

# Islamic Education Curriculum Reform Politics in Morocco

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I spent last year doing dissertation fieldwork in Morocco. My research examines the process through which competing actors reform the Islamic education curriculum for the public schools. After three months of further language study in Fez, I did a number of interviews across the country with members of the educational bureaucracy including Islamic education teachers, Ministry of Education employees, and school administrators. I also interviewed members of civil society with an interest in the reforms including politicians, scholars, journalists and the leadership of parent organizations. Finally, I worked in the archives of an Islamist newspaper that provided in-depth coverage of recent reforms. I collected factual-based articles, editorials, and open letters from parent associations and organizations representing teachers and Islamic education inspectors.

The main goal of the fieldwork was to understand the process of how curriculum is reformed in order to identify the ways in which content is politicized. My research addressed questions such as: Who is involved in the writing of new curriculums? What guidelines are they given in this process? Who writes the guidelines? How are conflicts resolved on important committees? How are important groups included in the process? What groups are excluded? In order to understand how this process becomes politicized, I also focus on several other questions such as: What issues come to the national spotlight during such reforms? Who brings these issues to the public's attention? Who provides the platform for such issues to be discussed? When is there a formal response from the bureaucracy to



public discussions? When are public concerns ignored?

In the dissertation, I discuss the “sausage making” of curriculum reform and identify the openings in the process that have allowed political conflicts to influence curriculum design. Then I highlight one aspect that has been particularly important in shaping the curriculum, the conflict between leftists and Islamists. A number of interviewees suggested that the Islamic education curriculum was used by the monarchy to strengthen Islamists in order to counter the influence of the left. The curriculum was one of several means of maintaining factions within the opposition and encouraging infighting so that the opposition did not unite and oppose the monarchy itself. The project thus identifies a heretofore-unrecognized branch of a well-known strategy employed by the monarchy. Interestingly, though, my research also suggests that these

factions, as they gained access to political power through democratization, began employing the same strategies, including the manipulation of Islamic education curriculum, in guiding their relationships with one another.

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