Introduction

This book investigates the political factors fueling state regulation of religion in the Arab Middle East, as played out in the realm of education. Recent scholarship has explored global variation in the relationship between religion and state, but an overarching theory to explain why and how governments regulate religion remains elusive. In the Arab world, most countries emerging from colonial rule in the twentieth century incorporated formal state establishment of Islam into their state- and nation-building projects, reflected in constitutional stipulations that Islam was "the religion of the state." But there has been considerable variation – both between states and within states over time – in the way this religious establishment has translated into state policies regulating religious interpretation and practice. State regulation of religious life in Saudi Arabia is quite unlike its counterparts in, say, Egypt or Morocco or Tunisia, despite the fact that all these countries have declared Islam to be the official state religion. The varying nature and degree of regulations touching on the religious realm across the Arab world have been evident in any number of policy domains, not least in education. What explains such variation?

To answer this question, I examine the evolving politics of religious regulation in the education systems of two Arab countries – Morocco and Tunisia – between 1956, the year these countries gained their independence from French rule, and 2016. The book tracks and explains three manifestations of religious regulation in these states over time: the infusion of Islam into the national curricula of public schools, the balance between autonomous and state-controlled institutions of religious learning, and the training and licensing of religion teachers in schools and in mosques. By analyzing the political processes at work as Morocco and Tunisia regulated religious expression and activity through their education systems, the book sheds new light on the connections between

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political authoritarianism, government entanglement in religion, and state-religion relations more generally in the Arab world.

I concentrate on religious education – as a locus of state regulation – for several reasons. The first has to do with connections between education and political legitimacy. In the West, the gradual separation of church and state from roughly the sixteenth century onward entailed a process in which the "state gained organizational control over practices and institutions which formerly were placed under 'spiritual' authorities, such as private and civil law, *education*, science, etc."[1] Ambitious secular rulers were eager to wrest education from the control of religious authorities, since education was seen as a pivotal tool for producing a national culture and reinforcing allegiance to the state.[2] In the Islamic world, too, many postcolonial leaders believed that public education offered a means of constructing a national identity and reinforcing their own political legitimacy once the European powers withdrew. Insofar as Arab state leaders in the postcolonial era considered education a crucial tool for bolstering state legitimacy, they had an interest in seizing education from the exclusive control of the learned religious elite, or ulama (sing. ʿalim). The Quranic school was historically the primary institution of the individual's socialization to the values of the Muslim community (*umma*), serving as the intermediary between the family and the Islamic state. As one leading Moroccan sociologist put it, "The school extended the work of the family and anticipated the power of the state. This is very important because all [political] legitimacy, whatever its form, depended on the individual supporting the claim of the leading power to rule."[3] Thus, the education systems of the new states became contested spaces

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[1] Matthias Koenig, "Politics and Religion in European Nation-States: Institutional Varieties and Contemporary Transformations," in *Religion and Politics: Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Bernhard Giesen and Daniel Suber (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 295. Italics mine.

[2] The literature on the connections between education and state- and nation-building in the West is vast but a good starting point is Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 303–38. There is also a rich literature, largely in history and political science, about the manifestation of an emerging political culture in systems and mechanisms of education in the United States. See, for example, David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, eds., *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2009); Lawrence Cremin, *American Education, the National Experience: 1783–1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); and David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[3] Interview with Mohsine Elahmadi, Rabat, January 7, 2013.

for representatives of state and societal interests debating questions of national identity and political authority. With the possible exception of works by Gregory Starrett and Malika Zeghal on postcolonial reforms of religious education in Egypt and Tunisia, most of the scholarship on the contemporary links between education and nation-building in the Arab world has not focused on religious education *per se*, and where it has, the relevant works remain confined to single country case studies.[4] This book traces the impact of debates over national identity on religious education policy in two Arab countries throughout the decades following independence, with a view to theorizing about the politics of religious regulation more broadly.

A second reason to concentrate on religious education as a target of state regulation in the Arab world derives from the role institutions of religious instruction have played in shaping the interpretation of the religious tradition. In contrast to, say, the Catholic realm, the (Sunni) Muslim world is not overseen by a centralized, hierarchically structured religious institution. In the absence of a central body vested with authority to interpret religious teachings and weigh in on such key matters as the optimal relationship between religion and state, "the control of religious interpretation [and] the devising of state mechanisms of authorization . . . are so crucial to a government that needs to secure its control of state and society."[5] In the postcolonial period, one of the ways in which

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[4] On the links between education and nation-building in the Islamic world, see, for instance, Betty S. Anderson, "Writing the Nation: Textbooks of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 21 (2001): 1–14; David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); and Sam Kaplan, *The Pedagogical State: Education and the Politics of National Culture in Post-1980 Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). On the evolving role and tenor of religious education throughout the contemporary Islamic world, see Malika Zeghal, "Public Institutions of Religious Education in Egypt and Tunisia: Contrasting the Post-Colonial Reforms of Al-Azhar and the Zaytuna," in *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World: Legacies and Challenges*, ed. Osama Abi-Mershed (New York: Routledge, 2010), 111–24; Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Michel Lelong, "Le Patrimoine Musulman dans l'Enseignement Tunisien Après l'Indépendence" (PhD Dissertation, Université de Provence I, 1971); the excellent collection of essays in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Iren Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[5] Malika Zeghal, *Islamism in Morocco: Religion, Authoritarianism, and Electoral Politics* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008), xvi–xvii.

Arab regimes have sought to control religious interpretation, and thereby assert control over states and societies, is by enacting policies regulating religious education. And in their quest for control, Arab regimes (like all regimes) have faced pressures, constraints, and opportunities that have rendered their efforts to regulate religion more or less effective over the years. Understanding how these pressures, constraints, and opportunities have shaped states' regulation of religion is a central aim of this book.

In pursuing that aim, I build on and contribute to two principal bodies of scholarship. The first is social science literature highlighting the role of political interests, ideology, and social structures in accounting for dynamics of state–religion relations. Consider, for example, the "religious economy" school, which has argued that a state's approach to regulating religious institutions principally reflects the leaders' political and economic interests. Likewise, scholars focused on the role of ideas have shown that ideological debates over religion and secularism – particularly in the period of early state-building – can have long-term ramifications on the nature of religious regulation in that state. And sociologists have demonstrated the role that dominant social groupings, such as tribes, can play in affecting a state's regulation of religious institutions. The arguments advanced in these schools of thought have enriched our understanding of state-religion dynamics, moving us well beyond the simpler, if initially promising, framework of secularization theory.

Still, in certain key respects, these theories leave us with nagging questions. For example, the interest-based assumption of religious economy scholars that leaders prioritize staying in power seems self-evident enough, but it does not tell us much about why and how a leader's desire to stay in power influences policy decisions implicating religion, or why and how that leader's preferences, and by extension the relevant policy decisions, change over time. For their part, ideational theories cannot account for the ostensibly puzzling instances in which policy shifts occur against the backdrop of state elites' unchanging ideological convictions. Sociological explanations have rightly drawn attention to the role of alliances between regimes and dominant social structures, but they have not always considered the reasons those alliances form in the first place. The theoretical propositions coursing through this book seek to fill such lacunas.

The second strand of scholarship I engage addresses the relationship between Arab governance structures and religious actors in society. In the past three decades, much of the scholarship on Middle Eastern politics focused on the durability of authoritarianism and the concomitant

emergence of Islamist social movements, conveying the image of an inherently strong, often "secular" Arab autocracy confronting ascendant "religious" opposition movements in society. The presumption of a strong Arab state came under reexamination with the swift downfalls of Zine al-ʿAbidine Ben ʿAli in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, but even before the 2011 uprisings, scholars had begun to challenge the notion that states in the postcolonial Arab (and, more generally, Islamic) world had ever been truly "secular."[6] This book extends such challenges to the dominant narratives, highlighting the constraints and pressures facing state institutions and leaders in the formulation of policies regulating religion, and demonstrating that the dichotomy pitting a secular state against a religious society obscures more than it enlightens the complex and shifting relationships between religion and state throughout the region.

REGULATING ISLAM IN MOROCCO AND TUNISIA

The ensuing chapters present a theory of how and why Arab states regulate religion, and demonstrate how that theory has played out through an examination of the politics fueling state regulation of religious education in two Arab countries since their independence in 1956. The comparative exercise follows the logic of John Stuart Mill's *method of difference*, in which selected cases are similar in as many ways as possible except for those to which the observed variation is attributed. Morocco and Tunisia, which have demonstrated both cross-national and within-country variation in regulations affecting religious education over time, share important conditions that enable us to control for certain factors in explaining the observed variation. Both countries emerged from French colonial rule in the mid-twentieth century; both countries enjoyed similar levels of economic development at the outset; and both countries have majority

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[6] Key works in this vein have included Sayyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Zeghal, *Islamism in Morocco: Religion, Authoritarianism, and Electoral Politics*; Colin J. Beck, "State Building as a Source of Islamic Political Organization," *Sociological Forum* 21 (2009): 337–56; Birol Baskan, "The State in the Pulpit: State Incorporation of Religious Institutions in the Middle East," *Politics and Religion* 4 (2011): 136–53; Rachel M. Scott, "Managing Religion and Renegotiating the Secular: The Muslim Brotherhood and Defining the Religious Sphere," *Politics and Religion* 7 (March 2014): 51–78; and Rory McCarthy, "Rethinking Secularism in Post-Independence Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies* 19 (2014): 733–50.

Sunni Muslim populations. Yet, Morocco and Tunisia have differed in the configuration of the three factors to which I am attributing much of the observed variation in religious regulation, i.e., in the interplay of each regime's legitimating ideology, political opponents, and institutional endowment. The similarities and differences between these two countries, therefore, lend themselves well to a comparative study.

For each country, I demonstrate the extent to which the interaction of regime ideology, political opposition, and institutional endowment produced shifts in three indicators of religious regulation. The first indicator is the infusion of Islam into the national curricula, i.e., the degree to which Islamic principles and tenets are embedded into the national curricula of public schools. I focus on changes in secondary school Islamic education and philosophy curricula because it is at the middle and high school levels and in these subjects that tensions over religion and secularism have been most acute. Each country underwent several periods of distinct curricular orientation. In Morocco, the curricular stasis of the first decade after independence shifted toward an expansion and reorientation of the curricula beginning in the late 1960s, and in the mid-1990s the regime once again sought a reorientation that continues to this day. In Tunisia, the period between 1956 and 1969 saw a contraction and reorientation of the curricula, followed by an expansion and reorientation in the 1970s and 1980s, and yet another contraction and reorientation from 1989 onward.

The second indicator to be explained is the shifting balance between state-controlled and autonomous institutions of religious instruction. I focus on the evolving administrative status of two institutions: the Quranic school (at the preprimary, primary, and secondary levels) and the mosque-university. Quranic schools and institutes of higher Islamic learning have historically carried tremendous cultural significance as principal sites of religious learning, and thus identity cultivation, throughout the Muslim world. Furthermore, they have retained an importance for substantial numbers of citizens to the present day. By the early 2000s, for example, over 80 percent of Moroccan children enrolled in preschools were attending Quranic schools.[7] On the eve of independence, Morocco and Tunisia possessed numerous institutions of traditional Islamic learning, including Quranic schools for young children and classical institutions of advanced religious learning such as the Qarawiyyin

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[7] Moroccan Ministry of National Education, *Aperçu sur le Système Educatif Marocain* (International Bureau of Education, 2004).

Mosque-University in Fes and the Zaytuna Mosque-University in Tunis. After 1956, the states diverged in their respective approaches to these institutions. In Morocco, the reigns of Mohammed V and Hassan II (1956–99) saw a blend of autonomy and state control for many institutions of religious learning. Since the early 2000s, Mohammed VI has been asserting tighter state control over Quranic schools and institutions of higher Islamic learning. In Tunisia, the trajectory went from state control in the 1950s and 1960s to a mix of autonomy and state control in the 1970s and 1980s, to a resumption of state control in the 1990s and 2000s. The political tumult of what came to be known as the Arab Spring led to a weakening of state control over religious institutions in Tunisia.

Finally, I examine shifting regulations of training and licensing procedures for teachers of Islam, both in schools and in mosques. Research reveals variation within and between the cases in several ways, including who was enlisted to teach religion classes, which ministries supervised the training and licensing of religion teachers, whether nonreligious subjects and instruction by nonreligious professionals were required as part of religion teachers' training, and the degree to which ulama engaged in teaching received their training and/or salaries from the state. The story of how and why Morocco and Tunisia have regulated religion through their education systems is partly a story of these states' attempts to regulate ideas, but it is also a story of how and why they sought to mold and reform the individuals entrusted to disseminate those ideas.

To tell this story, I rely on evidence drawn from seven years of research. In addition to an extensive review of the secondary literature on modern Moroccan and Tunisian political history, I spent parts of 2011 and 2012, and much of the 2012–13 academic year, conducting field work in Morocco and Tunisia. Living in these countries permitted me to interview nearly seventy officials involved in crafting education, and specifically religious education, policies over the past twenty years – principally, Education Ministry division heads, leading imams, religious seminary professors and deans, and civil society members who consulted on the reforms. In Morocco, I also accessed related texts and documents stored in the National Center for Documentation, the National Library, the King Abdul Aziz Center for the Maghreb in Social Sciences, and the Abderrahim Bouabid Foundation's archives. In Tunisia, I reviewed curricular materials, textbooks, ministry directives, and related documents held in the national archives, the National Museum of Education and its affiliated National Center for Pedagogic Innovation and Education Research, the Institute for Research on the Contemporary Maghreb,

the National Documentation Center (particularly for press articles), the Center for Economic and Social Research and Studies, and the Arab Human Rights Institute. To complement the materials located in North Africa, I gathered and analyzed Moroccan and Tunisian school textbooks housed at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany. Finally, five research trips to the region since 2014 enabled additional interviews with Moroccan and Tunisian ministers of religious affairs, Education Ministry officials, political party leaders, and imam training directors, permitting deeper examination of the states' regulations of religious institutions since the upheavals of 2011.

Stitching these elements together, I begin by presenting my main theoretical argument in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 then dives into the Moroccan case, providing an historical account of how the Alaouite regime's ideology of legitimation, political opposition, and institutional endowment evolved between the country's independence in 1956 and the onset of the Arab Spring in late 2010. In Chapter 3, I describe and analyze the impact of these factors on Morocco's curricular incorporations of Islamic instruction, shifting balances between state control and autonomy for Moroccan institutions of religious learning, and changes in training and licensing procedures for religion instructors between 1956 and 2011. Chapter 3 also introduces the concept of "identity bargaining," my way of characterizing instances in which authoritarian regimes such as the Alaouite monarchy, when faced with limited institutional resources, confront opponents' demands by trading concessions to some aspects of citizens' identities in exchange for lessened pressure to fulfill others. Chapter 4 then turns to the Tunisian case, reviewing how the ideology of legitimation, political opposition, and institutional endowment of the regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-ʿAbidine Ben ʿAli evolved between independence in 1956 and the departure of Ben ʿAli in 2011. Chapter 5 then demonstrates how these factors interacted to produce curricular reforms, shifting balances between state control and autonomy for religious institutions, and changes to licensing and training procedures for Tunisia's instructors of Islam.

Given the import of recent events in the region, it seemed advisable to devote a separate chapter to the post-Arab Spring landscape. Thus, Chapter 6 examines evolving dynamics of state regulation of religion in both countries since the 2011 uprisings, positioning the whole study in the contemporary context of change and uncertainty in the post-Spring Arab world, and highlighting questions emanating from the study that will hopefully invite further research. For example, while both states'

efforts to regulate religious institutions similarly comprised elements of the respective regimes' survival strategies, the divergent paths of Morocco and Tunisia since 2011 – regime survival in one case, regime collapse in the other – raise the possibility that the states' varying approaches to regulating religious institutions throughout their contemporary history may partly explain the differing fates of each regime since 2011. To the extent that the Moroccan regime's skillful management of the religious realm over the years contributed to that regime's relative stability in the aftermath of the Spring, the findings of this book enhance our understanding of why and how the Arab monarchies managed to emerge from the political challenges of the past six years intact. In Chapter 6, I address the possible links between religious regulation and the "monarchical exceptionalism" of the post-Spring Arab world in greater depth.