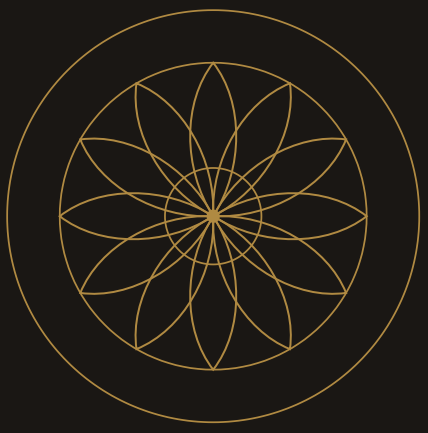


THE SACRED DIVIDE

THE FULL RECORD

Sunni Islam

Islam family

HONOR THE FAITH · NAME THE MACHINERY

TEXT CHECKED 2026-10-03

Before you begin

This is the record of Sunni Islam in *The Sacred Divide*. It has 27 sections, the same 27 used for every tradition, so that any section can be set beside the same section for another. Every fact is sourced.

Before each section, a short note says what the section is built to show, so you know what you are looking at before you read the detail.

After each section, a note headed *Why this matters to you* points at the part of the section most likely to touch an ordinary reader: a member, a donor, a parent, a voter, someone thinking about leaving, or someone outside forming an opinion. It usually ends with a question. The questions are not traps. They are the ones a careful reader would ask anyway.

The hard questions in section 23 are set out one at a time: the question, why it is asked, and an example already documented in this record.

Where a note states a fact, the fact comes from this record's own tables and cited sources or, in a few places, from a well-known research finding named in the text. Corrections are logged, with their dates, in the last section, *What changed on this page*.

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How to read this

Every religion in The Sacred Divide is laid out the same way, in the same 27 sections, so that any section can be compared across religions. This file examines institutions, offices, money and power. It does not judge anyone's faith or the truth of any belief.

EVIDENCE GRADES

Each of the 30 techniques carries a grade for how it is established in this tradition.

- **CODIFIED** Written policy, published rule, contractual requirement, or a procedure the institution has confirmed in its own documents. The strongest grade and the hardest to deny.
- **DOCUMENTED** Established by court judgment, government inquiry, regulatory action, or financial filing. Not the institution's own words, but a body with subpoena power.
- **TAUGHT** Repeated leadership instruction from platform, publication, or curriculum, without a formal rule. Deniable as emphasis rather than policy.
- **CULTURAL** Community enforcement the institution neither mandates nor prevents. Real in effect, unattributable by design — the highest-deniability grade. A volume graded mostly Cultural has not been cleared of anything: it means the page names no document that makes the institution responsible. Cultural does not mean minor, and it is not a finding of absence.

- CONTESTED Occurs in some parts of the tradition and is actively opposed in others. Generalizing this grade across a whole tradition is a misuse of it.
- REFORMED Documented historically and materially changed since — policy withdrawn, practice ended, or independent oversight accepted. Recorded because omitting it would be dishonest.
- UNGRADED Present in the source material without a grade assigned yet. Read as an unverified pattern claim, not as a finding.

RECEIPTS

Bracketed labels such as [OFFICIAL POLICY] name the kind of source a claim rests on.

- **Official policy.** The institution's own written rule: handbook, canon, policy letter, catechism, trust deed, temple recommend question. The strongest evidence available, because it cannot be attributed to a rogue individual.
- **Court record.** Judgments, convictions, filings, and testimony given under oath. Adversarially tested, which is more than most religious claims about themselves have been.
- **Government inquiry.** Royal commissions, grand juries, parliamentary and state investigations with subpoena power. Where these exist they are usually the best record of what an institution did rather than said.
- **Regulatory action.** Findings and penalties from bodies like the SEC or consumer-protection regulators. Narrow in scope, unusually precise in what they establish.
- **Financial record.** Filings, audited statements, tax returns, disclosed compensation, property transactions. Frequently the only place an institution tells the truth about its priorities.

- **Leadership statement.** Recorded sermons, conference addresses, published letters. The institution in its own voice, to its own people, on the record.
- **Independent investigation.** Reports commissioned by the institution but conducted externally. Weaker than a court and far stronger than a press release — and notable when the institution publishes them in full.
- **Academic source.** Peer-reviewed history, sociology, and demography. Best for context, structure, and scale; weaker for specific institutional conduct.
- **Former member testimony.** Firsthand accounts from people who were inside. Indispensable and interested at once — graded as testimony, never presented as documentary proof.
- **Pattern observed.** A recurring configuration with no single document behind it. Labeled as an observation rather than a finding, and the weakest claim type in this codex.

METHOD

- Separation of targets. This codex analyzes institutional control patterns, never the worth of believers or the truth of beliefs. Theology is out of scope; behavior, money, and power are in scope.
- Pattern over anecdote. A tactic is attributed to a tradition's high-control expressions only where the mechanism recurs — one bad congregation proves nothing; the same architecture in a hundred proves the architecture.
- Evidence weighting. Every factual claim carries a bracketed source-type label and should carry a grade (A–D). Claims marked SOURCE NEEDED or PATTERN OBSERVED are analysis, not established fact, and must not be published as fact.
- Steelman rule. Every tactic section presents the institution's strongest defense before countering it. If the defense cannot be stated in a form its adherents would recognize, the counter is not yet earned.

- Asymmetry honesty. Similar tactic does not mean identical severity. A shunning policy that costs your entire family is not the same as a community that cools toward doubters, and the codex must never flatten that difference.
- The mirror rule. Any framework this powerful can itself be misused — to smear traditions, flatter one's own, or manufacture grievance. The self-audit and language guardrails apply to this project as much as to any institution it examines.

CITATIONS

A small raised number in the text links to the matching item in this religion's Sources, near the end. Every source was checked, and the date of the last check is shown at the top.

01 At a glance

BEFORE YOU READ

The whole page on one screen: how big Sunni Islam is, who sits at the top, how that person is chosen and whether anyone can remove them, where the money comes from, and what leaving costs. The disclosure scorecard underneath asks six yes-or-no questions any charity or public company would be expected to answer. Every later section expands one of these rows.

SIZE	Sunni Islam has about 1.7–1.8 billion adherents (roughly 87–90% of Muslims). **ACADEMIC SOURCE** · Pew
WHO'S IN CHARGE	No single office leads Sunni Islam. Its most cited seat of learning is al-Azhar in Cairo, headed by Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb, who was appointed by the president in 2010.
CHOSEN BY	Since a 2012 law, the Council of Senior Scholars is to elect the Grand Imam, but the current holder was appointed by the president in 2010, before that law, and this page records no election under it.
REMOVABLE BY	Nobody can remove him, because the 2014 Constitution makes the office irremovable.
MONEY IN ONE LINE	Sunni institutions draw on the same giving as Islam generally, and add state salaries for clerics, Gulf endowments for institutions abroad, and the media economies of celebrity preachers.

LEAVING IN ONE LINE	Community and family enforcement typically exceeds institutional enforcement; leaving or liberalizing costs marriage prospects, family standing, and in diaspora communities, one's entire social base. VARIES BY COMMUNITY
THE UNANSWERED QUESTION	Who accredits the scholars who decide who counts as a scholar — and why does that trail end at a ministry almost every time?
EVIDENCE	None of the 30 techniques is sourced to a named document; grades: Cultural 15, Taught 12, Contested 3
FAMILY	Islam — islam, sunni-islam, shia-islam, ahmadiyya, dawoodi-bohra
LAST CHECKED	2026-10-03

Disclosure scorecard

ACCOUNTS	PAY	SAFEGUARDING	EXTERNAL FIRST	REMOVAL	REPLY
PARTIAL	NO	PARTIAL	PARTIAL	NO	NO

Y Yes — established from a public source · **P** Partial — true of some parts of the tradition, or true in some jurisdictions · **N** No — not established from any public source · **?** Not assessable — no institutional apex exists to assess

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The glance table's answer to who chooses the top office is "Since a 2012 law, the Council of Senior Scholars is to elect the Grand Imam, but the current holder was appointed by the president in 2010, before that law, and this page records no election under it", and to who can remove its holder, "Nobody can remove him, because the 2014 Constitution makes the office irremovable".

Read that as though it described the board of a pension fund holding your savings. Would you accept the arrangement there? The scorecard finds no public evidence of leaders' pay, a written removal procedure or on-the-record replies. Each "No" is something the institution could publish tomorrow. Ask yourself why it hasn't.

02 A day inside

BEFORE YOU READ

One ordinary day, told from inside. The person is a composite built from documented patterns, not a real individual. The point is to make the structure visible at human scale: phrases like "removal mechanism" or "giving record" are easy to read past, but a Tuesday organized around them is not.

Yusuf · A Tuesday in the school term · A South Asian city

He is nineteen and has been at the madrasa (a religious school) since he was seven. He can recite the entire Qur'an. He cannot fill out the form at the government office where his brother works, because it is in English, and this is a fact he has known about himself for two years and has told no one.

Morning revision at five. The younger boys sway over their texts. He loves this room. He loves the sound of it. He has been happy here in a way he does not think his brother has ever been happy anywhere.

At nine Qari Sahib (the teacher of Qur'an recitation) canes a boy named Bilal for the third time this month, on the hands, and the room goes carefully quiet and then resumes. Yusuf has seen this for twelve years. He no longer registers it as an event. Afterward Bilal sits beside him and Yusuf gives him half his bread and neither of them says anything.

In the afternoon a man from the sponsoring foundation visits, and the boys line up, and there are photographs. The man's Arabic is better than the teachers'. Yusuf notices that the new books have arrived and that the new books say some things differently than the old books, and that nobody has remarked on this.

At six he walks past the school his cousin attends, the one with the computer room. He stands there for a moment. Then he goes home, where his mother has made his favourite thing, and where his father says with real pride that his son is a hafiz (one who has memorized the whole Qur'an) and that Allah has blessed this house.

At night on the roof he does something he does not do in front of anyone: he opens his brother's old English primer and works through eight words with a torch. It takes him forty minutes. He puts it back exactly where he found it. He is not certain whether what he is doing is ambition or betrayal, and there is nobody in the building he could ask.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Did any moment in that day feel familiar: a cost nobody questions, a door nobody can see how to open? The section of this page that explains that moment is the one to read first. If nothing felt familiar, ask whether that's because it isn't your life, or because the patterns have become normal to you.

03 The forefront

BEFORE YOU READ

The page's thesis in one place. First, the single question the documented record could not answer. Then the widest gap between what the institution says and what the record shows, one cost of leaving set beside how it is officially denied, and the strongest objection to this whole page, answered rather than dismissed.

> You were probably taught there is no priest between you and God — and that is true, and it is the strongest thing you own. What you may not have been taught is how much of what governs your life was decided by men who were paid to decide it, in offices funded by governments, using a vocabulary of piety that makes their rulings hard to question out loud.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

Who accredits the scholars who decide who counts as a scholar — and why does that trail end at a ministry almost every time?

The widest gap between word and record

THEY SAY	THE RECORD SHOWS	RECEIPT
Scholars are independent of rulers.	States took over the endowments that funded scholarly independence and replaced them with salaries. Egypt's nationalization of waqf property after 1952 is the documented case [66].	ACADEMIC SOURCE

One cost of leaving, beside its denial

COST	DOCUMENTED?	DETAIL	THE OFFICIAL DENIAL
Family rupture	Very common	Family support, marriage prospects and, in practice, inheritance are withdrawn.	“Islam forbids compulsion in religion.”

The strongest objection, answered

The objection. You do not understand the diversity of the madhhabs (the legal schools), so any specific practice you name is one school's position at most.

What is true in it. The objection is correct, and this codex uses that diversity as evidence rather than ignoring it. The position of the Hanafi school, one of the four Sunni legal schools, on a woman contracting her own marriage is cited because it shows the restrictive position is contested rather than divine.

The answer. But diversity cannot function as a permanent alibi. If a practice occurs, someone is enforcing it, and the question of who pays the

enforcing scholar has a public answer in most of these countries.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Try answering the unanswered question yourself: *Who accredits the scholars who decide who counts as a scholar — and why does that trail end at a ministry almost every time?* If you can't, who could, and would asking them be welcome? How an institution reacts to a fair question often tells you more than the answer does.

04 What healthy looks like here

BEFORE YOU READ

What genuinely works in Sunni Islam, stated first and separately from any critique. That is a standing rule of this book: no tradition is reduced to its worst documented moments. Anything criticized later is measured against the best of what is described here.

> Sunni Muslims are ~87–90% of all Muslims. Authority lies in the Qur'an, the Sunnah (the Prophet's example), scholarly consensus and four major legal schools, and there is no single head.

Healthy practice here looks like independent scholars who keep the classical tradition of distance from rulers, and communities that fund their mosques locally to avoid foreign money with strings attached. It also looks like debate cultures in which disagreement between the legal schools models legitimate pluralism.

Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah — mass-membership organizations that choose their own leaders rather than having them appointed by the state, together representing well over a hundred million people — show that accountable Sunni institutions exist at scale.

Some of that standard is already on the record. Nahdlatul Ulama replaced its chair through a contested delegate vote in 2021 [17]. In 2017 the Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI) issued fatwas declaring child marriage harmful and its prevention obligatory [37]. Sisters in Islam has run Telenisa, a free legal clinic on Islamic family law for women, since 2003 [41], and initiated Musawah, the global movement for equality in Muslim family law, in 2009 [40]. Turkey publishes the Diyanet's budget as a line in the state budget [32] [33]. Each is a place where the tradition met the standard this page applies, and each is recorded here as credit. The NU vote has since been overtaken: in November 2025 NU's supreme council declared its elected chair dismissed, and a January 2026 plenary restored him [62]. In August 2026 its congress voted 401 to 150 to have the chair chosen by a nine-member council of senior scholars rather than by delegates, and that council chose Abdul Hakim Mahfudz by consensus [63]. NU no longer picks its chair by delegate vote.

Sources for this section: [17] [18] [32] [33] [37] [40] [41] [62] [63] [64]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

A bias check before the critique. People tend to read criticism of their own group as an attack and criticism of other groups as simply true. Social psychologists call this in-group bias; it shows up even when the groups are assigned at random (Tajfel's "minimal group" experiments, 1971). If you belong here, did this section feel fair? If you don't, did anything in it surprise you? The surprise is a rough measure of what you had assumed.

05 History

BEFORE YOU READ

A dated timeline and a few moments where the direction changed. Dates matter because they show that most rules had a beginning. A rule that began in a particular year, for a particular reason, is a rule that can be examined, and sometimes retired.

Sunni Islam emerged from the majority position in the early disputes over succession to the Prophet. Classical institutions (madrasas, the legal schools and caliphal patronage) built durable scholarly authority. The modern era added state religious ministries, Gulf-funded missionary networks, and satellite and online preachers.

Timeline

HISTORY AT A GLANCE



Numbered markers match the timeline below; spacing is proportional to the years.

1

632–661 CE

Succession settled by community consensus rather than lineage

The defining Sunni position: legitimate authority is communal, not hereditary-charismatic.

2

700–950

Four legal schools form around founders active c. 700–855 (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) and consolidate over the following century

Interpretation becomes a professional discipline with credentials and precedent.

3

850–1100

Canonical hadith collections (records of the Prophet's sayings and deeds) compiled (al-Bukhari, Muslim); theology (kalam) debates; Sufi mysticism spreads — organized Sufi orders (tariqas) follow in the 12th–13th centuries

Authority is textual, and therefore belongs to whoever controls training.

4 1000–1500

Madrasa systems and waqf (religious endowment) funding expand across the Islamic world

Scholarly independence rests on endowment income — until states control the endowments.

5 1517–1924

Ottoman state appoints a religious hierarchy under the Shaykh al-Islam (the empire's chief religious official)

Scholars become salaried officials; endorsement becomes a job requirement.

6 1740S–1800S

Wahhabi movement allies with the House of Saud

A purist reform movement acquires a state — and later, oil.

7 1900S

Colonial dismantling of waqf and sharia (Islamic law) courts; Muslim Brotherhood founded 1928

Mass-movement Islamism emerges as a modern political form.

8 1970S–2000S

Petro-funded global mosque, school, and publishing networks

One interpretation gains disproportionate global distribution capacity. ACADEMIC SOURCE

9 2000S–PRESENT

Satellite and internet preachers; state crackdowns on independent clerics

Authority fragments online while states tighten control of the pulpit.

10 PRESENT

Reform and feminist scholarship; official establishments closely aligned with governments

The classical check on rulers is largely gone; the recovery effort is underway from the margins.

Moments in the room

833–848 — THE INQUISITION THAT FAILED

The Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun imposed a doctrinal test on scholars. Ahmad ibn Hanbal refused, was imprisoned and flogged, and did not recant. The policy was abandoned; his refusal became foundational.

Why it matters. It is the tradition's own founding precedent for scholarly independence from the state. It is the strongest internal argument against every state-appointed council on this page — and it belongs to the tradition, not to its critics.

1961 — THE UNIVERSITY IS NATIONALISED

Egypt's Law 103 reorganised al-Azhar under state control, converting the Muslim world's most cited seat of learning into an institution whose leadership is appointed under state law. Since 2012 the law has given the choice of Grand Imam to al-Azhar's own Council of Senior Scholars; the current Grand Imam was appointed by the president in 2010.

Why it matters. This was the moment the trail from 'who accredits the scholars' to 'a ministry' was formally paved. Before this, the answer was contested; after it, it was administrative.

2016 — A CONFERENCE DECIDES WHO COUNTS

At Grozny, a conference of scholars convened under Chechen state patronage issued a definition of Sunni orthodoxy that excluded certain currents. Rival states and scholars immediately disputed it.

Why it matters. Orthodoxy was defined by a conference held under a head of state's patronage, and the dispute that followed ran along state lines rather than theological ones. The map of the argument was political.

Sources for this section: [8] [9] [48] [49]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Pick one rule that shapes your week and look for it on the timeline. If it has a start date, it was decided by people at a particular moment, for reasons of that moment. Were you taught it as timeless? What would it mean for you if it turned out to be younger than your grandparents' grandparents?

06 Branches & variants

BEFORE YOU READ

Sunni Islam is not one bloc. This section maps the main branches and variants, so that nothing documented about one community is read as true of all of them.

Sunni Islam has four legal schools, and theological currents that range from the Ash'ari and Maturidi schools of theology to the Salafi, Deobandi and Barelvi movements. Sufi orders overlay all of them.

BRANCH OR CURRENT	WHERE IT PREDOMINATES	WHAT DIFFERS ON THIS PAGE'S QUESTIONS
Hanafi school (Abu Hanifa, c. 700–767)	Turkey, Central Asia, Pakistan, India [47]	It is the school that lets an adult woman contract her own marriage, the reason this page treats guardianship as contested, not divine [47].
Maliki school (Malik ibn Anas, d. 795)	North, West and Central Africa [54]	It reads the sources through the practice ('amal) of the Medina community [54].
Shafi'i school (al-Shafi'i, 767–820)	East Africa, parts of Arabia, Indonesia, the Kurds [55]	It is the predominant school in Indonesia and Malaysia, where this page's court records on child-marriage dispensations (court permission to marry below the legal age) and apostasy jurisdiction come from [4] [5] [31].

Hanbali school (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 780–855)	Saudi Arabia [56]	It is the textualist school, and its founder's refusal of the caliph's test (833–848) is the tradition's founding precedent for scholarly independence [49].
Salafi and Wahhabi currents	Arabian origin, spread globally through Gulf-funded institutions (see Money)	These currents put direct reading of the texts ahead of the four schools' accumulated rulings, and the 1744 Saudi–Wahhabi pact joined the current to a state [57].
Deobandi and Barelvi movements	South Asia and its diaspora; Deoband founded 1867 [58]	They are rival South Asian seminary networks, and their disputes have at times turned violent [58] [59].
Sufi orders	Everywhere; strongest in Africa, the Balkans, South and Southeast Asia	Authority runs through a living shaykh (a spiritual master), and the 2016 Grozny conference defined orthodoxy to include Sufism and exclude Salafism [48].
Mass organizations	Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama (~57% identify) and Muhammadiyah (~6%) [18]	Muhammadiyah elects its leaders by delegate ballot at its congress [64]. Nahdlatul Ulama elected its chair by delegate vote in 2021 [17], but in 2026 its congress voted 401 to 150 to have a nine-member council of senior scholars choose the chair, and that council chose by consensus [63]. Both choose their own leaders, which is the counterexample to state-appointed authority.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you know one community of Sunni Islam, you know one community. Most bad generalizations about a religion, and most unfair defenses of it, come from treating one branch as the whole. Which branch is the one you picture when you hear the name? Is that picture yours, or one you were given by news coverage or by the community itself?

07 Structure

BEFORE YOU READ

The organizational chart: how many people and institutions there are, where authority sits, who holds the top office, and who holds what beneath it. The question to keep in mind is simple: if the person at the top got something badly wrong, what written procedure exists to correct or remove them?

Size and shape

Adherents	There are about 1.7–1.8 billion Sunni Muslims (roughly 87–90% of Muslims). ACADEMIC SOURCE · Pew
Regions	The main Sunni populations are in Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Turkey, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Central Asia.
Trend	Sunni Islam is growing with population, and Salafi-influenced practice has expanded well beyond its original geography through funded institutions and media.
Participation	Participation ranges from state-enforced to nominal. Mosque attendance is gendered, and male attendance is what most surveys actually measure.

Authority

- Scholars and muftis (scholars qualified to issue legal opinions) issue fatwas (formal legal opinions). State grand muftis serve governments. Transnational movements (Salafi networks, Deobandi and Barelvi institutions, the Muslim Brotherhood tradition) compete for interpretive market share.
- Gulf petro-funding built a global infrastructure of mosques, schools, and translated literature exporting particular interpretations.

ACADEMIC SOURCE / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

The top of the chain

> The scholarly class defines orthodoxy; states appoint the scholarly class. Hold both sentences at once.

OFFICE	WHO SITS IN IT NOW	CHOSEN BY	REMOVABLE BY
al-Azhar (Cairo) — the tradition's most cited seat of learning	Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb, appointed by the president in 2010, holds it.	Since a 2012 law, the Council of Senior Scholars elects the Grand Imam; the current holder was appointed by the president in 2010, before that law, and this page records no election under it.	Nobody can remove him; the 2014 Constitution makes the office irremovable.
Saudi Council of Senior Scholars	The Grand Mufti, Saleh al-Fawzan since 2025, chairs it, and every member sits by royal appointment.	Members are chosen by royal decree.	Members are removable by royal decree.
Turkey's Diyanet (the Presidency of Religious Affairs)	Safi Arpaguş has headed it since he was appointed by presidential decree in September 2025. The Diyanet drafts the Friday sermon read in some 93,000 mosques [12].	The Turkish presidency appoints its head.	The Turkish presidency can remove its head.

THE TELL

Ask who accredits the scholars who decide who counts as a scholar. The trail ends at a ministry almost every time — al-Azhar, made irremovable by Egypt's 2014 constitution, is the partial exception, and its budget is still a state line.

Who holds what

ENTITY	TYPE	HOLDER	HOLDS	WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU	RECEIPT
Official grand mufti offices	State clerical establishment	State-appointed muftis	They hold fatwa authority that tracks government policy.	It bears on whether a ruling you follow is religion or foreign policy.	GOVERNMENT REPORT
Al-Azhar and comparable state-linked institutions	Scholarly authority	Grand Imam and senior council	They hold global interpretive prestige, and are funded and appointed within a state relationship.	What counts as orthodox is decided inside a state's structure.	ACADEMIC SOURCE
Transnational madrasa networks	Education	Network leaderships and funders	They offer free schooling for the poor and hold a lifetime pipeline of dependent graduates.	It bears on whether a boy from a poor family can ever earn a living outside religion.	ACADEMIC SOURCE
Gulf religious foundations	Funding	State and royal charitable bodies	They hold decades of exported mosque, school and publishing infrastructure.	The books in your local mosque's library may be theirs.	ACADEMIC SOURCE

Satellite and platform preachers	Media	Individual celebrity scholars and their companies	They hold audiences larger than any classical scholar ever had, with no ijaza (a teacher's licence to transmit religious knowledge) required.	They may be who your teenager takes their religion from.	PATTERN OBSERVED
Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI)	Semi-official scholarly council	Council leadership drawn from the major Islamic organizations, state-funded	It issues nationally influential fatwas, including two 2005 fatwas, one declaring Ahmadiyya outside Islam and one ruling against pluralism, liberalism and secularism, and it keeps a role in halal (permissible under Islamic law) certification.	It bears on whether a minority mosque in your district is tolerated, and on who certifies your food.	OFFICIAL POLICY / ACADEMIC SOURCE

Sources for this section: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 15 16

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Sunni Islam has no pope, and that is real. But the page follows the question of who decides who counts as a scholar, and finds that the trail "ends at a ministry almost every time." The current Grand Imam of al-Azhar was appointed by Egypt's president in 2010; since 2012 the law has given the choice of his successor to al-Azhar's own Council of Senior Scholars, and the 2014 constitution makes its holder irremovable. When you follow a fatwa, do you know who appointed the person who issued it, and who pays him?

08 Law & state here

BEFORE YOU READ

What states actually do. That includes how they fund, protect, regulate or enforce the tradition, and which outside body, if any, can compel an answer from it. For most readers, this is where the institution meets their own passport.

Sunni Islam has no single legal regime; each state supplies its own. This table sets the seven jurisdictions on this page side by side.

COUNTRY	LEAVING ISLAM	CRITICIZING ISLAM	WHO CONTROLS THE PULPIT AND THE FATWA
Saudi Arabia	Leaving Islam is punishable by death under the kingdom's application of Islamic law [50].	Criticism is prosecuted, and clerics who declined to back state positions have been detained since 2017 [13] [51].	The Grand Mufti and the Council of Senior Scholars control them, by royal order [10].

United Arab Emirates	Hudud crimes (offences whose penalties are fixed in scripture), the basis for a death sentence for apostasy, were removed from the penal code in 2020 [69]; human-rights monitors still list apostasy as a risk [50].	Criticizing Islam is a crime: Decree-Law 34/2023 sets a minimum of one year for insulting religions or their rites (Art. 4) [65]. The matching article of the 2021 Crimes and Penalties Law [19] is not confirmed on this page.	Awqaf (the General Authority of Islamic Affairs, Endowments and Zakat) writes one Friday sermon for every mosque [24], and the UAE Council for Fatwa is the official fatwa authority [21].
Egypt	Leaving Islam is not a crime in the penal code, but courts have dissolved a marriage on apostasy grounds [27].	"Contempt of religion" carries up to five years (Art. 98(f)) and is actively prosecuted [26].	Authority sits with al-Azhar's Grand Imam, irremovable since 2014 [8 9].
Turkey	Leaving Islam carries no penalty.	Publicly insulting religious values carries six months to a year (Art. 216(3)), and the law has been used against critics [61].	The Diyanet, a state presidency, drafts the sermon for some 93,000 mosques [11 12]
Pakistan	Apostasy is not codified as a crime, but Pakistan is listed among countries where expressing it can bring a death sentence [50].	Defiling the Prophet's name carries a mandatory death sentence (s. 295-C) [28].	Federal and provincial religious bodies share it, and there is no single mufti.
Indonesia	Leaving Islam is not a crime, but publicly inciting others to have no religion carries up to 2 years under the new Criminal Code, in force since 2 January 2026 [30].	Blasphemy carries up to 3 years (Art. 300) [30], and a sitting governor was jailed for blasphemy in 2017 [29].	MUI issues fatwas; the state now runs halal certification [6 7]
Malaysia	Leaving Islam is a matter for the state syariah courts (Malaysia's Islamic courts), and the civil courts decline jurisdiction (Lina Joy, 2007) [31].	Criticizing Islam is an offence under state syariah enactments.	State religious councils and muftis control them.

The UAE's new Personal Status Law (in force 15 April 2025) is the region's most significant recent change: marriage at 18 for both sexes, a court may marry an adult woman over her guardian's objection, maternal custody to 18, and judges may apply general sharia principles without being bound to one school [22] [23].

Who can compel an answer

Charity regulators oversee mosque trusts and endowments, education authorities oversee supplementary schools, and the civil courts can also compel an answer. For the great state-appointed councils, accountability runs through the appointing state — asking the council to answer is asking the ministry.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Sunni Islam has no single legal system; the state supplies one. In Saudi Arabia a leading scholar was arrested in 2017 after declining to publicly back the state's position on Qatar, and prosecutors later sought the death penalty; in 2025 he remained in solitary confinement with his trial repeatedly postponed. In Malaysia the Federal Court ruled in 2007 that only a sharia court could recognize a woman's leaving Islam. In the UK you have full civil rights, but your marriage may not be civilly registered. Do you know whether yours is? Is your wife's or your daughter's?

09 Money

BEFORE YOU READ

Where the money comes from, how each flow is justified, how it can be used to control, and who benefits. Read it the way you would read any organization you give to: what is disclosed, what is not, and who decides.

Where it comes from

- Sunni institutions draw on the same giving as Islam generally, and add state salaries for clerics, Gulf endowments for institutions abroad, and the media economies of celebrity preachers.
- Madrasa networks in South Asia run on donations and offer free education — genuine service that also creates pipeline loyalty.

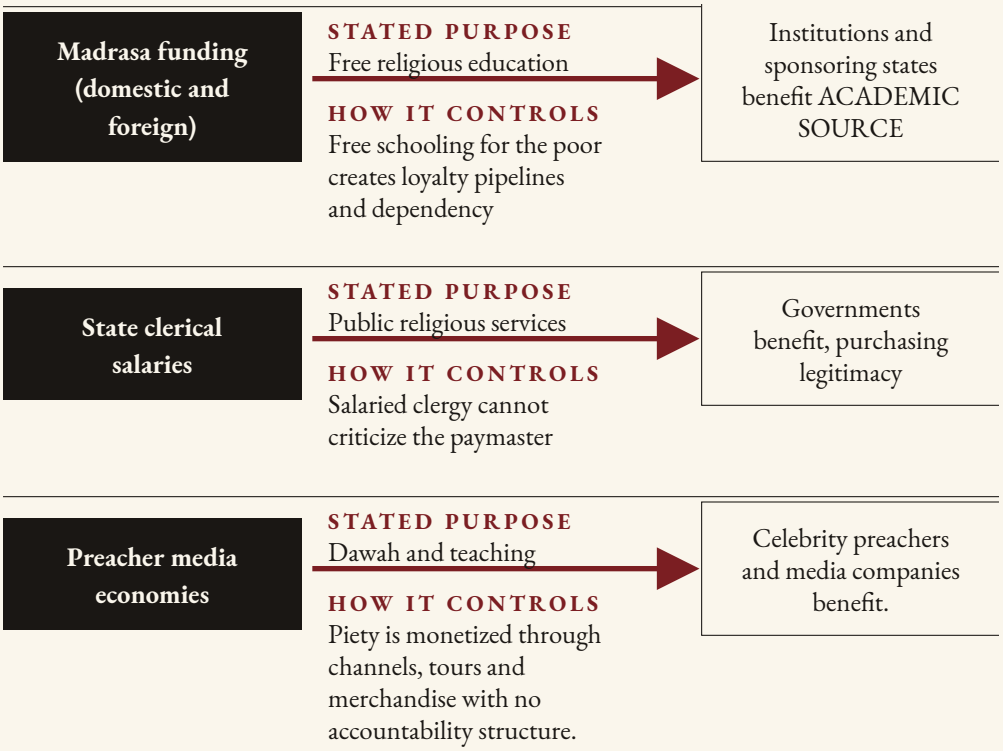
ACADEMIC SOURCE

Follow the money

FLOW	STATED PURPOSE	HOW IT CONTROLS	WHO BENEFITS
Mosque donations and building funds	Community worship space	Major donors gain informal veto over imams and sermon content	Boards, donors and their preferred interpretation benefit.
Madrasa funding (domestic and foreign)	Free religious education	Free schooling for the poor creates loyalty pipelines and dependency	Institutions and sponsoring states benefit ACADEMIC SOURCE
State clerical salaries	Public religious services	Salaried clergy cannot criticize the paymaster	Governments benefit, purchasing legitimacy OFFICIAL POLICY
Preacher media economies	Dawah and teaching	Piety is monetized through channels, tours and merchandise with no accountability structure.	Celebrity preachers and media companies benefit.

WHERE THE MONEY GOES, AND WHAT IT HOLDS





Not to scale. The table gives one figure, the German church tax of €6.75bn in 2025; the other flows are shown without amounts.

Pipelines this tradition shares

ZAKAT TO PATRONAGE

Source. The money comes from zakat, the obligatory alms paid at a fixed rate.

Path. State zakat board → Appointed distributors → Recipients and political constituencies

Disclosed. Collection totals are disclosed.

Hidden. Distribution criteria and discretionary awards are hidden.

CERTIFICATION FEE

Source. The money comes from ordinary businesses seeking certification that they comply with religious rules.

Path. Certifying agency → Scholarly supervisors → Advisory positions at certified firms

Disclosed. Certification status is disclosed.

Hidden. Fee schedules and advisory compensation are hidden.

PILGRIMAGE ECONOMY

Source. The money comes from a religious obligation with a fixed destination.

Path. Licensed operators → Host state revenue → Concession holders

Disclosed. Visa quotas and pricing are disclosed.

Hidden. Margins and concession awards are hidden.

STATE CLERICAL PAYROLL

Source. The money comes from public revenue.

Path. Religious affairs ministry → Licensed clergy → Sermon content approval

Disclosed. Headcount and budget are disclosed.

Hidden. How the sermon is drafted, and who approves it, is hidden.

HONOR AND MARRIAGE ECONOMY

Source. This economy runs on families managing their reputation.

Path. Matchmakers and community brokers → School admission and business trust → Conformity across the whole family

Disclosed. Nothing is disclosed.

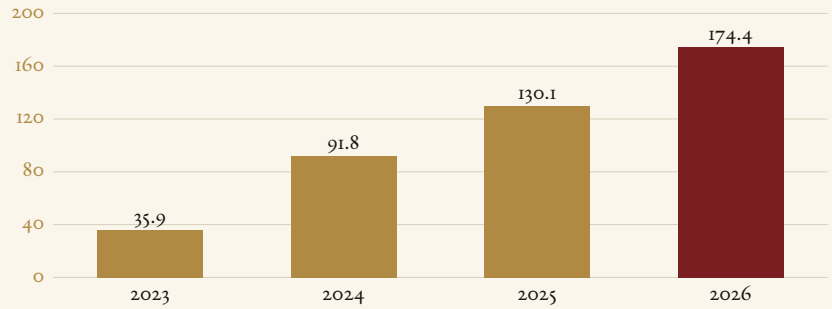
Hidden. Everything is hidden, because none of it is written.

Money in numbers

Most Sunni money is never published: zakat to individuals, sadaqa (voluntary charity), madrasa fees, and foreign institutional funding have no public ledger. Two state-run flows do publish numbers.

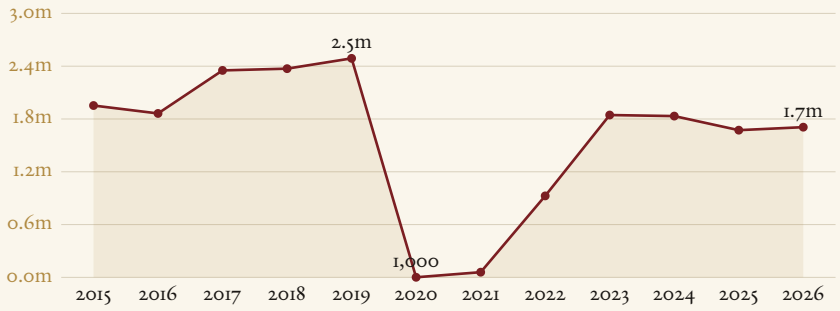
Madrasa networks in South Asia run on donations and offer free education — genuine service that also creates pipeline loyalty.

TURKEY'S DIYANET: CENTRAL-BUDGET FIGURES



billion lira (nominal) — Nominal lira during years of high inflation; the rise is real but smaller in constant terms. 2023 is the allocation in the budget law, before supplementary transfers. 2025 is the figure the Diyanet requested and the government proposed to parliament; the enacted figure is not recorded on this page. 2024 and 2026 are as reported for the central budget. [34] [35] [32] [33]

HAJJ PILGRIMS, 2015–2026



pilgrims — Quotas, fees and visas for the pilgrimage every able Muslim owes once are set by one state. [36]

- **Diyanet:** ₺35.9bn (2023, budget law) → ₺91.8bn (2024) → ₺130.1bn (2025, requested and proposed) → ₺174.4bn (2026) [32] [33] [34] [35].
- **Hajj:** 2,489,406 pilgrims in 2019; 1,000 in 2020; 1,673,230 in 2025; 1,707,301 in 2026 [36].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

On top of the giving every Muslim shares, the page adds state salaries for clerics, Gulf endowments for institutions abroad, and celebrity-preacher media economies. The say-do table records that states took over the endowments that once funded independent scholarship and replaced them with salaries, and gives Egypt's 1952 waqf nationalization as the documented case. When a scholar or a mosque abroad is funded by a foreign government, that is information you are entitled to. Does your mosque tell you who funds it?

10 Genealogy

BEFORE YOU READ

Rules with a history. Each card asks the same three questions: what was this rule originally for, has that reason expired, and who benefits from the rule continuing anyway?

SCHOLARLY AUTHORITY ABSORBED INTO STATE PAYROLL

Origin. The Ottoman state appointed a religious hierarchy under the Shaykh al-Islam, and colonial and post-colonial religious affairs ministries completed the process. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. Classical madhhab scholarship was independent because waqf endowments paid for it, not rulers. That independence let scholars rebuke kings — a genuine constitutional check.

Why that reason expired. States took over the endowments and replaced them with salaries; Egypt's nationalization of waqf property after 1952 is the documented case [66]. The check is gone, and nothing replaced it.

Who benefits now. Governments benefit, obtaining religious endorsement for policy at the price of a civil-service wage. The loss is yours: there is now no institution that can tell a ruler he is wrong.

FREE MADRASA EDUCATION AS LOYALTY PIPELINE

Origin. Medieval madrasas, funded by waqf, provided genuine mass education centuries before public schooling existed. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. It was real charity in a world with no alternative. Poor children learned to read.

Why that reason expired. Where curricula limited to hifz (memorizing the Qur'an) displace literacy, numeracy, and employable skills, the charity becomes a trap: a graduate whose only credential is religious is economically dependent on religious institutions for life.

Who benefits now. Sponsoring states and movements benefit, acquiring a generation with no exit options, and so do the institutions staffed by graduates who cannot work anywhere else.

GUARDIANSHIP OVER WOMEN'S MARRIAGE

Origin. Classical law required a wali (a male guardian) for the bride, in societies where women had no legal standing. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. A woman without contractual capacity needed a representative who was liable for the arrangement.

Why that reason expired. She now has contractual capacity in every field but this one. The Hanafi school itself permits an adult woman to contract her own marriage, which demonstrates the requirement was always contested, not divine consensus.

Who benefits now. Fathers and brothers benefit, retaining veto power over an adult woman's life, and so does the honor economy that makes her choices a family asset.

'HONOR' ENFORCEMENT OUTSOURCED TO FAMILY

Origin. It began with pre-Islamic tribal honor codes that survived Islamization and later acquired religious vocabulary. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. It served kin-group survival in stateless environments, where a family's reputation was its only security.

Why that reason expired. There are states, police, and courts. What remains is violence against women defended in religious language by people who cannot cite a text for it.

Who benefits now. Male relatives benefit, and so does every institution that gets free enforcement while truthfully insisting it never ordered anything. This is the purest example of cultural outsourcing in the codex.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The expired-reason test works on any rule. Take one you follow or enforce, name what it was originally for, and ask whether that reason still exists. If it doesn't, and the rule survives anyway, the section's last question is the one that matters to you: who benefits from it continuing?

11 Reach

BEFORE YOU READ

How far the institution's authority extends into three private areas: what members may read and hear, how children are raised and schooled, and decisions about their own bodies.

Information

- Official 'grand mufti' offices issue fatwas that track government policy closely; independent scholars who diverge face suspension, travel bans, or prosecution. **GOVERNMENT REPORT**
- Approved-scholar lists and 'don't take your religion from the internet' warnings function as source control, however reasonable the surface concern. **PATTERN OBSERVED**
- Diaspora communities may treat academic Islamic studies as inherently hostile, closing the only avenue for internal historical critique. **PATTERN OBSERVED**

Children

- Maktab (elementary Qur'an school) and madrasa instruction begins in early childhood, and in some systems full-time hifz displaces literacy, numeracy and employable skills. ACADEMIC SOURCE
- Physical abuse is documented, and so, in some residential madrasas, is sexual abuse with weak reporting pathways [67]. INVESTIGATIVE REPORT
- Gender segregation and modesty enforcement begin young; girls' schooling is curtailed in specific contexts, the extreme case being the Taliban's bans. GOVERNMENT REPORT

Bodies

- Only men may hold the imamate (leading prayer) for mixed congregations, and women's prayer space is often smaller, partitioned or absent, so that the architecture itself expresses hierarchy. PATTERN OBSERVED
- Marriage requires a male guardian's involvement for the bride in most schools, and polygyny is permitted for men.
- Forced and child marriage occur where religious marriage operates outside civil registration; the religious form is used to bypass state minimums. GOVERNMENT REPORT

- Domestic-violence verses and hadith are contested internally; conservative readings have been used to counsel women to endure.
  ACADEMIC SOURCE / FORMER MEMBER TESTIMONY

Sources for this section: 13 14 67

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a parent, this is the section about your children: what they may read, what they are taught about their bodies, and who else has a say in their schooling. Ask what your child would need to do at sixteen to hear the strongest case against what they were taught. Would they be allowed? Would they know it existed?

Diaspora communities may treat academic Islamic studies as inherently hostile, closing the only avenue for internal historical critique.



12

The 30 techniques

How the thirty techniques are established here

12	15	3
TAUGHT	CULTURAL	CONTESTED

STAGE 1 Idealize	1 Love Bombing **CULTURAL**	2 Weaponized Generosity **CULTURAL**		
STAGE 2 Hook	3 Future Faking **TAUGHT**	4 Hoovering **CULTURAL**		
STAGE 3 Devalue	5 Devaluation **TAUGHT**	6 Gaslighting **TAUGHT**	7 Double Bind **TAUGHT**	
STAGE 4 Confuse	8 Intermittent Reinforcement **CULTURAL**	9 Moving the Goalposts **CULTURAL**	10 Strategic Ambiguity **CULTURAL**	11 Projection **CULTURAL**
	12 DARVO **CULTURAL**	13 Normalization / Desensitization **CULTURAL**		
STAGE 5 Isolate	14 Isolation **CONTESTED**	15 Triangulation **CONTESTED**		

STAGE 6 Extract	16 Flying Monkeys **CULTURAL**	17 Smear Campaign **TAUGHT**	18 Silent Treatment / Stonewalling **TAUGHT**	19 Manufactured Consent **TAUGHT**
	20 Trauma Bonding **TAUGHT**	21 Learned Helplessness **CONTESTED**	22 Benevolent Control **TAUGHT**	23 Infantilization **TAUGHT**
	24 Identity Erosion **TAUGHT**	25 Spiritual Bypassing **TAUGHT**	26 Financial Control **CULTURAL**	
STAGE 7 Discard	27 Manufactured Crisis **CULTURAL**	28 Discard **CULTURAL**		
STAGE 8 Replace	29 Replacement **CULTURAL**	30 Plausible Deniability **CULTURAL**		

Thirty named techniques from domestic-abuse and social-psychology research, applied to institutions, in the eight stages of the cycle.

BEFORE YOU READ

A fixed checklist of thirty influence and control patterns from research on coercive control and social psychology, applied here to institutions rather than to individual people. Every entry carries an evidence grade. The grade matters more than the name of the technique: Codified or Documented means there is a paper trail; Contested means the claim is disputed.

Thirty named techniques from domestic-abuse and social-psychology research, applied to institutions, in the eight stages of the cycle. Each carries an evidence grade for this tradition.

Stage 1 · Idealize

You arrive with a need and are met with more warmth than you have had in years.

A convert or returnee is celebrated intensely — meals, mentorship, a place, a purpose, proof that the method works.

What it asks of you: Were you welcomed, or were you scored?

1 · Love Bombing

Overwhelming affection on arrival to create emotional dependency before terms are revealed.

How it shows here

- A convert is often quickly taught the "correct" prayer, "correct" creed, "correct" scholars, "correct" gender boundaries, and "correct" method — frequently before they understand the internal diversity of Islam.
- Salafi or conservative Sunni environments may greet the convert warmly, then immediately begin stripping away music, mixed friendships, holidays, clothing choices, dating habits, and independent interpretation.
- The person is celebrated as a trophy of dawah (inviting others to Islam): proof that Islam is spreading, proof that the community is righteous, proof that the method works.

The strongest defense. Teaching correct practice is necessary. Islam is not whatever the convert wants it to be.

The counter. Instruction is not the problem. The problem is speed plus dependency. When affection is front-loaded and correction follows immediately after attachment forms, the convert learns that love is available only through obedience.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Convert celebration and mentorship are community practice with no governing body.

2 · Weaponized Generosity

Giving help that installs unspoken obligation.

How it shows here

- Sunni communities may provide strong social infrastructure: mosque meals, Qur'an classes, rent help, funeral support, marriage networks, youth programs, and convert mentorship.
- Conservative environments may give practical help first, then attach it to "proper" practice: correct prayer, correct creed, correct scholars, correct dress, correct gender boundaries.
- A convert who receives community support may later be told that disagreement with the dominant interpretation shows arrogance, Western corruption, weak iman (faith), or disrespect for the Prophet.
- Family and mosque aid can become inseparable: help with housing, jobs, marriage, or childcare may be tied to visible conformity.

The strongest defense. Teaching correct Islam is part of caring for someone. A convert needs guidance.

The counter. Guidance becomes control when the guide also controls the food, friends, marriage prospects, and social belonging. If material and emotional support are used to accelerate conformity before the person understands Sunni diversity, then help is functioning as capture.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Meals, rent help, marriage networks and convert mentorship are given by local communities, and tying that help to conformity is local practice that no governing body directs.

Stage 2 · Hook

You are given a future that cannot be verified, and a rope for whenever you drift toward the door.

The future on offer is Paradise and the pleasure of Allah, deliverable after death. The rope is a retrieval network of relatives, matchmakers and community elders who begin calling the moment your attendance drops.

What it asks of you: The people retrieving you are not employees. They are family, which is exactly why the mechanism costs the institution nothing.

3 · Future Faking

Promising a future that keeps you invested but never has to arrive.

How it shows here

- Sunni institutions often frame salvation around correct creed, correct prayer, correct practice, correct scholars, correct law, correct community, and correct avoidance of innovation.
- The future promise is safety: stay with the saved group, follow the Sunnah, obey qualified scholars, avoid deviance, and you will be among those successful in the Hereafter.

- In stricter environments, the believer is told that tiny details may carry eternal significance: how you pray, dress, speak, eat, marry, celebrate, vote, shave, raise children, or interpret texts.
- The future keeps expanding into regulation. It is not enough to be Muslim. You must be the right kind of Muslim, under the right authorities, avoiding the wrong books, wrong sects, wrong friendships, wrong innovations.

The strongest defense. Sunni guidance preserves the Prophet's way and protects believers from misguidance.

The counter. Protection becomes future faking when salvation anxiety is used to keep people dependent on gatekeepers. If every ordinary decision is loaded with afterlife consequence, the believer never matures. The scholar becomes the map, the mosque becomes the checkpoint, and paradise remains the reward for staying inside the approved lane.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Salvation framed as staying with the saved group under approved scholars is preached and taught in sermons and study circles, without a body that issues the promise or answers for it.

4 · Hoovering

Pulling someone back after they've started to leave, through guilt, love, or fear.

How it shows here

- Someone leaving a Sunni community may be told to return to the Qur'an and Sunnah, stop following desires, avoid corrupt influences, and speak to a proper scholar.
- Conservative communities may frame doubts as ignorance, arrogance, Western brainwashing, liberal corruption, or influence from deviant sects.
- The person may be urged to attend halaqas (study circles), meet the imam, resume prayer, wear proper dress, leave "bad company," and re-enter the rhythm of the mosque.
- The hoover is often routed through religious correction: "You don't need to leave Islam. You just need proper knowledge."
- Family may push marriage, mosque attendance, or scholar consultation as a way to "stabilize" the doubter.

The strongest defense. Seeking knowledge and consulting scholars are normal parts of Sunni Islam.

The counter. Guidance is not neutral when the approved guides all lead back to the same conclusion. If every doubt must be processed through authorities whose job is to preserve your obedience, then "ask a scholar" means "return to the frame that made leaving impossible."

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL Retrieval is carried out by relatives and matchmakers, which is why no institution can be held to it.

Stage 3 · Devalue

You are taught that you are broken, that your perception is unreliable, and that both exits from the trap lead back inside.

Someone stricter is always the benchmark. Your practice is a bit lax, your creed a bit loose, your iman a bit weak — never stated harshly, always present.

What it asks of you: You are being measured against a standard that recedes as you approach it.

5 · Devaluation

Reducing your sense of worth so you become dependent on the institution for identity.

How it shows here

- Sunni environments can devalue by teaching that the ordinary believer is not equipped to interpret religion independently and must rely on scholars, madhhabs, hadith authorities, fatwas, and approved teachers.
- The believer is told that sincerity is not enough; they must have correct aqidah (creed), correct fiqh (jurisprudence), correct prayer, correct intention, correct dress, correct gender conduct, correct avoidance of bidʿah (innovation in religion).
- A person who questions may be accused of following desires, lacking knowledge, being arrogant, imitating the West, or disrespecting the Prophet.
- The self is made small before an enormous apparatus of correctness. The believer is never simply faithful; they are always at risk of error.
- Fear of misguidance keeps the person dependent on those who claim to know the safe path.

The strongest defense. Sunni scholarship protects people from ignorance and misinterpretation.

The counter. Protection becomes devaluation when it teaches adults that their conscience is dangerous unless filtered through approved authorities. If every independent moral alarm is dismissed as ignorance or desire, then scholarship has become a leash.

EVIDENCE GRADE

TAUGHT Deference to scholarly authority over personal judgment is taught in most institutional settings and disputed in others.

6 · Gaslighting

Making you doubt your own experience so you trust the institution's interpretation instead.

How it shows here

- A believer asks about conflicting hadith, harsh legal rulings, gender inequality, sectarian claims, or historical problems, and is told, "Ask people of knowledge," but only approved scholars count.
- If the answer does not satisfy them, the problem becomes their adab (proper manners toward scholarship), arrogance, lack of Arabic, weak iman, or contamination by Orientalists.
- A person's conscience may say a ruling is unjust, but the system says, "Allah knows better, and scholars know more than you."
- In stricter environments, doubt itself becomes suspicious: sincere questions are allowed only if they end in submission.

The strongest defense. Religious law is complex; laypeople need qualified scholarship.

The counter. Expertise is not gaslighting by itself. It becomes gaslighting when expertise is used to override conscience without accountability. If every moral objection is dismissed because you are not qualified, then scholarship has become a wall, not a light.

EVIDENCE GRADE

TAUGHT Telling a questioner to 'ask people of knowledge', and treating a lack of Arabic or adab as the problem, is repeated instruction in institutional teaching rather than a written rule.

7 · Double Bind

A trap where both options lead to compliance. No exit serves you.

How it shows here

- Sunni students are told to follow qualified scholars, not their own whims — and when scholars disagree, choosing between them is itself called 'fatwa shopping' or following desire. You must not interpret alone, and you must not choose among interpreters.
- Young Muslims are told marriage completes half the religion and delay is dangerous — while also told obedience to parents is paramount, even when parents block or force a match.
- Criticizing a celebrated shaykh is backbiting; staying silent about his documented harm is loyalty. The victim's speech is the only sin with a name.

The strongest defense. Deference to scholarship protects the religion from chaos and self-serving interpretation.

The counter. Protection from chaos does not require a system where the layperson is wrong whichever way they turn. When every path except passive deference has a disqualifying label, scholarship has become gatekeeping.

EVIDENCE GRADE

TAUGHT Both halves of each bind (follow qualified scholars but do not choose among them; marry early but obey parents who block the match) are taught from pulpits and in study circles, without a formal rule that joins them.

Stage 4 · Confuse

The rewards become unpredictable, the standard keeps moving, the answers stop meaning anything, and the accusation gets turned around.

Object and you are arrogant, Western-influenced, disrespecting scholars, or serving Islamophobes. The accusation is about your character, never the substance you raised.

What it asks of you: When 'who do you think you are' replaces an answer, you have your answer.

8 · Intermittent Reinforcement

Unpredictable reward that creates addictive emotional dependency.

How it shows here

- Students of a shaykh receive attention in unannounced portions — ijazah, front-row nearness, a public du'a (personal prayer) — and the competition for unpredictable favor disciplines a whole student body without a single command.
- Communities alternately celebrate the convert (Eid invitations, marriage interest) and forget him (unreturned messages, no one notices his absence) — and he intensifies practice to re-trigger the welcome that came free the first week.
- Strictness itself pays out intermittently: most days cost comfort with no visible return, then a dream, an answered du'a, a scholar's nod — one coin that funds another year at the machine.

The strongest defense. Scholars cannot mentor everyone equally; proximity naturally follows effort and adab.

The counter. Naturally unequal attention becomes a control instrument the moment it is the community's main currency and its rules are unstated. If effort truly earned nearness, the schedule would be learnable. It is kept unlearnable because unlearnable is what compels.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL A shaykh's uneven attention and a community's uneven welcome are informal social practice; no rule or body sets the schedule.

9 · Moving the Goalposts

The standard of success keeps shifting so you can never arrive.

How it shows here

- A believer is told to follow the Qur'an and Sunnah. Then they must follow the correct madhhab, correct aqidah, correct scholars, correct hadith interpretation, correct dress, correct gender rules, and correct avoidance of bid'ah.
- A person asks a scholar and follows the answer. Later they are told they asked the wrong scholar, followed a weak opinion, lacked adab, or misunderstood the ruling.
- Reformist or questioning Muslims are first told to seek knowledge. When they gain knowledge and still disagree, the standard moves to Arabic mastery, ijazah, classical training, or deference to tradition.

The strongest defense. Religious knowledge has levels; laypeople need qualified guidance.

The counter. Levels become a trap when qualification is defined so narrowly that disagreement is impossible. If no amount of study grants permission to dissent, "knowledge" is just a locked gate.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The shifting standard (the right madhhab, then Arabic, then an ijazah) is applied in conversation and community pressure, not in any published rule.

10 · Strategic Ambiguity

Language that sounds profound but means nothing specific — functioning as a shutdown to real questions.

How it shows here

- "Follow the scholars" sounds clear, but which scholars count often shifts depending on the desired answer.
- Bidʿah, modesty, proper aqidah, and correct adab can remain vague enough to discipline dissent without transparent boundaries.
- Communities say Islam is easy, then impose dense requirements around prayer details, dress, gender, sectarian boundaries, and speech.

The strongest defense. Sunni jurisprudence contains legitimate diversity and scholarly disagreement.

The counter. Diversity becomes strategic ambiguity when pluralism is invoked to soften criticism but narrowness is enforced on members. If options exist only when defending the system, not when freeing the believer, ambiguity is doing control work.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Terms such as bidʿah, modesty and adab are left undefined in community use, and no body publishes where their boundaries lie.

11 · Projection

Accusing the outside world of the exact thing the institution practices.

How it shows here

- Sunni gatekeepers may accuse questioners of following desires while protecting their own desire for authority, certainty, male control, and communal conformity.
- A believer who asks about harsh rulings may be told they lack knowledge, while scholars avoid admitting interpretive disagreement or political influence.
- Reformers may be accused of innovation while conservative institutions use modern fundraising, media, branding, and political machinery.
- Doubters are accused of Western influence while communities ignore the influence of patriarchy, nationalism, tribalism, or authoritarian culture.

The strongest defense. Sunni scholarship protects people from making religion up according to personal desire.

The counter. Scholarship becomes projection when every challenge is called desire but the institution never examines its own desires: control, reputation, uniformity, and immunity from scrutiny.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Accusing questioners of following desires or of Western influence is a community response to challenge; no ruling or procedure stands behind it.

12 · DARVO

Deny the wrongdoing. Attack the person who raised it. Reverse victim and offender.

How it shows here

- A person questions a scholar, imam, or institution over gender rules, abuse handling, financial misuse, or authoritarian control. The first response is denial: "You misunderstood the ruling," "That is culture, not Islam," or "The scholar did nothing wrong."
- Then comes attack: "You lack adab," "You follow desires," "You are influenced by the West," "You are spreading fitna" (discord).
- Then reversal: the scholar or mosque becomes the victim of slander, while the harmed person becomes a danger to community unity.
- Women challenging male authority may be accused of feminism, rebellion, immodesty, or trying to corrupt Muslim families.
- Dissent is treated as a spiritual threat greater than the original abuse.

The strongest defense. Islam requires evidence, due process, and protection from slander.

The counter. Due process is not DARVO. But if "bring evidence" is demanded from victims while leaders control the evidence, witnesses, reputation, and religious framing, then due process has become a locked courtroom where the accused owns the judge.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Accusations of arrogance and Westernization are social sanctions, not rulings, and carry no procedure or appeal.

13 · Normalization / Desensitization

Practices that would seem extreme to an outsider feel normal to insiders because they were installed before critical evaluation developed.

How it shows here

- Conservative Sunni environments can normalize constant correction: prayer posture, beard length, hijab standards, gender interaction, speech, music, celebrations, and "proper" aqidah.
- Believers may become desensitized to scholar dependency: if unsure, ask; if troubled, ask; if morally alarmed, ask; if the answer still feels wrong, your nafs (the lower self) or ignorance is the problem.
- Warnings against bid'ah, deviant sects, liberal Muslims, ex-Muslims, and Western influence can make intellectual narrowing feel like protection.
- Women and youth may gradually accept surveillance by family, mosque, and community as ordinary religious concern.

The strongest defense. Sunni practice preserves the Prophet's example through careful guidance.

The counter. Careful guidance becomes desensitization when correction never ends and autonomy never arrives. If the believer grows used to being watched, corrected, and redirected in every detail, the Sunnah has been turned into a surveillance habit.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Constant correction of dress, posture, speech and gender interaction is carried out by families and communities, not required by any governing body.

Stage 5 · Isolate

Your world narrows until every voice you hear is inside the system, and everything you came for now runs through a middleman.

The world narrows to approved scholars, approved reading, and warnings against the internet and academia. Marriage prospects and business trust run through the same network as your religious instruction.

What it asks of you: There is nowhere neutral to take a question. Notice that this was constructed, not inevitable.

14 · Isolation

Shrinking your world until the only voices you hear are inside the system.

How it shows here

- Sunni isolation can happen through approved-scholar ecosystems: listen to these shaykhs, follow this madhhab, avoid deviant sects, avoid liberal Muslims, avoid Shia, avoid ex-Muslims, avoid secular critics.
- A believer may be told that independent research is dangerous because they lack Arabic, hadith training, fiqh knowledge, or proper adab.

- Conservative Sunni communities may isolate through gender codes, dress expectations, mosque-centered life, marriage pressure, and suspicion of "Western" psychology, feminism, or secular education.
- The person is not always physically cut off; instead, their epistemic world is narrowed. Only certain scholars are safe. Only certain questions are sincere. Only certain conclusions are Islamic.

The strongest defense. Sunni tradition relies on qualified scholarship because religion is complex.

The counter. Expertise becomes isolation when it blocks access to competing interpretations. If the ordinary believer can only consult scholars already approved by the community, then "qualified knowledge" becomes a gated enclosure.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CONTESTED Approved-scholar lists and warnings against outside sources are movement-specific; the madhhab tradition itself cuts the other way.

15 · Triangulation

Inserting intermediaries between you and the thing you came for, so the institution is always in the middle.

How it shows here

- Sunni communities triangulate through scholars, madhhabs, hadith collections, fatwa sites, imams, parents, and approved teachers.

- A person with moral doubts is told, "Ask people of knowledge," but only certain scholars count. If they consult reformist or critical voices, they are accused of following desires.
- The believer is compared to the "saved sect," the pious predecessors, righteous scholars, modest sisters, obedient brothers, and those who "hold firmly to the Sunnah."
- Triangulation happens through sectarian fear: "Do not listen to Shia," "Do not listen to liberals," "Do not listen to Orientalists," "Do not listen to ex-Muslims."
- Gender conduct is triangulated through the community: one person's clothing, prayer, friendships, or marriage choices become everyone's business because they supposedly affect communal morality.

The strongest defense. Sunni Islam relies on scholarship to preserve correct belief and practice.

The counter. Scholarship becomes triangulation when it is used to outnumber conscience. If every authority you are allowed to consult is selected because it will return you to compliance, then you are not being educated. You are being boxed in by credentials.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CONTESTED Routing every doubt through approved scholars and sectarian warnings is specific to some movements; the diversity of the madhhabs offers the believer other routes.

Stage 6 · Extract

Now the harvest: your labor, your money, your identity, your silence, your children's schooling, your capacity to trust yourself.

Major donors to mosque building funds quietly select the imam. Free madrasa education leaves a graduate unemployable outside religious work. Clerics draw state salaries. An adult woman's marriage requires her guardian's signature. Object, and you are told you are arrogant and Westernized.

What it asks of you: A child who leaves school at eighteen unable to earn a living outside religious employment has not been educated. He has been retained.

16 · Flying Monkeys

The community enforces the institution's norms without being asked — mobilized by culture, not memos.

How it shows here

- A questioning Sunni Muslim may be told by multiple people to "ask a scholar," but only approved scholars are acceptable.

- Family, imam, halaqa friends, and online teachers may all converge: "You lack knowledge," "This is your nafs," "You are following desires," "Don't listen to liberals or ex-Muslims."
- Women who resist conservative gender expectations may be corrected by men, women, relatives, mosque teachers, and social media preachers.
- A person exploring other Islamic interpretations may be warned by others that they are falling into bidʿah, deviance, or Western corruption.

The strongest defense. Sunni Islam values seeking knowledge from qualified scholars.

The counter. Seeking knowledge becomes FLYING MONKEY pressure when "qualified" means "guaranteed to return you to obedience." If every friend, teacher, imam, and relative sends you back to the same approved authorities, scholarship is being used as crowd control.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Family, imam, friends and online teachers converging on the doubter is community enforcement; no body directs it or answers for it.

17 · Smear Campaign

Rewriting your character after departure to protect the institution from the implications of your leaving.

How it shows here

- Sunni dissenters may be smeared as followers of desires, liberals, deviants, Orientalist-influenced, ex-Muslim-influenced, ignorant, arrogant, or lacking adab.
- Reformers may be accused of bidʿah or trying to water down Islam.
- Women challenging gender restrictions may be smeared as Westernized feminists trying to destroy the family.
- Those who question scholars may be framed as disrespectful and unqualified, regardless of their actual evidence.

The strongest defense. Communities must protect correct belief and prevent confusion.

The counter. Protecting belief becomes smear when disagreement is treated as moral corruption. If the institution answers critique by labeling the critic deviant, it is not protecting truth. It is protecting control.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Labels for dissenters (deviant, liberal, lacking adab, Westernized feminist) are repeated from pulpits and online platforms, with no formal rule that sets them.

18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling

Refusing to engage with legitimate questions in order to maintain control.

How it shows here

- A believer asks about harsh rulings, abuse handling, gender inequality, or contradictory scholarly claims and is told to ask qualified scholars, but no answer is ever allowed to settle against the institution.
- Imams may avoid addressing community abuse publicly to prevent scandal.
- Women who report misconduct may be told to bring witnesses, preserve modesty, avoid gossip, and let elders handle it privately.
- Questions about power are absorbed into religious process: "Have adab," "be patient," "this is complex," "do not speak without knowledge."

The strongest defense. Islam requires evidence, caution, and qualified judgment.

The counter. Caution becomes stonewalling when power controls the evidence, witnesses, forum, and timeline. If every path to justice runs through those invested in avoiding scandal, the process is a maze, not a court.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Advice to bring witnesses, preserve modesty and let elders handle misconduct privately is repeated instruction, not written procedure.

19 · Manufactured Consent

Creating the appearance of choice when the conditions of choice were shaped before you could evaluate them.

How it shows here

- A believer "chooses" a ruling after being told only certain scholars count and disagreement is following desires.
- Women "choose" stricter dress or segregation in communities where nonconformity means gossip, suspicion, or reduced marriageability.
- A young person "chooses" religious marriage expectations after family, imam, and community define alternatives as haram (forbidden) or dishonorable.
- The layperson "consents" to legal authority because they are told they lack knowledge to disagree.

The strongest defense. Following qualified scholarship is responsible religious practice.

The counter. Guidance becomes manufactured consent when the range of acceptable guidance is preselected. If every approved scholar leads back to compliance and every dissenting scholar is labeled deviant, the believer's choice is staged.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT That only certain scholars count, and that disagreement is following desires, is taught in institutional settings; the conformity it produces is enforced socially.

20 · Trauma Bonding

The wound and the bandage come from the same hand.

How it shows here

- Conservative Sunni environments may cycle correction and acceptance: wrong prayer, wrong dress, wrong scholars, wrong gender conduct — then praise when the person aligns.
- The believer is warned about bidʿah, deviance, hell, weak iman, and following desires; relief comes through approved scholars, proper aqidah, and community acceptance.
- A doubter is made anxious about misguidance, then told safety lies in returning to the Sunnah as interpreted by approved authorities.
- Approval is intermittent: affectionate when compliant, corrective when independent.

The strongest defense. Sunni guidance protects people from error and helps them practice correctly.

The counter. Guidance becomes TRAUMA BONDING when correction destabilizes the person and approval restores them. If the community repeatedly creates anxiety about being wrong and then offers itself as the only safe path, dependency is not accidental.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Warnings of bidʿah, hell and misguidance, with relief offered through approved scholars and proper aqidah, are taught from pulpits and in study circles.

21 · Learned Helplessness

Teaching you that your own judgment is unreliable until you stop trusting it entirely.

How it shows here

- A believer seeks answers from scholars, but every unsatisfying answer leads to another scholar, another warning, another accusation of weak knowledge.
- A woman tries to comply with modesty expectations, but the standard keeps tightening.
- A young person tries to discuss doubts and is told they lack adab, Arabic, proper knowledge, or sincerity.
- Eventually they stop asking because asking only proves deficiency.

The strongest defense. Knowledge has levels, and religious questions require humility.

The counter. Humility becomes LEARNED HELPLESSNESS when no amount of learning permits moral agency. If the believer can never become qualified enough to object, scholarship has become a ceiling.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CONTESTED Deference to scholars over personal judgment varies enormously by school, country, and community, and is actively disputed internally.

22 · Benevolent Control

Control wrapped in the language of care, so that resisting the control feels like rejecting the love.

How it shows here

- Sunni authority often presents scholar dependency as protection from ignorance and misguidance.
- Communities may restrict which scholars, books, sects, or interpretations are safe.
- Gender separation, dress codes, and marriage restrictions are framed as preserving modesty and preventing fitna.
- A believer who questions may be told they are being cared for by being redirected to "people of knowledge."

The strongest defense. Ordinary Muslims need qualified scholarship to avoid error.

The counter. Scholarship becomes BENEVOLENT CONTROL when it narrows the believer's options before they can think. If only approved authorities are safe and all dissent is desire, care has become intellectual containment.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Presenting dependence on approved scholars as protection from misguidance is repeated in institutional teaching, without a written rule.

23 · Infantilization

Positioning the adult believer as permanently childlike and dependent on institutional authority.

How it shows here

- Laypeople may be told they cannot interpret texts, evaluate rulings, or follow conscience without scholars.
- Women may be treated as needing male guardianship, modesty correction, or community oversight.
- Young adults may be pressured into approved marriage paths because they are not trusted with desire.
- Questioners are redirected to authorities rather than engaged as capable adults.

The strongest defense. Religious knowledge is complex and requires qualified scholars.

The counter. Expertise becomes INFANTILIZATION when it denies adult agency. If no amount of study, conscience, or lived experience allows disagreement, scholarship has become parental control.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Teaching that laypeople cannot interpret texts without scholars is repeated instruction; the male guardianship the entry mentions is required by most schools' law.

24 · Identity Erosion

Gradually replacing your identity with a role the institution provides, until you can't separate who you are from where you belong.

How it shows here

- Sunni environments may define the person through correct aqidah, correct scholars, correct prayer, correct dress, correct gender conduct, correct avoidance of bid'ah, and correct community.
- The believer's own moral reasoning is reduced beneath scholar dependency.
- Personal conscience becomes suspect if it conflicts with approved fiqh.
- Women and young people may be absorbed into roles defined by modesty, obedience, marriage, and communal reputation.
- A person may stop asking, "Is this just?" and start asking, "Which approved scholar says this is allowed?"

The strongest defense. Sunni scholarship preserves guidance and protects believers from error.

The counter. Guidance becomes IDENTITY EROSION when it replaces conscience instead of forming it. If every meaningful choice must pass through approved authority, the believer's moral self has been outsourced.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Defining the believer by correct creed, dress and conduct under approved scholars is taught in institutional settings, without a formal rule.

25 · Spiritual Bypassing

Using spiritual language to avoid engaging with real pain, real questions, and real accountability.

How it shows here

- Legal or gender harm may be bypassed with "Allah knows best," "scholars know more," or "this is a test."
- Doubt is bypassed through warnings about nafs, Shaytan, arrogance, or corrupt sources.
- Abuse allegations may be redirected into adab, evidence rules, family privacy, or avoiding fitna.
- Psychological distress may be reduced to weak iman or lack of dhikr (remembrance of God).
- Moral alarm is spiritualized as ignorance.

The strongest defense. Sunni tradition teaches humility before revelation and scholars.

The counter. Humility becomes SPIRITUAL BYPASSING when it stops moral inquiry. If "Allah knows best" is used to end a conversation about human harm, divine mystery has been used to protect human power.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Phrases such as 'Allah knows best' and 'this is a test', used to close questions about harm, are repeated in religious instruction, not set down as policy.

26 · Financial Control

Extracting money through spiritual obligation while offering no transparency about where it goes.

How it shows here

- Sunni communities may financially pressure members through mosque fundraising, Islamic school tuition, scholar donations, conference fees, online courses, charity drives, and marriage costs.
- "Supporting the deen" (the religion) can become a moral obligation that makes refusal feel spiritually suspect.
- Conservative communities may financially isolate members by discouraging certain careers, loans, mixed workplaces, or secular education.
- Financial dependence on family or mosque networks can make dissent dangerous.

The strongest defense. Supporting scholars, mosques, schools, and charity preserves Islamic life.

The counter. Preservation becomes FINANCIAL CONTROL when money buys religious influence or silence. If donors shape authority and the dependent cannot safely disagree, the community has made obedience economically practical.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Major-donor influence over mosque appointments and sermon content is a widely reported pattern with no governing rule.

Stage 7 · Discard

You become expensive — too many questions, too much independence — and the urgency ramps up until you are removed.

Family withdraws, marriage prospects close, and you are labeled an apostate or a hypocrite. In some jurisdictions there is legal exposure. The community is small and total, especially in the diaspora.

What it asks of you: Nothing was announced. Everything changed. That is the mechanism working correctly.

27 · Manufactured Crisis

Creating urgency to suppress critical thinking and generate loyalty.

How it shows here

- Conservative Sunni spaces may manufacture crisis through bidʿah panic, sectarian warnings, fear of liberalism, fear of feminism, fear of ex-Muslims, and warnings against corrupt scholars.
- A believer asking questions may be treated as urgently at risk of misguidance.

- Gender boundaries are framed as crisis prevention: one conversation, outfit, friendship, or education choice could lead to fitna.
- Community leaders may use fear of deviance to centralize authority.

The strongest defense. Sunni tradition protects believers from misguidance and innovation.

The counter. Protection becomes MANUFACTURED CRISIS when ordinary inquiry is treated as spiritual emergency. If every alternative view is a threat and every question must be contained, scholarship has become crisis management.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Panic over bid'ah, deviance and fitna is raised by community leaders and conservative spaces, with no body that issues it or answers for it.

28 · Discard

Removing members who become too costly — too many questions, too much independence, too visible a contradiction.

How it shows here

- A Sunni believer who questions approved scholars, hadith, gender law, or sectarian boundaries may be labeled deviant, arrogant, ignorant, liberal, or corrupted.
- Someone who adopts different interpretations may be treated as unsafe to follow or befriend.

- Women who reject conservative expectations may lose marriage prospects, family approval, or mosque respectability.
- The community discards dissent by redefining the dissenter as outside proper knowledge.

The strongest defense. Communities must protect correct belief and avoid misguidance.

The counter. Correct belief becomes DISCARD when disagreement makes a person socially untouchable. If the community cannot distinguish sincere dissent from corruption, scholarship has become a sorting machine.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Costs of leaving are borne privately in family homes, which is exactly why institutions can truthfully deny imposing them.

Stage 8 · Replace

Your seat is filled before the door shuts, and nobody is responsible for any of it because the authority was attributed to God.

There is no membership roll and no vacancy, so nothing visibly changes — which is its own kind of answer. And the authority is God's, held by scholars whose salaries come from governments they cannot criticize.

What it asks of you: Ask who pays the man whose ruling you are told is God's. The answer is a matter of public record in most of these countries.

29 · Replacement

Your seat is filled before the door closes behind you.

How it shows here

- A questioning student is replaced by one who accepts approved scholars without resistance.
- A woman who loosens dress standards is replaced in community esteem by someone stricter.

- A reform-minded member is replaced by a loyal traditionalist in teaching or leadership circles.
- The community's ideal believer becomes whoever confirms the authority structure.

The strongest defense. Communities elevate people who model correct practice.

The counter. Modeling becomes REPLACEMENT when compliant people are used to shame dissenters. If the "good Muslim" is always the one who asks fewer threatening questions, piety has become an HR category.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Community esteem shifting to more compliant members is social practice, with no appointment rule or body behind it.

30 · Plausible Deniability

The institution is never responsible, because the authority is attributed to God — who isn't available for cross-examination.

How it shows here

- Sunni institutions can say, "Follow qualified scholars," then define "qualified" as scholars who preserve the accepted answer.
- A woman is not officially forced into a stricter standard, but family, mosque, marriage markets, and community gossip make the stricter standard socially necessary.

- A doubter is told to ask questions, but if questions persist, they are following desires, lacking adab, or listening to corrupt sources.
- Communities deny sectarian pressure while warning against deviant groups, liberals, reformers, ex-Muslims, Orientalists, feminists, or Shia sources.
- Harsh rulings are defended as scholarship when imposed, then softened as “one opinion” when criticized publicly.

The strongest defense. Sunni Islam contains scholarly diversity. Laypeople need guidance. Communities are protecting people from misguidance.

The counter. Diversity becomes PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY when it is advertised to outsiders but narrowed for insiders. Guidance becomes guardianship when adults are never allowed to reach a dissenting conclusion. Protection from misguidance becomes protection from scrutiny when every alternative is pre-labeled dangerous.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Divine authority is invoked by scholars whose salaries, in most jurisdictions, are a matter of public record.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Count grades, not names. A long list of Contested entries says something very different from a short list of Codified ones. A bias to watch for in yourself: people rate the same pressure as "normal" when their own group applies it and as "manipulation" when another group does. Before you judge an entry, try imagining it applied by a group you distrust. Does it look different?

13

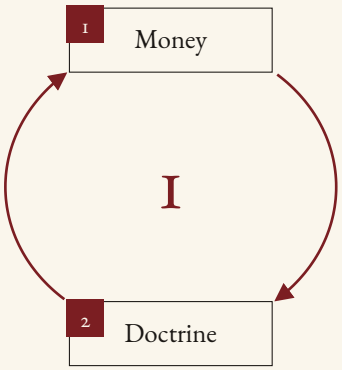
The loops

BEFORE YOU READ

How the techniques connect into cycles. A single practice can look harmless on its own. The loops show how one step feeds the next, so that, for example, a newcomer's welcome turns into an obligation.

> The seven loops below show how the practices connect, so that each step makes the next one easier and the last step feeds the first. The loops are analysis built from findings recorded elsewhere on this page PATTERN OBSERVED; each step names the section or technique where its fact is recorded.

1 · Money to Doctrine to Money



Free religious education is funded by donors who also determine the curriculum, producing graduates who staff the institutions that teach it.

How it runs.

1. Madrasa networks in South Asia run on donations, domestic and foreign, and offer free education (section 9).
2. Funding carries the funder's interpretation: sponsoring states benefit from madrasa funding, and Gulf foundations exported mosque, school and publishing infrastructure whose curriculum was a condition of the gift (sections 7, 9 and 16).

3. Where hifz-only curricula displace literacy, numeracy and employable skills, the graduate's only credential is religious (sections 10 and 11).
4. Such a graduate is economically dependent on religious institutions for life, and those institutions are staffed by graduates who cannot work anywhere else (section 10).
5. The graduates teach the same curriculum to the next intake, and the donors go on funding it (section 9, Follow the money).

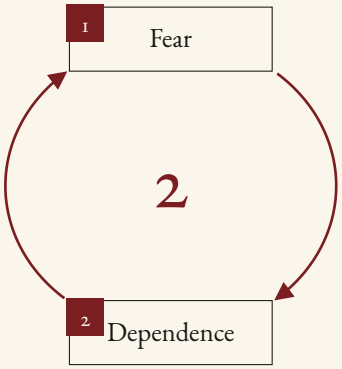
Techniques that feed it. 2 · Weaponized Generosity, 26 · Financial Control, 19 · Manufactured Consent, 21 · Learned Helplessness.

Why it closes. The graduate's only employer is the network that trained him, so the curriculum he teaches is the one he was taught, paid for by the same funders. No step requires anyone to decide to continue it.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where education authorities oversee what supplementary schools teach (section 8), where congregations refuse funding conditioned on curriculum (sections 18 and 20), and where parents require that a madrasa also teach reading, writing and arithmetic (section 17). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. In section 2, a man from the sponsoring foundation visits Yusuf's madrasa, and the new books that have arrived "say some things differently than the old books"; nobody remarks on it.

2 · Fear to Dependence to Fear



Fear of apostasy and family shame is installed young, relieved only by conformity, and transmitted by relatives at no institutional cost.

How it runs.

1. Religious instruction begins in early childhood, and gender segregation and modesty enforcement begin young (section 11).
2. The believer is warned about bidʿah, deviance, hell, weak iman and following desires, and relief comes through approved scholars, proper aqidah and community acceptance (technique 20).
3. A believer who asks questions is treated as urgently at risk of misguidance (technique 27).
4. Leaving carries the threat of eternal punishment, and the family is told its own salvation is implicated (section 15, The ledger of exit).
5. Relatives and community members do the enforcing while institutions issue nothing, and the retrieval network of relatives and elders begins calling the moment attendance drops (section 15; stage 2).

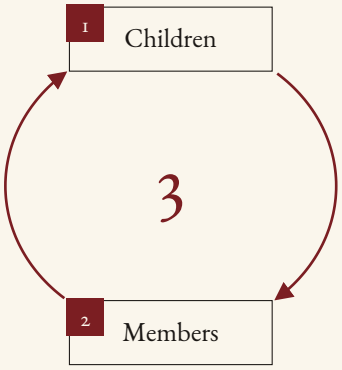
Techniques that feed it. 27 · Manufactured Crisis, 20 · Trauma Bonding, 16 · Flying Monkeys, 4 · Hoovering.

Why it closes. The only relief on offer is conformity, and the people who administer it are family. Because the family is told its own salvation is at stake, each generation has a reason to install the same fear in the next.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where a family treats a question as a question rather than an emergency, where teachers show that restrictive rulings are contested across the schools (section 20), and where support exists for Muslims who are staying as well as for those who leave (section 25). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. The ledger of exit in section 15 records family rupture as very common, and sets beside it the official denial: "Islam forbids compulsion in religion."

3 · Children to Members to Children



Madrasa pipelines produce adults who cannot earn outside religious employment, who send their sons to the same schools.

How it runs.

1. Free schooling draws children from poor families into maktab and madrasa instruction from early childhood (sections 9 and 11).
2. In some systems full-time hifz displaces literacy, numeracy and employable skills (section 11).
3. Boys in hifz-only schooling reach adulthood with no employable credential, which makes exit financially impossible (section 17).
4. Physical abuse, and in some residential madrasas sexual abuse, goes with weak reporting pathways, and families have been pressed to forgive the cleric (sections 11 and 14).
5. The graduate's family is honored for having a hafiz, and the institutions are staffed by graduates who cannot work anywhere else (sections 2 and 10).

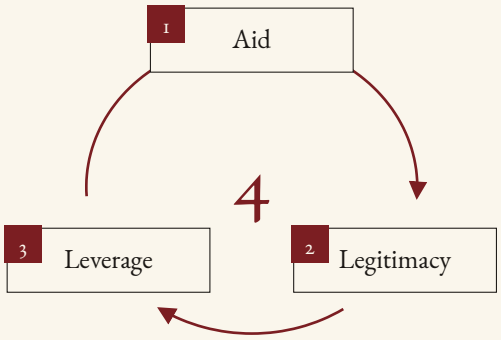
Techniques that feed it. 13 · Normalization / Desensitization, 19 · Manufactured Consent, 2 · Weaponized Generosity, 23 · Infantilization.

Why it closes. Each generation enters before it can weigh the choice and leaves unable to earn outside religious work. The honor attached to a hafiz gives the family a reason to choose the same school for the next son.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where parents ask whether a madrasa will also teach their son to read, write and count well enough to earn a living (section 17), and where madrasa teachers decline to teach in an institution with no external reporting route (section 18). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. In section 2, Yusuf, nineteen, can recite the entire Qur'an but cannot fill out a form in English, while his father says with real pride that his son is a hafiz.

4 · Aid to Legitimacy to Leverage to Aid



Exported religious infrastructure buys soft power for funding states, which sustains the funding.

How it runs.

1. From the 1970s, petro-funded mosque, school and publishing networks spread worldwide (section 5).
2. Communities received infrastructure they needed and an interpretation they did not select (section 16).
3. Exporting states purchase soft power through that infrastructure (section 16, Who benefits).
4. Official grand-mufti offices issue rulings that track state policy, turning scholarship into an instrument of foreign and domestic policy (sections 7 and 16).
5. State and royal charitable bodies go on funding the infrastructure abroad (section 7, Who holds what).

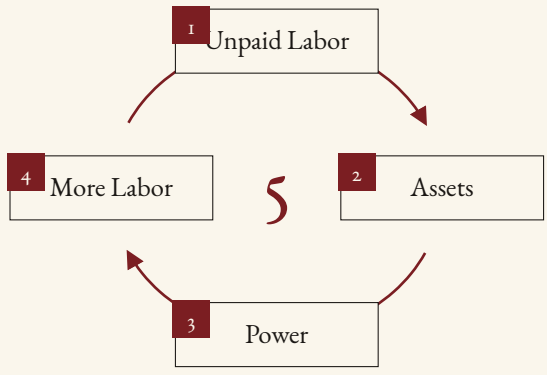
Techniques that feed it. 2 · Weaponized Generosity, 22 · Benevolent Control, 26 · Financial Control, 30 · Plausible Deniability.

Why it closes. The gift and the condition arrive together. The building earns the funding state goodwill, the curriculum carries its interpretation, and the influence that results gives the state a reason to keep funding.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where congregations fund their mosques locally and reject conditional foreign money, at the cost of slower growth (section 20), and where diaspora community boards decline funding conditioned on curriculum (section 18). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Section 16 records that decades of petro-funded mosques, schools and free literature gave communities worldwide infrastructure they needed: "The building is a gift; the curriculum is a condition."

5 · Unpaid Labor to Assets to Power to More Labor



Members' donations build the mosque, boards hold the property, and major donors gain an informal veto over imams and sermon content.

How it runs.

1. Members give to mosque donation and building funds for a community worship space (section 9).
2. In the diaspora, community boards hold the property and hire the staff (section 18).
3. Major donors gain an informal veto over imams and sermon content (section 9).
4. Local imams do everything for modest pay, between the ministry's directives and the donor's expectations (section 18).

5. Supporting the deen is framed as a moral obligation that makes refusal feel spiritually suspect, and the giving continues (technique 26).

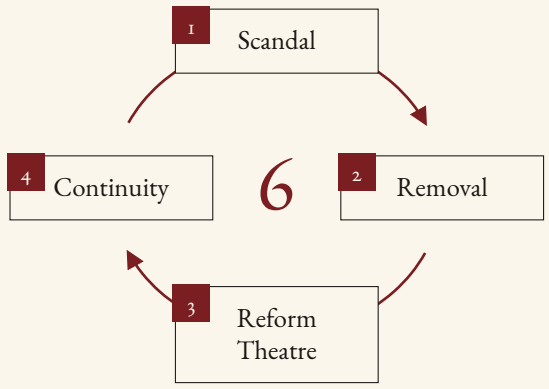
Techniques that feed it. 26 · Financial Control, 19 · Manufactured Consent, 16 · Flying Monkeys.

Why it closes. The people who give hold no office over what they built, and the boards and donors who do hold it decide who leads prayer and what is preached.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where charity regulators oversee mosque trusts and endowments (section 8), and where boards publish who funds the mosque and on what terms. This lies with community boards and donors. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Stage 6 records mosque building funds "where major donors quietly select the imam".

6 · Scandal to Removal to Reform Theatre to Continuity



Families are pressed to forgive, the community closes ranks, and no reporting policy is written.

How it runs.

1. Physical abuse, and in some residential madrasas sexual abuse, is documented, with weak reporting pathways (section 11).
2. Families of abused children have been pressed to forgive the cleric, and clerics have escaped conviction despite police reports (section 14).
3. Imams may avoid addressing abuse publicly to prevent scandal, and women who report misconduct may be told to bring witnesses, preserve modesty and let elders handle it privately (technique 18).
4. Family honor suppresses abuse reporting decisively (section 15, How the cost is denied).
5. In Pakistan no central body governs the madrasas or can investigate allegations, and the page predicts the school will reopen under a new head (section 14).

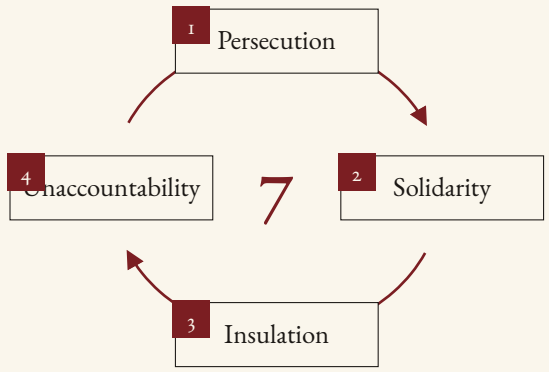
Techniques that feed it. 18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling, 12 · DARVO, 25 · Spiritual Bypassing, 17 · Smear Campaign.

Why it closes. The pressure to forgive falls on the family that reported, so the next family has a reason not to report, and no rule is written.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. Section 18 names madrasa teachers as able to refuse to teach in an institution with no external reporting route. Section 23 asks whether abuse in a religious school was reported to police. Outside that, section 14 predicts the next case will come from an outside journalist. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. In section 2, a teacher canes a boy for the third time that month, and Yusuf, who has seen it for twelve years, no longer registers it as an event.

7 · Persecution to Solidarity to Insulation to Unaccountability



Anti-Muslim hostility is genuine and is used to make any internal criticism into evidence for the enemy.

How it runs.

1. An objector is told they are arrogant, Western-influenced, disrespecting scholars or serving Islamophobes (stage 4).
2. Doubters are accused of Western influence, reformers of bidʿah, and women who challenge gender restrictions of Westernized feminism (techniques 11 and 17).
3. Diaspora communities may treat academic Islamic studies as inherently hostile, closing the only avenue for internal historical critique (section 11).
4. Raising a problem inside the community is itself treated as the offence, 'fitnah in the ranks' (section 14, Words used here).
5. Members are taught that raising these things helps the enemies of Islam, and the question ends before any evidence is examined (section 23).

Techniques that feed it. 17 · Smear Campaign, 11 · Projection, 12 · DARVO, 27 · Manufactured Crisis, 14 · Isolation.

Why it closes. Every criticism, internal or external, is sorted as hostility, so the more criticism arrives the stronger the case for closing ranks becomes.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens when critics inside the tradition are heard as insiders: section 21 records women scholars, jurists and a mass organization raising these questions from within, and section 5 records that the founding precedent for independence from the state, Ahmad ibn Hanbal's refusal, belongs to the tradition itself. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd was declared an apostate for his scholarship on the Qur'an and ordered separated from his wife (section 19).

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The loops explain why good people stay in arrangements they would never sign up for from scratch. The more you have already put in, the harder it is to walk away. Researchers call this the sunk-cost effect (Arkes & Blumer, 1985), and it works on time, money and relationships alike. Ask yourself: if you were starting today, knowing what you know, would you join?

The seven loops below show how the practices connect, so that each step makes the next one easier and the last step feeds the first.

14 Say versus do

BEFORE YOU READ

Direct, checkable comparisons: a public statement on one side, the documented record on the other, and the receipt that links them. This is the most falsifiable section on the page, because each row either matches its source or it doesn't.

In Pakistan no central body governs the madrasas, and none can investigate or respond to abuse allegations.

What they say, what the record shows

THEY SAY	THE RECORD SHOWS	RECEIPT
Scholars are independent of rulers.	States took over the endowments that funded scholarly independence and replaced them with salaries. Egypt's nationalization of waqf property after 1952 is the documented case [66].	ACADEMIC SOURCE
We follow the consensus of the scholars.	The consensus cited is usually one school's position, and the disagreeing schools are not mentioned.	ACADEMIC SOURCE
Honor violence has nothing to do with Islam.	The statement is correct, and many scholars say so plainly. The mechanism is legal, not doctrinal: where qisas-and-diyat law (retaliation, or compensation paid to the victim's heirs) lets a victim's heirs pardon a killer, a family that kills one of its own can also forgive itself. Pakistan narrowed this only in 2016.	OFFICIAL POLICY · Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or Pretext of Honour) Act 2016, Pakistan

Accountability or theatre?

Last time the chair ran. Families of abused children have been pressed to "forgive" the cleric, and police say clerics have escaped conviction despite police reports [67].

Who holds the chair now. In Pakistan no central body governs the madrasas, and none can investigate or respond to abuse allegations [67].

Prediction. The next case will be reported by an outside journalist, the argument will be about the journalist, and the school will reopen under a new head.

Words used here

TERM	WHAT IT MEANS INSIDE	WHAT IT DOES	SAID PLAINLY
Ijma / the consensus of the scholars	Agreement of qualified scholars, a recognised source of law.	Invoked to close questions where consensus is in fact contested — and where the scholars in question were appointed by a ministry.	'Everyone agrees, and I will not be listing who.'
Ulama / the people of knowledge	The scholarly class.	A genuine and demanding tradition of learning. The accountability question is upstream: in most of the modern world, who accredits them is a state.	'Defer to the scholars — and do not ask who appoints the scholars.'
Fitnah in the ranks	Discord raised within the community.	The specific form used against internal reformers, as distinct from external critics.	'Raising this here is the offence.'

Sources for this section: [1] [66] [67]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Test one row yourself. Pick a "they say" line you have actually heard said in person, then read the receipt. If the record matches the statement, this page is wrong about that row, and you should tell us. If it doesn't, what does it mean that you had never seen the receipt?

15 Cost & cover

BEFORE YOU READ

What leaving actually costs here, in family, work, housing, money and legal status, and how each of those costs is officially denied. Where the cost is low, the page says so plainly.

What leaving costs

- Community and family enforcement typically exceeds institutional enforcement; leaving or liberalizing costs marriage prospects, family standing, and in diaspora communities, one's entire social base.

  VARIES BY COMMUNITY

The ledger of exit

COST	DOCUMENTED?	DETAIL	THE OFFICIAL DENIAL
Family rupture	Very common	Family support, marriage prospects and, in practice, inheritance are withdrawn.	“Islam forbids compulsion in religion.”
Community standing	Yes	The person is labeled an apostate, Westernized or a hypocrite, and diaspora networks are tightly knit.	“That's just people's opinions.”
Legal risk	Jurisdiction-dependent	Apostasy or blasphemy statutes may apply, with personal-status consequences for custody and marriage.	“Those are national laws, not religion.”
Spiritual threat	Yes	Eternal punishment is threatened, and the family is told its own salvation is implicated.	“A sincere warning.”

How the cost is denied

CHANNEL	LEVEL	NOTE
Explicit policy	Medium	Legal-school rulings are published; enforcement mechanisms usually are not.
Informal enforcement	High	Family, neighborhood, and marriage-market pressure carry the load.
Leadership distance	High	There is no pope and no synod, so no one is accountable for the aggregate.
Doctrinal ambiguity	High	Any practice can be relocated to another madhhab or 'culture.'
Cultural outsourcing	High	Honor codes, FGM (female genital mutilation), and forced marriage are attributed to local custom.
Volunteer enforcement	High	Relatives and community members enforce; institutions issue nothing.
Sacred secrecy	Medium	Family honor suppresses abuse reporting decisively.
Exit cost denial	High	'No compulsion in religion' is quoted while the actual costs are borne privately.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The page records that community and family enforcement usually exceeds anything institutional. Leaving, or simply becoming more liberal, can cost marriage prospects, family standing and, in diaspora communities, a person's entire social world. If someone in your family started asking questions, would they come to you, or would they hide it from you? What does your answer say about the cost here?

16 The ledger

BEFORE YOU READ

The balance sheet. It shows who benefits, who pays, and what leverage flows back to the institution in return for what it gives.

Who benefits

- Exporting states benefit, purchasing soft power through religious infrastructure. ACADEMIC SOURCE
- Official clerics benefit, because their salaries and platforms depend on endorsing power, and so do media preachers who monetize piety

through satellite channels and speaking fees.

- Patriarchal family structures benefit, gaining doctrine-backed authority over women's and children's choices. PATTERN OBSERVED

Money out, leverage back

- Decades of petro-funded mosques, schools, and free literature gave communities worldwide infrastructure they needed and an interpretation they did not select. The building is a gift; the curriculum is a condition. ACADEMIC SOURCE
- Official grand-mufti offices issue rulings that track state policy, converting scholarship into foreign and domestic policy instruments. GOVERNMENT REPORT
- Satellite and online preachers monetize piety at scale with no scholarly accountability structure — audience size replaced ijaza as the credential. PATTERN OBSERVED

Who pays

- Women pay, in guardianship, divorce, mosque access and domestic-violence counseling.
- Children in unregulated residential madrasas pay.
- Independent scholars pay, silenced for diverging from official positions.

- Doubters and ex-Muslims pay, losing family and, in some states, legal safety.
- Sufi and minority communities pay, targeted by purist movements.

GOVERNMENT REPORT

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Find yourself in this table. Are you among those who benefit, those who pay, or both? Most readers are both. The question is whether the exchange was ever explained to you in these terms, and whether you would agree to it if it had been.

17 Who gets hurt most

BEFORE YOU READ

Where the weight lands hardest, and what it compounds with: poverty, childhood, gender, a lack of civil alternatives. This is the human stakes stated plainly.

Where the weight lands

The costs in section 15 do not fall evenly. They fall hardest where a person has the least power inside the institution and the fewest places to go outside it. The table names who carries the most, how, and what makes it worse.

WHO	HOW	WHAT IT COMPOUNDS WITH
Women	They face guardianship over marriage, exclusion from the mosque by its architecture, and counsel to endure domestic violence.	It compounds with economic dependence and the absence of civil family law.
Boys in hifz-only schooling	They reach adulthood with no literacy, numeracy or employable credential.	It compounds for life, and it makes exit financially impossible.
Independent scholars	They face suspension, travel bans and prosecution for diverging from official positions.	It compounds with the loss of the only career they trained for.
Sufi and minority communities	They are targeted by purist movements with funded infrastructure.	It compounds where the state sides with the funders.
Girls whose schooling is curtailed	In specific contexts they are withdrawn from school at puberty.	It compounds into early marriage and permanent dependence.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The table names women (under guardianship over marriage, mosque exclusion by architecture, and counsel to endure domestic violence), boys in hifz-only schooling who reach adulthood without literacy or an employable credential, independent scholars, Sufi and minority communities, and girls withdrawn from school at puberty. If you are a parent choosing a madrasa, ask: will my son also learn to read, write and count well enough to earn a living if he ever wants to?

18 The middle tiers

BEFORE YOU READ

The people in the middle: local clergy, teachers, officials and volunteers who apply rules they did not write. The section exists so that an institution is not collapsed into a monolith, and so that people in the middle can see their own position in it.

Most of the tradition's daily work is done below the councils and ministries, by people who see decisions without making them. Local imams, madrasa teachers, matchmakers and family elders, and the boards that run diaspora mosques each carry part of the load, and each stands at one point where the next decision could be declined. The table sets

out what each tier does, what it sees, what it is asked to do and where it could refuse.

ROLE	DOES	SEES	IS ASKED TO	COULD REFUSE
Local imams	Do everything, for modest pay	The ministry's directives and the donor's expectations	Keep the community calm	Present a single school's ruling as the whole of Islam
Madrasa teachers	Teach memorization to children for long hours	Which pupils are being harmed	Maintain discipline and discretion	Teach in an institution with no external reporting route
Matchmakers and family elders	Operate the marriage market that enforces most of the conformity here	Which families are being coerced	Protect reputations	Broker a marriage the woman has not freely agreed to
Community boards in the diaspora	Hold the property and hire the staff	How foreign funding arrives with expectations	Take the money	Accept funding conditioned on curriculum

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a local leader, a teacher or a volunteer, this section is about you. It is not an accusation: most of the people who carry out a rule did not write it. But the middle tier is also where a rule is most often quietly softened, or quietly enforced. Which do you do, and what would happen to you if you chose differently?

19 Documented cases

BEFORE YOU READ

Named, dated, sourced incidents: court records, government inquiries, regulators' findings and on-the-record reporting. Read the outcome lines in particular. They show what actually changed, if anything.

The professor declared an apostate (Egypt, 1993–1996)

WHEN: 1993–1996

WHAT: Lawyers used hisba — a suit on behalf of public morals — to have Cairo University professor Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd declared an apostate for his scholarship on the Qur'an. The Cairo Court of Appeal ordered him separated from his wife in June 1995; the Court of Cassation upheld the dissolution in August 1996. The couple left Egypt [27].

RECORD: Cairo Court of Appeal (14 June 1995); Court of Cassation (1996) [27]

OUTCOME: Egypt narrowed hisba standing in 1996, but the ruling stood [27].

TACTICS: 17 · Smear Campaign, 14 · Isolation, 28 · Discard

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The blasphemy death sentence overturned (Pakistan, 2010–2018)

WHEN: 2010–2018

WHAT: Asia Bibi, a Christian farmworker, was sentenced to death under s. 295-C in 2010 after a dispute with Muslim co-workers; the Lahore High Court upheld it in 2014. The Supreme Court acquitted her on 31 October 2018, finding contradictory evidence and a late complaint [28].

RECORD: Supreme Court of Pakistan (31 Oct 2018); review petition dismissed Jan 2019 [28]

OUTCOME: Nationwide protests led by a religious party followed the acquittal; she left the country [28].

TACTICS: 16 · Flying Monkeys, 27 · Manufactured Crisis, 17 · Smear Campaign

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

A pardon for an honour killing (Pakistan, 2016–2022)

WHEN: 2016–2022

WHAT: Social-media figure Qandeel Baloch was killed by her brother in July 2016. He was sentenced to life in 2019; in February 2022 the Lahore High Court freed him after their parents pardoned him — although a 2016 law had removed the heirs' pardon for honour killings, the protection applies only when a court classifies the killing as one [1][2][3].

RECORD: Lahore High Court (14 Feb 2022) [3]

OUTCOME: The loophole the 2016 reform left open was used against its own headline case [2][3].

TACTICS: 30 · Plausible Deniability

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The cleric facing the death penalty (Saudi Arabia, 2017–present)

WHEN: 2017–present

WHAT: Salman al-Awda, one of the kingdom's best-known scholars, was arrested in September 2017 after declining to publicly back the state's position on Qatar. Prosecutors sought the death penalty on 37 charges in 2018; in 2025 he remained in solitary confinement with his trial repeatedly postponed [13] [14] [51]. The charges included Muslim Brotherhood affiliation and calls for government reform [68].

RECORD: Specialized Criminal Court proceedings, as reported by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty [14] [51]

OUTCOME: Unresolved as of the last public report (Amnesty, 2025) [51].

TACTICS: 18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling, 17 · Smear Campaign

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

A governor jailed for blasphemy (Indonesia, 2016–2017)

WHEN: 2016–2017

WHAT: Jakarta's Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama ("Ahok"), said voters were being deceived by the use of a Qur'anic verse against him. After mass rallies, the North Jakarta District Court convicted him of blasphemy (Art. 156a) on 9 May 2017 and sentenced him to two years — more than the prosecutors had asked for [29].

RECORD: North Jakarta District Court (9 May 2017) [29]

OUTCOME: He served his sentence, and Indonesia's 2023 Criminal Code kept a blasphemy offence [30].

TACTICS: 16 · Flying Monkeys, 27 · Manufactured Crisis, 12 · DARVO

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The convert the civil courts would not hear (Malaysia, 2007)

WHEN: 2007

WHAT: Lina Joy, born Muslim, converted to Christianity and asked the registration department to remove "Islam" from her identity card so she could marry. The Federal Court ruled 2–1 on 30 May 2007 that only a syariah court could recognize her leaving, under Article 121(1A) [31].

RECORD: Federal Court of Malaysia, *Lina Joy v Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan* (2007) [31]

OUTCOME: Exit from Islam in Malaysia runs through the institution being left.

TACTICS: 14 · Isolation, 21 · Learned Helplessness, 7 · Double Bind

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

These are not hypotheticals. Six documented cases on this page rest on a named record. The most common reaction to documented cases is "that was them, not us." Before settling on that, read the outcome lines. Did anything change in the structure that allowed each case to happen, or did one person leave while the structure stayed?

20 Precedent

BEFORE YOU READ

What has already been broken once, somewhere, and what would count as real change here. It is a benchmark, not a prediction.

It has been broken before

WHAT	WHO	WHEN	WHAT IT COST
Scholars in the classical tradition refused state payroll to preserve their independence.	Centuries of jurists	Historic	It cost them poverty and periodic imprisonment.
Contemporary teaching on the diversity of the madhhabs shows that restrictive rulings are contested.	Traditionalist scholars and academics	Ongoing	It has drawn accusations of laxity.
Locally funded mosques have rejected conditional foreign money.	Diaspora congregations	Ongoing	It cost them slower growth.
Indonesia raises the minimum marriage age to 19 for both sexes	Child-marriage survivors whose petition won a 2018 Constitutional Court ruling	2019	Religious courts' dispensations for underage marriage rose sharply in the years that followed

What would change this page

A major state-appointed council publicly ruling against its appointing government's interest — and surviving intact — would revise the capture finding this page rests on.

Sources for this section: [4] [5]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Some rows here record a change that has already happened somewhere; others name what would count as change here. When you are told something "can't change", it is fair to ask: can't, or won't? And who decided?

21 Voices from inside

BEFORE YOU READ

People from inside Sunni Islam who raised the hard question publicly, often at real cost. They answer the objection that criticism only ever comes from outsiders.

- **Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855).** Refused the caliph's doctrinal test, was flogged and imprisoned, and did not recant; the inquisition was

abandoned in 848 [49]. He is the tradition's own precedent for independence from the state.

- **The Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI), 2017.** Hundreds of women scholars met in Cirebon and issued fatwas declaring child marriage harmful and its prevention obligatory, and against marital rape [37].
- **Sisters in Islam and Musawah.** Sisters in Islam is a Malaysian group that has worked for women's rights from inside the Islamic framework since the 1980s. It initiated Musawah, the global movement for equality in Muslim family law, launched in Kuala Lumpur in February 2009 [40] [41].
- **Khaled Abou El Fadl.** He is a jurist trained in Egypt and Kuwait who argues, in *Speaking in God's Name* (2001), that authorities misuse divine law against women and others [38].
- **Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im.** He argues in *Islam and the Secular State* (2008) that sharia can only be followed freely, never enforced by a state [39].
- **Salman al-Awda.** Arrested in 2017 after declining to publicly back the state's position on Qatar, he faces a death-penalty prosecution on 37 charges, including Muslim Brotherhood affiliation and calls for government reform; as of 2025 his trial had been repeatedly postponed [13] [14] [51] [68].
- **Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.** Kept publishing after a court declared him an apostate [27].
- **Nahdlatul Ulama.** The world's largest Muslim organization replaced its chair through a contested delegate vote in 2021 [17]. In November 2025 its supreme council declared that chair dismissed, and a January 2026 plenary restored him [62]; in August 2026 its congress moved the choice of chair from a delegate vote to a nine-member council of senior scholars [63].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Were these people traitors, or the most loyal members their tradition had? Most were treated as the first at the time, and some are honored as the second now. If someone in your community raised one of these questions tomorrow, how would they be treated, and by you?

22 Regional variants

BEFORE YOU READ

The same tradition under different governments. What a member can say, leave, marry or inherit depends heavily on the state, and these cards show how differently it plays out.

United Arab Emirates

APEX: Awqaf (the General Authority of Islamic Affairs, Endowments and Zakat) issues one Friday sermon for every mosque, at a time fixed nationwide since January 2026 [24]. The UAE Council for Fatwa, formed in 2018 and chaired by Abdallah bin Bayyah, is the official fatwa authority and supervises fatwas by other bodies [21].

LAW: Blasphemy is a crime: Decree-Law 34/2023 sets a minimum of one year for insulting religions or their rites (Art. 4) [65]; the matching article of the 2021 Crimes and Penalties Law [19] is not confirmed on this page. Hudud — the basis for a death sentence for apostasy — were removed from the penal code in 2020 [69]. The 2024 Personal Status Law (in force April 2025) sets marriage at 18, lets a court marry an adult woman over her guardian's objection, and extends maternal custody to 18 [22 23].

DOCUMENTED Reform has come by decree, fast and real, and the sermon, the fatwa and the family court all sit inside government [21 22 24].

EXIT: The provisions cited here punish insulting religion or its rites, not private belief, so disclosure, not belief, is usually the legal event [65].

REGULATOR: Complaints go to the federal and emirate courts and to Awqaf. For abuse in Dubai, the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children runs a 24-hour helpline, 800111 [46].

TELL: The Gulf's most reform-minded family law and its most centralized pulpit are the same fact: the reforms arrive by decree, and so could their reversal.

Saudi Arabia

APEX: Grand Mufti Saleh al-Fawzan, appointed by royal order on 22 October 2025, chairs the Council of Senior Scholars, whose members sit by royal appointment

[10].

LAW: Apostasy can carry the death penalty [50]. Women over 21 may obtain passports and travel without a guardian's permission since 2019 [25].

DOCUMENTED: Clerics have been detained since 2017, including one facing a death-penalty prosecution [13][14][51].

EXIT: Leaving carries the highest legal risk on this page.

REGULATOR: There is no independent body; UN human-rights experts report on the kingdom [60].

TELL: When the fatwa chair is filled by royal order, "the scholars say" and "the state says" are one sentence.

Egypt

APEX: The apex is the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, appointed by the president in 2010. Since 2012 the law gives the choice of a Grand Imam to al-Azhar's Council of Senior Scholars, and the 2014 Constitution makes the office irremovable [8][9].

LAW: The principles of sharia are the main source of legislation (Art. 2); "contempt of religion" carries up to five years (Art. 98(f)) [8][26].

DOCUMENTED: Blasphemy prosecutions of converts and Christians continued into 2026 [26]; a court once dissolved a scholar's marriage for apostasy [27].

EXIT: Leaving carries no criminal penalty, but personal-status law follows religion, as a court showed when it dissolved a scholar's marriage [27].

REGULATOR: Complaints go to the courts, which are also the enforcement route [26][27].

TELL: The only irremovable Sunni chair on this page sits in a state that prosecutes blasphemy — independence of the office is not freedom of the believer.

Turkey

APEX: The apex is the Diyanet, headed by Safi Arpaguş since September 2025 [11].

LAW: A secular constitution with a state religious presidency; the Diyanet's budget is a line in the state budget [32] [33]; insulting religious values carries up to a year (Art. 216(3)) [61].

DOCUMENTED: The Diyanet has a budget of ₺174.4bn for 2026 [33] and a domestic network of some 93,000 mosques [12].

EXIT: Leaving carries no legal penalty; the costs are social and familial.

REGULATOR: Parliament votes the budget; that is the lever [32] [33].

TELL: A secular republic runs one of the largest mosque payrolls in the world — and publishes it, which is more than most religious bodies do.

Pakistan

APEX: There is no single mufti; the state's religious courts and councils share authority.

LAW: Defiling the Prophet's name carries a mandatory death sentence (s. 295-C) [28]. For honour killings, the 2016 law removed the heirs' pardon, but only where a court classifies the killing as honour-based [1] [2].

DOCUMENTED: The record includes the Asia Bibi acquittal (2018) and the acquittal of Qandeel Baloch's brother after their parents' pardon (2022) [3] [28].

EXIT: Leaving carries a very high legal risk; even the 2018 acquittal was met with nationwide protests [28].

REGULATOR: The superior courts — which acquitted Asia Bibi — are the working check [28].

TELL: The highest court overturned a blasphemy death sentence, and the country shut down in protest. The law is only half the machinery; the crowd is the other half.

Indonesia

APEX: There is no state mufti; MUI issues fatwas [6]. The two mass organizations choose their own leaders: Muhammadiyah by delegate ballot [64], and Nahdlatul Ulama, since its August 2026 congress, through a nine-member council of senior scholars rather than a delegate vote [17] [63]. Their followings are given in [18].

LAW: The 2023 Criminal Code (in force January 2026) keeps blasphemy (up to 3 years) and adds up to 2 years for publicly inciting others to have no religion [30]. The minimum marriage age has been 19 since 2019 [4].

DOCUMENTED: Religious courts' dispensations for underage marriage rose from 23,126 (2019) to 64,211 (2020) [5], and a governor was jailed for blasphemy in 2017 [29].

EXIT: Leaving is legally possible between recognised religions; atheism is socially and legally exposed [30].

REGULATOR: Oversight rests with the religious courts, the Constitutional Court (which heard the child brides' petition) and Komnas Perempuan (the National Commission on Violence against Women) [4] [5].

TELL: The world's largest Muslim country has the world's largest Muslim organizations, which choose their own leaders — and a religious court that grants tens of thousands of child-marriage dispensations.

Malaysia

APEX: State religious councils and muftis hold authority, and the ruler of each state is the head of Islam there.

LAW: Syariah courts have exclusive jurisdiction over Muslims' religious status (Art. 121(1A)) [31].

DOCUMENTED: The record includes *Lina Joy* (2007) [31], and a free legal clinic for Muslim women (Telenisa) has run since 2003 [41].

EXIT: Leaving is possible only through the syariah court.

REGULATOR: Status questions go to the syariah courts, and Sisters in Islam's Telenisa gives legal advice [41].

TELL: A constitution that guarantees freedom of religion sends the question of leaving to the courts of the religion being left.

United Kingdom

APEX: There is none; mosques are independent charities, and sharia councils are voluntary.

LAW: An independent review in 2018 recommended civil registration of religious marriages so women are not left without legal status [53].

DOCUMENTED Honour-based abuse is handled as a crime; a specialist helpline supports victims [44].

EXIT: Leaving is legally free, and socially costly in close communities. Support exists for people leaving [42].

REGULATOR: The Charity Commission oversees mosques registered as charities, and the police handle honour-based abuse [44].

TELL: The same school of law, in a jurisdiction where the state neither appoints the imam nor enforces the fatwa: the costs of leaving fall back to family.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

This page covers the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United Kingdom. Your country changes what this tradition can do to you, and what you can do about it. If you live somewhere not listed, ask which of these cards your country most resembles. If you are a voter, note that each of these arrangements was chosen by a government.

23 The questions

BEFORE YOU READ

The six questions the documented record could not resolve. Each is set out below: why it is being asked, and a concrete example already on this page that it points back to.

QUESTION 1 OF 6

If a scholar's salary is paid by a government, on what basis would you ever distinguish his fatwa from that government's press release?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

This is the load-bearing question of the page. Every finding about state-controlled religious authority depends on it. If a scholar's salary comes from a government, what test could a believer use to tell a ruling from a policy?

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The say-do table sets "Scholars are independent of rulers" beside the record: states took over the endowments that funded independent scholarship and replaced them with salaries, with Egypt's 1952 waqf nationalization as the documented case. The cases section records Salman

al-Awda, arrested in 2017 after declining to back a state position; his case remains unresolved.

QUESTION 2 OF 6

Why can a boy leave a madrasa at eighteen unable to earn a living outside religious employment — and who benefits from that being true?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

Education that leaves a graduate employable only by religious institutions is not free in the way it is presented. It makes the student dependent on one employer for life. The question is structural; it is not a claim about any single school's intent.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The genealogy section records that where hifz-only curricula displace literacy, numeracy and employable skills, "the charity becomes a trap." The who-gets-hurt table adds that this "makes exit financially impossible."

QUESTION 3 OF 6

The Hanafi school permits a woman to contract her own marriage. Why does your community not, and who decided?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

This question can be answered from inside the fiqh tradition itself. If one of the four recognized schools permits it, a community's refusal is a communal choice, not a requirement of the text.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The branches table records that the Hanafi school lets an adult woman contract her own marriage, "the reason this page treats guardianship as contested, not divine."

QUESTION 4 OF 6

Scholars across the schools condemn honor killing as murder. Yet until 2016 Pakistani law let a victim's heirs pardon the killer — and when the killer is family, the heirs are the family. Why did closing that route take until 2016, and why does it still depend on a court classifying the killing as "honor"?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

The long gap between scholarly condemnation and legal reform is itself evidence. It measures how much of the practice was about religious law, and how much was family custom in religious language.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The cases section records Qandeel Baloch, killed by her brother in 2016. He was sentenced to life, and in 2022 the Lahore High Court freed him after their parents pardoned him, despite the 2016 law.

QUESTION 5 OF 6

If a child was beaten or abused in a religious school, was it reported to police? If not, whom did the silence protect?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

Reporting obligations for child abuse exist in every jurisdiction this page covers. The question is whether religious schools are treated as exempt in practice.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The reach section records documented physical abuse and, in some residential madrasas, sexual abuse "with weak reporting pathways."

QUESTION 6 OF 6

You were taught that raising these things helps the enemies of Islam. Ask who taught you that, and what their silence bought them.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

The closing question aims at the silencing mechanism itself. A rule that raising a problem "helps the enemies of Islam" ends the question before any evidence is examined.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The cases section records Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, a Cairo University professor whom a court declared an apostate for his scholarship on the Qur'an, and ordered separated from his wife in 1995. The legal route used was a suit on behalf of public morals.

In closing

The thing your tradition should be proudest of is precisely what has been taken: scholars who could not be bought because rulers did not pay them. Everything in this profile is a departure from that inheritance. Asking for it back is not modernism.

You can love the Sunnah and refuse a paid cleric's politics. You can revere scholarship and still ask who signs the cheque. That is not weak faith; that is the classical tradition's own standard, applied to the people currently claiming it.

Sources for this section: [1] [2]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Choose one question and ask it this month, out loud, to a real person who could answer it. Then write down what happened. Were you answered, redirected, or told that asking was the problem? Whichever it was, the response is information.

24 Leaving safely here

BEFORE YOU READ

Practical, non-theological guidance for someone who needs to step back or step away safely. It is a safety document, not an argument.

This is practical guidance, not legal advice. Where you are matters more than what you believe — read the Law & state table first.

1. **Check your jurisdiction.** In some countries on this page leaving, or saying so, is a crime; in others it is legally free [69] [26] [28] [30] [50].
2. **Do not announce.** The laws on this page punish public acts — declaring, insulting, inciting — so disclosure, not belief, is usually the legal event [65] [26] [30].
3. **Secure documents and money first.** Keep your passport, identity documents and a bank account in your own name; in Saudi Arabia, women over 21 may now hold their own passport [25].
4. **Know your family-law exposure.** Marriage and custody often follow religion: a court dissolved one scholar's marriage for apostasy, and Malaysia routes the question to syariah courts [27] [31]. Take legal advice before any disclosure if children are involved.
5. **Plan for your safety if honour is invoked.** Specialist services exist for forced marriage and honour-based abuse [44] [46].

6. **Find your people quietly.** Local affiliate support groups (listed on its site) for ex-Muslims exist, and so do helplines for Muslims who are staying [42] [43] [45].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Even if this section is not for you, it may be for someone you know. Most people who leave a high-demand community say that the first person who listened without trying to argue them back mattered more than anything else. Could that person be you?

25 Where to get help

BEFORE YOU READ

Organizations that can help, each checked directly against its own site, with the date of the check. Nothing here is endorsed beyond that check.

Checked 2026-09-27. Numbers and services change; check the organization's own site.

ORGANIZATION	FOR	WHERE	CONTACT
Dubai Foundation for Women and Children	Domestic violence, child abuse, trafficking; emergency shelter	Dubai, UAE	24-hour helpline **800111**; SMS 5111 [46]
Karma Nirvana	Honour-based abuse and forced marriage	UK	Helpline **0800 5999 247** [44]
Faith to Faithless (Humanists UK)	People leaving high-control religion, including Islam	UK	Helpline **0800 448 0748** (freephone; Monday 10:00–13:00, Wednesday 10:00–13:00, Thursday 16:00–19:00 UK time) and peer support [42]
Ex-Muslims of North America	Local affiliate support groups (listed on its site); emergency fund	US, Canada	Online application [43]
Naseeha	Muslim peer mental-health helpline (for people staying, too)	North America	**1-866-627-3342**, call or chat, 24/7 [45]
Sisters in Islam — Telenisa	Free legal advice on Islamic family law for women	Malaysia	Tue–Thu 10:00–17:00, phone +603 7960 3357 [41]
Musawah	Equality in Muslim family law; research and advocacy	Global	Online [40]
Humanists International — Humanists at Risk	People facing prosecution for apostasy or blasphemy	Global	Casework [52]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Save one contact now, before anyone needs it: **Dubai Foundation for Women and Children** (domestic violence, child abuse, trafficking; emergency shelter; Dubai, UAE). People in crisis rarely have the energy to research options. Having a name ready is one of the most useful things you can do for someone else.



26

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BEFORE YOU READ

Every numbered citation on this page, with a named, checkable source. Spot-check a few before trusting the rest; that is the honest way to read any page in this book, including this one.

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(Standard chronology — the four legal schools' founders, Abu Hanifa d. 767, Malik d. 795, al-Shafiʿi d. 820, Ibn Hanbal d. 855; al-Bukhari d. 870 and Muslim d. 875; the Saudi–Wahhabi pact of 1744; the Muslim Brotherhood founded 1928 — is uncontroversial and is cited to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entries on each: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sunni)

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Don't take this page's word for anything either. People tend to believe a claim more the more often they have heard it, whether or not it is true; this is the "illusory truth effect" (Hasher, Goldstein & Toppino, 1977). Spot-check three citations at random. If any fails, tell us, and it will be corrected and logged.

27 What changed on this page

BEFORE YOU READ

A dated log of what changed on this page: corrections, additions and new sources. Changes are logged in public rather than made quietly.

- **2026-10-03:** Updated the Nahdlatul Ulama example: its chair was declared dismissed in 2025 and restored, and in 2026 its congress moved the choice of chair from delegates to a council of senior scholars. Corrected how the Grand Imam of al-Azhar came to office, the case of Salman al-Awda, the UAE blasphemy citation, the 2025 Diyanet budget figure, the number of mosques in Turkey, the Indonesian fatwas, and a claim about madrasa abuse that the sources did not support; added sources for each, regraded three techniques, and fixed two help-line entries.
- **2026-09-27:** Checked against the sources and corrected: al-Azhar's Grand Imam is elected and irremovable, not state-appointed; Diyanet head named (Safi Arpaguş) and mosque count updated; population corrected to 1.7–1.8 billion; the "trail ends at a ministry every time" line softened.
- **2026-09-27:** Added Branches, Law & state, Money in numbers, six documented cases, Voices from inside, eight regional cards, Leaving safely and Where to get help; the 1961 al-Azhar turning point now notes the 2012 change.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

This page keeps a public log of its own changes, mistakes included. Does the institution you belong to, give to, or were raised in keep one like it? If not, how would you know what it got wrong, and when?

Colophon

Set in EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License), regular, italic and bold, with true small capitals and old-style figures in text and lining tabular figures in tables. Laid out with Paged.js in Chromium from the same Markdown that feeds the website. US Letter, single-sided, tagged for accessibility and checked against PDF/UA-1 with veraPDF. Built 2026-10-27. Text checked 2026-10-03.

Palette: ink, oxblood, gold, cream, rule. Seven type sizes. Rules of 0.4 pt and 2 pt only.