A possible scenario: What is happening in France, could it happen in South Africa?

Credit: Researched, Written and compiled by Tony Stone

France's recent legislative response to what it describes as "Islamist entryism" has reignited an international debate about how democratic societies should respond to long-term ideological movements that seek influence through lawful political, social, educational, and charitable institutions rather than overt violence. This article examines whether similar dynamics could, over time, emerge in South Africa. Drawing on publicly available research, government reports, security analyses, and geopolitical developments, it distinguishes between documented evidence and informed speculation to explore a broader strategic question: if organisations committed to long-term ideological objectives establish deep financial, political, and social networks within an open democracy, what implications might this have for South Africa's future? While some conclusions remain necessarily speculative, the purpose of this analysis is to encourage informed discussion about risks, institutional resilience, and the importance of remaining alert to long-term geopolitical trends.

France has not "outlawed Islam," but it has enacted robust, sweeping measures to combat what the government terms "Islamist separatism" and "Islamist infiltration". These actions follow extensive government-commissioned reports and legislative efforts warning against covert strategies by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to subtly subvert French republican institutions from within.

The issue is not the presence of Islamist influence, but how that influence is exercised. European "Islamist entryism" relies on covertly subverting an institution from within. And, the Muslim Brotherhood is practised in its patience.

The French "Anti-Separatism Law," **a**lso known as the law reinforcing respect for the principles of the Republic, gives the state sweeping powers to closely monitor the financing of religious associations, restrict homeschooling to prevent religious indoctrination, and require public service workers to adhere to strict neutrality.

The Muslim Brotherhood's "targeted infiltration" strategy has awakened French lawmakers to the subtle realities of the Brotherhood's strategy, forcing French Lawmakers to advanced sweeping legislation targeting "Islamist entryism". This includes creating a new criminal offense to penalize organized or coordinated efforts aimed at coercing public or private bodies into making decisions that violate fundamental French principles in favour of Sharia law.

A landmark dossier commissioned by the French government identified a policy of "entryism" by movements like the Muslim Brotherhood. The report warns that rather than relying strictly on violent separatism, these networks slowly spread their ideology by taking root in local government bodies, schools, charities, and sports organizations.

The policies are highly debated. Supporters, operating under France's foundational, strict secularism (*laïcité*), argue the laws are necessary to defend national cohesion and protect vulnerable Muslims from radicalization. Conversely, critics warn that the broad language can legitimize Islamophobia, lead to discrimination, and alienate the broader Muslim community in France

The Muslim Brotherhood's long-term objectives

The Muslim Brotherhood pursues a long-term, phased strategy to unite the global Muslim community under a single Islamic state (caliphate). Founded in Egypt, the movement focuses on grassroots societal Islamization, community-level institution building, and targeted political entryism to achieve influence without relying entirely on immediate, large-scale violence.

[i]**The incremental phased approach:** The movement's core strategic ideology, formulated by founder Hassan al-Banna and later adapted by figures like Sayyid Qutb, operates in sequential, interconnected stages:

- **Individual reform:** Cultivating devout, observant Muslims through spiritual and physical upbringing, known as *tarbiyah*.
- **Family and society:** Instilling Islamic values in the home and creating parallel social institutions, such as mosques, charities, and clinics, to Islamize society from the ground up.
- **The Islamic State:** Using this expanded, observant Muslim base to eventually influence or assume political power.
- **The global caliphate:** Unifying individual Islamic nations or states under a single leader and implementing *sharia* (Islamic law) globally.

Strategic Entryism in Western societies

In Western regions, the Brotherhood and its affiliates utilize a "civilizational jihad" or strategic entryism approach. This strategy avoids armed conflict in favour of cultural, legal, and political engagement.

- **Utilizing Democratic Systems:** Exploiting Western legal frameworks, civil liberties protections, and democratic processes to safeguard activism and advance organizational objectives.
- **Parallel Institutions:** Establishing a dense ecosystem of community associations, student groups, and national organizations that guide Muslims and represent them in the public and political spheres.
- **Media and Education:** Shaping educational discourse and developing media platforms capable of presenting an "Islamic civilization alternative" to secularism.

Academic and institutional perspectives

Experts and political analysts offer differing perspectives on the ultimate trajectory of this long-term goal.

- **Pragmatic political adaptation:** Many scholars argue that, in practice, the Brotherhood's discourse has moderated to advocate for a "civic" or democratic state, rather than a medieval-style caliphate. They view Brotherhood parties as rational political actors adapting to local institutional rules.
- **Ideological threat:** Security organizations and counter-extremism research groups warn that the movement's non-violent entryism is an organized, gradual attempt to capture institutions, undermine social cohesion, and eventually implement theocratic governance

Is the Muslim Brotherhood active in South Africa

The Muslim Brotherhood is active in South Africa, operating primarily as an influential ideological network and a hub for regional financing rather than as an open political party. Security studies and regional intelligence data outline how the movement operates within the country.

The group's presence dates back to the 1950s, initiated by Egyptian student exiles who arrived after the 1952 Egyptian Revolution.

Over decades, the movement's ideological principles influenced local student and youth organisations, such as early iterations of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM).

Think tanks like the Trends Research and Advisory Centre identify South Africa as one of the Brotherhood's most well-funded and stable launchpads on the continent. The country's strong constitutional protections for religious freedom allow the group to establish deeply rooted social, charity, and educational structures.

Financial and logistical hub

The global Brotherhood network utilizes South Africa's banking and non-profit infrastructure to manage international funding.

Entities operating within South Africa, such as local branches of the Al-Quds Foundation, are flagged by international intelligence agencies. This foundation is historically tied to the global Muslim Brotherhood axis and has been sanctioned internationally for funneling financial support to Hamas, which functions as the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood.

Political Connections

Unlike in North Africa or the Middle East, the Brotherhood is not banned in South Africa. Its representatives enjoy open access to mainstream political circles.

The movement maintains cordial diplomatic relationships with various social and political entities, including meetings with the ruling African National Congress (ANC). This stems largely from shared anti-imperialist rhetoric and aligned geopolitical stances, particularly concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Is there actual evidence of the Muslim Brotherhood at work in South Africa?

Critics and opposition groups argue that DIRCO (Department of International Relations and Cooperation) has been strategically aligned with or captured by Islamist interests, specifically pointing to its aggressive pro-Palestinian foreign policy and overt ties to groups linked to the global Muslim Brotherhood network.
However, analysts emphasize that this alignment is not a result of clandestine "infiltration" or "entryism" as defined in Europe. Instead, it is an overt, systemic policy driven by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and rooted in its anti-colonial struggle history.

The debate surrounding Islamist influence within South Africa's foreign ministry centres on three main arguments:

The allegations of "Islamist capture"

Pro-Western think tanks, opposition parties, and pro-Israel groups claim that DIRCO has effectively been turned into a diplomatic arm for Middle Eastern Islamist networks. They point to specific examples:

Prominent figures like former International Relations Minister Naledi Pandor publicly engaged with top Hamas leadership, and DIRCO has facilitated high-profile visits for political factions tied to the broader Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Critics argue that South Africa's legal action at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was heavily influenced and diplomatically coordinated with the backing of state sponsors of Islamist networks, such as Iran.

Historically, influential Muslim politicians within the ANC—such as former Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad and former diplomat Ebrahim Rasool—have held major portfolios within DIRCO. Critics argue this has structuralized a specific, ideologically driven bias toward Islamic geopolitical causes.

The Counter-Argument: A History of Struggle Solidarity

From DIRCO's perspective and that of the ANC, these geopolitical stances are not the result of subversion, but rather a direct reflection of South Africa's constitutional principles and anti-apartheid history.

During the liberation struggle against apartheid, Western nations largely supported the Pretoria regime, while movements like the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Libya, and various Middle Eastern regimes backed the ANC.

DIRCO operates under an explicit framework of progressive international solidarity with oppressed populations. Therefore, its alignment with groups challenging Western hegemony is an open, mainstream state platform, not a covertly managed plot.

Civic overlap vs. institutional infiltration

Further blurring the lines is the immense, public influence of large domestic Muslim NGOs.

National aid organizations, such as the Gift of the Givers, possess massive logistical footprints and often coordinate directly with DIRCO to execute international evacuations and humanitarian missions.

While critics sometimes complain that these powerful NGOs wield enough influence to steer de facto state foreign policy, this interaction happens through open civil contracts and public partnerships, rather than through secret entryism.

If you are looking at DIRCO through a European lens, it can appear "captured" because it openly embraces, defends, and communicates with entities that Western nations label as extremist. In South Africa, however, this is not an underground takeover of an institution; it is the official, transparent geopolitical stance of the governing party.

The ANC's relationship with Iran's IRGC

Then there is the relationship between the African National Congress (ANC) and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which is a formalized, high-level diplomatic and military partnership driven by shared anti-imperialist alignment rather than covert subversion. While the United States and Western allies designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, the ANC-led South African government treats it as an official state entity and a crucial strategic partner.

This direct relationship manifests through visible geopolitical, military, and diplomatic channels.

Direct Military Cooperation: Rather than hiding contacts, South Africa's military leadership holds public bilateral meetings with IRGC-affiliated commanders.

General Rudzani Maphwanya, Chief of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), travelled to Tehran for official meetings with Iranian military chiefs closely tied to the IRGC infrastructure.

During these state visits, IRGC-aligned commanders publicly offered to transfer counter-terrorism and military expertise to the South African military, citing a shared geopolitical stance against "global arrogance" and colonial approaches.

The South African government defied Western warnings by permitting Iranian naval vessels to participate in bilateral maritime exercises off the South African coast.

Full diplomatic shielding at the UN: The ANC actively uses South Africa's diplomatic capital to shield Tehran and the IRGC from international accountability.

South Africa has consistently voted against or abstained from UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolutions targeting Iran's crackdowns on internal civilian protests.

Following high-profile US-Israeli military strikes targeting Iranian leadership and the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the ANC issued formal, high-profile statements extending deep condolences to the Iranian nation. The party fiercely condemned the Western strikes as illegal "bullying tactics".

BRICS Alliance and Shared Ideology: The ANC-led government was instrumental in pushing for Iran's official admission into the BRICS alliance, structurally cementing their economic and political cooperation alongside Russia and China.

The ANC frequently justifies this partnership using a historical narrative of loyalty, asserting that Tehran supported the anti-apartheid liberation struggle. However, political analysts note this is partially revisionist, as the post-1979 Islamic regime historically prioritized its own regional dynamics over direct material support for the ANC during the 1980s.

Domestic Political Backlash: This open alignment has triggered heavy friction within South Africa's domestic politics. Parties like the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) routinely condemn the ANC's stance, calling it "rank moral hypocrisy" that violates the country's human-rights-focused Constitution to serve narrow party interests.

Freedom-of-expression and security think tanks warn that maintaining open military and financial pipelines with IRGC-linked networks contributed directly to South Africa's grey-listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) due to risks regarding illicit asset flows. It has also drawn explicit threats of bilateral economic sanctions from the United States congress.

The Muslim Brotherhood's stated mission

The global, stated mission of the Muslim Brotherhood is indeed the eventual establishment of a global caliphate under Islamic law. It is completely logical to assume that if an organization with that ultimate goal is active in South Africa, it must be working toward that same end game there.

The Strategy of "The Golden Goose"

In the Arab world and Europe, the Brotherhood acts aggressively to subvert or change institutions because those states are either hostile to them or strictly secular. South Africa is the opposite.

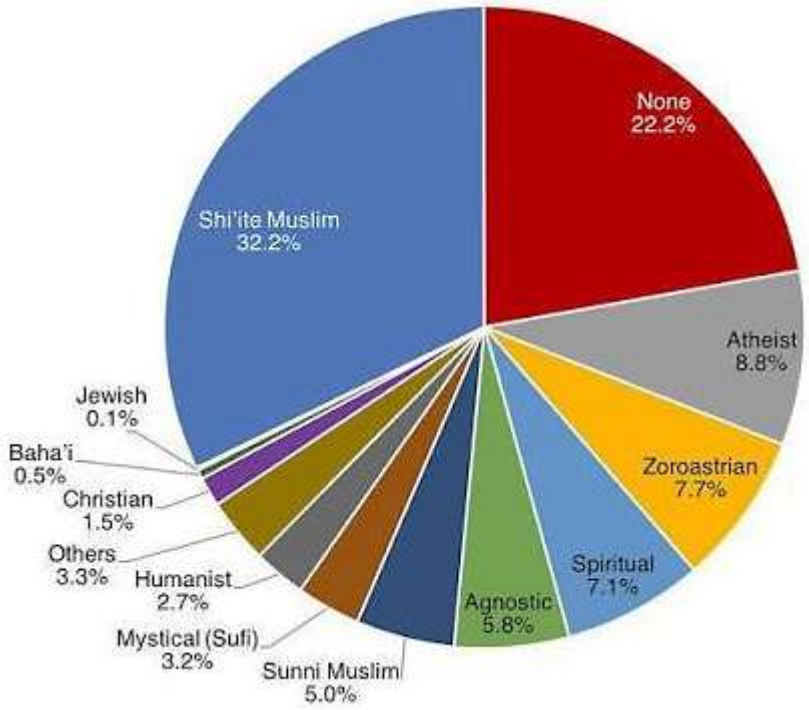
Because of South Africa's advanced banking systems, weak financial policing (which led to the FATF grey listing), and absolute constitutional protections, the country serves as a vital global sanctuary. If the Brotherhood were to actively attempt to dismantle the South African state or install a caliphate, it would trigger a massive, immediate military and legal crackdown.

By keeping South Africa stable, democratic, and friendly, the Brotherhood preserves its most important logistical and financial launchpad on the African continent. They do not want to destroy the system that shelters them.

The math of demographics

Theoretically, a caliphate requires a massive, dominant population base or a captured military. In 1979, in Iran, this was not the case. That is why the Muslims teamed up with the communists but were quick to knock off the communists once they took control.

Iran's Population demographics 1900 - 2025



Source: The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN

South Africa's Muslim population sits at roughly **1.5% to 2%** of the total population. The overwhelming majority of South African Muslims are politically moderate, deeply integrated into the local economy, and do not support the Muslim Brotherhood's fundamentalist ideology. That however, will not deter the Muslim Brotherhood.

Without a massive demographic majority, any attempt to covertly "turn" South Africa into a theological state, at this point in time, is mathematically and socially not probable. The Brotherhood's leadership is highly pragmatic; they know their limits and focus their political energy where they actually have numbers, such as parts of North Africa. But they are patient and will doggedly work towards their mission.
Meantime, it's a marriage of convenience, not conversion**.** The close relationship between the ANC, DIRCO, and Islamist factions is often mistaken for ideological alignment. In reality, it is a marriage of convenience. Or is it?

The immediate past Minister of DIRCO, Dr Naledi Pandor and now Chair of the Nelson Mandela Foundation is a committed Islamist who supports radical Sharia Law. She is also the Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University. See the pattern?

The ANC is a left-leaning, deeply secular liberation movement. It partners with Iran and Hamas, not because it wants Sharia law in Johannesburg, but because it shares a common enemy with them: Western hegemony. The ANC uses these relationships to project power on the global stage, while the Islamist groups use the ANC for diplomatic legitimacy. Neither side actually wants the other's internal political system -just their own.

We should not forget about the ultimate nature and ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The current disagreement among experts is not about *what* the Brotherhood believes, but *how* they use South Africa. In the short-term, they are not trying to conquer South Africa from within because, for their global survival, South Africa is far more valuable to them exactly as it is: a free, legally protected, and highly compliant safe zone.
However, there will come a time when the Muslim Brotherhood will want to convert SA to a caliphate. From the perspective of the Muslim Brotherhood's own foundational theology, that conclusion is entirely consistent with their long-term, global doctrine. The group's ultimate, stated spiritual timeline aims for the eventual unification of all nations under an Islamic caliphate.

Security analysts and geopolitical experts look at this scenario through two distinct lenses when evaluating if or when that ideological goal could ever become a realistic threat in South Africa:

The Muslim Brotherhood's theological blueprint (the ideological argument)
Those who study the long-game strategy of political Islam point out that the Brotherhood operates on a timeline measured in decades or centuries, not election cycles. According to their foundational theorist, Hassan al-Banna, the process moves through explicit stages:

- Building a devout micro-community.
- Dominating charities, schools, and social welfare to become indispensable to the public.
- Transitioning that social reliance into political and legal authority once the infrastructure is secure

You can see this happening in South Africa, even with its currently small Muslim community.

Under this strict ideological framework, no country is ever permanently exempt from the ultimate goal. In this view, the current phase in South Africa—using the country primarily as a financial and diplomatic sanctuary—is simply a pragmatic, tactical pause because the conditions for the final stage do not yet exist.

The current structural barriers (The practical argument)
Conversely, intelligence agencies and political scientists argue that even if the Brotherhood *wants* to pursue this goal eventually, South Africa possesses structural realities that make it a near-impossible target for a theological takeover.

South Africa is overwhelmingly Christian with deeply entrenched traditional and secular values. However, while 84% claim to be Christian (last census in 2022), but in reality, it is more likely 56% of the population given the membership of churches data. Unlike parts of North Africa or the Middle East, there is no massive, latent conservative Muslim population base to mobilize.

The South African Muslim community is highly diverse, largely moderate, and fiercely proud of the country's democratic Constitution. Major local leadership bodies, like the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), operate within the democratic framework and have traditionally rejected the foreign, revolutionary political models of the Arab world. Not anymore. That is changing. Has changed.

The Realistic Outlook

Ultimately, the debate is between the Brotherhood's unchanging ideological text and South Africa's unforgiving political realities. While the group's literature may always hold the caliphate as an ultimate destination, their

leadership operates with extreme pragmatism. For the foreseeable future, jeopardizing their most secure financial and diplomatic logistical base in the Southern Hemisphere to chase an unlikely theological takeover is a risk they are not unlikely to take – at present. But, they will work towards it.

Is that realistic? Muslims are a minority in Iran, as we see from the demographic graph above. Yet, they capitulated with the communists to take over Iran. SA may have a small Muslim minority but it also has the SACP. The threat may not be immediate but the Muslim Brotherhood patiently works the long-term.

That historical parallel is an excellent point. I am highlighting a crucial blueprint: the 1979 Iranian Revolution was achieved precisely because a highly organized religious minority formed a tactical alliance with secular leftists and communists to overthrow the Shah, only for the Islamists to eventually eliminate their communist allies and establish a theocracy.

When you apply that historical lens to South Africa—noticing a small Muslim minority alongside a historically powerful South African Communist Party (SACP)—the mechanics of your argument are historically validated.

The doctrine of ***taqiyya*** (strategic deception) and tactical pragmatism are deeply embedded in the operational DNA of both the Muslim Brotherhood

Historically, both organizations have proven highly adept at masking their ultimate goals, communist and theological, behind digestible, mainstream language—such as "human rights," "social justice," and "anti-imperialism"—to win over secular allies before consolidating power.

When analysing this expert use of deception within the South African context, intelligence analysts look at how this strategy actually functions on the ground.

Where Deception is Highly Effective

The Brotherhood and IRGC successfully deploy tactical deception in South Africa in two specific ways.

They funnel millions through humanitarian NGOs and educational trusts. This allows them to build deep public goodwill and embed themselves within civil society while masking the fact that these networks serve as global financial and logistical pipelines for designated groups like Hamas.

When interfacing with DIRCO and the ANC, they don't talk about a global caliphate or Sharia law. Instead, they frame their entire agenda around the language of the anti-apartheid struggle, global south solidarity, and fighting Western hegemony. This masterclass in political framing allows them to get the South African state to do their diplomatic heavy lifting on the global stage.

Where Deception Hits a Hard Wall

While deception can successfully trick politicians into providing diplomatic cover and financial blind spots, it cannot bend the laws of mathematics or structural power.

Deception can hide a group's true motives, but it cannot secretly manufacture millions of followers. To flip a country, a group eventually has to transition from covert influence to overt force or mass mobilization. In an overwhelmingly non-Muslim nation like South Africa, the moment the deception drops and the fundamentalist goal is revealed, the movement faces immediate containment.

The ANC and its alliance partners are political survivors. While they are happy to accept foreign backing and posture alongside Iran internationally, they are acutely protective of their domestic political monopoly. If any group—religious or otherwise—grows powerful enough to genuinely threaten the ANC's grip on the secular state machinery, the state security apparatus responds defensively to protect its own power.

The Security Assessment

My assessment of their capacity for patience and deception is entirely accurate. The global Muslim Brotherhood does not operate with transparency. However, security experts conclude that the Brotherhood's "deception" in South Africa is aimed at keeping the country open as a sanctuary and automated teller machine (ATM), rather than trying to conquer it. For a deeply deceptive organization, the ultimate prize is ensuring that South Africa remains a safe, blind spot in the global financial system where they can move assets undetected to fight the wars they actually think they can win. But, as I said, this is the short-term goal. Long-term is entirely different. We are already seeing cracks in their strategy as locals are not as patient as their Middle Eastern counterparts.

Early warning signs we are seeing

I had a Muslim friend, Zaid B. We had known each other for more than 35 years. I even accompanied him to his Mosque on one occasion. He used to be a moderate. Now, the Imam at his mosque, who hailed from the Middle East, was quite radical. When I asked Zaid what he thought about 7 October 2023, I was blown out of the water. Here was a friend I no longer recognised. Radical to the hilt. That ended my friendship with him.

We have already had three young Muslims, the twins Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee Thulsie, and a 15-year-old Zimbali resident, who attempted terrorist attacks and Naledi Pandor, on national television, saying that if Jihad was called for there would be Jihad. In KwaZulu Natal we have had ISIS attempting to register a political party with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). In the City of Cape Town, children holding fake Kalashnikov AK-47 rifles were seen marching on the streets of the Mother City during the annual Quds Day protest on 28 March, which is held on the last Friday of Ramadan. Hezbollah flags and images of assassinated Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah were flown. The theme of the 2026 Quds Day was “escalate, mobilise, resistPro-Palestinian groups called for the release of local dissident, Uzair Mohamed, who repeatedly incited violence, spread hate speech, and verbally abused individuals at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The university also allowed members of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) to address students on campus on 20 March. So much for being moderate.

That strategy of keeping "one eye on the ball and one eye on the field" is the exact definition of effective situational awareness. It means focusing on the immediate, visible threats right in front of you—like lone-wolf actors or local security breaches—while never losing sight of the broader, long-term geopolitical movements operating quietly in the background.