

### Research justification

#### Empirical questions will lead the fieldwork cases

- Why have these reform processes been undertaken at this historical juncture?
- How has reform proceeded?
- What are the emerging or likely outcomes of these reforms?

#### Central to the above issues, a larger set of theoretical questions will emerge

- What are the consequences of the increased capacity to mobilise people for collective action on a 'moral' basis in a liberalised context?
- Given the central role of religious organizations in defining a "moral order" and institutionalizing the capacity to pursue it, what impact will have religion on the distribution of power and on the development of new institutional forms for exercising it in Africa?
- How will this in turn affect state capacity for the provision of public goods?

#### These cases will also, inevitably, raise some larger questions of a normative content

- How these recent reform initiatives challenge the secular nature of the state?
- How do they affect behavioural change and do they provide enough incentives for improving gender equality and gender relations?

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# Formalising schooling

## Religion and the education sector in the Sahel

By engaging in a comparative examination of the religion and education reform processes in three countries – Niger, Mali and Senegal – this research stream is addressing directly the kind of issues about the “fit” between state institutions and African social and cultural realities with which the Africa Power and Politics programme is concerned.

Across the Muslim majority countries of the Sahel, one response in the post-colonial period to the reality of the bad “fit” between the provision of public education and social expectations has been the development of a vast parallel system of informal religiously-based education, outside the official state system, and created largely in explicit response to the limitations of the state educational system.

A number of factors in recent years, have prompted countries in the region to embark on significant experiments in reforming education, such as the introduction of religious education in state schools.

By definition, “going with the grain” in Africa will produce outcomes more aligned to local social realities and to local values and expectations. These may well clash with other values presented as “international” or “universal” (and usually in fact Western in origin). We believe not only that such questions are unavoidable, but also that it is crucially important that they be raised in the context of the APPP. While “going with the grain” may be highly desirable when it produces more functional instructions for reaching desired outcomes, it may be more questionable when it weakens institutional capacity to effect desired transformations in society. Balancing such tradeoffs should thus be a central part of any evaluative judgment on the benefits of any given institutional change on development.

For further information, visit [www.institutions-africa.org](http://www.institutions-africa.org) or contact the Religion and education research stream co-leaders: **Prof. Leonardo Villalón** ([villalon@afrika.ufl.edu](mailto:villalon@afrika.ufl.edu)) **Dr Mahaman Tidjani Alou** ([mata@intnet.ne](mailto:mata@intnet.ne)).