This case study is one of a series produced by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University and the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), an NGO established in the World Bank and based today at Georgetown University. The goal is to generate relevant and demanding teaching materials that highlight ethical, cultural, and religious dimensions of contemporary international development topics. This case study underscores the complex roles played by Islamic schools in Bangladeshi and Senegalese societies, the contemporary challenges these schools face, and various reform efforts undertaken by both religious and secular actors. Earlier case studies on female genital cutting (FGC or FGM) and the Ebola crisis focus on the complex questions of how culture and religious beliefs influence behaviors.

This case study was prepared by Nathaniel Adams and Lauren Herzog, with oversight and direction from Katherine Marshall. Field research was conducted by Nathaniel Adams, Lauren Herzog, and Wilma Mui. Comments from Jocelyne Cesari, Crystal Corman, and Ebrahim Moosa are gratefully acknowledged. Cover photo by Andrew Oberstadt.

About the World Faiths Development Dialogue

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) is a not-for-profit organization working at the intersection of religion and global development. Housed within the Berkley Center in Washington, D.C., WFDD documents the work of faith-inspired organizations and explores the importance of religious ideas and actors in development contexts. WFDD supports dialogue between religious and development communities and promotes innovative partnerships, at national and international levels, with the goal of contributing to positive and inclusive development outcomes.

About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.
Why this case study?
Islamic education systems (broadly, and sometimes misleadingly, termed madrasa education) are the subject of mounting attention, prominent on various development and foreign policy agendas. Discussions are often driven primarily by security concerns, namely efforts to address the spread of radical Islam through these institutions. There is, however, also a growing recognition that Islamic education institutions can and do play important roles in meeting the basic global goal of education for all and in addressing a common and growing demand for attention to values and culturally appropriate curricula in the school context. In many countries (Bangladesh and Senegal notable among them), Islamic school systems are major education providers. They often fill key gaps in state-run education systems, for example in reaching marginalized populations. They also point to significant demand for religious education, notable in Muslim communities in different world regions. For these reasons, it is important to explore and think critically about these systems, including how they fit within broader national education strategies and how reform proposals meet concerns both of national education authorities and of religious leaders and communities. With its important contributions and contested social position, Islamic education will be a critical element in education policy in the years to come.

Approaching the disputed topic of Islamic education and reform
A central premise in contemporary approaches to development is that access to quality education undergirds all other development efforts. Education is seen as critical to sustained development because of its role in building the skilled workforce necessary for economic transformation. Equally important, education is viewed as fundamental to cultivating the informed citizenry necessary for an engaged democracy and the increasingly plural societies that characterize much of the world. Education’s roles in shaping social values and norms explain its central role in all manner of social movements, both religious and secular, that seek to bring about social change.

Terminology: Madrasa
Madrasa means school in Arabic and it is used in that sense in this case study. However, the label is used in different ways in different countries, sometimes to refer to what are essentially schools for young children, elsewhere to describe an Islamic education system that may extend through post-graduate studies. Some use the term rather pejoratively, thus failing to take into account both the rich historical traditions of Islamic education and the diversity of contemporary approaches. The term madrasa is widely used in Bangladesh, less so in Senegal.
After the so-called Islamic “golden age,” this cosmopolitan tradition in Islamic education faded slowly. Madrasas became increasingly interested in the preservation of tradition, notably in the face of European colonialism. It was during the colonial era that both externally- and internally-driven madrasa reform projects were launched. In many colonial contexts, including in Bangladesh and Senegal, colonial authorities took a keen interest in madrasa education. They believed that changing or eliminating these traditional religious education systems could contribute to the modernization and secularization of these societies and lessen the social influence of antagonistic religious authorities. In some contexts, however, madrasas were also seen as a potential forum to train local civil servants, particularly those that dealt with Islamic law. Externally-driven madrasa reforms of the colonial era were often contemporaneous with internal Islamic reforms, many linked to emerging movements, which aimed at returning Muslim communities to fundamentals that would protect and perpetuate a “pure” Islamic knowledge and practice in the face of modernization. These movements, which took place across the Muslim world, varied in approach. Many eventually were where anti-colonial resistance was articulated. In some cases, their distrust of the West extended to include ambivalence towards or outright rejection of what was considered to be “Western knowledge.”

Madrasas in education policy

Madrasas have recently become something of an ideological battlefield in debates about the roles religious institutions and beliefs play in society and who is seen as speaking for the “true” Islam. Beyond pragmatic issues related to the provision of education, debates about madrasas can touch at the heart of redefining what it means to be a Muslim today both in Muslim-majority and more plural communities.

The term madrasa is used to refer to various and quite different Islamic educational institutions; global discussions of madrasa education are complex partly because of the imprecise usage of the term. Madrasa can be used to refer to a range of Islamic schools, from Islamic primary schools or “kindergartens”—known in Bangladesh as maktabs and in Senegal as darasas, which focus primarily on rote memorization of Qur’an—to Islamic universities, some of which teach predominantly secular subject matter, including engineering or medicine. Policy discussions of madrasa reform, however, are most often focused on Islamic schools at the primary and secondary level.

Traditionally, most Islamic education institutions functioned to train religious clergy, as well as teach foundational recitation of the Qur’an for children, at least for boys. In parts of the Muslim world, they have become important education providers for a much broader range of students. However, perceived deficiencies in curriculum and pedagogical approaches in these schools have led education policymakers to fear that madrasa education has the potential to marginalize impoverished youth even further by providing a poor-quality education that imparts few skills necessary for employment. In the aftermath of 9/11 and the ongoing “war on terror,” madrasas have become a focal point on international security and development agendas. There is a widespread perception that some Islamic schools are breeding grounds for extremist and militant ideology, though many specialists argue that this narrative rests on limited and very patchy evidence. In response to such concerns, in recent years development policymakers and practitioners have focused on approaches to madrasa reform that might have wider applicability. Bangladesh’s reformed Alia madrasa system and Senegal’s Franco-Arab schools are two models that have been looked to as significant examples for both approach and implementation.

When approaching madrasa reform it is important to consider not only the how, but also who desires the reform and for what reasons. Is the ultimate goal of reforming Islamic education institutions to convert these traditional institutions into “secularized” schools that can meet the demands of students and a modern economy? That is, should they aim solely at preparing students to be economically successful after graduation? Alternatively, is madrasa reform also aimed at encouraging the development of more open and cosmopolitan intellectual traditions within Islam to engage with a deep and
diverse range of theological and secular scholarship? The most common reform approach has been to secularize madrasas or to integrate them into a national education system. This is most often achieved by offering cash and material incentives to the schools, which then agree to integrate secular subject matter into curriculums and submit to government regulation. Some such reform efforts have seen some success, at least in terms of expanding curriculum and increasing oversight. But what challenges have these experiences demonstrated and how should we move forward? Bangladesh and Senegal present two different yet illustrative examples for understanding madrasa reform efforts in Muslim-majority development contexts.

**Suggested Assigned Readings**

**Bangladesh**


**Senegal**

The Bangladesh context
Bangladesh, a small and densely populated country in South Asia, comprises most of the wet lowlands of the Bengal Delta. Roughly 89 percent of the Bangladeshi population is Muslim, with a regional Islamic tradition dating back to the twelfth century. Bangladeshi Muslim beliefs and institutions reflect a diverse set of influences, including Sufi mysticism (Sufis were among the first to spread Islam in Bengal), as well as orthodox Islamic reform traditions dating from the nineteenth century.

Bangladesh faces significant and diverse development challenges. The world’s eighth most populous country (160 million as of 2015), Bangladesh is among the most densely populated countries in the world. In the years after independence in 1971, Bangladesh seemed to be facing intractable problems of poverty, but has seen robust economic growth in recent years (roughly six percent annually), driven primarily by the export garment industry. In terms of life expectancy and certain health indicators, Bangladesh has achieved better results than many countries at comparable income levels. The nation’s active civil society is given much credit for this progress. Local NGOs have focused sharply on expanding social services and pioneering innovative anti-poverty programs such as microfinance. Bangladesh, however, is still considered a low-income country as well as a fragile state by some measures.

Despite major reductions in poverty rates, some 31.5 percent of the population still falls below the national poverty line. Education is often cited as the leading development priority for Bangladesh. Even as of 2015, some 96 percent of the labor force did not possess a secondary school certificate, and two-thirds have not completed primary schooling. However, innovative education programs have driven major growth in enrollment: Primary school enrollment, for example, increased from 60 percent in 1990 to 92 percent in 2012. Perhaps more impressively, gender parity in enrollment, long a major challenge in South Asia, has now been achieved at the primary and secondary level. The ratio of girls to boys in primary school rose from 0.83 in 1990 to 1.02 in 2011, and in secondary school from 0.52 to 1.13. These gains have been driven primarily by gender-focused public interventions, including stipend programs for girls, improved access (girls often have stronger mobility restrictions), and changing social norms. As of 2005, there were 16,526,136 students enrolled at the primary level with an annual growth rate of .36 percent. At the secondary level, there were 22,150,390 students enrolled with an annual growth rate of 1.51 percent. These enrollment numbers have begun to level off after tremendous growth between 1980 and 2000.

Bangladesh is renowned for development innovations and is often described as a laboratory for new approaches and strategies. This is true in the education sector, with novel public-private partnerships that have included active government collaboration with NGOs and also, notably, with madrasas. These partnerships have extended access to school for millions of children across the country, but also result in a large and complex system with 13 types of providers, 10 examination boards, over 150,000 institutions, 40 million students, and one million teachers.

Notwithstanding remarkable progress in expanding access and equity, deficiencies in education are a major hindrance to social and economic development in Bangladesh. These deficiencies center on widespread quality issues, low student retention, and pockets of poor access in some rural areas. Only a third of primary school students in Bangladesh achieve expected numeracy and literacy skills for their grade. Student-teacher contact time is one of the lowest in the world, at an average of only 2.5 hours per day. Completion rates for the five-year primary school cycle are only 50.7 percent, and the average number of years to complete the cycle is 8.6 years. Approximately five million children are not enrolled in school, having either never attended or dropped out prematurely in order to work to support their families.

Poor children and those living in rural areas are far more likely to face significant barriers to school attendance and worse educational outcomes when they do attend. Enrollment inequity between poor and non-poor children has been nearly eliminated.
at the primary level; however, the secondary gross enrollment ratio for poor children is only 45 percent as compared to 76 percent for non-poor children. Petty corruption presents noteworthy barriers to education, especially for the poor. Despite nominally free education in public schools, informal payments are common, and cash stipends provided by the government may not be paid out properly. Bribes can also influence exam pass rates.

Madrasas in Bangladesh

Madrasas have been enduring institutions in Bangladesh and today are larger and perhaps more influential than at any time in the nation’s history. The number of madrasas has grown dramatically since Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan, increasing from less than 2,000 in 1971 to roughly 15,000 registered madrasas by 2014, with at least as many unregistered, though likely many more. Madrasas have contributed to the expansion of access to education and, less well appreciated, to Bangladesh’s success in achieving gender parity in enrollment. Bangladesh stands out worldwide in terms of the size of the contribution madrasas make to education provision. Madrasas account for roughly 2 percent of enrollment in Pakistan and 4 percent in India, while in Bangladesh approximately 13.8 percent of students enrolled at the primary level and 21 percent of those at the secondary level attend madrasas. Thus, these “traditional” institutions are increasingly popular in rapidly modernizing Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh madrasas are divided between Alia, or “reformed” madrasas, and Quomi, which are not reformed. Alia institutions, as a condition for financial support, submit to government regulation and oversight by the Madrasa Education Board. They have also adopted and follow the national curriculum, retaining elements of the traditional religious subjects. Alia degrees are government recognized whereas Quomi degrees are not. The Alia system as of 2014 consisted of 9,341 institutions with 3.6 million students. Much less is known about the independent and unregistered madrasas collectively termed Quomi; estimates for numbers of schools range between 15,000 and 64,000. The government has put increasing pressure on Quomi institutions to register and join in the reform efforts, with limited success.

Madrasa reform in Bangladesh

The unique quasi-public Alia system in Bangladesh is quite distinct as a model that has aimed purposefully to bridge different approaches to education while building on traditional Islamic approaches. Alia madrasas trace their history to colonial era madrasa reforms undertaken by the British authorities in Bengal. In 1782 Governor General William Hasting sponsored the creation of the Alia Madrasa in Calcutta. Combining Western pedagogical and administrative approaches for traditional subjects, including Arabic, Persian, and Islamic law (fiqh), the school was aimed at training Muslims to occupy lower posts in government offices and, perhaps most importantly, to act as interpreters of the Muslim civil code. Over the years further secular subjects were added, including English, math, and science. This was the first major externally-driven attempt to modernize madrasas in Bengal. While British madrasa reforms in this era were fairly limited, the tradition of the secularized state-supported madrasa endured, retaining the moniker Alia. The Alia system now includes any madrassa that has adopted the national curriculum of Bangladesh and submitted to state regulation. Alia madrasas today are in many ways comparable in quality and outcomes to government schools. As state-supported and regulated Islamic schools, Alia madrasas are somewhat unique entities in the Muslim world and therefore have been of interest to those exploring models for madrasa reform.

The reform approach for Alia madrasas has been straightforward; the government provides financial incentives to madrasas and, in exchange, the schools adopt secular subject matter and submit to government oversight and regulation. Incentives primarily take the form of bolstered teachers’ salaries and material support, including textbooks and computers. Alia schools are thus state supported, but not state owned. The government pays 90 percent of salary costs for teachers who cover both religious and secular subjects, while the local community maintains the school facilities. In total, roughly 72 percent of the budget of an Alia madrasa is borne by the government. As a result of reform efforts, Alia madrasas offer comparable or, in some cases, better quality education compared to government schools. Given the reorientation in curriculum, adding secular subjects while substantially abbreviating traditional religious coursework, Alia madrasas now aim to equip students with the practical skills necessary to join the workforce upon graduation.

The central strategies and character of Alia madrasas have thus shifted towards more worldly concerns. This shift has had
largely positive results in expanding access to quality education, particularly in rural areas. It has also meant, however, that Alia madrasas have largely ceded their position within the hierarchy of Islamic education in Bangladesh. The unformed Quomi institutions are now seen to be the seat of Islamic authority and the home of true Islamic scholarship in Bangladesh. Alia madrasas no longer serve the traditional function of the madrasa in Islam, namely to train Islamic clergy. Nearly all ulama (Islamic scholars) and imams in Bangladesh are products of the Quomi system, and it is still these institutions that are seen to speak for Islam and define what it means to be a “good Muslim” in Bangladesh. Thus, if one of the goals of madrasa reform is to contribute to a more enlightened Islamic discourse that engages with the full breadth of the Islamic and Western intellectual traditions and responds to contemporary challenges, Alia madrasas have fallen short.

An especially successful education reform in Alia madrasas was a female secondary school stipend program introduced in 1993 that was supported by the World Bank. Its goal was to increase girls’ enrollment and attendance. The program waived tuition fees for girls and provided additional funding for schools that enrolled girls. The government’s decision to include madrasas in this program was largely responsible for opening up these traditionally all-male institutions to girls. The number of female students in madrasas jumped from 7.7 percent in 1990 to 52 percent in 2008. Madrasas accounted for 35 percent of the expansion of enrollment for girls in that era and contributed significantly to efforts to achieve gender parity in education nationally. Some political actors have pointed to the inclusion of Alia madrasas to girls as a pro-madrasa intervention (meant pejoratively). The reforms clearly contributed significantly to efforts to achieve gender parity at the secondary level. They also had important indirect effects on unformed Quomi madrasas. The opening of Alia madrasas to girls has pushed many Quomi institutions to likewise open girls’ madrasas in order to compete with Alia schools in this new market. Growing access to religious education for women, despite concerns over the perpetuation of regressive gender norms, has allowed women to become somewhat better integrated into religious structures, which were long the exclusive domain of men. The increased presence of women in these conservative institutions has expanded their influence in the public sphere in new and significant ways, though these are very little studied and understood currently. At present, most female Quomi students and graduates do not appear to be motivated by a desire to challenge male dominance in these institutions or in Islamic communities and practice more broadly, but the long term effects remain to be seen.

Quomi madrasas are heirs to a very different madrasa reform project from the Alia madrasas that have their roots in colonial-era reforms. They are part of the orthodox Deobandi tradition that stretches across the Indian sub-continent. The history of this educational movement still shapes the very insular and protective approach many of these institutions take towards Islamic scholarship. The Deobandi movement was founded in the immediate aftermath of the Sepoy Rebellion against the British in the mid-nineteenth century as an anti-colonial Islamic revival movement. Though they made extensive use of British administrative practices and pedagogical methods, the central aim of the founders of the Darul Uloom Deoband madrasa was to establish Islamic schools that could serve as a critical bulwark against Western cultural imperialism. They envisioned madrasas as sites where Islam would be curated in a “pure” form, free from outside influence, to provide an intellectual counterweight to the predominance of Western knowledge. This approach was predicated on the quest to uncover a singular “true Islam” at the expense of engaging in dialogue with more pluralist perspectives within the Islamic tradition. Most Quomi madrasas in Bangladesh still operate on this Deobandi model and look to Darul Uloom Deoband in India as the standard-bearer in Islamic education.

Many Quomi institutions rooted in the Deobandi tradition retain a strongly protective independent orientation. Many have been reluctant to adopt government reforms and introduce “Western” subject matter into curriculums. Quomi schools utilize the Dars-i-Nizami curriculum developed by Mullah Nizam Uddin at Firangi Mahal in Lucknow in the eighteenth century. The actual curriculum content can vary depending on the competencies of instructors. While Quomi madrasas are not registered with or regulated by the government, many do operate under one of five independent education boards which have some influence over curriculum and teaching methods: Bangladesh Quomi Madrasa Education Board (Befaq) in Dhaka, Befaqul Madarisil Arabia in Gopalganj, Azadbini Edaraye Tamil Madarisil in Sylhet, Ettehadul Madarisil Arabia in Chittagong, and Tanjimul Madarisil in Bogra. Darul Uloom Moniul Islam Hathazari, founded in Chittagong in 1901 by a group of Deoband trained scholars, is considered the most prestigious of Bangladesh’s Quomi madrasas and has considerable influence throughout the Quomi network.

In contrast to Alia madrasas, Quomi institutions are primarily aimed at developing skills required to fulfill the duties of a religious leader. Those include the writing of “khutbahs” or sermons delivered during Friday prayer, the articulation of fatwas or Islamic legal rulings, and the skills associated with the art of religious debate and discussion. Ulama from leading Quomi
madrasas tend to emphasize the authority of the orthodox canonical teachings, which in many moral expressions can be at odds with the lived experience of Muslims today. This tension can undermine consensus on vital ethical questions necessary for social change and transformation. Most Quomi madrasas are boarding schools, which allow students more time to dedicate to scriptural study. Alia madrasas, in comparison, follow a standard school schedule: 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Quomi madrasas stress an austere and pious life so facilities can often be very basic. Likewise, as these schools often depend entirely on local donations for their operating costs, educational materials and other supplies can be sparse. Quomi madrasas have a restrictive schedule and can be fairly closed environments for students, meaning that they often have limited opportunities for interaction with the wider community. In the current climate of anxiety and suspicion around radicalism, this can undermine social trust on both sides.

Employability of Quomi graduates is an ongoing concern. The number of graduates of these schools far outpaces the availability of religious jobs in Bangladesh, and degrees from Quomi madrasas are not recognized by the government, curtailing access to higher education and to many jobs. Quomi madrasas often impart few pragmatic skills traditionally associated with modern life. Graduates thus often struggle to find mainstream employment. This issue, coupled with allegations of radicalization from some segments of Bangladeshi society, has meant that Quomi madrasa students often experience both economic marginalization and social alienation. There has been increasing recognition in recent years of the need for better social integration of these graduates.

Many Quomi madrasas have diversified their curriculum in order to compete with Alia madrasas and other public and private education providers. Recent years have seen the slow introduction of non-religious subjects into Quomi curriculums, though this has been a sporadic and uneven process and it is not widely known and appreciated. A recent survey showed that roughly 73 percent of rural Quomi madrasas teach some English, 70 percent teach some science, 59 percent teach the Bengali language, and 44 percent teach some math (up to grade 8 or equivalent). Changes have not been systematic, in part due to the fractured nature and limited authority of Quomi madrasa boards. While many of the recent changes within Quomi madrasas can be seen as an indirect response to the educational approaches utilized by other providers, they are also linked to the major social and economic shifts underway in Bangladeshi society. This could indicate an ongoing natural evolution of these schools. Indeed, some of these changes may be driven by the arrival of new, younger madrasa teachers who as a result of technological savvy are more connected with the wider world and thus more likely to see the value in “secular” knowledge.

Reform within Quomi madrasas is of particular concern because these institutions produce the bulk of the nation's religious leaders. Graduates of Quomi madrasas analyze and comment on social issues from a theological perspective and purport to speak for the “true” Islam. Many Bangladeshi citizens turn to these figures seeking guidance for a range of domestic and community matters. From this perspective simply secularizing madrasas as an approach to reform is problematic. For those who wish to see real ideological change among religious leaders in Bangladesh, diversifying curriculum in madrasas to include a wider, richer, and more diverse collection of Islamic theological scholarship, including a wider array of “traditional” sources, is of central importance. To date, however, it has not been a focal point for madrasa reforms.

The Bangladeshi government has moved with increasing urgency to bring Quomi madrasas under government oversight and regulation, in large measure responding to the growing threat of Islamic militancy and fears about the spread of radical ideology. Quomi institutions, however, greatly value their independence, so reform efforts are highly sensitive. The government has thus moved cautiously and has sought out support from key Quomi figures. For example, in April 2015 the Bangladeshi government engaged several high-ranking members of Hefazat-e-Islam, including chief Shah Ahmad Shafi, director of Hathazari Madrasa and chairman of the largest Quomi madrasa education board in Bangladesh, Hefazat-e-Islam (Protectors of Islam) is an alliance of orthodox madrasa teachers and students centered in Bangladesh’s Chittagong region that claims to represent more than 25,000 Quomi madrasas. Shah Ahmad Shafi, director of Hathazari Madrasa and chairman of the largest Quomi madrasa education board in Bangladesh, is Hefazat’s leader. While the group claims to have exclusively religious goals they have engaged in high profile protests and demonstrations against national legislation related to education and women's empowerment. The group has issued a list of 13 demands that include a ban on the public mixing of sexes, prosecution of atheists, and imposition of the death penalty for blasphemy.

Hefazat-e-Islam

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Shafi, appointing him head of a 17-member panel to explore reforms. Internal divisions among Quomi institutions ultimately doomed this effort. There was considerable dissent within the panel, and Shafi eventually unilaterally released an eight-point charter that agreed to reforms as long as they did not require government aid to madrasas and did not necessitate a change in teaching methods.

The current situation is that, in effect, after this setback, Quomi reform efforts have stalled. The extent to which further progress can be made may depend on the level of trust that can be built between the government and Quomi madrasa leaders and the resolution of divisions between Quomi leaders themselves.

The Senegal context

Senegal, a small country in West Africa with a population of about 14 million, has a long-standing reputation for interreligious harmony. Senegalese Islam (some 94 percent of Senegalese are Muslim) is heavily influenced by Sufism, and most Muslims identify with one of four Sufi orders present in Senegal (Tidianes, Mourides, Qadiri, and Layenes). Christians (4 percent—largely Catholic) are a respected religious minority.

Senegal has made progress in many areas of development, but it ranks low on the Human Development Index (HDI)—170 of 188 countries and territories ranked, with a score of 0.466 in 2014. The HDI evaluates countries on three dimensions: health, education, and economy. Senegal’s HDI has increased steadily since 1980 (0.325), but progress has been uneven. Life expectancy has increased by nearly 40 percent in that time period, and expected years of schooling have more than doubled. However, mean years of schooling have increased only from 2.2 to 2.5 years, and gross national income (GNI) per capita has increased slowly (from $1,902 in 1980 to $2,188 in 2014). Though aspiring to middle income status, Senegal is still a poor country located in one of the regions of the world with the highest incidence of poverty.

Senegal’s current development strategy gives high priority to education, and Senegal has long been engaged in international education dialogue. In 2000, Senegal hosted the World Education Forum, and it has been an active adherent of the Education for All initiative, which aims to achieve universal education. Senegal has made substantial financial investments in education—in recent years, the government reports that it has allocated over 40 percent of its operating budget to this sector. Improving education quality and equity are central to Senegal’s development agenda and education strategies. Senegal has made important gains in gross enrollment (from 56 percent in 1994 to 81 percent in 201429) and gender parity at the primary level (from a .75 ratio of girls to boys in 1994 to 1.09 in 201430). Significant challenges remain, however. Girls attend primary schools at higher rates than boys, but drop out in high numbers at each successive education level. An estimated nearly 600,000 primary school-age children are out of school, even though school attendance to age 16 is mandatory by law, and public education is free for students ages 6 to 16. Costs of school materials remain prohibitive for some families. Weak government regulation for many of Senegal’s schools means that quality and curriculum are inconsistent. Literacy remains a challenge with significant gender disparities: Just 51 percent of females aged 15 to 24 were literate in 2013, compared to 61 percent of males of the same age. Those living in rural regions are more likely to reject the public education offered; these regions often offer the fewest private school options.

Senegal’s educational offerings are quite diverse, with various formal and informal options. The formal sector includes public preschool, primary school, secondary school, and higher education, plus a variety of technical and professional training institutions. Teaching is primarily in French; a continuing issue is the approach to teaching in Senegal’s indigenous languages, a challenge accentuated by their number. It also includes private schools that adhere to government regulations and, at times, receive government funding. The informal sector is subject to little regulation. This complexity and duality is reflected in significant limitations on data.

The public education sector has faced many challenges, recently exacerbated by rapid expansion to accommodate growing numbers of students and the goal of universal primary education. Challenges include insufficient facilities, materials, and even teacher training. In 2013, 11.4 percent of public school classrooms nationwide were temporary shelters, down from 16.43 percent in 2012. Only 68.8 percent of public schools had restroom facilities in 2013, with stark regional differences (94.7 percent in Dakar versus 48.2 in Kédougou). Many teachers teach double shifts (6.6 percent of classes in 2013) or multi-grade classes (28 percent of classes in 2013) to increase education access. The Ministry of National Education notes that double shifts, in particular, impede quality learning. The government is working closely with many partners, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, USAID, and many private institutions and foundations, toward sustainable solutions.

Islamic education in Senegal

In parallel to the public education sector is the private education sector. Though aspiring to achieve universal education, many parents opt to send their children to Islamic madrasas, which are generally more accessible and affordable. The private education sector is relatively small and largely unregulated, with a huge variety of options ranging from government-affiliated schools to madrasas that do not require government aid to madrasas and did not necessitate a change in teaching methods.
Table 1. Education in Senegal: A Snapshot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public schools (2013)</td>
<td>7,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2013, officially registered)</td>
<td>1,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secular: 57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Franco-Arabic: 27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic: 11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of preschool students</td>
<td>191,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of primary school students</td>
<td>1,805,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of lower secondary school students</td>
<td>711,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of upper secondary school students</td>
<td>248,509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Colonial authorities established fines for those who did not abide by the decrees, while encouraging attendance at French schools. Senegalese French speakers had opportunities in the colonial administration, whereas non-French speakers faced difficulties, such as communicating with colonial authorities on various issues. Teachers used various methods to attract children to French schools, with anecdotal reports of teachers at times offering prizes or sweets to children who attended. Many parents and Qur’anic instructors resisted the colonial mandates; some Qur’anic instructors gave an air of compliance but resisted subtly. Enforcement of the decrees was uneven, and teachers in French schools saw increased attendance during periods of greater enforcement.

Facing tensions, colonial authorities attempted to make public schools a more attractive option to Senegalese by integrating Islamic education and Arabic into the curriculum. Some Senegalese religious leaders, however, continued to advise followers to not send their children to French schools.

This was also a period when the influence of Islam was increasing in Senegal. Thus, there was rising demand for Qur’anic schools. Daaras were the preference for rural populations (and in any event, there were few government schools in these areas). Arabic literacy rates were higher than French literacy rates in rural areas. The larger towns had greater numbers of colonial schools, but daaras remained the more popular education choice there, as well. Senegal has never developed, however, an Islamic sector, which includes many religious education offerings (both formal and informal). The diverse Islamic schools represent a significant group of private institutions, but the small Catholic education system (which was initiated largely in the nineteenth century) has a strong reputation among Senegal’s Christians and Muslims. Other private schools include a range of non-religious schools, either entrepreneurial or associated with non-profit efforts. Private schools can be recognized and regulated by the government; those that do follow the national curriculum.

Islamic education in Senegal dates back nearly as far as the first introduction of Islam during the eleventh century. For centuries, Islamic education in Senegal centered largely around the daaras, or Qur’anic schools grounded in the Sufi tradition. Qur’anic schools were the principal form of schooling and education, reaching both elites and wider communities. A Qur’anic instructor (referred to locally as a marabout or serigne daara) headed each school and taught students, or talibës, the Qur’an. The talibës typically memorized the Qur’an over the course of a few years and were to internalize and display the comportment expected of a good Muslim.

Islamic schools were thus the principal education providers in Senegal for centuries, with few other options until the colonial period. The French colonial administration, whose rule of Senegal began in the seventeenth century, sought to solidify its hold through various assimilation strategies and a classic indirect rule system that notably involved the leaders of the Sufi orders. However, the French did meet resistance, both armed and cultural. A mix of rule through traditional authorities and authoritarian measures was reflected in approaches to education policy and practice.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several colonial administration policies aimed to shift education in Senegal away from a focus on Arabic and Islamic studies in favor of promoting the French language and French curriculum. Cultural assimilation was the goal, at least for a small elite. The results were mixed. Efforts included measures designed to limit Qur’anic schooling and drive Senegalese children to French schools. An 1870 decree mandated that Qur’anic school instructors must be able to speak French in order to teach it to their students; students who could not speak the language fluently within two years would not be allowed to continue in the Qur’anic school, but would be required to attend a French school. An 1896 decree dictated that school-age boys must attend French school during the day; they were permitted to attend Qur’anic school only outside French school hours. Other regulations focused on required authorizations of Qur’anic schools, and mandatory examinations of instructors.
education system extending to higher learning (though options are currently under study). Those who sought to further pursue religious subjects studied with a Sufi teacher; some studied abroad in Mauritania, Morocco, or the Middle East.

Thus, when Senegal became independent in 1960, it inherited both the formal education system that the French colonial administration had introduced—a very classic French system with a curriculum modeled on the metropole—and the Islamic education system that had existed for centuries. Senegalese who succeeded in the French system were eligible to advance through French higher education institutions. The new rulers of Senegal had largely emerged from that system and valued it. French not only became Senegal’s official language, but it also continued as the official language of instruction in the public education system. Close ties had existed between Senegal’s elites and the French long before independence. The government chose to continue with the French-style secular education model. Even from the early years after independence, however, both the teaching of religion in the public system and the status of the daara system were topics of lively debate. One thorny topic was the teaching of religion in public schools, which was almost entirely absent.

In 1981, the nature of Senegalese education was the central focus of the États Généraux de l’Education et de la Formation, a national dialogue process. Among other parties, religious communities participated; they called on the government to integrate religious curriculum into public schools and provide government support to religious schools. In 1985, the Ministry of National Education included in its accepted measures the introduction of religious education, but in a manner that was to respect the secular and multi-religious character of Senegal.

After Abdoulaye Wade became president in 2000, the debates over the role of religious education heated up. Concerned that the public education system was not adequately responding to the public’s needs, Senegal’s government undertook several reforms. These were largely to address public resistance—more widespread in some regions than others—to the public education system. The 2002 reforms, which became law in 2004, altered the secular nature of public education that had existed up to that point. Major elements of successive reform measures focus on the introduction of public Franco-Arabic schools, modernization of the daara, and introduction of religious education into public schools.

Originally developed in Senegal in the 1970s, the Franco-Arabic model is viewed as especially promising, and it is emerging as an attractive option. With the reforms, the government adopted the model officially, and expansion is receiving support from various sources. Some daaras have undertaken reforms, both independently and as an official part of government programs. The government’s program of daara modernization began only in 2002, but some daaras began independent reforms long before, often with the assistance of outside funding.

The integration of four hours of voluntary religious education per week into public primary schools was a significant element of the reform (before 2004, religious education was entirely absent). Parents can choose between an Islamic or a Christian curriculum for their children. There are political arguments that current provisions and, above all, implementation are insufficient. This reflects the long-standing debates about whether the public education system is well adapted both to Senegal’s culture and to the economic and social needs of its population. One question is whether four hours of voluntary religious education in public primary schools is sufficient in a country where religious education is seen as a central element of raising good citizens who are grounded in Senegalese culture and values.

Despite the government’s focus on including stakeholders from all levels in discussions about the future of education, debates continue on whether participation is sufficiently broad and deep. For example, some Qur’anic instructors maintain that they were not adequately involved in discussions of reforms and that their concerns were not heard. Other educators have noted their dislike for the term “modern” daara and prefer language like “improved” daara.

Until 2013, students in Senegal educated in Arabic rather than French had limited options. The state-administered Baccalauréat examination was available only in French, and the limited French language skills of students receiving a primarily Islamic education were rarely sufficient to pass it. An Arabic Baccalauréat was offered, but it was not organized by the government. The director of an Al-Azhar (a Senegalese network of schools where the primary language of instruction is typically Arabic) institution who was involved in advocating for reform explained that, “During all those years, among those who left [school], they had a [Baccalauréat] in hand that wasn’t recognized by the state. They weren’t able to enter the universities or pursue higher education if they didn’t have a scholarship to go [study] in an Arab country.” Since 2013, the Senegalese government has offered an Arabic Baccalauréat exam, and there is some space in the Arabic Department at the university in Dakar for students who excel. The same director has recently decided to emphasize teaching his students French. This way, he argues, students will master both Arabic and French, giving them a full range of options to choose from.
The contemporary picture: Types of Islamic schools in Senegal

The Islamic education system in Senegal has changed significantly in the decades since independence, and it is diverse and complex. Reasons include the rapid increase in modern state education, the growth of a variety of private schools, social and cultural changes across the society (including rapid urbanization), and pressures on the traditional daara system. Noteworthy were the seismic effects of the protracted drought in the 1970s that transformed the rural landscape. Many daaras moved to the cities (along with many rural families), changing the pattern of relationships between students and Qur’anic instructors. Daaras had previously relied on agricultural labor from the students—seen as fostering a strong work ethic, developing useful skills, and helping them to cope with hardship—to support the daara and provide food. During the same period, options for Islamic education became more diverse, and several new school types emerged. By the end of the twentieth century, there were several models of Islamic education in Senegal.

Daaras are largely informal schools operated by a Qur’anic instructor (typically with an affiliation to a Sufi order). Many pedagogical practices date back centuries. In the traditional model, students (mostly boys) were typically sent to live in the daaras. The Qur’anic instructor taught students the Qur’an, largely through a focus on rote memorization, and in Arabic (a foreign language in Senegal). These schools were seen as instilling important values in the children, such as humility, submission, and perseverance. The central objective was to raise children with a strong knowledge of Islam, but also citizens with strong values and morals. This historically played out in rural settings, heavily influenced by the agricultural backdrop. It was traditional for students to work the fields that the daara owned and managed. Today, there are different models of daaras; many daaras remain boarding-style, but in some, students attend during evenings, weekends, or school holidays. In this model, daara education is often viewed as complementary, as students attend another school as their primary source of education. Girls often attend, and, at least at very young ages, classes consist of both girls and boys. Although there are organized groups of Qur’anic instructors, the system is very decentralized, with very little government regulation.

An important emerging model is the Franco-Arabic schools. The first were established in the 1970s as private schools. They served as an alternative between a French-style or Islamic school. These schools offer a hybrid style of education, teaching students Arabic and Islamic studies, in addition to the normal public curriculum that includes French. Many private Franco-Arabic schools are operated individually, while others belong to a network of schools. Some are affiliated with a specific Sufi order, but others are unaffiliated; many schools claim to accept students regardless of order affiliation. The government recognizes some of Senegal’s private Franco-Arabic schools as official private schools. Senegal’s government began launching public Franco-Arabic schools following the 2002 education reforms.

Private Franco-Arabic schools established in the 1970s served as an important model for education reforms, and public Franco-Arabic schools are now officially part of the national education system. The education reforms of 2002 saw the Senegalese government adopt this model as a potentially integral part of the public school system, but it has expanded slowly. As of 2013, 27.7 percent of private schools were Franco-Arabic, compared to only 3.4 percent of public schools. The numbers are growing: Shortly after the reforms were launched, there were only nine public Franco-Arabic schools (2003), but the number had increased to 266 in 2013.53

Referred to as “modern” daaras, an increasing number of Islamic schools are operated privately, but they are regulated by the government with the objective of integrating them into the official education system.54 The government can now recognize the modern daaras as private schools, and some receive government support. The number of the modern daaras is still small, but expanding the modern daaras program is a government priority. Modern daaras, much like Franco-Arabic schools, offer a hybrid-style education. They typically offer trilingual instruction, with Arabic, French, and national languages.55

A widely held and discussed debate in Senegal is whether traditional forms of Islamic education, like that offered in many Senegalese daaras, are stagnant in their curriculum and practices, with antiquated methodology that does not prepare students for today’s realities. Various Islamic schools and communities are innovating and introducing new approaches to Islamic education, and there is recognition of the importance of addressing what amounts to a bifurcated educational system. However, reform has proved to be a complex topic with intensely political, cultural, and religious dimensions; overall progress has been slow. Many issues remain to be resolved.

Watch this UNICEF video on the Education For All movement and girls’ education in Senegal:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DW-_WEUgQ5U
Bangladesh: Who are madrasa students and what drives demand for madrasa education?
Demand for madrasa education in Bangladesh has clearly increased, but the reasons are not fully understood. There is speculation but limited solid information on the topic. One common narrative is that, because many madrasas fully subsidize expenses for students, they can be the only educational options available to the very poor. As education (and demand for education) has expanded throughout Bangladesh, madrasas have grown to serve the rural poor. Others believe that the expansion of madrasas is driven by increased religiosity and a demand that religious subjects receive greater emphasis in school curricula. This is thought to be part of a growing “Islamization” of Bangladeshi society, driven as new Salafi interpretations of Islam are imported from the Middle East. Backlash against perceived Westernization that has accompanied rapid economic growth and development is another factor.

No single explanation fully explains why madrasa education is so attractive. The educational decisions of Bangladeshi households can be complex and take different factors into consideration. Parents may weigh the potential benefits of schools in terms of future employment and earnings against the monetary cost of school fees and supplies. Traveling long distances from home is a common concern, particularly for girls whose mobility parents wish to control strictly. The desire to instill proper values and mold youths into “good Muslims,” “good citizens,” and “good wives” who fulfill responsibilities to family and community is an important consideration. Studies highlight that parents may send children within the same family to different types of schools. One survey showed that among families with at least two secondary school-age children, 70 percent chose madrasa education for some and secular education for others. Understanding how and why parents value madrasa education is critical for education policy in Bangladesh.

Career prospects: Particularly in rural areas, the difference in quality between the reformed Alia madrasas and government schools is not great, and therefore the decision can often be between Alia madrasas and government schools on the one hand and Quomi madrasas on the other. If economic or career success is a goal, parents are more likely to choose an Alia madrasa or government school.

Religious knowledge and values are appreciated in Bangladeshi society. This form of social capital has been identified as a major reason why parents choose madrasa education. Qur’anic literacy is highly prized in many communities and having a child who is a Qur’an Hafez (able to recite the entire Qur’an from memory) can be a source of pride, seen to confer considerable blessings upon the family. The qualities that madrasa education aims to develop in youth—trustworthiness, moral fortitude, good judgment, and submission to God—are seen as attributes that are critical for a leader in Bangladeshi communities. Because they treat Islamic scripture comprehensively, Quomi madrasas are seen as better equipped to impart these qualities and are thus seen in many communities as critical in the production of local leaders.
leaders. In rural areas in particular, community leadership still has strong religious associations, and madrasas serve a critical function. Higher religiosity on the part of the father is positively correlated with madrasa attendance. Madrasas also seem to be favored in more religiously conservative areas.\textsuperscript{69}

**Gender and purdah:** Since reformed Alia madrasas began opening their doors to girls in the early 1990s, demand for girls’ madrasas has increased dramatically. This is linked to the strong emphasis in Bangladeshi society on purdah, restrictions placed on women’s mobility in order to safeguard their purity and virtue. In Bangladesh these qualities are often seen as essential to ensure marriageability. Purdah mainly involves the confinement of women in the home or the veiling of women in public spaces. The tradition has long been a target of women’s rights advocates in Bangladesh, who see it as a severe restriction on the social agency of women. They worry that a renewed focus on purdah, typified by the increasing prevalence of the once uncommon burqa, threatens decades of work towards gender equality.

Issues related to purdah can and do figure heavily in decisions on whether to send girls to school in many conservative communities.\textsuperscript{60} Parents may believe that an emphasis on purdah contributes to a girl’s safety both in the classroom and traveling to and from school. In contrast to government and nonprofit schools, 85 percent of madrasas maintain a “strict policy of purdah” in the classroom, while the figure is just 18 percent for secular schools.\textsuperscript{61} Secondary school, which corresponds with the age of menarche, is when mobility restrictions on girls are at their most severe. Often if a secondary madrasa is not available, families will choose not to send their daughters to school, believing that ensuring their future as wives is the most important consideration for both economic and social reasons. In conservative contexts, if madrasas are available, girls are six times more likely to attend secondary school.\textsuperscript{62} Madrasas are also seen as important for developing etiquette and manners (abab) in girls. This is aimed at producing an ideal Muslim womanhood and cultivating the qualities of selflessness and dedication that make a good wife and mother.\textsuperscript{63}

**Senegal: What contributes to demand for Islamic education?** Demand for religious education, and particularly Islamic education, is strong in Senegal. This echoes the high religiosity of the society, reflected in a Pew Forum study in which 98 percent of Senegalese responded that religion is “very important” in their daily lives.\textsuperscript{64} Educating the next generation of Senegalese is viewed as an obligation, with the word “education” often used in a holistic sense. In the Senegalese context, education means instilling children with strong morals and good values, while preparing them to contribute to society. For many decades, Islamic and state schools were sharply separated, both in practice and in policy; few saw Islamic education and “Western” education as compatible and complementary. Rigorous analysis of parents’ motivation for choosing either Islamic or secular education is limited, and debates tend to draw on anecdotal evidence.

**Poverty and affordability:** One strand of argument holds that parents send their children to the *daaras* simply because they cannot afford to feed another child; these schools can indeed be a lower-cost option for parents. Public schools do not feed and clothe children, and there are many unofficial costs in addition to enrollment fees and charges for uniforms and supplies. These costs can be prohibitive for families. Certainly, a family’s financial situation can factor into decision-making around education. Parents generally do not pay to send their children to *daaras*. This model is grounded in history, when many *talibés* worked on the *daaras’* farms, as most *daaras* were located in rural areas. This was seen as character building for the children and contributed to the economic well-being of the school—and the food harvested helped to feed students.

**Values and religious competency:** Finance is by no means the only consideration for school preference and demand for religious education. Senegal’s high religiosity is another factor. Many of Senegal’s *talibés* do not come from impoverished families; rather, these families elect to send their children to the *daaras* for the competencies they believe their children will gain there.

**Image of schools and educational approach:** A significant motivation in selecting a school type is social and religious norms.\textsuperscript{65} Senegalese society values Islamic knowledge and *Qur’anic* memorization. Senegalese religious leaders are expected to have gone through Senegal’s Islamic education system—a small number study in other Muslim-majority countries. The Sufi orders in Senegal have strong ties to Sufi communities in other countries (Nigeria, Mauritania), and parents from these countries send their children to Senegal’s *daaras* because of the quality Islamic education they believe their children will receive.

**Bangladesh madrasas and society: Radicalism and social attitudes of madrasa students**

Madrasas are controversial institutions in Bangladesh. Proposals for madrasa reform have been debated since Bangladeshi independence in 1971. During the bitter Liberation War, Islamic tradition and political power were central issues, and the new government defined itself in its constitution and ethos as a secular nation. The new government thus viewed the ma-
The issue of madrasa education figures prominently in polarized discourse regarding the role of Islam in Bangladeshi society. The main issues are concerns that the madrasas contribute to radicalization and militarism, that they tend to perpetuate regressive gender norms, and that many madrasa students are poorly integrated in society. The antiquated pedagogy and curriculum of madrasas limit the employability of madrasa graduates, particularly those that come from the orthodox madrasa system.

Madrasas, and particularly Quomi institutions, are seen in some quarters as hotbeds for radicalization and Islamic militancy, though concrete evidence to that effect is limited. These accusations should be seen in relation to broader national and international political contexts as part of a closer empirical examination of Islamic radicalization in Bangladeshi society. Concerns arise partly from the closed nature of these institutions. Quomi madrasas have been very little studied in the Bangladeshi context and remain largely an unlit spot in both development and scholarly literature. Quite widely-held assumptions about the links between madrasas and terrorism were challenged by recent high-profile Islamic militant attacks, including the July 2016 Holey Bakery attack and killings of bloggers and secular thinkers, because many of the suspected militants who have been captured or killed have come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds and attended elite private schools in Dhaka, supporting growing international evidence of the increasing draw of radicalism among these groups. Madrasa students have been implicated in ongoing terrorism; for example a weapons cache was discovered at a mosque run by a U.K.-based charity in 2009.69 However, periodic raids on madrasas have turned up little in the way of weapons or militant literature. The few studies of attitudes among Quomi madrasa teachers and students have been carried out likewise give little credence to fears of rampant radicalization. A recent survey suggested that while the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the wider war on terror, were seen by the majority of respondents as an anti-Muslim campaign, the vast majority of respondents opposed jihad against the United States or the West.67 Even so, since a growing number of Quomi madrasa graduates struggle to find employment and face social alienation in wider society, fears remain that these young men will be highly susceptible to radical messages. In short, the narrative about the social and educational background of militants has been complicated significantly.

Many Quomi madrasa teachers and students are involved in Hefajet-e-Islam, a coalition of orthodox madrasa teachers and students with highly socially conservative positions who advocate the social Islamization of Bangladesh. The group coalesced in 2010 in opposition to Bangladesh’s national education policy, ratified that year, which they perceived as including insufficient provisions for Islamic education. In the years since, Hefazat has staged a number of violent protests. In 2011 the group took to the streets to oppose the National Women’s Development Policy, which, among other things, granted equal rights to inheritance between male and female siblings, which members of Hefazat suggested was in direct violation of sharia law. Their largest and most violent demonstration came in 2013 in response to the anti-Islamist Shahbag uprising. The group issued a list of 13 wide-ranging demands that included a ban on the public mixing of sexes, prosecution of atheists, and imposition of the death penalty for blasphemy. Protesters from Hefazat then organized a “long march” toward Dhaka in an attempt to force the government to cede to their demands. Originating from several areas of the country, the march ended in a massive demonstration in Dhaka on May 5, 2013, that became known as the “Dhaka siege,” coordinated with major protests in other cities around the country. Protesters vandalized vehicles and shops and clashed with the police. The unrest left an estimated 50 protesters dead and countless properties damaged.

Hefazat’s emergence is illustrative of a growing divide in Bangladeshi society between more “secular” social forces, with an ideology particularly dominant within the nation’s large NGO sector, and religious conservatives, most strongly represented by the Quomi madrasa system. Education has long been recognized as key to the shaping of values and social attitudes; consequently it has been a major focus of social reformers. The role schools play has made madrasas a particularly important ideological battleground in Bangladesh between religious conservatives and secular progressives. On the secular side, some advocate reform or abolition of madrasas out of concern that these institutions inculcate youth with regressive social attitudes and perpetuate traditional patriarchal gender norms. There is indeed evidence that madrasa graduates hold more conservative social attitudes, particularly with regard to gender. A recent study found that in comparison to students at secular schools,
madrasa students are more likely to prefer larger families and believe that it is “up to God” to decide the appropriate number of children. They are also more likely to believe that higher education is more necessary for boys than girls and prefer a greater integration of religion into governance.\textsuperscript{68} However, the opinions of madrasa students were not that far out of line with those of their peers in secular schools and, more broadly, what we might think of as “conservative” social attitudes that predominate in much of Bangladesh. Any understanding of social attitudes within Bangladeshi madrasas should be nested within an understanding of social attitudes at a broader national level.

**Senegal: Contemporary debates and concerns**

Today, more than 55 years after independence, there are tense debates in Senegal about education policies, notably those that hark back to the colonial era. Across quite different types of French-modeled and Islamic education, education quality is inconsistent. Despite progress, especially in expanding enrollments, many educational indicators are disappointingly low. Senegal’s Islamic schools vary widely in curriculum content, infrastructure, and basic educational models; some issues are particular to the Muslim education system, while others are part of the broader education challenges that Senegal faces. Several key concerns are highlighted in policy debates.

**Curriculum and future prospects:** A common critique is that students coming out of certain types of schools are not equipped with the necessary skills to be successful in modernizing Senegal.\textsuperscript{69} Evidence is scattered, and there is limited data to suggest that graduates from any single category face worse job prospects than those of others (overall job prospects are poor).\textsuperscript{70} Daaras, in particular, are the subject to this type of criticism. Some students emerge without basic literacy and numeracy skills, which limits their options largely to the informal economy or to serving as religious leaders, where numbers are fairly limited.

**Language issues:** Although students at many Islamic schools study a wide variety of subjects, their language skills are often in Arabic rather than French, and Arabic is not widely spoken in Senegal outside religious circles. Notwithstanding skills they have acquired, the lack of French proficiency limits their higher education opportunities in Senegal and their ability to enter many fields, such as many civil service positions (as French is the official language in Senegal). With the recent implementation of the Arabic Baccalauréat exam (required for university entrance) after a push from Arabic educators, there are more opportunities for Arabophones, albeit still more limited than those for Francophones. Those who gain entrance to the university after passing the French Baccalauréat exam are able to enroll in all departments, while those who have taken the Arabic exam are limited to pursuing studies in the Arabic department, although they can seek higher education opportunities outside of Senegal.

**Pedagogy:** There are vocal critics of the pedagogical practices employed in the daaras, centered on the understanding that what is used is rote memorization. Defenders of the daara model are particularly concentrated in religious communities. The schools are central to the formation of good Muslims, with, for example, an emphasis on core values of humility and respect. Some defenders support reforms to better align these schools with present-day realities, but proponents argue that the daaras have produced Senegal’s foremost religious leaders and scholars. These leaders, past and present, are highly respected and are seen as contributors to Senegalese society. It is difficult, some Senegalese say, to argue with these visible results of a daara education.\textsuperscript{71}

**Offer not matching demand:** Various studies highlight rather widespread concerns among Senegalese as to whether the curriculum and approach of public schools align with their cultural and religious realities.\textsuperscript{72} This perception is stronger in some regions than others, and is particularly pronounced in important religious cities, such as the Mourides’ holy city of Touba. Residents of several regions point to the lack of religious education as their greatest concern with the current public education system; this concern is most common in rural areas, which tend to have few education options apart from public schools.\textsuperscript{73}

**Curriculum adapted to Senegalese culture and Islamic values:** The Ministry of National Education’s current strategic plans highlight the need to adapt the public education curriculum to local realities and to include local communities in the process.\textsuperscript{74} Such reforms are seen as a way to increase equity in education and eliminate discrimination linked to gender, geographic location, instruction type, or religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{75} One goal is to enroll more girls in school by addressing cultural concerns. The reforms provide new options to parents who do not wish
to send their girls away to live in daaras but do not want their daughters to attend French-style schools. Development of Franco-Arabic schools has been slow and has not kept up with public demand.  

Reaching children out of school: Despite Senegal’s mandatory schooling laws for children ages 6 to 16 and the push for universal education, many Senegalese children either never attend school or drop out after a short period. Reasons include girls leaving school to work at home or as domestics in urban areas to contribute to their families, insufficient infrastructure and sanitation facilities, and limited education options in rural areas. In 1999, an estimated 720,000 primary school-aged children were out of school (55 percent of them girls), a significant number representing nearly 44 percent of the primary school age population (ages 7 to 12). There has been considerable progress in increasing education access: In 2012, about 590,000 primary school-aged children were out of school (43 percent girls), representing approximately 30 percent of that population. The government is working with partners to ensure that as education access increases, children are able to obtain a quality education; education quality suffered in the 2000s during the rapid education system expansion.

Child welfare: The welfare of many talibès (students in Senegal’s daaras) is a longstanding and controversial topic. Following the droughts of the 1970s, many daaras relocated to urban areas. This changed the nature and pattern of relationships between talibès and Qur’anic instructors, who had previously relied heavily on agricultural labor by students to support the school. In urban areas, many talibès are sent into the streets to beg for money that goes to the Qur’anic instructors. Some organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Anti-Slavery International, contend that this is a form of child slavery, with gross human rights violations in certain daaras, including poor living conditions and allegations of physical abuse. A contrasting view is presented by scholar Rudolph T. Ware III, who maintains that most daaras employ the same practices that have been used for centuries—practices seen as central to raising a good Muslim and instilling religious knowledge and values, for example, begging instills humility. This view holds that the daara system is misunderstood by outsiders who fail to understand Islamic education in West Africa.
Living conditions and practices differ widely among daaras, with most largely outside government regulation. Senegal’s government, with the assistance of its partners, is expanding its program to modernize daaras. The government also has a daara inspection unit, but it is reportedly underfunded and understaffed. Following several high profile incidents, such as the 2013 death of nine talibés in a fire in Dakar, there have been increased calls for greater regulation and government involvement in the daaras.

Bangladesh and Senegal provide two illustrative cases through which to explore the challenges and potential of addressing Islamic education in education policy in a more purposeful way. The two contexts are very different; however, they illustrate shared dynamics that may have relevance in Islamic education contexts elsewhere. Education has roles in retaining and transmitting “traditional” knowledge and values, particularly in contexts of rapid development and economic and social transformation. Demand for religious or religiously infused education appears to be on the rise. Religiously provided and focused education can be controversial for various reasons that differ depending on the context. With debates around the roles of religious beliefs and institutions in society and in governance, these issues take on political dimensions.

The Bangladesh and Senegal cases illustrate the significance of debates about Islamic schools and Islamic education in national education policies and priorities. The schools fill critical gaps and reach key populations. This was the case when madrasas opened to girls in Bangladesh and when the Senegalese government responded to the demand for more religious education by modifying the public school curriculum and supporting blended religious/secular school models. Various concerns linked to Islamic education in both contexts are also relevant to national education policies: for example, how Islamic schools serve as education providers while retaining traditional functions of training religious clerics and providing a moral education.

Important questions surrounding the Bangladesh and Senegal experiences are relevant and important for both policymakers and those engaged in leadership and management of education systems, including religious actors. Among questions to explore are the impact of reforms on the training of religious clergy and how this contributes to evolving traditions in contemporary Islam, including interreligious relationships. The broad issue of social norms—whether adapting to changes of modernization such as gender equality, approaches to child rearing and protection, and democratic and civic norms—or susceptibility to radical currents, especially those linked to violence, are central concerns in both countries. The balance between secular and religious approaches to governance and to education is a live issue in both Bangladesh and Senegal and is the topic of active debate in both countries.

What can we learn from the two experiences, in two very different contexts? The following questions are suggested for reflection and class discussion.

• How do you understand the debates around secular versus religious education in this context? What are the main issues of concern?
• How do Islamic education systems work, and how are they related to state education policies and systems?
• What drives demand for Islamic education? How do popular narratives about this demand match with empirical evidence?
• What distinctive roles do Islamic schools play in providing education in development contexts? What gaps in official public education systems do they fill?
• How is education related to social values and norms in the Bangladeshi and Senegalese contexts? How does this relate to debates about education among ideologically differing social groups?

• What inspires suspicion of madrasa education in these contexts?

• What has contributed to social exclusion and marginalization among madrasa students and graduates?

• Why have madrasas tended to develop an insular character in relation to “Western knowledge” and how does this pose challenges for reform?

• What has motivated reforms of madrasa systems in Bangladesh and Senegal? How can different objectives shape different approaches to reform?

• What roles have external partners played vis-a-vis national actors in debates about madrasa systems and the need for and challenges facing reform?

Supplementary Reading

**Bangladesh**


**Senegal**


2 Hefner, 2009.
4 "Bangladesh Poverty Assessment: A Decade of Progress in Reducing Poverty, 2000-2010." World Bank, 2013. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/16622/785590NPWP/Bangladesh068a937773480PUBLIC0.pdf?sequence=1
5 "Seeding Fertile Ground: Education that Works in Bangladesh." World Bank, 2013. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/16768/806130E88BDB0E808037985900PUBLIC0.pdf
6 School enrollment, primary (% net)." World Bank, 2016. Available at: data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENG.RT
11 Ibid.
14 Unicef, 2009.
20 Bano, 2014.
21 Ibid.
25 These are measured by life expectancy, mean years of education among the adult population, expected years of schooling for children of school-entry age, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita expressed in constant 2011 international dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) rates.
29 "Gross enrollment ratio, primary, both sexes (%)." World Bank, 2016. Available at: data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENG.RT
31 "School enrollment, primary (gross), gender parity index (GPI)." World Bank, 2016. Available at: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.PRIM.FM.ZS
32 "Out-of-school children of primary school age, both sexes (number)." World Bank, 2016. Available at: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ENR.PRIM.LMO.60.ZS
38 Ibid.
43 Duke Bryant, 2015.
45 Duke Bryant, 2015.
46 Boucher, 1974.
47 Gellar, 2005.
48 Ibid.

2) Based on interviews with educators in Senegal, May and June 2016.

3) The Baccalauréat is the exam that students take at the end of high school in order to gain entry to institutions of higher education.


5) Villalón and Bodian, 2012.

6) Ibid.


9) Ibid.


12) Ibid.

13) Ibid.


15) Villalón and Bodian, 2012.

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid.

18) Ibid.


20) Ibid.

21) Ibid.


23) Ibid.
