

The Relation between External and Internal Authoritarian Legitimation

The Religious Foreign Policy of Morocco and Kazakhstan

Adele Del Sordi and Emanuela Dalmasso

Abstract

How do authoritarian regimes use their international activities to boost legitimacy at home? The mechanisms that connect authoritarian international activities and domestic legitimation remain understudied. This essay sets out to fill this gap by presenting an attempt at creating a theory about the phenomenon—the dynamic legitimation model. This model connects two distinct actions: on the one hand, authoritarian elites observe the international context and produce discourses and policies that aim to create a positive country image, or brand. On the other hand, authoritarian leaders use the international recognition they consequently obtain to legitimize their rule at home, by presenting themselves as internationally praised role models. As in a hall of mirrors, the recognition achieved in the international context is discursively translated into evidence of good performance in front of the domestic population. The essay demonstrates this argument by illustrating how two contemporary authoritarian regimes, Morocco and Kazakhstan, actively try to conform to international discourses on religion, particularly regarding the promotion of moderate Islam and interfaith dialogue, while adapting their strategies to the situation at home. In addition, it shows how they capitalize on the praise they obtain in the attempt to boost legitimacy at home.

Keywords: Authoritarian legitimation, authoritarianism, dynamic legitimation, Kazakhstan, Morocco.

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In the last few years, the scholarly literature on authoritarian legitimation has made significant headway in understanding how regimes try to achieve a certain level of popular belief in the justness of their rule.¹ Departing from the awareness that even the most repressive autocracies cannot survive without popular support,² and that legitimation may be as important as co-optation and repression to regime survival,³ scholars have begun to look at how authoritarian regimes justify their rule through institutions, claims, or a combination of different strategies.⁴ The authoritarian quest for legitimacy has an international dimension, too. However, despite a few notable exceptions, the questions of whether and how autocracies use their international engagement to boost legitimacy at home remain little studied.⁵ This essay aims to contribute to this field of studies, by investigating the mechanisms that connect the creation of a national “brand” abroad and legitimation at home. It is argued, here, that these two processes are intimately linked and dynamically reinforce each other, through what we present as the dynamic legitimation model.

The essay uses the case of the religious foreign policy of Morocco and Kazakhstan to illustrate international and domestic strategies of legitimation,

¹ See for instance, Aleksander Dukalskis and Johannes Gerschewski, “What Autocracies Say (and What Citizens Hear): Proposing Four Mechanisms of Autocratic Legitimation,” *Contemporary Politics* 23, no. 3 (2017): 251-268; Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, “Identity, Procedures and Performance: How Authoritarian Regimes Legitimize Their Rule,” *Contemporary Politics* 23, no. 3 (2017): 287-305; Maria Y. Omelicheva, “Islam and Power Legitimation: Instrumentalisation of Religion in Central Asian States,” *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 2 (2016): 144-163; Martin Brusis, Joachim Ahrens, and Martin Schulze Wessel, *Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Johannes Gerschewski, “The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes,” *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 13-38.

² Peter Burnell, “Autocratic Opening to Democracy: Why Legitimacy Matters,” *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2006): 545-562.

³ Gerschewski, “The Three Pillars of Stability.”

⁴ For instance, regarding institutions, see Brusis, Ahrens, and Wessel, *Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia*. For claims, see Omelicheva, “Islam and Power Legitimation,” and von Soest and Grauvogel, “Identity, Procedures and Performance.” For a combination of different strategies, see Dukalskis and Gerschewski, “What Autocracies Say (and What Citizens Hear),” and Adele Del Sordi, “Legitimation and the Party of Power in Kazakhstan,” in *Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, ed. Martin Brusis, Joachim Ahrens, and Martin Schulze Wessel (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 72-96.

⁵ Bert Hoffmann, “The International Dimension of Authoritarian Regime Legitimation: Insights from the Cuban Case,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 4 (2015): 556-574; Heike Holbig, “International Dimensions of Legitimacy: Reflections on Western Theories and the Chinese Experience,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, no. 2 (2011): 161-181; Marianne Kneuer, “The Quest of Legitimacy: Foreign Policy as a Legitimation Strategy in Authoritarian Regimes,” paper presented at the ISPA and ECPR Joint Conference, Sao Paulo, Brazil, February 2011, 16-19; and Edward Schatz, “Access by Accident: Legitimacy Claims and Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Central Asia,” *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 3 (2006): 263-284.

and as well as the complex relationship interlinking them. Both Muslim, and both authoritarian, Morocco and Kazakhstan also share a status of lesser power, meaning that, while they are missing something in terms of power and international influence, they also seem to have sufficient capacity and resources to attempt to improve their situation. Most importantly, both countries take a proactive international stance, intensely engaging both with their regional counterparts (the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region and Arab world for Morocco, and the post-Soviet region for Kazakhstan) and with Western partners and institutions. This proactive stance extends to the religious sphere. As it will be seen, Morocco and Kazakhstan actively participate in, and sometimes even initiate, international religious institutions and dialogue forums; provide consultation on religious education and training; and engage in bilateral and multilateral cooperation on fighting extremism and religious-based terrorism. Most importantly, their leaders maintain a continuous discourse on religion, talking about it in their interaction with the international community at all levels.

The essay proceeds comparatively, analyzing how the authorities of both countries frame religion when addressing audiences outside and inside their countries. To this purpose, the essay analyzes the official discourse of the two country leaders, the King of Morocco and the President of Kazakhstan, toward both international and domestic audiences. The findings provide insight into the two authoritarian regimes' efforts to conform to international discourses, while adapting their strategies to the situation at home, and show how leaders capitalize on the praise they obtain to boost legitimacy at home.

It should be noted that the focus of this essay is elite-centered, concentrating on the active and deliberate process through which authoritarian elites produce a "brand" for their nation and conform to international hegemonic discourses on the outside, while attempting to justify their rule before their own citizens by producing a legitimizing discourse. Following Christopher Ansell, we refer to the latter process as legitimation, meaning the "dynamics, discourses and strategies by which actors seek and maintain legitimacy, regardless of whether they are successful or not, morally convincing or not."⁶ Here, this term is used in ideal opposition to legitimacy, that is, the actual belief that a set of rules, an institution, or a leader is rightfully in place. The essay focuses on the production of discourses and strategies. Consequently, it leaves aside the question of whether the messages produced in this way are positively received by the population at home, creating, therefore, actual regime legitimacy. This question is extremely relevant, and a crucial one for understanding the role of legitimation as a mechanism for the stabilization and the enhancement of

⁶ Christopher K. Ansell, "Political Legitimacy," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2001), 8704-8706, quoted in Bert Hoffmann, "The International Dimension of Authoritarian Regime Legitimation," 558.

regime survival, even if its study can be challenging in authoritarian contexts.⁷ While indicating that it is a possible avenue for future research, the growing, but still limited scholarly understanding of the production of authoritarian legitimacy, especially regarding its domestic–international aspects, provides sufficient justification for our focus on the strategic production of legitimating frames.

The remainder of the essay is organized as follows: after a brief discussion of the relevant literature, the dynamic legitimation model is presented. The case study is then introduced, and followed by two empirical sections, devoted to the evolution of religious discourses in Morocco and Kazakhstan, and to the ways in which the leaders project international praise or criticism on their domestic audiences. A final discussion of findings concludes the essay.

Dynamic Legitimation

What do authoritarian regimes seek when they promote certain policies and values internationally? Besides genuinely believing in such values, is it possible that they use them instrumentally to create a national brand to propose to the international community? And could they, at the same time, pursue other goals, which relate to seeking legitimacy at home? Finally, how do these questions relate to the issues of authoritarian stability and the choice of stabilization mechanisms (legitimation, in particular)? These questions have been addressed separately by the literature on nation branding, particularly regarding Islamic moderation, democratization, and authoritarian survival. We draw on these bodies of scholarly works to propose our own theorization, which connects the aspects of nation branding and external legitimation in a dynamic way.

On the one hand, it is possible that countries might use values, including religious moderation and interfaith dialogue, to brand themselves as reliable allies to their international partners. Building on the literature concerning nation branding, political trust, and the dialogue of civilizations, Stacey Gutkowski uses the case of Jordan to demonstrate how Middle Eastern states actively promote Islamic moderation and interfaith dialogue by pursuing a variety of genuine and instrumental goals.⁸ In her work, Gutkowski follows the prompt of Michaelle Browsers, who previously found that Jordan’s Amman Message, a document seeking to clarify “who and what does and does not constitute ‘true Islam’,” had “all too often served strategic actions.”⁹ Gutkowski further shows that Jordan made consistent political and civil society efforts in that

⁷ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

⁸ Stacey Gutkowski, “We Are the Very Model of a Moderate Muslim State: The Amman Messages and Jordan’s Foreign Policy,” *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016): 206–226.

⁹ Michaelle Browsers, “Official Islam and the Limits of Communicative Action: The Paradox of the Amman Message,” *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (2011): 943.

direction not only because it had an authentic interest in promoting dialogue and peace, but also because it wished “to deepen political trust with the USA, attempting to instrumentalize the moral authority of religion as a form of state productive power.”¹⁰ In other words, Gutkowski shows that values such as religious moderation can be used instrumentally, as “discursive markers used by actors to build alliances, send political signals to their constituencies and elide normatively and politically problematic actions.”¹¹ Gutkowski uses the concept of nation branding to illustrate how this can be done, showing that a discourse of religious moderation is used in the larger effort of creating “brand Jordan.”¹² The idea of branding that she considers—and that we adopt here—is not related to a specific product or feature but is a wider effort to mobilize a positive image about a country.¹³ This can be summarized by the definition of Asli İğsiz, who defines nation branding as “a set of political moves by state officials to secure power in comparison to other states.”¹⁴ Similar to Jordan, Morocco and Kazakhstan also consistently try to brand themselves as reliable allies and partners of the West, and portray themselves as connection belts between the West and their own geographical region.

But could authoritarian regimes be pursuing other goals when branding their countries to gain favor outside? The same instruments, words, images, and representations also could be used by authoritarian regimes to try to improve their stability. Framing, for instance, can be used by nondemocratic regimes to enhance their stability.¹⁵ Cédric Jourde connects the literature on authoritarian survival and the concept of extraversion to demonstrate how, by drawing on the international discourses on security and Islamic terrorism and making adjustment to their own by adopting frames related to “Islamism,” “warlordism,” and “subversive threats,” the small authoritarian states of Mauritania and Guinea were able to reverse the representations of Western states about them, and consequently gain more support and lower pressure for democratization.¹⁶ Three aspects of Jourde’s work are particularly relevant: the first is his convincing account that foreign policy and discourses might affect authoritarian stabilization at home and be instrumental to it. His study is a rare exception to the lack of works on how authoritarian regimes make active use of

¹⁰ Gutkowski, “We Are the Very Model of a Moderate Muslim State,” 206.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹² *Ibid.*, 209.

¹³ For the different definitions of nation branding, see Nadia Kaneva, “Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 5-25.

¹⁴ Asli İğsiz, “From Alliance of Civilization to Branding the Nation: Turkish Studies, Image Wars and the Politics of Comparison in an Age of Neoliberalism,” *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 4 (2014): 689-704, quoted in Gutkowski, “We Are the Very Model of a Moderate Muslim State,” 209.

¹⁵ Cédric Jourde, “The International Relations of Small Neoauthoritarian States: Islamism, Warlordism, and the Framing of Stability,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2007): 481-503.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 488-496.

international factors to stay in power.¹⁷ Second, we borrow from Jourde the idea that, at least in part, the choice of frames and branding strategies adopted by authoritarian regimes depends on the observation of the international context in that particular moment; we believe, in other words, that authoritarian countries try to conform to what Jourde calls “hegemonic authoritarian discourses.”¹⁸ In the post-9/11 scenario, it is not surprising that Morocco and Kazakhstan should have chosen to conform to the general condemnation of radical Islam and to the necessity of a global war on terrorism.¹⁹ However, it will be seen that the way their approaches evolved reflected both their domestic and regional situations. The final insight that we take from Jourde is the connection between the relatively small power of a country and its need for intense international engagement, which he derives from the concept of extraversion. The latter was discussed originally in the study of colonial and post-colonial relations in an attempt to understand the proactive policies that African elites enacted to compensate for their relative weakness and dependence. While not stating that Morocco and Kazakhstan are small states, they certainly do not possess the status of global, or even of regional, powers. They are, therefore, authoritarian states in need of international cooperation, aid, and approval, and might be trying to reverse international assumptions and to create a new brand to achieve these goals, while, at the same time, possessing sufficient resources to engage in such enterprise.

In sum, lesser authoritarian regimes, which need to maintain good relations with their international allies to improve their international position, receive more aid, or reduce the pressure for democratization, engage in what we call “extraversion-like branding” (see figure 1) by both observing the hegemonic international discourses and producing, accordingly, their own discourse for the consumption of their international partners.

What neither Gutkowski nor Jourde do is to see whether or how authoritarian regimes also might use the good opinions they mobilize abroad as legitimation claims at home. This challenge was addressed by recent studies on external legitimation.²⁰ Departing from the Weberian classical framework or the empirical classification of Beetham, these studies look at whether and how authoritarian regimes use their international activities, including diplomacy, participation in international relations, and discourse, to boost

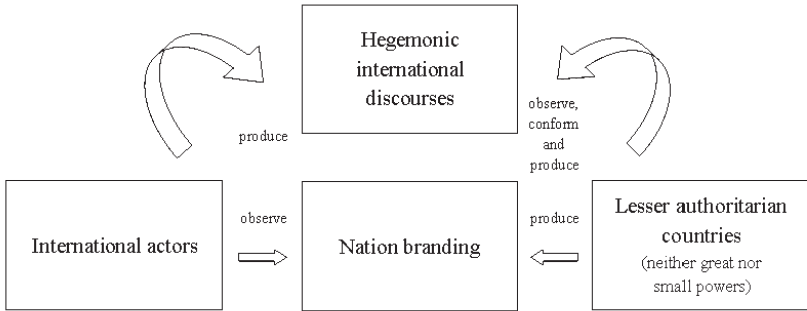
¹⁷ Gero Erdmann, André Bank, Bert Hoffmann, and Thomas Richter, “International Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes: Toward a Conceptual Framework,” GIGA Working Paper 229 (Hamburg: GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2013), 12.

¹⁸ Jourde, “The International Relations of Small Neauthoritarian States,” 481.

¹⁹ Irene Fernandez-Molina, *Moroccan Foreign Policy under Mohammed VI, 1999–2014* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2015), and Roger N. McDermott, “Kazakhstan’s Emerging Role in the War on Terror,” *Terrorism Monitor* 2 (2004): 6–8.

²⁰ Among the most notable: Kneuer, “The Quest of Legitimacy”; Hoffmann, “The International Dimension of Authoritarian Regime Legitimation”; and Holbig, “International Dimensions of Legitimacy.”

Figure 1. Extraversion-like Nation Branding



legitimacy at home. In other words, external legitimation encompasses all those “legitimation strategies vis-à-vis the domestic audience that pass through the international realm.”²¹ For instance, Heike Holbig shows that the Chinese leadership employs “explicit acts of international recognition” to create a positive image of itself in the national discourse.²² Thus, external recognition, which “is mobilized internationally and reported to the country’s citizens,” helps China’s leadership to gain legitimation at home.²³ This resonates with what Edward Schatz calls “international recognition,” referring to post-Soviet Kazakhstan where “the elite chose to base its legitimacy claim on external recognition inward to domestic audiences.”²⁴ To this purpose, the Kazakhstani elite engaged in intense diplomatic and international activity in the first years after independence, with the goal of presenting itself as professional and deserving of support in front of its domestic audience. Figure 2 illustrates external legitimation.

We propose, here, a theoretical framework that connects the two perspectives, considering how authoritarian states might engage in nation branding not only to gain international support but also as a source of legitimizing discourses to be used at home. We call this dynamic legitimation. Dynamic legitimation connects the two distinct actions described above: on the one hand, authoritarian elites observe the international context and produce discourses and policies that aim to create a positive country image, or brand. On the other hand, authoritarian leaders use the international recognition they consequently obtain as a means to legitimize their rule at home, by presenting themselves as internationally praised role models and, therefore, deserving of support by the local population. Figure 3 below illustrates the elements of dynamic legitimation.

²¹ Hoffmann, “The International Dimension of Authoritarian Regime Legitimation,” 569.

²² Holbig, “International Dimensions of Legitimacy,” 178.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Schatz, “Access by Accident,” 270.

Figure 2. External Legitimation

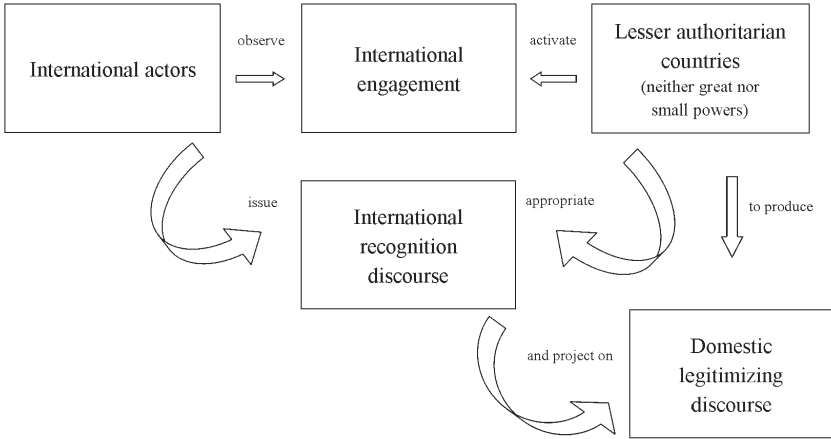
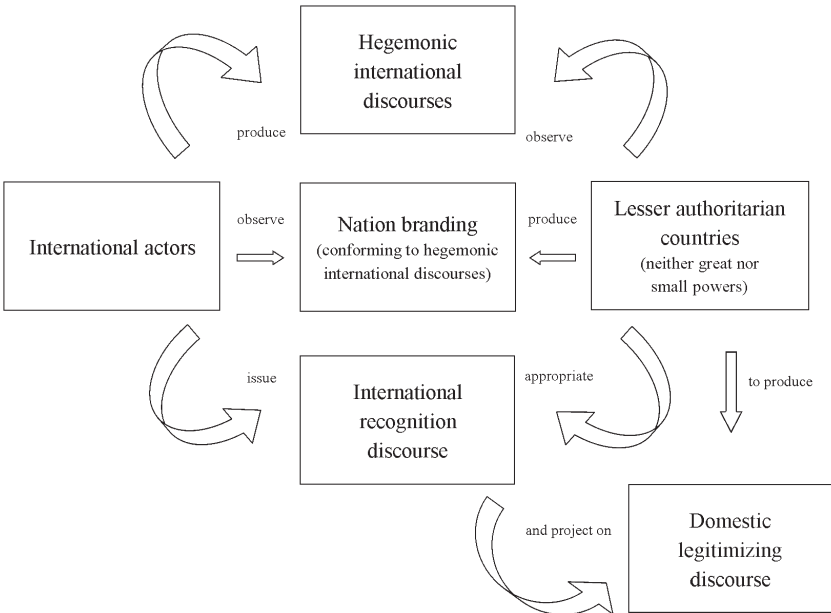


Figure 3. Dynamic Legitimation



Besides highlighting the interaction among nation branding, international recognition, and domestic discourses of legitimation, the definition of this type of legitimation as dynamic also hints at its variation over time. As will be seen in the empirical section of the essay, countries may adapt their strategies of branding and legitimation to changing conditions in the international and

domestic contexts. It should be added that this essay focuses on only two of the steps and phases of dynamic legitimation, namely the production of the brand in discourses addressing international audiences, and the production of a domestic discourse that reproduces instances of international praise or refers to more general international recognition. The actual issuing of praise by international actors is left out. Although it would be very interesting to see how effective the branding exercise is in creating recognition among international partners, our goal is to focus on the strategies that are used by authoritarian states to produce legitimating frames. And, as the empirical section will demonstrate, the leaders of Morocco and Kazakhstan are able to present many references to international recognition and use them to legitimize their own rule, independently from the breadth and quality of the actual recognition discourse.

Research Design, Case Selection, and Methodology

The essay proceeds comparatively, by looking at how two authoritarian regimes make instrumental use of religious international and domestic discourses for their dynamic legitimation. As mentioned, the countries selected are Morocco and Kazakhstan, in representation of the MENA region and Central Asia, respectively.²⁵ Both are Muslim countries, with the majority of the population practicing Islam.²⁶ Islam is the state religion in Morocco, but not in Kazakhstan.²⁷

However, in both cases, the political relevance of religion is high. Both countries intervene directly in the regulation of religious matters at home. In Morocco, the King's religious legitimacy is a constitutional matter insofar as article 41 of the 2011 constitution defines the King as the "Commander of the Faithful" and gives him, alone, the religious prerogatives connected to such title. In addition, the same article defines the King as the Head of the Superior Council of the Ulema. The council is the sole institution allowed, upon monarchical request and approval, to issue a *fatwa*, and the council's attributions, composition, and modalities of functioning are established by royal decree. The King also appoints the Minister of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs and the Secretary General of the Mohammedan League of

²⁵ More Muslim countries are located in sub-Saharan and Eastern Africa, as well as in Southeast Asia. We excluded them *a priori*. In this essay, we focus on the two aforementioned regions for the close interaction they have with the West and because they fall within our respective areas of expertise.

²⁶ PEW Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The Future Global Muslim Population Projections for 2010–2030* (January 2011), page 157, file:///C:/Users/Del%20Sordi%20P/Downloads/FutureGlobalMuslimPopulation-WebPDF-Feb10.pdf (accessed September 28, 2017).

²⁷ For a classification, see Islamic Countries of the World, *WorldAtlas.com*, <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/islamic-countries-in-the-world.html> (accessed September 29, 2017).

Scholars, the two most powerful religious institutions in Morocco.

In Kazakhstan, the state oversees mosques, madrasahs, and Muslim organizations and supervises religious education through a Spiritual Board. More generally, the state regulates religion through the Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Religious Affairs, mainly tasked with the registration of religious communities. Relatively permissive in the first years of independence, regulation has become increasingly tight over time.²⁸ Besides co-opting religious institutions, the state represses “nontraditional” forms of Islam, banning movements and organizations that do not conform to the national “correct” type of Islam.²⁹ In 2016, a Ministry of Religious Affairs was established, with the goal to better enforce state control against religious extremism, which is perceived to embody “nontraditional” and destructive strands of Islam.³⁰

At the international level, both countries belong to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.³¹ However, Islamic law does not play a dominant role or constitute the sole basis of the legal system in either country. This feature allows Morocco and Kazakhstan to engage in a pragmatic and flexible use of religious discourse, a margin of maneuver which is particularly useful when dealing with Western constituencies.

The two countries are neither the most populous nor the most important within their regions and have something to wish for in terms of power and influence, being very different from Muslim states that are regional powers, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt. At the same time, Morocco and Kazakhstan are not small states, in the sense that they have sufficient capability to pursue a coherent foreign policy and propose their own framing of religion to the international community. Not only are they not small states literally, but also they have sufficient economic resources to make such framing possible, as they belong to the World Bank’s middle-level income group.³² We consider

²⁸ Sergey Marinin, “State Regulation of Religion in Kazakhstan: Reconsideration of Approaches,” *Central Asian Security Policy Briefs* 23 (2015): 1-19; Alexander Wolters, *The State and Islam in Central Asia: Administering the Religious Threat or Engaging Muslim Communities?* no. 2014/03, PFH Forschungspapiere/Research Papers, PFH Private Hochschule Göttingen, 2014; and Dilshod Achilov and Renat Shaykhutdinov, “State Regulation of Religion and Radicalism in the Post-Communist Muslim Republics,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 5 (2013): 17-33.

²⁹ Nargis Kassenova, “Kazakhstan: Islamic Revival and Trajectories of State-Society Relations,” in *Religion, Conflict and Stability in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Katya Migacheva and Bryan Frederick, RAND Corporation Research Report Series (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 115-138.

³⁰ Nurlan Yermekbayev, “Why Kazakhstan Created the Ministry for Religious and Civil Society Affairs,” *The Diplomat*, November 10, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/11/why-kazakhstan-created-the-ministry-for-religious-and-civil-society-affairs/> (accessed June 5, 2018), and Kassenova, “Kazakhstan.”

³¹ OIC, “OIC Member State Countries” (2015), <http://www.oicexchanges.org/members/oic-member-state-countries> (accessed September 29, 2017).

this position to be particularly important: both states are in a position lower than wished, yet have sufficient resources to try to improve their status.

Both Morocco and Kazakhstan are authoritarian regimes, and rely, to a certain degree, on legitimation and persuasion for their stabilization, sometimes preferring these strategies to sheer repression. Kazakhstan has been defined as a “soft authoritarian regime” which relies more often on “discursive pre-emption” than repression.³³ In Morocco, the strategic capacity of the regime to include and exclude some parts of society is based on a combination of inclusion in participatory institutions and co-optation.³⁴ This does not mean that, in either case, repression is absent or irrelevant, and does not make the

³² This selection was made in terms of country wealth and political stability, excluding from the number of possible case studies those countries that are too poor (that is, belonging to the World Bank’s “low income” group) or too unstable to coherently pursue ambitious plans of nation branding because they experienced war, revolution, or regime change in the timeframe we considered (2001–2016): Afghanistan, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, and Yemen. Instead, Morocco and Kazakhstan belong to the group of middle-level income countries, although the first is in the lower-middle group and the second is in the higher-middle. Following the same reasoning, Muslim countries that define themselves as small states were excluded (Bahrain and Qatar, which both figure in the World Bank-based Forum of Small States (see World Bank, Small States, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/922761504726183951/COUNTRY-LINK-Small-States.pdf> (accessed September 28, 2017)). Despite their size, Bahrain and Qatar have sufficient economic influence to brand themselves as travel destinations and venues of international sports events (the Formula 1 Bahrain Grand Prix and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar). See, for instance, John E. Peterson, “Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State,” *The Middle East Journal* (2006): 732-748. However, they were excluded as there is no “small state” in the Central Asian region that could be compared with them.

³³ Edward Schatz, “The Soft Authoritarian Tool Kit: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 2 (2009): 203-222, and Edward Schatz and Elena Maltseva, “Kazakhstan’s Authoritarian ‘Persuasion’,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, no. 1 (2012): 45-65.

³⁴ See, for instance, Emanuela Dalmasso, “Participation without Representation: Moroccans Abroad at a Time of Unstable Authoritarian Rule,” *Globalizations* 15, no. 2 (2017): 198-214; Matt Buehler, “Continuity through Co-optation: Rural Politics and Regime Resilience in Morocco and Mauritania,” *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015): 364-385; and Julie E. Pruzan-Jørgensen, “Analyzing Authoritarian Regime Legitimation: Findings from Morocco,” *Middle East Critique* 19, no. 3 (2010): 269-286. Extremely authoritarian regimes, and those that have a particularly bad track record in terms of physical repression, are not suitable case studies for this research because of the smaller role of legitimation in those political systems. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, therefore, were excluded from the number of case studies. Both, in fact, are very authoritarian and repressive, scoring less than -8 (in the timeframe considered, Uzbekistan has an almost constant score of -9, and Turkmenistan of -8) in the Polity IV Index, where the threshold for “Autocracy” is for values equal to or less than -6. The scores were retrieved from the Polity project website, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm> (accessed September 27, 2017). In addition, both countries have high frequency of physical repression, confirmed by their scores in the CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Index (considered for 2001–2011). The index ranges from 0 to 8, with 0 indicating no government respect for personal integrity rights: Uzbekistan has a score of 2.81 and Turkmenistan of 3.81. Conversely, Morocco maintained an average score of 4 for the Physical Integrity Rights Index, while Kazakhstan of 4.09. In Polity IV, Morocco is classified as a closed anocracy, scoring -6 until 2011, and -4 later; Kazakhstan is classified as an autocracy, with a score of -4 until 2003, and of -6 successively. Information on the CIRI Index and data can be found at <http://www.humanrightsdata.com/> (accessed September 29, 2017).

two regimes less authoritarian. It only means that, in the general overview of regime stabilization strategies, legitimation holds a relevant place and is not made totally useless by the widespread sense of fear, which would be prompted by generalized repression. Finally, both countries have a history of proactive interaction with the international community, gaining advantages from this interaction in terms of trade, aid, and diplomatic prestige, and both maintain good relations with their regional counterparts and with Western partners and institutions.³⁵

Dealing with the projection of a positive brand abroad and of a portrait of capability and professionalism at home, dynamic legitimation is best analyzed through the words and images that are used for these purposes. Therefore, the essay attempts to look at official discourses on religion and at the framing strategies employed by the countries' leaders both externally and internally. Originally developed by students of Social Movements, framing involves the selection, from an agent, of particular aspects of a text to "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."³⁶ In particular, the analysis of framing in the official discourse enables researchers to see how ruling elites engage in "reality construction," selectively emphasizing information for a given purpose.³⁷ In this case, the analysis of frames addresses the way officials focus on specific aspects of religion and draws a conclusion about the type of image the authorities seek to project both abroad and domestically. The sample of documents (54 for Morocco and 104 for Kazakhstan) has been selected by searching all the speeches mentioning religion given to Western audiences between 2001 and 2016 by the King of Morocco and the President of Kazakhstan, addressing both local (in French and Russian) and international (in French and English) audiences.³⁸ The documents have been read repeatedly and coded, using both an inductive and a deductive strategy, as some of the

³⁵ See, for instance, Kristina Kausch, "The European Union and Political Reform in Morocco," *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 2 (2009): 165-179; Gregory W. White, "Free Trade as a Strategic Instrument in the War on Terror? The 2004 US–Moroccan Free Trade Agreement," *The Middle East Journal* 59, no. 4 (2005): 597-616; Johan Engvall and Svante E. Cornell, *Asserting Statehood: Kazakhstan's Role in International Organizations* (Singapore: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, 2015); Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Power Contest in Central Asia in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³⁶ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 52.

³⁷ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 614, quoted in Schatz, "Access by Accident," 268.

³⁸ A first examination of all the materials revealed that Morocco and Kazakhstan also adapt their frames to the foreign audiences they are addressing, differentiating between Western and non-Western (for Kazakhstan, this was noted as well by Omelicheva, *Counterterrorism Policies in Central Asia*). While acknowledging the existence of these other frames and discourses, in this essay, we focus on the national branding produced for Western audiences because, so far, both countries mainly use Western international recognition to boost their domestic legitimation.

frames that were found already had been known in the literature. As seen above, Gutkowski found that “moderation” could be successfully used to create a national brand; also, the portrayal of elites as professionals and deserving of support thanks to their proactive international engagement has been discussed by Schatz.³⁹ In addition, Kazakhstan has been found, at the domestic level, to distinguish between “traditional,” and therefore acceptable, forms of Islam, and “nontraditional” interpretations, where the latter are associated with radicalism and terrorism and considered a threat to security.⁴⁰ As pointed out by Sami Zemni, Morocco distinguishes between “tolerant and modern Islam” in contrast to a dangerous and destructive “foreign Islam,” and promotes the Moroccan multicultural and multiconfessional identity, while stressing the monarchical role in protecting it.⁴¹ Another important frame is made of the redefinition of the boundaries between politics and religion. Other frames were detected as recurring from the reading of the documents, which have been coded, consequently, *in vivo*. The empirical sections of the essay present the evolution of the religious foreign policies fostered by both countries.

Morocco

Branding Morocco:

From Knowledge-Based Mediation to Royally Protected Moderation

In 2007, Mohammed VI ordered the creation of the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies in order to develop anticipation-based expertise. In its 2015 Forum Report, the institute took into account Morocco’s assets in building its national branding. Following the geostrategic position and the reform “that has allowed Morocco to accelerate its transition to democracy and to resist the shocks induced by the ‘Arab Spring,’” the report identifies as a key factor: “[Morocco’s] international behavior, based on political and religious moderation that gave the country the opportunity to play the role of privileged mediator and bridge between the Muslim world and the West.”⁴² Indeed, in the last decades, Morocco has successfully mobilized its religious symbolic capital at the international level to create the brand of a moderate Muslim country that promotes interfaith dialogue. However, the way the kingdom has done so has evolved over time. During the first years of his reign,

³⁹ Gutkowski, “We Are the Very Model of a Moderate Muslim State,” and Schatz, “Access by Accident.”

⁴⁰ Omelicheva, “Islam and Power Legitimation”; Marinin, “State Regulation of Religion in Kazakhstan”; and Kassenova, “Kazakhstan.”

⁴¹ Sami Zemni, “Islam between Jihadi Threats and Islamist Insecurities? Evidence from Belgium and Morocco,” *Mediterranean Politics* 11, no.2 (2006): 231-253.

⁴² IRES, *Forum 2015: Actes des rencontres organisées par l’IRES* [Forum 2015: Proceedings of conferences organized by IRES] (2015), http://www.ires.ma/en/documents_reviews/recueil-comptes-rendus-de-lactivite-ires-forum-2015/ (accessed September 27, 2017).

Mohammed VI told the participants in the meeting, The Peace of God in the World, that interfaith dialogue “must be based on judicious knowledge, clairvoyance, lucidity and humility, because arrogance and intolerance are the worst enemies of constructive dialogue.”⁴³ Along the same lines, Mohammed VI addressed the participants of the first World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, organized under his patronage,⁴⁴ with the following words: “It is up to you today to take up a double challenge, first of all, to free the Word of God... and to do so by using the vast knowledge and skills that humanity can enjoy today.”⁴⁵ A few years later, addressing a message to the participants of the Rencontres of Fez on the theme “the sacred and modernity,” the King’s focus shifted from shared knowledge to unique Moroccan specificities:

By adopting a mediate and moderate Islam, combining the logic of reason and the light of faith, Morocco has been able to remain, throughout the ages, a meeting place for civilizations and convergence of cultures... . The model thus constructed by the Moroccans enables them to reconcile authenticity and openness, and to integrate science, wisdom and realism into their everyday life, venerating science and scholars, and edifying, over the centuries, schools and the high places of knowledge.⁴⁶

Thus, until the beginning of June 2007, the King’s international speeches focused on the role of knowledge and how Morocco’s moderate Islam fostered, through knowledge, the development of a multicultural environment. The discourse about the tolerant nature of Morocco and the importance of a culture of knowledge was developed further in the following years, but the King’s speeches progressively included other discursive frames.⁴⁷

In a national context of the rising power of Islamist groups and, more importantly, radicalism, the monarchy felt the necessity to reestablish its religious legitimacy. This legitimacy is an important, if not the most important,

⁴³ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, December 18, 2001. Mohammed VI’s speeches quoted in this essay can be found in the Kingdom of Morocco’s official database, <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-du-roi> (accessed June 6, 2017). See also the speech given on January 4, 2005, which proclaims: “It is up to you today to take up a double challenge, first of all, to free the Word of God... and to do so by using the vast knowledge and skills that humanity can enjoy today.”

⁴⁴ The next year, royal patronage also was given to the second World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, organized in Seville. In addition, in June 2005, the Kingdom established the Permanent Institute for Interreligious Diplomacy in Fez.

⁴⁵ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, January 4, 2005.

⁴⁶ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, June 2, 2007.

⁴⁷ For more examples of Morocco’s framing of tolerance and culture of knowledge, see the King’s speeches given on August 3, 2008, March 10, 2009, March 8, 2010, October 16, 2010, July 2, 2011, and November 28, 2012.

source of legitimation for the monarchy, as the King is considered to be a descendant of the Prophet and is constitutionally defined not only as the Head of State but also as the Commander of the Faithful. The extensive and wide-ranging religious reform program that followed the 2003 Casablanca bombings was boosted further by the 2007 Casablanca bombings.⁴⁸ In turn, the need to reassert control over the national religious sphere, already heavily emphasized in the King's speeches addressed to the national audience, was increasingly echoed in his international speeches. Discursive elements such as a tolerant and modern Islam in contrast to a dangerous and destructive foreign Islam; the Moroccan multicultural and multiconfessional identity as well as the monarchical role in protecting it; and the redefinition of the boundaries between politics and religion that used to be part of Mohammed VI's speeches to the nation moved to the international sphere.⁴⁹ Speaking to the Sufi Tariqa Tijania toward the end of June 2007, the King stated that "our first and last aim... [is] to protect Sunnite Islam, tolerant, free from all inclination to heresy, and free from all blind extremism and biased politicization."⁵⁰ The next year, to another international audience, Mohammed VI made the link between the Moroccan moderate and tolerant Islam and his role as Commander of the Faithful by declaring:

Our religious policy is the result of our long history, open to regional and global changes... . It is based on the institutional integration of the management of religious affairs. The cornerstone of this building is the institution of Imarat Al-Mouminine "Emirate of the Faithful", guarantor of the sustainability of the foundations of our religion according to our rite.⁵¹

The 2011 events and the instability and violence in various countries of the MENA region that followed increased Morocco's need to foster its religious legitimation by securing international support. In 2013, the Emirate of the Faithful was identified by the King as the guarantor of moderation and tolerance against obscurantism and radicalism.⁵² The King's monopoly over religion also was presented at the Counter-terrorism Committee Meeting, held on the September 30, 2014, at the United Nations headquarters in

⁴⁸ Driss Maghraoui, "The Strengths and Limits of Religious Reforms in Morocco," *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 2 (2009): 195-211, and Hamed El-Said, *De-radicalising Islamists: Programmes and Their Impact in Muslim Majority States* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012).

⁴⁹ Zemni, "Islam between Jihadi Threats and Islamist Insecurities?"

⁵⁰ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, June 27, 2007.

⁵¹ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, September 17, 2008.

⁵² Mohammed VI, Official Speech, September 30, 2013.

New York. Explaining the specificity of Moroccan religious policies, the Minister of Habous and Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Toufik, pointed to the link between the stability of the regime and its promotion of moderation, noting that the Head of State derives his legitimacy from his responsibilities as Commander of the Faithful.⁵³ One year later in New York at the Summit of Leaders fighting against ISIS and violent extremism, the King declared Morocco's will to share "the programs it has developed for the promotion of Islamic values based on tolerance and openness to other religions, cultures and civilizations."⁵⁴ Finally, in January 2016, the Kingdom organized an international conference whose main outcome was the Marrakesh Declaration, a document that aims to promote "true Islam." According to Sarah Feuer, the scholars who gathered in Morocco and wrote the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities "can be classed as representatives of state Islam insofar as their home institutions are legally, administratively, and fiscally tied to the states governing their respective countries."⁵⁵ Thus, the Declaration seems to be an updated version of a regime-sponsored brand of "official Islam" that was promoted by the Amman Message. To summarize, Morocco has been able to embrace the international discourse but also gradually introduce into its international framing topics that reflected domestic interests.

External Legitimation: Domestic Reflections of International Praise

Over time, the need to reassert control over the national religious sphere turned into an asset on which Morocco could capitalize at the international level. In addition, the role of privileged mediator and reliable ally that Morocco plays at the international level has been used by the regime to foster its internal legitimation. In July 2007, the King stated, "Morocco is now an active partner on the international stage... promoting cohabitation values and reinforcing the synergistic coexistence and interaction between civilizations and religions."⁵⁶ He also described Morocco as "recognized by wise people around the world, as a nursery of virtuous values,"⁵⁷ and declared his will to take "advantage of... the credibility enjoyed by the Moroccan model within its regional environment

⁵³ See *High-Level Meeting of the Security Council on the Moroccan Approach in the Field of Fighting against Terrorism*, New York (September 30, 2014), https://www.diplomatie.ma/Portals/26/Events/69th_session_ag_un/Morocco%20approach%20anti%20terrorism%20UN (accessed July 26, 2017).

⁵⁴ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, September 29, 2015.

⁵⁵ Sarah J. Feuer, *State Islam in the Battle against Extremism: Emerging Trends in Morocco & Tunisia*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Focus*, no. 145 (June 2016), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus145_Feuer-4.pdf (accessed July 24, 2017).

⁵⁶ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, July 30, 2007.

⁵⁷ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, September 19, 2008.

and internationally.”⁵⁸ During the last few years, the King has increasingly praised Morocco’s religious foreign policy to his domestic audience. He went as far as declaring,

the Moroccan model for the management of religious affairs is appreciated at its true value and is the object of sustained interest at the continental and international levels...we would like the Moroccan experience to be made available to friendly countries that share with Morocco the attachment to the same spiritual principles and values and who have expressed the wish to benefit from the Moroccan model, as this is the case for co-operation in training Imams.⁵⁹

The King also defined the forums hosted by Morocco as “all manifestations of trust and credibility which our country enjoys on an international scale”⁶⁰ and praised the Security Forces “for their mobilization and vigilance in order to counter the multiple terrorist attempts that desperately seek to harm the Moroccan model world-wide recognized for its singularity.”⁶¹ The link between antiterrorism policies and the religious one has been made clear by Mohammed VI, who declared, “Morocco is an effective partner in the fight against terrorism, whether it is in terms of security cooperation...or through its singular model in the management of the religious matters.”⁶²

Kazakhstan

Branding Kazakhstan:

Multiconfessional, Dialogue-Promoting, Internationally Engaged

Since independence, Kazakhstan has showed a strong interest in promoting dialogue among different civilizations.⁶³ This commitment soon took the shape of a steady promotion of religious dialogue, a necessity that was felt with a new urgency after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In 2003, Kazakhstan organized the first Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. The congress, which gathered high-level religious representatives from all the

⁵⁸ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, November 6, 2008.

⁵⁹ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, July 30, 2014.

⁶⁰ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, July 30, 2015.

⁶¹ Mohammed VI, Official Speech, August 20, 2015.

⁶² Mohammed VI, Official Speech, July 30, 2016.

⁶³ For instance, in 1992, Nazarbayev proposed to the United Nations that it convene a forum to enhance the promotion of peace, security, and stability in Asia and, from there, to the whole world. The proposal was accepted, resulting in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. See Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), <http://www.s-cica.org/> (accessed October 2, 2017).

major faiths in the country's capital, Astana, later became a triennial event.⁶⁴ The congress is central to the creation and promotion of Kazakhstan's brand as a multiconfessional country with a strong commitment to interfaith dialogue. Kazakhstan is said to be particularly suited to the promotion of dialogue by its geographical position, which places it as a bridge between East and West—a well-recognized frame regularly employed internationally by Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev.⁶⁵ Most importantly, Kazakhstan is presented as a country where “not only there is confessional diversity but also the government takes care of the development of the spiritual culture of their citizens regardless of their religious belief.”⁶⁶ Employing the power of symbols, Nazarbayev often evokes the image of Astana's “domes, minarets and bell towers” to exemplify the harmonious coexistence of different faiths in Kazakhstan.⁶⁷ In particular, Nazarbayev uplifts Kazakhstan's experience as an example and inspiration for the rest of the world:

In Kazakhstan, we founded a successful model of coexistence of 18 faiths, which live in peace, harmony and mutual understanding. Our legislation on religious association works on the principles of equality and freedom of conscience... in the country there are 3,312 mosques, churches, prayer houses, synagogues and other places of worship. We have 47 religious-oriented mass media. Almost 500 missionaries are active in the country... . The followers of all religions in our country are members of one large Kazakh family... . We demonstrated that tolerant relations within society are a matter of conscious responsibility of the state, religious associations, and ordinary citizens.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ See the page devoted to the congress, Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, <http://www.religions-congress.org/content/view/358/35/lang,english/> (accessed March 2, 2018).

⁶⁵ As found by Erica Marat, “Nation Branding in Central Asia: A New Campaign to Present Ideas about the State and the Nation,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1123-1136. See, for instance, Nursultan Nazarbayev's speech of February 13, 2003. Nazarbayev's speeches can be found on the president's official website, <http://www.akorda.kz/ru/events> (accessed October 2, 2017).

⁶⁶ Nursultan Nazarbayev, speech of February 13, 2003. A very similar quotation was found in the speech for the Fourth Congress: Nursultan Nazarbayev, May 30, 2012.

⁶⁷ It can be found, for instance, in the speeches that Nazarbayev gave to the Third (July 1, 2009), Fourth (May 30, 2012), and Fifth (June 10, 2015) congresses. On the symbolic value of Astana for nation branding and legitimation, see also, Adrien Fauve, “Global Astana: Nation Branding as a Legitimization Tool for Authoritarian Regimes,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (2015): 110-124.

⁶⁸ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, June 10, 2015.

To this, Nazarbayev adds the conviction, recurring very often in his speeches, that religion, spirituality, and faith have a crucial role to play in converting the clash of civilizations into a “dialogue of civilizations,”⁶⁹ as well as in fighting terrorist ideologies. For instance, in the speech that concluded the 2006 congress, he said:

The tragedy of September 11 demonstrated how dangerous are the forces resorting to violence and terror. We have to place every effort to eradicate the ideology of terrorism and enforce the universal values of humanism. Therefore, to the destructive ideology of terrorism we should oppose an ideology of tolerance, harmony and dialogue. Our forum voiced the important idea that we have to avoid the use of religion to cover ambiguous political goals.⁷⁰

This frame—that interfaith dialogue is a remedy to the clash of civilizations and to the security threats posed by extremism and terrorism—is regularly proposed by Nazarbayev in editions of the congress (2009, 2012, and 2015) as well as in other venues, particularly those in which Kazakhstan has political ambitions.⁷¹ Here, the other aspect of Kazakhstan’s use of religious discourse to brand the country becomes evident. Kazakhstan not only tries to propose itself to the world as a model of multiconfessional harmony and a solution to religious-based terrorism through interfaith dialogue. The congress itself, together with other initiatives promoted internationally by Kazakhstan, is used as a proxy to demonstrate the country’s commitment to such values and as a platform for further international engagement.⁷² Kazakhstan also brands itself as a relevant international actor, intensely engaged in promoting interfaith dialogue. An example is the address that Nazarbayev gave to the United Nations General Assembly in 2007. After reminding the delegates of Kazakhstan’s being an “example of tolerance,” and highlighting again “the critical importance of a dialogue between world religions on key issues of the modern world order,” Nazarbayev mentioned the previous editions of the congress, proposed that the Third Congress should be “be convened under

⁶⁹ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, February 13, 2003.

⁷⁰ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, September 13, 2006.

⁷¹ For instance, on these grounds, Kazakhstan convened a forum on interethnic and interreligious matters within the framework of the Organization for the Security of Cooperation in Europe. See Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, June 12, 2006. The commitment to interfaith dialogue, along with other proof of international engagement and political liberalization, possibly helped Kazakhstan to obtain the coveted chairmanship of the organization in 2010. See Del Sordi, “Legitimation and the Party of Power in Kazakhstan.”

⁷² Other initiatives, besides the congress and the already mentioned CICA, include the creation of a dialogue platform called G-Global, the forum Islam against Terrorism, and many more such schemes.

the auspices of the United Nations,” and called for “an international year of convergence of cultures and religions.”⁷³

While it cannot be excluded *a priori* that such discourse contributes to the creation of a more tolerant environment within the country, domestic control of religion is much stricter than depicted in the international discourse. In particular, the practices of state co-optation of religious organizations and repression of “nontraditional” religious movements, also within Islam, contribute to an oppressive environment.⁷⁴

External Legitimation:

Broadcasting International Praise and Recognition at Home

As in a hall of mirrors, Nazarbayev uses the praise and recognition obtained thanks to these activities to increase his prestige as a ruler and to legitimize his regime before domestic audiences. This activity is not limited to the praise obtained through religious discourse, but extends to international engagement, in general. A young country dealing with a problematic recent history and experiencing one of its worst economic crises ever, in the 1990s, Kazakhstan turned by necessity to international recognition as a source of legitimacy.⁷⁵ While later it started to ground regime legitimacy in performance and institutions, the Kazakhstani leadership continued to seek legitimation through international engagement.⁷⁶

The international recognition of Kazakhstan’s model of peaceful coexistence among different religions, as well as the country’s proactive role as promoter of interfaith dialogue, have a relevant role in the domestic discourse concerning legitimization. The main venues used by Nazarbayev in search of legitimation at home are his Messages to the Nation. Originally broadcast live, these annual speeches have a very wide audience, as their content is repeated by state media.⁷⁷ In these messages, Nazarbayev tries to convince the citizenship of the importance of Kazakhstan’s model for the international community: “We are known to the whole world for our tolerance and for our inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue and harmony.”⁷⁸ In particular, Nazarbayev highlights the state’s role in achieving such results: “The international community has

⁷³ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, September 25, 2007.

⁷⁴ Kassenova, “Kazakhstan.”

⁷⁵ Schatz, “Access by Accident.”

⁷⁶ Del Sordi, “Legitimation and the Party of Power in Kazakhstan,” and Adele Del Sordi, “Kazakhstan 2015-2016: Balancing Regime Stability amidst Local and Global Challenges,” *Asia Maior* 27, 2016 (2017): 439-461.

⁷⁷ See also, Del Sordi, “Legitimation and the Party of Power in Kazakhstan.” Other important speeches analyzed here are those that the president has addressed to the parliament; to the ruling party, Nur Otan; and to the People’s Assembly of Kazakhstan. However, because they directly address the population, the Messages to the Nation have special relevance in investigating the regime’s legitimation.

⁷⁸ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, February 16, 2005.

already recognized our coherent policy aimed at ensuring tolerance, interfaith and intercultural harmony among representatives of all nationalities living in our country and representing a single nation of Kazakhstan.”⁷⁹ Or, later: “Peace and harmony, a dialogue of cultures and religions in our multinational country is rightly recognized as a world standard. The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan has become a unique Eurasian model of the dialogue of cultures. Kazakhstan has become a centre of global interfaith dialogue.”⁸⁰

The President also emphasizes the praise the country receives for its engagement in promoting interfaith dialogue and notes how that raises the country’s international profile. Referring to the congress, he said in his 2004 Message: “The relevance of our country on the political and economic map of the world is growing. Kazakhstan has become the place where first-order world forums take place.”⁸¹ Assessing the results of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy initiatives and proposing their continuation, the President noted: “Also this year Astana will host the IV Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which has become an important platform for international interfaith dialogue...Kazakhstan's foreign policy proposals have received support from the world community.”⁸²

Finally, Nazarbayev emphasizes the role of Kazakhstan as a precious ally of the West in the War on Terror as a significant contribution to the country’s international reputation. In 2005, he said: “We have made Kazakhstan a regional leader, a respected international partner, an active participant in the fight against international terrorism, drug trafficking and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.”⁸³

Conclusions

One of the main consequences for the international system of the 9/11 attacks and the U. S.-led militaristic response was polarization. To take a side in the global war on terror was mandatory for any country wanting to be part of the international system. The same events, however, also created new opportunities for nondemocratic countries in search of external support, insofar as the United States had to “put aside its democratic scruples and seek closer ties with autocracies throughout the Middle East and Asia.”⁸⁴ Another

⁷⁹ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, March 1, 2006.

⁸⁰ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, December 14, 2012.

⁸¹ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, March 19, 2004.

⁸² Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, January 27, 2012.

⁸³ Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, February 16, 2005. Similarly, he stated in his 2012 Message: “We play an important role in strengthening global security, we support the world community in the fight against international terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking.” See Nursultan Nazarbayev, Official Speech, January 27, 2012.

⁸⁴ Thomas Carothers, “Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror,” *Foreign Affairs* (2003): 84-97.

very important consequence of 9/11 was the return of religion to the political scene, highlighted by Jeffrey Haynes.⁸⁵ According to him, there have been four phases of religion's international political influence since the Second World War. However, it is only during the last phase (i.e., 9/11 and its aftermath) that religion reemerged as a key political actor. Thus, Morocco and Kazakhstan's choice to introduce a religious dimension to their support to the U. S.-led coalition can be considered only a wise one.

Yet, without the ability of both countries to adapt their framing to their domestic interests as well as to the international discourse, the outcome of their branding could have been less remarkable. As the essay has demonstrated, far from passively adopting a preconceived discourse, the religious foreign policies of Morocco and Kazakhstan have been adapted to the international discourse by adopting topics, proposing perspectives, and responding to international trends, while also being sensitive to domestic interests. Morocco, while initially proposing itself as a mediator and promoter of interfaith dialogue, was led by successive crises to redirect its international framing to a version closer to its needs to consolidate regime legitimacy, linking the promotion of moderation and "true Islam" to the political survival of the Commander of the Faithful. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, not only framed its country as a multiconfessional haven, but also as a capable, intensely engaged international actor, ready to fight the global challenges of extremism and terrorism by promoting interfaith dialogue. By doing so, Kazakhstan reflected its need to ground domestic legitimacy in international engagement, something that the country has been doing since the 1990s.

Through such efforts, both countries have demonstrated their capacity to turn internal challenges into opportunities to be offered in the international sphere. In addition, Morocco and Kazakhstan have used the international recognition they earned thanks to their positioning as promoters of interfaith dialogue, moderation, and international engagement to boost regime legitimacy at home. Through external legitimation, that is, by presenting to the home audience international praise in support of the leaders' right to rule, Morocco and Kazakhstan, respectively, have used religious foreign policy to face a domestic legitimacy crisis and to build a legitimation strategy otherwise difficult to create.

The dynamic legitimation model outlined in this essay constitutes a first step in understanding the complex relationship interlinking international and domestic strategies of legitimation pursued by authoritarian states. After demonstration here, its usefulness should be further tested in other case studies, both in terms of countries and topics used to gain legitimation.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and International Relations after '9/11'," *Democratization* 12, no. 3 (June 2005): 398-413.