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Research Article

Islam as Unifier and Divider in Politics and Nation-Building in Modern Sudan

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Abstract. This article analyzes the dual role of Islam in Sudan's modern history, emphasizing its capacity to unify communities while simultaneously deepening political and social fragmentation. Covering the period from independence in 1956 to the present conflict, it traces how Islamic references shaped legitimacy, governance, and violence. The study employs a qualitative and historical-critical method, drawing on constitutions, Sharia statutes, scholarly works, international reports, and archival news, with triangulation and process tracing ensuring reliability and contextual depth. The findings demonstrate that Islam has repeatedly been instrumentalized to consolidate political power. Early on, Sufi networks such as the Ansar and Khatmiyya promoted cohesion but also entrenched rivalries that destabilized politics. Under Jaafar Nimeiri and the National Islamic Front, state-led Islamization, epitomized by the September Laws, institutionalized exclusivity and marginalized both non-Muslims and dissenting Muslims. This framework intensified conflicts in Darfur and South Sudan, linking Islamization to displacement, atrocities, and gender-based violence. By contrast, inclusive Islamic discourses stressing justice and Maqasid al-Shariah fostered civic trust and opened pathways for negotiation, as reflected in the Juba Peace Agreement. After the 2019 revolution, reforms aimed at separating religion from the state suggested a shift toward inclusivity. Yet renewed war reopened avenues for political instrumentalization: the Sudanese Armed Forces drew on Islamist currents to revive jihadist rhetoric, while the Rapid Support Forces positioned themselves as anti-Islamist actors mixing religious symbolism with secular claims. These dynamics reveal the enduring malleability of Islam in Sudanese politics. The study concludes that inclusive framings encourage unity, while monopolization entrenches division, situating Sudan's experience within broader debates on religion, authoritarianism, and nation-building in divided societies.

Keywords:
Sudan, Islamization, Nation-Building, Conflict, Political Legitimacy

Introduction

Sudan's modern political development has been strongly shaped by Islamic institutions and ideas that have been deeply rooted since the colonial era. Sufi orders such as Ansar and Khatmiyya played an important role in connecting rural communities with political parties,(Morton, 1989; G. Warburg, 1996) while also creating a social base for the Muslim majority in the north. (Al-Shahi, 1981; Musso, 2017) British colonialism also shaped this pattern through selective partnerships that strengthened some networks and restricted others, thereby embedding Islamic symbolism in early state narratives(Mahmoud, 2001; G. Warburg, 1997). This legacy resulted in

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postcolonial politics that utilized Islam as a source of mobilization, while simultaneously preserving lines of division in political competition(Morton, 1989; G. Warburg, 1995).

Studies on nation building show that religion is an important source of legitimacy for new states. In a Muslim-majority context, Islam provides shared norms that elites can use to assert political authority(Altaikyzy, 2024; March, 2021). However, its impact depends on how religion is institutionalized: inclusive strategies strengthen stability, while exclusive approaches fuel tensions. (Dwijayanto & Afif, 2020; Hamayotsu, 2002). Sudan demonstrates how religion can be both a tool of legitimacy and a source of factionalism when linked to sectarian networks or used to suppress differences(Cesari, 2017; Fincham & Dunne, 2020).

The main issue of this research is how Islam functions as both a unifying and divisive identity in Sudanese politics. To understand this duality, it is necessary to distinguish between Sufism and Islamism as different historical currents(An-Na'im, 2009; Sanni, 2010). Islamism promotes state transformation through the Islamization of laws and institutions, while Sufism emphasizes community cohesion and political patronage(Maram et al., 2025; Maruyama, 2011; Sharief, 2020). The dominance of Islamism after 1989 reinforced authoritarianism and polarization, while Sufi networks continued to influence electoral configurations(Maram et al., 2024; G. Warburg, 1995). Academic debate centers on how these two currents interact with state institutions and influence legitimacy.

The second debate compares Sudan with other African countries facing religious and ethno-regional diversity. Some have opted for constitutional secularism, while others have implemented partial or full Islamization(Abbink, 2020; Viorst, 1995). Comparative findings show that stability emerges when religion is institutionalized inclusively; conversely, Islamization that marginalizes certain groups triggers resistance (Rothfuss & Joseph, 2015; Seri-Hersch, 2020). In this framework, Sudan demonstrates that institutional choices and elite strategies are crucial in determining whether Islam strengthens the national project or triggers rejection(Jeffery-Schwikkard, 2024; Viorst, 1995).

Previous research has revealed that Islamization and Arabization projects are understood differently in each region of Sudan; in the South, these policies are considered domination (F. Deng, 1995; Hawi, 2017). Sociological and historical studies reject a binary reading between Arab African or Muslim non Muslim identities, because identities change according to context(Madibbo, 2012; Sharkey, 2007). These findings show that religion can be a unifying force in the north but a dividing line in other regions, explaining the internal tensions throughout the country's history (F. Deng, 1995; Hawi, 2017).

Other literature highlights the dynamics of center periphery and how state policies reshape the identities and interests of communities (Idris, 2012; Waal, 2005). Conflicts in Darfur and peripheral regions show that Islamic symbols coexist with strong ethnic identities(Babyesiza, 2015; W. Berridge, 2019), while state patronage and security practices often determine patterns of violence more than religious teachings. Institutional and ethnographic studies also confirm that communities often interpret or adapt Islamization according to local contexts(Manger, 2017;

Sharkey, 2007), This underscores the importance of tracing processes, not just identity categories.

A review of the literature reveals a number of gaps in the research. Studies on Sudan remain fragmented by period, obscuring the historical continuity of Islamic institutions (W. J. Berridge & Islamist, 2019; Hawi, 2017). The dichotomy of identity often oversimplifies a more fluid reality. Peripheral regions such as Darfur and the South are underrepresented in national analyses, despite their importance in assessing the limits of the country's Islamization(Madibbo, 2012; Sharkey, 2007). Furthermore(Idris, 2012; Waal, 2005), attention to the mechanisms linking elite strategies with local dynamics remains limited(Babyesiza, 2015; W. Berridge, 2019), necessitating an integrated approach that combines the roles of Sufism, Islamism, and regional politics(Morton, 1989; G. Warburg, 1995).

This article aims to reframe the understanding of how Islamic symbolism and organization can simultaneously strengthen national integration and create political divisions(Altaikyzy, 2024; March, 2021). This study also attempts to synthesize findings on Sufism and Islamism to explain the mechanisms linking elite strategies with public responses(An-Na'im, 2009; Cesari, 2017; Hamayotsu, 2002). Furthermore, this article places the Sudanese experience in a broader comparative perspective to provide new insights into the design of constitutions and governance in pluralistic states(Abbink, 2020; Jeffery-Schwikkard, 2024). By presenting an analysis from the colonial period to the Islamist era, this paper offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the dual role of Islam in Sudanese politics(Idris, 2012; Waal, 2005)..

Method

This study uses a qualitative-interpretative approach based on historical and political analysis, focusing on reconstructing context and tracing causality to understand the dynamic relationship between Islamic references and political developments in Sudan. Data was obtained from constitutions, Sharia-based regulations, academic literature, international organization reports, and news archives. To maintain reliability, all sources were triangulated and cross-checked, while archival protocols ensured systematic and transparent data recording. Each finding was analyzed in its historical, political, and socio-cultural context to avoid anachronisms and confirm changes in the meaning of Islamic references over time.

Ethical considerations are important given the sensitivity of political violence and religious identity in Sudan, so reflexivity is maintained through recognition of the researcher's position and perspective. Process tracing is used to trace the causal mechanisms linking religious discourse to political legitimacy or fragmentation, aided by indicators that enable systematic reconstruction of events. The Bayesian approach enhances transparency by reassessing hypotheses in light of emerging evidence, while repeated evaluation and cross-verification minimize confirmation bias. By combining data triangulation, contextual sensitivity, and reflective analysis, this method ensures both accuracy and relevance in examining Sudan's political-historical developments and the impact of religious discourse on patterns of legitimacy and division.

Results and Discussion

Islam as Integrative Identity in Nation-Building

The role of Islam in Sudan's nation-building processes reveals a complex trajectory, simultaneously embedding integrative possibilities while generating fragmentation. This chapter integrates findings with interpretative discussion by focusing on elite mobilization, Sufi networks, inclusive religious framings, and state-led mechanisms of identity construction. The narrative is organized thematically, with each section situating Sudan's experience within broader comparative debates in the social humanities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Sudanese elite used Islamic symbols and idioms to legitimize independence and unite diverse groups, following a pattern common in many postcolonial Muslim countries(Krais, 2019). As in Algeria and Morocco, religion became a symbolic source for anti-colonial mobilization and the formation of national identity, while in West Africa the Niasse network helped formulate a vision of Islam-based liberation(Wyrtzen, 2013). Sudan employed a similar strategy by packaging political demands in religious rituals and language that resonated across classes and regions(Wright, 2013). However, unlike other cases, mobilization in Sudan was shaped by the existence of Sufi orders that had organized religious authority into competing factions, so that Islamic symbols operated in a more fragmented landscape(Esposito, 2015).

Ansar and Khatmiyya demonstrate how Sufi networks functioned both as a force for integration and a source of fragmentation. The spiritual authority of the Mahdi and Mirghani families fostered loyalties that transcended ethnic and regional boundaries, which were then translated into politics through the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party, which mobilized broad support(Morton, 1989). On the one hand, this pattern helped consolidate the national electorate and limit ethno-regional movements in the early days of the state(G. R. Warburg, 2009). However, the rivalry between the two orders also instilled sectarian competition in the political structure(Tripp et al., 1992), so that even though they supported nation-building by uniting various groups under the banner of Islam, they also deepened the fragmentation that hindered the achievement of national consensus.

The inclusive framing of Islam emerges as a key variable for explaining when religion supports cohesion versus when it generates division. Inclusive Islamic discourses, particularly those drawing on principles of social justice and Maqasid al-Shariah, have been associated with higher levels of social trust, civic compliance, and cooperation (Auda, 2012). In contexts where Islam has been deployed to emphasize equal opportunity and poverty reduction aligned with Sustainable Development Goals, cross-regional cooperation is strengthened (Khan & Haneef, 2022). Sudan's elites occasionally embraced such inclusive framings, presenting Islam as a source of unity transcending ethnic and linguistic divides. For instance, electoral campaigns often invoked universalist Quranic messages to frame political participation as a shared civic duty (Abdelhay et al., 2016). Where inclusivity was present, citizens reported higher compliance with civic obligations and greater trust in national institutions. However, exclusive framings—emphasising dominance over minorities or privileging particular sectarian identities—undermined these gains,

exacerbating marginalisation and fueling resistance, particularly in non-Muslim southern regions and ethnically diverse peripheries (Noble-Frapin, 2009).

State institutions further shaped the integrative potential of Islam through education, rituals, and media. School curricula illustrate how religion is instrumentalized in nation-building. In Pakistan, curricula promote a singular version of Islam that contributes to ethnocentrism (Qazi & Shah, 2018). In India, ostensibly secular education often normalizes Hindu symbols, casting Muslims as "the other" (Amatullah, 2022). In Indonesia, moderate Islamic curricula struggle against conservative pressures (Zuhdi, 2018). Sudan's curricula, similarly, projected Islam as foundational to national identity, which strengthened cohesion in the Muslim-majority north but alienated non-Muslim populations in the south (Sharkey, 2007). The emphasis on a unitary Islamic identity reinforced northern dominance while neglecting pluralism, reproducing structural inequalities that hindered genuine national integration.

Public rituals functioned as another medium for constructing belonging. Comparative evidence suggests that communal and cross-ethnic rituals strengthen identity more effectively than individualized practices (Khamenei & Turner, 1998; Rimé & Páez, 2023). In Sudan, state-sponsored celebrations of Islamic festivals reinforced a sense of collective identity among northern populations (Tripp et al., 1992). However, when imposed nationally, these same rituals excluded non-Muslims, thereby intensifying divisions. Thus, rituals offered a double-edged mechanism: locally integrative but nationally polarizing when applied without sensitivity to pluralism.

Media representations likewise shaped national belonging. In Western contexts, portrayals of Islam often construct Muslims as outsiders, exacerbating tensions (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022). In Sudan, state-controlled media consistently depicted Islam as synonymous with Sudanese national identity (Daoud, 2023). While this reinforced unity in dominant regions, it deepened the alienation of groups whose identities were not recognized in these portrayals. The media's exclusionary narratives thereby contributed to long-term conflict dynamics, highlighting how state power over symbolic communication can reproduce rather than resolve divisions (De Waal et al., 2014).

When compared with other African Muslim-majority states, Sudan illustrates the risks of exclusive religious institutionalization. Nigeria and Ethiopia, despite religious diversity, maintain constitutional secularism as a means of managing pluralism (Jatau & Maza, 2023). Sudan's choice to constitutionally enshrine Islam as the state religion intensified exclusion, producing long-term instability and ultimately secession (Zahid & Medley, 2006). The comparative lesson is that religion can unify when embedded within inclusive frameworks but destabilizes when codified as an exclusive principle of governance. Sudan's trajectory underscores how elite strategies and institutional design determine whether Islam functions as an integrative or divisive identity.

The findings suggest that Islam's integrative potential in Sudan was strongest when elites employed inclusive framings, when Sufi networks aggregated broad constituencies, and when institutions contextualized religion in ways sensitive to

diversity. Conversely, fragmentation emerged when exclusivity dominated political strategies, curricula imposed singular religious identities, rituals excluded minorities, and media constructed narrow definitions of belonging.

State Islamization and Instruments of Political Control

The consolidation of state Islamization in Sudan illustrates how religion was strategically mobilized to entrench authoritarian control rather than to spark genuine spiritual or moral renewal. Empirical evidence indicates that the deployment of Islamic law and ideology under Jaafar Nimeiri and later the National Islamic Front (NIF) functioned less as a religious awakening than as a calculated political project. This trajectory is consistent with the broader theoretical framing of the study, which highlights how religion is often instrumentalized for legitimacy, though its effects hinge on whether the application is inclusive or exclusive (Cesari, 2017; Hamayotsu, 2002).

The September Laws of 1983 exemplify this politicization of Islamic law. While presented as a step toward embedding Sharia, they were in reality a political instrument of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hassan al-Turabi's shifting statements underscore this point: he initially praised Nimeiri's piety but later acknowledged that the Brotherhood's goal was seizing state power, not pursuing moral reform. The laws' implementation revealed hypocrisy and brutality, sparing foreigners under diplomatic pressure while subjecting Sudanese citizens to amputations and even crucifixions. Public disillusionment was evident in the 1985 Khartoum protest of nearly six hundred victims of amputation, while boasts such as "we killed 28 officers in one night" revealed reliance on coercion rather than consent. The emphasis on public morality operated mainly as a smokescreen for consolidating political control.

Cross-national comparison shows that Sudan's trajectory was distinctive yet not unique among Islamist movements. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, lacking military control, was overthrown in 2013 (Zahid et al., 2021). Turkey's AKP consolidated authority through gradual electoral strategies and institutional capture, while Tunisia's Ennahda pursued coalition-building and ideological moderation (Lo, 2018; Maram et al., 2024). By contrast, Sudan's Islamization was abrupt, militarized, and exclusionary, embedding authoritarian consolidation rather than democratic compromise.

Institutional capture by the NIF under Turabi was extensive. The judiciary was reshaped by loyal appointments and the codification of Islamic law, ensuring courts enforced ideological orthodoxy (Al-Bashir, 2021; Burr & Collins, 2003). Security structures expanded through the Popular Defense Forces and intelligence units that placed Islamist loyalists in the coercive core of the state (Herrero, 2018). Media outlets became tools of propaganda and censorship, silencing opposition while amplifying the NIF's narrative of religious legitimacy (Burr & Collins, 2003; Mohammed, 2012). These strategies correspond to what comparative literature terms tamkeen, embedding loyalists across institutions to secure one-party dominance.

Fiscal patronage is an important pillar of this system. As Ahmed (Ahmed, 2012)shows, autocratic regimes often rely on indirect income such as foreign aid to

finance their loyalty networks. In Sudan, state funds are channeled to Islamic organizations aligned with the NIF, buying support while eliminating alternative voices. This pattern of distribution maintains elite cohesion but sacrifices social spending(Arriola, 2009; Kuran, 2018; Levitsky & Way, 2012), blurring the line between state and religion and embedding NIF authority both materially and symbolically.

The repressive dimension of the Islamization of the state is legalized through various legal provisions. Articles 196–207 impose the death penalty for acts such as attempting to overthrow the government, armed resistance, sabotage, and establishing prohibited organizations. Other regulations criminalize religious insults or disruption of rituals with the threat of imprisonment or execution. These provisions show how the regime equates loyalty to the state with loyalty to religion, thereby positioning opposition as both treason and heresy. Thus, the implementation of Sharia law is not a normative application, but rather a tool of political domination to silence resistance and maintain ideological monopoly.

The social consequences were profound. By embedding exclusivity at the heart of governance, the NIF alienated large segments of Sudanese society, mainly non-Muslim communities in the South and religious minorities elsewhere. In contrast to inclusive Islamic framings that enhance trust and cooperation (Di Napoli et al., 2019; Jan et al., 2021), Sudan's exclusivist approach deepened fragmentation and fueled resistance. Reliance on coercion, legal repression, and institutional capture undermined pluralism, weakening rather than advancing nation-building. Compared with Tunisia's pluralistic strategies, Sudan diverged sharply, illustrating the risks of authoritarian Islamization.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the Islamization of the state changed daily life by demanding that citizens show loyalty through public rituals and legal compliance, even though many privately harbored resistance(Balcells & Sullivan, 2018). Because its sources were born in a polarized context, interpretation of this practice requires careful triangulation, but evidence still shows that the Islamization of the NIF was primarily a political project based on coercion, patronage, and ideological control. Sudan's experience shows how Islamic symbols and institutions were manipulated for authoritarian consolidation, ultimately undermining legitimacy, inclusivity, and national cohesion. The elite's choice to prioritize a militaristic and exclusive approach over a more inclusive model of Islamization deepened long-term conflict and left a legacy of fragmentation that continues to shape Sudan's political dynamics today.

Post-2019 Reconfigurations and the War Between SAF and RSF

The aftermath of Sudan's 2019 revolution brought sweeping reconfigurations of the relationship between religion and the state, reshaping the political landscape and setting the stage for the confrontation between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Legal and constitutional reforms initiated during the transitional period marked a decisive break from decades of state-led Islamization, yet the eruption of war in 2023 reintroduced religion as a contested political resource, mobilized by competing actors with divergent aims. The evidence underscores how the post-2019 trajectory revealed both the opportunities and the

fragility of disentangling religion from authoritarian politics in deeply divided societies.

The transitional government's reforms directly undermined the ideological foundations of the National Islamic Front era. The 2019 Constitutional Declaration omitted sharia as a primary source of law, guaranteed freedom of religion, and repealed the apostasy law (2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan, 2020; Omer, 2021). A subsequent agreement with the SPLM-North al-Hilu in September 2020 declared that "the state shall not establish an official religion," thus laying the foundations for secular governance (Byrd, 2020). These reforms were driven by civilian transitional leaders and rebel groups with international support (2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan, 2020). However, Islamist movements rejected the changes as a betrayal of Sudan's Islamic identity (Abdelaziz, 2025). Therefore, the reforms contained a paradox: while strengthening inclusivity and enhancing Sudan's international legitimacy, they also provoked backlash among entrenched Islamist constituencies, foreshadowing renewed conflict.

The outbreak of the SAF-RSF war in 2023 dramatically reshaped religion-state dynamics. Former Islamist networks, particularly those tied to the dissolved National Congress Party (NCP), aligned with the military. Thousands of NCP-affiliated operatives and Islamist brigades, such as al-Baraa Bin Malik were documented fighting alongside the SAF (Abdelaziz, 2023; "Sudan's Army, Islamists, and the Al-Baraa Bin Malik Brigade," 2023). General Burhan consolidated this alliance by reinstating Islamist civil servants, securing bureaucratic loyalty (Abdelaziz, 2025). This SAF-Islamist bloc revived narratives of jihad and national defense, framing the conflict as both a military and spiritual struggle. The return of Islamist ideology in military discourse reflected not only a mobilization strategy but also an attempt to restore the legitimacy of a state order once anchored in religious exclusivity.

In contrast, the RSF adopted a parallel governance strategy, asserting itself as an alternative authority in territories it controlled, particularly Darfur and Kordofan (Woldemichael, 2025). In mid-2025, the RSF announced a "parallel government" to institutionalize its administrative functions. Drawing on marginalized constituencies, it capitalized on grievances against Khartoum elites and presented itself as an anti-Islamist alternative (Sampson, 2025). While invoking Islamic concepts such as martyrdom to connect with local traditions, the RSF also emphasized justice, tribal solidarity, and resistance to Islamist dominance, projecting itself to international actors and Gulf allies as a pragmatic force (D. J. Deng, 2025; "Janjakezan: A Profile of Islamists in the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)," 2024). This dual approach allowed the RSF to balance religious symbolism with secular rhetoric, positioning itself simultaneously as locally rooted and internationally credible.

The strategic deployment of Islamic discourse by both factions illustrates the enduring influence of religion in Sudanese politics, even during moments of secular reform. The SAF-Islamist coalition mobilized mosque networks and religious charities to recruit fighters and provide aid, reinforcing war zone loyalty ((EUAA), 2025). The RSF, while distancing itself from old Islamist elites, nonetheless drew selectively on Islamic imagery to maintain legitimacy among its constituencies (D. J. Deng, 2025).

Both strategies deepened social fragmentation, with forced conscription and the recruitment of child soldiers exacerbating human rights abuses ((EUAA), 2025; Staff, 2024). Religion thus persisted as a flexible but divisive instrument, mobilized in distinct ways across competing centers of power.

Peace agreements following the revolution sought to institutionalize a more inclusive relationship between religion and the state. The 2019 Constitutional Declaration and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement introduced provisions for religious freedom, minority protection, and regional autonomy (Davies, 2022; Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Parties to Peace Process, 2020). Evidence suggests these reforms enhanced minority participation and improved Sudan's international reputation (2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan, 2024). However, implementation lagged due to bureaucratic inertia, social prejudice, and Islamist resistance, creating a gap between constitutional guarantees and lived realities ((WEA) et al., 2021) Analysts warn that without robust enforcement, such reforms risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative (Davies, 2022). The eruption of the SAF-RSF war further obstructed progress, as both factions prioritized military objectives over institutional reform.

Comparative analysis places post-2019 Sudan within a broader debate on transition in divided societies, showing that Islamist movements tend to persist when they retain access to coercive power and organizational discipline(Erturk, 2024; Ottmann, 2017). In Sudan, Islamists maintain influence through their alliance with the SAF, while the RSF exploits anti-Islamist rhetoric and local governance to strengthen its legitimacy. This pattern illustrates a general tendency for authoritarian Islamization to resurface when elites face existential threats, while anti-Islamist actors can also strategically adapt religious discourse. The Sudanese case underscores the fragility of attempts to separate religion from authoritarianism: secular reforms require enforcement and social consensus, while war opens new spaces for the instrumentalization of religion in alliances, recruitment, and power management. Although interpretations must be cautious given the changing evidence due to conflict, these findings suggest that post-2019 reforms only temporarily shifted the religion-state relationship before it was reshaped by the logic of war, reinforcing the argument that Islam in Sudan remains a flexible instrument for both cohesion and fragmentation.

Conclusion

This study shows that Islam has consistently had a dual political function in Sudan, serving both as a unifying force and a source of division. In the early period of independence, Islamic symbols and Sufi networks, particularly the Ansar and Khatmiyya, mobilized a broad social constituency, contributing to national cohesion and political participation. However, these same networks also fostered prolonged sectarian rivalries, which shaped party politics and institutional divisions within the state. This combination of unity and rivalry laid the foundation for the complex religious-political landscape that followed.

During the Nimeiri regime and the National Islamic Front, the political role of Islam shifted towards a more systematic and coercive Islamization of the state.

Policies such as the September Laws were designed as religious reforms, but essentially functioned as tools of political consolidation. Their implementation marginalized non-Muslims and dissenting Muslims, strengthened authoritarian rule, and exacerbated long-standing inequalities between the center and the periphery. These exclusionary practices contributed significantly to the conflicts in Darfur and South Sudan, demonstrating that religion, when monopolized by the ruling elite, can deepen social divisions rather than strengthen national integration.

The post-2019 transition period briefly signaled a shift toward more inclusive governance through legal framework revisions, expanded religious freedoms, and reduced institutional dominance of Islamization. However, the conflict between the SAF and RSF exposed the vulnerability of these reforms, as both sides selectively used Islamic rhetoric to legitimize their actions and consolidate support. These developments confirm that Islam's role in the formation of the Sudanese state is influenced more by the political strategies of elites than by religious doctrine. Sustainable peace and national cohesion therefore depend on the establishment of inclusive institutions that prevent the politicization of religion, respect plural identities, and ensure that religious authority is not used to justify domination or violence.

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