



Hasan al-Turabi's Pragmatic Approach to Establishing an Islamic State in Sudan

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 <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.317>

Abstract

This research examines the pragmatic approach of Hasan al-Turabi, a key figure in the Sudanese Islamic movement, in fighting for an Islamic state. Using qualitative analysis that combines the concepts of pragmatism and social movement theory, this study reveals al-Turabi's strategy in translating Islamic ideals into political action, including building alliances with various religious factions and exploiting revolutionary momentum. Findings demonstrate al-Turabi's success in advancing Islamization and shaping Sudan's socio-political landscape but also faced challenges in the consistent implementation of Sharia and protection of the rights of marginalized groups. Comparisons with Islamist figures such as Rached Ghannouchi and Recep Tayyip Erdogan highlight the particularities of the Sudanese context and variations in the strategies and outcomes of political Islamist movements. This study deepens our understanding of the complex dynamics between political pragmatism and religious idealism in Muslim countries, with important implications for inclusive governance. Through a critical exploration of al-Turabi's legacy, this research contributes to discussions about the future of Islamic politics that accommodates diversity and protects the rights of marginalized groups.

Keywords: Hasan al-Turabi, Sudan, political pragmatism, Islamic governance, social change.

Introduction

The Sudanese political landscape has witnessed a notable shift since the mid-20th century, with the rise of Islamic movements gaining significant influence (Daoud, 2020). This period marked the beginning of a new chapter in the country's political narrative, in which Islamic movements sought to gain immense power and influence that changed Sudan's political dynamics. Influential Islamist figures such as Hasan al-Turabi advocate the creation of an Islamic state based on Islamic principles (Sidahmed, 2020). The combination of religion and politics in Sudan has not only resulted in shifts in government structures but has also sparked debate over Islam's role in determining the country's laws and social standards (Ibrahim & Zein, 2014).

This intellectual attitude became the basis for the institutional reorganization of Sudanese society and sparked discussions about integrating religious teachings into government institutions. Sudanese society's political contours and ethos are shaped by the intersection of religion and state affairs, characterized by debates around incorporating Islamic goals in



government institutions (W. Berridge, 2021; S. Hale, 2018). Amid the discourse on the relationship between religion and politics in Sudan, the pragmatism shown by al-Turabi in fighting for an Islamic state is an interesting phenomenon to study in more depth.

To understand the complexity of the challenges facing al-Turabi, it is essential to look at Sudan's turbulent historical and political context. Since the colonial period under the Anglo-Egyptian Sultanate (1899-1956), Sudan inherited a secular system of government and law that was not entirely in line with Islamic principles (Köndgen, 2017). In addition, there are deep geographic and cultural divisions between Sudan's Arab-Muslim north and the more ethnically and religiously pluralistic south, fueling a long conflict between southern separatist movements and Islamization efforts from the north (S. Hale, 2018; Sidahmed, 2020). This study of al-Turabi's Islamic movement in Sudan provides a significant example of the complex interplay between religion, identity, and social change in the modern context. By examining his pragmatic strategies in establishing an Islamic state, this research contributes to the broader understanding of how religious ideals shape political action and societal transformations in contemporary Muslim societies.

Therefore, this research explores the pragmatic ways al-Turabi uses to translate Islamic idealism into real political action. Although ideological in promoting Islamic ideas, al-Turabi demonstrated a capacity to adapt and be sensible in navigating Sudan's volatile political landscape. Therefore, this research explores the pragmatic ways al-Turabi uses to translate Islamic idealism into real political action.

Although several studies discuss al-Turabi's role in Sudanese politics, only some deeply examine the pragmatism in his approach to realizing an Islamic state. The legacy of pragmatism that Al-Turabi left behind reflects the complex dynamics that emerge when the Islamic faith is combined with political governance. While he has been ideologically consistent in promoting Islamic ideas, al-Turabi has also proven his ability to adapt and be pragmatic in navigating Sudan's unstable political terrain. His legislative and socio-political reforms, which included the implementation of the Sharia and the revision of the educational curriculum, brought about significant changes in the legal and social structure of the country, which constituted his Islamic vision.

To understand al-Turabi's pragmatism in advocating for an Islamic state in Sudan, it is essential to study his pragmatism itself. As explained by philosophers such as William James (1998) and John Dewey (1998), pragmatism emphasizes the importance of practical consequences and adapting ideas to changing circumstances. In Islamic politics, pragmatism is an attempt to navigate the complexities of modern governance while upholding religious principles. Al-Turabi's vision of establishing an Islamic state in Sudan was influenced by his interpretation of Islamic sources and the works of Muslim thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Maududi. Al-Turabi aims to align Islamic teachings with contemporary political realities, recognizing the need for flexibility and adaptation in pursuing an Islamic state. This approach reflects a pragmatic attitude that seeks to navigate the complexities of government while still upholding religious principles (Hosseini & Rafeei Alavi, 2023). In addition, social movement theory can be used to understand how al-Turabi mobilized resources, built support networks, and took advantage of political opportunities in fighting for an Islamic state (Wiktorowicz, 2004). This theory analyzes how actors like al-Turabi organize movements by exploiting political opportunity structures, building collective identities, and using specific action repertoires to achieve their goals (Della & Diani, 2006). Thus, social movement theory can help understand the internal and external dynamics that shape al-Turabi's pragmatic strategy.

As pointed out by al-Turabi, Islamic pragmatism is the strategic alignment of political goals with Islamic ideals. This pragmatic view emphasizes the importance of reconciling religious values with the practical demands of government (Coşgel et al., 2020). Al-Turabi's



engagement with Islamic sources and the ideas of influential Muslim thinkers informed his strategy for establishing an Islamic state, highlighting the need to understand Islamic principles in modern governance.

However, there has yet to be much research that combines the concept of pragmatism and the theory of political Islamic movements to analyze al-Turabi's case comprehensively. By combining these theoretical frameworks, this study will fill the gap by understanding the dynamics al-Turabi faced in navigating his pragmatism and ideological goals when fighting for an Islamic state in Sudan. Filling this gap will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic movement actors such as al-Turabi negotiate between political pragmatism and ideological idealism in the context of contemporary Muslim countries.

Thus, this research fills this gap by exploring the pragmatic ways al-Turabi translated Islamic idealism into real political action. Furthermore, the findings of this study will emphasize the importance of balancing religious beliefs with inclusive governance that respects the rights of marginalized groups in Sudan. Building social cohesion through discussion and reconciliation between diverse groups and upholding international human rights standards is how Sudan and other countries face similar issues regarding integrating Islamic values within the governance framework. To build a just, prosperous, and stable society in the long term, engagement with the international community and respect for universal human values must continue to be a priority.

Research Methods

This research employs a comprehensive methodology to delve deeper into al-Turabi's pragmatic approach to advocating for an Islamic state in Sudan. The primary data collection method is document analysis, which includes primary and secondary sources. The theoretical framework used combines the concepts of pragmatism and social movement theory. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on key themes such as ideological adaptation, political alliances, and institutional reform. Triangulation of data sources and peer debriefing will be carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This comprehensive research method will hopefully provide new insights into the complex dynamics between religion and politics in contemporary Islamic movements, especially by exploring al-Turabi's pragmatism in fighting for an Islamic state in Sudan.

Al-Turabi's Pragmatic Strategies and Tactics

Al-Turabi, an essential figure in the Islamic movement in Sudan, is known for his pragmatic approach to pursuing the creation of an Islamic state. He interprets Islamic concepts innovatively to adapt them to the modern political context, integrating traditional Islamic values with ideas of democracy, pluralism, and human rights while maintaining *tawhīd* or monotheism as the foundation (al-Turābī, 2004; G. R. Warburg, 2009). One concrete example is the *tajdīd* concept *tajdīd*, which means "renewal" or "restoration," to emphasize the importance of renewing the understanding of Islam and applying it in the contemporary political context. In al-Turabi's interpretation, the concept of *tajdīd* includes both religious and political aspects (Al-Turabi, 1987). He used this concept to emphasize the need to update existing systems of religious knowledge and articulate his political vision, combining aspects of Muhammad Abduh's *ijtihād* with al-Banna's practical political activism (Kedourie, 2013; Zafirovski, 2021)

One of al-Turabi's pragmatic strategies was his involvement with various Islamic leaders and clerics in Sudan to promote a particular interpretation of Islam and the application of Sharia. For example, despite ideological differences, he built ties with Salafi groups such as Ansar al-Sunna, supported by Saudi Arabia (Kourgiotis, 2022).



In the October Revolution of 1964, al-Turabi played an essential role in framing the struggle within a religious narrative to mobilize support. As a legal expert at Khartoum University, he had access to intellectual circles and students to spread his political ideas based on Islamic principles. He used religious narratives to strengthen the legitimacy of his political struggle, depicting the revolution as part of an effort to realize social and moral justice according to Islamic teachings. Al-Turabi mobilized the Muslim masses to support the revolution by linking political struggle to religious values.

Al-Turabi also used clever communication strategies and ideological framing to attract support from educated and pro-change circles. As an intellectual, he articulated a vision of Islamic reform and political change in intellectual circles, framing his ideology in the context of Islamic intellectualism to appeal to those who understand Islamic theology and jurisprudence. He combined philosophical discourse with practical political activism, such as founding the National Islamic Front (NIF) and promoting Sharia, responding to the aspirations of educated circles for real change based on Islamic principles. Its alliance with Salafi groups positions its agenda as part of a broader Islamic reform movement, while its narrative of modernization appeals to those seeking a balance between tradition and modern values.

After the revolution, al-Turabi took a pragmatic step by joining Nimeiri's government in 1977. This decision allowed him to promote his Islamist agenda from within the system. During this period, al-Turabi implemented the September 1983 Law by integrating Sharia into the Sudanese legal system.

After the fall of Nimeiri in 1985, al-Turabi formed the NIF, which became an essential force in the 1986 general elections. The NIF allied with Sadiq al-Mahdi's Umma Party, and al-Turabi served as attorney general in this coalition government in 1988-1989. He also formed strategic alliances with various Islamist groups to strengthen support, such as the Salafist group Ansar al-Sunna, which Saudi Arabia claims close ties to the Saudi Grand Mufti Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz back. Al-Turabi attempted to moderate his anti-Sufi views by collaborating with Ansar al-Sunna, who joined him, supporting plans for an 'Islamic Alliance' with Saudi Arabia in 1966 and naming his party NIF in 1985-1989 to emphasize its Islamic identity and appeal to nationalist sentiment. His alliance with the mainstream Salafi movement helped fight neo-colonialism. During the coalition period, al-Turabi drafted a criminal code similar to the September Laws of the Nimeiri era. His efforts to codify Islamic law reflect his continued commitment to the creation of an Islamic state, even though he had to compromise with different political forces.

In 1989, al-Turabi played a crucial role in bringing Omar al-Bashir to power through a military coup. However, relations between the two deteriorated over time due to political vision and ambition differences. The ideological Al-Turabi clashed with the more pragmatic and authoritarian al-Bashir. Despite once being a close ally of al-Bashir and playing an essential role in the regime, al-Turabi showed pragmatism by switching to the opposition camp after his ouster. He formed the People's Congress Party (PCP) and became the main opposition force, transforming himself into a democrat. Although it calls into question his ideological consistency, this move reflects al-Turabi's ability to adapt to changing political circumstances to maintain his influence.

His pragmatic approach also faced resistance from puritanical Salafi factions within his movement. An extreme example is the Salafi-Jihadist group, which declared al-Turabi an infidel in 1995 and encouraged violence against him based on their interpretation of al-Turabi's beliefs (al-A. al-Hājj M. Aḥmad, 2012). This shows how sharp the ideological conflict is between al-Turabi and several Salafi camps, which not only condemn him but also encourage violence.



Achievements and Setbacks in Pursuing an Islamic State

As a prominent figure in Sudan's Islamic movement, al-Turabi's pragmatism was instrumental in his pursuit of establishing an Islamic state. As Attorney General during Nimeiri's reign, he actively promoted policies that introduced the 'September Laws', incorporating Islamic ḥadd punishments into Sudan's legal system (Köndgen, 2017). Despite facing criticism and challenges, al-Turabi remained committed to the principles of Sharia, even after Nimeiri's overthrow.

The founding of the NIF by al-Turabi demonstrated his ability to mobilize resources to pursue the implementation of Sharia as a central element in creating an Islamic society. Al-Turabi's success in gaining political power and influence in Sudan, which resulted in the establishment of an Islamic state in 1989, must be connected to his ability as an influential Islamic thinker. His works, such as "The Islamic State," provide an ideological basis for his vision of an Islamic state and offer an innovative interpretation of Islamic concepts in a modern context (Turābī, 2001).

However, the implementation of Sharia under al-Turabi's government faced consistent implementation challenges throughout Sudan. This country, with significant ethnic and cultural diversity, complicates efforts to unify Islamic law interpretation and application. For example, in Western regions such as Darfur, which are dominated by non-Arab communities, resistance to the codification of Sharia is very strong because it is seen as threatening local traditions and identity. Meanwhile, in the north, which is more influenced by Arab-Islamic traditions, the implementation of Sharia receives more excellent support even though there is still resistance from liberal and secular groups (Gallab, 2018).

Many critics considered al-Turabi's approach too rigid and needed to be more appreciative of the diversity of deep-rooted Islamic practices. Traditional Sufi groups, for example, opposed al-Turabi's efforts to limit the rituals and practices of Sufism, which were considered heresy (GR Warburg, 2009). As a result, rejection and resistance emerged from segments of society who felt their traditions and beliefs were threatened by mainstream interpretations of al-Turabi.

Al-Turabi's efforts to establish an Islamic state sparked a long-running debate about the role of religion in modern governance and the boundaries that should be maintained between religion and politics (WJ Berridge, 2017). Secular and liberal groups criticized al-Turabi for blurring this dividing line too much, sacrificing the principles of democracy and pluralism. Meanwhile, hardline Islamists accused al-Turabi of compromising Sharia too much for political purposes.

In his journey to pursue an Islamic state, al-Turabi faced challenges in managing the internal dynamics within his Islamic movement. Although he succeeded in uniting various Islamic factions under the umbrella of the NIF, tensions and rivalries between the different groups continued to exist. Al-Turabi's maneuvering with other critical actors in Sudanese politics, such as President Nimeiri and military leader Omar al-Bashir, also established complex power dynamics in his pursuit of an Islamic state (Verhoeven, 2013).

Although al-Turabi succeeded in building alliances with various Islamic groups, both inside and outside Sudan, his efforts to establish an Islamic state also faced opposition from secular groups and Islamic factions who held different views on the interpretation of Islamic law and the role of religion in governance (WJ Berridge, 2017). The controversy surrounding al-Turabi's approach and policies impacted social cohesion and political stability in Sudan, with increasing tensions between various religious and political groups (Martin, 2003). Al-Turabi's vision also has implications for human rights in Sudan, especially regarding the rights of women and minority groups (Maram et al., 2023; Shehadeh, 2003).



In analyzing al-Turabi's efforts, pragmatism in balancing political goals and Islamic principles becomes relevant. While he remained committed to Sharia principles, he also demonstrated flexibility in building alliances and adapting his strategy to political realities. However, the inconsistencies in its ideology and approach also reflect the difficulty balancing political pragmatism and religious idealism.

When compared with other Islamic figures who also attempted to establish an Islamic state, such as Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran or Abul A'la Maududi in Pakistan, al-Turabi's approach was similar in terms of commitment to Islamic principles and efforts to integrate them into government. However, Sudan's different political and social contexts and al-Turabi's distinctive leadership style and strategy differentiate his pursuit of an Islamic state (Baroudi, 2023; Maceoin & Al-Shahi, 2013).

Al-Turabi's legacy has long-term implications for Sudan's political, social, and religious landscape. Strengthening rigid interpretations of Islam, restrictions on freedom, and religious divisions were some of the consequences of his efforts to establish an Islamic state (Hasan Makkī Muḥammad Aḥmad, 1999; Taylor & Elbushra, 2006). Although Sudan is trying to build a stable post-conflict government, the influence of Islamist groups that have long been in power and know about managing state administration cannot be ignored. Learning from Sudan's experience can offer valuable insights for other Muslim countries facing similar dilemmas in reconciling religion and politics.

Learning from Sudan's experience can offer valuable insights for other Muslim countries facing similar dilemmas in reconciling religion and politics. For instance, Egypt's brief experience with the Muslim Brotherhood rule under Mohamed Morsi highlighted the challenges of integrating Islamist movements into a democratic framework. The subsequent military coup and crackdown on Islamists underscored the deep polarization and mistrust between religious and secular forces in the country (Ardevini, 2017; Brown, 2013).

Indonesia and Malaysia have also navigated the complex relationship between Islam and the state in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, despite being the world's largest Muslim-majority country, has maintained a relatively secular constitution while accommodating Islamic political parties within its democratic system. However, recent years have seen religious conservatism and sectarianism rise, threatening its pluralistic traditions (Hefner, 2019; Aspinall, 2021). Malaysia, on the other hand, has institutionalized Islam as the official religion and grappled with the role of Sharia law within its dual legal system, leading to tensions between religious and secular authorities (Hamayotsu, 2015; Moustafa, 2018).

Impact on Sudan's Socio-Political Landscape

Al-Turabi's movement has left an indelible mark on Sudan's socio-political landscape, significantly shaping the country's trajectory. The pragmatic approach adopted by al-Turabi emphasized the importance of practical consequences and the adaptation of ideas to changing circumstances (Gallab, 2018), allowing the Sudanese Islamic movement to adopt a dynamic political strategy.

One of the main impacts of the al-Turabi movement was the economic transformation of Sudan. Al-Turabi encouraged Islamic private enterprise and economic empowerment among Islamists, leading to significant middle-class growth within the Islamic movement (Tignor, 1987). This strategy reflects al-Turabi's pragmatism in adapting the movement to Sudan's socio-economic realities while mobilizing resources to support his political goals.

Apart from that, the al-Turabi-led movement also experienced a significant ideological revolution. Under his leadership, Sudan's Islamic movements became more open and adaptive, allowing them to embrace various segments of society. This transformation brought the movement to the center of Sudanese politics, with the National Islamic Front (NIF),



founded by al-Turabi, becoming the third-largest party in parliament in 1986 (Ḥasan Makkī Muḥammad Aḥmad, 1999).

Al-Turabi also mobilized the masses and united various social and religious groups in his movement. He successfully attracted support from essential sectors, such as agricultural and industrial workers, and religious groups, including Sudanese Sufi orders, Salafi groups, and Mahdists (Gallab, 2016). Al-Turabi's ability to frame the struggle of the Islamic movement as an effort to fight for the interests of various sectors of society was an essential aspect of his success in mobilizing broad support (Wiktorowicz, 2004).

Al-Turabi also adopted 'front' tactics in mass mobilization by establishing local branches known as usrah or circles during the mass expansion of the Islamic Movement in the 1970s. This tactic allowed the movement to expand its scope and strengthen its base of support across various sectors of society (Ḥasan Makkī Muḥammad Aḥmad, 1999).

The evolution of al-Turabi's thought also significantly impacted Sudan's socio-political landscape. His shifting attitudes toward socialism and Islam and his pragmatic approach to traditional social institutions such as Sufism reflect his efforts to navigate the complexities of Sudanese politics (GR Warburg, 2009). His involvement with various schools of thought and his criticism of traditional authorities demonstrate the internal dynamics within the Sudanese Islamic movement (Jamal, 1991).

However, the impact of the al-Turabi movement also gave rise to challenges and controversy. The implementation of Sharia law and the promotion of specific religious interpretations raise concerns about the rights of minority groups and women (Maram et al., 2023; Shehadeh, 2003). Additionally, al-Turabi's alliance with authoritarian regimes and his involvement in partisan politics sometimes blurred the lines between religion and politics, drawing criticism from various quarters (Martin, 2003). Despite this, al-Turabi's legacy remains significant in contemporary Sudanese politics and society. His influence in changing Sudan's socio-political landscape through a pragmatic approach and effective mass mobilization reflects the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics in the Sudanese context. Understanding the impact of the al-Turabi movement using the theoretical framework of pragmatism and social movement theory provides essential insights into the dynamics of Islamic politics in Sudan and its relevance for broader discussions about Islam and state governance.

Al-Turabi is seen as a pragmatic politician with a clear ideology linked to the development of radical Islam in Sudan and as a model for the wider Islamic world. Its ability to facilitate cooperation among radical Islamic groups marks its political significance (Martin, 2003). However, his pragmatic approach also had limitations and unintended consequences, such as increased tensions among various religious and political groups and concerns about marginalization and discrimination against certain groups (Taylor & Elbushra, 2006). Al-Turabi's legacy reflects the complexity of reconciling political pragmatism and religious idealism. Although controversial, his pragmatic approach offers an alternative model that balances fidelity to Islamic principles with the practical demands of modern governance (WJ Berridge, 2017).

Impact on the Rights of Marginalized Groups

The impact of Al-Turabi's approach to the rights of marginalized groups in Sudan has given rise to various challenges and problematic consequences. The Islamization policies he pushed, although intended to fight for justice and prosperity through an Islamic framework, ultimately hurt minority groups, women, and peripheral regions such as Darfur and South Sudan (Metz, 1991; Sidahmed, 2020).



The implementation of Sharia law through the September 1983 Law disproportionately affected non-Muslim communities, such as Christians and adherents of traditional African beliefs. They face discrimination and restrictions in carrying out their religious practices, although Al-Turabi claims that Islamic law protects minority groups (An Na'im, 2019; Fluehr-Lobban, 2012; Maram et al., 2023).

While Al-Turabi was initially known as a supporter of women's rights, the implementation of his interpretation of Islam in state policy resulted in certain restrictions. Laws influenced by her vision, such as the Personal Status Act of 1991, limited women's rights in divorce, inheritance, and child custody (Fluehr-Lobban, 2012; S. Hale, 2018). Women also face pressure to adhere to conservative norms in dress and participation in public spaces, raising questions about Al-Turabi's commitment to gender equality (Nageeb, 2004).

Al-Turabi's efforts to build an Islamic state centered on Khartoum also impacted peripheral regions such as Darfur and South Sudan, which have significant non-Muslim populations. The policy of Islamization and centralization of power gave rise to alienation and resistance in these regions (Jok, 2007). The conflict in Darfur, for example, was partly sparked by dissatisfaction with the dominance of the central government supported by Al-Turabi (De Waal, 2005).

More broadly, Al-Turabi's approach of implementing a particular interpretation of Islam through state policy has impacted pluralism and religious freedom in Sudan. Minority groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who do not align with his vision face restrictions and discrimination (Mahmud, 2006; Warburg, 2003).

Transnational Influences

Al-Turabi's pragmatic approach impacted Sudan, had influence beyond the country's borders, and had implications for the Islamic world. Al-Turabi played an essential role in the globalization of radical Islam through the founding of various Islamist organizations in Sudan and the creation of the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress (PAIC) in 1991 as a platform for global Islamist leadership. PAIC aims to advance the theory of Islamic revival and expand Islamist influence beyond Sudan (Taylor & Elbushra, 2006).

Al-Turabi's activities and leadership in Sudan also influenced radical Islamic movements internationally. His alliance with Salafist groups and his strategic approach in forming a broad coalition to create an Islamic State reflected his impact on Islamist ideologies and movements beyond Sudan's borders (Gallab, 2018). Although his significance in the world of radical Islam still requires further exploration, his innovative interpretation of Islamic concepts, such as *shūra* (consultation) and *ijmā'* (consensus), to justify a more participatory form of Islamic governance resonated with some Islamist thinkers seeking to reconcile Islamic principles with democratic ideals (Al-Turabi, 1987; Moussalli, 1994). Moreover, his pragmatic approach to building alliances across ideological lines and his emphasis on the role of Islamic movements in resisting Western neo-colonialism found echoes in the rhetoric and strategies of Islamist groups in other parts of the Muslim world (Esposito & Voll, 2001; Kepel, 2006). Al-Turabi's combination of historical reformist trends with practical political activism also influenced the development of the Islamist approach in the political environment of the late twentieth century (WJ Berridge, 2017). However, the influence of al-Turabi's ideas and strategies on other Islamist movements was not uniform, as the specific contexts of each country shaped their interpretation and application.

Al-Turabi's tactical alliances with various Islamist currents, including elements of Radical Islamism, demonstrate his awareness of the broader Islamic landscape and the need to ally with multiple ideological currents to advance his agenda. His engagement with concepts popularized by figures such as Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Maududi reflects his strategic approach to navigating the complexities of Islamist discourse (Esposito & Voll, 2001). Al-



Turabi's ideas and strategies rooted in Islamic revivalism and political Islam also resonate with Islamist movements globally. His emphasis on the reconstruction of scientific knowledge and the concept of *tajdid* also influenced the development of Islamist thought and activism outside Sudan (Gallab, 2018).

Assessing Al-Turabi's Pragmatism in Islamic Governance

In Islamic governance, al-Turabi's pragmatism is a defining characteristic of his leadership within the Sudanese Islamic movement. Pragmatism in Islamic politics, which involves adapting Islamic principles and teachings to the realities and demands of modern governance, is a global phenomenon observed across various Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Mecham, 2019; Nasr, 2007; Noorhaidi, 2009). While the specific challenges and contexts may vary across regions, the need to reconcile Islamic values with practical considerations of statecraft is a common theme in the Muslim world. This requires a balance between loyalty to Islamic values and practical considerations in decision-making. In his efforts to build an Islamic state in Sudan, Al-Turabi demonstrated significant pragmatism in his approach and strategy.

Al-Turabi's intellectual and ideological background was shaped by a fusion of traditional and modern Islamic thought. His early education in the Sudanese Sufi tradition and involvement with classical Islamic scholars strengthened traditional Islamic teachings. However, his criticism of the Sufi tradition and traditional clerics, including his father, demonstrated his desire for reform and reform (WJ Berridge, 2017). His education in the West, such as at the University of London and Sorbonne University, and his involvement with modern Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, introduced him to contemporary Islamic ideology and Western political ideas (AA El-Affendi, 1991).

The evolution of al-Turabi's thinking on the relationship between Islam and politics reflects his pragmatic approach. Initially, he supported private Islamic companies to strengthen his movement but later criticized the economic shortcomings of private companies when clashing with conservative members of his movement. He also adopted elements of socialist economic policies while criticizing Sudanese Communists, but later aligned himself with Islamic banking practices and praised communist thinkers in his fight against al-Bashir's regime (Gallab, 2018; *Interview with Sudanese Leaders Al-Turabi and Al-Attabani, 11/1994*, 1994; Jamal, 1991).

Al-Turabi's pragmatism was most clearly seen in his efforts to implement Sharia law in Sudan. He played a crucial role in drafting legal documents such as the 1987 NIF Sudan Charter and the 1991 Criminal Code, which aimed to embed Sharia principles into the Sudanese legal system (Peters, 2005). While encouraging the implementation of Sharia law, al-Turabi also recognized the rights of non-Muslims to freely exercise their religious beliefs in the personal and social spheres. He stressed the need for continued interpretation of Islamic law to adapt to contemporary needs (G. Warburg, 2006).

Al-Turabi also engaged in various political alliances and compromises to advance his Islamization agenda. He worked closely with Salafi groups, including the Saudi-backed Ansar al-Sunna, as well as Mahdist and Sufi groups to build broader support for his vision of an Islamic state (Kourgiotis, 2022). His pragmatic approach allowed him to navigate Sudan's diverse religious and political landscape, although at times at the expense of his movement's ideological purity (Griffin, 2005).

The impact of al-Turabi's pragmatic approach to Islamic governance in Sudan is significant but controversial. Although he successfully integrated Islamic principles into government to some extent, his efforts also generated criticism and opposition from various quarters. Some criticize his ideological compromises and alliances with authoritarian regimes, while others question his commitment to pluralism and non-Muslim rights (Shehadeh, 2003). The



implementation of Sharia law and the promotion of specific religious interpretations also raises concerns about marginalization and discrimination against certain groups.

Nonetheless, al-Turabi's pragmatism in Islamic governance remains relevant to contemporary discussions about Islam and politics in the Muslim world and beyond. Sudan's experience under its influence offers valuable lessons about the challenges and opportunities in aligning Islamic principles with the realities of modern governance (A. El-Affendi, 1990). His approach, although imperfect, represents an attempt to navigate the tension between religious idealism and political pragmatism in the context of the contemporary nation-state.

Al-Turabi's lasting legacy in the Islamic political landscape of Sudan and the wider Muslim world remains significant. He is recognized as one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of the 20th century, whose ideas and actions continue to shape discourse on Islam and politics. Although controversial, his pragmatic approach to Islamic governance offers an alternative model that seeks to balance loyalty to Islamic principles with the practical demands of modern governance (WJ Berridge, 2017).

To better understand al-Turabi's pragmatism in Islamic governance, it is helpful to compare his approach with that of other prominent Islamists, such as Tunisia's Rached Ghannouchi and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Although they are all considered pragmatic Islamist leaders, the different political contexts in their respective countries have produced varying approaches and results in their efforts to merge Islam and politics.

Al-Turabi, Rached Ghannouchi, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, although both considered pragmatic Islamists, have significant differences in their political context and approaches to combining Islam and politics. These differences reflect the diversity within political Islam movements and how their leaders adapt their strategies to the political realities of their respective countries (Bayat, 2013; Woltering, 2002).

In Sudan, al-Turabi operated in a post-colonial context characterized by divisions between the Muslim-dominated north and the more pluralistic south (Esposito & Voll, 2001). His pragmatic approach is evident in his efforts to build alliances with various Islamic factions, including traditional Sufi groups and more conservative Salafis, to strengthen his movement (Kepel, 2006). Al-Turabi also engaged in the existing political system, including joining Nimeiri's government, to promote his Islamization agenda from within (AA El-Affendi, 1991). However, his sometimes confrontational approach and compromises with authoritarian regimes ultimately sparked divisions within his movement (G. Warburg, 2006).

In Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi led the Ennahda party in a more pluralistic and democratic post-revolutionary transition (Daoud, 2020). Ghannouchi adopted a more consensual approach, seeking to build coalitions with secular parties and emphasizing Islam's compatibility with democracy (Tamimi, 2001). Ennahda, under his leadership, showed a willingness to compromise on issues such as women's rights and the inclusion of Sharia in the constitution to maintain political stability (Wolf, 2017). Ghannouchi's more inclusive approach reflects Tunisia's relatively more socially advanced context and his commitment to working within a democratic framework (Cavatorta & Merone, 2014).

Meanwhile, in Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP party succeeded in combining Islamic identity with an agenda of economic development and democratic reform, at least at the beginning of his government. Erdogan capitalized on dissatisfaction with Turkey's secular elite and presented himself as a defender of the religious middle class (White, 2011). Although the AKP's policies were not always compatible with liberal democracy, Erdogan's gradual and pragmatic approach to accommodating religious aspirations within a democratic framework allowed him to rule for decades (W. Hale & Ozbudun, 2009). However, its increasing



authoritarian tendencies in recent years have raised concerns about the future of democracy in Turkey (Hamid et al., 2017).

This comparison shows that although al-Turabi, Ghannouchi, and Erdogan sought ways to combine Islam and politics, their approaches were shaped by different political contexts (Hamid et al., 2017). Al-Turabi operated in a more confrontational and authoritarian environment, while Ghannouchi navigated a more pluralistic post-revolutionary transition. Erdogan, at first, succeeded in combining Islamic aspirations with economic development within a democratic framework despite growing concerns about authoritarianism (Cizre, 2016).

Conclusion

Al-Turabi's legacy in the Islamic political landscape of Sudan and the wider Muslim world highlights the enduring complexity of reconciling Islamic principles with the demands of modern governance. His pragmatic approach, although controversial, offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of integrating religion and politics in the context of contemporary nation-states.

Sudan's experience under al-Turabi's influence illustrates the dilemma facing many Muslim countries today: how to fulfill people's religious aspirations while building inclusive and responsive political institutions. Al-Turabi's efforts to implement his vision of an Islamic state reveal the tension between rigid religious interpretations and the need for pluralistic governance. The inability to resolve these tensions contributed to social divisions and political instability that ultimately undermined his Islamization project.

However, al-Turabi's legacy also highlights the potential for a more adaptive and pragmatic approach to combining Islam and politics. Its willingness to engage with various schools of Islamic thought and build cross-ideological alliances shows the possibility of accommodating diversity within an Islamic governance framework. Although his approach sometimes entails difficult compromises, it reflects an attempt to navigate complex political realities while remaining faithful to Islamic principles. For other Muslim countries struggling to reconcile religion and politics, Sudan's experience offers valuable lessons. This emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and participatory approach to Islamic governance, which respects the diversity of religious interpretations and protects the rights of minority groups. It also highlights the importance of building consensus gradually and avoiding too rapid changes that could trigger backlash and division.

Ultimately, al-Turabi's legacy invites a more profound reflection on the role of Islam in modern governance and the challenges of adapting religious principles to a changing political context. As Muslim countries grapple with these questions, critical engagement with Sudan's experience can offer valuable insight into ongoing efforts to balance religious beliefs and the demands of effective and just governance. The case of al-Turabi and his impact on Sudan's socio-political landscape highlights the intricate dynamics between Islamic politics and social change in modern nation-states. This study offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of navigating religious ideals within the pragmatic governance framework, contributing to the ongoing discourse on religion, identity, and societal transformations in the Muslim world.

The study of al-Turabi's pragmatism in fighting for an Islamic state in Sudan paves the way for further research on similar dynamics in other Muslim countries. Future research could further explore the strategies adopted by Islamist figures in different contexts, as well as examine the long-term impact of these efforts on governance, human rights, and social cohesion. For policymakers in countries with significant Muslim populations, lessons from Sudan's experience can help formulate more inclusive and sustainable approaches to aligning religious aspirations with the principles of good governance. Understanding the complexity of these



challenges and learning from past successes and also the failures, will be critical to building a more stable, just, and harmonious global society.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



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