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Casablanca Bombings, Preventing Violent Extremism, Imam Training Program, Commander of the Faithful, Religious Pluralism

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Imam Training in Morocco: Preventing Violent Extremism as a Religious and Political Strategy

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Abstract

Following the 2003 Casablanca Bombings in Morocco there was an increased concern in protecting the physical and spiritual security of the nation. The state immediately responded by issuing a large crackdown on Salafists where many were arrested, imprisoned, and deprived of their rights. Due to the rise of extremist rhetoric in the mosques, particularly in rural and impoverished areas, the state also responded by closing any mosques they deemed to not be promoting moderate Islam and removed their imams. Out of this, a Preventing Violent Extremism Program was created that was composed of security and religious-based policies. The security policies entailed increased intelligence and arrests, and the religious policies a promotion of a state-sponsored Moroccan Islam, the control of all religious institutions and education, and the development of an Imam Training Program. This paper seeks to examine the efficacy of the Imam Training Program in preventing violent extremism through the analysis of newspaper articles, scholarly pieces, and first-hand interviews. The purpose of this paper is to show that the Imam Training Program, and the broader Preventing Violent Extremism Program, are more effective in strengthening the power of the king as Commander of the Faithful and in limiting religious pluralism than in preventing extremism. This study contributes to the discussion of preventing violent extremism strategies by suggesting marginalization and socioeconomic adversity as targets for action.

Key terms: Casablanca Bombings, Preventing Violent Extremism, Imam Training Program, Commander of the Faithful, Religious Pluralism

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Introduction

The 2003 Casablanca Bombing stood as a turning point for Moroccan counter-terrorism strategies and religious policy. Immediately following the attacks and over time a series of policies and programs have been enacted in an official Preventing Violent Extremism program with the aims to restore security and the image of stability and regional leadership. While this program has these positive goals to curb extremism and improve regional security, it also has worked to promote one homogenized version of Moroccan Islam and consolidated the power of King Mohammed VI in Morocco and internationally. The Preventing Violent Extremism program is multi-pronged with both security and religion aspects. The religious program is often the one praised as preeminent and innovative, however is the program's perceived success due to the security aspect instead? Is the intelligence gathering and the mass arrests what are actually preventing attacks or are the religious policies preventing extremist rhetoric and therefore future attacks?

The Imam Training Program is one of the most important aspects of the religion prong of the Moroccan Preventing Violent Extremism program. The Mohammed VI School for the Training of Imams (f. 2015), which trains imams from Morocco and throughout sub-Saharan Africa, is a key executor of the program's goals. The school was built and sponsored by the state, and the students regardless of their nationality are taught Moroccan Islam, to promote Moroccan Islam, and to not support other forms of Islam. This program raises the question: Is promoting one form of state-sanctioned Islam necessary and effective to prevent violent extremism, or is it more effective in limiting religious pluralism and expanding the king's power? Islamists have generally opposed the king as Commander of the Faithful so by banning their rhetoric and preaching, even if they are not promoting violence and terror, is the strategy fully meant to

prevent terrorism or to also limit opposition? While Moroccan's may not have a lot of faith in the government, they do in their imams. Imams are trusted leaders of the community who are obeyed by those that follow them. By promoting the king's message as the only 'right' message through the training of imams, the king's policies are being transmitted to the imams' communities. Since the communities generally listen to the lessons and guidance of their imams, they are giving legitimacy and power to the king's religious and political messages.

Considering these factors what is then the efficacy of the Imam Training Program in preventing violent extremism? Is it more effective in achieving its other unstated goals? Would other strategies be more effective? Would an alteration or synthesis of current strategies be more productive? It has been 17 years since the attacks and 5 years since the Imam Training School was opened, so is it too soon to tell? How and when will we know if the moderate message is taking root in all regions rich and poor? How and when will we know if the program is, in fact, preventing acts of terror which garners it so much international praise?

When beginning my research, I started with the broad question: How did the Moroccan government work to contradict the extremist ideas of the 2003 Casablanca bombing attackers to both a domestic and international audience? However, because of the time constraints and the many methodologies employed by the Moroccan government to achieve these goals, I am focusing my research on the Moroccan Imam Training Program. My question is: How was/is the Imams Training Program used as a tool to counter violent extremism? As follow-up questions I will ask: Why does the official concern on imams as an agent to counter violent extremism exist? And: To what extent and in which ways has the training program served this goal?

My paper starts by examining the 2003 Casablanca Bombing and the reactions to it. Secondly, I examine Morocco's Preventing Violent Extremism strategies as a whole, then I go

on to explore the structure of the Imam Training Program in detail. I lastly examine the efficacy of the Imam Training Program and how it might be achieving other goals than preventing violent terror.

Assumptions and Methodology

In light of the COVID-19 epidemic, I was forced to return to the United States from Morocco before the commencement of the ISP period. Because of this, I was unable to conduct numerous in-person interviews with Moroccan imams, historians, and civilians as I had hoped. I had planned to conduct interviews and site visits in Rabat, Casablanca, and Fes. I am spending the ISP period quarantined at my home in New Jersey, so I shifted the methodology for my research to an analysis of pre-existing sources and a few virtual interviews. My research sites included scholarly online databases, online newspaper articles, written and video interviews conducted by news sources, lectures given to the Multiculturalism and Human Rights Program, human rights analyses, and Webex. I looked at articles, data, and reports from the 2003 Casablanca Bombing to the present in order to analyze the effects of the bombing and the responses by the state. I specifically looked to focus on the role and effects of the Imam Training Program on preventing violent extremism in Morocco. I looked at a wide variety of sources, both state and private, domestic and international, and hope that in doing so I eliminated potential sources for bias and worked to show every side of my argument.

For my interviews, I conducted three qualitative interviews with open-ended responses. These interviews were conducted with experts, two Moroccan and one American, and were conducted over the Webex video chat platform. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form and gave permission for the audio to be recorded and for their names to be used in the

course of my research. Conducting interviews with experts added depth to the arguments made in my paper and gave years of first-hand experience that I do not have.

In this paper, the Literature Review and Analysis sections were combined since my project began as an analysis of preexisting sources. The contents of my sources, interviews, and analysis are intertwined throughout the body of this paper.

Before beginning my research, I assumed that the Imam Training Program would be widely supported by its participants and that they would also have high praise for the king as Commander of the Faithful. I believed that the training program was an important part of a grander strategy to combat violent extremism but did not know if it was effective in promoting moderate Islam or also in consolidating the power of the monarch in the region. Based on my experience living and learning in Morocco, I assumed that the king would work to increase his own power by any means and that state-run efforts might always have this as an underlying motivator. This research seeks to explore the Imam Training Program, and the broader Preventing Violent Extremism program, to determine if it is actually effective in achieving its stated goal.

Literature Review and Analysis

The Casablanca Bombing

The Events and their Perpetrators

The Moroccan Preventing Violent Extremism program, and consequently the Imam Training Program, were born out of what is considered the September eleventh of Morocco, the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks. According to Krueger and Maleckova (2003), "The term "terrorism" means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence

an audience". These acts of terrorism, committed by Salafia Jihadia which is an Al-Qaeda affiliate, greatly undermined Moroccan feelings of stability and exceptionalism (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 38). The Casablanca attacks occurred on May 16, 2003 and were a series of coordinated strikes at a Spanish cultural center, the Belgian consulate, a Jewish community center, and the Farah Maghreb Hotel (Jehl, 2003). On the day of the attacks, NPR's Eric Westervelt reported that "like the attacks in Saudi Arabia on Monday…it appears the terrorists [were] more targeting Western business and political interests and regimes with ties to the US, not just specific American targets" (Simon, 2003). Morocco has long had "close diplomatic relations with the US and European countries and the kingdom has cooperated in the war on terrorism. In addition, fundamentalists have long detested Morocco's moderate stance toward Israel" (Simon, 2003). As a result of the various attacks, at least forty people were killed, and sixty people were injured from a mix of car bombs and body explosives (Simon, 2003).

It is often believed that perpetrators of terrorist attacks such as this come from vulnerable, impoverished communities. In Morocco, "[a]t least 70% of the population is under the age of 30, coupled with high youth unemployment, which stands at 21.4%" and according to Boulter (2016) this indicates that "there is plenty of fertile ground for terror recruiters to coax disillusioned young men, and women, into pursuing jihadist activities". Boulter (2016) also notes that the "the individuals recruited were all young men, with origins in the Casablanca slum of Sidi Moumin". NPR's Scott Westervelt also believed that "the slums of Casablanca have been something of a centerpiece for growing Muslim fundamentalism in Morocco" (Simon, 2003). However, in 2005 the New York Times reported that:

> In the four attacks for which the most complete information about the perpetrators' educational levels is available -- the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the 9/11 attacks, and the Bali

bombings in 2002 -- 53 percent of the terrorists had either attended college or had received a college degree. As a point of reference, only 52 percent of Americans have been to college. The terrorists in our study thus appear, on average, to be as well educated as many Americans. (Bergen and Pandey, 2005)

Sadik Rddad agrees that there is often this false claim that fundamentalists are ignorant or did not go to school and says that many are smart, even engineers or doctors (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Rddad also says that it is easy for them to recruit young people by appealing to polarizing issues such as Palestine, presenting Muslims as victims of the West, and stating that you are not a good Muslim unless you violently stand up against those who are killing your brothers (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). As there are many conflicting scholarly studies and resulting conclusions on whether poverty breeds fundamentalism, it is difficult to determine from existing literature if targeting those communities is an effective tool in a religion-based preventing violent extremism program.

Responses by the Moroccan State

After the 2003 terrorist attacks, the Moroccan state aimed to restore the image of Moroccan Islam as having the values of "moderation, tolerance, and interfaith coexistence" through a combination of religion and security-based policies (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 39). Due to the abrupt change in both the domestic and international perception of Morocco's stability and security, the state had to act quickly to address both the bombing and the factors they perceived to have caused it. These reactions included mass arrests of about 2,000 suspected Salafi extremists. These mass arrests were carried out along with "home searches without judicial warrants, mostly in poor neighborhoods that are suspected Islamist strongholds…Many reported that they were then transported to a detention center in Temara, outside Rabat, that is operated by the General Directorate for the Surveillance of the Territory" (Dakwar, 2004, p. 2). In addition to the limited human rights afforded in this detention facility, "[m]any suspects were convicted and

sentenced before October 1, 2003 – the date an amendment to the Criminal Procedural Code went into force and granted defendants the right to appeal their convictions on the facts" (Dakwar, 2004, p. 2). The reactions also included support for anti-terror and anti-money-laundering legislation, the 2015 creation of the Central Bureau of Judiciary Investigations, social and human development programs (INDH), religious reforms to curb Wahabism and Salafi Jihadism, 2004 Family Code reforms, and discussions with/conversions of Salafists (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 39). In May 2017, the Reconciliation Program was launched to reconcile jihadists with the self, religious texts, and society so that these prisoners could be reintegrated (Hmimnat, 2019). However, this program has been very selective in who can participate, and many who participated were granted royal pardons thereby giving Jihadist inmates an incentive to participate in spite of their religious beliefs. As an example, Sheikh Umar al-Hadouchi, a Salafist preacher imprisoned for his association with the bombing, was pardoned in 2011 (Sheline, 2019, p. 8). However, in 2013, he "participated in a dialogue organized by an affiliate of the PJD intended to reduce ideological division. He also issued a fatwa condemning Moroccans who traveled to fight for the Islamic State. He represents a figure previously affiliated with terrorism, but who subsequently rejected violence" (Sheline, 2019, p. 8). The religious scholars who lead the program all belong to the official religious establishment and therefore promote the state's interpretations and discredit others (Hmimnat, 2019). Many of these Salafists joined the Renaissance and Virtue Party which has moved to support the king's legitimacy and to participate in formal politics (Zerhouni and Akesbi, 2016). It appears that by working to convert and pardon these prominent Salafists, the king not only aimed to quell extremist rhetoric but also to gain control over a group who opposes him and legitimize the monarchy's power.

Morocco's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Strategies

Introduction

These actions to restore security and faith in the nation after the 2003 Casablanca Bombing were organized into a multi-pronged effort known as the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) program. The questions I aim to explore in this section are: How much religious freedom does the constitution guarantee and are those freedoms enforced? And: If yes, does the PVE program further limit religious freedoms in Morocco?

After the attack, the state aimed to "reshape the official version of Islam" and to "strengthen the religious bureaucracy's central role" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 39). The state needed to create a large marketing strategy as political, economic, and tourism reputations were at risk. The PVE program combined security-based and religious-based strategies, with "religion…intensively incorporated as a crucial component", in order to effectively address the threats to Morocco made apparent by the bombing (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 36). The goals of this program were "Islamization from above, safeguard[ing] spiritual security, [and] immuniz[ing]…against threatening opponents," which include Islamist movements, Salafists, Shiites, and Christian proselytizing missionaries (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 39). The state also adopted development projects in shanty towns since they believed that poor, young, unemployed people are easy prey to fundamentalist groups and wanted to counterbalance that narrative (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). We do not know the efficacy of these development programs realized in these communities. While these goals aimed to protect the present and future security of the Moroccan people, they also consolidated the power of the king and limited religious pluralism. The security-based policies may have been the teeth in the PVE

strategy while the religious-based policies worked on many levels to further the state's political interests.

Security-based Policy

In addition to the mass arrests of Salafists and state support for anti-terror legislation, the state's intelligence and security services have developed significantly as a response to the Casablanca attacks. Sheikh Mohamed Fizazi, who inspired many young radicals, was sentenced for 30 years on charges connected to the attack (Boulter, 2016). On Mar 20, 2007 the King's Public Prosecutor stated that Saad Houssaini, a prominent Islamic combatant and leader, was referred to the Rabat Appeal Court "under charges of undermining national security by receiving funds intended to finance acts compromising the security of the state, as well as forming a gang to plan and carry out terrorist acts which seriously undermine the public order" (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007). In January 2015, "The country´s new judicial body, or Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations…was established as part of amended anti-terror legislation" (Boulter, 2016). It "has been instrumental in uncovering jihadist groups. In the first six months of its creation, it had thwarted the activities of at least 15 terror cells" (Boulter, 2016). In the same year as the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations' founding, approximately 300 Moroccan jihadists went to fight for the Islamic State in Libya and the Moroccan authorities arrested groups of jihadists with links to them in three cities (Boulter, 2016). Also, in 2015, an Islamic State group known as the Caliphate Soldiers in Morocco was broken up in Essaouira (Boulter, 2016). "According to the latest figures published by the…Bureau…187 terrorist cells planning terrorist actions in the Kingdom were dismantled in the period between 2002 until January 2019, and more than 3,202 people were arrested" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 37). These impressive statistics show that Morocco is being proactive in combatting terrorism from a security-based perspective, but

they also show that the nation is not being 'immunized' from extremism (Hmimnat, 2019). If the PVE program was as successful as marketed, there would not be so many attacks to prevent and people to arrest.

Religious Policy

The Moroccan Religious Preventing Violent Extremism (MRPVE) program is a continuance of a mid-1980s policy based on faith-based diplomacy. This policy has been upgraded and "functions through a number of sophisticated institutional mechanisms regulated by bilateral agreements and detailed provisions" with the Imam Training Program as a prominent example (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 7). For King Mohammed VI, the religious initiatives are a vital component of his interests and the transnational religious policies provide an influential 'soft power' (Hmimnat, 2018).

The Casablanca attacks "destroyed the illusion that the Moroccan monarchy's grounding in Islam protects it from Islamic extremism and terrorism" so the state had to create a version of Islam that could combat them (Maghraoui, 2008). Their counterterrorism strategy is built "upon an inclusive, offensive counter-ideological approach which focuses on winning 'hearts and minds' through fostering and spreading moderate understanding of Islam…both inside and outside the country" (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 9). This entailed creating and promoting one 'Moroccan Islam'. The Moroccan religious narrative adheres to Sunni Islam and the Maliki school of thought, with Sufism at the core being used to create a regime monopoly on national religious identity (Daadaoui, 2016). Sufism is defined as the mystical, spiritual dimension of Islam that interests itself in defeating the evil inclinations of the inner soul such as selfishness, materialism, and egotism (Rddad, 2020). The MRPVE strategies serve to preserve this religious identity, but also stem "from the state's vision of the necessity to strengthen the Commandership of the

Faithful's religious legitimacy" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 39). By promoting Moroccan Islam as the best Islam to promote moderation and counter extremism, the king is homogenizing religious identity and strengthening his religious legitimacy inside and outside of Morocco.

With the official Moroccan Islam comes intensive religious supervision of society. The Ministry of Religious Affairs oversees this by placing mosques and preaching sites under tight state control, and by providing services and equipment (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 40). In maintaining this supervision, the state has monopolized credentials to acquire religious authority through institutionalizing the issuance of fatwa, the training of imams and mourshidat, and the revision of religious programs in schools (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 40). On top of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ulama Council and the Mohammedian Rabita of Religious Scholars work to promote the state's message. The Mohammedian Rabita engages in de-radicalization and immunization efforts through an intellectual engagement with extremist ideas in academia, the media, and online (Hmimnat, 2019, pp. 40-41). They identify areas vulnerable to violent extremism, create safe religious content, and develop counter-extremism narratives that dismantle jihadist ideologies and immunize society against their rhetoric (Hmimnat, 2019, pp. 40-41). In addition to dismantling jihadist ideologies, the regime uses their official Islam to discredit popular protests, especially in the post-2011 climate (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 42). The MRPVE has the advantage that it "stems from a realistic, inclusive approach substantively different from the security-or the extreme laic-based approach which have proved…short and inefficient to fight against religious extremism in a number of MENA countries" (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 9). However, the policy also has many disadvantages, and has not been used solely to fight religious extremism but to achieve political goals and marginalize opponents of the state as well.

The MRPVE program faces many deficiencies such as the ideological vision framing it, the instrumentalization of it to serve certain political interests, the uncertain efficacy in functioning, and the scope of action (Hmimnat, 2019). "Apart the bold initiatives undertaken by Arrabita, the other religious institutions do not reach or may not have the appropriate tools to deal with sensitive spaces and hot spots where Jihadists groups manage to disseminate violent ideas and recruit potential extremists" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 43). Hmimnat also points out that "a significant part of official religious discourse is still immersed in traditional advocacy and religious guidance, which remains less influential and less interesting, either in form or in content, to the current generation of young people" and that "official religious discourse and all state-sponsored initiatives in general are regarded cautiously by the populace for lacking credibility" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 43). Also, "religious institutions lack the internal tools and indicators to measure their effectiveness and capacity to reach the desired results" thereby rendering them unable to determine if their methodologies are successful (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 43). Because they cannot determine this, they are then unable to identify faults and create change in the program to increase its efficacy.

The MRPVE remains a largely fragmented effort that creates a balance between religious actors so that none can pose a threat to the regime itself (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 43). "This lack of coordination, however, weakens the strength of MRPVE and challenges its effectiveness in the field" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 43). Hmimnat recommends that an intergovernmental body be created to synergize the fragmented activities of this policy. This organization would then be able to develop indicators to determine their impact and present credible data to assess it. While organizing the religious-based efforts could help to immunize against extremism in the long-

term, in the short-term it is difficult to distinguish how effective the religious strategy is due to the high vigilance and intelligence work of Moroccan security services (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 41).

The Imam Training Program

In a 2008 speech King Mohammed VI described the ulama as the 'conscience of the nation' as they are the ones on the front lines of the war on terror interacting Moroccans daily (El-Katiri, 2012, p. 58). As such, in 2015, as part of the religion-based strategies to counter violent extremism, the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Mourchidin, and Murchidate was founded. This institution, located in Rabat, plays a pivotal role in the MRPVE strategies and distinguishes Morocco as a regional religious leader.

Mohammed VI School for the Training of Imams

The training institute is an advanced and comprehensive facility that cost 200 million MAD and took 9 months to build (Chaoui, 2017). It is comprised of a mosque, classrooms, amphitheaters, a library, computer rooms, multipurpose rooms, a restaurant and residence complex, and a social and sporting complex (Habous, 2015).

Admission

The original training program began in 2004 with 150 men and 50 women, and upon the opening of the Mohammed VI School in 2015 these numbers were expanded to "150 [Moroccan] preacher Imams and 100 [Moroccan] preachers (Morchidate) trained each year" (Habous, 2015). After the king's visit to Mali in 2013, the program was opened up to international students which further separated Morocco as a religious leader in the region and grew the program to over 1,200 students (Chaoui, 2017). The training school welcomes a multitude of international students, as of 2017 data, from these nations in this percentage breakdown: 16% Morocco, 23% Guinee, 22% Mali, 21% Ivory Coast, 5% Niger, and 2% Tunisia (Hmimnat, 2018).

It is important to note that this training program is state-sponsored and highly selective. After the announcement was made, "more than 3,500 candidates submit their applications. The conditions are strict: menu of a license, having learned the Koran by heart, women 30 hizb, and being under 45 years of age. These candidates are distributed according to the grades obtained at the university" (Chaoui, 2017). From this pool, the 150 students are selected. "The idea is to tighten the recruitment criteria, with the creation of a body of imams who were to preach the good word across the country and also supervise their colleagues" in order to ensure the support and spread of the official Moroccan Islam (Chaoui, 2017). Students do not appear to be selected who are predisposed to non-Sufi based forms of Islam, thereby ensuring that only the students who are most amenable to the king's religious message will be selected. As an example, in the original Malian group 95% of the imams selected were Sufis and 70% Tidjanis, and it is believed that those from Salafi backgrounds were not pushed forwards over those with Sufi backgrounds (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 25). The admission system aims to preserve the values of Moroccan Islam, moderation and tolerance, and to protect them against extremism.

Curriculum

The curriculum at the Mohammed VI School for the Training of Imams aims to give its students a diverse and comprehensive education so that they have the necessary tools to lead their communities with the values of Moroccan Islam. The curriculum length differs for Moroccan, sub-Saharan African, and French students – one, two and three years respectively – as foreign students need to "'unwind' the bad religious training the students received throughout their careers as imams, making them stronger opponents of ISIS, as the group often relies on recruits' limited knowledge of Islamic tenets" (Global Risk Insights, 2016). The topic areas of the curriculum are expansive and mark a shift from pre-Casablanca bombing times which were

comprised of a more traditional than modern education. According to the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs (2015), the students are given both theoretical and practical training. The theoretical training includes sharia, Arabic language, foreign languages, psychology, and computer science. The practical training includes manuals of research and preparation, public speaking, physical education, and methods of communicating and convincing. According to Fadoua Hassani Alaoui, an IT teacher at the institute, imams are trained to master the internet so that they can contact other users and alert them if they are doing illegal things (TRT World, 2017). They are also given training in mechanics, agriculture, tailoring, and IT to increase the chance of them receiving jobs upon their return home (TRT World, 2017). According to Chaoui (2017), the modules and curriculum are routinely updated to reflect changes in society, making the Mohammed VI School one that caters to the modern challenges it faces instead of being stuck in traditional ways. However, the instructors mainly come from the Councils of Ulemas, a state institution, and are "paid up to 300 MAD an hour" (Chaoui, 2017). The facilities, the admissions, and the curriculum are developed and run by the state, thereby spreading a homogenized version of Islam that carries political power throughout Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa, and beyond.

Stipend

In addition to the instructors' pay, imams are also highly incentivized to preach the king's religious and political messages. While students, they receive a scholarship of 2,000 MAD per month (Chaoui, 2017). After graduation, they become government employees and "[g]raduates of both sexes among Moroccans receive a salary equal to that received by an assistant administrator of public administration, in addition to health coverage and the right to promotion" (Foundation Muhammad VI, 2015).

Placement After Graduation

In order to graduate, students must be evaluated by two subcommittees with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, one for the Quran and the other for social sciences. According to Foundation Mohammed VI (2015), 2,100 Moroccan imam instructors, 900 Moroccan instructors, and 1,534 foreign students have graduated from the training program thus far. Then, each "qualified imam instructor is assigned to a territorial district where there is a Local Council of [U]lema and a Delegation from the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs" (Foundation Muhammad VI, 2015). The imams work in mosques and supervise the religious requirements of the citizens, and the mourshidat run literacy programs for women, direct after school programs in mosques, and council single mothers, prisoners, and hospital patients (Errihani, 2011). According to Rddad, after 2003 much more importance was given to female religious guides (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). They were given both a religious and secular education like the male imams, and then appointed throughout the country to both rural and urban shanty towns. It was important to capitalize on women because women find mosques to be exclusively for men, so the mourshidat gives someone for women to go to for guidance and a religious education (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Women are the first teachers of their children, and if they are taught the state's moderate Islam then they can spread it, and according to Rddad, prevent the susceptibility to radicalization of both mothers and their children (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Outreach and "knowledge of local realities and customs" are highly important for both male and female graduates as they aim to influence the hearts and minds of their jurisdictions to guide not only their religious lives, but personal and political ones too (El-Katiri, 2012, p. 65).

Views of Students

Students and scholars seek to promote moderate Islam and disavow extremist ideas in their nations. The Mohammed VI Institute is an important facet of the strategy to immunize these countries against extremist ideologies as these students will become "enlightened religious leaders" in their respective communities (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 23). In an interview with TRT World (2017), a Turkish broadcast service, Abdesselam Lazaar from the Mohammed VI Institute says that: "The role of the institute is to correct the wide interpretations used by terrorists to justify concepts such as loyalty and disavow sharia, Salafism, and jihad. These concepts have been disfigured and misused". Because of this disfiguration, Aboubakr Thani Sylla, a Guinean student, says his mission is difficult because "correcting conceptions is not an easy task" and "you need a lot of things to change peoples' behavior" (TRT World, 2017). Youssef Belal, an anthropologist of religion, challenges these misconceptions and misuses of Islamic terms and says that jihad is about a commitment to do good. The institute encourages the contextualization of Islam in opposition to the extremists who decontextualize Islam to promote their aberrant version of jihad. It encourages pluri-disciplinarity that takes Imams away from the simplistic, literal reading of Islam (French 24, 2017). Mohamed El Ouassi, a French student of Moroccan origin, supports Belal's ideas by saying that terrorism is stealing the Islamic religion via ideology and needs to be countered by ideas taught in their training (French 24, 2017). These individuals believe in the mission of the institute and many, like Hind Usman, a young woman from Nigeria, have left their homes to study Islam in Morocco so that they could affect lasting, peaceful change upon the completion of their studies (Bouknight, 2019). These students find the institute to be key in fighting against Islamist ideologies, and to be giving them the tools and advanced knowledge to do so in their own communities.

The Friday Sermon

An important way in which Morocco's religious leaders influence the hearts and minds of their followers is through the Friday sermon. The Friday sermon is one of the most important rituals in Islam and its contents have drastically changed since government intervention began in 2003, resulting in effects on both religion and politics (Errihani, 2011). Before the attacks, "radical imams in Moroccan mosques were free to preach their gospel because their rhetoric was seen as 'empty' by the state" (Errihani, 2011). Afterwards, the Friday sermon became an important target in preventing violent extremism strategies and the Mohammed VI School for the Training of Imams was the boldest step taken to counter Islamist discourse in it (Errihani, 2011). According to Errihani (2011), there are three types of sermons in Morocco: moderate, militant, and state sponsored. Moderate sermons are the least common and least controversial as they are grounded less in politics and more in moderate religious discourse. They promote salvation through moral conduct and fear of God and shun direct criticism of the state and its institutions. Militant sermons strongly connect religion and politics. They condemn foreign intervention in the Muslim way of life, denounce Arab leaders for betraying them, and call for a return to a more authentic Islam. These sermons rely on the imam's ability to interpret Islamic texts in a way that corroborates a purely Islamist agenda and work to turn people against the state. State sponsored sermons are those promoted by the monarch and his religious institutions. These sermons are given to imams by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs or are pre-approved by the ministry if written by the imam. Their messages praise the regime and stress Islam's call for obedience to the umma's leader, the Moroccan king and Commander of the Faithful.

Importance

Presently, most Islamic states believe that this sermon should only convey religious messages, however, religion and politics have been inextricably linked throughout history

(Errihani, 2011). For example, the Prophet Mohammed was also a statesman, and therefore moral and socio-political content were intertwined in his messages (Errihani, 2011). The Friday sermon is "delivered by a symbolic power figure, both political and social, who speaks on behalf of the congregation using the uncontestable sources on which the Muslim faith is based (the Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah)," and no one dares question this authority (Errihani, 2011). The imam is considered an authority who must be obeyed; however, he is not only conveying religious teachings. The sermons have been "a useful public forum for channeling religious, political and social announcements that impacts on the way members of the congregation conduct themselves on a day-to-day basis" and aim to "reform through persuasion that eventually leads to action" (Errihani, 2011). In 2011, imams were given a sermon to promote a 'yes' vote on the constitutional referendum (Belghazi, 2020). The new imam is expected to uphold and promote government policy and condemn religious influences that differ from the official narrative of Moroccan Islam.

Morocco has a population of about 34.3 million and more than 99% of that population identifies as Sunni Muslim; religiosity has only increased since the state's independence in 1956 (State Department, 2018; El-Katiri, 2012, p. 55). In a 2011 survey of Moroccans 88.9% of respondents indicated that religion is 'very important' in their life (World Survey, 2011). In that same survey, when asked how much faith they have in imams and given the options 'a great deal', 'quite a lot', 'not very much', 'none at all', 'no answer', and 'don't know', 65.5% said 'a great deal' and 24.7% said 'quite a lot' (World Survey, 2011). However, when given those same options and asked how much confidence they have in the government, 19.6% said 'a great deal', 24.8% said 'quite a lot', 31.7% 'not very much', and 17% 'none at all'. This data is important in that it shows a high Sunni Muslim population, high confidence in imams, and low confidence in

the government. While there is 'not very much' confidence in the government, the government is able to wield political influence through the state-run training of imams. A large majority of Moroccan's have 'a great deal' of faith in imams, and by placing their faith in their imams the Moroccan people are unknowingly placing their faith in the homogenized religious and political messages of the king, thereby ensuring loyalty to the state in all reaches of the nation.

The Efficacy of the Imam Training Program in Preventing Violent Extremism

While Morocco's religious reforms following the 2003 Casablanca Bombings have served as a political tool to consolidate the Commander of the Faithful's power, El-Katiri (2012) argues that they are not simply a charade. The reforms are "arguably one of the most comprehensive reform packages of religion and religious institutions in Morocco, or indeed other Muslim countries, have yet experienced" (El-Katiri, 2012, p. 54). However, while these reforms, specifically the founding of the Mohammed VI School for the Training of Imams, may succeed in limiting Salafist preaching and promoting moderate Islam, there is no cohesion of the overall strategy. Given that it does not have the necessary resources, its tasks are "vast and probably impossible to achieve in the foreseeable future" (El-Katiri, 2012, p. 67). Also, there is no data to determine if succeeding in these goals results in achieving the larger goal of preventing violent extremism. Boulter finds that intelligence and security methods will be most effective in reducing "the appeal of Morocco as a base for IS operations" supporting the point that the Imam Training Program's promotion of a moderate Islam is not most effective. Before 2003 Morocco had said that they do not have a problem with religious extremism because they have moderate Islam. If moderate Islam was really the antidote to extremism, then Morocco would not have extremism (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Maghraoui stated that imams can play a role in reforming religion but does not think that reforming religion will result in less religious extremism as extremism will find ways around the new barriers (Driss

Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The religious-based policies are not solely a political tool, but they are more effective in limiting religious pluralism and increasing the power of the king than preventing violent extremism.

Prevention of Salafist Preaching

"Containing radical discourse in the mosque in an attempt to preserve political order became a priority for the Moroccan state on the eve of the May 2003 Casablanca attacks. Prior to this date, Islamist imams enjoyed the status of rock stars in their mosques" (Lamlili, 2007). The Islamist imams' messages were viewed as nonthreatening, however immediately following the attacks the state fired all non-authorized imams and silenced opposing voices so the they could take charge of religion (Errihani, 2011). Through rigorous state control of Islamic institutions and education, Salafist preaching has been kept out of the mosques and replaced with state-sponsored ideas. These extremist messages have been eliminated from all forms of education as well. Global Risk Insights (2016) identified that extremist groups like ISIS recruited youth through "the use of independent extremist preachers," so by reforming education in schools and in the mosque the state works to eliminate this threat.

The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs monitors religious education and all dissemination of Islamic materials (State Department, 2018). Included in this policy, the ministry monitors the imams and the female religious leaders. "According to media reports…the government requested regional MEIA representatives identify and monitor imams (morchidines) and female Muslim spiritual guides (morchidates) who have accounts on social media to ensure only official religious positions were conveyed through these personal accounts" (State Department, 2018). These morchidines and morchidates are trained by the Mohammed VI School, whose curriculum teaches the proper messages to convey and use of media. While the

government said they did not interfere with the chosen topics for sermons, the religious leaders were required to abide by MEIA-issued guidelines in the Guide of the Imam, Khatib, and the Preacher (State Department, 2018). Quranic schools were also monitored to prevent extremist rhetoric and ensure teaching follows the approved doctrines. In order to do this, "[t]he government required mosques to close to the public shortly after daily prayer times to prevent use of the premises for what it termed "unauthorized activity," including gatherings intended to promote extremism" (State Department, 2018). If new mosques were to be constructed in Morocco, they would require approval from the MEIA to ensure their adherence to state policies and official Moroccan Islam. In primary, junior, and high schools, the Ministry of Education and the MEIA introduced thirteen new textbooks on religion and legal sciences to "remove extremist or intolerant references and promote moderation and tolerance" (State Department, 2018). The monitoring of content in sermons, Islamic religious education, and the dissemination of Islamic material by media are claimed to be for the purpose of combatting violent extremism. Errihani (2011) argues that the state has been successful in curbing extremist discourse in the mosque through these efforts, which include the Imam Training School, religious broadcasts, and more.

However, it is important to note that religious reform in education and the mosques has not worked towards eliminating extremism on its own. According to Hmimnat (2018), NGOs play a large part in this battle. NGOs, like the Maghreb Scholars League and the Africa Centrism Forum, work to disseminate moderate Islamic through from below. The Moroccan MUR is known for "being active in confronting extremist thoughts in fragile areas such as Sidi Moumen neighborhood where the 2003 Casablanca bombings' suiciders came from" (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 20). Because these NGOs have intimate knowledge of the vulnerable communities they work to

affect, they are able to have a strong positive impact on the fight against extremism in Morocco showing that you cannot rely solely on the efforts of the ulema to be successful in this mission.

Strengthening the Power of the Commander of the Faithful

Morocco's powerful and leading religious reforms to combat violent extremism also work to strengthen the power of the Commander of the Faithful, a religious status codified by King Hassan II in the 1962 constitution (Sheline, 2019, p. 3). The Moroccan constitution states that Islam is the religion of the state, guarantees the freedom to practice religious affairs, and names the king Commander of the Faithful (State Department, 2018). While the 2011 Arab Spring protests resulted in a new constitution, it did not do away with the centrality of the monarchy in the Moroccan political system (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). And, according to the constitution, the king, who claims descendance from the Prophet, is the only political institution allowed to combine both political and religious power (El-Katiri, 2012, p. 55). Islam and politics are inherently intertwined from the top down.

The Moroccan king acts as a central top-down state actor who defines what is implemented by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and any other institution that concerns religious reforms. The High Council of Ulema, a "group headed and appointed by the king with representatives from all regions of the country," is "authorized to issue fatwas, which become legally binding only through the king's endorsement in a royal decree and subsequent confirmation by parliamentary legislation. If the king or parliament decline to ratify a decision of the Ulema, the decision remains nonbinding and unenforced" (State Department, 2018). Thus, changes in religion cannot be made without the approval of the monarch. Also, the king's power allows him to suppress rivals. For example, there are two main Islamist parties in Morocco, the PJD and Justice and Charity. The PJD supports the king as Commander of the Faithful while

Justice and Charity is anti-state and has been banned (Lefevre, 2013). By only legalizing the functions of those who support him, the king is allowed to evade criticism and promote his own political and religious policies.

Because of the preeminence of Morocco's religious reforms and international reach of the Mohammed VI Training School, the king has gained a lot of respect and power outside the nation as well. This is especially notable in other Muslim West African nations, especially ones belonging to Sufi orders.

> Sufism is one of the common denominators that bind Morocco, historically and culturally, with a number of sub-Saharan African countries. The Kingdom has been for a long-time a pivotal hub for many Sufi orders, such as Tidjania, Qadiriya, Darqawiya, Shazilia and others, providing an entrance through which Islam spread and expanded into Western and Eastern Africa. (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 15)

Hmimnat notes that King Mohammed VI makes frequent and prolonged visits to African nations, making direct contact between the leader of the umma and a mass of followers (Hmimnat, 2018). The monarchy has sent a considerable amount of resources into the Western Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa, regions in which they want to gain influence (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Through "outreach to secular countries like Senegal and Mali that cannot legally regulate religion, yet wish to discourage the spread of extremism," the king reinforces his religious leadership in the region (Sheline, 2019, p. 6). In Senegal, people "whatever their status, take the royal visit to their country as a personal matter. Their reception of the monarch is first and foremost a reception of the Commander of the Faithful…they prostrate on his passage as though they are performing the pledge of allegiance to him" (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 13). The Ministry of Islamic Affairs builds mosques, donates copies of the Quran, and provides Islamic publications. According to Hmimnat (2018), since 2014 the king has donated about 10,000 copies of the Quran, edited by the Mohammed VI Foundation, to each country he

has visited. In these nations the king holds public Friday prayers where he stresses the values of tolerance, moderation, and common identity. King Mohammed VI spreads Moroccan Islam and increases his own legitimacy not only by educating foreign imams, but also by traveling to these nations and preaching these messages himself. The religious goal is to promote moderation and prevent violent extremism, but the political goal on top is to strengthen the authority of the king as Commander of the Faithful.

The Moroccan model of spiritual based security has grown in favor over those of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Tunisia and its influence has reached outside of sub-Saharan Africa (Hmimnat, 2018). Morocco has become a key leader in the international community and its strategy "encouraged…precisely because its compatibility, inclusiveness, and solubility into the ongoing peacebuilding and counter-terrorism initiatives in the region" (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 10). At a 2018 Armistice Day celebration in France, King Mohammed VI sat in the front row with the heads of state of France, Germany, Russia, Canada, Israel, and the United States, representing the king's international standing. "Mohammed VI has developed partnerships with the EU and the U.S., particularly on the issues of combatting terrorism and preventing migrants from crossing into Europe from North Africa" (Sheline, 2019, p. 3). "The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) states the importance of strengthening the roles of religious leaders to counter violent extremism, and on September 30, 2014 Morocco attended a UN Counterterrorism Committee event (Hmimnat, 2018). This event was entitled 'Countering Incitement to Commit Terrorist Acts Motivated by Extremism and Intolerance: The Kingdom of Morocco's Approach and Experiences of other African States'. The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate noted the Imams Training Program as a best practice and stated that religious institutions play a pivotal role "in creating a sound environment for dialogue and

coexistence within the community, and effectively prevent any abuse of religion to justify or incite terrorist acts" (Hmimnat, 2018, p. 3). The United Nations, one of the foremost international authorities, presented Morocco's strategies as preeminent thereby justifying and validating the efforts that create the program regardless of there not being data to support its success or that it may result in limiting religious pluralism or undue power to the monarch. This elevates the goal of preventing terrorism over the potential faults and drawbacks with the program itself. These events gave the king greater international respect and influence and did not provide motivation to genuinely monitor the effects of the program on the Moroccan population.

The king's increased international praise for the PVE program is a result of an image projected not of an on-the-ground reality. The religious and security measures in the PVE program are supposed to compliment one another, but according to Smith, it is a carrot and stick situation with the makhzen leading the way as the omnipresent stick (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). The stick forces you to change your attitude, beliefs, and interpretation of religious texts or undergo negative conditions or treatment (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). The rhetoric promoted is of national unity, but in order to limit opposition the strategy is to divide and conquer. To maintain control over a unified nation, the king has to create disunity among his enemies. Instead of using violence like his father, Hassan II, Mohammed VI uses symbolic methods to subdue opposition. For example, a journalist who was covering the protests in the Rif had her sex life exposed; instead of threatening the opposer with violence the king threatens them with an unrelated and largely symbolic legal action (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). On the other hand, opposition that changes their ideology and gives fealty to king is rewarded. Half of the commission that managed the revision of the constitution in 2011 was composed of former

militants and radicals from the 1970s and 1980s, and the PJD was sanctioned as a political party and won seats in Parliament despite being Islamist (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Smith is skeptical of the PVE program as it theoretically may have merits, but in administration the security programs are in charge and people under a stick will lie about their true beliefs to protect themselves (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). You do not change peoples' beliefs by putting a stick over their heads. This program has political goals to silence opposition and marginalize religious actors that threaten to delegitimize the Commander of the Faithful.

The Limiting of Religious Pluralism

In developing and enforcing their religion-based preventing violent extremism program, with a key facet being the Imam Training Program, "Morocco might be unconsciously adopting the same mantra as ISIS and company: that subscribing to their particular interpretation and worldview is the only true way to be a Muslim" (Global Risk Insights, 2016). By promoting Moroccan Islam as the only correct version of a complex religion, the state is limiting religious pluralism, which has a reducing effect on diversity and culture and a growing effect on the king's political and religious power.

Islam and the rights of religious minorities are not contradictory nor incompatible, however, one of the major challenges facing the Muslim world today is "how to accommodate contemporary human rights principles within an Islamic worldview and without falling into a false choice between traditionalist approaches to sharia and liberal alternatives drawn from secular discourse" (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 33). For conservative reactionary communities, they think that what is is good, that they need to resist change, and that they have to combat anything that does not look like them (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9,

2020). During the constitutional debates in 2011 religious scholars, such as Ahmad Raissouni, "argued that including freedom of religion in the new constitution would threaten the Islamic identity of the state and the principle of the "commander of the faithful" as the cornerstone of the Moroccan political system" (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 37). However, modern ideas of human rights and religious freedoms are not incompatible with an Islamic identity. In fact, to promote freedom of religion, the Islamic texts should be rethought to synchronize local meanings and practices with universal ideas (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 33).

International human rights law is a key feature in this debate. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political rights contained specific and fundamental references to freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 33). These texts

> agree on the right to choose one's beliefs, as well as the right to change them. They insist on freedom of worship and the right to publicly express one's beliefs, they reject any form of discrimination on the basis of religion, and they prohibit the advocacy of religious hatred. The provisions insist that individuals should not be compelled to profess a belief. (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 34)

However, it is important to note that there are exceptions to the principle of belief in the international agreements such as permitting national laws to be restrictive factors. It is permissible "to restrict freedom of belief when public order and safety are at risk, or when this right interferes with public values or with the fundamental rights and freedoms of others" (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 34). Also, the Moroccan constitution "does not establish the supremacy of international treaties over domestic law, which means that the protection of human rights including the freedom of worship is not guaranteed" (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 38). The exceptions and ambiguity in the language of these texts allow their interpretation to be up to each individual country. In Morocco, one could argue that public order and safety have

been at risk since the 2003 Casablanca Bombings, and that in order to protect the nation the monarchy needs to promote unity and public values through Moroccan Islam and the Religious PVE program. Language meant to promote religious freedoms may actually be used to justify the restriction of it.

The state's message promotes that the only way to be Moroccan is to be Sunni Muslim, and to be anything else excludes you from state acceptance. In one of the king's last speeches, he made it clear that his title of Commander of the Faithful includes everyone, not just Muslims, and, according to Maghraoui, this may be a small sign of openness towards religious minorities (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). However, Maghraoui also stated that the rights of religious minorities have to be secured through a legal process that protects them which is not really there yet (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The policy of spiritual security is supposed to protect the state, but if it is meant to deprive people of certain rights then it becomes problematic.

The Moroccan constitution says people are free to practice their religious affairs, but the king is the Commander of the Faithful and the protector of Islam, and prohibits any criticism of Islam (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). In fact, the constitution "prohibits political parties founded on religion and political parties, parliamentarians, and constitutional amendments that denigrate or infringe on Islam" (State Department, 2018). And, Moroccan law "penalizes the use of enticements to convert a Muslim to another religion and prohibits criticism of Islam" (State Department, 2018). People are also not given the right to change their religion and this has been a major problem (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). "Most traditionalist scholars agree on the principle that once a person becomes a Muslim, he or she is not allowed to change religion. They argue that apostasy

is contrary to Islam's communitarian principle and undermines social cohesion" (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 34). To be anything or to promote anything but Sunni Islam invites legal penalties and a great burden on one's life. "According to the 2017-2018 Moroccan Association of Human Rights Report, the only non-Muslim citizens who could freely practice their religion were Jews. While Jews have historically had a special status, Shia are considered highly suspicious, the Baha'i are banned, and Salafists are banned and subject to deradicalization programs (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Local Christian and Shia leaders reported the government detained and questioned some Christian and Shia citizens about their beliefs and contacts with other Christians and Shias" (State Department, 2018). A few years ago, the state closed high schools they believed were teaching Shia Islam (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The Moroccan government also restricts minority religious groups through denying formal requests and as an example, denied two citizens the documents needed to marry because of their Christian beliefs (State Department, 2018).

On June 14, 2018 the Minister of State for Human Rights Mustafa Ramid "stated in an interview that 'freedom of belief does not pose a short-term threat to the state but is certainly a long-term danger' to national cohesion" (State Department, 2018). From the top down, other religions than that which is supported by the state are repressed and made to seem like a threat. Despite Pew Research Center (2015) identifying approximately 20,000 Christians, less than 10,000 Hindus, less than 10,000 Buddhists, less than 10,000 Jews, and less than 10,000 members of other religions as comprising Morocco's population, on June 19, 2018 Minister of Justice Mohamed Aujjar "denied the existence of Christian, Baha'i, and Ahmadi citizens on national television, but he said throughout history, Morocco has allowed Jewish citizens and visiting Christians from Europe and Africa to practice their religious affairs freely" (Pew Research

Center, 2015; State Department, 2018). For Shias, the state wants to eliminate their influence in Morocco and Maghraoui sees this as a possible infringement on freedom of worship (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Anyone claiming to be a Christian has the potential to be stopped and harassed and any attempt to convert a Muslim to Christianity is a felony offense (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Ironically, the Pope most recently visited Morocco in 2019 under the invitation of Mohammed VI to "reinvigorate 'interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding between the faithful of the two religions, and the values of peace and tolerance'" (Bouknight, 2019). These religious minorities do exist and as exemplified above, are not allowed to live as freely as their Sunni counterparts. Majorities in collectivist cultures, like Morocco, are afraid their unity will be diluted by minorities and therefore create nations that are prisons of minority voices, meaning that they exist but are controlled and disciplined (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). In promoting the religious strategies to prevent violent extremism, the state also promotes policies that restrict freedom of religion in Morocco.

Morocco is highly restrictive of religion, both outside and inside of Sunni Islam. While there are about two hundred instances in which the Quran guarantees the right to exercise freedom of belief, this right is not realized on the ground in Morocco (Iharchane and Maghraoui, 2017, p. 35). According to the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Features Project (2016), for the indicator 'government restriction of religion' the median world score is 2.8/10 and Morocco is marked at 7.4/10. Smith finds that the government's PVE program limits religious freedoms as it ensures only the state sanctioned religion has influence over the population (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Under the strategy introduced by new royal decree in 2004, the High Council of the Ulama's "main strategic goal is to achieve a high level of religious

homogeneity among Moroccan Muslims and maintain the Madhab unity in Morocco" (El-Katiri, 2012, pp. 57-58). As mentioned, one of the state's first actions following the Casablanca bombings was to close mosques they deemed not in compliance with their religious beliefs and then to monitor the rest. While it is beneficial to prevent the preaching of extremist ideas and this action achieved that, the state is also forcefully imposing official Moroccan Islam and prohibiting any messages that differ from being represented whether or not they promote violence. When asked in a 2017 survey to express their agreement with the statement:

> 'There is only one way to interpret the teachings of my religion,' responses varied [among Moroccans], without a strong affirmative or negative trend: 37 percent voiced agreement or strong agreement; 25 percent expressed disagreement or strong disagreement; 20 percent selected 'I do not know'; and 17 percent said they neither agreed nor disagreed. (Sheline, 2019, p. 11)

This shows that while many Moroccans agree there is one way to interpret Islam like the king does, many Moroccans also disagree and find that there are multiple ways to interpret Islam thereby countering the king's narrative. Outside of the mosque, the state controls and standardizes the curriculum in Quranic schools and traditional education, where the only religion taught is Moroccan Sunni Islam (El-Katiri, 2012). Rddad believes that education and religion should create a uniform culture and that American/Western values cannot be projected on Muslim/Eastern countries, however, this prevents students of all ages and circumstances from learning about a diverse array of religious backgrounds (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). By not learning of other religions and focusing on Moroccan Islam, the state is ensuring that each generation subscribes to their religious narrative and does not declare allegiance to another faith as this action would then challenge the power of the Commander of the Faithful.

On top of preventing the rise of opposition, the Commander of the Faithful also bans it. There are not supposed to be political parties in Morocco that are founded on religion, but the PJD is an Islamist party sanctioned by the government since they show fealty to the king (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). At the same time, Al-Adl wa Al-Ihssan (Justice and Charity), an Islamist movement that opposes the king as the spiritual leader, has been banned. The positions taken by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Council of the Ulama during the 2011 Constitution referendum and Hirak al-Rif (2016) indicate how the "Moroccan regime uses official Islam to discredit popular protests and take control" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 42). The Imam Training Program supports the idea of official Islam being used as a political tool as it enforces that Moroccan Islam is the correct Islam to both domestic and international audiences. As students from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa graduate from this program, they return back to their communities and promote the homogenized state Islam and could potentially be curbing religious diversity in their communities.

There is a vast difference between the rhetoric of tolerance and pluralism, and the reality that there can be no threat to Islam as defined by the monarchy (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Morocco is a state of paradoxes. The state is aiming to create cohesion, but at the same time they are marginalizing and alienating minority religious groups. Until the state begins to protect the rights of all peoples, they will not achieve true cohesion and will remain at risk to the factors that contribute to violent extremism. While it is positive that the Imam Training Program and the broader religious preventing violent extremism program are promoting peace, moderation, and unity, the limiting of religious pluralism and expansion of the monarch's power can have lasting negative effects. These effects could include falsely claiming

to be immunizing the nation and the surrounding region against violent extremism while not attacking more probable causes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There were three types of measures enacted following the 2003 Casablanca Bombings: immediate, short-term, and long-term (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The immediate measures were the crackdowns against perpetrators, and the short and long-term measures were the reforms of the religious field. Reforming the religious field entailed placing mosques under direct supervision of the state and substituting a pro-Saudi Secretary of Islamic Affairs with a Sufi adept. The goal was to use moderate Islam to change the rhetoric from hatred of non-Muslims, a fundamentalist value, to love of every creature, a Sufi value. It also worked to change the notion of jihad from an extreme jihad that perpetuates attacks against non-Muslims, to a Sufi jihad that emphasizes the internal struggle against materialism and egoism. The state promoted the image of Moroccan Islam with four cornerstones: Ash'ari, Maliki, Sunni Islam, and the king as Commander of the Faithful, and Rddad believes these are important because they help immunize Morocco from external influences like Shia Iran. Smith points out that contrary to the Maturidi school, which is rationalist and believes god exists within a frame of human reason, the Ash'ari school says human reason is unstable and subordinate to the Quran and Sunna, and that too much interpretation is the problem (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). He also believes that taking control of the mosques was a way to immunize against rural imams preaching fundamentalist ideas and recruiting for extremist organizations. The king is responsible for the protection of moderate Islam against internal and external radicalization and no one can issue a fatwa or teach anything that goes against the characteristics of moderate Islam

he has prescribed (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The way Rddad described these matters made them seem beneficial and productive in achieving their goals.

However, Andrew R. Smith attributes these policies more to image than to effectively immunizing against fundamentalists (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). He says that from 1999, when King Mohammed VI ascended to the throne, until 2003, the year of the Casablanca Bombings, the king's policies had opened up discourse and increased freedom of speech and of the press. Following the bombings, the monarchy issued severe crackdowns where the Makhzen rounded up many Islamists and anyone they deemed suspicious, with or without evidence, and forced confessions through torture or by threatening families. At the same time, the monarchy was promoting an image of tolerance. Where Rddad briefly mentions the arrests and provides a positive tone to the king's responses following the 2003 attacks, Smith provides details of the human rights abuses and display of power that occurred. According to Smith, the security approach is the reality on the ground not the religious policies. The monarchy is intent on sustaining a credible image of legitimacy and ensuring countries who are invested in Morocco, like France and the U.S., that there is a democratic transition occurring. The Moroccan state promotes this transition of justice movement while also brutally cracking down on Islamists (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020).

The Moroccan PVE program is a "questionable success story" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 37). Official discourse by the state brands their strategy as 'unique' and shows that Morocco incurs the "least number of terrorist attacks compared to its neighbors" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 37). In spite of this, the 2011 World Survey data shows that when asked about their worry of a terrorist attack, 50.1% of respondents indicated 'very much' or 'a great deal'. The state does not share the amount of Moroccan fighters involved in international terrorist organizations, "the rise of

recidivism among former extremist detainees", or "the growing number of terrorist cells dismantled by the Moroccan security authorities" (Hmimnat, 2019, p. 37). If there are so many people to be arrested, then the immunization of fundamentalism has clearly not been effective. However, Errihani (2011) argues that "As long as the state continues to call attention to the peace and stability that it has guaranteed its subjects in these uncertain times, it is expected to continue to count on its citizens' support in the fight against religious extremism in Morocco". As long as the state continues to project the image of stability and legitimacy, people will continue to give up their human rights.

The Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs argues that "the state's intervention in the religious practices of its subjects will eventually help Moroccans return to the firm roots of Islamic shari'a, which are uniquely Moroccan due to the influences of Moroccan cultural traditions on people's religious practices" (Errihani, 2011. The ministry further argues "that a return to the Moroccan brand of Islam (Popular Islam) has always been the hallmark of the spiritual peace and stability, which have characterised Morocco throughout its long history, and has therefore made Morocco an exceptionally stable and peaceful country in the Arab and Muslim world" (Errihani, 2011). These policies fail to acknowledge religious diversity and suggest that only official Moroccan Islam can create peace and stability in Morocco and the regions the monarch is attempting to influence.

The monarch cannot allow various interpretations of Islam, anything against himself as the religious leader, or a promotion of violence; and since imams have considerable influence over their flock both directly and indirectly, they are a useful tool in preventing these things (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). You cannot deradicalize a nation simply by cracking down, and Rddad argues that the long-term measures effective in

deradicalization are education and the training of imams (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). In these educational programs, Rddad says all forms of rhetoric that teach hatred of Jews or other Muslims should be removed, and that Islam should be taught with a more liberal interpretation of the sacred texts that promotes peace and tolerance. After 9/11 we learned that terrorism has no face and no boarders, and he further argues that because of this training only Moroccan imams is not complete and it should extend to neighboring countries to create buffer zones (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Rddad argues that you cannot pass anti-terror acts without programs that aim at deradicalizing rhetoric, and that you need to train people to train others for long-term change. While the effort in fighting violent extremism may be multi-pronged, limiting religious pluralism in the name of creating unity will not solve these issues. Violent rhetoric should not be supported, of course, but specifically using religion to fight fundamentalism will not be entirely successful.

In order to make concrete, measurable progress in 'immunizing' against Islamic fundamentalism and violent extremism in Morocco, socioeconomic issues need to be addressed. The Imam Training Program and other aspects of the religious PVE program are not useless, but they are only one aspect of how to deal with extremism (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Extremism is not limited to Muslim societies, and therefore does not necessitate a religious approach. Social marginality breeds different type of violence, and in Muslim countries it could result in ISIS or Al-Qaeda and in the U.S it could result in gangs (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Rddad agrees that fundamentalism is not exclusive to Islam and says that it does not have to be religious; it came first in Christianity in the 20th century and Communists are a type of fundamentalist (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). He notes that fundamentalism nourishes on people who are not

normal and the same, but many people think that what is normal is natural whereas what is normal is humanmade (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). By dealing with security or religious field reforms you are only dealing with artificial components and incorrectly assuming the source of extremism is religion (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Extremism is not inherently Islamic or Muslim and certain inequalities do not breed certain problems; extremism is an outcome of social marginalization no matter the location (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020).

Extremism is the result of long-term structural problems in any given society, and if you want to deal with extremism, you need to deal with structural issues such as social inequality and economic disparities, and push forward a democratic order (Driss Maghraoui, personal communication, May 9, 2020). The structural issues are not in the security and religious fields; there are more fundamental causes. While Rddad believes that you need to combat fundamentalism using dissemination of rhetoric, training of young people, and training of imams, this, while it may be helpful in spreading the values of moderate Islam to subsequent generations, will not work to 'immunize' against the causes of extremism (Sadik Rddad, personal communication, May 9, 2020). Many young people live in hopeless poverty situations in Morocco and if you do not address the underlying socioeconomic conditions you will not succeed in this goal (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020). According to Smith, Morocco was one of the first African nations to transfer public wealth into private hands, and these private hands are often close to the king. Moroccans have to pay for things they should get for free, government funding for public education was given to private, public school teachers often have to work multiple jobs, and the Unemployed Graduates Movement is one of the largest, ongoing Moroccan protest movements (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication,

May 11, 2020). What is need is economic self-sufficiency and literacy development to give opportunities and hope, and instead there is an overwhelming sense of intimidation (Andrew R. Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2020).

Conclusion

The Imam Training Program, an important feature of the Moroccan Religious Preventing Violent Extremism Program, is used to prevent violent extremism by spreading state-sanctioned Islam from the monarchy through the imams to the people. The teaching of Moroccan Islam promotes one Islam as the correct Islam to the Moroccan people, but also to many other nations in the region the Imam Training Program has partnerships with. In creating, funding, and executing this program as a response to the 2003 Casablanca Bombings and the creation of a spiritual security policy, the state has aimed to immunize the region against extremist rhetoric and violent acts of terror. While discouraging violence and promoting moderate Islam is positive, the larger effects of the program are in strengthening the power of the king as Commander of the Faithful and in limiting religious pluralism.

Extremism and fundamentalism are not limited to Islam and they are not limited to religion. They are also not solely the result of religious factors and therefore it is not best to fight them with a religious counter-narrative. Extremism and fundamentalism are the result of alienation, marginalization, and socioeconomic struggles and these issues are not confined to religious communities. People who faces these issues often have no hope, and those without hope become desperate, and desperate people do desperate things. These desperate things may include religious extremism, or they may include gang violence. The location of the community does not matter, but the extreme adversity they face does.

Highly educated, moderate imams can provide guidance and ideas, but they cannot provide education, job, and health program. The Moroccan government can provide these things, but for the most part they are not, and they are continuing to receive international praise for their religious PVE efforts. The Moroccan government should be addressing the socioeconomic factors that lead to extremist ideology, instead of trying to use religion to fight something religion does not cause.

For further study I would suggest examining methods to address these socioeconomic issues. Also, I would suggest creating an accurate method by which to gather data to examine the efficacy of these methods.

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