

Law, Religion, Health and Healing in Africa



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6 COVID-19, POWER IMBALANCE AND THE RESHAPING OF STATE-RELIGION RELATIONS IN NORTH AFRICA: THE ALGERIAN CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to contain the dangers resulting from the deadly pandemic of Covid-19, governments in democratic and autocratic countries alike have imposed lockdowns and adopted special measures, including emergency provisions that restricted freedom of movement, gathering and freedom of religious practice. The impact of the lockdown measures has been profound, leading to a resurgence of authoritarianism and a reshaping of state-religion relations, even in leading world democracies with long-established traditions in respecting freedoms and the rule of law. Due to the pandemic, “towns, cities and entire countries [were] placed into lockdown and places of worship closed, with the active concurrence, or passive acceptance, of faith leaders”.²

The implementation of emergency provisions in the so-called young democracies of North Africa has had immense implications for the free practice of religious activities and for the role of the state in the religious sphere. The restrictions on religious freedoms in countries like Algeria have been severe, and authorities increased their surveillance and control of mosques and religious associations leading to a visible expansion of state powers. Hence, one consequence of the pandemic is that it made the practice of religious activities more open to state intervention.

In this chapter, I argue, through the Algerian example, that this increase in state intervention has been more visible in countries where the state enjoys monopoly on religious life and those already characterised by strict restrictions on civil liberties and basic freedoms. Due to the nature of the state-religion relation and the way that religion is administered in Algeria, the pandemic has reshaped the state-religion relationship creating a power imbalance as it allowed the state to increase its surveillance powers and to strengthen its monopoly of the country’s religious sphere.

While the special emergency lockdown measures were justifiable to some extent, their implementation caused alterations in the state-religion relations and triggered controversies – legal and socio-political – on the protection of religious freedoms and

1 Associate Professor of Civilisation, Department of English, 8 May 1945 Guelma University, Algeria.

2 Hill M. 2021. “Locating the right to freedom of religion or belief across time and territory”, in Ferrari S, Hill M, Jamal A and Bottoni R (eds). *Handbook of Freedom of Religion or Belief*. London: Routledge.

rights during public health emergencies and the tension between basic freedoms and constitutional rights, on the one hand, and public safety and order, on the other. These developments, too, are the subject of the analysis in this chapter. Through qualitative analysis of relevant texts, documents, laws and views of state and non-state actors, I argue that the pandemic provided an appropriate pretext for the state to impose its narrative through official religious institutions and to consolidate its control of the country's religious affairs.

THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN ALGERIA

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Algeria and other North African countries has been different from its impact in Europe, mainly because of the different nature of state-religion relationship. The state in North African countries plays a major role in religious life through official religious institutions. These institutions have become important tools for the state to monitor religious activities, increase its control of religious ideology and enforce official interpretations of religious texts and laws.

The Constitution of Algeria provides for freedom of worship, freedom of conscience and freedom of assembly in accordance with the law, and it states that freedom of conscience and freedom of opinion are inviolable. Article 42 states: "The freedom of conscience and the freedom of opinion shall be inviolable and the free exercise of worship shall be guaranteed under the respect of law."³ However, the way the religious sphere and the practice of religious freedoms are organised in Algeria differs completely from the Western state-church relation, where the two institutions are separate and the religious and political powers in society are clearly distinct. As in the other countries of the Maghreb region, the state in Algeria administers and dominates the religious sphere. It is due to state monopoly on religion that the impact that Covid-19 had on the power balance between state and religion in North African countries, such as Algeria, differs largely from its influence in Western countries.

With the independence of Algeria in 1962 from the French colonial rule, which lasted 132 years, Islam became the official religion in the country. In fact, even before independence, the first founding text of the modern Algerian nation, which declared the revolution against the brutal French colonialism, set the goal of the fight for national liberation as: "the establishment of the sovereign democratic social Algerian state within the framework of Islamic principles".⁴ Article 2 of the first constitution of the independent Algerian state in 1963 made Islam the "religion of the state".⁵ The subsequent constitutions of 1976, 1989, 1996 and 2020, kept the

3 Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Official Gazette No. 76 of 8 December 1996.

4 The National Liberation Front, Algeria, General Secretariat. 1954. "The Declaration of the First of November 1954".

5 Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

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second article as it is. The state has always sought to organise the religious sphere and to control the religious doctrine and discourse in the country. Consequently, the state enjoys an almost complete control over the country's religious sphere. The executive branch of the state is responsible for the management of religious affairs and mosque activity in the country.

The state constructs and licenses mosques and *waqfs* (which are also known as *habus*). The Ministry of Religious Affairs along with other state institutions regulates and controls the management of mosques and other religious and charitable institutions. It oversees mosques and clerical staff, administers *hadj* (pilgrimage), *umra* and *zakat* (almsgiving).⁶ The state also appoints imams and other civil servants (inspectors, teachers of Quran, female spiritual guides (*murshidat diniyyat*) and pays their salaries. Only state-sanctioned mosques can lead Islamic services, and only government-authorised imams, hired and trained by the state, can lead prayers in mosques.

Besides the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the High Islamic Council (HIC) is the other important institution set by the state to help organise and control religion in the country. It was first established in January 1966 as part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs by Decree 66-4, with the purpose of "affirming the real face of Islam and eradicating every falsification and fiction introduced in the Islamic faith".⁷ Later, in 1989, a constitutional amendment separated the HIC from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and promoted it to a "constitutional institution". The significance of the HIC lies in the fact that it is responsible for issuing official *fatwas*, which can be promoted by different tools owned by the state. According to Article 161 of the 1989 Constitution, the High Islamic Council is established directly by the president of the Republic, who chooses a president for the council from among its 15 members.⁸

As far as the practice of religions other than Islam, besides the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, Algeria was the first Maghrebi country to have adopted a specific law guaranteeing the freedom and regulating the practice of non-Muslim belief through Ordinance 06-03 of 2006 Establishing the Conditions and Rules for the Practice of Beliefs other than Islam.⁹ Prior to the enactment of this law, there had been only a few scattered provisions dealing with religious freedoms of non-Muslims in the country. Ordinance 06-03 was adopted with the aim of implementing the constitutional proclamations of religious freedom for non-Muslims. The ordinance is seen as the most important legal reform in the area of religious freedom and the first specific law adopted to guarantee freedom

6 Ghanem D. 2018. "State-Owned Islam in Algeria Faces Stiff Competition", *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 13 March.

7 Bousadia M. 2021. *إيروتسد قس سوم ىل! ةي ميظنت ةئي ه ن م* [From an organisational body to a constitutional institution], *Elwassat*, 14 January.

8 Tamburini F. 2019. "The 'Islam of the Government': The Islamic High Councils in Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 55(4):1-17.

9 People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, General Secretariat of Government. 2006. *Joradp* (Official Journal of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria), 25.

of religion in Algeria. Ordinance 06-03 was designed to apply to non-Muslims the same constraints imposed on Muslims, including stipulating that religious rites must comply with the law and respect public order, morality and the rights and basic freedoms of others, also established also the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups, a new government entity, responsible for facilitating the registration process for all non-Muslim groups.¹⁰

While government officials argued that Ordinance 06-03 came to enforce the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, and to extend state protection to all the religious groups and their houses of worship, some argued that with its many limitations, it came in fact to tighten up state control of religious associations and their religious activities.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the assumption of the Algerian authorities that the 1990s Algerian Civil War had its roots in the rise of an imported type of extremist religious ideology pushed the state to seek more control of the religious sphere and doctrine, to increase its surveillance over mosques and to tighten its control of religious discourse. Hence, since the 1990s, “relations between Islam and the state have evolved toward greater government control of the religion”.¹² The state has also promoted and elevated religious streams and ideologies that are deemed moderate and represent the real Algerian values and identity, including Sufi orders.¹³

Nevertheless, state monopoly of the religious doctrine and the organisation of religion have never been taken for granted. The state has always found itself in contest with a diverse array of religious actors, particularly Islamic parties and Salafist movements.¹⁴ The religious discourse and ideology of the latter, which have always been significant and influential, did not appeal to the state, which used different tools to weaken them and succeeded to promote and co-opt other ideologies. The association of some religious groups and ideologies with extremism and security during the 1990s led the state increasingly to seek to control the country’s religious sphere. Hence, because of this sensitivity towards religion and the way religion is administered in Algeria, the state of emergency during Covid-19 led to an immense expansion of state power at the expense of religious freedoms.

10 People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, General Secretariat of Government. 2006. “Ordinance 06-03, s 2, art 9”, *Joradp* (Official Journal of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria), 26.

11 Ferchiche N. 2013. “Religious Freedom in the Constitutions of the Maghreb”, in Durham WC, Ferrari S, Ciannitto C and Thayer D (eds). *Law, Religion, Constitution*. London: Routledge, 196.

12 Ferchiche, “Religious Freedom in the Constitutions of the Maghreb”, 186.

13 Boukhars A. 2021. “Algeria’s Sufis Balance State Patronage and Political Entanglement”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 7 June.

14 Sakthivel V. 2018. “Algeria’s Religious Landscape: A Balancing Act”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 1 September.

THE PANDEMIC AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

When Covid-19 hit the region in 2019, Algeria had already been grappling with the consequences of previous crises that shaped the decade of the 2010s. It was a very tense decade, as a series of successive crises hit the region and caused economic and social instability. These included the 2014-2016 oil price decline and the 2019 resurgence of large-scale popular protests known in Algeria as the Hirak (Arabic for “movement”). During this mass protest movement, there was a sense of distrust between the state and the general public. Hence, the pandemic intensified the social and political problems, and the new measures adopted by the state to slow down its spread led to the expansion of its powers at the expense of civil society and religion.

The resurgence of large-scale popular protests in Algeria, initially in outrage at then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth term in office, created a tense climate. The demonstrations started on 22 February 2019 in most Algerian cities, and they turned into the largest and longest protests in the country’s history within a short time.¹⁵ The Hirak forced Bouteflika to step down weeks later. Yet, the weekly Friday rallies did not stop, as Algerians were determined to accompany the political transition taking place. Over many weeks, the mosque was the hub of the Hirak mass protest movement. The weekly marches took place every Friday and started from mosques after Friday Prayer, benefitting from the huge gatherings of congregants to perform the Islamic Jumu’ah prayer.¹⁶ The Hirak, however, was interrupted by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Algeria confirmed the first case of Covid-19 within its borders in late February 2020 and subsequently suspended domestic and international air and maritime travel and closed universities, schools and mosques. The closure of mosques and the suspension of Friday Prayer would subsequently weaken the Hirak. The authorities formally banned the demonstrations held each Friday in March 2020 after 57 weeks of mass demonstrations in major Algerian cities. As a matter of fact, even if the demonstrations had not been formally banned, the mere suspension of Friday Prayer would have made it difficult for the demonstrators to mobilise as big a number of people as had been the case when the prayers were allowed. The government also implemented partial lockdowns and curfew measures in critical areas, such as Algiers, Blida, Batna, Oran, TiziOuzou, Setif and other cities with high numbers of Covid-19 cases.¹⁷

Since its beginning, the pandemic has paved the way for the regime to deal with the demonstrations and to halt the Hirak. After the government’s decree prohibiting the protest movement, nominally to prevent the spread of the pandemic, some key

15 Ghebouli ZL. 2020. “Algeria, One Year into the Hirak: Successes and Setbacks”, *Fikra Forum*/ Washington Institute for Middle East Policy, 21 February.

16 Bliidi S. 2020. “New wave of Algeria protests raise questions about future of Hirak”, *The Arab Weekly*, 17 June.

17 Mestek YML. 2020. “Algeria: Politics and Protests in Coronavirus Times”, in Kempe F et al (eds). *The politics of pandemic: Evolving regime-opposition dynamics in the MENA region*. Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council.

figures in the protest saw the move as a convenient attempt to restrict the demonstrations.¹⁸ Opposition parties and HIRAK activists accused the government of exploiting the pandemic to crack down on religious and political rights and using it as an excuse to weaken the HIRAK, especially because of the interplay between religious and political freedoms. Suspending Friday Prayer (a religious right) led to the halting of the demonstrations of the HIRAK movement (a political freedom). The suspension of Friday Prayer was the key measure that facilitated the suspension of the HIRAK movement. Hence, the pandemic was “a perfect public health pretext to ban gatherings and demonstrations.”¹⁹

The president of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, Abdelah Jaballah, described the decision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to suspend daily congregational prayers and the Jumu'ah Prayer in mosques as incorrect. He maintained that the *fatwa* was not based on any religious basis and argued that if the real purpose behind the decision was to prevent the spread of the virus, then the ban would also have included markets and public administrations where people gather in large numbers.²⁰ The authorities defended the validity of the emergency measures, arguing that the restrictions they imposed on some constitutionally guaranteed political and religious rights, including suspension of religious gatherings, become legitimate in such emergency times – not least because health experts worldwide advised that the lockdowns and certain restrictions were legitimate and indeed could be the most effective option to face the exceptional emergency. President Abdelmajid Teboune assured Algerians that “the state is determined to protect freedoms and rights as much as it is responsible for protecting persons and property”.²¹

Despite the formal suspension of the protests, thousands of protestors had previously defied lockdown measures and challenged the state on many occasions. There was wide opposition to the banning of congregational prayers in general and the suspension of Friday Prayer in particular. Many of protestors who violated the lockdown were arrested and jailed.²² In fact, even before the pandemic, there had been complaints about the regulations organising the right to gather and demonstrate in Algeria.²³ During the pandemic, religious rights overlapped with political freedoms. Hence, the impact of the pandemic on the religious life in Algeria was multidimensional and rapidly transformed socio-religious life of millions of

18 Mestek, “Algeria: Politics and Protests in Coronavirus Times”.

19 Abdelhadi M. 2021. “Viewpoint: Algerian blame games expose deep political crisis”, *BBC*, 2 September.

20 “Algeria, President of an Islamist Party Considers Closing Mosques because of Covid Illegal”, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 18 March 2020.

21 “Algeria Fights Corona”, *Al-Arabiya*, 18 March 2020.

22 “Thousands defy Algeria’s Covid-19 curfew in pro-democracy protests”, *Al-Arabiya*, 3 March 2021.

23 The International Human Rights Framework on the Right of Peaceful Assembly, Algeria. Online at: <https://www.rightofassembly.info/country/algeria#> [Accessed 8 December 2022].

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Muslims who used to organise their life and activity around the five congregational daily prayers. The ensuing restrictions impacted their right to freedom of religion, restricted their collective religious activities, changed notions about the spiritual and the physical and severely altered state-religion relations.

EMERGENCY PROVISIONS AND THEIR IMPACT

The official religious institutions in the country came to prominence during the fight against the pandemic. Their religious authority has been used to explain and justify the emergency measures, including the closure of mosques and the suspension of congregational prayers. The government found these institutions a useful tool to help it manage the exceptional situation during the pandemic.

In the beginning of the pandemic, the Algerian government responded to the threat of the virus by issuing a set of decrees and executive orders to impose social distancing and lockdown limiting some constitutional rights and liberties.²⁴ Under emergency decree legislation, the state, which had already been in control of the religious sphere, gradually gained excess powers, which allowed it to impose further restrictions on religious freedoms. Later on, with the spread of the pandemic and the increase in human losses, there was a need to amend some articles in the criminal law. In particular, the Algerian authorities adopted amendments to the Penal Code. Article 459 of the Penal Code, relating to noncompliance with decrees and administrative orders, was amended, and a new article was introduced to criminalise “endangering the lives and physical integrity of others” with the aim of enforcing the respect of social distancing and other lockdown measures.²⁵ Article 290 bis of the Penal Code punishes with up to two years imprisonment anyone who “exposes the life of another human being or his physical integrity by not following a rule or a law. The sentence is of up to five years if the events happen during sanitary lockdown, a catastrophe or another calamity.”²⁶ This law imposed further restrictions on freedom of expression and of association by punishing with prison sentences any act that may be considered a threat to the safety of others.²⁷

There were complaints that the emergency provisions led to tightening the lockdown measures on mosques in a discriminatory way. Authorities were not as severe with other sectors where large gatherings of people were allowed to take place. Gatherings of people in markets, transportation system and post offices did not cause much concern for authorities. People questioned the real purpose behind

24 Khelfi H and Khelfi A. 2020. “Legal Characterization of Violations Recorded after the Covid-19 Legal Prevention Measures: A dissertation on the light of law N.2220-06 of April 28, 2020, Amending the Criminal Law”, *Annales de l’université d’Alger* 34 (Special Edition).

25 Khelfi and Khelfi, “Legal Characterization of Violations Recorded after the Covid-19 Legal Prevention Measures”.

26 People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, General Secretariat of Government. 2020. *Joradp* (Official Journal of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria), (29 April):13.

27 Khelfi and Khelfi, “Legal Characterization of Violations Recorded after the Covid-19 Legal Prevention Measures”.

this discrimination, with some wondering whether Covid-19 was “a religious virus”, which infects gatherings in worship houses but not the long lines of post at offices, public transportation and other workplaces.²⁸ There were also complaints that houses of worship were being discriminated against particularly. This gave the impression that the state had implicitly decided that the practice of religious duties was less essential compared to other activities of economic nature. Tightening the lockdown on mosques, in particular, created a feeling that the state was being less considerate of religious communities, compared to other communities of economic value.

The exceptional measures adopted by the government in a bid to contain the pandemic led to increased surveillance and ramped up the state's control over houses of worship, associations and citizens. The result was an increased intervention of the state in the religious life of people and limitation of their right to gather for their congregational religious practices. The organisation of religion by the executive branch of government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs made it easier for the Algerian state to tighten its control of religious activity in the country. Hence, the Covid-19 crisis created further disequilibrium in the balance of power between state authorities and religious associations and mosques. The implications of the new imbalances have been more visible in countries like Algeria, because democracy and the rule of law are not yet well established. The exceptional measures and the strict lockdown allowed for a huge expansion in state powers on the expense of the freedom to gather and worship.

One of the clear consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic was the discrimination by the state between houses of worship and other institutions, which might be an outcome of considering religious activity less essential and less important due to valuing the physical over the spiritual.²⁹ Also, the way authorities implemented the lockdown measures raised doubts about the declared objectives and increased distrust of the government actions at a time when trust in government measures and the cooperation of the civil society and other associations – including religious ones, which have a significant weight in North African Muslim-majority countries – were crucial for an effective management of such emergency crisis.

This lack of trust in the emergency provisions taken by the state led to discontent and resistance to some measures. Suspending Friday Prayer, closure of ablution areas in mosques, limiting the Friday sermon to fifteen minutes and imposing distancing during prayers after the reopening of mosques caused wide discontent. People wondered, once again, whether Covid-19 infects people only in houses of worship rather than in workspaces and other crowded places.³⁰

28 Elgendi Y. 2020. “Impact of Covid-19 on Religious Freedom: State-Religion Relations in the Time of a Pandemic”, *Dialogue Institute*. SUSI Scholars Virtual Conference. Online at: <https://dialogueinstitute.org/2020-susi-scholars-virtual-conference>

29 Elgendi, “Impact of Covid-19 on Religious Freedom”.

30 Boukebba A. 2020. دجاسملا قلغ ديدمت نم يبعش عايتسا.. ايچيردت رجحل عفر تاءارجا دعب [After the partial lifting of the lockdown, popular dissatisfaction for the extension of the

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The state's bid to exploit the Covid-19 emergency to consolidate its monopoly on religious doctrine and the *fatwa* was resisted by religious actors who had traditionally challenged the state's monopoly of religious sphere and competed with the official religious doctrine, particularly scholars of the Salafist movement and some Islamic parties. Other religious associations, imams and independent religious scholars also criticised particular measures and tried to push back against harsher government restrictions on mosques. This led to the termination of the service of some imams and their final dismissal, due to their violation of its decision to close mosques or criticising the discrimination against houses of worship.³¹

In one famous case, the most influential Salafi scholar contested an official *fatwa* issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, causing a big controversy. After the pandemic eased down and the number of infections decreased, the ministry allowed congregational prayers to be resumed under new conditions, including observing safe distancing between the congregants. Professor Cheikh Mohamed Ali Ferkous, the most prominent Salafi scholar and spiritual leader in Algeria, issued a *fatwa* stating that distancing during prayer is not justified and that for the prayer to be accepted congregants need to pray side by side, shoulder by shoulder.³² This scholar and his *fatwas* enjoy a huge popularity in Algeria, but his *fatwa* regarding observing safe distancing between the congregants could not be implemented in mosques as the Ministry of Religious Affairs enforced its own official *fatwa*.

This triggered a heated debate on the religious validity of distanced prayers. Performing the five daily prayers is the second of the five pillars of Islam and one of the distinguishing features of this religion. According to the *sunnah* (traditions regarding Prophet Muhammad), in normal circumstances, congregants are to stand abreast, shoulder-to-shoulder. Given the Covid-19 pandemic's exceptional circumstances, the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued a *fatwa* advising that congregants in mosques should stand at a distance from each other during prayers.

It is well-established in Islamic juristic tradition that due to the sanctity of human life, Muslims may be exempted from fulfilling some of the duties during exceptional circumstances such as wars or plagues. Islam, for instance, prescribes limiting movement, gathering, and traveling during plagues. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also encouraged quarantine to keep the plagues from spreading. The Prophet says: "If you hear that there is a plague in a land, do not enter it; and if it (plague) visits a land while you are therein, do not go out of it"³³

Hence, the *fatwa* council of Ministry of Religious Affairs based its *fatwa* regarding the closure of mosques and social distancing during congregational prayers on the

closure of mosques], *Ultrasawt*, 15 June 2020. Online at: <https://ultraalgeria.ultrasawt.com>

31 Mustapha K. 2021. *يديرل نيساي خيشلا فيقوت رارق نع لودعلا بلباطت ناسنإل قوقح قطبار*. [Human Rights League demands reconsideration of the decision to suspend cheikh Yacine Lerari], *Elhiwar*, 16 April. Online at: <https://elhiwar.dz/featured/199789/>

32 Ferkous MA. Fatwa No. 1280 (in Arabic). Online at: <https://ferkous.com/home/?q=fatwa-1280>

33 *Sahih al-Bukhari* 5728, bk. 76: ch 30: "What has been mentioned about the plague".

Islamic principle of *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life), which is one of the main *maqasid al-sharia* (objectives of sharia).³⁴ However, those who supported Farkous's *fatwa* believed that maintaining social distance during congregational prayer makes the prayer *batila* (incorrect). The *fatwa* that social distancing during congregational prayers is not permissible is based on the assumption that the harm that can be inflicted on the congregants if they prayed in the normal manner is only a perceived harm not a real one, and a *Fard* (religious duty) cannot be dismissed because of perceived harm.³⁵

Disagreement between the state's official *fatwa* and some imams and independent scholars caused controversy and even disorder in some mosques, as in the same mosque one could find some congregants abiding by the ministry's instructions in some lines and others violating the instructions refusing to maintain social distance while praying. Numbers of congregants visibly decreased after the reopening of mosques, as many decided they would rather pray at home than forego praying shoulder to shoulder, in the traditional fashion.³⁶

CONCLUSION

Under emergency decree legislation, the state exploited the pandemic to tighten its control of the country's religious sphere. Two factors allowed the state to use the pandemic to consolidate its domination of the religious sphere and to mute the religious voices that have traditionally challenged its monopoly of religious ideology and doctrine. The first factor relates to the power imbalance between official religion and the other religious actors. The second factor is related to the fact that the country is a young democracy where the rule of law is not yet well-established and there exists a wide gap between the promise of the existing laws and their application.

One dangerous consequence of the sometimes unjustified limitations imposed by the state on religious freedom in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it led to widening the gap between the general public and the state. As the state gained excess powers within the fear-dominated climate resulting from the pandemic, it imposed further restrictions on religious freedoms and increased the measures of surveillance and control over mosques and religious associations, which further increased distrust of government measures.

In this chapter, I have examined the discrimination against mosques in implementing the lockdown measures, which led many to believe that the state is less considerate of the practice of religious and spiritual duties and the views and *fatwas* of religious scholars and imams, especially if they are not in favour of its plans and policies.

34 See Padela AI. 2018. "The Essential Dimensions of Health According to the Maqasid al-Shari'ah Frameworks", *International Medical Journal Malaysia* 17(1)

35 Ferkous, *Fatwa* No.1280.

36 دجاسم لى لى عة فيض رحى و ائاف نم رذحت قىال اقباقن [Imams' Union warns of Agitative Fatwas against Mosques], *Echourouk Newspaper*. 4 November 2020.

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I have also explained how the organisation of religious affairs in the country led to a visible expansion of the state monopoly of the country's religious sphere during the time of pandemic. The political role of the mosque and the interplay between religion and politics can account for the impact of the pandemic on the practice of freedoms in general and religious freedoms in particular. The state has been accused of exploiting the pandemic for political gains. Tightening control and imposing surveillance over mosques, in addition to suspending Friday Prayer, led to the weakening of Algeria's 2019 mass protest movement.