGOs. But it’s a double-edged sword. Other parts of civil society think we’re in bed with the government and sometimes we’re not as strong as we should be.”

At times, Kenya’s Christian leaders have skillfully navigated their relationships with the secular authorities, avoiding state capture and using their influence to advance political change. Their most decisive intervention came at the end of the era of one-party government in 1991. At this pivotal moment, church leaders—under pressure from the laity—loudly and bravely called on President Moi to allow a peaceful political transition to multiparty democracy. Church leaders representing some of the members of the NCCK, such as the Anglican Church and Presbyterian Church of East Africa, were particularly vocal in standing up to Moi.

More recently, the authority of the church has been diluted by internal divisions and the ascendancy of a politically quietist Pentecostal movement. Ethnic fracturing within denominations was painfully exposed when violence broke out following the disputed election result of 2007, and the moral authority of the church was dented by its unsuccessful campaign against the 2010 constitution. Corruption among some church leaders has also compromised their ability to speak out and made them vulnerable to co-optation by the state. Politicians have exploited these moral and—in the case of the newer, poorer Pentecostal churches—financial weaknesses by implicitly “buying” loyalty from churches through donations and involvement in community fundraisers.

40. Author interview with executive director of religious interface body, Nairobi, May 15, 2018.
42. In a statement against the scourge of corruption in society, the head the Anglican Church of Kenya acknowledged the pernicious effect of *harambee* fundraisers, warning his bishops to “shun partisan politics from the pulpits” and continuing, “let us not allow harambee money to become a subtle way of sanitizing the corrupt leaders.” The Anglican Church of Kenya Head Office, “Press Statement by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya Most Revered Dr. Jackson Ole Sapit on the Role of the Church in the Fight against Corruption,” April 23, 2019, https://www.theelephant.info/documents/anglican-church-of-kenya-ack-press-statement-on-the-fight-against-corruption/.
Kenyan governments have largely succeeded in outmaneuvering the main Muslim organizations, which face a binary choice: Those who choose to engage risk state capture and loss of credibility among their followers; those who try to keep the state at arms' length face marginalization and, in some cases, repression. SUPKEM, the largest body representing Muslim interests in Kenya, is an example of an institution that traded legitimacy for access. Formed in 1973, SUPKEM is affiliated with 150 Muslim organizations and has a network of district councils nationwide. Although it was meant to be a unifying organization that rises above political partisanship, SUPKEM was closely associated with KANU, the party that ruled Kenya from independence until 2002, and has maintained close ties with governments up to the present day. As a result, SUPKEM's legitimacy among ordinary Muslims has faded over time. As Hassan Ndzovu puts it in his study of Muslim political interactions with the Kenyan state, “There is a perception among Muslims that SUPKEM has been compromised by the government and that is why the state is comfortable to work with the organization.”

Other Muslim organizations like the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) and National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF) were formed to represent the growing number of salafi Muslims in Kenya. However, their credibility also suffered when they got entangled in partisan politics. Before the 2007 elections, NAMLEF signed a memorandum of understanding with Raila Odinga’s Orange Democratic Movement but later accused him of failing to deliver on his promises during his term as prime minister in the government of national unity. These political setbacks created friction among the main Muslim organizations. The CIPK, which had also supported Raila, broke ranks with NAMLEF and supported Uhuru Kenyatta in 2013 and again in 2017. Political dealmaking delivered benefits to leaders such as the CIPK secretary general, Sheikh

43. SUPKEM was the only Muslim interface body recognized by President Moi.
45. For more details, see Sebastian Elischer, “Partisan Politics Was Making People Angry: The Rise and Fall of Political Salafism in Kenya,” 8–9.
Mohamed Dor, who was appointed Kenya’s ambassador to Oman, but irreparably damaged the standing of his organization in the eyes of marginalized Muslim youth.

The 2017 election demonstrated the diminished ability of Kenya’s religious leaders to unify in the face of Kenya’s most intractable political problems and could signal a decrease in their efficacy in times of crisis. Most religious leaders remained on the sidelines, from where they issued uncontroversial statements calling for peace. After the August 2017 election was annulled and the opposition decided to boycott the rerun, Kenya’s main religious communities were unable to decide whether to support the move, mirroring the divisions of broader society. However, following the election, religious leaders asserted themselves once more to encourage a reconciliation between President Kenyatta and Kenya’s main opposition leader, Raila Odinga. Their mediation led to a public handshake between the two men in March 2018 and the opening of a dialogue on ways to permanently reduce political tensions, including discussion of constitutional reforms. This episode suggests that the state continues to turn to religious leaders to mediate political problems, even though their capacity to effectively perform this role at moments of national crisis has weakened over time.

DIVIDE AND RULE: STATE MANAGEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH KENYA’S MUSLIMS

Kenyan leaders’ treatment of their Muslim citizens merits further discussion because it is in this area that they stray furthest from their constitutional obligation to treat all religious groups equally. The experiences of Muslims in Kenya suggest that for Kenyan governments, religious management is part of a strategy of political control. Successive governments have sought to weaken Muslims, who historically vote for the opposition. Their actions have fragmented Muslim communities, sown distrust, increased inter- and intrareligious tensions, and inadvertently provided recruitment material for the terrorist groups who seek to attract disillusioned young Muslims.
Government attitudes toward its Muslim citizens hardened with the emergence of al Qaeda in the 1990s and have intensified since 2011, when Kenya invaded southern Somalia to try to alleviate the threat from al-Shabaab. For the past decade, government policy toward Muslims has been fixated on defeating terrorism, mainly through harsh, often indiscriminate security operations. The strategy of confrontation takes several forms.

First, the government has shut down legitimate debate about political, social, and economic grievances by cynically ascribing a hidden “religious” agenda to these discussions. The government’s response to the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) illustrates this approach. The MRC channeled anger about underdevelopment, land grabs, and unemployment into demands for independence for the Coast. Its message won support from Christians as well as Muslims, but the government misrepresented the MRC as an armed group that associated with al-Shabaab. The authorities banned the MRC in 2010, an action that was eventually overturned by Kenya’s Supreme Court.

Second, the government has exploited public concerns about terrorism to harass Muslims. Unlike Christian leaders, who are given latitude to comment on politically contentious matters, outspoken Muslim leaders and preachers who challenge state discrimination, poor governance, and human rights abuses have been accused of extremism. NGOs working on human rights issues that affect Muslims (and Kenyans more generally), such as HAKI Africa and Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), have been branded terrorists, had their assets frozen, and been forced into lengthy, costly legal battles to continue operations.46

Third, the government has directed heavy-handed counterterrorism and security operations against Muslim individuals, institutions, and communities. The government has responded to the threat from terrorist groups like al Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and their domestic offshoots by trying to identify and detain so-called extremist


Excessive force has also been used to temporarily close mosques accused of propagating extremism, such as the Masjid Musa in Mombasa, which was raided in 2014 with the loss of eight lives.\footnote{U.S. Department of State, \textit{Kenya 2014 International Religious Freedom Report}, 4.} According to a Kenyan human rights group, at least 81 Muslims accused by the authorities of extremism disappeared or were murdered at the Coast between 2012 and 2016.\footnote{HAKI Africa, “What Do We Tell the Families? Killings and Disappearances in the C Region of Kenya 2012–2016,” December 2016, http://hakiafrica.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HakiAfricaWDWTTF_V14.pdf.} Other harsh tactics have included ethnic profiling, extraordinary renditions of terrorist suspects, and the denial of passports and identification documents to Kenyan Muslims.\footnote{This problem predated the terrorist threat in Kenya but has intensified in recent years. Some Kenyan Muslims report having to produce the birth certificates of grandparents or even great-grandparents to obtain identification documents.} Some of these operations have targeted entire communities, with brutal crackdowns launched on primarily Muslim neighborhoods in the northeast, parts of Nairobi, and at the Coast.

Despite these aggressive measures, there are growing signs that the government is willing to address religious fragmentation, rising interreligious tension, and the radicalization of a small number of Muslims. The Kenyatta administration has established a new bureaucracy to research, monitor, and deter violent extremism. It has
adopted several programs that aim to tackle the underlying causes of radicalization, using research that identifies "pull" factors like religious ideology and "push" factors such as poor governance (at national and county levels), injustice, abuses by state security forces, and the social, political, and economic marginalization faced by young people in parts of the country. These programs have been packaged under the broad umbrella of Kenya’s countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy.

The government’s embrace of CVE is a deliberate attempt to align with the priorities of international donors who are willing to contribute generous sums to the effort. It is also an implicit acknowledgment that its security-dominated approach to violent extremism has limits, although public recognition of this fact seems unlikely at the current juncture.

The centerpiece of the effort has been the establishment of the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC), which launched the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) in 2016. The document examines the drivers of radicalization and identifies places where radicalization is occurring, such as prisons, religious institutions, and via the Internet. The NSCVE outlines a strategy focused on nine pillars of activity. These include work in the education sector and engagement with faith-based communities to weaken the ideological factors that contribute to radicalization. Ongoing programs that fall under these pillars include collaborating with groups like SUPKEM and the CIPK to train clerics and stationing imams in prisons to meet with convicted terrorists to challenge the religious ideologies used by some to justify their actions.


Some of Kenya’s religious interface bodies have undertaken initiatives that dovetail with the government’s work. For example, the IRCK has a CVE working group that includes initiatives to combat extremist messages on social media, develop counternarratives with Muslim clerics, and formulate new madrassa curricula.53

The consensus among Kenyan analysts and donors working on CVE is that the NSCVE is a sound document.54 However, critics accuse the NCTC of failing to widely consult with domestic civil society during the preparation and rollout of the strategy, instead placing more emphasis on winning international approval and the donor funding that comes with it.55 Three years later, the full document had not been published online, nor had a detailed budget been released.

Ultimately, the NSCVE will stand or fall on its implementation, which remains at an early stage. Furthermore, the success of the policy depends on the government putting political capital and financial resources into the urgent task of security sector reform. Without good faith efforts, human rights abuses and unprofessional conduct among the security forces will continue, fatally undermining the fight against terrorism and its causes. On a more encouraging note, the NCTC has made considerable efforts to help counties affected by violent extremism—such as Mombasa, Kwale, and Lamu—design their own CVE strategies. Compared with its peers in the region, Kenya appears to have a more nuanced approach to the problem. Tanzania, for example, has yet to issue a CVE strategy

54. Based on interviews in the United States and Kenya, April–May 2018.
55. During a June 2015 visit to Kenya to attend an international conference on CVE, Sarah Sewall, who was then undersecretary of state for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, expressed her disappointment that civil society organizations like HAKI Africa and MUHURI had been excluded. Brian Dooley, “Obama Must Address Kenya’s Alarming Weak Counterterrorism Plan,” Defense One, July 21, 2015, https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2015/07/obama-must-address-kenyas-alarmingly-weak-counterterrorism-plan/118282/.
and remains locked into the hard security responses that characterized Kenya’s approach earlier in the decade.

**IMPLICATIONS OF STATE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

Kenyan governments have used the authority of the state to assert political control over religious institutions and leaders. They have succeeded in establishing a degree of control over the more established faith denominations, at the cost of losing control over newer, ascendant groups. Several impacts can be observed.

First, governments have accelerated a process of religious diffusion. Kenya’s religious landscape is broad and diverging. This trend is in line with global patterns that are beyond the control of governments. But the more coercive strategies of divide and rule adopted by Kenya’s government and its overreliance on talking to the religious establishment to the exclusion of other groups have exacerbated the situation, causing a breakdown in engagement between politicians and the religious leaders who represent Pentecostal and salafi movements. As a result, the government is less able to corral religious leaders and their followers, and religious leaders are incapable of forging unified positions on public policy issues. Part of the problem is structural. The growing Pentecostal movement is decentralized and autonomous, which hinders formal engagement through bodies like the NCCK. Furthermore, its leaders are less ideologically inclined to take confrontational positions against temporal authorities unless their interests are directly affected. The increasing irrelevance of formal dialogue processes adds a level of unpredictability to government-faith relations that was not present before.

Second, Kenya’s Muslim communities are more alienated and divided than ever before. The government’s confrontational, discriminatory approach toward its Muslim citizens and their religious leaders has widened the splits in a community that was already fragmented. Heavy-handed security operations have placed in danger Muslim leaders who speak out against the problem of extremism
and are therefore viewed as government collaborators. They have also complicated the government’s halting, incomplete attempts to work with Muslim organizations like SUPKEM and the CIPK, to train clerics, and to monitor what is preached in mosques and taught in madrasas.

Third, Kenya has suffered increased insecurity and human rights abuses. The government’s security-driven approach to the problem of violent extremism has failed to prevent terrorist attacks, which have become deadlier. There were large-scale attacks on Nairobi’s Westgate Mall in 2013, the town of Mpeketoni in 2014, Garissa University in the northeast in 2015, and a Nairobi hotel complex in January 2019. In response, serious human rights violations have been committed by members of the security forces. Specialist security units set up with the support of Western donors like the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) have been accused by human rights groups of carrying out extrajudicial killings and other abuses. The mass roundups of Kenyan-Somali Muslims that occurred during Operation Usalama Watch in 2014 further alienated some Muslim communities.

Finally, Kenyan governments have presided over a rise in inter-religious tension. In the wake of terrorist outrages, some Christian organizations have demanded state protection from Muslims, while Muslim organizations point out that their communities have suffered the brunt of attacks and the state response to them. These strains have been exploited by groups like al-Shabaab, which seek to stoke sectarian conflict. A Muslim civil society leader from Mombasa observed, “Muslims and Christians here on the Coast generally

---

56. For example, the chairman of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, Sheikh Mohamed Idris, was shot dead in Mombasa in 2014. Before his death, he had been threatened by youth attached to radical mosques.
57. Mutambo, “Plan to Vet Islamic Teachers.”
treat each other well but when the government comes in and discriminates against us, it creates tension between the communities.”

The government has been largely inactive as relations between followers of the two main faiths have frayed. The Kenyatta administration has not tried to initiate outreach and dialogue with more adversarial religious groups within the Pentecostal and salafi movements, which are less inclined to engage with each other. Furthermore, it has failed to nudge the IRCK, which is also reluctant to draw these groups under its umbrella. The fact that interreligious violence in Kenya has largely been avoided is testament to the strength and discipline of its religious communities and the work of its leaders in preaching tolerance and mutual respect, rather than efforts by the government.

CONCLUSION

Kenya’s religious space is fragmenting. This fragmentation is a product of global religious trends and jarring social and economic change. Successive governments have hastened this process through divisive actions that include co-opting religious leaders and mounting security operations that discriminate against and alienate Muslim communities.

The government’s co-optation of faith leaders from the establishment creates an impression of harmonious relations, but it imposes costs on both sides. Religious leaders who too readily accept the embrace of the government have sown division and mistrust among their faith communities. Young Muslims have become particularly alienated from religious leaders in organizations like SUPKEM, whom they see as self-serving and out of touch. As a result, they have turned to new leaders who are less inclined to engage with the government. Thus, the government loses the ability to partner with religious organizations that represent Kenya’s faith communities. The result is that both sides are less capable of preempting and

60. Interview with executive director of Human Rights Organization, Mombasa, May 12, 2018.
managing tensions. As one security analyst puts it, the “government is engaging with religious leaders it thinks are influential but who are disconnected from their own followers.”

The government’s confrontational stance toward some Muslim religious communities is also damaging because it forces Muslims to pick sides, creating an us-versus-them mentality that increases hostility toward the state and fuels interreligious tension. The government deserves credit for recently shifting toward a multidimensional approach that acknowledges some of the root causes of violent extremism. However, the damaging legacy of its abusive conduct in Muslim communities will take a long time to overcome.

The erosion of long-standing forums for communication between the government and religious leaders and the emergence of a more divisive, unpredictable, and divergent religious space is a problem that may in the long run undermine the fundamental objectives of any government in Kenya: to retain power and keep the peace.

BURKINA FASO: STATE AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN TURBULENT TIMES

Sebastian Elischer

AN OPEN RELIGIOUS PLAYING FIELD

For most of its modern history, Burkina Faso avoided intervening in the religious sphere.¹ According to its constitution, Burkina Faso is a secular state that protects religious freedom, and individuals can choose and change their religion freely. While its Christian minority dominated the state system and government, nonintervention by a largely Christian administration helped preserve a delicate sociopolitical balance and avoid Muslim-Christian antagonism. As a result, the state has largely avoided imposing institutional restrictions, such as registration requirements for places of worship, state licensing of preachers, or imposing state control of religious schools or curricula.² This gave religious institutions and movements widespread freedoms to operate.

1. The author thanks Dr. Alexander Stroh from the University of Bayreuth, Germany, Dr. Dan Eizenga from the Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada, Dr. Frederick Madore, Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for African Studies at the University of Florida, and several analysts in Burkina Faso for their input. Given the sensitivity of the topic in Burkina Faso’s current political climate, the local analysts remain anonymous. The author is solely responsibility for the content of this chapter.

Part of the state’s relaxed attitude toward religious regulation stemmed from the fact that until fairly recently, secular actors were the most potent threat to governmental authority. In the cities, civil society organizations and trade unions often defied state authority and overthrew governments. In rural areas, chiefs and local authorities positioned themselves as alternative power centers to the central government. The prevalence of secular opposition meant that the state paid less attention to challengers from the religious sphere.

However, over time, religious actors grew bolder in challenging state policies. This led to more concerted state efforts to regulate religious affairs and actors, though ultimately religious actors—both Christian and Muslim—undermined these attempts. According to survey data from Afrobarometer, 85.5 percent of overall respondents identified religion as very important in their life. The importance of religion was significantly higher among Muslim respondents (87.3 percent) compared to Christian respondents (67.9 percent) in the same survey.

Moreover, religious organizations play an active social and political role. In the Christian sphere, the Catholic Church is intertwined with Burkina Faso’s political elite, many of whom studied in the country’s Catholic school network. This gives the church a privileged position. The Catholic Church withstood the state’s brief attempts to weaken it and assert oversight of its school system because, as a longtime advocate of political reform, the church had credibility and legitimacy.

Muslim communities’ relationship with the state has evolved very differently. Early on, the state sought to integrate Muslims and Muslim leaders into the state-run clientelistic business sector network. By making Muslim businessmen dependent on the government, the state hoped to ensure their deference, especially during politically sensitive periods. This dependence explains why Muslim political lobby groups and Islamic social movements have not posed

---

a threat to state authority for most of the country’s modern history. The support of Muslim leadership, in turn, made any state intervention in Islamic affairs largely unnecessary. Since 2005, however, Muslims have become more politically vocal and organized. A new generation of young Muslim leaders has begun to question the political status quo, their historical marginalization, and the privileged position of the Catholic Church in Burkinabe politics. These shifts are creating new challenges for the Burkinabe state and the role of religion in society and politics.

Past studies discussing the potential for religious radicalization in the Sahel regarded Burkina Faso as an exceptionally peaceful country in an otherwise volatile neighborhood. Analysts stressed the country’s long history of peaceful religious coexistence and argued that the potential for radicalization was marginal. Recent events defy these expectations. Since January 2016, Burkina Faso has seen an escalation of jihadi-salafi violence. Jihadi groups with origins elsewhere in the region, such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al Mourabitoun, carried out the initial wave of attacks. Yet, by December 2016, a domestic jihadi-salafi group, Ansarul Islam, emerged in the north of the country. Ansarul Islam has caused unprecedented destruction in Burkina Faso’s Sahel region, leading to the displacement of thousands of people. In 2018, several groups—Ansarul Islam, the Islamic State in the Greater

5. The Sahel region is an administrative province in the far north of Burkina Faso.
Sahel (IS-GS), and the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM)—expanded their efforts and operations in the resource-rich eastern region.\(^7\)

Burkina Faso is now echoing the experiences of other Sahel countries, where jihadi-salafi groups have become a permanent security challenge to the state and its citizens. The increase in terrorist activity has led to growing tensions between Christians and Muslims, as well as between Muslim communities and the state. This growing tension, combined with the state’s historic absence from regulating the religious sphere, has undermined the states’ ability to counter Burkina Faso’s evolving jihadi-salafi threat.

Recent initiatives to establish state oversight mechanisms in religious affairs either lack the funding and organizational structure to be effective or were withdrawn due to Muslim protest. The failure of the state to impose state oversight mechanisms on religious practices means that the Islamic sphere remains vulnerable to the spread of jihadi-salafi ideology and recruitment, threatening not only affected Muslim communities but broader interreligious relations and the country’s delicate sociopolitical balance.

**BACKGROUND: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND THE STATE**

France established the colony of Upper Volta on March 1, 1919, in the area that is today Burkina Faso. France imposed several reorganizations of the territory before Upper Volta achieved independence.

---

on August 5, 1960. On August 4, 1984, the country changed its name to Burkina Faso.

The religious makeup of Burkina Faso has changed dramatically since its independence. Most notably, both Christianity and Islam have grown substantially, primarily at the expense of the country’s traditional religions. The first religious census, undertaken in 1960, classified 27.5 percent of the population as Muslim, 3.8 percent as Christian, and 68.7 percent as practicing traditional African religions. Today, the Burkinabe population is divided between Muslims (62 percent), Christians (22.5 percent), and Traditionalists (16 percent). These numbers should be taken as rough proxies for the actual strength of each religious community. Muslims dominate the northern, eastern, and western borders of Burkina Faso, whereas the majority of Christians reside in the center of the country. Still, each region is religiously mixed. Intermarriage between members of different religions is common. Further, there is mobility between different religions, as individuals switch back and forth, given the important role religious communities play in the provision of social services.

Although in general there is no significant correlation between ethnic and religious identity, the Fulani are mostly Muslim. The Fulani are a minority in most regions but are the majority in the economically marginalized Sahel province. Numerous jihadi-salafi groups operating in the Sahel have pursued a strategy of developing ties to local ethnic groups. This was the case among the Tuareg in Mali and now appears to be happening among the Fulani as well.

10. According to 2006 census. See also ibid., 5.
11. It is impossible to verify these numbers. Analysts and policymakers sometimes refer to different numbers, but these do not differ significantly from the 2006 census.
12. Various interview partners confirmed this to the author.
Overall, Burkina Faso displays considerable diversity among and within different religions.

Burkina Faso is considered one of the least developed countries in the world, according to the Human Development Index. Its gross per capita income is $615, placing Burkina Faso well below the average for sub-Saharan Africa ($1,637). Literacy rates remain extremely low, with an average literacy rate of 28.7 percent of the population aged 15 and above. There are large disparities between urban and rural areas, which constrain access to education. Living conditions in rural areas are far worse than in the cities. The economic situation of the Fulani is particularly dire. Fulani face discrimination at the state level, and many in the north lack access to state services. While there is no link between the socioeconomic condition and the distribution of religious groups in Burkina Faso, some consider the socioeconomic and political position of the Fulani to be a key driver of the spread of jihadi terrorism.

For Christians, Catholicism and Pentecostalism are the two numerically dominant churches in the country. Catholicism arrived in 1899 with French colonists, and the first Catholic school opened in 1906. During the papacy of Pius XII, the Catholic Church opened its first vicariate in Ouagadougou. Today, there are 15 dio-

---

Burkina Faso

ceses across the country. According to official sources within the church, there are around 3.7 million Catholics in Burkina Faso. The archbishop of Ouagadougou serves as the head of the church.

Among the various Pentecostal communities, the Assemblies of God is the most significant group. It entered Upper Volta in 1920 but was initially barred from establishing a presence in areas in which the Catholic Church was already present. The French colonial administrators saw the Protestant congregations as competitors and harmful to the administration’s development efforts. According to local estimates, the Pentecostal communities today account for approximately 5 percent of the population.

During the colonial period, the French enabled the Catholic Church to establish itself as the main provider of educational institutions. Members of the church enjoyed special privileges, including exemption from the code de l’indigénat, an inferior legal status for local populations. The years preceding and following independence in 1960 saw the rise of a small administrative elite who had been educated in Catholic schools. The first president, Maurice Yaméogo, is an important example. He was a graduate of the Catholic education system. Given the close proximity between the political and administrative elites and the Catholic Church, many, including Catholics themselves, view them as politically privileged and as the administrative elite of the country.

Islam has had a well-established presence since the fifteenth century, when Christianity arrived in the area. As in other West African nations, Sufism emerged as the dominant strand of Islam. The Tijaniyyah brotherhood—which has strong ties in Morocco, where its patron, Sidi Ahmed al-Tijani, is buried—is particularly prominent.

19. The founders are often referred to as “the Americans.”
Salafism also has a long history in the country and constitutes the second major doctrinal group within Islam. In 1958, the Union Culturelle Musulmane (UCM) opened a chapter in Ouagadougou. The UCM was led by foreign clerics and divided along those doctrinal lines. In 1962, Muslims formed the Communauté Musulmane de Haute-Volta (CMHV), which in 1984 became the Communauté Musulmane du Burkina Faso (CMBF). The CMHV formed with the explicit intention to build bridges between the Sufi brotherhoods, the salafi doctrine, and other Islamic schools of thought.

Throughout history, external forces, in particular Arab forces, exerted significant influence on Muslim dynamics within the country. Early on, salafi clerics established close and lasting ties with clerics in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula.23 Despite many well-intentioned attempts to bridge the doctrinal differences, and even though many Burkinabe Muslims frequently refuse to identify with a doctrine and regard themselves simply as Burkinabe or African Muslims,24 the divisions between Sufis and salafis ultimately split the CMHV. In 1973, the Mouvement Sunnite, the salafi-led wing of the CMHV, broke away and formed its own association.25

A remarkable feature of Burkina’s Islamic landscape is the high degree to which Muslims organize in different associations, representing various professional groups. In 2005, various Muslim leaders attempted to unite all Islamic groups under the roof of one organization and formed the Fédération des Associations Islamiqyes du Burkina (FAIB).26

23. Idrissa, *The Politics of Islam*. Early on, Sufis and salafis in Burkina worked toward a theological synthesis, which was not the case elsewhere.
26. Oumarou Kanazé, a wealthy salafi businessman with close links to President Compaoré, was the driving force behind its formation and its main financier. Since his death in 2011, the leadership rotates between the various factions and groups that make up the FAIB. See International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance*. 
Despite the phenomenal growth of Islam since the 1950s, Muslims remain underrepresented in the civil service and the political elites. Only one out of eight presidents was Muslim, while the other seven were Catholics. By contrast, Muslims are well represented in Burkina Faso’s business sector.

For the better part of Burkina Faso’s volatile political history, religious groups were bystanders in conflicts between secular forces. Since the early 1960s, various central governments have tried to impose authoritarian rule and state authority on its citizens. In the cities, the trade unions defied these attempts and fought for socio-economic improvements for ordinary people. In recent years, human rights groups joined the unions in their endeavor to create a political system that is responsive to citizen demands. In the countryside, traditional authorities tried to undermine state authority.

Under President Yaméogo, the first president of Upper Volta, the political climate was shaped by purges within the government, the civil service, and the ruling party, as well as crackdowns on the opposition. In a move designed to consolidate the power of the central state at the expense of the countryside, Yaméogo stopped the disbursement of state funds to traditional leaders in rural areas. This move undermined the influential position of the traditional leaders, as they became unable to finance economic development projects in their respective areas. Many of Yaméogo’s victims joined trade unions, which became the home of the urban opposition.

Strikes and street protests led to growing polarization and political instability. On January 3, 1966, a general strike paralyzed the capital. The same day, Muslim lieutenant Sangoulé Lamizana declared himself to be in control of the country. He refrained from

30. Lamizana, the first and only Muslim president, remained in power between 1966 and 1980.
trying to impose state authority on the countryside and left non-state actors to operate on their own. His attempts to restore civilian rule ultimately failed due to the high degree of political polarization among the political parties as well as between various civil society groups and the state.31 A series of military coups in the 1980s ensued,32 until Captain Thomas Sankara claimed power in August 1984. He initiated far-reaching changes to the relationship between the state and society.33 Sankara’s main goal was to expand territorial control and integrate the countryside into political decisionmaking at the center.

Through local committees for the defense of the revolution (CDRs),34 the National Council for the Revolution (CNR) was able to penetrate large sections of the territory and thus expand state authority in areas that previously had been ruled by traditional leaders and other local elites. On October 15, 1987, Captain Blaise Compaoré, a leading figure within the CNR, overthrew Sankara.35 Under his tenure from 1987 to 2014, the state continued to expand its presence across the territory, building on earlier attempts to establish state authority outside of the capital.36 Although his regime survived multiparty elections and a number of other far-reaching institutional changes, waves of citizen and opposition protests challenged the regime.37 Urban protests became particularly prominent after Norbert Zongo, the editor of an independent newspaper, was killed.

32. On November 25, 1980, Colonel Saye Zerbo overthrew his administration. Unable to consolidate his rule, Zerbo was overthrown on November 8, 1982, by Major Dr. Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo.
33. The day of the coup, the new government renamed the country Burkina Faso or “land of integrity.” The name change indicated the intention of Sankara’s Conseil National de la Révolution (National Council of the Revolution) to eradicate corruption and to reform the political economy.
34. In French, comités de defense de la revolution.
36. The trend is also visible in indicators measuring state capacity, such as the state fragility index. In 2006, Burkina Faso was ranked 50th, in 2019 it was ranked 47th. For details, see https://fragilestatesindex.org/.
in December 1998. In 2003, 2007, and 2011, there were several military mutinies that called for an end to corruption in the defense sector. These calls echoed the demands of secular civil society. In 2014, Compaoré tried to circumvent the presidential term limit, which provoked a popular insurrection resulting in his downfall and free and fair elections in 2015.

Compaoré’s downfall had a dramatic impact on the state’s ability to engage with jihadi insurgents. Jihadi-salafi groups had been active in a number of nearby Sahel countries for some time already, most notably in Mali. During the first half of 2012, jihadi insurgents had occupied the northern half of Mali’s territory. The failure of the Malian armed forces to halt the jihadists’ advances toward the Malian capital provoked a military intervention by France and the subsequent deployment of UN troops. Before, during, and after this Malian crisis, Compaoré and his confidants reached a tacit understanding with the jihadists. With this agreement, the jihadists would refrain from attacking Burkinabe territory and the Compaoré government would include the jihadists in negotiations with Mali and other West African states. But Compaoré’s downfall and the dismissal of key administrators who engaged with jihadi-salafi leaders have narrowed Burkina Faso’s options in dealing with the rise of jihadi-salafi violence and activity. There are no longer any established communication channels between the state and the jihadists, who now are operating in Burkina Faso. The removal of Compaoré’s political network combined with the lack of steering capacity in the Islamic sphere together undermine the state’s ability to weaken the Islamic insurgency. Counterterrorism operations and the deployment of the security services have not stabilized the jihadist-affected regions. Instead, arbitrary arrests by the Burkinabe

Sebastian Elischer

armed forces and violence by pro-state militias have alienated the rural areas from the capital and fomented jihadist recruitment among marginalized Muslim communities.41

DIVERGENT STRATEGIES FOR STATE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGION

The Burkinabe state maintains distinct and ever-changing relationships with its Christian and Muslim communities. Each relationship is informed by the community’s history and its role in the state structure. The Catholic Church is the second most institutionalized entity after the state, which enabled it to become one of the most influential social actors despite the fact that it is a minority religion.42 Catholic schools historically have served as Burkina Faso’s training and recruitment ground for the national administrative elite.43 Its privileged position and close ties with the state bureaucracy enabled the Church to take a visible stance against corruption and nepotism without having to fear any repercussions from the state.

During the general strike in January 1966, the church sided with the trade unions, helping remove the administration.44 During the Lamizana period, the church advocated a return to constitutional rule. Lamizana’s relationship with the church disintegrated for two reasons. First, his administration nationalized the Catholic primary schools. This policy dealt a huge blow to the church, as the primary schools served as the main vehicles for spreading the Christian faith. The church reacted by establishing the so-called Communautés chretiennes de base (Christian Lay Communities or

CCB). The CCB are local Catholic organizations that became the main drivers of missionary work across the country. The fact that the church withstood the state's attack on its infrastructure and managed to create alternative local structures to spread its faith demonstrated its strength and ability to maneuver around state policies when necessary.\(^{45}\) This was the first time in Burkina’s history that a government openly tried to undermine the influence of a religious group. Second, Lamizana established new and close relations with the Muslim world. Lamizana’s turn to the Arab world in general—and Saudi Arabia in particular—mirrors the foreign policies of many francophone Muslim-majority countries in West Africa. African governments viewed the Arab world as an additional source for development assistance and a resource for Islamic education.\(^{46}\)

By the mid-1970s, the church had become completely disillusioned with the Lamizana regime and, as a result, sermons became increasingly critical of the regime.\(^{47}\) The Sankara government took a different approach. Despite his antireligious Marxist rhetoric, Sankara treated the Catholic Church more gently and respectfully than other social or religious groups. Several members of local CDRs served as members of the CCBs,\(^{48}\) which was a powerful reminder of the close links between Catholicism and state power. Although the force and violence of the Sankara revolution turned the church silent vis-à-vis the government, the Sankara administration did not infringe on religious liberty or turn against the church. Instead, it maintained close contact with the church hierarchy. During the almost three decades of Compaoré, the church

\(^{45}\) Magloire Somé and Cecily Bennett, “Christian Base Communities in Burkina Faso: Between Church and Politics,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, no. 3 (2001): 275–304. From the mid-1990s onward, the Burkinabe state returned the elementary schools to the Catholic Church in stages.


\(^{47}\) Otayek, “L’église catholique,” 221–258.

\(^{48}\) Kane, *État et minorités*. 
reemerged as a careful yet persistent champion of human rights and political liberalization.\footnote{For example, in 1991 it joined other civil society organizations in their call for a national conference and expressed its disappointment after Compaoré’s refusal to organize one.}

Following the assassination of independent journalist Norbert Zongo, the Catholic Church participated in the commission investigating his murder.\footnote{Harsch, \textit{Burkina Faso: A History}.} Toward the end of the Compaoré regime, the church took a more outspoken stance against the government. In 2013, it refused to take its assigned seats in the senate—a new, second chamber that was approved by parliament but never created.\footnote{Pierre-François Naudé, “Burkina Faso: L’église boycottera le futur sénat,” \textit{Jeune Afrique}, September 17, 2013, https://www.jeuneafrique.com/168468/politique/burkina-faso-l-eglise-boycottera-le-futur-s-nat/. The Compaoré government tried to create the senate, but people protested against it. The bill was withdrawn but not formally abandoned. The new government has not issued any statement about how it wants to move ahead. No one knows if the new government will create the new chamber or not. Chances are they will not pursue the upper chamber any further, but the project has not been formally abandoned.} After Compaoré had declared his intention to amend Article 37 of the constitution, the presidential term limit, the church stated that the amendment would lead to divisions and political polarization. Its close-knit network of followers, long-established autonomy from the state, and often implicit but visible criticism of human rights abuses provided the Catholic Church with a high degree of legitimacy among those who led the insurrection against Compaoré in late October 2014.\footnote{See Eizenga, “Burkina Faso,” 48–55.}

Until recently, and in stark contrast to the Catholic Church, the various Islamic communities remained relatively mute toward state authority. This silence is less surprising with regard to the Sufi communities, which historically have been accommodating of state power.\footnote{Zidane Meriboute, \textit{Islam’s Fateful Path} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).} Yet, even the salafi community, organized in the Mouvement Sunnite, remained passive until recently. In contrast to Christians, Muslims lacked access to civil service positions and remained detached from the central government bureaucratic ma-
chinery. However, the Muslim community found a niche for itself in the nascent private sector, like in many other African countries during that time.

The Lamizana administration fostered the Africanization of the country’s business sector through preferred credits for domestic entrepreneurs. Although he did not explicitly target the Muslim community, it inadvertently spurred the rise of Muslim businesses in four sectors: transport, mining, tourism, and construction. At the same time, it made the Muslim entrepreneurial community part of the state-run clientelistic network and thus contingent on the goodwill of the incumbent. Having achieved the required financing from the banks, success in the four sectors became dependent on receiving licenses from the state, which enabled new enterprises to broaden their commercial activities. Receiving the necessary licenses required proximity to and support of those in power.54

Whereas their dominance in the educational sphere and their high degree of institutionalization enabled Catholics to help “make” and run the state, Muslims remained vulnerable to changes within the state-run clientelistic networks. Tacit cooperation with any administration thus became a necessity. By allowing the Mouvement Sunnite to break away from the CMHV and form its own association, Lamizana’s regime further bolstered its support among the Muslim communities.55 Like his decision to Africanize the economy, this move was not a deliberate strategy toward the Muslim community but part of his broader approach to allow societal groups to operate unhindered.

During and after the Sankara coup, soldiers damaged several mosques in the capital. Like Sankara, they viewed traditional and religious authority as obstacles to political and economic progress. The socialist, secular-modernist, and pro-development rhetoric of the Sankara government undermined Islam’s standing in the country. Leading Islamic clerics remained docile in all matters sensitive to the

state because their well-being depended more on state support than the well-being of the Catholic Church. This pattern remained in place during the 1990s. The Mouvement Sunnite did not condemn the murder of Zongo, for example, and—in line with the state-loyal groups of the CMBF—remained mute on most political matters.

After the political liberalization of the early 1990s, students and civil servants became active in new Islamic associations that mobilized Muslims to participate in elections, though they did not endorse specific candidates. Beyond this, however, there was little or no explicit engagement with the Compaoré regime. Muslim clerics frequently called for peace and order but did not directly criticize the government.

### THE MALIAN CRISIS AND THE DOMESTICATION OF JIHADI-SALAFISM

Since January 2016, Burkina Faso has experienced an increasing number of jihadi-salafi attacks in the capital, the north, and more recently, the eastern region. The emergence and subsequent escalation of jihadi-salafi violence is partially linked to the ongoing conflict in Mali. However, it increasingly has taken on a domestic element. The Malian crisis started in early 2012, when a combination of secular Tuareg secessionists and jihadi-salafi groups conquered Mali’s northern territory. The joint conquest soon resulted in the jihadi forces ousting the Tuareg secessionists from their positions and establishing jihadi rule across northern Mali.

---

57. Gomez-Perez, “‘Political’ Islam.”
58. A highly influential person in this regard was Oumarou Kanaozé, the former head of the Mouvement Sunnite, who helped found and subsequently headed the FAIB. Kanaozé was part of Compaoré’s clientelistic business network, president of the Burkina Chamber of Commerce, and close supporter of the former president. See Frédéric Madore, “Rivalités et collaborations entre aïnés et cadets sociaux dans les milieux associatifs islamiques en Côte d’Ivoire et au Burkina Faso (1970–2017)” (PhD diss., Université Laval, 2018), https://corpus.ulaval.ca/jspui/handle/20.500.11794/33246.
The French military intervened in Mali in January 2013. The subsequent United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) initially established a modicum of stability. Yet, the security situation across Mali continued to deteriorate as violent groups proliferated and increased their attacks while widening their respective zones of influence across Mali. Groups that have long operated in Mali, including AQIM and Al Mourabitoun, were behind the high-profile attacks in Ouagadougou in January 2016 and March 2018. In 2017, these and other regional jihadi forces merged into the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims. In December 2016, the first homegrown jihadi-salafi organization, Ansarul Islam, emerged in Soum, Burkina Faso’s northernmost province.

Soum Province is one of the poorest regions in the country. Since independence, the lack of viable infrastructure has isolated the region from the rest of the country. Extremely harsh environmental conditions have worsened in recent years due to droughts, flash floods, wind, and wildfires. These crises have caused a decline in the already fragile living conditions for the region’s population, which includes the largest concentration of ethnic Fulanis. The Fulanis now appear to be the primary recruitment base for various jihadi-salafi groups operating in the region, including JNIM and Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (IS-GS).

Ansarul Islam’s founder, Boureima Dicko, had joined Ansar Dine, a Malian jihadi organization that was a major player in the

---

60. Al Mourabitoun is a merger between the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa and Al-Mulathameen. Both groups have their origins in Mali, Mauritania, and other nations in North and West Africa.
63. In February 2018 the State Department classified Ansarul Islam as a terrorist organization.
64. Ansarul Islam’s former leader, Boureima Dicko, at one point declared his intention to establish a Fulani caliphate. At the same time, the recruitment of the group is not confined to the Fulani community.
jihadi uprising in northern Mali, in 2012. The son of a Sufi imam, Dicko had been preaching in mosques and on the radio since 2009 and enjoyed considerable influence in his home region. In 2013, he was arrested by the French military. In 2015, Dicko returned to Burkina Faso, where he declared his intention to create a Fulani caliphate. It is unknown how many fighters are in Ansarul Islam, but local analysts suggest that the organization does not have more than a few hundred men under its command. According to the media, Boureima Dicko died in May 2017 after a confrontation between Ansarul Islam fighters and the French military. His brother, Jafar Dicko, took charge of Ansarul Islam.

Since December 2018, Burkina’s eastern region has become another victim of jihadi attacks by Ansarul Islam, JNIM, and IS-GS. The eastern region is a trafficking hub for gold and contains many tourist attractions that create lucrative opportunities for insurgency groups to fund their operations. Hardening inequalities between multinational companies and Western tourists and the local population have provided a fertile ground for the recruitment of jihadi insurgents. The emergence of a jihadi narrative that legitimizes violence by referring to scripture and the need to fight economic injustice has aided in recruitment. Since 2018, Catholic Churches have become a frequent target of attacks in the region. The explicit targeting of Christians has the potential to undermine decades of peaceful coexistence and intermixing between the two major religions.

Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project provide information about the number of fatalities and attacks by the outside jihadi groups (JNIM, JNIM affiliates, IS-GS) and Ansarul

Islam. As of June 2019, the total number of fatalities in 2019 (133 fatalities) already supersedes the number of fatalities in 2018 (125 fatalities) and 2017 (28 fatalities). The number of fatalities caused by Ansarul Islam has grown steadily since its formation.68 In 2018, the number of Ansarul Islam attacks, totaling 74, equaled the number of attacks by the jihadi groups with roots outside of Burkina Faso. The data illustrate the deteriorating security situation. In the North, the conflict between the security forces and Ansarul Islam led to the displacement of 100,000 people and the closure of more than 1,000 schools.69

The removal of President Compaoré’s political network and the long-term failure of the Burkinabe state to engage with Islamic communities other than through clientelist linkages narrow the options of the state to resolve the conflict. In the aftermath of the jihadi occupation of northern Mali in 2012 and prior to the French intervention in January 2013, the Burkinabe government was the main driver behind the mediation attempts between jihadi-salafi groups and the Malian government. Thus, during the second half of 2012, Compaoré—a long-standing diplomatic dealmaker in the West African region70—served as the chief negotiator between the Malian government, the jihadi insurgents in Mali, and delegations of other West African nations. He treated Iyad Ag Ghali, the founder and leader of Ansar Dine in Mali,71 and other jihadi insurgents with the same courtesy and attention as the other parties involved in the conflict. This provided the Malian insurgents with diplomatic clout and recognition. After the French had intervened militarily in

71. The State Department designated Iyad Ag Ghali as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in February 2013.
Mali, Compaoré allowed Iyad Ag Ghali to use Ouagadougou as his base.\textsuperscript{72}

The Burkinabe state further permitted jihadi-salafi groups to cross into northern Burkina Faso as long as they did not target the state.\textsuperscript{73} This evidently benefited the jihadis, as Iyad Ag Ghali managed to form JNIM, a group that caused considerable destruction in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in the Sahel. The jihadi occupation of Mali’s North partially explains Burkina Faso’s policy of appeasement. The jihadi conquest demonstrated the dismal state of the Malian armed forces, with many Malian soldiers abandoning their units. The ability of the jihadis in northern Mali and the general unhappiness among the Burkinabe armed forces with their government might have led the Compaoré government to believe that their own security apparatus might be similarly unprepared to fight a jihadi insurgency. The months-long failure of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) between July and December 2012 ultimately triggered the French military intervention in January 2013. The intervention illustrated the dependency of the West African region on external military assistance.

Following their ousting from northern Mali, the jihadi insurgents required continued access to resources to regroup and shelter from the various military forces now operating across the Sahel, which they received by cooperating with Compaoré. The arrangement between the Burkinabe government and the jihadi forces was informal. Its implementation relied on a small number of individuals, including Djibril Bassolé, minister of security (2004–2007) and minister of foreign affairs (2011–2014); General Gilbert Diendéré, commander of the Compaoré presidential guard and leader of the unsuccessful countercoup against the interim government in September 2015; and Moustapha Limam Chafi, special council to


Compaoré with close ties to jihadi groups in the Sahel. The popular insurrection against Compaoré led to the imprisonment of these individuals and the disintegration of long-standing networks between the state and the jihadi forces.

Since the election of Roch Marc Kaboré in November 2015, Burkina Faso’s approach toward the security crisis revolves around military confrontation with jihadists rather than negotiating with or co-opting members of the respective terrorist groups. This antagonized local stakeholders who share an affinity with certain aspects of jihadi ideology. In addition, the Burkinabe state has done little to prevent the radicalization of the Muslim faithful. Dicko was able to preach unhindered for some time after his return from Mali and enjoyed some local support, although the security services were aware of the content of his sermons. Although his presence raised the concern of many in the North, the state had no legal basis to remove him from local radio or local mosques where he was preaching. Moreover, the area around Soum lacked well-respected Islamic clerics, who could have questioned the theological basis on which he was operating. This suggests that there is a role for the state to establish some steering capacity in the religious sphere.

Several factors facilitated the formation of Ansarul Islam and allow for the continued presence of the various jihadi groups with roots elsewhere in the region: the influx of jihadi-salafi ideology, which provides a narrative justifying violence against the state and non-Muslims; deteriorating living conditions in an already marginalized area; porous borders with countries in which jihadi groups have been active for some time; the general lack of state authority on the countryside; and the inadequate response by the security forces to the security crisis in the northern and eastern parts of the

---

country. Counterterrorism operations in 2017 and 2018 resulted in extrajudicial killings, abuse of suspects in custody, and arbitrary arrests. Massacres by security forces and state-backed militias have led to local fear and resentment of the security forces and are additional drivers of jihadist recruitment in the countryside.\textsuperscript{77}

**THE (FAILED) IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS REGULATION**

The escalation of jihadi violence in the Sahel coincided with two state initiatives to impose state surveillance on religious activity. In 2015, the government created the National Observatory for Religious Affairs (ONAFAR),\textsuperscript{78} which is tasked with analyzing how religious representatives appear and represent their theological convictions in the media.\textsuperscript{79} ONAFAR itself does not have the authority to sanction individuals or their organizations, but it directs its findings to an organization that does: the Superior Council of Communication (CSC).\textsuperscript{80} In addition, ONAFAR aims to provide the state bureaucracy with information about the content and the goals of different religious doctrines. One of the goals of this new body is to educate state administrators about ONAFAR’s national leadership, which includes four Muslims as well as two Evangelical and two Catholic representatives. The leadership of the observatory likes to stress that its purpose is not to stigmatize the Islamic faith—a clear indication that many perceive ONAFAR as an entity targeting Islamic practice rather than an organization aiming to strengthen social cohesion. According to its own spokesperson, ONAFAR lacks the organizational structure and the funding necessary to impact the religious sphere.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{77} Human Rights Watch, “Burkina Faso: Killings.”
\textsuperscript{78} In French, Observatoire national des faits religieux.
\textsuperscript{79} Nordic Africa Institute, Rival Priorities.
\textsuperscript{80} In French, Conseil supérieur de la communication.
In addition to creating ONAFAR, the government tried to pass a draft bill to regulate religious organizations and practices. The bill sought to ensure that prayer services could only occur within buildings that are designated for prayer and that receive prior authorization by the state. It further included provisions banning building religious structures on public grounds, ostentatious displays of religious symbols in public, and public school officials from discussing their religious preferences. The draft bill was a major break from the previous engagement with religion where state authority refrained from regulating or intervening in religious spaces.

Many Muslims regarded the bill as punishing the Muslim community for the Ansarul Islam attacks and the growing concerns about the spread of Islamic radicalism. In particular, the Mouvement Sunnite criticized the bill’s stipulation that prayer would have to take place in a building intended for prayer and that these buildings needed to gain state authorization. After the FAIB and many of its constituent member organizations expressed opposition, the government withdrew the bill.

Despite the opposition, polling data shows that a majority of Burkinabe citizens support the notion that the state should intervene in religious matters under certain conditions. According to data from Afrobarometer, 58 percent of Burkinabe citizens agreed that the government should have the power to regulate speech in places of worship, especially if preachers or congregants threaten public security. Only 39 percent agreed that the government should never limit what is said in a place of worship. Among Catholics, the support for governmental restrictions is higher than among the general population: 69 percent of the Catholic respondents agreed that the government should have the right to regulate worship. Among Muslims the support for government regulations is lower, but it is still shared by a majority: 55.4 percent of the Muslim respondents agreed with state regulation of worship.

---

The fact the government withdrew the bill demonstrates that the new government is mindful of Muslims’ concerns. At the same time, it demonstrates that Islamic organizations are capable of mobilizing successfully against state authority under certain conditions. Independent of the emergence of jihadi-salafi violence, Muslim groups—and conservative Sunni groups in particular—have become outspoken about their historical marginalization vis-à-vis the Christian community in the last decade. In part, this was due to the formation of the FAIB, which provided the Muslim community with more organizational power to channel their grievances, as well as the result of generational change. The younger generation of Muslims is no longer willing to accept their political marginalization vis-à-vis the privileged position of Catholics. Given the previously acquiescent position of the Muslim community toward state authority, this is a new development. It indicates that Muslim leaders are likely to protest any further state intrusion in Islamic affairs and are likely to scrutinize the country’s political leadership in a more vocal and public manner than before.

CONCLUSION

Since independence, the Burkinabe state has refrained from subjecting religious activity to state authority. Despite constitutional provisions to restrict religious practice, and although a majority of citizens back regulatory mechanisms in the religious sphere in principle, recent state attempts to exercise state authority in the religious sphere have largely failed to regulate religious affairs. This is unlikely to change any time soon. The Catholic Church remains an influential social and political actor, while the Muslim community, and in particular the salafi community, has become more confident and outspoken advocates of their interests. Both religious communities enjoy considerable support among their followers, and their ability to derail legislation aimed at regulating religious affairs attests to their influence and strong position.

Compaoré’s departure, followed by free and fair elections in 2015, has still not translated into economic gains and equality for most
Burkinabe citizens. As long as economic development stalls, religious communities are likely to maintain their distance from state authority. Continued socioeconomic deprivation will make it difficult for the state to generate trust and support for state actions. Especially among the Muslim community, this might lead to opposition to the state. The escalation and domestication of jihadi-salafi violence is likely to further complicate the relationship between the state and its religious communities, as well as between Christians and Muslims. The continued presence of Islamic radicals and future jihadi attacks on the Catholic community in the East have the potential to deepen the mistrust between Christians and Muslims and thus divide Burkinabe society.

Three factors will drive the future relationship between the state and religion. First is the ability of the new government to mediate between the two dominant religious groups. The newly created ONAFAR might prove to be a useful asset in this regard. If it manages to improve interreligious relations, it might help undermine domestic radicalization. The extent to which the new government is prepared to acknowledge and address the long-standing disparities of Muslims’ access to state bureaucracy will matter both for Christian-Muslim relations and the relationship between the new government and the Muslim majority. This effort will need to include a commitment to economic development and economic opportunities, especially in marginalized regions that have become recruiting grounds for young disaffected Muslims.

Second, how the conflict in Mali is contained will impact security and Muslim communities in Burkina Faso. If the international community and the Malian government manage to contain the ongoing violence, it is reasonable to expect a weakening of jihadi-salafi violence in Burkina Faso. This might not occur in the same way for the insurgencies in the North and East, which have local roots and require a multifaceted strategy. The Burkinabe state currently lacks such a strategy.

Third, the failure of the current government to regulate religious practice reduces the options available to the government to undermine jihadi activities. The government now has to contain the
various jihadi groups with the help of the security services, whose course of action appears to have the opposite effect.

It seems unlikely that the Malian crisis or any of the other security crises involving jihadi-salafism in the region will end soon. Jihadi-salafism will remain Burkina Faso’s main security challenge for years to come. The awakening of a political consciousness among Burkinabe Muslim community will produce more Muslim political activism. To ensure societal cohesion and to escape Mali’s trajectory, the Burkinabe government needs to pursue a dual strategy. The government must remove jihadi radicals from the Islamic landscape and create a security environment in which the state rebuilds the trust of its citizens, regardless of religion. At the same time, the government needs to accept Muslim political activism as a new political reality and address legitimate Muslim grievances. Achieving these goals would require the government to seek the support of Muslim leaders. This is a challenge in a country where postindependence governments have failed to build meaningful links between the state and its Muslim community.
CONCLUSION

Haim Malka

Africa has deep religious diversity within countries and between countries. More than 1.2 billion people divided among 54 countries embrace a wide variety of religious traditions, and even within religions there is a wide spectrum of practice and belief.

Governments in Africa generally do not try to control religion, but religion on the continent has often had a political role. Opposition groups have invoked the two principal religions, Islam and Christianity, as tools to challenge states, and states have courted religious authorities to bolster their legitimacy.

The fluid intermingling of religion and politics carries with it risks for states. Embracing the clerical establishment too tightly risks delegitimizing religious authorities. If the public sees religious leaders justifying brutality, repression, and corruption, those clerics lose their moral authority and sacrifice their claim to spiritual leadership. Likewise, governments that use religious regulation as a cover to harass legitimate political opposition and repress marginalized communities risk exacerbating the conditions that fuel extremism. Too little intervention, however, is also a peril. It can foster communal conflicts and create space for extremists to recruit and operate. Growing radicalism would threaten both the host state and its neighbors.

Amidst the ethnic, sectarian, religious, economic, and political diversity of Africa, each government must find its own balance. It must reach an appropriate equilibrium that protects freedom of expression and worship while also preventing violent movements
from exploiting the religious sphere. Political-religious dynamics are not static, and states must constantly reassess and adjust their policies based on shifting internal and external trends as well as their own objectives. Each state does so in its own way.

In doing so, the religions are not treated equally. Within Muslim communities, there are groups that argue that their violent opposition—to the government, to ruling elites, to non-Muslim communities, and even to many of their coreligionists—is theologically justified. While these groups are a minority, they color the way that governments in Muslim-majority states and Muslim-minority states alike think about their ties to religious communities. Suppressing religious extremism becomes not merely a social imperative but a security imperative as well. Because such groups are exceedingly rare in Christian communities, nations with both Muslim and Christian communities treat them very differently, even if the principles of their engagement with religion are the same.

For Morocco, Islam is inseparably tied to the monarchy’s legitimacy. Of all the countries in this study, Morocco has developed the most comprehensive strategy to bureaucratize religious institutions and shape religious discourse. Its overriding objective has been to strengthen monarchical power and undermine violent interpretations of Islam. Yet for Morocco’s religious policy to be effective in the long run, it must look beyond the government’s immediate political needs and develop policies that address the frustration and demands of the country’s youth.

In Tunisia, political polarization has obstructed state efforts to align Islam and state institutions in a way to combat extremism. In response, the state has resorted to an often heavy-handed, security-oriented approach to monitoring religious space. One consequence is that the most important religious institutions in Tunisia have been unable to play a constructive role in broad government efforts to address the country’s social, political, and security challenges. Equally importantly, religious space has become a growing source of division in Tunisian public life.

In Nigeria, a country evenly split between Muslim and Christian populations, the government applies religious regulation unevenly.
This approach creates vulnerabilities for the state and has consequences for religious institutions and communities. While there are growing calls for more effective governmental regulation of religion—both to counter extremism and to oversee murky church finances—Nigerian authorities are wary of provoking a popular backlash.

Kenya’s government has largely avoided overt interference in religious affairs while aligning itself with the Christian majority. In doing so, the government has accentuated the second-class status of a Muslim minority population that mostly resides in regions associated with the political opposition. The ongoing marginalization of Kenya’s Muslim community helps explain some of the appeal of extremist groups like al-Shabaab, which, in turn, have drawn a harsh counterterrorism response from the state.

Burkina Faso has a similar legacy of nonintervention in religion, but the rise of salafi groups and violent extremism has created new threats. In response, the government’s regulation of Muslim affairs has taken on an increasingly security-oriented cast. Although the Catholic Church remains the country’s most influential religious institution, the Muslim community is becoming increasingly politicized. Salafi leaders, in particular, are starting to criticize the ruling elite, and younger Muslims are making more demands of their government.

While conditions in each country are different, and each state employs different institutions and unique approaches to regulating religious life, a number of common themes emerge that provide important lessons for understanding the impact of state intervention in religious affairs more broadly across Africa.

- Undermining violent religious narratives is a priority for governments seeking to promote stability, and doing so requires policies that simultaneously protect freedom of expression without creating space for extremist discourse. Undermining those narratives requires more than monitoring speech or reforming religious education, however. It requires a parallel commitment to improve social, economic, and
political conditions to address widespread popular grievances. Troublingly, many governments have inadequate programs to improve conditions and use religious regulation to silence nonviolent opposition and religious doctrines that they consider hostile to their rule.

- Governments without any history of regulating religious affairs face steep challenges in their efforts to battle religious extremism. Not only do they cede space that extremists can exploit, but when they do intervene, their efforts are often highly securitized because they lack other noncoercive tools to engage with religious groups.

- There is an important difference between institutional reform of the religious sector and efforts to change or “modernize” doctrine so that it conforms to notions of “moderate Islam.” While some states are trying to do both simultaneously, the efforts require different strategies, tools, and resources. Institutional reform is often within governments’ grasp, but doctrinal reform is often elusive and can provoke damaging backlash.

- In most cases, neither governments nor civil society organizations manage religious issues in a vacuum. State efforts to dominate these activities without including voices from outside the state structure lose both credibility and dynamism, and they often foster greater conflict.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY**

There is no obvious role for the United States in African debates over religion. Yet, how African governments engage in the religious realm affects U.S. interests and policies on the continent and beyond. By intervening more aggressively in religious affairs, governments risk undermining legitimate religious institutions and deepening intercommunal tension. If religious regulation is used as a cover to harass marginalized communities, doing so risks enflaming security conditions rather than enhancing stability and security.
All of the country cases in this study are U.S. partners that receive U.S. economic and military assistance. U.S. officials should interest themselves in governments’ approaches to religious communities, in particular toward Muslim populations, and to their political and social contexts. The lessons here are also applicable to understanding the religious dynamics in other countries on the continent with which the United States has less intimate security ties.

U.S. policymakers need to recognize and understand regional governments’ motives, objectives, and methods for intervening in religious affairs. As U.S. policymakers learn more about religious dynamics in Africa, several important themes are important to highlight.

First, it is tempting to support state-defined narratives of “moderate” or “tolerant” Islam as an antidote to jihadi-salafism. While some governments may legitimately seek to promote the compatibility of Islam with human rights and tolerance, many also pursue socioeconomic, political, and security policies that vulnerable populations consider repressive and unjust. As long as citizens feel that their governments are failing them, extremists will recruit among marginalized youth.

Second, diplomatic outreach to religious actors in Africa is critical. But U.S. government officials risk creating further divisions by labeling religious groups or individuals as “moderate” or “extremist.” In some cases, those individuals labeled as “moderates” can speak English and appeal to U.S. officials, though they may not represent their faith community. Those deemed “extremist” might not agree with all aspects of U.S. foreign policy, but in some cases they may be useful interlocutors in combatting violence because they command respect and legitimacy.

Third, countering violent extremism and preventing violent extremism programs can serve important U.S. foreign policy objectives in Africa. But these programs have limits that are important to recognize. Partner governments have become adept at using CVE language and accompanying financial assistance to further their own political objectives. In many cases this includes deploying U.S. security assistance to suppress nonviolent political opposition
groups and silence dissent. Such actions reinforce the grievances that drive people to use violence against regimes, creating a cycle of state repression and antiregime violence.

Finally, U.S. support for good governance and transparency creates the best opportunity for undermining extremists in the long run. Supporting both governments’ and citizens’ efforts for inclusive dialogue, effective education, professional political parties, independent media, and a robust civil society can build more resilient and less conflict-prone societies.

For the United States, the diversity and fragmentation of approaches to religion in Africa challenge efforts to engage more strategically on the continent. More informed policy requires a deeper understanding of the diversity of religious movements and the motives of government intervention in religious affairs.

States and opposition groups will continue to seek control over religious institutions and religious discourse for the foreseeable future. At stake for the countries analyzed in this study is more than merely elite competition for resources. The struggle is over the identity of the modern nation-state and the relationship between regimes and their citizens. Rather than producing a clear winner, the struggle will endure and change in the process. The battle over religious symbols, education, and discourse will shape the contours of politics and society in Africa for the next generation, and beyond.
INDEX

Abacha, Sani, 75
Abdali, Ahmed, 22, 22n54
Adoums, Ahmed, 52
al-Adl wal-Ihsan. See Justice and Charity Movement
African Inland Church (AIC), 95
African Union (AU), 18n18
Afrobarometer, 112, 133
Algeria, 38
Amazigh, 8, 24n44
*amir al-mu'minin*. See commander of the faithful
Anglican Church, 100, 100n42
Ansar al-Sharia, 40, 54, 58
Ansar Dine, 127, 129
Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU), Kenya 108
Arabic language, 24–25, 25n44, 27, 43
Ashari theology, 13
Assadissa Channel, Morocco, 20
Assembly of God, 117
Association of Preaching and Reform, Tunisia, 44
*awqaf*. See Islamic endowments
Babangida, Ibrahim, 72
Balala, Khalid, 91
Basic Education Act of 2013, Kenya, 95
Bassole, Djibril, 130
Battikh, Othman, 47, 49n40, 51, 51n47
Bello, Ahmadu, 72
Ben Ali, Zine al-Abidine, 38–39, 39n11, 42n18, 44, 44n25, 49n41, 51, 53
Boko Haram, 4–5, 65, 65, 68, 71, 75, 78, 80–81, 83
Bourguiba, Habib, 34–35, 37–38, 42n18
Buhari, Muhammadu, 74
Burkina Faso, 8, 111–119, 120n33, 120n36, 121–22, 126–31, 135–36, 139; Ansarul Islam in, 113, 127n65–64, 128, 129n68, 131, 133; Catholic Church in, 112–13, 117, 122–24, 123n45, 126, 128, 134; Christian communities in, 112, 115, 132–34; colonialism in, 114–15, 117; counterterrorism in, 121–22, 132; economic conditions in, 116, 135; Fulani ethnic group in, 115–16, 127–28; jihadi-salafists in, 121, 126–32; jihadi-salafi violence in, 113–14, 121, 126, 128–29, 134–36; Malian crisis and, 121, 126–32, 135–36; Mouvement Sunni in, 118, 124–26, 126n58, 133; Muslim-Christian relations in, 135; Muslim communities in, 8, 112–15, 115, 122, 124–26, 135–36, 138; Pentecostal communities in, 117; political system, 119, 154–35; prayer, draft bill, 153; religious demographics in, 115; religious freedom in, 111; Sahel region of, 113–14, 113n5, 130; salafism in, 118, 126, 134; Saudi Arabia and, 118, 122–23; Soum Province, 127; state fragility index, 120n36; Sufism in, 118
Catholicism, 116, 123; Catholic Church and, 2, 87–88, 112–13, 116–17, 122–24, 126, 128, 154, 139
Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), 45n30
Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), 71
Chafi, Moustapha Limam, 130
Christian-affiliated schools, 97
Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), 73
Church of All Nations, Nigeria, 64
code de l’indigénat, Burkina Faso, 117
colonialism: in Burkina Faso, 114–15, 117; French, 8n6, 36n5, 116, 117, 121, 127–30; in Nigeria, 74, 81–82
commander of the faithful (amir al-mu’minin), 11, 14, 18, 24, 25, 28, 30, 33
Communauté Musulmane de Haute-Volta (CMHV), 118, 125
Communauté Musulmane du Burkina Faso (CMBF), 118, 126
Communautés chrétiennes de base (Christian Lay Communities, CCB), Burkina Faso, 122–23
Compaoré, Blaise, 120–21, 123–24, 126, 129–31, 134; jihadi forces and, 126–27, 130–31; Kanaozé and, 126n58; Malian crisis and, 121, 126, 130, 136
Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK), 101, 105, 108
countering violent extremism (CVE), 5–6, 5n4, 10, 63–64, 105–6, 106n55, 141–42; in Kenya, 95n26, 105–6
counterterrorism, 6, 10, 38, 139; in Burkina Faso, 121, 152; in Kenya, 103, 105, 106, 106n55; in Tunisia, 38–39, 42n18, 54, 55n58
Dar Hassaniya, Morocco, 15
Dasuki, Ibrahim (Sultan), 75
da’wa. See spiritual outreach
Dicko, Boureima, 127–28, 127n64, 131
Dicko, Jafar, 128
Diendéré, Gilbert, 130
Dor, Mohamed (Sheikh), 101–2
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), 150
education: access to, 37; foreign language, 24–25, 25n45, 27, 36n6; in Kenya, 94–99; in Morocco, 31–32; radicalism and, 24; at Zaytuna Mosque, 56. See also Ministry of Education
Education Act of 1968, Kenya, 95
Ennahda, 2, 40, 41, 41n15, 41n17, 42–47, 50, 53–58; imams appointed by, 49n42; inheritance rights and, 46–48; political activity separated from Islamic activism, 45–46; religious factions, 45; Zaytouna and, 34–38, 41–42, 48n38, 50–51, 55, 57–59
Essesbi, Beji Caid, 46, 47n55
Ethiopia, 4
family code (moudawana), Morocco, 21
fatwa, 17, 22
Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, Nigeria, 67
Fédération des Associations Islamiques du Burkina (FAIB), 118, 118n26, 126n58, 133, 154
Fedio, Uthman dan, 74
foreign language education, 24–25, 25n45, 27, 36n6
France, Malian crisis and, 127, 129–30
Friends of Zaytouna Mosque organization, Tunisia, 56
Fulani, 65, 115–16, 127–28
Ganduje, Abdullahi, 74
Ghali, Iyad Ag, 129–30
Ghannouchi, Rached, 42–43, 42n18, 42n19, 58n67
Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), Nigeria, 83
Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), Burkina Faso, 114, 114n7, 130
Group for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, Tunisia, 40
Gulf Cooperation Council, 39
habous. See Islamic endowments
HAKI Africa, Kenya, 103, 106n55
harambee fundraisers, Kenya, 100n42
Hassan II (King), 3, 11, 11n2, 13, 15
Hizb al-Tahrir, 40
homosexuality, 82; same-sex marriage, 83, 89, 89n13; Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014, 83
human rights abuses, 32, 103, 106, 108, 124
Ibadan Cross Crisis, Nigeria, 77–78
Ibrahim, Jibrin, 79
imam training, 17–18; in Morocco, 19–20, 45n30, 51; in Tunisia, 50–52, 60–61
inheritance rights, Tunisia, 46–48
Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), 96, 106, 109
interreligious relations, 90–91, 108, 114, 135. See also Muslim-Christian relations
Islamic endowments (awkaf, habous), 18, 35, 37, 37n9, 41, 57–58
Islamic fundamentalism, 11
Islamic identity, 12–14, 13n10–11, 16, 25, 25n45, 33, 38
Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), 78–79; bans on, 79–80
Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), 91, 93
Islamic State group (ISG), 4; in Morocco, 13, 13n9; in Tunisia, 36, 40, 54; Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS), 13–14, 114n7, 127–28
Islamization, 66, 82
Istiqlal Party, Morocco, 12n5
Jebali, Hamadi, 44n25
Jewish communities, 8n6, 36n5, 87n7
jihadi-salafists, 1–2, 2n1; in Tunisia, 39, 40, 53–55; in Burkina Faso, 115, 121, 126–32; in Mali, 4, 126–32
jihadi-salafi violence: 12, 55, 113–14, 121, 126, 128–29, 135–36; discourse, 15, 17; terrorism campaign, Tunisia, 40
Jomaa, Mehdi, 50
Jonathan, Goodluck, 74
Joshua, T. B., 64
Justice and Charity Movement, (al-Adl wal-Ihsan) 27–29; social welfare services, 28n54
Justice and Development Party (PJD), 25n45, 26–27, 26n47, 27n52
Kaboré, Roch Marc, 131
Kaduna State, Nigeria, 69, 78, 79
Kanazoe, Oumarou, 118n26, 126n58
Kenya, 2, 5, 139; Anglican Church of, 100, 100n42; Basic Education Act of 2013, 95–96; Christian communities in, 8, 86–87, 98; countering violent extremism in, 95n26, 104–7; counterterrorism in, 103–7; Education Act of 1968, 95; education in, 94–99; ethnic groups, 86, 87n4, 91; human rights abuses in, 106, 108; intercommunal conflict in, 6; Islamic Party of, 91; Ministry of Education in, 95n26, 97; Muslim-Christian tension in, 86, 91, 97, 108–9; Muslim communities in, 86–88, 87n6, 95, 97, 101–8; Pentecostal movement in, 88–89, 93–94, 100, 107; preaching regulated in, 93; religious demographics in, 86–90; religious diffusion in, 107; religious education in, 97–98; religious institutions in, 99–102; religious regulation in, 85–86, 93–94; salafism in, 88–89, 101; Saudi Arabia and, 89; al-Shabaab in, 92, 103–4, 104n47, 105n51; Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, 94, 98–99, 101, 101n43; terrorist attacks in, 108; United States Embassy in Nairobi bombing, 91
Kenya African National Union (KANU), 93, 101
Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), 94
Kenya Constitution of 2010, 85, 92–93
Kenyatta, Uhuru, 86, 93–94, 102, 104–5
al-Khademi, Nourredine, 49–50, 57
Laabidi, Houcine, 57–58
Lamizana, Sangoule, 119–20, 122–23, 125
Larayedh, Ali, 44n25
Local Government Areas (LGAs), Nigeria, 68
Index

madhhab, 13n10, 42
madrasa, 89, 95, 97–98, 106, 108
al-Maghrawi, Mohammed bin Abdurrahman, 30, 30n62
Maghreb, 2, 8, 9, 15, 34, 113, 144n7
Maitatsine riots, Nigeria, 77
al-Majlis al-`Ilmi al-A’la (Supreme Scientific Council), Morocco, 22
Makaburi, Abubakar Shariff (Sheikh), 104, 104n47
Mali: Imams in, 19n24; Ansar Dine in, 127–29; crisis in, 126–32; jihadi-salafists in, 4, 126–32; Tuareg secessionists, 126; Malian crisis, 126–32, 135
Maliki school of jurisprudence, 13, 13n10, 18–19, 51
marginalized communities, 6, 122, 127, 137, 140
Masjid Musa, Kenya, 104
Middle Belt, Nigeria, 69, 77
Ministry of Education: in Kenya, 95n26, 97; in Morocco, 16, 23–24; in Nigeria, 70; in Tunisia, 53
Ministry of Religious Affairs: in Morocco, 18–19, 23, 29–30; in Tunisia, 38, 48, 48n38, 49–52, 51n48, 56, 58
Mohammed VI (King), 12–13, 24
Mohammed VI Foundation of Scholars in Africa, Morocco, 20
Mohammed VI Institute for Training of Imams, Morchidines, and Morchidates, Morocco, 19–20
Moi, Daniel arap, 2, 91, 93, 100, 101n43
Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), Kenya, 103
Morchidates, Morocco, 19, 19n23
Morocco, 8, 8n6, 158; in African Union, 18n18; Assadissa, 20; Casablanca bombings, 12, 30; civil society, 26–30; diaspora populations in, 18; education in, 17, 22–25, 31–32; imam training in, 17–20, 51; independence, 15; ISG in, 13, 13n9; Islamic identity, 12–14, 13n10, 33; Islamist political parties, 26; Maliki-Ashari legal and theological doctrine, 18–19;
Ministry of Education in, 16, 23–24; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 18–19, 23; monarchy, 14–18, 14n12, 21, 21n32, 25–26, 28, 30–31, 33; nongovernmental organizations in, 27, 27n49; nonstate religious activity, 25–30; political parties in, 25–28; power structure, 12, 14–25, 30–31, 33; preaching in, 17, 18–20, 22; religious identity, 13–14; religious scholars in, 15, 17, 21–22; salafism in, 12–13, 22n33, 29–30, 29n60; Saudi Arabia and, 11–12; sociopolitical trajectory of, 31; soft power strategy, 17–18, 18n18; state reforms, religious approval of, 21, 21n31; Sufism in, 12–13, 13n11; youth dynamics, 31
moudawana (family code), Morocco, 21
al-Mourabitoun, Burkina Faso, 113, 114n7, 127, 127n60
Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI), Tunisia, 42n18
Mouvement Sunnite, Burkina Faso, 118, 124–26, 126n58, 133
Muslim Brotherhood, 26n47, 42n18
Muslim-Christian relations, 2–3; in Burkina Faso, 111, 135; in Kenya, 91, 97, 108–9; in Nigeria, 69, 77, 82
Musulms for Human Rights (MUHURI), Kenya, 103, 106n55
National Coordination Coalition to Defend the Qur’an, Tunisia, 50
National Council for the Revolution (CNR), Burkina Faso, 120
National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), 95n24, 99, 100, 107
National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC), Kenya, 105–6
National Hajj Commission, Nigeria, 72
National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF), Kenya, 101
National Observatory for Religious Affairs (ONAFAR), Burkina Faso, 132–33, 135
National Strategy for Combating Violent Extremism, Tunisia, 54–55
National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE), Kenya, 105–6
National Universities Commission, Nigeria, 70
Nidaa Tounes party, Tunisia, 44, 52
Nigeria, 8, 138–39; Boko Haram in, 63, 68–69, 75, 78, 81; Christian communities in, 65–66, 70–72, 84; colonialism in, 74, 81; Constitution of 1979, 67; Constitution of 1999, 66–67; federal character, 66, 67; federalism, 66, 68; Federal Sharia Court of Appeal, 67; foreign influences in, 82–83; hereditary authorities in, co-optation of, 74–75; Maitatsine riots, 77; Middle Belt, 69, 77; Muslim-Christian violence in, 69; Muslim communities in, 65–66, 83; Operation Safe Corridor, 71; Pentecostal movement in, 64, 65, 81–82; political system, 68–70; preaching regulation in, 77–78; religious demographics in, 65–66, 66n8; Religious Preaching Bill, Kaduna State, 78; Sabuwar Gandu Friday Mosque, 80; Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014, 83; sharia in, 63, 65n2, 75–76, 76n35; Shi`ite Islamic Movement of, 65; United States Embassy in Nairobi bombing, 91
Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Commission, 72
Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), 73
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), 7, 27, 27n49, 40, 44–45, 50, 100, 105
Odinga, Raila, 101, 102
Okba ibn Nafaa Mosque, Tunisia, 48n39
Operation Safe Corridor, Nigeria, 71
Operation Usalama Watch, Kenya, 108
Orange Democratic Movement, Kenya, 101
Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Nigeria, 72, 83
Oritsejafor, Ayo, 64, 74
Osinbajo, Yemi, 82
Pentecostalism: Pentecostal communities, 2, 116–17; Pentecostal movement, 5–6, 64–65, 81–82, 88–89, 93–94, 100, 107
preaching: Association of Preaching and Reform, 44; in Burkina Faso, regulation of, 111, 133; in Kenya, regulation of, 93, 108; in Morocco, 17–22; in Nigeria, regulation of, 77; in Tunisia, 44, 50, 52
Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya, 100
Presidential Committee on Individual Freedom and Equity (COLIBE), Tunisia, 46
preventing violent extremism (PVE), 5–6, 10, 54–56, 141–42
Prosperity Gospel, Kenya, 88, 88n8, 93
al Qaeda, 4, 11–12, 36, 38–39, 91, 103, 113, 114n7; in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), 113, 127
al-Qarawiyyin University, Morocco, 16, 16n15
Rabita Mohammadia des Ulemas (Mohammeda League of Scholars), Morocco, 21–22
radicalization, 6, 22, 24, 31, 39, 54–55, 55n58, 65, 81, 104–5, 113, 131, 135
Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria, 81–82
religious education: Arabic language in, 24–25; Christian-affiliated schools, 97–98; in Kenya, 97; in Morocco, 17, 22–25, 31–32; Muslim-affiliated schools, 97–98; in Tunisian school system, 53, 60–61
religious hereditary rulers, Kenya, 62, 65, 70, 75–75, 80
religious movements: colonialism and, 3, 95; political regimes aligning with, 3; state conflict with, 4
Religious Preaching Bill of 2016, Nigeria, 78
religious scholars, 9, 15–17, 21–23, 31, 35, 37
Religious Societies Rules, Kenya, 89n12, 93
Rogo, Aboud (Sheikh), 104, 104n47
El-Rufai, Nasir, 78
Sabuwar Gandu Friday Mosque, Nigeria, 80
Sahel region, Burkina Faso, 113–15, 113n5, 121, 130, 132
salafism/salafi, 2n1, 12n4, 36; in Burkina Faso, 118, 134; jihadi-salafists, 1–2, 2n1, 9, 31, 40, 53–55; in Kenya, 88–89; in Morocco, 12–13, 17, 29–30, 29n60; in Nigeria, 66, 81, 83; in Tunisia, 36, 39, 40, 43–44, 49–50, 54–55, 58, 60–61; political, 2n1
Sankara, Thomas, 120, 123, 125
Sanusi, Sanusi Lamido, 71, 74
Saudi Arabia, 11–12, 30n62, 39, 48n39; Burkina Faso and, 118, 125; Kenya and, 89; Morocco and, 11–12; religious influence, 12n5, 83
al-Shabaab, 4, 92, 103–4, 104n47, 105n51, 108, 139
sharia, 14n12, 40, 54, 65, 67, 75–77, 76n35, 89
sharif, 14–15
Shi‘ite Islamic Movement, 65
socioeconomic injustice, 32, 55n58, 116
Somalia, 103
Somali refugees, 92, 92n17
spiritual outreach, 2n1, 28–29, 39, 44–45
Sufism, 3, 12–13, 13n11, 20, 20n25, 43, 49, 51, 83, 117–18, 124, 128
Sunni Islam, 2n1, 22, 34, 88, 134
Superior Council of Communication (CSC), Burkina Faso, 132
Supreme Scientific Council (al-Majlis al-‘Ilmi al-A‘la), Morocco, 22
See also counterterrorism
al-Tijani, Sidi Ahmed, 117
Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhood, 2on25, 117–18
Tlili, Mounir, 40n14, 50–51
Troika government, Tunisia, 41, 41n15, 50
Tunisia, 2, 34, 138; Arabic language in, 43; civil society in, 45n28, 61; Constitution of the Tunisian Republic, 36, 43; counterterrorism in, 54–55, 55n58; Ennahda in, 2, 40, 41, 41n15, 41n17, 42–50, 53–58; imam training in, 19–20, 50–52; independence in, 34; inheritance rights in, 46–48; Islam in, 36–37, 59–61; Islamist political parties in, 38, 40, 41; Jewish communities in, 36n5; jihadi-salafist terrorism campaign in, 40; Ministry of Education in, 53; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 38, 49–52; modernization efforts in, 37; Muslim communities in, 8; national identity, 59; National Strategy for Combating Violent Extremism, 54–55; nongovernmental organizations in, 40; political polarization, 59–60; post-independence identity crisis, 36–41; post-revolutionary, 35, 39–41; radicalization in, 39; religious education in school system of, 53; revolution, 39–40; terrorism in, 40, 53–55; Troika government, 41, 41n15; women's rights in, 37, 37n7, 41n17; Zaytouna Mosque, 34–35, 37–38, 41n16, 48n38, 50, 55–59,
Tunisian National Constituent Assembly, 40, 40n12

ulema. See religious scholars

Unification and Reform Movement (MUR), Morocco, 27

Union Culturelle Musulmane (UCM), Burkina Faso, 118

United Muslims of Africa (UMA), Kenya, 93

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 92n17

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), 127

United States: aid and assistance, 10, 141; countering/preventing violent extremism, 5, 141–42; diplomatic outreach, 141; Embassy in Nairobi bombing (1998), 91; Iraq invasion by, 12, 39; policy, 140–42

Upper Volta, 114, 117, 119. See also Burkina Faso

Usman, Yusufu Bala, 62

Wahhabism, 12–13, 12n4, 39

women's rights: inheritance, 46–48; in Morocco, 21n31; in Tunisia, 37, 37n7, 41n17, 59

Word of Life Bible Church, Nigeria, 64

Yaméogo, Maurice, 117, 119

Yoruba hereditary ruler, Nigeria, 74

youth marginalization, 7, 12, 31–32, 60, 88, 102, 105, 109, 113, 134–35, 141

Yusuf, Muhammad, 80

al-Zakzaky, Ibrahim, 78–79

Zaytouna Mosque, Tunisia, 34–38, 59; Center for Islamic Studies, 38; educational activities at, 41n16, 50, 56; Ennahda and, 41–42, 55, 57–58; Friends of Zaytouna Mosque organization, 56; funding, 48n38; Higher Institute of Islamic Civilization, 38; Higher Institute of Theology, 38

Zerbo, Saye, 120n32

Zongo, Norbert, 120, 124, 126
CONTRIBUTORS

Haim Malka is a senior fellow and deputy director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC, where he oversees the program’s work on the North African Maghreb. His principal areas of research include drivers of radicalization, government strategies to combat extremism, religion and identity, violent non-state actors, and North African politics and security. Malka has testified before Congress and authored numerous book chapters and articles on a range of subjects relating to North Africa and the Middle East. Before joining CSIS in 2005, he was a research analyst at the Brookings Institution, where he concentrated on U.S. Middle East foreign policy and Israeli-Palestinian issues. Malka spent six years living in Jerusalem, where he worked as a television news producer. He holds an MA from Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs and a BA from the University of Washington in Seattle.

Richard Downie is a senior associate of the CSIS Africa Program, where he previously served as deputy director from 2009 to 2018. He has conducted research in more than a dozen African countries and is the author or coauthor of more than 20 CSIS reports. He joined CSIS following a decade-long career in journalism. He has conducted research and completed writing projects on Africa for the Council on Foreign Relations and the U.S. Institute of Peace. He is a contributor to the Africa section of Freedom House’s annual report, Freedom in the World. Downie holds an MA in international
public policy from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and a BA in modern history from Oxford University.

**Sebastian Elischer** is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Florida, which he joined in 2015. His work analyzes the interplay between identities and institutions, and he is particularly interested in how identities shape and affect procedural democratization in sub-Saharan Africa. His current work examines the nature and effect of religious regulation in areas of weak statehood. Elischer regularly contributes to public debates on Africa; has authored numerous books, chapters, and articles; and is a coeditor of the *Africa Yearbook*. Elischer earned his PhD from Jacobs University Bremen, an MIS at George Washington University, and an MA at the Free University in Berlin. He received a BA from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

**Ellen Laipson** is the director of the International Security program at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. She joined GMU in 2017 after a distinguished 25-year career in government and as president and CEO of the Stimson Center from 2002 to 2015. She serves on a number of non-governmental boards related to international security and diplomacy and is a columnist for *World Politics Review*. Her last post in government was vice-chair of the National Intelligence Council from 1997 to 2002. She also served on the State Department’s policy planning staff and the National Security Council staff, and worked at the Congressional Research Service for more than a decade. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, she serves on the advisory councils of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. She was a member of the CIA External Advisory Panel from 2006 to 2009 and President Obama’s Intelligence Advisory Board from 2009 to 2013. Laipson was also on the secretary of state’s Foreign Affairs
Policy Board from 2011 to 2014. She received an MA from the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and an AB from Cornell University.

Alex Thurston is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Cincinnati. From 2013 to 2014, he was an international affairs fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations. Thurston also served as a desk officer for Nigeria at the U.S. Department of State. He has taught in the African Studies program at Georgetown University and as a visiting assistant professor of political science and comparative religion at Miami University. His research focuses on Islamic thought and activism in northwest Africa. He has written two books on salafism in the region. His other publications have been featured in *African Affairs*, the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *African Studies Review*, and elsewhere. He has done fieldwork in Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Morocco. He holds a PhD in religious studies from Northwestern University and an MA in Arab studies from Georgetown.
ABOUT CSIS

Established in Washington, DC, over 50 years ago, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to providing strategic insights and policy solutions to help decisionmakers chart a course toward a better world.

In late 2015, Thomas J. Pritzker was named chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees. Mr. Pritzker succeeded former U.S. senator Sam Nunn (D-GA), who chaired the CSIS Board of Trustees from 1999 to 2015. CSIS is led by John J. Hamre, who has served as president and chief executive officer since 2000.

Founded in 1962 by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke, CSIS is one of the world’s preeminent international policy institutions focused on defense and security, regional study, and transnational challenges ranging from energy and trade to global development and economic integration. For eight consecutive years, CSIS has been named the world’s number one think tank for defense and national security by the University of Pennsylvania’s “Go To Think Tank Index.”

The Center’s over 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis and develop policy initiatives that look to the future and anticipate change. CSIS is regularly called upon by Congress, the executive branch, the media, and others to explain the day’s events and offer bipartisan recommendations to improve U.S. strategy.

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).