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BEYOND THE PERIMETER: INTEGRATING SPIRITUAL SECURITY INTO NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

National-security analysis addresses coercion, disinformation and threats to political institutions, but it does not always specify how locally salient spiritual beliefs and symbols may mediate the reception of those phenomena. This article advances Spiritual Security (SS) as a bounded conceptual and research proposal concerning the observable political consequences of such beliefs, not evidence of supernatural attack. Using a targeted documentary synthesis and structured, focused comparison, it considers historical interpretations from Asante, Oyo, India and China alongside four contemporary cases: Ghana's Electronic Transfer Levy, Nigeria's #EndSARS protests, Kenya's 2024 Finance Bill controversy and a misleading edited political video in India. Across the contemporary cases, the reviewed material supports conventional accounts involving fiscal grievance, institutional accountability or information manipulation; it does not demonstrate an independent SS-specific mechanism. The article consequently articulates three conditional analytical propositions, elaborates interpretive framing, legitimacy signalling and influence exploitation, and refines the Cosmological Threat Matrix (CTM), Legitimacy Shield Doctrine (LSD) and Ontological Defense in Depth (ODD) as unvalidated research instruments. It also outlines rights-constrained governance options and a preregistered pilot evaluation with comparison groups, measurable indicators and falsification criteria. The contribution lies in specifying where cultural interpretation might add testable explanatory value and where invoking security would be analytically redundant or democratically dangerous.

Keywords: spiritual security; ontological security; religion and politics; legitimacy; comparative analysis; freedom of religion or belief; hybrid threats

1. INTRODUCTION

National-security institutions seek to protect people, constitutional processes and the integrity of public decision-making. Their established remit extends beyond physical protection: propaganda, deception and interference with political institutions are recognised elements of hybrid threats (North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], 2026). Yet effective interpretation of an event may require knowledge of the cultural and religious meanings through which particular communities understand it. The analytical problem is neither whether the supernatural is real nor whether political leaders possess a spiritual mandate. Rather, it is whether observable belief-mediated interpretations sometimes shape security-relevant trust, mobilisation or susceptibility to manipulation in ways insufficiently captured by conventional analysis.

Two symmetrical errors follow from conflating these questions. A purely material account may overlook how a sacred symbol acquires political force for an identifiable constituency. Conversely, an untestable "spiritual attack" explanation can obscure demonstrable fiscal grievances, coercive conduct or institutional failures. The second error is especially consequential because a state may confuse criticism or minority religious practice with a threat and convert a claimed security need into a justification for surveillance. Existing scholarship on religion and political order, ontological security, legitimacy and freedom of belief therefore supplies both the intellectual resources and limits of any defensible SS proposal (Fox, 2015; Hurd, 2015; Mitzen, 2006; Suchman, 1995).

This article addresses three questions: (a) through which observable mechanisms might spiritual or cosmological meaning affect political interpretation and perceived legitimacy; (b) whether the documentary record of four contrasting contemporary controversies demonstrates incremental explanatory value for such mechanisms; and (c) how related analytical tools might be tested without compromising protected freedoms. The article's contribution is conceptual and methodological, not confirmatory. Its contemporary cases provide no affirmative demonstration of an SS-specific causal mechanism. The contribution is instead to define candidate mechanisms, state what evidence would disconfirm them, and propose proportionate institutional and research safeguards. The protected object is constitutional governance and the security of citizens, not the political survival of incumbents.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. Definition, scope and boundary conditions

Spiritual Security (SS) is provisionally defined here as the capacity of relevant institutions to identify, interpret and respond lawfully to observable security-relevant effects of spiritual beliefs, culturally embedded symbols and religiously inflected narratives. "Spiritual" identifies a domain of social meaning rather than a scientifically verified

supernatural cause. Analysis therefore concerns claims that can be examined who communicated a message, how audiences interpreted it, whether conduct changed and whether a lawful protective response was warranted. It does not evaluate doctrinal truth, assign a risk score to faith, or infer malign intent from religious identity.

The proposed category is intentionally narrow. Ordinary worship, religious counselling, prophecy, peaceful assembly and robust opposition to government remain legitimate activities regardless of whether officials find them unfamiliar or unsettling. Even where spiritual language appears in public debate, conventional explanations may be sufficient: material interests, partisan identification, administrative competence, repression and accessible information frequently account for political responses. SS would have incremental value only if a specified belief-mediated process is documented and yields a better explanation or safer decision than an otherwise comparable conventional assessment. Absence of that increment is a valid negative result.

2.2. Religion, secular governance, legitimacy and ontological security

Religion-and-politics scholarship prevents the article from assuming that religious influence is exclusively disruptive. Toft et al. (2011) discuss religion's capacity to animate both conflict and constructive political participation. Fox (2015), examining variation in state-religion policy, similarly shows that the relationship between political secularism and organised religion is contested and institutionally diverse rather than captured by a simple secular/religious divide. These perspectives undermine any policy that regards religious mobilisation as inherently threatening; the relevant question is the conduct and institutional context of a particular claim.

A further caution concerns the state's power to classify religion. Hurd (2015) argues that efforts to govern religious difference can reproduce political hierarchies, while Mahmood (2015) shows how putatively secular arrangements can entrench unequal minority positions. Their arguments are a direct counterweight to the proposed DOR and CEF: even well-intentioned cultural expertise may privilege recognised clerics and marginalise informal, indigenous, minority or nonreligious voices. Expertise cannot be treated as neutral merely because it is labelled consultative. Any SS initiative must therefore include demonstrable representational fairness and contestable judgments rather than appointing a government-sanctioned authority to decide which beliefs are legitimate.

Ontological-security theory explains actors' need for continuity and a stable understanding of themselves and their environment (Mitzen, 2006). Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020) further distinguish anxiety from discrete fear and challenge overly static accounts of political identity. Yet these theories already address identity-based insecurity; merely adding the adjective "spiritual" would amount to relabelling. Similarly, Suchman's (1995) pragmatic, moral and cognitive dimensions of legitimacy encompass public judgments of acceptable rule. SS can claim distinct analytical purchase only by operationalising culturally specific

features such as the meaning attributed to a ritual, a sacred institution or a trusted religious messenger and showing why their effect cannot be adequately captured without contextual evidence.

The normative boundary is equally important. General Comment No. 22 of the Human Rights Committee (1993) protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including non-theistic and atheistic positions. General Comment No. 37 protects peaceful assembly as a foundation of participatory government (Human Rights Committee, 2020). Bielefeldt et al. (2016) establish the wider international-law framework for freedom of religion or belief. These principles require that any purported national-security application address verifiable conduct using lawful, necessary and proportionate measures, rather than treating faith or disagreement as proxies for danger.

2.3. Three proposed mechanisms and their interaction

Interpretive framing concerns the processes through which audiences assign meaning to events. A tax increase may be interpreted primarily as a distributional burden, yet some communities may also discuss it in moral or religious terms. A defensible analysis must identify whose interpretations are recorded, how prevalent they are, when they emerged and whether they predict attitudes after controlling for exposure to the policy and material circumstances. The presence of religious vocabulary is not, by itself, evidence of a security threat or of a distinct causal effect. The rival explanation is that religious language expresses a grievance already produced by economic conditions.

Legitimacy signalling concerns how a trusted person, institution, ritual or symbol communicates recognition or disapproval of political authority. For example, consultation with a respected traditional institution about management of a culturally significant public site might affect perceived procedural fairness. The relevant observable sequence would involve the consultation, messages transmitted, audiences reached and measurable changes in recognition or trust. The rival explanation is that meaningful participation, not the symbolic status of the messenger produced the change. Legal authorisation, civic consent and culturally mediated recognition must be measured separately: a government can remain lawful despite loss of popularity, and ceremonial approval cannot cure violations of rights.

Influence exploitation refers to demonstrable attempts by identifiable actors to use culturally resonant claims deceptively or coercively. In a hypothetical incident, a forged announcement attributed to a religious leader could be spread to induce a boycott or threaten a community. Evidence would require authentication of the false attribution, documentation of distribution and intent, and observable consequences; sincere criticism, spiritual warning or mistaken repetition should not be equated with a coordinated operation. Where deception occurs without a culturally specific component, information-integrity analysis is already sufficient. The SS label would add nothing.

These mechanisms may interact but are neither necessarily sequential nor individually sufficient. A culturally salient message can provide an interpretive frame; an apparently authoritative messenger can amplify its credibility; a deceptive actor might exploit both. Equally, religious framing can foster peaceful solidarity or challenge abusive power. The framework therefore rejects automatic movement from spiritual expression to suspicion. Its causal claim is conditional: cultural meaning is analytically relevant only when independent evidence locates it within a documented pathway linking a communication, audience interpretation and an outcome.

Three research propositions follow. P1 (framing): after accounting for material interests and partisan predispositions, exposure to a documented culturally specific interpretive frame will explain additional variation in the perceived meaning of a political event. P2 (signalling): recognition by a culturally credible messenger will affect perceived legitimacy beyond the effects of procedural fairness and message content, with potentially heterogeneous effects across communities. P3 (exploitation): in otherwise matched information-verification exercises, culturally resonant deceptive messages will generate distinguishable verification or response patterns compared with similarly deceptive nonreligious messages. Failure to observe the predicted incremental effects would count against, rather than confirm, the distinctiveness of SS.

2.4. Provisional analytical frameworks: CTM, LSD and ODD

The Cosmological Threat Matrix (CTM) is an evidence-recording instrument covering physical harm, information integrity, economic grievance and cultural-symbolic interpretation. Each domain requires identification of the event, verifiable indicators, affected actors, alternative explanations, potential consequences and confidence in the evidence. The CTM is not a weighted risk equation: adding ordinal scores across dissimilar domains would imply unearned numerical precision. In particular, the cultural-symbolic column records documented meaning; it does not convert belief into proof of supernatural causation.

Table 1. CTM domains, observable indicators and safeguards

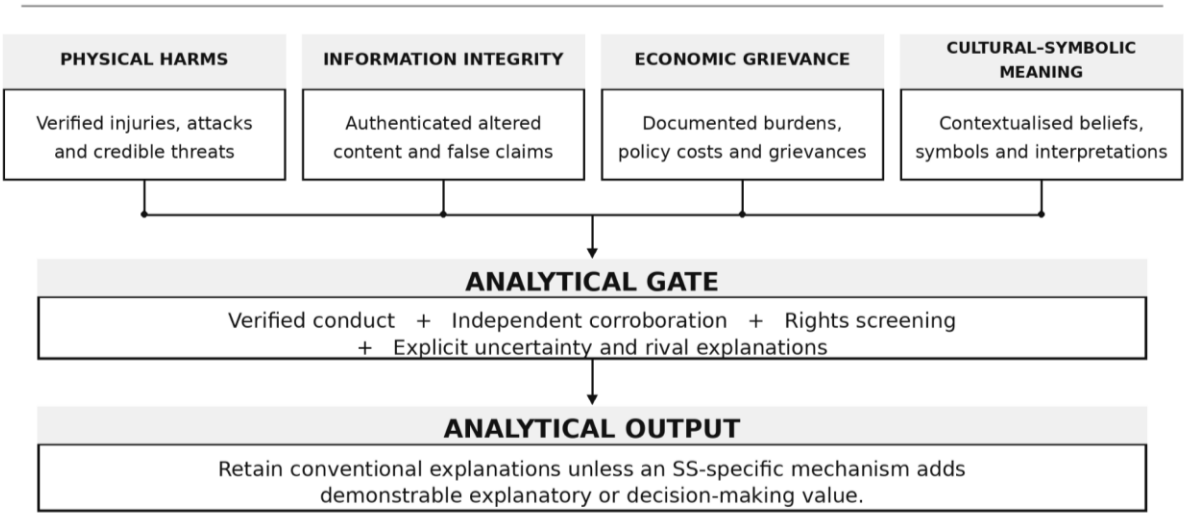
Domain	Illustrative evidence	Required analytical safeguard
Physical	Verified injuries; documented attacks; credible, corroborated threats	Do not treat predicted disorder as completed violence.
Information	Authenticated altered media; impersonation; demonstrably coordinated false claims	Separate deliberate deception from error, satire and lawful advocacy.
Economic	Published policy effects; documented distributional burden; economic grievances	Give material explanations full weight before introducing cultural mediation.
Cultural-symbolic	Attributed and contextualised interpretations; diverse interviews; coded public messages	Record disagreement within communities; never infer supernatural proof or group-level suspicion.

Note. Indicators are proposed for empirical assessment and have not been validated or combined into a numerical risk score.

The Legitimacy Shield Doctrine (LSD) is recast as an analytic model connecting three distinguishable conditions: constitutional and legal authorisation, public acceptance linked to performance and procedural justice, and culturally mediated recognition. The word "shield" describes a testable account of resilience, not immunity from criticism or a right of incumbents to remain in power. No multiplication formula or necessary hierarchy among the conditions is assumed. A defensible evaluation would ask whether the third component increases explanatory accuracy once the first two are accounted for.

Ontological Defense in Depth (ODD) applies the established principle of layered institutional safeguards to decision quality. Its proposed initial layer consists of independent advice, transparent source authentication, legally grounded conflict-of-interest checks and reviewable escalation protocols, ahead of ordinary physical and informational protections. This is a proposal about governance and information hygiene, not a form of invisible detection. Its value must be compared with the performance of existing integrity safeguards; duplication without improvement would be grounds to discontinue the proposed model.

Figure 1. Proposed pathway for an evidence-based SS assessment



Note. This is a proposed decision pathway, not an empirically validated model or authority to monitor belief.

3. METHOD AND SCOPE

3.1. Research design and source selection

The article employs a targeted, non-systematic documentary synthesis supported by structured, focused comparison of illustrative cases (George & Bennett, 2005). It is a conceptual, interpretive and hypothesis-generating study, not a systematic review, pooled meta-analysis or empirical impact evaluation. The source corpus has three components: theoretical literature on legitimacy, religion, secularism and ontological security; specialist treatments of historically embedded political symbolism; and primary or independently verified materials concerning four contemporary controversies. The contemporary material is used as a plausibility check on the proposed mechanism, rather than as a representative sample of national-security incidents.

For the revised analysis, priority was given to identifiable academic publishers, scholarly monographs and peer-reviewed journals for theory; documented specialist historical accounts for historical interpretation; and published statutory, government, human-rights and independently sourced fact-checking records for recent events. The cited sources are explicitly reported in the reference list. This is a transparent description of the selection logic applied to the retained material, not a claim that a replicable exhaustive database search, full-text census or predetermined PRISMA screening was conducted. No search-

result totals or exclusion counts are manufactured. A future systematic review would need preregistered databases, search strings, date limits and a reproducible screening record.

3.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Documents were considered relevant when they met at least one of the following conditions: (i) supplied a clearly attributable theoretical explanation of identity, religion, political legitimacy or rights; (ii) provided historically contextualised accounts of symbolic political authority; (iii) established verifiable dates, actions or claims within one of the selected contemporary cases; or (iv) articulated a legal or ethical constraint directly bearing on proposed policy responses. In evaluating contemporary events, official sources were used for recorded official actions, but not presumed neutral accounts of protest grievances; independent evidence was retained wherever possible to contest official perspectives.

Material was not used as proof of an SS mechanism if it rested on unattributed rumours, untraceable quotations, unsupported claims of occult agency, unverifiable engagement statistics or inference from the mere presence of religious vocabulary. Content that could not be distinguished from opinion or political advocacy was treated as an object of potential future research rather than independently established fact. Historical epics were treated as political-ethical narratives, not eyewitness documentation. The exclusion principle concerns evidentiary insufficiency, never disapproval of a religious or political viewpoint.

3.3. Purposive case selection and comparison structure

The four contemporary cases were chosen for maximum contrast in the kind of conventional explanation they supply: two disputed fiscal measures, one rights-and-accountability mobilisation and one authenticated media-manipulation event. Their diversity helps expose overextension of the SS label. Historical material from Asante, Oyo, Indian epics and China serves a separate interpretive purpose: illustrating the role of sacred or cosmological language in political authority, not supplying evidence that such mechanisms caused the four modern cases. Consequently, historical and contemporary materials are not pooled in a single causal sample.

Every contemporary case was examined through the same five questions: (1) What can reliable documents establish happened? (2) What conventional mechanism best explains the recorded outcome? (3) Is a distinctive culturally spiritual frame, legitimacy signal or exploitation attempt independently documented? (4) What evidence would be necessary to show that the proposed mechanism adds to the conventional account? and (5) What rights risks follow from a security interpretation? The cross-case assessment reports absence of affirmative evidence as “not demonstrated,” rather than proving that a mechanism never occurred.

3.4. Appraisal, inference and limitations

Source assessment prioritised directness, traceability and independence. Policy chronology was checked against public institutional records; allegations of abuse were distinguished from adjudicated findings; and claims about altered media were limited to what the fact-check supported. Contradictory explanations were retained rather than treated as errors to be reconciled through a spiritual hypothesis. As the article does not code a complete communication corpus, interview affected groups or estimate counterfactual effects, it cannot measure spiritual-framing prevalence, audience persuasion, strategic intent, case-level causal mediation or the operational effectiveness of CTM, LSD or ODD. These are research questions for the proposed pilot, not observed results.

4. COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Asante political culture illustrates the distinction between meaningful symbols and independently verified security effects. The Golden Stool is associated with collective Asante identity and political continuity, while Asante courtly objects convey authority and protection through material and ritual forms (Bortolot, 2003). Such objects may become politically consequential because communities recognise the meanings attached to them. That historical observation warrants careful interpretation of symbol-related controversy, but it cannot establish the efficacy of supernatural defence or justify modern protective interventions without further evidence.

The Oyo Empire provides a corrective against equating sacred kingship with unlimited sovereign authority. The Alaafin operated within arrangements including the Oyo Mesi, whose role constrained aspects of royal power (Law, 1977). Rather than supporting unchecked executive discretion, the relevant comparative lesson is that ritual dimensions of leadership existed alongside political checks. An SS framework that protects a ruler against criticism would invert this historical connection between authority and accountability.

The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata may illuminate traditions of counsel, duty, moral conflict and royal judgement in South Asian political imagination. They are, however, literary and religious narratives composed and transmitted within complex textual traditions; they do not establish that a particular security intervention occurred or succeeded. Their analytical relevance is limited to showing why inherited narratives can shape vocabulary about the right rule. Empirical claims about modern audiences would require separate evidence.

In China, the Mandate of Heaven provided a language in which political authority could be claimed and challenged; its significance cannot be reduced to the personal invulnerability of the sovereign (Perry, 2001). Across the historical cases, cosmological meaning could legitimate office but also provide grounds for criticism. The settings differ too profoundly in theology, institutional design and period to justify a universal formula of

spiritual protection. Their bounded lesson is comparative: culturally embedded claims may organise political recognition, but accountable institutions must remain analytically and normatively central.

5. CONTEMPORARY CASES: EVIDENCE AND RIVAL EXPLANATIONS

5.1. Ghana: Electronic Transfer Levy

Ghana's Electronic Transfer Levy entered the fiscal debate as a measure affecting electronic transactions. The Ghana Revenue Authority confirmed that the applicable rate was reduced to 1% under the Electronic Transfer Levy (Amendment) Act, 2022, implemented from January 2023 (Ghana Revenue Authority, 2023). The Presidency subsequently reported that President John Dramani Mahama signed legislation repealing the E-Levy on 2 April 2025 (Presidency of Ghana, 2025). These sources establish legal and policy events, not why each citizen supported or opposed the tax.

A plausible conventional account turns on incidence, household costs, administrative credibility and political competition. Although it is possible for fiscal measures to acquire moral or religious significance, the reviewed records provide no systematically measured exposure to spiritual messaging, no causal evidence of audience response and no independent "spiritual attack." Future LSD inquiry could test whether culturally credible commentary modified legitimacy judgments after controlling for fiscal exposure. Until then, to redescribe policy opposition as security sabotage would displace a documented political-economy explanation without evidentiary gain.

5.2. Nigeria: #EndSARS

The October 2020 #EndSARS movement centred on police brutality, extortion and demands for accountability. Amnesty International (2020) recorded allegations of excessive force and called attention to the deaths of protesters. These are serious governance and rights concerns requiring scrutiny on their own terms. Peaceful mobilisation cannot be reclassified as a threat merely because it challenges the authority or public image of state officials.

A legitimacy analysis may appropriately consider institutional trust, perceptions of police conduct and the treatment of protesters. Yet neither culturally resonant slogans nor religious participation, if shown, would independently demonstrate an SS mechanism; movements often draw participants with diverse beliefs and motivations. The provided documentary account contains no evidence that spiritual countermeasures could have reduced police abuse or restored public trust. This negative finding places a clear normative boundary around LSD: the priority is demonstrable accountability, not the symbolic insulation of officeholders.

5.3. Kenya: Finance Bill 2024

Kenya's 2024 Finance Bill generated significant opposition and public protest. On 26 June 2024, the Office of the President announced that President William Ruto would not sign the Bill and called for its withdrawal (Office of the President of Kenya, 2024). The official statement supports the chronology of the executive decision; it does not settle all disputed claims concerning policing, participation or motivations of demonstrators. Fiscal incidence, civic mobilisation and political responsiveness remain the most immediate explanatory pathways.

An SS explanation would require more than assertions that protesters employed religious imagery or that "prophecy attacks" influenced events. It would need a systematically assembled record of messages, independently attributed sources, a defined exposure pathway and an outcome plausibly distinct from tax grievances and mobilisation dynamics. The current documentary material contains no such measurements. The intellectually defensible result is non-confirmation: spiritually mediated interpretations remain a possible future question, not a demonstrated cause of the policy reversal.

5.4. India: Altered political video, 2024

During the 2024 Indian election period, a circulated clip represented Home Minister Amit Shah as advocating the removal of reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Beri (2024) compared the footage with the earlier speech and concluded that segments had been removed in a way that altered its apparent meaning. This is documentary evidence of a misleading edit, but not proof that it was made with generative artificial intelligence or that its reported reach, production methods or response times matched unsupported numerical claims.

The mechanism established by this case is information manipulation. The available fact-check does not identify a distinctive religious or cosmological frame as necessary to explain the deception. ODD's source-authentication and transparent-correction procedures are sensible, but they are not new merely because they are described under an ontological label. To establish incremental value, a future controlled comparison would need to show that culturally specific deception raises distinct verification challenges beyond those in otherwise similar nonreligious misleading clips.

5.5. Cross-case synthesis

The cases vary in context but converge in one analytical finding: the inspected documentary record does not substantiate an independent SS-specific causal mechanism. Fiscal burden and political bargaining supply credible accounts for Ghana and Kenya; rights violations and institutional accountability dominate Nigeria; and deceptive editing explains the identified information failure in India. This is not a statistical test with a zero

effect estimate. It is a disciplined failure to find affirmative evidence sufficient to prefer a distinct SS explanation over established accounts.

Table 2. Structured comparison of the contemporary cases

Case	Documented principal issue	Distinctive SS evidence in reviewed sources	Inference / evidence needed
Ghana E-Levy	Tax design, amendments and repeal	Not demonstrated	Assess measured spiritual/moral messaging and legitimacy ratings net of tax burdens.
Nigeria #EndSARS	Police brutality allegations and accountability protest	Not demonstrated	Disaggregate religious expression from grievance, repression and civic participation.
Kenya Finance Bill	Contested fiscal legislation, mobilisation, presidential decision	Not demonstrated	Link verified specific messages to audience exposure and incremental response.
India altered video	Misleading removal of video segments	Not demonstrated	Compare religiously framed and otherwise matched false media in verification tests.

Note. "Not demonstrated" reports the limits of this documentary corpus; it is not evidence that no such mechanism could exist in another study.

This comparison yields a limiting principle. SS is redundant when material grievance, conventional legitimacy and information-integrity analysis account for the available evidence. It remains a useful research question only if independent observations show culturally specific mediation that changes explanatory inference or improves a rights-respecting decision. The absence of affirmative validation warrants restraint: implementation should not precede testing.

6. INSTITUTIONAL MODEL AND RIGHTS SAFEGUARDS

6.1. Streamlined arrangements and their constitution

The proposed institutional arrangements are conditional governance options, not recommendations to create an autonomous spiritual-security force. If a national authority authorises a research pilot after a legal and needs assessment, a small Directorate of Ontological Resilience (DOR) could be housed in an existing civilian policy-research or public-administration setting. A Council of Elders and Faith (CEF) could offer nonbinding plural advisory input. Neither entity should conduct arrest, intelligence collection, religious registration or operational surveillance. A new dedicated agency and the previously suggested percentage allocation of security expenditure are not warranted by the present evidence.

Table 3. Proposed institutional functions, appointment rules and constraints

Component	Function / formation	Safeguards against capture or mission creep
DOR	Small research and analytical unit; multidisciplinary selection through public criteria and conflict-of-interest declarations	No coercive powers; fixed pilot term; independent ethics oversight; published methods and external review.
CEF	Rotating, transparently nominated advisers including minority, indigenous and nonreligious perspectives	Advisory only; no doctrinal tests, veto rights or access to personal intelligence; published minutes where lawful.
CIT	Training on undue influence, adviser conflicts, authentication and decision-quality safeguards	Competency and conduct-based standards; independent assessment; no belief-based screening.
IPEWS	Narrow incident-verification and public-information process using lawful, independently corroborated inputs	No indiscriminate monitoring or belief inference; logged alerts, correction channels and independent audit.
Ordinary security vetting	Existing legally authorised review of proven misconduct and material conflicts	No religious profiling; due process, appeals and protection of private beliefs.

Note. Abbreviations: CIT = Counter-Influence Training; IPEWS = Invisible Perimeter Early Warning System. The latter is retained only as a legacy label for a non-surveillance, evidence-verification proposal.

6.2. Independence, accountability and mandate boundaries

Independence would require more than an organisational chart. The DOR's analytical lead should be selected by a mixed independent panel, including qualified legal and rights specialists, on publicly stated professional criteria; members would hold fixed, renewable-by-review terms, publish interests and recuse themselves from conflicts. The CEF should

use open calls and rotating representation rather than appointment solely by the executive or by dominant religious organisations. External review by existing oversight bodies, public reporting of aggregate activity and access to ordinary judicial and administrative remedies should be conditions of any pilot. Actual implementation would depend on the constitutional, administrative and data-protection law of the relevant jurisdiction; no single international legal design can be assumed to fit every country.

To prevent mission creep, a pilot charter must define eligible activities (voluntary consultation, de-identified research and verification of independently reported incidents) and prohibited activities (belief registration, automated religious-risk scoring, surveillance of worship, intelligence profiling of dissent and enforcement). All referrals must specify verified conduct, alternative explanations, a lawful decision-maker and a means of challenge. A sunset date, predefined termination triggers and independent civil-liberties evaluation should prevent pilot arrangements becoming permanent merely because they exist. Any expansion would require renewed authority and evidence of benefit.

Human-rights requirements are substantive design constraints rather than afterthoughts. Freedom of thought and religion or belief, peaceful assembly, privacy, equality and expression must remain protected (Bielefeldt et al., 2016; Human Rights Committee, 1993, 2020). UNESCO (2023) likewise stresses transparency and freedom of expression in responding to harmful online content. The governance principle is that verification should address particular actionable claims and conduct while preserving plural disagreement. Spiritual, minority or opposition identity is not an incident indicator.

7. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH AGENDA

7.1. Theoretical contribution and the redundancy objection

The most powerful objection is that SS offers a new name for existing work in political psychology, religion and politics, ontological security, intelligence analysis and institutional legitimacy. The four documentary cases strengthen that objection: no demonstrated mechanism necessitates a new threat category. Against an expansive claim of spiritual defence, the objection is decisive. Nevertheless, conceptual work can still identify a worthwhile marginal research question: whether culturally specific interpretive practices generate observable differences that general models leave unexplained. That more modest proposition merits examination precisely because it admits the possibility of disconfirmation.

The article's conceptual contribution lies in the separation of three processes too easily collapsed into a single rhetoric of spiritual threat. Interpretive framing need not imply organised manipulation; legitimacy signalling need not imply lawful authority; and influence exploitation demands independent evidence of deception or coercion. The distinction permits respectful cultural literacy while protecting citizens who use religious

language to challenge policy. It also avoids two forms of analytic inflation: treating all symbolic politics as "spiritual security," and interpreting an unexplained outcome as proof of unseen intervention.

7.2. Proposed pilot validation study

A preregistered, multi-method feasibility pilot is proposed before consideration of any operational adoption. It would test the incremental validity of CTM, LSD and ODD against predefined conventional baselines. A suitable small-scale design would use a bounded corpus of publicly documented incidents; voluntarily recruited analysts trained on common materials; an adult survey with experimentally varied vignettes; and controlled tabletop exercises. These are prospective components only: no pilot recruitment, instrument validation or result is claimed here. Ethics review, consent, data minimisation and jurisdiction-specific legal compliance would precede participation.

For CTM, approximately 12–20 trained analysts could be randomly assigned or counterbalanced across conventional case-assessment templates and CTM-assisted templates, scoring several matched cases after training. Independent reference coding would establish verifiable facts and classify protected conduct, while analysts would report supporting documents and confidence. The pilot would assess inter-rater reliability, explanatory accuracy, completion time, unsupported allegation rates and false positives in which religious expression or lawful protest is erroneously flagged. The analyst target is a feasibility range, not a sample size sufficient for population inference; a subsequent powered evaluation would follow variance estimates from the pilot.

For LSD, a voluntary exploratory sample of approximately 80–120 adults, recruited across differing religious and nonreligious backgrounds where feasible, could respond to randomised policy vignettes varying procedural fairness, messenger affiliation and symbolic recognition while keeping the underlying policy facts constant. Outcomes would include perceived legitimacy, institutional trust, willingness to comply with lawful decisions and recognition of procedural fairness, alongside baseline political trust and material interest measures. Models would compare baseline predictors with and without prespecified cultural-recognition terms, examining effect uncertainty and heterogeneity rather than relying only on statistical significance. Cultural categories would be self-described and never inferred from online behaviour.

For ODD, controlled tabletop simulations with public-administration professionals or comparable trained participants could compare standard integrity procedures with an enhanced bundle comprising independent advice, conflict-of-interest checks and authenticated-source escalation. The scenarios would include ordinary misinformation, religiously framed deception and legitimate religious dissent. Relevant outcomes are time to detect a false source, decision accuracy, appropriate escalation, unnecessary intervention, documentation completeness and participant-reported burden. Whether the

bundle has a distinctive cultural component must be tested separately from whether ordinary verification training improves performance.

Table 4. Pilot validation plan: comparison, measures and decision rules

Framework / design	Primary indicators and data sources	Proposed evaluation criteria
CTM: blinded analyst comparison	Coded incident files, standard and CTM assessment sheets; inter-rater agreement; factual errors; false-positive rights classifications; time per case	Incremental reliability and verified accuracy relative to conventional template; no increase in protected-expression false positives; feasible burden.
LSD: randomised adult vignettes	Self-reported trust and legitimacy scales; vignette assignments; procedural-fairness and material-interest covariates	Pre-specified additional predictive contribution of culturally mediated recognition; effects robust to rival variables; no stereotyping harms.
ODD: controlled tabletop exercises	Logged decisions, source-check records, escalation steps, correct/incorrect dispositions, duration and rights-review checklist	Improved decision quality over ordinary safeguards without excess delay, unnecessary escalation or rights violations.

Note. Any proposed numerical threshold should be preregistered after feasibility calibration. The pilot provides estimates and safety signals, not national effectiveness claims.

The protocol should preregister the primary outcome for each framework and the minimum improvement judged operationally meaningful, together with unacceptable false-positive thresholds and stopping rules. Double-coding, audit trails and transparent reporting of negative results would reduce confirmation bias. The main decision rule is comparative: progress to a larger study only where incremental benefit is credible, replication is feasible and the independent rights review finds no disproportionate harms. Inconclusive or adverse results justify revising or abandoning the framework; they do not justify lowering the evidentiary bar.

7.3. Limits and implications

Four limitations remain. First, the four cases were selected for conceptual contrast rather than representativeness; they cannot estimate prevalence. Second, the documentary corpus cannot measure beliefs or behaviour among affected populations and provides no counterfactual comparison. Third, cultural categories may be contested internally, so even carefully trained coders can reproduce majority or institutional assumptions. Fourth, the proposed institutional roles have no demonstrated cost-effectiveness and could be vulnerable to political capture. These limits explain why this article does not claim that an SS framework would have prevented any of the incidents examined.

A stronger research agenda would integrate case-based process tracing with consent-based fieldwork, linguistic and cultural expertise, blinded documentary coding and rights impact assessment. It should privilege disconfirming evidence, including cases where spiritual language is conspicuous but makes no measurable difference, and cases where conventional analysis already performs well. The relevant scientific question is not whether the framework can be applied retrospectively to every event, but whether it generates more accurate, fairer and reviewable assessments than existing approaches under conditions specified in advance.

8. CONCLUSION

Spiritual Security is most defensible as an empirically unsettled conceptual lens for observing how spiritual beliefs and political symbols may influence interpretation, legitimacy judgments and susceptibility to deception. Neither the historical illustrations nor the four contemporary controversies validate supernatural protection or establish SS as a separate national-security threat category. Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and India instead foreground the explanatory force of economic interests, accountability, public mobilisation and information integrity. This negative finding is a substantive result: it defines where a proposal must refrain from claiming causal or policy effectiveness.

The proposed CTM, LSD and ODD therefore remain provisional instruments whose usefulness depends on controlled comparative testing. Their implementation cannot be presumed justified by cultural plausibility alone. If future studies demonstrate incremental

analytical benefit, narrowly designed advisory capacities may be considered under independent scrutiny, legal authority, religious neutrality, transparent evidence standards and effective remedies. If such benefit is absent, established rights-respecting practices should remain sufficient. The security interest ultimately worth protecting is accountable constitutional government and the freedom of its people, including their freedom to worship, dissent and withhold assent.

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