

# Morocco's Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

- Morocco's multifaceted approach to countering terrorism includes hard security measures; regional cooperation and intelligence sharing; promotion of moderate Islam; democratic reform; inclusive development and legal measures.

## Promoting Moderate Islam

- Morocco practices and preaches the Maliki school of Sunni Islam and works to promote values of moderation and tolerance both at home and abroad through education programs, community building, and religious training.
- In Morocco, the King is recognized as [Commander of the Faithful](#) and enjoys a monopoly on domestic religious authority that shuts out radical proponents of political Islam. The King's religious influence even extends beyond Morocco, including into certain parts of West Africa.
  - In August 2016, King Mohammed VI delivered a [speech](#) strongly condemning radical Islam that garnered international praise, including from [BBC](#) and [The Christian Science Monitor](#). In the speech, King Mohammed VI stressed, "Those who engage in terrorism, in the name of Islam, are not Muslims. Their only link to Islam is the pretexts they use to justify their crimes and their folly. They have strayed from the right path, and their fate is to dwell forever in hell."
- One essential component of Morocco's [counter-radicalization strategy](#) is reorganization of the state's religious structures to protect citizens from invasive, extreme forms of Islam. This has included upgrading mosques; publishing an official bulletin of imams; creating a Directorate of Religious Education within the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and decentralizing the ministry's operations; reviewing laws governing Muslim places of worship; establishing a religious council in Europe for the Moroccan diaspora; using radio and television to promote moderate teachings; reviewing textbooks and syllabi to eliminate radical exhortations to violence; and promoting scholarly research on the nation's Islamic values through the Mohammedan League of Ulema.

## The Imam Training Program

- In March 2015, Morocco launched the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murchidines, and Murchidates, which aims to prepare the next generation of Muslim religious leaders from across the region to counter extremist interpretations of Islam. The [program](#) trains imams from Morocco and abroad to preach, practice, and teach moderate Islam. In addition to 150 Moroccan imams and 100 Moroccan murchidates, the [Institute](#) is currently training 447 imams and murchidates from Africa and Europe, including 212 from Mali, 37 from Tunisia, 100 from Guinea, 75 from Côte d'Ivoire, and 23 from France.
- The program includes theoretical studies, lectures, seminars, and practical training, with courses in Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence, psychology, foreign languages, IT, human sciences, and history and politics, the latter tailored to each imam's country of origin. On the practical side, students are taught research skills, public speaking, and dialogue and persuasion methods.
- This institution builds on previous efforts to train imams and murchidates. The [murchidate](#) program, now fully incorporated into the Institute, began in 2006 to provide female spiritual leaders with the necessary training to teach, interpret, and promote Maliki Islam. Each murchidate is

assigned to one or more mosques throughout the country. While they do not lead prayers, the mourchidates give basic religious instruction in mosques and provide support in prisons, hospitals, and schools. The program serves both to spread Morocco's message of tolerant Islam and to augment the role of women in a traditionally conservative domain.

- In July 2015, King Mohammed VI launched the [Mohammed VI Foundation](#) for African Oulema, to support Moroccan and African theologians and scholars in promoting religious tolerance and moderation on the continent. The Foundation will also support the establishment of religious and scientific schools and cultural centers to spread the values of moderate Islam.

### ***Deradicalization in Prisons***

- In Morocco's prison system, [deradicalization](#) is accomplished through religious supervision carried out by authorities from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and members of regional and local religious councils. In 2013 alone, these officials visited roughly 5,000 incarcerated offenders. Today, detained extremists represent about 1 percent of Morocco's prison population, or 600 out of 74,000 total prisoners.
- Another crucial element of prisoner deradicalization is successful reintegration into society. Moroccan prisoners are offered opportunities to [study](#) toward either university degrees or vocational certifications. Additionally, the government is partnering with private companies to provide work, training, and employment upon release.
- The Mohammed VI Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Prisoners is a key player in this domain. The foundation's latest [project](#) – inaugurated by the King in July 2015 – is a support program for micro-projects and self-employment. More than 300 former inmates are expected to benefit from the 5-million-dirham (~\$512k) program. The Foundation strategy also focuses on social reintegration as part of its larger mission that aims at “reinforcing societal security, fighting delinquency, reducing recidivism and creating income-generating activities through improving the quality of life of former prisoners.”
- Cooperation between the Foundation, the Penitentiary and Reintegration Administration, and other government Ministries like the Ministry of Vocational Training, and support from civil society and private sector actors allows these programs to succeed.
- Morocco has a powerful example of the benefits of renouncing violence – the case of [Mohamed Fizazi](#). A former radical Salafist preacher well known for preaching violence and jailed in connection with the 2003 Casablanca bombings, Fizazi was “successfully deradicalized,” released from prison in 2011 through a royal pardon, and in 2014 led Friday prayers in the King's presence in Tangiers.

### **Reform and Development**

- Alongside religious initiatives, Rabat's counter-radicalization strategy includes the political reforms embraced by the latest constitutional amendments and the "Advanced Regionalization" program; steps to increase respect for human rights and the rule of law; and development efforts to prevent the marginalization of individuals and communities.

- Recognizing the role of economic marginalization on the attraction of terrorism, Morocco launched the [National Initiative for Human Development](#) in 2005 to fight poverty and generally improve economic conditions in the poorest neighborhoods. Efforts have also been made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and advance the standard of living for all Moroccans, especially women and children.

## Legal Measures

- Morocco has made reforms in the police and intelligence services, including the creation of a Moroccan “FBI” – the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ). By bringing various elements of the security sector under a central institution, the BCIJ works to bolster “security governance nationwide within a legal and transparent framework,” according to the 2015 State Department [Report](#) on Terrorism.
- Morocco has passed legislation criminalizing the intent to travel to danger zones, and in January 2015, the Chamber of Representatives of the Moroccan Parliament adopted a new [anti-terrorism law](#) aimed at strengthening legal measures to prevent citizens from leaving the country to join foreign terrorist groups. The Parliament agreed to impose 5-15 year prison sentences on citizens attempting to join the Islamic State. The bill amends the Code of Criminal Procedure to allow any Moroccan within the country or abroad, as well as any foreign national in Morocco, to be prosecuted for terrorist offenses committed overseas.
- These are just some examples of the ways Moroccan authorities are working to [neutralize security risks](#) posed by ISIL and other terrorist groups. Moroccan security forces have been active in monitoring terrorist recruitment, dismantling terrorist cells, and working with regional partners to stem the flow of foreign fighters.

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