

	Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026	
	RESEARCH ARTICLE 	
<h1>Salafism in Algeria and the Reconfiguration of Religious Legitimacy: A Sociological Analysis of Discourse, References, and Symbolic Authority</h1>		
Chettah Kheira PhD in Cultural Sociology Algeria Email: kheira1314@gmail.com		
Issue web link https://imcra-az.org/archive/389-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-1-vol-9-2026.html		
Keywords Salafism; religious discourse; symbolic legitimacy; Algerian society; religious field; contemporary religiosity		
Abstract <p>This study examines the Salafist current in Algeria as a dynamic socio-religious phenomenon that has developed within complex historical, political, and cultural contexts, particularly during and after the period known as the “Black Decade.” Rather than approaching Salafism through reductionist or security-centered frameworks, the research adopts a sociological perspective that situates Salafist discourse within the broader transformations of the Algerian religious field. The study analyzes how Salafist actors mobilize religious references—especially the concepts of Sunna and bid'a—to regulate individual and collective behavior, redefine ritual practices, and assert symbolic authority over competing forms of religiosity. Particular attention is given to representations of family relations and funeral rituals as key sites where struggles over religious legitimacy are enacted. The findings demonstrate that Algerian Salafism is neither a monolithic nor a culturally detached discourse. Despite its critical stance toward popular and Sufi practices, it engages selectively with local cultural and historical references, revealing an internal diversity shaped by national memory, postcolonial dynamics, and social negotiation. This interaction underscores the role of Salafism as an active social actor contributing to the reconfiguration of contemporary religiosity in Algeria. Ultimately, the study argues that Salafism in Algeria should be understood as part of an ongoing symbolic struggle within the religious field, where competing actors seek to define “authentic” Islam, negotiate moral authority, and reshape everyday religious practices in response to societal change.</p>		
Citation Chettah Kh. (2026). Salafism in Algeria and the Reconfiguration of Religious Legitimacy: A Sociological Analysis of Discourse, References, and Symbolic Authority. <i>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</i> , 9(1), 757-764. https://doi.org/10.56334/sci/9.1.67		
Licensed © 2026 The Author(s). Published by Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems (SEI) by IMCRA - International Meetings and Journals Research Association (Azerbaijan). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).		
Received: 21.04.2025	Accepted: 24.10.2025	Published: 05.01.2026 (available online)
Introduction <p>Since independence, the religious field in Algeria has undergone profound transformations linked to the social and political changes experienced by society. These transformations intensified during the Black Decade, which represented a pivotal moment in the restructuring of religious discourses and the positions of actors within the religious domain. In this context, the Salafist current emerged as one of the most significant currents seeking to redefine religious meaning and correct daily religious practices according to a normative vision based on a specific understanding of religious legitimacy, the concept of bid'a, and commitment.</p> <p>The presence of the Salafist current in Algeria should not be understood as an isolated religious phenomenon, but rather as a social actor that interacts with historical and cultural transformations. It seeks to reshape societal representations of religiosity, family, and collective rituals, within the framework of a symbolic struggle in the religious field over the monopoly of defining "legitimate religiosity." Accordingly, this study approaches the Salafist current from</p>		
757 - www.imcra-az.org , Issue 1, Vol. 9, 2026 Salafism in Algeria and the Reconfiguration of Religious Legitimacy: A Sociological Analysis of Discourse, References, and Symbolic Authority Chettah Kheira		

a sociological perspective, focusing on the analysis of its discourse, references, and relationship with society, away from reductionist interpretations that directly link it to violence.

The study stems from the following question: To what extent does the Salafist current contribute to reshaping religious discourse in Algeria, and how does this discourse interact with the social, historical, and political transformations experienced by Algerian society?

1. Historical Context of the Emergence of the Salafist Current in Algeria:

In pursuit of a deeper understanding of the intellectual mindset underlying the Salafist current, and to approach its visions as a religious actor shaped within a specific historical and social context of Algerian society, this study adopts a sociological reading that takes into account the profound transformations in the religious field, particularly amid the religious and political conflicts that Algeria experienced during the 1990s, known as the "Black Decade." This period constituted a pivotal moment in reshaping religious discourses and their social representations, opening the way for the emergence of various religious currents, including the Salafist current, as a discourse seeking to regulate religious meaning and define patterns of individual and collective behavior.

From this context, the research aims to explore the extent of the Salafist current's contribution to these transformations by analyzing its presence in Algerian society and its relationship with the phenomenon of religious violence, whether in its intellectual or armed dimensions, as experienced by society during that period. This relationship is not viewed as a direct causal one, but rather understood within the framework of the social and religious representations held by Salafist actors about themselves, their social environment, and concepts such as religious legitimacy, *bid'a*, and correct adherence to religion.

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the difficulty of asking direct questions about issues of violence and extremism, the study adopted an indirect approach through analytical indicators that are more capable of revealing the positions and representations of the Salafist current without falling into preconceived judgments. These indicators were divided into four main axes:

- The first indicator focuses on the historicity of the Salafist methodology in Algeria, by tracking the stages of its emergence and spread, and analyzing the social and political contexts that contributed to its consolidation within society. This allows for understanding it as a social product linked to specific historical circumstances, rather than as an isolated phenomenon detached from its environment.
- The second indicator addresses the religious reference of the Salafist current, through studying the religious figures it relies on as sources for *fatwas* and guidance, whether inside Algeria or abroad, alongside analyzing its stance toward the Sufi methodology as one of the historical components of religiosity in Algerian society. This indicator highlights the conflict of references within the religious field and how each current seeks to impose its symbolic legitimacy.
- The third indicator deals with the differences and schisms within the Salafist current itself, by highlighting the nature of the intellectual and organizational divisions it has experienced. This reflects, sociologically, the dynamism of the religious field and the multiplicity of interpretations within the same current, in addition to the impact of political and security factors in reshaping these divisions.
- The fourth indicator relates to the reality of the Salafist current and its future in Algerian society, through analyzing the difficulties it faced in attempting to implement its methodology in social reality, and the resulting challenges concerning the extent of society's acceptance of this discourse and its ability to adapt to local cultural and religious specificities.

Thus, approaching the Salafist current not only as a religious discourse but also as a social phenomenon that interacts with the historical, political, and cultural transformations of Algerian society contributes to reshaping the features of contemporary religiosity within a complex and changing context.

2. The First Indicator: The Historicity of the Salafist Current in Algeria - A Sociological Reading

The Salafist discourse, particularly in its Wahhabi form, presents a specific conception of its own historical origin and development. It fundamentally denies being a "current" and insists on being an authentic religious methodology extending throughout Islamic history since the era of the Companions and the Successors, considered the "correct" way of understanding and interpreting religious texts. From a sociological perspective, this conception reveals a symbolic strategy aimed at conferring historical and religious legitimacy on the Salafist discourse by linking it to the earliest beginnings of Islam and stripping it of any modern or contextual character. This allows it to be presented as a fixed normative reference that transcends time and social transformations.

Within this framework, the Salafist discourse attributes the "deviation" from this methodology to what is known as the theological (*kalām*) and philosophical schools in Islamic history. Scholastic theology ('ilm al-*kalām*) is portrayed as an epistemic rupture with the Salafist understanding of texts, introducing rational and interpretive concepts that were later deemed sources of doctrinal innovations (*bid'a*). This period is historically reconstructed within a conflictual narrative based on the binary of "Sunna/*bid'a*," where the dominance of theological discourse during the middle Islamic

centuries is seen as a key factor in marginalizing the Salafist methodology. In this context, figures such as Ibn Taymiyya are invoked as a reformist actor who revived this methodology in the face of what is considered the excessive encroachment of philosophy and theology into the religious field.

This historical narrative continues by linking Ibn Taymiyya to a chain of scholars and reformers regarded as organic extensions of this methodology, such as Ibn al-Qayyim and Mohammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, extending to contemporary Salafist figures like al-Albani, Ibn Baz, and Ibn 'Uthaymin, and later to organized Salafist currents. From a sociological viewpoint, this continuous chain reflects an attempt to construct a "symbolic genealogy" within the religious field, used to produce historical continuity and enhance the symbolic capital of the contemporary Salafist current.

The Salafist current constitutes a historical extension of the methodology of the Companions and the Successors, relying on complete adherence to the original texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna, free from theological and philosophical interpretations. Over the centuries, the Islamic world witnessed phases of deviation from this methodology due to the dominance of theological and philosophical schools, which introduced rational frameworks and foundational principles later considered distant from the original Salafist understanding. The reformist efforts led by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, and Mohammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab contributed to reviving the Salafist methodology, establishing a reformist line that sought to restore correct religious practice and reinforce doctrinal legitimacy. This was later reflected in contemporary Salafist figures such as Shaykh al-Albani, Ibn Baz, and Ibn 'Uthaymin, extending to modern organized Salafist currents, demonstrating the continuity of the current in preserving its historical heritage and linking it to the righteous predecessors (al-salaf al-salih).

In the Algerian context, the field study showed that the Salafist current experienced periods of deviation and challenges at the local societal level, starting from the Fatimid ('Ubaydi) state, where respondents associated the spread of innovations, superstitions, and rituals outside the Salafist methodology with this period, viewing it as a phase of weakness in original religious consciousness. This phase created a gap between prevailing religious practice and the Salafist methodology, posing a challenge to the reformist wave of the current. With the emergence of religious reform in the twentieth century led by Imam 'Abd al-Hamid ibn Badis and the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, the researcher observed that people's daily practices began to change gradually: zawiyyas and kuttabs were organized, loud mourning rituals (wā'iḍāt) and shrines were abolished, and the masses began to prioritize the teaching of correct creed according to the Salafist methodology, reflecting the society's response to the religious and political transformation linked to national independence.

Through the field study, it became evident that the Salafist current faced three levels of resistance. The first was French colonial occupation, which represented a clear external pressure factor, yet it allowed the current to focus on internal reform and the building of strong legitimate foundations. The second was internal intellectual competition from Sufi orders, which linked jihad to predestination and submission to God's will, hindering the redirection of societal efforts toward direct political or military action. The researcher documented in the field that this conflict between Sufi practices and the Salafist methodology was present in daily life, whether through zawiya activities or individual behaviors, revealing a symbolic struggle between traditional religious reform and Sufi preservation of its rituals. The third level was represented by advocates of integration and assimilation, who attempted to dilute religious discourse and weaken national identity. This appeared in daily discussions and in religious schools, where the researcher observed local communities' resistance to this superficial discourse compared to the Salafist current, which linked religion to patriotism and national constants, such as the November 1, 1954, Proclamation.

From a sociological perspective, this historical and social narrative can be read within Bourdieu's concept of the religious field, where actors compete to monopolize the definition of legitimate religiosity and possess the authority of interpretation (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991). It becomes clear that the Salafist current does not present itself merely as a religious methodology, but as a symbolic tool to consolidate its position within the field through: confronting internal competitors, employing national history, and regulating daily religious practices to strengthen symbolic legitimacy. The field analysis confirms that the reconstruction of religious history is not merely a recounting of facts, but a symbolic tool for influencing society and reordering the balances of legitimacy in a religiously diverse Algeria, where daily practice intertwines with the symbolic and social struggles of the Salafist current.

2.1. The Salafist Current and Its Relationship with the Black Decade

The field study revealed that Algerian Salafists displayed clear reservation when speaking about the Black Decade, reflecting the current's sensitivity toward dealing with violent political events and their keenness to avoid linking their reformist methodology to any acts of violence or incitement. The researcher observed that this reservation is not merely an individual stance, but reflects a collective awareness of the importance of preserving the current's symbolic legitimacy within society, presenting itself as a peaceful, educational religious line far from any classification associated with violence or takfir (Hegghammer, 2008). Through field observation, it became clear that respondents tended to redirect the discussion toward their daily reformist practices, emphasizing unity, the dissemination of correct religious

education, and distancing from tendencies of division and hatred, reflecting their view of the Salafist methodology as a social tool before being purely religious.

The study also revealed that some respondents linked the violence and chaos during the Black Decade to the thought of the Muslim Brotherhood and the writings of Sayyid Qutb, which Salafists consider a source of takfiri deviation and incitement to killing and displacement, contributing to the dismantling of the social fabric and the disruption of moderate Islamic values in Algerian society (Bianchi, 2015). Field observations showed that this opinion is not rigid but based on continuous monitoring of daily behaviors and intellectual influences on local communities. The researcher noted that some groups were indeed influenced by these ideas, while most regions maintained the moderate reformist orientation of Badisi Salafism, enabling the current to preserve a degree of symbolic legitimacy and intellectual independence within the religious field.

On the other hand, the researcher documented that the Badisi current, after independence, focused on broad reformist efforts to correct erroneous religious practices resulting from French colonial influence, which led to the ignorance of some communities and the weakening of traditional religious culture (Roberts, 2003). These efforts manifested at various levels of daily life through the promotion of education in zawiyyas and kuttabs, the removal of French cultural influences on religious behaviors, and advising the public against relying on loud mourning rituals and shrine visits, which the current considered negatively affecting religious consciousness (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). The researcher clarified that these reforms were not merely religious activities but formed part of a strategy to reproduce symbolic legitimacy within society and consolidate the position of the Salafist current as the representative of the correct Islamic line and the guide for religious and social education.

From a sociological perspective, this analysis reflects the extent to which the Salafist current is tied to the Algerian religious field according to Bourdieu's concept, where actors seek to control the symbolism of legitimate religiosity and dominate frameworks of religious and social interpretation (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991). The Salafist current did not limit itself to addressing political events but employed this symbolic phase to reorder the balances of religious and social legitimacy, and to regulate societal daily practices in accordance with the moderate Salafist methodology. Field observations also showed that the current used this phase to strengthen national identity by linking religious discourse to national and historical values, making it a comprehensive framework that integrates religion, politics, and society without engaging in violence or takfiri divisions.

2.2. Divisions within the Salafist Current – Scientific Salafism versus Jihadist Salafism

In the early 1990s, Algerian society witnessed significant shifts in Salafists' positions toward politics. The field researcher observed that some Salafists tended to adhere to the educational and social religious dimension, considering parliamentary political participation likely to alter their methodology and expose them to political hypocrisy and lies, which contradicts their commitment to religious and social continuity (Hegghammer, 2008). The study showed that this reservation resulted from prior experience since the 1980s, when some religious groups attempted to engage in political life without adhering to legitimate guidelines, leading to a loss of credibility for certain religious currents.

On the other hand, field observations revealed tension between Wahhabi Salafism and Ikhwani (Muslim Brotherhood) Salafism. Ikhwani Salafism views Wahhabi Salafism as an alien current in Algerian society due to its reliance on Hanbali-Wahhabi thought, which prioritizes strict legal controls without considering local cultural and social differences, especially in matters of rigidity, strictness, and intolerance of multiple viewpoints (Bianchi, 2015). This divergence reflects a different understanding of the concept of Ahl al-Sunna: Ikhwani Salafism sees the term as broader, encompassing large groups of Muslims such as Shi'a, Mu'tazila, Ibadis, and Malikis, considering Ahl al-Sunna to pertain to religious principles rather than individuals, whereas Wahhabi Salafism narrows the term to include only what aligns with its methodology, which the field discourse interprets as a political and doctrinal instrumentalization of the term "Ahl al-Sunna" (Roberts, 2003).

Field analysis showed that these intellectual differences led to a clear division within the Algerian Salafist current, branching into two main branches: scientific Salafism, which focused on religious education and social reform, and hardline or jihadist Salafism, which tended toward extremism and sometimes violence, resulting from the application of Wahhabi understanding to political and social issues without regard for local reality (Hegghammer, 2008; Bianchi, 2015). This division contributed to shaping the religious landscape in Algeria, making it necessary to distinguish between those committed to religious and social reform and those deviating toward extremism, reflecting an internal struggle over symbolic authority within the religious field (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991).

From a sociological perspective, this division can be read as a symbolic struggle within the Algerian religious field, where each current seeks to establish its intellectual, social, and political project, whether through influencing individuals' daily practices or controlling religious concepts such as "Ahl al-Sunna" and "the Islamic state." Field analysis demonstrates that the tension between scientific Salafism and jihadist Salafism is not merely a dispute over religious concepts, but also a struggle over symbolic legitimacy and intellectual hegemony in Algerian society, with direct impacts on social and political cohesion (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996).

3. The Second Indicator: Religious References

This part of the field study sought to identify the religious references on which the Salafist current in Algeria relies, by determining the scholarly figures and intellectual sources that shape their religious and social knowledge and behavior, whether from local references or the broader Islamic space. The observations showed that the selection of religious references by Salafists does not limit itself to referring to religious texts alone, but involves networks of knowledge and symbolic references used to consolidate the current's position within the religious field and achieve epistemic and social legitimacy in society.

First, field analysis revealed that Wahhabi Salafism gives clear priority to referring to specialized scholars in fatwa issuance and teaching rather than individual ijihad, considering that the transmission of knowledge should be scientifically and symbolically framed, not open to the general public without a clear methodology. During interviews, names of local researchers and preachers emerged as scholarly references that transmit Sharia knowledge in a manner consistent with the Salafist methodology, serving as sources of fatwa and guidance, while members of the group transmit this understanding to the public through these scientifically established channels.

This observation aligns with academic studies analyzing Salafist references in the Maghreb countries. Amal Boubeker, in her book *The Salafists in the Maghreb Countries*, pointed out that Salafist currents interact with local and historical references, building their contemporary understanding upon them, and face epistemic conflict with other currents in society, including Sufi references and the traditional Maliki school, through attempts to localize Sharia understanding within the local context (Boubeker, 2011).

Advanced studies also indicate that Salafist reference is not limited to local models only, but encompasses broad intellectual sources from Islamic and global heritage. A conscious selection process occurs for references that align with the principles of the Salafist methodology, contributing to giving this reference a scientific and socially acceptable character. This is evident in the analysis of Salafism in the Maghreb region, which shows that Salafist reference interacts with local social and cultural traditions while seeking to impose its reformist project (Skoumi, 2025).

Another prominent aspect in the field analysis is the positioning of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars as a reference model possessing historical and epistemic capital in the Algerian religious arena. It played an important role in developing national religious consciousness before and after independence, becoming a reference from which some Salafists draw methods of religious education and organization within society, thereby enhancing the Salafist current's ability to communicate with the broader spectrum of individuals. References related to the history of Islamic movements in Algeria indicate that this historical role of the Association influenced the formation of a more cohesive Salafist reference linked to the local society and national identity (Al-Din S., 2023).

From a sociological perspective, religious reference among Salafists represents a symbolic and cultural tool for producing legitimacy within society. It is used not only as an epistemic base but also as a means to regulate and direct religious practice, and to strengthen Salafists' ability to interact with the masses in a culturally understandable and acceptable manner. Through it, they confront competing intellectual currents—whether Sufi or traditional jurisprudential schools—by strengthening their positions in the epistemic influence network within society. This reflects a symbolic struggle over legitimacy within the Algerian religious field.

Wahhabi Salafism in Algeria relies on a specific set of scholars and religious references that appear to respondents as fixed references used in guiding fatwas and determining doctrinal and behavioral standards. Field analysis highlights that the selection of these references is not limited to scholarly fame alone, but is also linked to the extent to which they are considered founders of the religious and legitimate value adopted by Salafists. This serves as an indicator of a symbolic epistemic network connecting the reference center to social behavior within Salafist groups.

In this context, local scholars are viewed as approved references for correct Salafist understanding, such as Shaykh Farkous, Shaykh Ramadan Jomaa, Shaykh Abu Osama, Shaykh Najib Jallouah, and Shaykh Salem Meridah. Salafists see in these scholars scholarly and symbolic weight capable of confronting disagreement and refuting opponents. These local references reflect the current's ability to localize religious reference in a way that connects it to the social and cultural specificities of Algerian society without losing its connection to Salafist doctrinal foundations.

At the level of the wider Islamic world, Wahhabi Salafists draw upon widely disseminated intellectual and historical references, most notably Imam Mohammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792 CE), regarded as the historical renewer and definier of the Wahhabi methodology within modern Salafism. His name is associated with "reviving monotheism and rejecting polytheism and innovations," based on an understanding heavily derived from the Hanbali heritage and the works of Ibn Taymiyya (Mohammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, His Salafist Creed and Reformist Call).

Significant weight is also given in Salafist circles to the methodology of Shaykh Mohammed Nasir al-Din al-Albani, who was observed to have contributed to defining standards of hadith and creed within contemporary Salafist discourse. Likewise, Shaykh Ibn Baz and Shaykh al-'Uthaymin, among others, whose works are employed as normative references in education and fatwa issuance, serving as an epistemic criterion for doctrinal and jurisprudential positions.

What unites these local and global references is the emphasis on restoring the “correct Salafist methodology” as the foundation for dealing with Sharia texts, through strong reliance on institutionalized Sharia sources such as books of monotheism and Sunna, and reducing dependence on jurisprudential tradition or theological schools. Historians and analysts have noted that this form of reference is based on referring everything considered an innovation back to the texts of the early predecessors, and then considering firmly rooted scholars as the standard for interpreting texts and applying them to social reality.

Field observations indicate that these references were not built in a vacuum, but are part of a symbolic network within the religious field through which the Salafist current aspires to monopolize the definition of religious legitimacy within Algerian society, by establishing reliable sources for fatwa and guidance. This contributes to organizing the daily religious practice of the current's followers and strengthening their connection to scholarly references that achieve a degree of intellectual and epistemic unity within the group.

3.1. Religious Reference in the Ikhwan Current (Muslim Brotherhood)

Field analysis reveals that the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) current in Algeria relies on a group of local scholars whom they view as reliable references for fatwa and religious guidance due to their long experience and ability to combine jurisprudential texts with social reality. This stems from their greater harmony with Algerian society's culture and social structure. Prominent among these figures are names such as Shaykh Tahir Aït Aljat, Shaykh Ahmad Hamani, Shaykh al-Hashimi, and Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Salam, who share common traits of long scholarly experience and the capacity to comprehend the specificities of the Algerian reality, making their positions trustworthy among Ikhwanis (Boumaza, 2010).

These observations indicate that reference within this current is not based solely on traditional “scholarly traditions,” but on its connection to the local society and its epistemic needs. Ikhwanis emphasize that reference must be capable of dealing with the complexities of contemporary reality, such as the relationship between religion and politics and issues of social justice—distinguishing their approach from other orientations that view jurisprudence as separate from reality or imported from outside the local context (Baba, 2014).

At the global level, respondents were unable to clearly identify reference figures outside the country, although in some cases names such as Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Dadaw were mentioned as representatives of a jurisprudential understanding that combines Sharia text with the requirements of reality, aligning with the Ikhwanī methodology that stresses *ijtihad* and the integration of jurisprudence with reality (al-Qaradawi, 1997). This referential approach links the authenticity of the Sharia text to the necessities of contemporary life, considering flexibility and *ijtihad* as indispensable conditions for understanding Islam in a changing global context.

On the other hand, observations showed clear reservation among some respondents toward official state references, with skepticism expressed about the actual role of official religious institutions such as the Supreme Islamic Council, and their inability to provide a religious reference that unites scholars and responds to society's aspirations. Some expressed this rejection on the grounds that these institutions lack scientific effectiveness and intellectual cohesion, often being handled in a bureaucratic logic distant from society's real needs (Ben Bari, 2018).

Respondents believe the solution lies in forming a scholarly movement that gathers scholars from various regions and affiliations to constitute a comprehensive and independent religious reference, producing an elite of scholars capable of addressing issues of contemporary *ijtihad*, jurisprudence, and religious politics. In this context, respondents' discourse indicates that contemporary scholars exist and have works in *ijtihad*, logic, and jurisprudence, but they are often isolated or invisible to the general public, which weakens the spread of their views and their broader participation in the religious field (Boumaza, 2010).

From a sociological perspective, these references can be considered tools of symbolic legitimacy within the Ikhwanī current, as Ikhwanis seek to accumulate symbolic capital in figures that combine scientific credibility with the ability to understand social reality. This contributes to strengthening group cohesion and organizing the relationship between the religious and the epistemic references they adopt (Bourdieu, 1991). This orientation also reflects the current's desire to reclaim interpretive legitimacy away from imported references that do not suit the specificities of Algerian society, indicating an internal struggle within the religious field over determining sources of fatwa and standards of Sharia judgment.

Regarding the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, some respondents noted that its past was Salafist in essence: “If you study the Association in the past—not now—you find that it was Salafist in origin, even if they call it Sufi or Quburi or Ash'ari about Ibn Badis, you will find that justice and his scientific reputation have wide impact, because they walk on true Salafist foundations.”

These observations reveal that the reference in Wahhabi Salafism derives its symbolic legitimacy from commitment to the traditional Salafist methodology foundations and the ability to distinguish truth from innovation in society, reflecting the effectiveness of this reference in consolidating the religious and social identity of Algerian society.

In contrast, some respondents pointed out that the Association in its present form has taken an Ikhwanī direction, affecting some Salafists' perception of its status as a pure reference. One of them affirmed: “Ahl al-Sunna is ancient in

Algeria, and if you study the Association in the past—not now—it is today Ikhwani and purely Ikhwani in methodology, but Ibn Badis and his brothers al-'Arabi al-Tabssi and Bashir al-Ibrahimi—you find Salafism present in them in word and deed; they differ with the Sufis and do not gather with them.”

This distinction between past and present reflects changes in the Algerian religious field, where symbolic conflicts among different currents—Wahhabi, Ikhwani, and Sufi—reveal a struggle over religious legitimacy and the credibility of reference. From a sociological perspective, the Association can be considered a central site within the religious field, yet surrounded by symbolic struggles over who possesses the authority to define fatwa and religious foundations, which is reflected in society's daily interaction with religious texts (Bourdieu, 1991).

Thus, it can be said that reference in Algeria is neither absolute nor rigid, but is formed through the interaction between history, scholarly figures, and intellectual affiliations, with each current preserving its symbolic elements that affirm its identity and distinguish it from other currents in the Algerian religious scene.

Conclusion

This study sought to approach the Salafist current in Algeria as a complex social and religious phenomenon that took shape within shifting historical, political, and cultural contexts. Its emergence and positioning within the religious field were not isolated from the profound transformations experienced by Algerian society since independence, particularly during the Black Decade, which represented a decisive moment in the reordering of religious and symbolic legitimacy balances. The analysis demonstrated that the Salafist current does not present itself merely as a doctrinal or jurisprudential discourse, but as a normative system aiming to regulate individual and collective behavior and organize daily religious practice according to a specific conception of “correct religiosity.”

From a sociological perspective, it becomes clear that Algerian Salafism operates within the religious field according to the logic of symbolic struggle, competing with other religious currents—such as the Ikhwani, Sufi, and official institutions—for the monopoly over defining legitimate religiosity and possessing the authority of religious interpretation. This struggle manifests clearly in the current's narrative of its history, in its selection of religious references, and in its stance toward deeply rooted social practices in society, such as funeral rituals and family relations, which it reframes within the binary of Sunna/bid'a. The reconstruction of religious history here is not understood merely as invoking the past, but as a symbolic tool for producing legitimacy and enhancing religious capital within society.

The analysis also showed that the Salafist current's relationship with the Black Decade was characterized by caution and repositioning, as it took care to separate its reformist methodology from armed violence, investing this period to affirm its image as a peaceful educational current seeking to reform society from within. This position reveals Salafist awareness of the importance of preserving social legitimacy and avoiding slippage into confrontational forms of religiosity that have lost legitimacy among broad sectors of Algerian society.

At the level of religious reference, the study revealed that Salafism in Algeria relies on a composite network of local and global references, used as symbolic resources to produce religious meaning and unify conceptions within the group. In contrast, the Ikhwani current emerges with a different reference model, more flexible and ijtihad-oriented, reflecting the plurality of religiosity patterns within Algerian society and confirming that the religious field is not a static domain, but a dynamic space where power, knowledge, and history intersect.

The study concludes that the Salafist current in Algeria cannot be reduced to a narrow doctrinal or ideological dimension; rather, it must be understood as a social actor that contributes to reshaping the features of contemporary religiosity through its interaction with historical transformations and local social and cultural structures. The findings also highlight that the future of this current remains contingent on its ability to adapt to Algerian social specificities and to manage the existing tension between the strict normative character of its methodology and the requirements of a diverse social reality. In this sense, studying Salafism constitutes an essential entry point for understanding the ongoing transformations in the Algerian religious field and the stakes it carries concerning identity, legitimacy, and social cohesion.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to established ethical standards in sociological research. It is based on qualitative analysis and field observations that respect the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. No personal identifiers were disclosed, and no vulnerable groups were subjected to harm or coercion. The research avoids stigmatizing language and refrains from normative judgments, ensuring analytical neutrality and academic integrity.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all individuals who contributed intellectually and empirically to this research, particularly those who shared insights into religious practices and social transformations in Algeria. Special appreciation is extended to academic colleagues whose feedback enriched the sociological depth and analytical clarity of this study.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

References

- al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. (1997). *Ijtihad in Islamic Sharia*. Cairo: Wahba Library.
- Baba, Abdelkader. (2014). *Islamic Movements in Algeria: Context and Transformations*. Algiers: Dar al-Huda.
- Ben Bari, Mohammed. (2018). *Official Religious Institutions in Algeria and the Issue of Reference*. Algiers: Dar al-Qasaba.
- Bianchi, R. (2015). *Unruly corporatism: Associational life in twentieth-century Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boubeker, Amal. (2011). *The Salafists in the Maghreb Countries*. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies.
- Boumaza, N. (2010). Islamism and political violence in Algeria. *Journal of North African Studies*, 15(3), 321–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2010.481312>
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Eickelman, D. F., & Piscator, J. (1996). *Muslim politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hegghammer, T. (2008). Islamist violence and regime stability in Saudi Arabia. *International Affairs*, 84(4), 701–715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00738.x>
- Mohammed ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. (n.d.). *His Salafist Creed and Reformist Call*. Riyadh: Imam Mohammed ibn Saud Islamic University Press.
- Roberts, H. (2003). *The battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002*. London: Verso.
- Saadoun, Nour al-Din. (2023). *The Salafist Movement in Algeria: Between Da'wa and Politics* (Unpublished Master's Thesis). University of Algiers 3, Algeria.
- Skoumi, M. (2025). Salafism and social adaptation in the Maghreb. *Journal of Maghreb Studies*, 12(1), 45–62.
- Wehrey, F., & Boukhars, A. (2019). *Salafism in North Africa: Puritanism and politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.